

Anthro assignment

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



Anthropology 100Dr. Judkins Fall 2012 Writing Assignment by Christina O'Shea In the early twentieth century, Arnold van Gennep, a French ethnographer, wrote "The Rites of Passage" in which he describes the process of changing social states of being. This one theory has certainly made a deep impact on anthropological thought due to the fact that it can be applied to a number of situations, both past and present, in which transitions are made. It can also be used as an educational tool for people to use so that they can have a better understanding of the practices of many different cultures.

In fact, many examples of the theory of Gennep can be found in ethnographic autobiographies, such as "Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi" by Don C. Talayesva. "Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi" is the story of Don C. Talayesva, a man raised as a Hopi Indian and then trained as a white man. Written from his point of view, the autobiography allows the reader to have a better understanding of Hopi culture as Don shares the story of his life. At one point in the work, Don mentions a particular moment in his life when he decided to join his father on a salt expedition to Little Grand Canyon.

I can honestly say that when I first read of the salt expedition of Don, I did not really think much of it. I believed that the reason that this event was even mentioned was to describe to the reader the method that the Hopi Indians used to acquire salt. However, after learning the rights of passage theory of Arnold van Gennep, I began to realize that this journey became more to do with initiation rather than nutrition. In "The Rites of Passage", Van Gennep explains that a rite of passage has three phases that are

handled through ritual and a symbolic code by which we understand meaning.

The first phase is called the "separation" phase in which you remove yourself from a former social status. In "Sun Chief", one example of how Don used this phase while on the expedition was before the journey even began. Don states that on the morning of the expedition, "the War Chief sprinkled a corn-meal path, placed a feather upon it with the breath line pointing westward...each of us stepped on the "road-marker," and the expedition was under way". Throughout the journey, Don describes the multiple customs of must perform while on the salt expedition in which he and his traveling companions pay respect to the ancestors and the gods which allowing Don to grow more spiritually, thereby preparing him for his transition. Following in the tradition of his ancestors, Don carves his clan emblem on a rock in order to pay respect to Hopi salt gatherers from years passed. At the shrine of the Salt Woman, Don also has intercourse with the shrine as a prayer for health and an increase in offspring. Since it was his first expedition, Don had to strip completely naked beforehand.

While reading of the various tasks that Don had to complete on his journey, I realized that the amount of commitment that Don had to these preparations reminded me of how I felt as I was preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation. By deciding to be a candidate for Confirmation, I, like Don, chose to follow in the footsteps of my parents and grow more spiritually. In order to be "confirmed", I had to complete various activities to prove that I should become an adult member of the Catholic Church.

The second phase of passage is called the “liminality” or “transition” phase is essentially the middle point where the actual transformation takes place. When Don arrives at the kiva “and the hole through which mankind emerged”, since this was his first salt expedition, he is given the task by the War Chief to reach down into an empty cavity, where the kiva was connected, while holding a prayer feather sprinkled with corn meal in his hand. In exchange for the feather, the spirits, traditionally, will give to Don the coveted yellow clay that, Don states, “is always used for paho making”.

Without fear Don reached down, while being held securely by his father and the War Chief, into the hole and, while letting go of each feather, drew handfuls of clay. During this, Don states “I could feel the presence of spirits below, who accepted the feather and gave me clay”. After depositing the feathers and praying, Don and his companions proceeded to a small fountain, high atop which was a cupped top overflowing with salt that they proceeded to gather for themselves and for the Salt Woman. While reading of the spiritual connection that Don experienced, I remembered that which I received during my Confirmation ceremony.

I had spent months preparing for this moment and now, at long last, there I was, wearing my red robe sitting in the pew in front of the church, waiting for my name to be called. Finally, when I was called by the bishop to come to him in front of the alter, I, like Don, showed no fear as I rose out of the pew and walked down the aisle of the church with my back to the congregation. After being called by the name of the saint that I chose to honor, I received a blessing from the bishop and was proclaimed a confirmed member of the Catholic Church.

The third and final phase of passage is called the “ re-aggregation” phase in which one re-enters society with their new status. In “ Sun Chief”, when all of the needed salt is gathered, it is determined that the expedition is now over and Don and the others begin the journey home. As they pass the various shrines Don notices that his offerings had been viewed favorably by the spirits. Eventually, after distributing a large amount of salt to the Salt Woman, they reached Moenkopi and, after turning the “ road-marker”, which they used in the beginning of their journey, eastward, they soon made their way back home to Oriabi.

Don is asked by his father what he thought of the salt expedition. Don replies that it was “ pretty tough” and he believes that the salt that they have gathered will not last them a year. His father replies that this is the way that most young men think now. After finishing Don’s account of the salt expedition, I could not help but sympathize with Don. After all of the steps that Don had to preform, Don probably thought that he would receive a larger amount of salt than he actually got.

As I was preparing to receive Confirmation, there were times where I would be sacrificing time, which, at the time, I felt was more important and so, I began to wonder if all of these preparations were even worth going through. However, I soon realized that spiritual growth is not something that is just given to you; it is something that is earned. Therefore, the journey to that growth needed to be tough for it showed how much you wanted it. Throughout the process, I kept reminding myself that it would all be worth it and, in the end, it was.

After being confirmed into the Catholic Church, I instantly felt the feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment. I was now officially an adult member of the Catholic Church. I also felt that through this sacrament, I had grown more spiritually and that my relationship with God had grown stronger. In Don's case, without question, he showed no fear as he performed each of the tasks and, though he did not think so at the time, all of the preparation was truly worth it. While on the expedition, Don paid tribute to both the spirits and the ancestors allowing him to grow more spiritually.

Since Don participated in the expedition, his elders no longer consider Don a novice for he has now gained experience necessary to assist him in the future. By going on this salt journey, Don has shown his respect for his culture and how he honors the traditions and customs of his heritage. By using van Gennep's rites of passage theory, the overall structure and true meaning of Don's salt expedition has certainly become clearer. Using this information, I have also found that van Gennep's theory cannot only be applied to the salt expedition, but to other life events of Don as well.

Other instances in "Sun Chief" where van Gennep's rites of passage theory can be applied are when Don was born, when he became married to Irene and when he was initiated into the Wowochim society. By showing me how Don's journey of spiritual growth resembled my own, I can now say that van Gennep's, surprisingly universal, theory has allowed me to have a better understanding of Don's culture. Works Cited 1. Talayesva, D. (1942). Sun chief: The autobiography of a hopi. (p. 232-246). London, England: Yale University Press.