



Crossing the Threshold: School Shooting as a “Ritual of Chiral Initiation”

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Abstract

The article delves into the phenomenon of school shootings, interpreting these as metaphorical representations of profound dysfunctions in cultural communication. The shootings are examined through the lens of the concept “Ritual of Chiral Initiation” introduced by the author. This concept portrays school shootings as inverted rituals in which traditional structures and values become reversed or distorted. The study leans on the post-structuralist tradition of deconstruction to find out why modern societies give rise to delinquent behaviors (like school shootings) and to comprehend their symbolic implications.

The goal of the research is to analyze school shootings as metaphoric representation of significant dysfunctions in cultural communication and to grasp their symbolic relevance in today’s society. School shootings are often the radical attempts of adolescents trying to find their footing in a society while facing the identity crisis. The results suggest that such aberrant behaviors stem from inverted rituals and upturned values.

School shootings signify the identity crisis in today’s society and can be considered as inverted rites of initiation. This article is meant for researchers interested in cultural communication challenges and societal delinquent behaviors.

Keywords

Delinquent Behaviors; School Shooting; Mass Killings; School; Ritual; Ritualization; Initiation; Separation; Sequestration; Liminality; Return



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Переход за грань: скулшутинг как «хиральная инициация»

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Аннотация

Статья исследует явление массовых школьных расстрелов как метафорического представления глубоких дисфункций в культурной коммуникации. Скулшутинг рассматривается через призму вводимой автором концепции «хиральной инициации», представляя общественно опасный феномен массовой школьной стрельбы как инвертированные ритуалы, где традиционные структуры и ценности обращены или искажены. Исследование опирается на постструктуралистскую традицию деконструкции для понимания, почему современные общества порождают делинквентное поведения, такие как скулшутинг, и их символическое значение.

Цель исследования: проанализировать скулшутинг как метафорическое представление глубоких дисфункций в культурной коммуникации и понять их символическое значение в современном обществе. Массовые школьные расстрелы могут рассматриваться как радикальные попытки найти своё место в обществе подростком, переживающим кризис идентичности. Исследование показывает, что такие делинквентные поведения возникают из-за обратных ритуалов и инвертированных ценностей.

Скулшутинг служит проявлением кризиса идентичности человека в современном обществе и может рассматриваться как инвертированные ритуалы инициации. Статья предназначена для исследователей, интересующихся проблемами культурной коммуникации и делинквентного поведения в обществе.

Ключевые слова

делинквентное поведение; скулшутинг; массовые убийства; школа; ритуал; ритуализация; инициация; отделение; сепарация; лиминальность; возвращение



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Introduction

In our complex and continuously evolving society, the tragic phenomenon of school shootings¹ emerges not merely as a manifestation of violence, but also as a metaphorical embodiment of profound dysfunctions in the structure of cultural communication. Understanding such events in this context demands particular sensitivity to the nuanced signals encrypted within their very nature.

The concept of initiation has always been a pivotal point in anthropological and philosophical analysis. In its classical form, initiation signifies a transition from one sociocultural state to another, representing a ritual that symbolizes a new beginning (Gennep, 1999; Turner, 1983). Viewing school shootings through the lens of the “Ritual of Chiral Initiation,”² we approach this phenomenon as an inverted ritual reflexing in the mirror with uneven surface, in which traditional structures and meanings are upended.

In the works of M. Foucault, multiple means of understanding power, knowledge, and sociocultural practices intersect (Nizovtsev, 2015). It is precisely within his poststructuralist tradition that we can delve deeper into examining how and why modern societies manifest delinquent behaviors like school shootings and their symbolic significance.

Individuals in contemporary society are facing an identity crisis (Kovalev, 2021). School shootings, a horrifying manifestation of alienation and social tragedy as they are, can also be considered as an extreme attempt of seeking identity amidst a profound cultural imbalance.

The crooked-mirror aspect of the initiation ritual contextualized with school shootings, offers an insight into how traditional patterns of classical initiation might be distorted and deformed under social tensions.

Researching school shootings within the framework of “Ritual of Chiral Initiation” can pave the way for innovative approaches in social psychology and anthropology. This research assists society in devising effective strategies to counteract such acts of violence.

Ultimately, the significance of such research stems from the imperative need to deeply understand the mechanisms of cultural and social interactions that might lead to catastrophic outcomes. By acknowledging and analyzing these mechanisms, we aim to foster a more harmonious and secure society.

In the contemporary social fabric characterized by diverse structures and forms of power expressed through the myriads of cultural practices, it becomes of

1 Armed attacks in educational institutions. This term refers to the manifestation of aggressive actions with the use of weapons in the space of educational institutions, mainly in relation to the studying audience, which in some cases turns into acts of mass violence. – Author’s note.

2 By this term, we mean a distorted ritual of initiation, where all the structural elements of classical initiation are displayed asymmetrically, as in a “crooked mirror”. Chirality is the property of a molecule not to correspond in space with its mirror image.– Author’s note.



paramount importance to understand how and why certain practices evolve into destructive and violent forms. School shootings lay bare the fundamental dysfunctions of our times, urging us toward deep and critical contemplation of prevailing events.

From this vantage point, we can postulate that conceiving of school shootings as a form of initiation ritual—though a distorted one—introduces new analytical horizons. This skewed ritual is not merely inverted; it stands as a poignant reflection of the potential deformation of social and cultural systems within heterotopic conditions. Michel Foucault suggested that heterotopias are spaces where conventional sociocultural practices are disrupted and where time and space intersect in unexpected, and at times, discordant amalgamations (Foucault, 1984). Viewed in this manner, school shootings could very well represent a manifestation of such heterotopia—a scenario where established norms and values are subverted, resulting in a dramatic collision of order and chaos.

Within this framework, school shootings can be interpreted as a crisis of initiation. In traditional societies, initiation rituals acted as conduits transitioning individuals from one phase of life to another, facilitating their socialization and acknowledgment by the broader community. Contrastingly, in the expanse of school shootings, this ritual becomes grotesquely contorted, culminating in a situation where young individuals, instead of experiencing integration and socialization, are thrust into tumult and devastation.

Founded on the aforementioned, this research seeks to analyze the phenomenon of school shootings as a perverted initiation ritual. It endeavors to unravel the sociocultural, psychological, and structural underpinnings that give rise to such incidents and to discern how grasping its intricacies might inform the formulation of preventive strategies against school shootings.

1. Sociocultural Relevance: Against the backdrop of an ever-evolving society where disparities in identity and social roles grow increasingly conspicuous, understanding the deep-seated processes that underlie school shootings is of paramount importance. Investigating such phenomena will facilitate the identification of specific cultural and societal elements contributing to the erosion of social bonds.

2. Psychological Dimension: Understanding the motivations behind these acts of violence can illuminate the psychological processes operating in the minds of young individuals. Such insights may, in turn, provide avenues for the development of preventive measures and early interventions.

3. Systemic Approach: School shootings are not isolated events; they result from a complex interplay of various factors. Analyzing this phenomenon through the lens of a distorted initiation ritual could offer novel perspectives on how systems of education, socialization, and community interaction might be refined or adapted to mitigate such tragedies.



Given the aforementioned considerations, there is a pressing need to delve deeply into the mechanisms of “Ritual of Chiral Initiation” to uncover and reinterpret the hidden structures that give rise to delinquent behavior.

Global research experience on School Shootings

Trying to understand the phenomenon of school shootings, we encounter a multifaceted and intricate scope of academic literature where diverse discourses and approaches intertwine, clash, and at times, conflict with each other. Immersing in this academic labyrinth, you have to recognize that every historian, sociologist, or psychologist studying school shootings does so with the help of one’s unique methodological tools, cultural perceptions, and ideological predispositions.

In international literature, the issue of school shootings is frequently examined in the context of social isolation, mental health, and access to firearms. Western scholars emphasize cultural specifics, the influence of media and social networks, and the role of the educational system in shaping the psychology of youth. By this, it’s important to heed the critical voices that highlight potential ideological biases or cultural constraints within dominant discourses.

A review of western authors researching school shootings reveals profound and layered aspects of this issue. In the work of B. A. Alexander and H. Harris (2020), emphasis is placed on the personal experiences of school staff in the context of shooting-related events. The four main themes outlined not only illuminate the psychological and emotional consequences but also provide a roadmap for addressing the needs of the educational community in the aftermath of a shooting. G. R. Paez, J. A. Capellan, and M. G. Johnson (2021) focus on the situational aspect of the shootings. Through conjunctive analysis, they pinpoint the features of mass shooting incidents, deepening our understanding of the environment in which those transpire and bolstering efforts for prevention. J. Highberger, W. Wang, and R. Brittingham (2022) accentuate the psychological component of the problem, specifically addressing the shift in students’ safety perceptions following shooting episodes. This approach not only evaluates psycho-emotional outcomes but could also prove pivotal in developing preventive programs.

A. A. Baird, E. V. Roellke, and D. M. Zeifman (2017) touch the critical question concerning the correlation between school size and the likelihood of violent incidents. Their conclusions highlight the significance of social relationships and the overarching atmosphere within educational institutions, potentially illuminating the root causes of such violence. Lastly, R. F. de Apodaca and colleagues (2012) undertake a comprehensive analysis of the characteristics of schools that have witnessed fatal shootings. The hypothesis that certain features of the school environment might foster feelings of anonymity or alienation among students challenges the society with the task of reforming such facets of school life.

Every study of school shootings offers either systems of knowledge or practices that shape the reality of those phenomena. D. A. Keatley et al. (2020) introduce



the concept of the “crime script,” delving into its chronology which presents a portrait of power characterized by planning and premeditation. This illustrates how power and knowledge interact: understanding how events unfolded in the past can inform predictions of future occurrences. J. S. Hong & D. L. Espelage (2020) address the issue of safety, which at the discourse level suggests a shift from the individual responsibility of the shooter to a systemic concern. Their research attempts to connect disparate fragments of knowledge, creating a cohesive network of understanding. R. W. Larkin (2009) broadens the scope of the phenomenon, suggesting that the actions of shooters are political acts. He goes through the history of power research, exploring its evolution, reinterpretation, and adaptability across different contexts. P. M. Markey et al. (2020) introduce racial dimensions uncovering prevailing stereotypes and biases, and emphasize the significant influence of sociocultural expectations in shaping perceptions of reality. A. Katsiyannis et al. (2023) offer an empirical analysis of the evolution of these events over time. Through the statistical examination, they present a landscape marked by social inequalities and racial disparities.

Western research on school shootings reveals multidimensional and occasionally contrasting discourses on the subject. J. Raitanen and co-authors (2019) investigate narratives of social exclusion within the context of school shootings. This scene characterized by bullying and social isolation, induces profound feelings of alienation, potentially leading to acts of mass violence. G. Kleck (2009) discusses school shootings within the gun control debate, shedding light on the intricate relationship between gun availability and violent acts. D. J. Harding and colleagues (2002) focus on the methodological challenges inherent in studying infrequent events like school shootings and advocate for a qualitative research approach.

While Western literature predominantly tackles such themes as social isolation, mental health, and firearm accessibility, Russian academic literature emphasizes the unique characteristics of the post-Soviet landscape, the evolution of sociocultural values, and an escalating sense of alienation among the youth.

The field of school shootings viewed through the prism of Russian research, presents a diverse array of studies. A. Yu. Karpova & N. G. Maximova (2021) employ a multifaceted methodological approach, using triangulation to explore the phenomenon through discrete categories and social interactions in the digital zone. Social networks emerge as arenas where signals and intentions of potential threats are made evident. This undeniably introduces a new form of power where, although knowledge is accessible to all, interpreting it requires a fresh perspective. Yu. V. Sukhodolskaya (2020) guides us into the orbit of criminological discourse, portraying school shootings not merely as acts of violence but as a nascent phenomenon demanding special attention and interpretation. Here, a novel truth surfaces, with each violent act seeking its criminological category. V. D. Nikishin's study (2021) emphasizes the extremist-terrorist tendencies within the Columbiner subculture, illustrating how words can serve as weapons and how rhetoric can manifest as tangible threats.



L. A. Goncharov (2019) undertakes a deep dive into the sociocultural contexts that foster violence. The psychological atmosphere enveloping adolescents becomes a risk factor, highlighting challenges in self-realization, interaction, and integration into the society. K. Sh. Sharifzyanova (2020) frames school shootings as a consequence of societal crises, wherein the burden of societal challenges falls upon children and adolescents. Youth subcultures attract delinquent behaviors like magnets, turning them into palpable threats. N. F. Borisova (2021) extends this dialogue but shifts the focus to the criminal-legal agenda, viewing school shootings as criminal acts characterized by bursts of violence. The main the emphasis is shifting to prevention, presenting the issue not merely as a catastrophe but as an opportunity for proactive measures. V. V. Orlov (2022) advances this discourse by clarifying terminology, identifying media as an active agent in this dialogue. His work sheds light on the media's role in shaping perceptions, its potential distortion of statistics, and suggests a pragmatic approach to delineate school shooting incidents. I. S. Golikhin (2021) delves profoundly into psychology backgrounding this phenomenon, examining both external and internal motivations behind such actions and proposing a legal remedy.

N. D. Uzlov and colleagues' study (2022) reveals an attempt to understand the issue through the socially common topic of weapon restriction. However, the focus quickly shifts to overhauling the prevailing value system. The authors acknowledge that the influence wielded by the educational sector struggles with distancing from economic and societal disparities. They argue that the educational framework should not be the place for mere transmission of knowledge but serve as a tool for reassessing sociocultural tenets.

N. Yu. Zavyalova & Yu. V. Lunkashu (2021) prefer a different course, emphasizing the human dimension over the technological one. They argue that the core of the issue is not the laws tightening but rather the absence of humane and accessible psychological support. They advocate that while authorities must impose punishments, they should also offer resources for socialization. U. B. Grinenko and R. Romero (2021), in contrast, present innovative research anchored in modern analytical methods. Rather than seeing school shootings as an isolated event, they seek to contextualize it within cyberspace, where discourse on the topic is both constructed and amplified. Focusing on digital content within the social network "VK", they explore certain methods of identifying potentially dangerous content associated with school shootings.

Central to A. V. Golenkova's (2020) research is the phenomenon of adolescent post-homicidal suicides (PHS)¹. This investigation analyzes the motivations and circumstances leading a teenager to such a drastic action following a murder. Notably, the study underscores that, while post-homicidal suicides are infrequent, they possess distinct traits and antecedent circumstances. In the research by N. D. Uzlov and M. N. Semenova (2021), the theoretical aspects of school shootings

1 Suicide after murder – author's note



are investigated framing school shootings as transgressive acts—a term borrowed from Georges Bataille, which signifies the aggressive overstepping of moral, legal, and religious boundaries. This interpretive expression offers a deeper understanding of school shootings, examining the phenomenon through the aspects of narcissism, perpetrators' manifestos, and postmodern narratives of death.

Both Western and Russian scholarly traditions reveal a shared intent: to fathom the profound underpinnings of the problem and to transcend mere surface analysis, venturing into the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of this distressing trend. Nevertheless, as is the case in any scholarly domain, the discourse surrounding school shootings is ever-evolving. Thus, our ongoing challenge is to maintain a critical stance, scrutinizing continually the varied perspectives and their background.

Methodology: the cancerous tumor of the ritual

In the context of analyzing school shootings as a Ritual of Chiral Initiation, we must reference the work of A. van Gennep's "The Rites of Passage". The researcher emphasizes that such rites mark the transition from one magical-religious or social state to another (Gennep, 1999, p. 8). He asserts that these rites manifest themselves in the ceremonies that signify such transitions.

The liminal state, both imagined and real, is present, to varying degrees, in all ceremonies that accompany the transition from one magical-religious or social state to another (p. 22).

In the dominion of sociocultural practices, where power and knowledge are interwoven, school shootings appear as a dark act of transition. Here, we see an individual, in this instance the shooter, attempting to redefine his social role. This act is not merely an act of violence; it signifies a transition, a move away from the old world and an entrance into a new one. The shooter undergoes a rite where death serves as the genesis for potential rebirth. This reversed rite of passage, termed "Ritual of Chiral Initiation," mirrors asymmetrically the traditional initiation rituals.

Analyzing the transition rites, A. van Gennep distinguishes two contrasting spheres: the profane and the sacred.

The isolation experienced by outsiders represents not only their vulnerability (given their position outside a specific community) but also their strength: they inhabit the sacred realm, while, for its constituents, the community embodies the profane (p. 29).

These dualities form the foundational elements of any transition ritual, with a state of liminality — a space of uncertainty and flux — lying in between. School shootings, in this light, can be perceived as a rite in which Columbine adherents execute a series of actions in a set sequence. However, distinct from traditional rites, this sequence is marred by brutality and homicide, positioning it as a perverse reflection of customary rites of passage.



V. Turner, a renowned anthropologist who delved into the symbolic abyss of rituals, delineated three key stages of the initiation rite: 1) Separation, during which the individual stands on the precipice of change; 2) Liminality, where one immerses oneself in a liminal state, existing between two worlds; and 3) Re-aggregation or Reintegration, where the individual comes back in a transformed state.

In the initial phase, separation, symbolic behaviors come into play. These behaviors signify the detachment of an individual or group from their previous position within the social structure, from particular cultural conditions (“states”), or from both. The intermediate “liminal” period is marked by ambivalence. The ritual subject, referred to as “the neophyte”, navigates a cultural realm that barely reflects attributes of either the preceding or subsequent state. In the final phase—re-aggregation or reintegration—the transition reaches its culmination. The ritual subject, whether individual or group, attains a relatively stable state and secures, vis-à-vis, the rights and obligations of a clearly defined and “structured” nature (Turner, 1983, p. 168).

Using these stages as a framework allows us to dissect the structure of school shootings, identifying similar phases within.

However, interpreting school shootings as a ritual demands caution. While a school shooting, a blatant act of violence, undeniably resonates with ritualistic connotations, it shouldn't be hastily categorized as such. To do so could be an oversimplification, if not a perilous pace. In our view, this phenomenon represents a stage of “Ritual of Chiral Initiation”—both distorted and traumatic. It's merely the visible part of an iceberg, beneath which there lies a deeper ritualistic process. Approaching this topic from these perspectives, we must brace ourselves for both deconstruction and reinterpretation. Aligned with the principles of ritualization, we suggest reinterpreting the stages that Turner discussed, specifically concerning school shootings. Our perspective doesn't stem from a disagreement with Turner's understanding of the initiation ritual's structure. Instead, it arises from the belief that the “Ritual of Chiral Initiation” is embedded within the initiation itself. It emerges as a malignant tumor, spreading throughout the body of “nominal” initiation, especially since the term 'school shooting' implies inherently a modern societal initiation rite centered in schools.¹

Thus, by simplifying this phenomenon, we are addressing a form of broken or, more precisely, a distorted initiation. This necessitates the introduction of new designations for its stages to ensure clarity. The first stage, which we will term “double separation,” may symbolize the violence actor's alienation from society amidst an ongoing rite of passage. The second, termed “inverted liminality,” represents the actual act of violence — a moment when the individual exists between two worlds (in this context, between life and death). Rather than distancing from society, he intrudes upon it with acts of violence. In contemplating this issue, it is decisive to penetrate into the intricacies of its structural characteristics. Through the examination of insights from M. Eliade (1994) and A. M. Lobok (1997), we

1 The author in no way condones the phenomenon of school shootings and, on the contrary, condemns it. However, in this case, the emphasis is placed on the definition of the term, which contains the word “school.”



confront the realization that the initiation mechanism is intrinsically linked to its inherent intensity and brutality. In traditional understanding, this process centers on the individual undergoing initiation. In contrast, the chiral interpretation externalizes the brutality. Dissecting this duality within the context of sociocultural dynamics can enhance our understanding of the phenomenon's essence.

The third stage, “non-return,” can be seen as the aftermath of the act, its ramifications for society, and the psychological state of the perpetrator. Within this format, “non-return” might symbolize the impossibility of returning to one’s prior state after committing such an act or, in a purely symbolic chiral interpretation, the detachment from life manifesting as physical death, while in a nominal initiation, the individual is reborn.

Thus, when interpreted through the paradigm of transitional rituals, a school shooting can be seen as a distorted form of initiation termed a “Ritual of Chiral Initiation.” This perspective challenges us to re-evaluate the traditional stages defined by Turner.

Double Separation: from initiation to traumatic experience

As V. Turner writes, the rite of passage begins with an act of separation:

The initial phase (separation) involves symbolic behaviors signifying the detachment of an individual or group from their previous position in the social structure and from certain cultural conditions (“states”), or from both (Turner, 1983, p. 168).

Here, the school can be viewed as an epistemological scene in which the individual becomes subject to various practices of power and knowledge. Within this transitional structure, an adolescent navigates between two worlds: the sanctuary of home and the arena of school. These locales establish two distinct regimes to truth, making the individual respond to diverse power systems. Confronting these varied epistemologies might produce an imbalance leading to cultural and psychological clashes.

In this context, a report from the U.S. Secret Service that highlights cases of school violence isn’t just a set of statistical figures; instead, it serves as a generic tool for dissecting the conceptual cocoon that envelops the phenomenon of school shootings. Within this discourse, there is no solitary identity attributed to the trespasser; rather, it spans a web of many socio-cultural and psychological factors (Vossekuil et al., 2004). At the nexus of these forces and narratives, a quest emerges to fathom the instances of trauma and dislocation that could drive adolescents to commit such extreme acts of violence.

Within the discursive panopticon of contemporary society where youth violence is prominently spotlighted, one can discern the interplay of diverse practices and forms of knowledge shaping individuals. School shootings may be understood as a phenomenon borne from distinct patterns of trauma and discord. We now aim to identify the factors that shape these behavioral blueprints.



1. Biological Factors. Drawing upon research by A. Raine (2002), neural immaturity is highlighted as a key factor increasing the likelihood of aggressive and criminal behavior. Studies by the Australian Raising Children Network and the Adolescent Health Center emphasize the importance of synaptic pruning in the developing adolescent brain. This process entails the reduction of unused neuronal connections while strengthening the active ones. This phenomenon arises from an initial surplus of neural components, such as axons, neurons, and synapses, which subsequently undergo pruning or apoptosis ('Why Is Synaptic Pruning Important for the Developing Brain?' 2017). Notably, the final stage of brain development takes place in the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision-making. Data from L. Steinberg (2004) and B. Figner et al. (2009) prove that adolescents are more inclined to risk-taking than children or adults.

2. Social Factors. The significance of the social context is evident within family and school environments. The academic literature contains debates regarding the influence of family structure on adolescent behavior. One of the viewpoints underscores the link between family structure and a child's mental well-being, pointing out potential risks tied to "non-traditional" family structures (Brown, 2010). Nonetheless, numerous studies challenge this perspective, indicating socio-economic factors as the chief determinants of child well-being. Longitudinal analyses have detected a correlation between higher income and education levels and child welfare, positing that the stability of the familial environment is key rather than its structural composition (Crawford et al., 2011).

In a broader social context, family interactions play a crucial role in shaping child's personality. Research suggests that families with criminal members often lack supervision and emotional intimacy (Gerard et al., 2016). Dr. George S. Everly, Jr. notes that many male adolescents who engage in school shootings tend to be isolated, display obsessive tendencies, and possess a limited ability to anticipate the repercussions of their actions (2018).

In a school setting, bullying remains a pressing issue. D. Espelage highlights that some bullying victims eventually adopt aggressive behavior as a mode of retaliation (Swaak, 2018). Bullying dynamics typically encompass three main participants: the bully, the victim, and the bystanders. This triadic interaction often leads to the victim's public humiliation. Such bullying may result in long-term adverse effects such as behavioral disorders, depressive states, and social isolation. On many occasions, victims might attempt to reclaim their reputation by turning to aggressive means. This could escalate to extreme violent acts, reminiscent of the incident with the Uvalde Shooter (Kesslen, 2022).

Of note is that the interplay of biological and social factors can place adolescents in intricate scenarios, exposing them to various traumatic experiences that might culminate in aggressive behaviors. It is vital to account for both these elements when conceptualizing preventive strategies and interventions.



Reviewing the studies on adolescent interactions in the face of globalization and technological advances, it's essential to underline that adolescents often exhibit a fluctuating disposition, riddled with contradictions and a sense of duality. This dichotomy stems from the ongoing conflict between adolescent's inner province and the external world molded by socio-cultural norms and anticipations.

A more in-depth investigation of the dual-separation mechanism reveals a mirrored (fractal?) progression. Here, every subsequent division emerges as a counter to the preceding one, forging a convoluted series of events that might shape the life path of a potential future aggressor. An adolescent caught in a tug-of-war between two symbolic topoi due to inherent aggressive tendencies and societal estrangement, faces yet another internal schism when navigating the socio-cultural landscape. This dual layer of progressive division can pave the way for intense internal distress.

Among many possible responses to such trauma there is a quest for equilibrium and harmony, manifesting either through violent actions or self-destructive behaviors. This can be interpreted as an attempt to establish one's own order amidst the chaos of both internal and external purviews. However, this chosen trajectory is not simply an act of self-preservation; it is a symbolic gesture that elicits pronounced reactions from the witnesses, most often characterized by fear or repulsion.

In our analysis, it is essential to emphasize the stage of dual separation during the "Ritual of Chiral Initiation." Investigating this specific stage allows for a deep theoretical exploration into the structure of adolescent self-consciousness and socio-cultural assimilation.

The "Ritual of Chiral Initiation" is not just a mirrored reflection of traditional socialization pathways. Instead, it represents a unique process in which the dichotomous structures of an adolescent's internal and external realities collide, setting the stage for potential discord. The concept of dual separation suggests a deep theoretical insight to adolescent's personal aspirations and values conflict with prevailing socio-cultural norms and expectations.

Within this framework, the stage of dual separation serves not only as a diagnostic tool but also as a mechanism for predicting potential acts of violence, particularly in educational settings.

Thus, a thoughtful examination of dual separation within the "Ritual of Chiral Initiation" provides us with a toolkit to deeply understand the dynamics of adolescents' inner conflicts. As a result, it helps timely interventions and adjustments to potential paths that may lead to destructive outcomes.

"Here comes Johnny!": the apex of violence and Inverted Liminality

The classical understanding of liminality, as articulated in the works of Turner, postulates a state between being and non-being, akin to liminal instances of death



or intrauterine existence. This notion frequently evokes images of invisibility and obscurity, suggesting absence of distinct boundaries or definiteness. Metaphors of ambiguity, voids, and eclipses characterize this transitional, elusive state, embodying both the potential for rebirth and the specter of annihilation.

Liminality and death are intimately intertwined within cultural and philosophical discourses. Nonetheless, death, in this context, is purely symbolic. It does not pertain to the biological cessation of life but epitomizes the metaphor of a transitional phase preceding a moment of rebirth or reincarnation. This symbolic death functions not as a terminus but as an indispensable juncture, enabling an individual or a collective to relinquish antiquated bonds and acquire a renewed identity or status. In this vein, liminal states can be conceived as portals or spaces for transformation where the old 'dies' to invigorate the new.

...liminality underpinning rituals of status elevation, wherein an individual, upon undergoing rites, progresses through the hierarchical schema of social standings from lower to higher (Turner, 1983, p. 20).

Let's consider the classical model of liminality.

Within initiation ceremonial practices, adolescents or neophytes were ushered into a disciplinary milieu where conventional power and knowledge constructs were rebuffed or reinterpreted. Within this setting, the uncharted land worked as an institution where their consciousness and self-awareness underwent recalibration. This domain, distanced from their former reality, elucidated mechanisms through which traditional demarcations between the material and the spiritual dissolved, accentuating a sense of anomaly. Subjected to this influence, the adolescents re-evaluated their intrinsic knowledge hierarchies and their alignment with the socio-cultural codes and societal regulations. Consequently, these initiation practices and rituals transformed into a mechanism facilitating reconfiguration and subsequent assimilation with the societal structures followed by augmented comprehension of one's own locus within them.

During this period, the adolescent immersed into the institutional structures of his tribe, gaining insights that transcended mere information dissemination. Through delving into myths and traditions, he deepened his grasp of the sociocultural backdrop, acquiring nuanced perspectives on the world around him. The names of deities and the narratives of their exploits served as orientation tools, providing not merely knowledge, but a context in which he could construct his life stance. Encountering societal norms and behavioral codes, he became aware of how they shape community life and delineate relationships therein. This formative process implied not only the acquisition of knowledge but also contemplation over one's identity within that horizon of events. Having undergone such experience, the adolescent faced the necessity to demonstrate resilience and determination to transition to the subsequent developmental phase. That wasn't merely a ritual. It was an affirmation of his readiness to assume new roles and responsibilities, underscoring his societal worth.



Within the cultural practices of many tribes during this time, stringent restrictive measures are often observed, such as food abstention, communication prohibition, and immersion in complete darkness. While at first glance these might appear as simple tests of physical endurance, they actually symbolize intricate representations of profound inner metamorphoses. The ascetic ritual primarily targets spiritual transformation, signifying a radical renunciation of former aspirations and dependencies. This renunciation of familiar desires is not the final goal but a pathway to reevaluate one's selfhood, comprehend one's societal role, and discern the essence of human existence. Overcoming adversities and pain during this ritual induces drastic psychological shifts, making realize the cessation of former life and the irreversibility of the transformation. This distinct demarcation between childhood and adulthood emphasizes the pivotal nature of the transition, heralding a new role and objectives within the tribe's sociocultural domain. Thus, the rites and restrictions become not merely acts of severity but a fundamental component in awakening and shaping the mind of a young individual.

The rite of passage, in this context, manifests itself as a tripartite recognition of the sacred, the death, and sexuality. These facets, previously obscured from an immature gaze, emerge as key junctures in an individual's transformation. The sacred reveals to the individual the depths of the cosmic order and his place within this expansive system. Within the confines of this ritual, death is not merely perceived as the fading of life but as a profound contemplation on the ephemerality of human existence. Sexuality is understood not solely as a biological imperative but as a complex web of relationships that forge interpersonal ties. Encountering these concepts for the first time, the young individual experiences a significant shift in his worldview. This awakening process enables one to reassess the life's direction and determine one's own role in the society. Consequently, initiation transcends being a mere ritualistic act; it becomes an intricate instrument that assists the individual in recognizing and accepting the evolved self at a profound level of consciousness.

Physical ordeals that individuals faced in many cultural traditions were often extreme and torturous. Their meaning did not lie in the actual physical pain endured but in the pursuit of spiritual transformation. Through grappling with intense sensations, individuals came to understand and live through deep aspects of human experience, such as transitions, endings, and fresh commencements. These ordeals propelled them past the boundaries of their initial state, where personal delineations remained vague. On this transformative journey, individuals reconnected with the core tenets of their identity, which lead to a deep introspection of their past selves and the revelation of new cognitive horizons.

The symbolic death of children, a ritual that is present in numerous cultural practices, coupled with the ensuing reawakening, serves as a profound analogy to cosmic creation. This ritual reflects age-old beliefs about the world emerging from chaos. In participating in this ceremony, young individuals not only underwent an experience but also recalibrated their perspectives, aligning with the grand cosmic schema.



The intense moments accompanying individuals during the ritual manifested as a fusion of spiritual enlightenment and cognizance. They experienced a profound connection to the cosmic essence, reconnecting to the roots of their cultural identity.

In this context, death was not viewed as an absolute end but rather as a transition. This metaphor, signaling the end of one phase and the beginning of another, enabled individuals to move beyond the limitations of their previous conceptions and viewpoints. Confronted with this transition, each gained a renewed understanding of the place within the global order.

This reevaluation, fundamentally transforming the individual, became a cornerstone of sociocultural interactions. Consequently, the initiation ritual transcended a mere journey of self-discovery, acting also as a testament to collective memory and the importance of shared traditions.

In essence, such rituals cultivated a strong bond between the individual and the cosmos, bridging the temporal horizons of the past and future, thus promoting sustained cultural and spiritual integration.

It is essential to examine the details of navigating the liminal phase—a period poised between two states or life stages. In this interstitial space, replete with ambivalence and diverse paths, there unfolds an intense internal metamorphosis and introspection. Liminality, from this perspective, emerges as a critical stage wherein the individual reassesses his perceptions, reference points, and position within the cultural landscape. In this regard, Turner posited:

The attributes of liminality or liminal personae (often referred to as “threshold people”) are inherently ambivalent. This ambivalence arises because both the concept of liminality and its embodiments evade or slip through the classification nets that typically define ‘states’ and positions within a cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they do not strictly belong to the category of “this” or “that.” They dwell in the interstices between positions that are designated and demarcated by law, custom, convention, and ceremony. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate characteristics are symbolized by a diverse array of symbols in numerous societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. For instance, liminality is often likened to death... (1983, p. 169).

In the study of liminality, we encounter a distinct phenomenon where the individual exists in a state of “neither here nor there; neither this nor that,” a state shaped more by cultural practices, customs, and rituals than by formal structures. This transitional phase saturated with deep ambivalence, compels adolescents to navigate between the familiar and the unfamiliar modes of life. In this stage, they confront internal tumult and contradictions, which can lead to feelings of disorientation. Such an intense state causing a disruption to their usual stability can be viewed as a jarring experience. However, this very state can also act as a catalyst, prompting self-reflection, personal transformation, and integration into societal structures.



In the context of “Ritual of Chiral Initiation,” we discern the specifics of adolescent transition when the individual becomes deeply aware of the dichotomy of the rift. On one side, it delineates the boundary between familial and academic realms, the two main arenas of the sociocultural development. On the flip side, it represents a profound fault, occasionally traumatic, which stems from the aforementioned boundary and can impact the individual’s psycho-emotional, and, potentially, physical well-being.

This dual dynamic engenders a compelling effect: the classical understanding of liminality, typically characterized as “neither there nor here,” seems to lose its conventional significance. The concept itself appears to invert, shining in a new light, reflecting and augmenting its initial aspects. In this new perspective, the subject transcends the established boundaries of liminality, offering us a more intricate and profound vision of this state. Such an inverted liminality necessitates a re-evaluation of our traditional methods used in analyzing and interpreting transitional phases in an individual’s life trajectory. An adolescent situated in a specific location like school and involved in specific actions such as harming peers, comes to represent a foreboding phenomenon of our times¹. Teetering on the edge of the familiar and the unknown, the adolescent involved in such a grim “ritual” might occasionally reassess his standing in the sociocultural landscape, viewing oneself as elevated and distinct from the peers. This sentiment, consistently distorted, becomes a driving force in the actions and choices. This behavior is evident in the majority of school shooters, be it the Columbine incident or the mass shooting in Kazan (2021). In the latter case, pertaining to Ilnaz Galyaviev’s assault on his school in Kazan in 2021, he professed during his arrest that he had “realized himself as a god”, “a monster awakened within”, and harbored “hatred for everyone” (Experts labeled the Kazan shooter a lone-wolf terrorist, 2021).

Within the context of cultural anthropological analysis, the violent actor’s aforementioned declaration can be interpreted as a clear expression of “Ritual of Chiral Initiation.” At a point where an individual reshapes or even transforms his grasp of liminality, we witness a process of reevaluation. Here, time-honored symbols, once tied to order, give way to indicators of fragmentation and volatility. This process of inversion might suggest that sound institutions responsible for molding an individual’s identity, like family or schools, confront challenges and inconsistencies. This, subsequently, may point towards an internal turmoil—where long-standing values and ideals are either questioned or wholly rejected.

Clearly, established structures and concepts, including those of the sacred, the sexuality, and death, undergo a process of redefinition in the context of this

1 In this context, differentiation is essential. Our reflection primarily focuses on manifestations of violence in educational institutions, given that our analytical subject pertains to the phenomenon of school shootings. However, it’s vital to underline that violence, stemming from the traumatic experience of “double separation,” can also manifest itself within the familial domain. Such incidents don’t fall within the school shootings category, but examining them in the context of “Ritual of Chiral Initiation” remains equally important. Moreover, we assert that when a teenager commits a violent act within the family, such as killing family members, scholars should and must interpret it within the “Ritual of Chiral Initiation” framework – author’s note.



inverted liminality. During this process, the sacred, traditionally understood as something lofty and inviolable, becomes the object of profanation: the school shooter, through acts of violence, distorts the sacred value of life by asserting it through the death of others, thereby reformulating the meaning of life through acts of destruction. Meanwhile, sexuality, typically associated with processes of birth and creation, loses its intensity in this context, becoming a state devoid of passion and attraction. Death, as a pivotal symbol in many traditions that once implied the possibility of spiritual transformation, is now contemplated as an inevitable and ultimate cessation of existence, severed from its profound contexts.

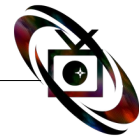
Thus, on the cusp between traditional liminality and its inverse, we encounter a reassessment of fundamental archetypes of human essence. Those aspects typically associated with elements of life, connection, and transformation—such as the sacred, the sexual, and death—are distorted and assume new forms within this perspective. The central figure in this scenario, the actor of violence, diving into the depths of this inverted reality, reinterprets established symbols, perhaps envisioning himself as the main interpreter of these new perspectives. This process of self-awareness and self-identification attests to a profound need to comprehend and reevaluate standard frames of perception. In this light, the actions and perspectives can be perceived by them as profound insights or even visions, in which the actors become observers or architects of a new order.

Non-Return to the world of the profane

In the initiation processes, a crucial role is played not only by the transformation of the individual's social status but also by the self-reevaluation as an entity possessing a unique identity. The Return stage is not limited to the simple conclusion of the ritual; rather, it becomes a chamber for deep reflection where the integration of new understandings and experiences leads to the reshaping of self-awareness. However, at times, this journey is fraught with internal conflicts, as fresh interpretations of the world collide with preexisting beliefs.

During the Return stage, the individual not only assumes new responsibilities and roles but also engages in an analysis of the new “self,” drawing on the experiences and knowledge gained during the transitional rites. This stage can be considered decisive in personality development, as it is here that a new understanding of one's place in society and the world crystallizes. The Return stage is not an ordinary endpoint but a starting point for a new dynamic of personal development, where self-discovery merges with adaptation to the changing socio-cultural environment.

“Ritual of Chiral Initiation” unveils profound layers of understanding the structure and dynamics of mass shootings in schools, presenting to us the non-linearity and asymmetry of what we conventionally perceive as an initiation process. The third stage, “non-return,” becomes a meaningful moment when the consequences of the act of violence leave a profound imprint not only on the social structure but also within the psychological labyrinth of the trespasser. This becomes



a source of rupture with reality, an intense sense of alienation, and the loss of individual identity.

In its chiral interpretation, “non-return” entails not only the physical withdrawal from the world but also spiritual alienation engendered by the act of violence. This idea of alienation functions as an invisible barrier, hindering the perpetrator from returning to previously embraced socio-cultural markers and values. Within this context, “non-return” serves as a counterpoint to traditional initiation, wherein, instead of transitioning to a new life stage, the individual plunges into an abyss of metaphysical stagnation or even regression.

Studying the “non-return” stage in wording of “Ritual of Chiral Initiation,” we confront the multi-layered nature of this issue, transcending the finite actions of the individual, such as suicide or surrender to law enforcement. This stage immerses us in a profound analysis of how socio-cultural markers and individual identities undergo transformation and redefinition. The contemporary media space with its ceaseless flow of information becomes a domain where the image of the criminal is constructed, modified, and amplified, inexorably linking him to his deeds.

Engaging with “non-return” necessitates a comprehensive analysis encompassing both the internal motivations of the perpetrator and the intricate interactions within the global communication environment. Under the influence of this process, the criminal’s image no longer just reflects his actions but becomes the product of numerous interpretations, exaggerations, and distortions in mass media.

The “non-return” definitely signifies a stage of shaping a new individual embedded within society. In today’s world, the media space holds a central role in defining social interactions. Media, in essence, not only transmits information but also participates in its formation, crafting narratives that can alter or even distort the original perception of the individual. Their attempts to impose this image upon society, coupled with awkward efforts to comprehend the perpetrator’s motives, profiling, and search for culpability, can lead to misleading portrayals. The depth and complexity of this issue are intertwined with fundamental philosophical and anthropological questions, calling for further academic reflections and analysis.

Brief Conclusions

Studying the dynamics of events and considering the prevailing socio-cultural context, it can be argued that “Ritual of Chiral Initiation” provides the most suitable model for analyzing the phenomenon of school shootings. It is not just a conceptual representation of events but a deeply ingrained understanding of an individual’s trajectory within our cultural matrix.

1. The first stage, double separation, implies that a subject who has already undergone a dramatic detachment from initial socio-cultural spaces, enters a state



of complete alienation, reconstructing one's place and self-identification in a new context.

2. The second stage, inverted liminality, reflects a crisis moment when familiar boundaries of reality become blurred. The subject, at this point, crosses a threshold, overturning conventional norms and expectations, plunging into a range of ambiguity and contrast. It's a temporal space between the known and the unknown, where the perpetrator grapples with profound questions of one's own identity and worldview.

3. The third stage, as noted earlier, elevates this process to the territory of societal interaction. Media, in its pursuit of interpretation and narrative creation, often distorts the essence of the incident, presenting a generalized, standardized image of the criminal. This portrayal, sometimes far from reality, influences public consciousness, introducing a new layer of interpretations and perceptions about the event. There's a risk that such distortion might lead to further societal misunderstandings.

However, it's important to acknowledge that any model has its limitations and cannot fully encompass the complexity and diversity of reality. School shootings, as extreme manifestations of socio-cultural tendencies, require a comprehensive and multidimensional approach, including psychological, sociological, and philosophical analyses. Only through such an approach can we hope to understand and perhaps prevent similar events in future.

This study attempts to create a hypothetical model for describing school shootings through an anthropological methodology of ritual and ritualization. Further research in this direction will provide deeper insights into the phenomenon of school shootings and mass shootings in schools.

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