

I have been fascinated and uplifted, in equal parts, by Grayson Perry's recent Channel 4 series on rites of passage. I envy his artist's gift to see and empathise and then to translate that understanding into something visible and beautiful. In the series he examined our major life events of birth, coming of age, marriage and death and sought to recognise their significance in an increasingly secular society.

I found his gentle, respectful examination of how other cultures mark major life events reassuring and I felt sad that we seem to have somehow sleepwalked in to the instantaneous selfie world of "take a picture" and then move on. I've never fully understood the national outpouring of grief, bordering on hysteria, when Princess Diana died, but perhaps it was a collective deep-seated reaction to an event that needed to be marked with real feeling and emotion and not a purely ceremonial rationalisation of a death.

Thinking further about major life events, there are many others that do not have roots in religious ceremony but nevertheless are significant landmarks such as graduation and first job. I think that our society has become too adept at boiling things down to the lowest common denominator, or just an excuse for a drink.

In this edition of *The Biomedical Scientist* our Here to Help article is on first day placement nerves. Nothing can fully prepare a person for laboratory life; it is so remote from an evening supermarket job

rites of passage



Have we become so focussed on efficiencies that we no longer know how to celebrate?

or holiday work in a sports club. To the uninitiated, a laboratory is a high octane, technologically alien environment and the successful completion of a placement, or period of training, is a rite of passage in every sense of the word.

At the other end of the scale, candidates who recently passed the histopathology reporting examination attended an RCPATH ceremony to receive their certificates and mark their rite of passage in to a new professional era. It was a moment of shared pride and celebration and that was the essence of Grayson's series: the construction of rites as a vehicle for the coming together and sharing of a celebration.

Our profession has a series of hurdles and rites that mark our professional

progress, from registration through to consultant level practice. We are not a profession that does fanfares but I think we are missing a trick if we downplay our milestone successes and I wonder whether we have become so focussed on efficiencies that we have unwittingly lost sight of the importance of the shared celebration of achievement. We have earned our right to recognition, perhaps it's now time to recognise the importance of our rites.

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