

Development of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation during Adolescence: A Review

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Abstract: In the larger context, society has been binary with respect to gender as well as sexual identity. It is a reality that the majority of the part of the society is not very comfortable with the idea of someone who expresses themselves differently than they look. It is of utmost importance that the common people should be made aware of the various contexts that exist and that propose their own understanding which explains the reasons behind minorities with respect to gender identity as well as sexual orientation. A thorough interrogation would unravel how sexuality and the identity related to gender, during the adolescent years emerges, this just may as well be an answer to the typical prevalence of heterosexuals in the majority and the reason behind the sexual orientation of other minorities as well. The current investigation would contribute to giving a peek into how many different groups of researchers believe in different reasons that are responsible for the formation of gender identity and sexual orientation during adolescence.

Keywords: Gender identity, Sexual Orientation, Adolescence

1. INTRODUCTION

The identity of a person is something that is very distinctive, personal in nature, and yet is a social undertaking. It is often associated with the body type that was given to an individual during the time of birth. The related persons often teach children what to think, what to express, and what to feel instead of 'how'. This often creates an imbalance between the gender identity that has been imposed on a person by society and what a person feels, as gender itself was presented by society and its norms. It is very important for society to understand that however one was born does not always align with the sense of gender identity that person has. To feel belongingness to gender and the expression related to it, should be a personal choice. Gender identity is a specific identification of roles and responsibilities that a person would like to associate carry on with. Many parts of the world, still do not believe the aforesaid, however, it is a reality of contemporary society. Sexual orientation is a debatable topic in society as its many different forms exist. Which one is the most accepted and which is not are social phenomenon. Many argue that since the ultimate purpose of humankind is to reproduce then why do the different sets of sex-related orientations exist. Coming to the question, what exactly are the elements that are responsible for the sexual orientation of an individual. To this, many different groups of people have their own set of beliefs, with the help of which the best and most widely accepted reason is yet to be found.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF GENDER IDENTITY DURING ADOLESCENCE

Gender is a social construct defined by society with respect to accompanying roles and responsibilities that come along with gender. The requirement for adhering to identity is the basic foundational necessity of any person which is also very important for their mental health (Kazieva 2015). Flotskaya 2018 stated that gender identity is a crucial component of someone's specific identification and is also the governor of the behavior while understanding and practicing social roles and responsibilities.

During the early adolescent years, Churkina (2017) found that the most prevalent gender identity among both the girls and the boys was androgynous, meaning they portrayed the significant characteristics both of masculine as well as feminine in nature. This could reflect that while the onset of puberty just begins, the adolescents are also curious and confused to experience and understand the characteristics of both the identities, to figure out which would be congruent with respect to their own gender. Kroger (2007) as well described that during the early age of adolescence, individuals commence putting their identity in place actively and are searching for agreeable choices. They starting to move ahead and conform in the chosen direction. This might be a very healthy way of perceiving the meaning that comes along with different gender and finding out the best suitable type for oneself. It has frequently been delineated from the perspective of cognitive and social learning theories that manifests human as a being who actively builds on the cognition through assimilating and accommodating new information into the existing schemas that are acquired by the environment such as gender. With regard to the expression of gender and divergence observed in gender, many other theorists believe the operation of biology, hormones, and epigenetics as well as the constitution of the brain are some factors responsible (Martin 2010).

Steensma et al (2013) opined that various researches reveal that the psychosocial, as well as biological factors distinctively, have an effect on the construction of gender identity but the inter-changeability and dynamics between the two are yet to be discovered. How any person contributes to the process on their own is also something that is yet not known. Vasilenko (2017) and Bakunova (2017) reported that adolescence is the most crucial time in life when the gender identity of a person is getting established. This period brings along many kinds of changes, in all domains of development when a person is transitioning between childhood to adolescence. This time is also characterized by confusion between adapting to many changes and what would one like to be, it also brings along the requirement for self-assertion. Adolescents also like to practice autonomy and freedom. Unpredictability and fluidity regarding one's sex and gender are very prevalent during these years. Due to bodily changes and hormones, the agreeing to self and the associating identity is also often uncertain. (Reisner et al., 2016).

Erickson explained in the theory of psychosocial development's fifth stage identity v/s role confusion. If someone has had a stable and reliable relationship, had autonomy and has confidence, then chances are that the person figures out one's identity and the associated roles. It would also determine future success and the ability to have an intimate partner to share life with. However, if a person is unable to do so and is in confusion with identity and respective roles, then it could have an adverse effect on a person's life that could last for a very long time (Ragelienė 2016) such as fear of commitment, unstable mental health, weak self-concept as well as low self-esteem.

Building upon Erikson's theory, Marcia (1966) reported that the process of construction of identity during adolescence is often influenced by beliefs and practices. In the case where people conform to an identity without curiously exploring other existing different forms then foreclosure takes place. The confusion related to identity takes place when a person neither explores nor understands nor conforms to any selected identity. The state when adolescents are experimenting and learning about identities, and have an openness towards options yet have not decided which one to take on, is associated with a Moratorium. This means when an individual is in the non-conforming stage while still exploring such period is called as Moratorium. For those who have understood the roles associated with different identities and have selected their own, along with meaning attached to it, and are ready to make further commitments, then the state of conforming to an identity is successfully achieved (Arnold, 2017).

There are many aspects that influence the identity of an individual which could be described as relatable to nature and nurture. Biological and genetic factors, environmental factors such as people who an individual lives and interact with within the immediate environment, friends, and the other social systems which directly or indirectly make an impact, all are contributing factors in constructing a person's identity.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION DURING ADOLESCENCE

Sexual orientation could be understood as the design of emotional, romantic, and sexual preference for one or more gender. It also relates to one's conscious perception of own identity on the grounds of attraction and behavior. It may or may not be learned by the community that one associates with. Many evidence state that sexual orientation may be understood as the degree of prevalence of sexual attraction towards other sex or to that of same-sex ranging on a continuum with two extremes of one and the other. If looked at broadly then various different sexual orientations could be categorized as homosexual (being attracted to same-sex as own), heterosexual (being attracted to other sex as of own), bisexual (being attracted to typically identified binary sex irrespective of own sex) as well as asexual (not attracted to any other sex irrespective of own).

Cisgender people (who are attracted to sex other than that of their own) often have an easy pass when it comes to acceptance in the family as well as the society with regard to a partner or sexually preferred mate. However, the discrimination and ill-behavior that the people experience because of their sexual orientation are quite often seen in the case when people prefer someone outside of the hetero-frame seen in present-day society such as lesbians, gay, bisexuals, etc. This has long-term negative effects on various dimensions of their life along with their mental health. Many researchers have been trying to study the background that helps in the formation of sexual orientation and related identity (Morgan, 2013).

Many different groups of believers have their own thoughts regarding the emergence and the rationale behind the different sexual orientations of different people. (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007; Sell, 1997) most commonly carry the opinion that it has to do with who a person incline toward or prefers to have erotic attractions or feelings for, this may or may not be or one or more than one gender. This group believes that sexual orientation could be simply understood by attraction. Mustanski et al., (2014) and Hall, (2019) along with many others believe that sexual orientation is an intricate construction that indicates many bearings on major key dimensions such as attraction, behavior, romance, and identity. This would mean that attraction alone is certainly not just one component but there are many more than contribute to forming a person's sexual orientation. Many investigations that take into account many measures to study orientation reveal that the given above key dimensions may not be the frequent factors that adolescents or adults always correspond to (Austin et al., 2007). Saewyc (2011) believes that while describing and noting the key factors behind sexual orientation, an in-depth analysis should be done while considering genetics and biological reasons and contemplating the dynamic relationship

among these. Many work that has been explored state that people who experience dissonance between their personal and sexual identity are often caught by depression, anxiety low self-esteem.

While adolescence is a delicate period of time, it is an absolute necessity that the immediate network of the individual need to educate, support, and help adolescents in order to understand different orientations and also give them space to freely express themselves. It could be articulated by the given studies that the environment near these individuals also has an effect on sexual orientation. Unfortunately, if some person discloses that their preference is different from the most prevalent orientations then it causes trouble for them. Rosario et al., in 2011 researched and showed that failing to positively integrate one's LGB+ identity into one's overall identity predicts depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Ryan et al., (2015) and Puckett et al., (2017) revealed that people who receive a pessimistic reaction from close ones with respect to disclosing sexual preference are also seen to have low self-esteem, suffer from depression and are also suicidal. However, it may be possible that differences do exist when we talk about the development of sexual identity towards different sex while comparing it to that of same-sex. Floyd & Bakeman, (2006) and Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, and Parsons, (2006) showed that much evidence communicates that adolescents who belong to sexual minorities undergo development at early ages. Significant facts and many investigations are yet under the process that is very much needed to understand the sexual orientation, its emergence, and development throughout adolescence not just for homosexuals but also for heterosexual parts of the human society.

It is safe to agree to the fact that sexual identity is almost understood by the end of the adolescent years. Calzo, et al. said that by late adolescence and early adulthood nearly everybody has a sense of sexual identity and preference for attraction towards other which may be towards the same sex or the other.

CONCLUSION

It could be said that no definite explanation exists to exactly identify the factors and components that make up the gender identity of a person. However, there are most agreed arguments by virtue of which majority believe that there are multiple factors that contribute their own significant information which collects and make a person have the identity that they express as their own. When talking about sexuality looking at it from a lifespan perspective, studies take into account different forces such as psychological, biological, lifecycle, etc. when finding human behavior. Different groups also represent different views of sexual orientation. To get a commonly believed and most accepted answer an inter-disciplinary as well as intra-disciplinary agreeableness is required to put forth the most arguable discussions and fruitful results.

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