Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood: A Cultural Approach

Chapter 5

Gender

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Chapter Overview

- Cultural and historical patterns of gender socialization
- Gender socialization in modern Western societies
- Gender stereotypes
- Impact of globalization

Clarifying the Difference

- Gender
  - Refers to the social categories of male and female
- Sex
  - Refers to the biological status of being male or female
**Traditional Cultures**

**From Girl to Woman**
- Girls typically work alongside their mothers from an early age
- Girls typically maintain a close relationship with their mothers
- During adolescence the ‘world contracts for girls’
- Girls endure new restrictions observed for women
- Girls have narrower socialization at adolescence because their budding sexuality is more likely to be tightly restricted

**Rates of Female Circumcision**

Discuss in terms of narrow socialization during adolescence.

*The Economist (1999)*

**Traditional Cultures**

**From Boy to Man**
- Boys typically have less contact with their families and more contact with peers
- During adolescence the ‘world expands for boys’
- Boys enjoy new privileges reserved for men
- For boys, manhood is something that has to be achieved
Are we different?

Theories of Gender Development: Socialization

- Areas where the lives of adolescent girls were narrowly constricted:
  1. Occupational Choice
  2. Intellectual Work
  3. Sexuality
  4. Physical Appearance

- Gender Intensification Hypothesis: Psychological and behavioural difference between males and females become more pronounced at adolescence because of the intensified socialization pressures to conform to culturally prescribed roles

Family, Peers and School

- Differential Gender Socialization
  - Socializing boys and girls according to different expectations
  - Creates an understanding of ‘appropriate’ behaviours for males and females
  - Reflects a culture’s beliefs about gender
  - Parents and teachers may do this without even thinking consciously about what they are doing

Give examples of differential gender socialization in childhood, adolescence and emerging adulthood.

One study found that 90% of all infants observed at an American shopping mall were wearing clothing that was gender specific in color or style.
Magazines ... a special issue

- Magazines, more than any other medium, display the most obvious focus on gender socialization especially for adolescent girls.
- Physical appearance is stressed as being of ultimate importance.
- There is also an intense focus on how to be appealing to boys.

Theories of Gender Development: Biological

- Biological:
  - Hormonal differences

- Physiological:
  - Women have more connections between hemispheres.
  - Women’s amygdala more strongly connected to other areas of the brain.
  - Differences in peak of brain size.
  - Maturation of some areas of the brain (mechanical and visual) faster for boys.

Theories of Gender Development: Evolutionary

- Men and women have experienced different environmental challenges throughout evolutionary history.
  - Hunter vs. nurturer
  - Paternity certainty
Masculinity, Femininity & Androgyny

- The Bem Sex Role Inventory
  - Describes traits regarded by most members of the American majority culture as being masculine or feminine
  - Most widely used measure of gender role perception
  - A cross-national study of young people in 20 countries found similar gender role perceptions with remarkable consistency

Discussion Stop

1. Take out a blank piece of paper and number 1 to 20
2. As the 20 words appear below for 2 seconds write down whether you think they describe masculine or feminine traits
3. Ready ...

Let's see how you did!

Bem Sex Role Inventory

... the answers!

1. Self-Reliant – Masculine
2. Compassionate – Feminine
3. Shy – Feminine
4. Analytical – Masculine
5. Dominant – Masculine
6. Ambitious – Masculine
7. Loyal – Feminine
8. Understanding – Feminine
9. Assertive – Masculine
10. Cheerful – Feminine
11. Affectionate – Feminine
12. Independent – Masculine
13. Aggressive – Masculine
14. Sympathetic – Feminine
15. Athletic – Masculine
16. Child-Like – Feminine
17. Tender – Feminine
18. Individualistic – Masculine
19. Competitive – Masculine
20. Gullible – Feminine
Androgyny

- The term used for the combination of masculine and feminine traits in one person
- Advocates of androgyny have argued that being androgynous is better than being either masculine or feminine because an androgynous person has a greater repertoire of traits to draw on in their daily lives
- Advocates point to research that show androgynous children are more flexible and creative than other children (Hemmer and Klieber, 1981)
- Androgynous women are better at saying “no” to unreasonable requests (Kelly et al., 1981)

But what about adolescents? Is androgyny best for them?

Persistence of Beliefs about Gender Differences

- Even when there is a statistically significant difference between males and females, for most characteristics there is nevertheless more similarity than difference between genders
- Most human characteristics fall into a NORMAL DISTRIBUTION where a small proportion of people rate much higher; a small proportion rate much lower; but most people fall somewhere in the middle

Take a look at the next slide to see how this works!

The Bell Curve

looking at math and gender

Even when gender differences exist between males and females, the portion of the two bell curves that overlap is much greater than the portion that is distinctive to either gender.