

26 - Theories of Gender Identity development

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© SPMM Course 10. Sexual development Gender identity typically forms around the age 3-4 and remains established. Gender typing describes the process where an individual acquires a sense of gender-related traits within the society they are born. It usually starts with clothing at a young age. Gender role: behaviour an individual engages in that identifies with their gender e.g. use of cosmetics. Theories of Gender Identity development □ According to Social Learning Theory of gender development, girls and boys learn to behave differently because the society treats them differently (pink dresses for girls, Barbie dolls for girls, etc.). Fathers treat children in a more gendered way than mothers. This sex typing is reinforced by further observational learning by the child and reinforcement that results on accomplishing gender specific developmental tasks. □ Cognitive Developmental Theory stresses the importance of child's participation in gender identity. A child's discovery about his/her biological sex leads to identification with a group and conformity as a result. Thus three stages have been identified:

1. Basic gender identity / gender labelling: Around age three, a child understands she/he is female or male.
2. Gender stability: By age 4 - 5 recognise that gender is retained life-long and will not change!
3. Gender constancy / consistency: Age 6 -7 understand that gender is immutable even if physical changes are carried out. It is a type of conservation achieved akin to Piaget's cognitive development □ According to Gender Schema Processing Theory, gender identity alone provides children the motivation to assume sex-typed behaviour. Following this they observe and learn to be of a specific gender in the society. Thus, a gender schema of the particular culture gets deeply incorporated and serves as a standard for comparison. Sex drive exists from birth but increases in adolescence due to raised androgen secretion. Sexual orientation is explored during adolescence. There are arguments for and against the biological determination of sexual orientation vs. shaping in childhood.

© SPMM Course Sexual Behaviours in Childhood Preschool (age <4 years) □ Exploring private parts through touch and rubbing or showing to others □ Trying to touch women's breasts

(including mother) □ Exposing oneself and attempting to see other exposed people (adults and children) Young Children (approximately 4-6 years) □ Stimulating genitals (masturbating) sometimes when others are present □ Kissing, or holding hands □ Talking about genitals without grasping the meaning in full □ Exploring private parts with peers e.g. “playing doctor”, “I’ll show you mine if you show me yours.” School-Aged Children (approximately 7-12 years) □ Masturbating privately □ Playing courtship games (“mummy and daddy”) □ Gazing at pictures of naked people; viewing sexual content in media (□ Wanting more privacy □ Showing reluctance to discuss sexual issues with adults □ Being sexually attracted to peers

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