

Sexuality and human development essay

[Health & Medicine](#), [Stress](#)



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Introduction

In this self-reflection paper, I discuss how I've undergone development with respect to sexuality based on cultural, familial and peer influences. This discussion will draw from various scholarly sources on sexuality and human development.

An Overview of my yester to current years

I was brought up in a Catholic home and the subject of sexuality in that setting was not talked about at all. I have a sister who is two years older than me and we were taught not to have sex until when we get married. I can recall that there were no discussions on sex or birth control or relationship matters. Interestingly, my mum had gone to school to become a nun, but she realized that she was not destined to become a nun and she gave up on that call. She ended up marrying my dad because she got pregnant while they were still dating. I did not learn about this until when I was an adult. My mum was never willing to talk about this; she was rather

shy when discussing adult sexuality, particularly if she was involved. My dad is not from Canada; he met my mum while on a trip to visit his sister. He was actually back in Austria when he got a letter from my mum indicating that she was pregnant. He came back from Austria to marry her. I find it interesting that although she had those experiences, still she could not talk to us about sex, pregnancy or birth control. I think it was a very uncomfortable subject for her.

Likewise, my dad seemed uncomfortable with the topic other than tell us if he had powers he would ensure that all gay people are sent to an isolated island away from the rest of the society. When I asked him if he would feel the same if I was gay, he did not hesitate to say yes. I did not wait until I was married to have sex and that was the right decision for me, but I really floundered initially when it came to sex and relationships. Had I had a more open relationship with my mum, I do not think I would have made as many mistakes as I did.

I have always been very open with my daughter about sexuality. If she has asked a question about sex, body parts among others, I always give her an open and direct, age-appropriate answer. I have made my best effort to give her a variety of direct opinions and to let her know that as she gets older she will need to make the right decisions about what is right for her.

Theoretical Background

Relationships at the familial, cultural and peer levels shape a person's development. Scholars such as Jean Baker Miller attempted to provide the theoretical framework underlying relationships (Comstock & Qin, 2005). In pursuit of theoretical explanations governing relationships, Miller coined the

relational-cultural theory. According to this theory, humans must have authentic as well as mutual connection in relationships if they have to grow and change (Comstock & Qin, 2005). Miller's theory posits that the history of one's relationships, at the familial level as well as all other significant relationships dictate the way one feels about himself or herself and others. Miller described five good things that she thought stem from growth fostering relationships. Firstly, one develops a sense of well-being or zest following his or her connection with others. Secondly, an individual acquires the ability and motivation to become proactive in not only those relationships, but also other situations. Thirdly, there is increased knowledge of oneself and the other person. Fourthly, one gains an increased sense of worth. Lastly, one develops a desire for more connections beyond the current one. It is essential to note that disconnection has horrible physical and psychological consequences. This theory helps people conceptualize the world in through the lenses of relationships as well as picture the destructive nature of isolation. The healing nature of relationships is illuminated when we picture the world through the lenses of relationships (Comstock & Qin, 2005). These relationships can be at the familial, societal or peer levels. At the society and familial levels, relationships are influenced by culture. Various scholars like Miller (2010) have attempted to evaluate how sex and human development are interlinked. According to Miller (2010), processes of gender socialization begin even before a child is born as parents prepare for their child's arrival. Once the child has been born, parents scrutinize the personality and behaviors of their child; are those behaviors related to how they are treated by their parents or are genetical in nature? In essence,

developmental scientists study the manner in which behaviors emerge or change with time. Scholars have shown that peer pressure, family influences and culture have a significant impact on culture.

According to Miller (2010), there are a number of family variables that affect an adolescent's sexual and contraceptive behavior. They include parents' education, sibling composition, marital status, parental support and control, and hereditary factors. The structure of a family plays a key role in the provision of a salient developmental context; young people grow up in the company of one or two biological parents or in the company of their older or younger siblings (Miller, 2010). When it comes to marital status, many studies have shown that a child who is raised by a single parent is likely to engage in sex while in the adolescent stage. Factors such as a single parent's dating activities and attitude towards relationships, influence a child's perception of sexuality (Miller, 2010).

The association between teenagers and their parents especially when the parent is single has a large impact on the behavior of teenagers (Patterson, 1996). In a complete family, both parents provide their view on important issues such as sexuality and the growing child can be shaped by either one or both parents' perception.

Sexuality is an adolescent risk behavior and it has been documented in many studies that peer influence is related with this behavior (Berten, 2010).

Youths are likely to influence their peers through peer pressure. The adolescent stage is characterized by an increase in risk behavior as well as increased conformity to peer pressures. It has also been noted that conformity to pressures and risk behaviors reduced significantly when an

individual is entering adulthood. Research has shown that adolescents who engage in multiple risky behaviors for instance those who engage in sex also take in alcohol or are involved in drug abuse. A large body of literature has suggested that there is a solid connection between risk behavior of adolescents and that of their peers and this is true even with respect to sexual behavior (Berten, 2010; Arnett, 1992).

On the other hand, society plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's sexual perception. Cultures are guided by various norms which are impacted into the growing child and as a result, the growing child's behavior is to some extent shaped by those norms (Hogan, 1982). The strongest aspect of culture that affects one's perception of culture is religion. Various religions have different teachings with respect to what constitutes sexual morality. Yet, members of a given religion may have varying perceptions of sexuality. For instance Catholics, Orthodox, Judaism, and Protestants all condemn abortion, masturbation, and homo-sexuality, extramarital and premarital coitus (Hogan, 1982). Those who are liberal are unlikely to tolerate those activities or practices.

Critical Analysis

With respect to my life, I find Miller's relational-cultural theory very relevant. At the familial level, I had a rather unconnected relationship with my mum. My mum and dad were not very open with respect to sexuality. In fact, my mum had a rather troubled sexual past. Her actions in the past contributed to the formation of our family. First, she gave up on her call to be a nun. Secondly, she became pregnant out of wedlock. These factors, led her to marry my dad. Unfortunately, she did not share her experiences with us and

my sister and I only learnt about when we had grown up. This disconnection has had various effects on my life. As I grew up, I was warned not to talk about sex or engage in sex before marriage. This was also due to the fact that I was brought up in Catholic Church setting. At this juncture, two things are evident. First, culture played a critical role in influencing my sexual life. Growing up as a Catholic, in a Catholic Church setting and as a nun trainee shaped the way I view sexuality. It seemed to me as a big sin to talk about sex. I did not wait until I got married to engage in sex and I attribute these actions to the cultural setting in which I grew up in. The other factor that influenced my sexuality was my relationship with my dad and mum as well as my peers. At home, my parents were against the idea of talking about sex. As a result, I viewed sex as a bad thing. On the other hand, growing up in a church setting and training as a nun prevented me from associating with my peers outside the church setting. Both these factors affected the way I viewed/view sexuality.

When I examine my own life, these three factors (culture, family and peer pressure) have played a significant role in shaping how I view sexuality. Let me begin by discussing our family structure. My mum had gone to school to become a nun, but she realized that she was not destined to become a nun and she gave up on that call. She ended up marrying my dad because she got pregnant while they were still dating. I did not learn about this until when I was an adult. My mum was never willing to talk about this; she was rather shy when discussing adult sexuality, particularly if she was involved.

Likewise, my dad was not comfortable with us when discussing sexuality.

These were perceptions of my parents with respect to sexuality. As a young

girl, I never felt it easy to discuss matters of sexuality owing to my parents' perception. This topic was completely subdued and it was seen as immoral by just talking about it. I only became comfortable to talk about sex in adulthood. The experience that I had with my parents has shaped the way I relate with my daughter. As I do not want her to fear talking about sex as if it is immoral, I have always been very open with my daughter about sexuality. If she has asked a question about sex, body parts among others, I always give her an open and direct, age-appropriate answer. I have made my best effort to give her a variety of direct opinions and to let her know that as she gets older she will need to make the right decisions about what is right for her.

With respect to culture, religion is the major cultural aspect that has shaped my view of sexuality. As a nun trainee, mingling with boys or talking about sex was the last thing I would think of. As with the Catholic culture, nuns are not supposed to engage in sex so, talking about it is unacceptable. This suppressive aspect of sexuality by the Catholic culture has long lasting impact on an individual's view with respect to sexuality. According to the Catholic teachings, nuns are not expected to marry but, when I gave up on this course, I found it necessary to talk about sexuality. In fact, I have a daughter and my past experiences guide me in teaching my daughter about sexuality.

In addition, peer pressure plays a significant role in defining one's perception of personality. I can confidently state that I did not fall prey to peer pressure. Since peer pressure is rampant during adolescence, I was lucky because at that time, I was training as a nun. As such, my focus was on learning the

values of a nun and as a Catholic and to a larger extent, a Christian. As documented in various literatures, youths are likely to influence their peers through peer pressure. The adolescent stage is characterized by an increase in risk behavior as well as increased conformity to peer pressures. It has also been noted that conformity to pressures and risk behaviors reduced significantly when an individual is entering adulthood. But, during this period, I was busy with my nun course and I'm lucky to have not been negatively influenced by peer pressure. I think the way I view sexuality today has no connection to adolescence peer pressure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has evaluated how human development is affected by sexuality based on cultural, familial and peer influences. Relationships at the familial, cultural and peer levels shape a person's development. When I examine my own life, these three factors (culture, family and peer pressure) have played a significant role in shaping how I view sexuality. As a young girl, I never felt it easy to discuss matters of sexuality owing to my parents' perception. With respect to culture, religion is the major cultural aspect that has shaped my view of sexuality. As a nun trainee, mingling with boys or talking about sex was the last thing I would think of. As with the Catholic culture, nuns are not supposed to engage in sex so, talking about it is unacceptable. In addition, peer pressure plays a significant role in defining one's perception of personality. I can confidently state that I did not fall prey to peer pressure. Since peer pressure is rampant during adolescence, I was lucky because at that time, I was training as a nun.

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