

Psychology of gay and lesbian adolescents



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Psychology of Gay and Lesbian Adolescents Adolescence is a critical period in human life span, as it signifies the formation of personality and the most important character traits. At this period, young person is particularly vulnerable to the conflicts in his/her environment as well as to the overall 'public opinion' about their 'otherness' or identity (Greene and Herek, 1994). Growing up is extremely demanding for homosexual adolescents, who begin to realize the weirdness of their sexual orientation. The present paper is designed to discuss the positive and negative points of their psychological maturation.

First of all, we should define the term 'homosexuality' and relate it to the growing individual. " Homosexuality is the persistent sexual and emotional attraction to someone of the same sex. It is part of the range of sexual expression. Many gay and lesbian individuals first become aware of and experience their homosexual thoughts and feelings during childhood and adolescence" (Anderson and Adley, 1997, p. 71). At the same time their parents begin to consider the adolescent to have mental disorder, as the traditional social stereotypes pose homosexuality as disease. In addition, Catholic Church prohibits 'sodomy' as one of the most dangerous deadly sins.

The basic theory about gay and lesbian sexual identity was created by A. Kinsey during his work at Huckleberry House, an institution that provided homosexual youth with psychological support and care. The first phase of 'coming out' (Kinsey et al, 1953) process begins when the teenager realizes he/she is different from others. The second stage includes direct attraction to the individuals of the same gender, followed by guilt and the anticipation of ostracism from the side of 'decent public'. Furthermore, gay and lesbian

adolescents might either deny themselves or begin to manifest their identity, with relative teenage maximalism. On the one hand, the young person is encumbered by their fears associated with social stigmas, parental response to their sexual orientation and the possible conflicts with peers. On the other hand, demonstrative youth might find some joy in their 'weirdness' and begin to establish themselves in quite deviant ways (flee from home, leaves school or joins marginal groups) (ibid).

The verification of Kinsey's viewpoint can be found in Martin and Hetrick's research (Gonsiorek, 1995) that took place among high school students with homosexual orientation. The scholars found that " Over 40% of their sample had suffered violence because of their sexual orientation ; 49% -of the violence occurred within the family, from parents or siblings.; 41% of females and 34% of males who experienced violent assaults reported having attempted suicide " (ibid, p. 30). What is most prominent about homosexual adolescents is their desire to commit suicide (ibid): 80 per cent reported at least one suicide attempt. In my opinion, these young people were simply not able to find a kind of referent group, which could give them a chance to be understood. The positive aspect of lesbian identity is the firmness of the friendship in so-called 'gay clubs': gay and lesbian adolescents are usually so delighted to find those who share their sexual interests and psychological position that they join homosexual circles for long years.

As one might assume, the inner life of gay and lesbian adolescents is quite complicated because of the direct influence of public opinion, stereotypes and commonly shared neglect of those who are far from established sexual standards. Nevertheless, homosexual young people often manage to realize themselves in a friendly environment.

Reference list

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