Editorial

Developing Identity in Adolescence

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The identity formation is a dynamic and life-long process which is characterized by continuous changes in the degree of exploration and strength of commitments [9,12]. These changes are pronounced and clearly visible at specific moments in life, in which one's identity is challenged and adolescence is a stage in which the individual is in the midst of a process of restructuring his social relationships, trying to find his place in society, and of making important choices for his future life. This is the reason why many researchers, consider a stable and coherent identity as a central developmental task during the period of adolescence. Instead of all these normative views, a study by [9] already recognized that not all adolescents are capable of becoming equally successful in negotiating this task. Some adolescents arrive at a clear and an integrated sense of identity; however, others end up in an identity confusion state.

Along with the quest for developing identity, adolescents are also advancing in their cognitive reasoning ability. Cognitive reasoning during the period of adolescence is marked by an increased capacity for abstraction, an ability to think about one's own thoughts, internal reflection, looking for links between relationships etc. This kind of expansion in the capacity as well as style of thoughts widens an adolescent's awareness, his imagination power, judgement and deep insight. The advanced cognitive reasoning capacity along with the pubertal changes, lead to a more rapid accumulation of knowledge that brings different issues as well as problems which can enrich and complicate the adolescent's life too, it enables an adolescent to start thinking more about himself. In negotiating the different issues related to the adolescents' self and identity, the differences in how individuals process self-related information and general cognitive reasoning processes play an important role.

A number of studies have been found to be linking rational-experiential processing systems to identity formation [5,8,10,15-17] and formal reasoning to identity formation [6,7,11-13,18]. As cognitive reasoning is an important aspect for the identity formation, substantial attention has been devoted in exploring the factors that are linked with development of identity. Identity processing styles proposed by referred as the social cognitive strategies that are used by the individuals to make decisions and to cope with personal problems, to process self-relevant information and are found to be helpful in constructing a sense of identity [1-4].

As exploration is seen as the important aspect in identity formation, so increasing exploration can serve as a fruitful tool in identity formation. Thus, the development of identity enhancement programs requires knowledge concerning the different important components of the process of exploration e.g., general cognitive reasoning processing systems, identity processing styles etc. and how these components of exploration are related to identity in adolescents. Acquisition of the knowledge about how these components operate will help in effective designing of identity enhancement programs. Under this program it is recommended that the quality of educational experiences should be improved so as to contribute in making adolescents' sense about their 'self.' It is suggestive that the schools, teachers and parents should become proactive in supporting and creating congenial learning atmosphere in the school as well as home context that should provide opportunities and experiences that are sensitive to rational-experiential processing systems and identity processing styles. Adolescents should be provided opportunities that promote active engagement in real life experiences that they can incorporate into their understanding of the sense of 'who they are?' Hence, the curricular and co-curricular activities should be aimed at promoting adolescents' sense about their 'self.'

Different seminars and workshops in which different adolescents may learn about the process of development of their self and identity in such a context that would focus and help in encouraging specific and general ways of processing the information related to their self, should be organized for the formation of their sense of 'who they are'.

In psychotherapy, the counsellors need to become sensitive with general processing systems i.e. rational-experiential systems used by the individuals to process the information. This awareness of the differences in the way individual's represents reality and process information leads counsellors' or therapists to balance more verbal exchanges and logical analysis about the irrational beliefs of the client with the use of behaviour-based treatment and experiential interventions. It means the undesirable behaviour is modified by changing the experiential system. There are three different ways of changing the experiential system: use of rational system to correct and train the experiential system, provision of emotionally significant corrective experiences and communicating with the experiential system through concrete representations. The basic aim is to teach clients to reprocess that information in a different way. It means creating new meanings for relevant stimuli, at conscious or preconscious levels.

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