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Sexual Identity

Sexuality is the manner people express and experience themselves sexually. It is a comprehensive term that fluctuated over time with historical contexts, and therefore lacks an exact definition. It involves biological, physical, emotional, erotic, social, or spiritual sentiments and behaviors. ^[1] Sexuality is unambiguously one of the fundamental aspects of human life, which consists of numerous facets such as biological sex, gender identity, gender roles, sexual orientation, intimacy and sexual expression.

Sexual Identity is what individuals think of themselves in terms of whom they are sexually or romantically attracted. ^[2] It is influenced by a multitude of factors like our emotional well-being, socio-economic circumstances, political and cultural environments and certainly, religion. Individuals thus confront an intense dilemma in identifying what they truly feel about themselves and the opposite sex. ^[3] Sexual identity may also refer to sexual orientation identity, which is when people identify or dis-identify themselves with a sexual orientation. Although sexual identity and sexual behavior are closely connected, they are distinguished. The *identity* referring to individual's idea of themselves, and *behavior* referring to actual sexual acts performed by the individual, and *sexual orientation* referring to romantic or sexual attractions toward persons of the opposite sex or gender, the same sex or gender, to both sexes or more than one gender, or to none. ^[2] According to Lemmer (2005: 125-136), sexual identity is more than sexual orientation and gender identity, further assuming that gender identity is a crucial element of sexual identity. He distinguishes three key perceptions when referring to maleness and femaleness:

- The way science defines maleness and femaleness
- The way society defines maleness and femaleness
- The individual's own personal perception of male/female. ^[3]

Sexual identity can alter throughout an individual's life and may or may not align with biological sex, behavior or sexual orientation. A study conducted by the Social Organization of Sexuality in 1990 says, only 16% of women and 36% of men who reported some level of same-sex attraction had a homosexual or bisexual identity. The same survey shows that 96% of women and 87% of men with either homosexual or a bisexual identity had engaged in sexual practices with someone of same sex, in contrast to 32% of women and 43% of men who had homosexual attractions. ^[3] The survey attempts to communicate that sexual orientation, sexual identity or gender does not always coincide with each other. ^[4]

Gender Differentiation

Lemmer (2005:126) observes that scientifically gender differentiation is profoundly explained but often carelessly called sexual differentiation; the word 'gender' is more specific than the all-encompassing term 'sexual'. The initial differentiation between the sexes occurs at the time of fertilization through the

determination of chromosomal sex. When the parents' sex chromosomes unite, either a male ovum (XY chromosomes) or a female ovum (XX chromosomes) will be formed. The chromosomal or genetic sex will cause the undifferentiated gonads to differentiate into either ovaries or testicles.

Gender Role

Gender role refers to the behavior of the gender, which has a powerful impact on sexual behavior and attitudes in almost all societies. It is likely to see to an individual as a boy but accepts the social role of a girl and how they usually do, or vice versa. The role identification can be so strong that even the public can think that the child is of an opposite gender, especially when they dresses up and physically carry out themselves like the gender they want to be.

Gender Side

It refers to the personality traits of the individual that are generally perceived as either more masculine or more feminine.^[3] Jung explains this as part of his theory of the collective unconscious in Jung's school of analytical psychology, where he describes the concept of the *animus* and the *anima*.^[5] He described the animus as the unconscious masculine side of a woman, and the anima as the unconscious feminine side of a man, each transcending the personal psyche.^[5] In essence, we all have some levels of male and female traits.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation refers to the sexual attraction of an individual towards another person; about the question that which gender arouses one sexually- male or female, both male and female, or none. Given below are the four different types mentioned.

- **Heterosexual** - Individuals that are sexually attracted to the opposite gender. In typical sense, a heterosexual person is considered to be *straight* and is the most general form of sexual orientation. This doesn't mean that other forms of sexual orientation are "inferior or less normal".
- **Homosexual** (gay or lesbian) - Individuals that are sexually attracted to the same gender. The integrity and other human values of homosexuals were unfortunately badly attacked in the past. It is a sexual orientation just like the other- nothing less and nothing more.
- **Ambisexual** (bisexual) - Individuals that are sexually attracted to both the genders without any sexual preferences whatsoever. This can be described as the sexual disposition of people who are neither entirely heterosexual nor exclusively homosexual in their sexual desires or responses.
- **Asexual** - refers to the complete absence of sexual feelings towards another, neither male or female. Although these cases are rare, they exist. It is important that people give them the dignity and respect all human beings deserve, and never to harass for their unique personal sexual orientation.

Sexual identity dilemmas and conflicts are one of the most terrible things individuals face these days in our society. It is high time to raise important clinical, ethical and conceptual problems for mental health professionals. Therapists must be willing to open to all possibilities of erotic variation and be willing to eliminate judgment. Progress in understanding the origins of sexual variations will undoubtedly open doors to an enhanced holistic understanding of the individual's sexuality and sexual variations as a whole. ^[3]

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