

# Understanding the Relationship between Sexuality and Morality among Adolescents

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*Adolescence is a Latin word, which means “a process of growing up.” Many psychologists and sociologists consider it as a very important phase of life, as all the major sexual orientations take place during this time of an individual. In addition, perception building and morality are put in the form of bricks to the new base of adulthood that ultimately gives a direction to the physical, social and psychological consequences faced in one’s life. This paper tries to throw some light how sexuality and morality are interweave together to put an adolescent into his/her specific role which is either socially accepted or rejected. Other related factors will also be discussed as they are somehow directly or indirectly shapes the perception regarding one’s own sexuality.*

**Keywords:** *Adolescents, sexuality, morality, physical and psychological health*

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## Introduction

Jersield (1963) defines adolescence as “span of years during which boys and girls move from childhood to adulthood mentally, emotionally, socially and physically”. It is certainly a crucial and significant period of life where physiological and psychological changes occur. Approximately adolescence starts from 12 years up to the age of 19 years globally. It can be segregated into two major phases: Early adolescence and late adolescence.

It is a transitional stage where an individual tries to gather a whole lot of information regarding various social, sexual and moral topics from every approachable source. Hence it also contributes a lot towards the development of one’s own self. Also during adolescence the insight starts improving which certainly leads to a better understanding of consequences related to specific events. Many studies in this field also discuss what are the major factors linked to posi-

tive and negative behaviours during this transitional phase. Donovan and Jessor (1985) identified a single cause of negative behavior among adolescents. The main finding of this study highlighted that there is a strong relationship between risky behavior and negative behavior displayed by adolescents.

Also in this developing period morality comes into use. It contributes largely to the overall development of personality. In fact family and peers are the key ingredients for the shaping up the morality among early adolescents. A broken family and bad peer relations can push the individual to the wrong tracks of emotional maladjustment. Another astonishing feature of this age is the development of hetero sexuality which means attraction towards the opposite sex. The primary release of hormones like testosterone and estrogen gradually lead the adolescent towards sexual maturation. So at this very phase the role of sex education becomes very necessary as it

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will give proper and correct knowledge not only about sex but also biological foundations behind it.

If, the sources behind the knowledge about sex are correct and trustworthy then it will also affect the morality of the young adolescent. Sexuality and morality are interrelated concepts. They tell us what actually an individual is able to return back to the society in a socially desirable way.

### **Sexuality Vs Morality**

The connection or link between sexuality and morality somehow or the other stems from our specific culture with which an individual relate himself/herself. Every adult in his/her early period of life is conditioned that his/her reputation is a reflection of his/her character. And subsequently the character displayed regulates the emotions which we perceive. But since the cultures are different and vary across the globe, so does the meaning of sexuality and morality. But on the other hand it is true that sexuality and morality cannot be virtually separated with each other.

During infancy there is hardly any recognition of one's gender but as the child grows, the sense of gender identity starts developing. Researches in the western world suggest that androgens have a role to play in gender specific behaviors (Wilson, 1999). Mostly it is seen that sexual interest is at its peak during middle and late adolescence (17 years). In talking with the respect to the Indian culture the moral values are somewhat dominating over the issues which are more necessary to be discussed. Here the morality says that talking about sex with the opposite gender and also with your own parents is still considered as a taboo in many places and different communities of our nation. This affects the perception of sexuality and sometimes it can lead to other diverse ways of satisfying their curiosity which is not socially acceptable in any of the cultures.

Also the biological, psychological and social factors are key in determining the sexuality among adolescents. Sometimes the sexuality or sexual behavior is determined by genes and hormones, which in turn may change other primary and secondary sexual characteristics. The best example of this can be Gender Identity Disorder. In a ways these factors are very much responsible for getting attracted or being attracted towards someone else. Teenagers make moral judgements in their day to day life which are building upon different perceptual processes. The environment in which he/she lives creates a big impact upon the thinking process of the person. Morality is also developed by the peer attachment and peer influence. If the peer group is not a desirable social group, then there are higher chances that the individual will also be like that group sharing same moral values which may not be ethically right and idealistic. Few researches also suggests that during the middle adolescence the rebellious is quite high but gradually at the time of entering into young adulthood, it comes down.

### **Factors Responsible for Morality in Adolescence**

Morality comes from the Latin word "*moralis*" meaning manner or proper behavior. Either in sociology or in psychology, not any single factor can be pinpointed and attributed to the development of morality among adolescents. Different psychologists label different factors for the development of morality. Piaget's theory of moral development laid the emphasis on simple games that can shape a child's moral behavior. For example; an adolescent in his childhood must have been told about some specific games and certain rules of playing that game. In that age, he/she simply follow those rules because he lacked that cognitive ability why the rules are formed or framed. But by breaking those rules, his/her true moral development take place.

In adolescence the same child learns to know that rules are laid down for the benefit of all players. Kohlberg also in the same direction of Piaget, further explored the moral development among young and old adolescents. He said that morality changes with the gradual increase of age. Older adolescents give more weightage to the rewards than to the efforts. If it gives lucrative opportunities then the approach and mentality towards the specific task would be entirely different. While in young adolescents, the pattern which is seen is to avail the consequences. It clarifies that when the fear of facing the consequences, especially negative consequences, there is decadence on moral values.

Carl Gilligan, a female therapist talked about moral development in girls which lead to the conclusion that justice and care given to oneself result in strong moral virtues. They will develop the same traits like that of their care givers and the likelihood to turn away somebody in need was less. Other factors like parents and peers also influence the moral development in adolescents. Young children like to imitate what they see from their parents and guardians, so it is often said that "parents are our first teachers". They try to inculcate the same moral values which they themselves follow. Also researches gives evidences that higher level of reasoning is related to parenting which is supportive in nature, like that of authoritative parenting style (Eisenberg et al., 2009). Also gender and sex of the individual is a factor that affects the role in moral development in the children as well as adolescents. In few researches the girls are shown to be more prone with shame or guilt if their behavior does not find concordance with the societal display of rules. On the other hands boys are more critical and evaluative as compared to girls.

#### **Developing Morality and Sexuality simultaneously**

It must be noted that there cannot be a single

line drawn between sexuality and morality and how they are inculcated in the life of an individual. Both the concepts develops simultaneously and leaving little scope for the researchers to ponder upon their varying sideline outcomes. But for sure, they are interwoven together. In some cases the sexuality of the individual dominates in his/her nature while in other it is the morality which is reflected more efficiently in his/her nature. But since both the concepts are shaped up by many factors, they both are present in every single human being. Morality and sexuality discriminates a man from the rest of the animal kingdom species.

The cognitions help a person to think and identify what needs to be done in order to wisely utilize these concepts. In some western nations the premarital sex is quite common. It is their moral thinking which signifies that there is no harm in having physical relations with the partners before marriage. On this basis we cannot judge and say that they are having wrong ethical values since our culture doesn't permit premarital sex. Here it is still considered as a sin. Hence this will affect the sexual thinking which is different in different cultures and subsequently our sexual wishes and desires are characterized.

Both the concepts are just like two sides of the coin. In a way it can be said morality and sexuality are indispensable from each other. Sexual orientation and moral values together shapes up the true character of a man.

#### **Conclusion**

There must not be any doubt in mind that morality and sexuality are two crucial developmental processes for a human being. It is a tendency of all adolescents to make mistakes and then learn from those mistakes. It is by the learning process that he/she will gradually get to the mark of standards which are acceptable by our society. The duty of the care givers, parents and guardians is to talk to them during this phase of

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development and guide them to the right path by understanding them in every possible way. Moral development or sexual development is not a one day process, rather it takes years and yet these processes overlap with each other and making them influence over the whole personality. During adolescence, an individual is full of enthusiasm due to biological functioning of the body and this develops somewhere a tendency to learn new tasks which are challenging in nature. So proper channelization should be maintained as it affects the mindset of an individual even during his youth.

Sex is the third basic need of humans according to Abraham Maslow, and every living organism does it for survival. The role of sexual ethics hence plays a vital role in adolescence as the primary and secondary sexual characteristics are developed in this age. Condemning the unethical sexual practices is a good way to tackle misleading information regarding sex. Also the destructive and impulsivity of emotions should be taken care of so that moral reasoning can get a chance to replace the misconceptions which are already developed.

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