Gender Identity Development among Transgenders in Odisha

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Abstract

Transgender identity development model given by Gagne, Tewksbury, and Mc Gaughey in 1997 proposed that the period of identity exploration was often very long, but there tended to be three major outcomes or desired outcomes. The transsexual MTFs (Male to Female) desired to transform completely to women. The cross-dressing men sought opportunities to vary their identity presentation, both publicly and privately. And last, the gender radicals desired recognition as transgendered.

Present study explores the nature of gender identity development and coming out experiences among transgender people. Major focus is given to transgender community in Odisha. The study trie to analyze the role of social stigma and discrimination in identity formation and coming out experiences, and to explore how social support mediate one's psychological well being and there by affect one's gender identity. The discovery of one's sexual orientation being toward the same gender can be a shock, and sometimes it may lead to identity crisis, which without accurate information and support may manifest into a traumatic experience.

Keywords: gender identity, transgenders, LGBT, Odisha

Introduction

Gender and sexuality are distinct but related topics. Individuals living in the early 21st century are gendered, and those genders inform and constrain our sexual expression. We are socialized by parents, peers, teachers and the media to conform to our gender roles: boys are active and assertive, girls are gentle and nurturing, and everyone is heterosexual. Those who do not conform to the norm of heterosexuality are subject to societal sanction, rejection, and, in some instances, violence. The existence of homophobia and heterosexism demonstrates the continued need to research the topic of sexuality, and to expose those mechanisms that normalize and naturalize heterosexuality while pathologizing alternate forms of gender and sexual expression.

Defining sexual orientation and gender identity is a very difficult task in Indian context. Although there are several movies which have been done upon 'sex' but none of them define sexual orientation or gender identity development of a person. Still it is very difficult for a common man to discuss about sex in a general context. A study conducted by British feminist scholar Marie T.Farr,

in late 1980s, upon first-year US college students; reveal that usually students face difficulty to discuss anything about sex because it is a very personal topic and they lack the suitable language for it, which should be neither clinical nor moral. So it is very much important to understand the concept of sex and gender.

The term sex refers to biological differences among male, female, and intersex people (hormones, secondary sex characteristics, reproductive anatomy) that can be changed over time through the use of hormones and surgical interventions (Krieger, 2003).

People are aware about rape and sexual harassment but still, they are unaware about homophobia and homosexuality. Usually people use a binary way (either male or female) of marking a person's sexual identity. They never think about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people and in case people find anyone from LGBT community, they do not accept them so easily and most of the times make fun of them. As a result, if anyone belongs to the LGBT community, they do not like to share it with others. They prefer to be 'closet' (without disclosing to anyone). Sometimes 'selective disclosure' takes place.

It is not possible to provide the accurate numbers of occurrence of LGBT people in the world. The most common figure generally mentioned is that 10% of a population display to more or a lesser degree a form of homosexuality. A survey conducted in India shows that 37-50% of the male population had experiences of same sex encounters. But however, there is no confirmed evidence for it. In single sex environments such as boarding schools and prisons it is sometimes claimed that homosexuality increases (Samelius and Wagberg, 2005).

In India, LGBT community is deprived of so many opportunities. Majorly they experience religious and social opposition which makes their life more pathetic. In India third gender people are popularly known as 'Hijra'. Hijra tradition is deep rooted in Hinduism.

Sometimes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer people face more critical situations where they take conversion therapy to change their sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. However, conversion therapies have been called 'improper' (Davison, 1991), 'patently inefficacious' (Brown, 1996) and 'unethical and professionally irresponsible' (Haldeman,1991).

For LGBT people, act of revealing their sexual orientation to others (coming out) is a very challenging work. Coming out to family, especially parents, is often the biggest challenge (Savin-Williams, 2003). It may need to be emphasized to young people that disclosing their sexuality is a process and a personal decision. When, to whom they come out, and timing is their choice and ideally, should be done with support and options. The process of coming out has some positive and negative consequences. But it is very important that a person should successfully come out in order to develop their gender identity. According to Cass Homosexual Identity Development Model, (1979), coming out is a necessary part of developing a healthy and positive identity as a gay/lesbian/bisexual individual. The process of coming out is not staged and always remains a fluid one.

However, a person's gender identity development takes place through certain stages and there are several theories and models that explain gender identity development. Some of them are - Cass

Identity Model developed by Cass in 1979, Fassinger's Model of Gay and Lesbian Identity Development developed by Fassinger in 1996, Homosexual Lifespan Development model by Hyde and Jaffee in 2000 and Troiden's Model of Sexual Identity Development proposed by Trioden in 1979. Adolescents may identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual without having had any sexual experience (Savin-Williams, 1989).

In a general sense, identity is used to refer to one's "unique combination of personal, generally inalienable data, like name, age, sex, and profession, by which that individual is characterized and distinguishable from any other person" (Graafsma & Bosma, 1994). This form of identity is primarily public in nature, and can include the identity of groups and organizations, such as the democratic party. But when it is related to discussions of social and personality psychology, identity may include how people are distinguished from one another on various personality dimensions. This may refer to one's own sense of one's personality structure, or how others see one's personality structure. Erikson's approach to identity includes a social-perceptual aspect: the awareness of being perceived by others in accordance with one's self-perception (Graafsma & Bosma, 1994). This is similar to the identity found in humanistic psychology, which is part of the process of self-actualization and the sense of being one's authentic self.

American Psychological Association defined gender as the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Gender identity refers to "one's sense of oneself as male, female or transgender" (American Psychological Association, 2006). The term gender identity has been used to describe an individual's internal sense of self as male,

female, or an identity between or outside these two categories (Wilchins, 2002). Therefore, Gender identity refers to a person's inner sense of being male or female or transgender. A person's gender identity can be same or different from their sex assigned at birth. Sometimes there is incompatibility in between the prescribed gender role and gender identity of a person.

There are some theoretical explanations that describe about the gender and sexuality within a person. These theories are drawn from a number of disciplines, including biology, sociobiology and psychology. Biological models of sexuality are drawn from two distinct schools of thought. The first is a straight forward biological explanation that suggests that homosexuality and transsexuality result from brain differences, genetic factors, and prenatal hormonal fluctuations (Bailey, 1995; LeVay, 1991, 1996). The second approach is the evolutionary or sociobiological model, which argues that sexual behaviors developed because they were selected for by evolutionary forces (Symonds, 1979). Although these approaches differ, here is some overlap, especially given that many researchers searching for biological causation are willing to accept evolutionary explanations for the existence of said mechanisms.

Psychological models of sexuality have also emerged from several different schools of thought. Many people associate the psychological study of sexuality with psychoanalytic approaches. Psychoanalytic approaches, such as Freud's, are one type of psychological explanation for the development of human sexuality. These perspectives postulate that individuals must resolve a series of psychosexual stages in

order to develop healthy adult sexuality. Deviations from normal adult heterosexuality are typically the result of improper fixation at a less mature stage (Freud, 1905). In contrast, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory focused on observation and imitation, may also account for learning about traditional gender roles and 'appropriate' sexual expressions.

Interactionist theories attempt to explain how biological, psychological, and cultural factors act together to produce a developmental outcome. One such interactionist theory is Money's (1988) neuro-hormonal stress-diathesis model. This model suggests that biological factors predispose an individual to a given outcome such as homosexuality, and thatenvironmental factors(e.g. mate availability) mediate the strength of that outcome.

Building Gender Identity among transgenders

In India there are a host of socio cultural groups of transgender people like Hijras/ Kinnars, and other transgender identities like Shiv-Shaktis, Jogtas, Jogappas, Aradhis, Sakhi, etc. However, these socio cultural groups are not the only transgender people, but there may be those who do not belong to any of the groups but are transgender persons individually. Though an accurate and reliable estimate of transgender people is not available, it cannot be denied that their number is miniscule compared with the total population of the country. Transgenders have very limited employment opportunities. Transgenders have no access to bathrooms/toilets and public spaces. The lack of access to bathrooms and public spaces access is illustrative of discrimination faced by transgenders in availing each

facilities and amenities. They face similar problems in prisons, hospitals and schools. Transgenders have very limited employment opportunities as most jobs are confined to male and female sexes. Transgenders, being a third sex, cannot even apply for most of the jobs.

Hijras are generally biological males who have adopted this specialized third gender status. Part of the Hindu religion, they worship 'Bahuchara Mata', the 'Mother Goddess'. They dress and act like women and undergo emasculation to be endowed with the divine powers of both the Goddess and the ascetic. "While hijras, as eunuchs or hermaphrodites, are 'man minus man,' they are also, unlike eunuchs in other cultures, man plus woman" (Nanda, 1993). Nanda noted that women who do not menstruate can become hijras as well, but this is far rarer. One of the hijras' principle roles in Indian society is to perform at celebrations following the birth of a son. They also perform at weddings. Again, these are culturally acknowledged ritual positions that are not filled by Western transgendered people. The hijras also challenge traditional notions that gender identity and biological sex are deterministic and intractable. "On the contrary, my study of the hijras suggests that gender identity can continue to undergo change after childhood, even in some dramatic ways" (Nanda, 1993).

Transgender Identity Development

Transgender identity development model was given by Gagne, Tewksbury, and Mc Gaughey in 1997. They examined the coming out process for transgendered people. However, they did not create a linear model for this phenomenon. Instead, they identified steps and challenges that were important in

the coming out and transitioning processes. First, they identified that transgendered people are in a different situation with respect to identity management than are gay, lesbian and bisexual people. While gay, lesbian and bisexual people often have the choice to not disclose their sexuality to, for example, colleagues at work, the transgendered person may not have this luxury. The transitioning process creates obvious, physical changes in the body that must be addressed with others.

This model was based on interviews with 65 male-born transgendered individuals. Largely, they said, these were Male To Female trans-sexuals, many of whom conformed to traditional beliefs about gender. Their goal was to live as women, and they saw their masculine bodies as a biological mistake. The cross-dressing men, on the other hand, simply saw cross-dressing as a way to express their feminine selves, but they were generally content with their masculine bodies. The last group was the radical transgenderists, ambigenderists, and third genders. This group wanted to live as non-gendered, or somewhere in between.The steps involved in the coming out and transitioning for these transgendered men and MTFs included an initial sense that their gender was wrong. The transsexuals reported knowing they were or wanted to be girls early in life, while the cross-dressers tended to say they knew they were boys but occasionally wanted to be girls. The cross-dressers tended to hide their desires and habits; this may have been more difficult for the transsexuals. Generally, they became aware of the fact that they were not accepted by society and were ashamed of their desires. This led to periods of drug use, drinking, and purging, or ridding themselves of all their female clothing and accessories.
The next period involved coming out to

oneself. Generally, this process was driven by events that informed them they were wrong for their cross-gendered behavior (such as being caught or admonished by someone), the location of a name or label for their feelings, and the realization that others shared their desires and practices. They may have fantasized about men during this time, although they rarely adopted a gay identity. The realization that they were not alone often alleviated (but not completely removed) their feelings of isolation.

After coming out to oneself, the individual followed this by coming out to others. Here, it was necessary to find a sense of validation, either from significant people in the MTF's life, or through interacting with a community of similar people. Public declaration of identity was unsurprisingly reported to be very intimidating. Attempts to pass while cross-dressed were also intimidating, although this public recognition of them as a woman was seen as different from significant others' recognition of them as transgendered. The authors found that support groups could facilitate identity development, but that they could also lead to greater confusion or increased anxiety.

Finally, the authors said, the transgendered MTFs found a resolution. The period of identity exploration was often very long, but there tended to be three major outcomes or desired outcomes. The transsexual MTFs desired to transform completely to women. The cross-dressing men soughtopportunities to vary their identity presentation, both publicly and privately. And last, the gender radicals desired recognition as transgendered. This extended process, the authors said, tended to create a strong sense of community among transgendered people, and instilled in them a desire to help other transgendered people.

Transgender Identity Development in Odisha

According to NALSA judgement para 20,15th April, 2014, Supreme Court stated that "each person's self-defined sexual orientation and gender identity is integral to their personality and is one of the most basic aspects of self-determination, dignity and freedom". So now it is visible that Government is taking vital steps for promoting the identity of transgenders as well as after such judgment some sort of legal rights transgenders can claim for their identity in society.

After NALSA judgment, a 32 year Government, gazetted officer, Ratikant Pradhan, came out boldly and accepted her identity as transgender. Now she has adopted a new identity as Aishwarya Rutuparna Pradhan (Times of India, December 20, 2015). Taking such bold step shows that social stigmas and stereotypes are now not able to prevent a transgender from coming out.

According to Express News Service, May 24, 2017, Odisha Government has made several policies to protect the rights of transgender people. For example, actions will be taken on parents who do not look after the specific need of the transgender child. Similarly action will be taken for any sorts of bullying or discrimination within school environment.In Odisha, several institutions are made for protecting and enhancing the rights of transgender people. Some of them are governed by transgenders. For example, Meera and Sadhna, two transgenders established two institutions 'SAKHA' as well as 'THE THIRD GENDER WELFARE TRUST' in the year 2006 and 2015 respectively. These institutions receive support from HIV Alliance India to undertake preventive HIV/ AIDS intervention amongst the transgender community.

A 27 year old transgender Meghna Sahoo got married to a man on January 27, 2017. This marriage is well supported by the society (Times of India, January 27, 2017). All above events shows that government of Odisha provides great scope for protecting as well as enhancing identity of transgenders.Thus ,transgenders of Odisha are now taking bold steps and coming out to their family as well as to the society

Conclusion

In Odisha, both at government and private level much more activities are conducted for gender identity development of transgender. Such activities are promoting them to take a bold step and disclosed their sexual orientation not only to their family but also to the society. Through social awareness programs stereotypes and taboos related to transgender are eliminating. However, it requires a long term consistent efforts to integrate transgender community of our society into main stream.

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