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SSK1204

Social Expectations and Identity Development

The task that the individual is confronted to during his adolescence is to get socialized. Adolescents are strongly requested to deal with socialization. During this process, the adolescent encounters all the society's demands and standards. The challenge that remains at that stage for the adolescent is to form his own place in the society where he lives. Moreover, he has to feel that he fits in that place. All through the socialization, the adolescent has to consider the social expectations because he can't forge his personality regardless of the surrounding environment and the external rules. Social expectations can push the adolescents to change their behaviors, their way of thinking. Actually, social expectations shape the identity of the adolescent.

Freedom and independence are two major concepts that the individual tries to search for during his adolescence. Freedom and independence have a special meaning for the adolescent which is to not to be compelled or forced to do something. The adolescent doesn't want to feel the pressure on him. This pressure becomes greater when it comes to social rules and expectations because the adolescent may feel that he is judged according to the society's standards and conventions. Sometimes, adolescents may perceive these expectations as a challenge that they have to win, and according to Crockett and Silbereisen, "adolescents are thought to perceive social expectations and to define tasks for themselves based on these expectations", (p.6, 1999). From this view, the social expectations seem inescapable. The adolescent can't deal with the external world without these expectations. This requirement is frequently responsible for the rebellion. (Geldard, Geldard, 2004). The adolescent feels that he is surrounded by different rules that don't fit necessarily his personality. So, sometimes he feels the need to make some changes in his behavior to make it more socialized. This change that occurs varies from an adolescent to

another depending on how the adolescent accept it. Some of them can perceive that change as a necessity and as a need. So, he would do his best to create a space where he can match his own needs and what he is expected to do. Others would perceive it as a duty where they feel no responsibility. Their change would be not effective since they don't think that they are in a need of such adjustment to create a harmony between themselves and the society's expectations.

The social expectations involve the interaction with others. In fact, the adolescent cannot form his identity without developing some relationships that link him with the others, as it is said by David Geldard and Kathryn Geldard in their book *Counseling Adolescents*, “ the adolescent can only construct a personal identity in the context of relationship with others” (2004, p. 11). This fact leads to recall the childhood. Childhood is also a stage in one's life where the individual is being used to get in touch with the external world. By starting to be socialized, social expectations begin at that specific period of life. Children are supposed to behave in such a way that would make the others call them, sweet or cute. Nobody would hear someone call a kid a devil in a serious way. Actually, children are expected to be angels. No one can imagine an evil act done by a kid. In the Moroccan society, children are often asked to call someone that they don't really know *khalti* or *aâmi* depending on the gender, which can be translated as “aunt” or “uncle”. Everybody becomes an aunt and an uncle, from the friend of the mother to the neighbor passing by the seller. This naming is spread all over Morocco. It is a rule that links young people and older people. It is a sign of respect regards the older persons. This fact shows one of the society's expectations regards the individual that starts from childhood and continue during adolescence until adulthood. At that point, children begin

to be aware of the presence of different behaviors that are not all accepted and where the choice is not allowed. In fact, they understand that the choice had been done by the society, and this society expects from that child to behave according to its choice.

Actually, while being a child, the individual is not given a lot of choice. Most of the time, he does what older people ask him to do, which he believes is the best alternatives. But at the same time, these demands at this age help children to get used to such expectations that will become bigger and heavier to stand over the next coming years.

During the growing up process, the adolescent meets at each stage more social expectations. Sometimes, they get more complicated. In fact, social expectations are the mould where the identity of the individual is put. They define and draw the borders of the identity. According to Levesque in his book *Not by Faith Alone*, “social expectations inspire the identity formation process as much as the more obvious biological and cognitive changes.” (2001, p. 36). This is to say that they play a huge role in determining the attitude of the adolescent towards himself and towards the whole society. Due to the hardness of the task of coping with these expectations, there are some adolescents that meet them and others who are unable to achieve them. At the adolescence stage, it is difficult to deal with the society’s expectations. People who are in this case are overwhelmed by these expectations. (Geldard.K, Geldard.D) .For those people, this feeling of inability that haunts them would push them to an “anti-social behavior” (Geldard.D, Geldard. K., p. 12, 2004), which is most of the time rebellion. Since he cannot get socialized, the individual chooses isolation. Other times, he can choose to do exactly the opposite of what he is expected to do. For instance, following a set of expectations and rules that don’t belong to the society where he lives, but rather to a

foreign society. The outcomes of those situations are several. Delinquency is one of them. The adolescent can't find his place among the society members. He starts to search for ways to belong to the marginalized peers, which meets the isolation concept. In fact, this turning to that marginalized members reveals a real lack in the need of belonging. The belonging need is not met, (Geldard,D. , Geldard, K., 2004). The inability to belong to a group may affect the self esteem of the adolescent. Thus, it can bring a sense of doubt in his own capacities about undertaking some initiatives. This lack of self confidence may push the adolescent to avoid any kind of susceptible situation, as it was said by Eriksson (Muuss, 1999) in his theory of identity development in the conflict about autonomy, shame and doubt. In contrast, people who achieve these expectations feel that their goal is reached, which is about to get socialized. They feel more and more comfortable in that new place where they have just settled. This achieved goal can bring a feeling of satisfaction. The individual can start to be proud of himself and more self confident. Thus, a higher self-esteem of himself could be attained. It would allow him to undertake more initiatives and to be more willing to take actions. In that situation, it is the autonomy part of Eriksson's theory that it is being satisfied. The adolescent would be no more afraid of relying on himself because he knows that he succeeded in doing the hardest task that he would be asked to accomplish during his entire life, which is to get socialized.

Social expectations vary from a society to another depending on its standards and conventions that are tightly related to culture and religion. But in fact, Havighurst, (as cited in Geldar, Geldar. , 2004), has defined some tasks that the adolescent has to make adjustments on and has to achieve. These tasks concern at first the gender and sexual role

of the adolescence. The adolescent must accept the role that is attributed to him and create according to that role relationships with peers who belong to that society.

Secondly, the adolescent is expected to start preparing his future life by developing some intellectual skills which would help him to have an occupation that will ensure an economic independence. This economic independence will bring the adolescent to prepare for a family life. Finally, the adolescent is required to build a set of values that fit with the environment where he lives in. These expectations form a sequence of achievements. Each expectation generates another one. Also, as the individual goes into age, he faces more complicated expectations that aim mainly the future life that is about adulthood. Moreover, those social expectations vary according to gender. Females and males are not expected to do the same things or to have the same goals or values. In fact, the expectation that was previously mentioned about the sex role is tightly related to this one. Each gender has its own role. Girls may feel that their main goal is to get married and to have children. Boys have to be always strong and never display or show any weakness. These expectations exert a huge pressure on both genders. Additionally, due to these expectations, girls may form long-term goals. They would stop thinking about the present moment, but rather start to prepare for their future lives as spouses and as mothers. Boys, would never act like they feel like to. They would always remember that they don't have to show their feelings. Failing in achieving these goals and coping with them is often responsible for the appearance of the violent behavior as it is said in *Counseling Adolescents*.

Social expectations could be perceived as a limitation of the development of the identity. But in some cases, it is considered as the element that saves the individual from

identity confusion. The adolescent has to find a landmark that would guide him through the process of the development of his identity. Eriksson refers to peers' expectations that can be considered also as social expectations since they are members of the society. According to him, the adolescent is in need of these expectations that come specifically from his peers to start having a sense of his identity which is different from the one that he gets from his parents. This distance that the adolescent creates towards his parents marks the end of the strong emotional dependence that he had with them—the departure. To maintain this relationship with parents, the adolescent has to respond to some expectations. Parents often, expect from their children to be and to do what they had wanted to be in their youth. Sometimes they don't realize deeply what they are asking their children to do. These behaviors can bring the adolescent to form what is called a false identity. The individual doesn't consider his own needs, or sometimes he can only perceive his needs through the others' needs. As it is said in *Normal Child and Adolescent Development*, “a false identity is also established in adolescents who have grown up in a family in which they continually adapted to their parents' needs and expectations at the expense of their own innate needs”, (Gemelli, p.478, 1996). They just want to see and recall their own youth through the one of their children. But at a certain moment, parents find themselves in the obligation of withdrawing from their children's lives (Geldard, Geldard., 2004) to give them the opportunity to become independent. Eriksson (Muuss, 1996) believes that this stage of independence is crucial for the adolescent “to attain a mature identity”, (p.52). In fact, while the parents' expectations vanish from the adolescent life, the social expectations in contrast, follow him through all his life. Actually, these expectations help him to stay focus on his own identity and

according to Erikson (Muuss, 1996), these expectations becomes more important at the period of entering adulthood because they are more likely to cause crisis due to the fundamental changes that they may set off.

Living in a community requires giving oneself up to its rules. Social expectations are the primary rules that the individual is confronted to during all his life. So, the individual can not act and react only depending on his own point of view. A whole society must be considered. In fact, it is not a simple task for an adolescent, especially when he is in a position that doesn't allow him to judge any of those expectations. Thus, the formation of his identity depends on how he coped with these social expectations and if he reached his goals by accomplishing the tasks that these expectations define for him.