

HOW DIFFERENTLY DO THE TWO GENDERS EXPERIENCE ADOLESCENCE FROM AN EMOTIONAL POINT OF VIEW?

Nowadays we can hear more and more about adolescence and adolescents. We have an enormous amount of information coming from newspapers, television, even from radio regarding how to treat these so-called 'handful' teenagers. It happens very often that we cannot resist describing them by rude attributes due to their 'trendy' behaviour, haircut or clothing. In fact the beginning and the end of adolescence cannot be exactly determined, but it starts approximately at the age of 12 and lasts until the end of our 10s. However, according to the latest conceptions, it may last even until the beginning of our 20s due to changing social requirements.

Adolescence is a very important and influential period in our lives therefore in my article I wish to give a presentation on the difficulties of this period, examining them from different perspectives (anatomical, analytical, cognitive, social psychological, cultural differences), still emphasizing gender gaps.

A serdülőkorról és a tinédzser korukat élő fiatalokról manapság egyre többet hallani. Információkkal bombáznak minket az újságokból, a televízióból, sőt még a rádióból is arról, hogy hogyan is kell bánni az úgynevezett "nehezen kezelhető" serdülőkkel. Gyakran nem bírjuk megállni, hogy ezeket a fiatalokat ne illessük valamilyen durva jelzővel „trendi” viselkedésük, frizurájuk vagy öltözködésük miatt. Valójában nem lehet pontosan meghatározni, hogy mettől meddig tart a serdülőkör, de körülbelül a 12. életévtől a tízes évek végéig nyúlik, bár a legújabb elképzelések szerint a változó társadalmi elvárások kialakulása miatt még a húszas évek elejére is áttolódhat.

A serdülőkör életünknek egy igen meghatározó és fontos szakasza, ezért cikkemben hangsúlyt fektetve a nemi különbségekre több különböző perspektívából megvilágítva (anatómiai / analitikus / kognitív / szociálpszichológiai / kulturális különbségek) szeretném bemutatni ennek az időszaknak a nehézségeit.

ANATOMICAL APPROACH

Studying adolescence the biological approach is of high importance since a large amount of changes may be observed both in our bodies and souls during this period from which a few will be described below.

Besides physical differences, there is one more essential that makes men and women different from each other, namely the *brain*. Its structure, its lateralisation gives the different views, ways of thinking of men and women.

The biggest power of human brain is to be found in the *frontal lobe* whose size raises us from animal world. The old, out-of-date tests have been replaced by modern technique by now, helping us have a more precise image of the structure of our brains. The use of modern cerebral picture producing procedures such as *MRI* (magnetic resonance imaging) and *PET* (positron emission tomography) provided us with a lot of new results. The MRI tests show that the *volume* of particular areas in a woman brain may have some connection with the better female oral performance. It is also shown that the *cerebellum* — besides controlling movement — had some connection with intelligence, performance, depending on its size. (Arató, 1997.; Ranchburg, 1998.)

Examining the *cerebral metabolism* — through its sugar consumption — some higher activity was detected in female brains allowing us to assume that a woman brain has a better *blood supply*. Women's ability to coordinate tiny movements in a better way as well as the better nature of speech may have some connection with the better blood supply above mentioned and with the cerebellum as well. However, these are only assumptions for the time being. (Arató, 1997.; Ranschburg 1998.)

Cerebral hemispheres have become specialized and differentiated by evolution. For instance in a masculine brain it is the left hemisphere that has become more differentiated while the right hemisphere has become the so-called subdominant one. The *Aqueduct of Sylvius* is about 0,5–0,6 cm longer in the left hemisphere and this is the reason for the more conspicuous left-right difference with men.

The *planum temporale* — that plays an essential role in verbal formation and comprehension — is usually larger in the left hemisphere. Being right-handed or left-handed is very important since with right-handed people the speech center is more dominant rather in the left-hemisphere. Regarding the *corpus callosum* we also find a difference between men and women. This corpus callosum is more developed and thicker in women's brains which mean that the connection and the harmony of the two hemispheres are better. The advantage of all this is that in case any part of the brain gets injured, the other parts may take over the functions of the injured part more easily. (Arató, 1997.; Ranschburg 1998.)

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

There are plenty of theories and researches that deal with adolescence from an analytical point of view such as Erikson's, Freud's, Mahler's, James Marcia's, Ranschburg Jenő's. I wish to mention two outstanding theories in my article, namely Freud's and Erikson's.

Although the first holistic description of adolescence was given by *Stanley Hall* in 1904, two other books became known world-wide at the beginning of the 1920s: *Psychology of youth* by *Eduard Spranger* and *Psychology of adolescence* by *Charlotte Bühler*. Using adolescents' diaries and notes, Spranger emphasized three main things among the characteristics of teenage:

1. discovery of the ego;
2. gradual development of life program;
3. integration into particular forms of life.

Besides anatomical changes, the *analytical perspective* is of high importance too since it is tracking human beings' corporal and psychological development from birth. *Sigmund Freud* is one of the outstanding figures of analytical approach whose psycho-sexual development theory may give an answer to a lot of questions.

In an average sort of human mind, sexuality and sexual development, maturation is noticeable during adolescence for the first time. But Freud claims the following:

These early childhood experiences play a major role in adulthood sexuality as well. So our sexual life already starts on its journey in our childhood, is being kept back during latency and everything starts in adolescence again. It is likely that the larger part of our childhood sexuality falls victim to the infantile amnesia, with few exceptions.

Freud mentions the so-called erogenous zones in connection with psycho-sexual development. The first erogenous zone is the mouth. The gratification is obviously connected to self-preservation, however it aspires to delighting. The oral phase is followed by the anal-sadistic period later. The child's attention is limited to defecation and controlling it, this period is dominated by the feeling of pang and pleasure.

The anal-sadistic phase is followed by the phallic one that has much influence on our sexuality. The child's attention orients towards his/her genitals, he/she finds pleasure in watching them, playing with them, then boys and girls go on different ways.

When the Oedipal period arrives, little boys start playing with their penises and it is accompanied with sexual fantasies connected to the mother. Then in connection with castration complex, the fear of the possible loss of their penises awakens and they will have the same genitals as little girls do. As for girls, they realize their lack of penis and this is the first significant disappointment that makes them turn away from sexuality.

The phallic phase is followed by latency that lasts until about the age of 11–12. (Freud, 1982.)

Comparing Freud's work to *Erik Erikson's*, we can see the following difference between the two analytical theories: the important conflicts of our lives are examined by *Erikson* not only until adolescence but also until the very end of our lives. (Erikson, 1991)

COGNITIVE CHANGES DURING ADOLESCENCE

When adolescence begins, the period of transition from school-age to adulthood, both a change and a new quality of cognition are needed. Besides the biological change, new social relations are developing that make us attain a social status with novel rights and responsibilities. This complex change in circumstances leads to the development of a novel and more complex way of thinking.

Adolescents' cognition is an essential psychological means in properly performing the task of becoming adult, and teenagers are trying to reconcile the different social expectations.

Opinions are divided concerning adolescents' cognition. It is assumed that teenagers' cognition is strongly dependent on the problem's content as well as on the context carrying the problem.

According to *Piaget*, a novel way of thinking is developing during this period that he calls formal operation; it is based on a novel logical system. The most important feature of formal operations is that all the possible combinations are taken into consideration in every single case, and these way relations are grouped according to the continuous connections with the whole, with the ensemble of parts. (Piaget, 1970)

The examination of gender differences has become very popular in the field of cognition as well. For instance, *Peskin* pointed out in his tests that secondary school girls had had better performance in 'feminine centered' formal operational exercises found interesting. But those girls, who are interested in sciences, had not better performance in these exercises than in standard Piaget-exercises. Gender gaps originate in the fact that boys find the contents of standard Piaget-exercises requiring formal operational cognition more interesting, and they are more familiar with resolving this kind of exercises. Resolving formal operations requires familiarity with spatial orientation and it is a matter of common knowledge that is better with men. (Piaget, 1970.)

So we come to the conclusion that certain abilities do not develop in the same way with girls and boys, but the fact if somebody is able to use this ability with success when it comes to solve a problem, depends on his/her experience.

These days researchers question Piaget's theory that says there is a definite dividing line between childhood and adolescence. Change in cognitive abilities may be either continuous or periodic, depending on how deep a child's knowledge is, regarding the given situation or problem. We will be able to come to the conclusion that it is a periodic change if the new type of cognition emerges in various contexts.

In connection with adolescence, the relation between the language and cognition was also studied. It turned out that teenagers could use abstract verbal nouns, concepts in a better way; they figured out the meaning of unknown words and drew some conclusions from the relations of familiar words. The aptitude for completing analogues is improving too during adolescence; some new structures of the meanings of the words are developing. According to many people, it is very important to emphasize that changes in the use and structure of the language are as important in adolescents' cognitive improvement as changes in resolving logical exercises.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

If we examine adolescence from a social psychological point of view, we can say that gender differences are being implanted into little children from birth. Little girls are dressed in rose dresses, while little boys in blue ones shortly after birth. Little girls play with puppets, little boys play with toy cars. These features are influenced by culture.

During long decades, stereotypes, preconceived ideas have been developing about how women and men should behave. For instance, if a woman starts to whistling or fighting, it will not fit into our image about women.

An American psychologist, *Feingold* dealt with gender gaps very much, used questionnaires and came to the following conclusions – that emphasize gender differences:

1. the theory of social role model which means that social roles connected to genders are responsible for gender-specific characteristics. So the fact if someone behaves in a womanly or manly way has some influence on his/her personality;
2. the model of social requirements is based on the fact that behaving in accordance with cultural requirements is forming personality as a self-fulfilling prophecy. So putative gender stereotypes result in gender differences;
3. according to the theory of artefactual model, gender-specific answers given to Feingold questionnaires are also influenced by how the particular feature is judged by society. (Feingold, 1988.)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES DURING ADOLESCENCE

It is very important to mention a fact we can read about in an article written by *John W. M. Whiting*. Concerning adolescence, he strongly believes and emphasizes that cultures may be divided into two groups by mother-infant relationship. One is the so-called back and hip culture, the other one is the cradle culture. The characteristic of back and hip culture is the constant, all-day long physical contact between the mother and the child, since the latter is being held in a shawl on his/her mother's back at all times. This kind of mother-child relationship is typical in South-America, Africa and in particular areas of Asia. As for the cradle culture, it is known for putting babies in a cradle made of wood or some other material, or in a pushchair, as it is called in modern cultures. We can meet this type of culture for instance in Europe or North-America. (Whiting, 1975.)

Let us take a long hard look at a hip-back culture, for instance the Kikukus', who live in Kenya. Children are in close relationships with their mothers here, and feel that they are in possession of huge power. Women and men live in separate houses in this community. If a new baby is born in the family, the older children are supposed to help their mothers. But after a while boys are beginning to experience that their male mates play with others and find different things important. So they are beginning to search for their older mates' company which leads to the conflict with their mothers. By the time these boys enter adolescence, these conflicts were blown over, and the initiation rite is taking place which means circumcision. Those who are not circumcised in this culture are not considered real men.

The identity conflict has a completely different nature in cradle cultures since babies live their lives 'separately' from their mothers from the very beginning. If there is something wrong, he/she will cry to make somebody sit him/her on his lap. In addition, mother and father sleep together in this modern culture which makes the child feel that he/she is not really wanted. And if another little baby is born in the family, he/she will definitely feel lonely. In these cultures, children are taught from the very beginning to find a supernatural spirit who will take care of them. This supernatural power may be God, a spirit, a natural power, anything that takes the child under its wings. In particular cultures of this kind, teenager boys are taken to an uninhabited island with no food or drinks, making them find some protective spirits for themselves who will take care of them. If someone is successful, he will be regarded as a real man. (Whiting, 1975.)

MY EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION

There are numerous researches on gender differences these days. We know that they mainly concern adulthood, when one's personality, way of thinking about life as well as his brain volume attain their final characteristics. The following question arose in my mind: are basic gender differences noticeable in adolescence — which is probably the most important and determining period of our lives — or do they dominate rather in adulthood?

I. METHODS

1. The text of the test and the precise exercise

The exercise consisted in completing a sentence that I had made up. There were no stipulations concerning how to finish the sentence, the point was make a complex story from it.

„Éva/Balázs saw on the school noticeboard that he/she had won the first prize of the competition...”

Boys were given the sentence starting with Balázs, girls with Éva.

2. Instruction

„You will see an uncompleted sentence on the paper I have given you. Please, finish this sentence at will, making a little story from it.”

3. The place and way of filling in

The test was a so-called paper-pencil test, taken in groups. The participants of the tests were from three different age-groups, the students of two schools in Budapest and of another two outside Budapest.

4. Evaluation

The evaluation of the stories was based on their endings. If the story was away from the point or both a positive and negative feature were present in it — balancing each other, of course — I considered it having a neutral end.

II. SAMPLE

The number of participants, the rate of genders and the average age

My tests concerned three age-groups: those of pre-adolescents, adolescents and young adults, 317 participants altogether. These three age-groups were needed for making a comparison, since I had assumed that the results of pre-adolescents and young adults would be alike, and gender differences would be the most obvious with adolescents.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| (A) Pre-adolescents | 65 , 32 boys, 33 girls, average age: 11 years |
| (B) Adolescents: | 114 , 42 boys, 72 girls, average age: 17,14 years |
| (C) Young adults: | 138 , 49 boys, 89 girls, average age: 25,6 years |

III. MY HYPOTHESES

(A) From an emotional point of view, teenage girls go through awkward age in a more negative way than boys do.

My hypothesis is based on the test results concerning gender differences. My reason to assume that girls experience adolescence in a more negative way was that their biological changes appeared in a more tangible way: the development of cushions of fat, the first menses, the change of endocrine system are often accompanied with fear. It is also a very important factor how a family, parents prepare their children for this period full of changes. On the other hand, I supposed that basic female qualities such as distress, sentimentalism and greater empathy would also be of high importance in going through awkward age.

(B) These significant differences do not occur during the period before and after adolescence, which is to say during latency then youth.

IV. RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION

Unlike pre-adolescents, in adolescents's stories the basic subjects, the plots belonged to a lot of different categories. There were stories where pleasure was ruined by the parent's reaction or there was a mistake, or the story was rather like a tale. The subjects of the stories varied shown below:

1. The parent's reaction ruins pleasure:

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- a) the parent takes the success for granted: he/she is not surprised by the child's success since it goes without saying;
- b) he/she expects something different from his/her child: for instance, his/her participation in the family business;
- c) unconcern, indifference: the parent does not set great store by the child's success;
2. Some misunderstanding, a 'joke', a mistake about the name, a dream: some participants made a joke of the story, some considered it a good dream and some attributed the success to a misunderstanding.
3. Fear of publicity: although the teenager is successful, he/she does not dare stand in front of his/her classmates and teachers.
4. Fraternal jealousy: the parents seemingly love one of the brothers/sisters more
5. Success not deserved: the great success was achieved not only by the child's own work, effort.
6. Others' jealousy ruins the success: for instance, a rival.
7. A stroke of fate: the winner is run over, dies and is robbed.
8. Celebration with some food, sweets.
9. A tale-like plot: using tale-like figures in the story that finally comes to a negative end.
„He immediately went home and told it to everybody. He knew what this all meant. He can travel to Canada and studies the French language there for four years. He is leaving in one week. Since it was already late, he washed and went to bed. In his dreams, he was in Toronto with skyscrapers around him. But suddenly a house-tall monster appeared and completely destroyed every house. People ran in a stampede. Except for him. He just stood there alone. When the monster wanted to reach him, he suddenly woke up; it was two o'clock in the morning. He knew that he had had this nightmare due to the trip. The following day he went to school in good heart, however a bit sleepy. And then he learnt that there had been a mistake about the names: not him, Kovács Balázs, but Kovács Béla won the first prize. Bad luck...”
10. A trip: the first prize of the competition is a trip.
11. A humorous but somehow a negative story.
- 12: An extreme, negative consequence.
„She went home, the news was greeted with a real enthusiasm by her parents; her friends and acquaintances were really happy about it too. This prize guaranteed her immediate admittance to the university of her choosing. She was studious and appreciated by her teachers and mates round her. She wanted to become a doctor; she was just about to get a degree when it turned out that she was suffering from leukaemia. Éva completely collapsed. She just sat in her room, blankly stared at the wall without being aware of it. But one day, when she went to hospital for examination, she saw a sobbing married couple who had just lost their child, and then she decided not to give up. She was admitted to the hospital for treatment where she read more and more, but one day she did not wake up any more...”

The results of pre-adolescents and adults were alike indeed, shown in the table below:

	number of participants	number of girls	number of boys	number of stories with positive ends	number of stories with negative ends
pre-adolescents	65	33	32	65	0
young adults	138	89	49	137	1

1. Table: The results of pre-adolescents and adults

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The adolescents' results were assessed with the help of χ^2 test, which are shown in the table below:

	ending			in total
	positive	negative	neutral	
sex: male	21	18	3	42
female	37	35	-	72
in total	58	53	3	114

2. Table: χ^2 test, SPSS program

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5,342 ^a	2	,069
Likelihood Ratio	6,192	2	,045
Linear-by-Linear Association	,633	1	,426
N of Valid Cases	114		

a. 2 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1,11.

3. Table: 2. table: χ^2 test, SPSS program

INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

My results just partially confirm my hypotheses above mentioned. The pre-adolescents' stories with positive endings refer to the fact that they still live in a world where the parent plays a determining role, it is him/her who decides about everyday life of the child to which the child has no objection yet.

But this harmony, dynamic breaks during adolescence and everyday lives of teenagers change, who are looking for themselves and exploring the world. Searching for identity and understanding the world is not always free from troubles. Teenagers' results prove all this too, since it is mainly the parent who ruins pleasure in their negative-ended stories. But there were also several other subjects in the stories that may be considered typical problems of adolescents such as speaking in public, fraternal jealousy, suicide, etc.

To assess the teenagers' stories, I used χ^2 test whose result shows that there is slight gender difference concerning ending the stories. So the positive balance is falling away compared to the pre-adolescents.

Among the young adults, there was only one person whose story came to a negative end which is really a low number compared to the other 137 positive-ended stories. There were no gender gaps here either, and apropos of this I wish to mention the Erikson theory that says gender contrasts stop existing by youth since they are turning into an intimate union.

To sum up, we may say that there is a kind of 'frame' in connection with the three age groups. The frame is given by the absolute positive stories of the pre-adolescents and the youth, while during adolescence, between the two frames the

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balance stops existing and we can see a weird world and transformation begin. This period may be considered a hard tribulation for both children and parents.

Keywords: adolescence, gender differences, emotional development

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