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Specific features of gender identity formation in children from single-parent and nuclear families in ontogenesis

Tatyana L. Khudyakova^{a*}, Ludmila N. Gridyaeva^a, Yuliya V. Klepach^a

^a Voronezh State Pedagogical University, Lenina 86, Voronezh, 394043, Russia

Abstract

This article is devoted to the problem of gender identity formation in children from single-parent and nuclear families in the process of socialization. In contemporary Russia such phenomena as blurred gender roles, destruction of the value of the traditional family, common mastering of professions traditionally associated with the opposite sex have caused distortion of children's understanding of the masculinity – femininity concept. Children from single-parent families find it especially difficult understand the formation of the ideas of masculinity, femininity, female and male roles and the behavioural patterns in society. Children raised in single-parent households can often be characterized by an emotional alienation from the male parent and the formation of a symbiotic relationship with the female parent. The results of our empirical research have shown that teenagers must have close emotionally stable relationships with both the male and female parents in order to develop a harmonious adaptive functional gender identity. However, single parenting does not necessarily cause destructive consequences for a child's identity, and dysfunctional relationships may emerge in a nuclear family, too.

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* Khudyakova T.L. Tel.: +7 915 583-38-77; +7 (4732) 37-19-96.

E-mail address: kafedra-pp@mail.ru

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of gender identity formation is very acute in modern society. Every year the traditional gender roles become more and more blurred (that can be observed in clothing, appearance, behavior), the traditional family concept is being devalued (many single-parent families are observed) and mastering of the professions traditionally associated with the opposite sex becomes more common. All these phenomena have caused distortions in children's understanding of the masculinity-femininity concept.

Researchers' interest in gender studies has only recently emerged. Mostly it was due to the emergence of gender research focusing on the analysis of gender inequality problems and their causes in the West in the 70s-80s. As a result, such scientists as E. Erickson, A. Giddens, R. Stoller, S. Bem devoted their studies to this topic.

In Russia the first studies of the gender identity problem in the framework of sex-role socialization were conducted by I.S. Kon who believed that children's concepts about their "masculinity" or "femininity" "were not inborn but developed through communication with other people and under the influence of upbringing and a broad range of social conditions" [1].

In the contemporary Russian science the problem of gender identity formation, especially its masculinity-femininity dimension has been addressed by I.S.Kletsina, T.V.Bendas, E.A.Zdravomyslova, A.A.Temkina, V.E.Kagan, O.A.Voronina and others. However, the problem of gender identity formation in children from single-parent families has not been deeply researched. Usually the researchers focused only on the studies of the gender identity formation process in children from happy families and in orphanage children.

However, in our opinion, the problem of unclear gender roles is one of the most important for children raised in single-parent families, as there is no male or female role model that serves as a basis for the formation of the adequate gender identity in single-parent households.

It is known that the concept of gender identity is formed in childhood. It is the family that shapes the idea of role-sex self-perception, creating behavioral patterns through the parents-children relationships that, in turn, help to further create a standard of masculinity and femininity, as well as an adequate attitude to the opposite sex.

It is also important to note that in single-parenting households this results in distorting the process of gender identity formation. A boy raised by a single mother lacks an opportunity to witness the characteristic features of male behavior and therefore he subconsciously adopts female features. For a girl in a similar situation, mother has to combine both her own mother role and that of the missing father; as a result, the child's psychosexual development is contradictory.

We can assume therefore that the formation of masculinity – femininity concepts, gender roles and behavioral patterns in society is problematic in single-parent families.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In our research we used the following battery of psycho-diagnostic methods:

- Sex-Role Inventory measurement of masculinity – femininity by S. Bem (modified variant);
- Express diagnostics of the feminine level (E.P.Ilyin);
- Self-evaluation of the masculine – feminine identity;
- Express diagnostics of the masculine level;
- Diagnostics of psychological sex (O.G.Lopukhova's modification) [2];

For the statistical data processing the Q-Rozenbawm criterion was used. A total of 100 children from single-parent and nuclear families participated in the research (50 from nuclear families and 50 from single-parent families).

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