

The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India

Aishwarya Chawla^{1*}

ABSTRACT

The transgender community in India today is subject to discrimination, antagonism and rejection, and kept at bay from the normative paradigm set by society. Transgender individuals are excluded from normal social and cultural life, and are not granted basic human rights because of their gender dysphoria. This paper is the case analysis of a young woman dealing with stressful life situations and consequent coping mechanisms employed, supported by suggested interventions. I embarked on this project with the intention to understand the dilemmas and the coping mechanisms adopted by members of the transgender community, after putting away my lens that proclaimed a gender binary. A sixteen-year-old student, renowned for being one of the first few Indians outspoken about her transgender identity, is the subject of this study. Her story has already struck a chord with people across the country. The case study method employed an idiographic approach under which Free Association, Semi-Structured Interview and the Bem's Sex Role Inventory were administered. Accordingly, the thematic analysis was conducted to focus on recurrent ideas like childhood memories, hardships faced, societal influences, self-perception, physical and psychological concerns, wishes, desires and future goals. The learned result was that the subject faced incredibly stressful experiences and employed certain coping mechanisms that are gender individuals do not.

Keywords: Gender, Sexuality, Transgender, Woman

The American Psychological Association defines '*transgender*' (often shortened to 'trans') as an umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity or gender expression does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. Trans people are often seen by others as non-conforming to a natural or inherited identity and so they are stigmatized; for this reason the National Alliance on Mental Illness suggests trans people are prone to depression and anxiety. Due to the constant stigma and discrimination, they are more likely to developing mental health issues.

¹ Tata Institute of Social Sciences, V.N. Purav Marg, Eden Gardens, Deonar, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

*Responding Author

Received: September 2, 2018; Revision Received: September 16, 2018; Accepted: September 30, 2018

2018 Chawla, A; licensee IJIP. This is an Open Access Research distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any Medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India

Stress for any transgender is obvious. If one is openly transgender, he/she may be under a lot of extra stress because of discrimination in the community. If he/she is still in the closet, he/she may have stress from hiding who he/she really is. Rejection, discrimination, fear, and confusion cause long-term stress in many transgender people. Being a transgender is hard. It is no surprise that transgender individuals experience a kind of stress that cisgender (those who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth) individuals do not. People who identify as transgender can and often do experience stigma, discrimination, violence and internalized homophobia.

In India itself, there are various challenges faced by members of the transgender community. The Indian mindset is moreover limited in terms of public knowledge, in which case there are human rights of individuals that are violated. The first and predominant type of exclusion comes from families wherein the transgendered individual is not treated fairly, or in extreme terms, even disowned. Exclusion in the health care arena, there are barriers in providing the transgendered individuals with the right kind of medical treatment. The Social and Welfare Schemes by the Government of India are also unavailable for the same, along with the fact that they do not have adequate resources to fund any kind of insurance plans.

Coming out of the closet is difficult for anyone, especially those people in the LGBTQ community due to the increasing antagonism and rejection from the society. Gender Dysphoria, needs to be addressed. This is a fundamental unease and dissatisfaction with the biological sex one is born with which results in anxiety, depression, restlessness, and other symptoms. The dysphoria often acts as a catalyst to change one's body and gender expression (how one presents to the world) to be more in keeping with what is felt to be one's gender identity (the gender that one feels oneself to be).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of studies have been carried out in the transgender community for a myriad of reasons. Recently known as "India's Third Gender", the transgender community has faced exclusion of many kinds. A study by Joseph D., 2013, stated that there are preconceived notions that the Hijara's are "neither male nor female". Hijaras are mostly people who are born with male physiology; adopt feminine gender identity, women's clothing and other feminine gender role. Social exclusion not only generates tension, violence and disruption but also perpetuates inequality and deprivation in society. Overcoming 'exclusion' constitutes the most elementary pre-requisite for the building of a democratic society.

A 2007 survey conducted by Dr. Joseph Kosciw of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that over 85% of trans students reported verbal harassment based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Nearly half (49.5%) reported physical harassment based on these characteristics, and a third (34.1%) reported being physically assaulted.

The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India

According to the Times of India (June, 2014), India's most recent census yielded the first official count of transgender people, at more than 490,000. Transgender activists in the country estimate this number to be six to seven times higher. Census results say that 55,000 came from parents identifying their children as transgender, legally recognized by the Supreme Court in India as the third gender, traditionally called "hijara." During the voter registration process, only 28,341 people registered as belong to the third gender, but the census clearly indicates a huge inflation in numbers. One notable finding of the census is the low literacy rate in the transgender community, at 46% in comparison to 74% literacy in the overall population.

Rationale and Objective

Issues of transgenderism have been significant from times immemorial. Sociologists have studied members of the transgender community, yet they aren't always given psychological importance. These issues have never been addressed in an effective manner. Naturally, changing the societal views and mindsets of people can be challenging. Gender fluidity is a concept that is still fuzzy for most people. The incidence of people with gender dysphoria increases day by day. Previous researches for exploring treatment for transgender people along with ways to combat the discrimination have served as an impetus for the present study. The case analysis is of a sixteen-year-old who broke the stigma of transgenderism and stood strong. The research question therefore remains, **“What are the challenges faced and coping styles employed by transgendered youth in India?”**

METHODOLOGY

Design

The case study method was employed for the present research. This included Free Association, Semi-structured Interview and Bem's Sex Role Inventory. Once the data was generated, the thematic analysis was carried out.

Sample

A sixteen-year-old transgender woman was chosen from New Delhi, belonging to the upper middle socio-economic strata, currently pursuing her schooling.

Methods

1. Free association is a technique used in psychoanalytic therapy to help patients learn more about what they are thinking and feeling. It is most commonly associated with Sigmund Freud, who was the founder of psychoanalytic therapy. Freud used free association to help his patients discover unconscious thoughts and feelings that had been repressed or ignored. When his patients became aware of these unconscious thoughts or feelings, they were better able to manage them or change problematic behaviors. The goal of free association is not primarily to uncover hidden memories but to identify genuine thoughts and feelings about life situations that might be problematic, yet not be self-evident.

The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India

2. A semi-structured interview is a method of research used in the social sciences. While a structured interview has a rigorous set of questions, which does not allow one to divert, a semi-structured interview is open, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. The interviewer in a semi-structured interview generally has a framework of themes to be explored. The inclusion of open-ended questions and training of interviewers to follow relevant topics that may stray from the interview guide does, however, still provide the opportunity for identifying new ways of seeing and understanding the topic at hand. Semi-structured interviews also allow informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms. Semi-structure interviews can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data.

3. Bem's Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) is a measure of masculinity-femininity and gender roles. It assesses how people identify themselves psychologically. Bem's goal of the BSRI was to examine psychological androgyny and provide empirical evidence to show the advantage of a shared masculine and feminine personality versus a sex-typed categorization. The test is formatted with 60 different personality traits which participant's rate themselves based on a 7-point Likert scale. Traits are evenly dispersed, 20 masculine, 20 feminine, and 20 filler traits thought to be gender neutral. All traits in the BSRI are positively valued personality aspects.

Procedure

Upon the selection of the sample, the three methods (namely Free Association, Semi-structured Interview and Bem Sex Role Inventory) were administered after the rapport was formed. The subject was informed about the confidentiality of her responses, and consent was taken.

Free Association

The subject was given instructions- "You have to speak about your experience as a transgender woman for about fifteen minutes. There are no right or wrong answers, speak aloud about whatever comes into your mind. You can also focus a little on the stresses that you have faced and how you overcame them". During the conduction phase, the subject was asked to sit comfortably and talk about her experiences after which, the data was recorded and transcribed.

Semi-structured Interview

A Semi structured interview was administered in order to tap into certain areas that the researcher wanted to study. The questions ranged from her childhood experiences, to schooling, support systems in and outside the family, societal views, coping mechanisms, to even being one of India's youngest transgender females. Instructions were given- "I will be asking you certain questions regarding your experience as a transgender woman. There is no time limit, feel free to express yourself". The data was recorded and transcribed.

Bem Sex Role Inventory

An Inventory was administered to the subject, which focuses on the gender roles. The subject was required to fill in the options that she found suitable to her behaviors and actions. Instructions were given- “You will now be required to fill out this inventory”, the rest of the instructions were given as per the BSRI manual. Accordingly, the data was tabulated and results reported.

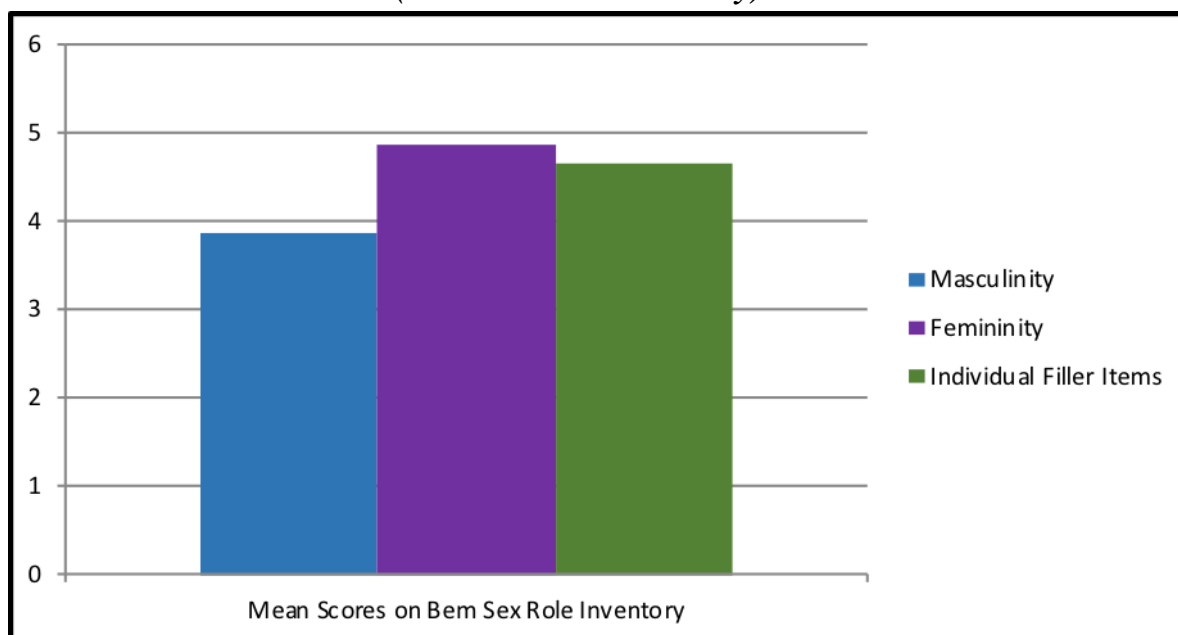
Using all three methods, thematic analysis was carried out.

RESULTS

Figure 1, Table 1: Mean Scores on the Masculinity, Femininity and Individual Filler Dimensions

	Masculinity	Femininity	Individual Filler Dimensions
Mean Scores	3.85	4.85	4.65

Graph 1: Bar Diagram expressing Mean scores on the Masculinity, Femininity and Individual Filler Dimensions (Bem’s Sex Role Inventory)



Case Analysis

“People changed lots of other personal things all the time. They dyed their hair and dieted themselves to near death. They took steroids to build muscles and got breast implants and nose jobs so they'd resemble their favorite movie stars. They changed names and majors and jobs and husbands and wives. They changed religions and political parties. They moved across the country or the world — even changed nationalities. Why was gender the one sacred thing we weren't supposed to change? Who made that rule?” — Ellen Wittlinger, *Parrotfish*

The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India

Wittlinger is absolutely right when she asks, “Who made that rule?” Gender is nothing but a societal framework. Generally, when it comes to lay persons, the difference between gender and sex is not clear. **Sex** refers to the biological or physiological characteristics of being male or female, while **gender** refers to the behaviors, roles and expectations of being masculine or feminine. A child is born as male or female and the body that he/she is born with makes the society presuppose gender and gender roles.

People often consider anatomy to be destiny. However, it is important to dispel the myths that more often than not, surround us. It is important to clarify the meaning of gender, gender roles and gendered preferences. We need to understand the notion of Gender Dysphoria. This is a fundamental unease and dissatisfaction with the biological sex one is born with which results in anxiety, depression, restlessness, and other symptoms. The dysphoria often acts as a catalyst to change one’s body and gender expression (how one presents to the world) to be more in keeping with what is felt to be one’s gender identity (the gender that one feels oneself to be).

The main problem of growing up with Gender Dysphoria, aside from the body dysphoria itself is the social predicament. Essentially everyone expects the individual to be and act like a boy/girl, when they feel inside to be a girl/boy. This Gender Dysphoria can be seen in the mean scores along the Masculinity and Femininity Dimension of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (depicted in Graph 1, Table 1).

The above-mentioned graph and table depict that her mean scores with respect to the Bem Sex Role Inventory fall highest in the dimension of Femininity, which corresponds to her gender transition from masculine to feminine. She has scored high on feminine characteristics such as affectionate, sensitive to the needs of others, compassionate, feminine, warm etc. and moderate on masculine characteristics like secretive, adaptable, dominant, analytical, individualistic, masculine etc.

Upon analyzing the case, there were various themes that emerged which have been discussed further.

Figure 2, Table 2: Generation of Themes

Early Realizations	Societal Influences	Self-Perception	Sense of Support	Wishes, Desires and Futuristic Goals
Childhood Memories	Struggling with Stereotypes	Enhanced Self-Esteem	Familial Support	
Sibling Envy	Lack of acceptance	Public Scrutiny	Peer Acceptance	
Pubertal Issues	Hardships faced	Physical and Psychological Attributes		

Early Realizations

1. Childhood Memories

Children get cues early on from parents about appropriate behavior, and internalize them. For example MTF (male to female) transsexuals have reported getting the message from parents that it wasn't okay for them to play dolls with their sisters or neighbors, and that they were expected to do "boy" things – like rough and tumble play. Kids of this age start to get the idea that there is a part of them that must remain hidden.

The participant stated, "I wanted to do ballet, I wanted to do Kathak, I wanted to do Bharatnatyam, I wanted to you know play with dolls, and dress up like a girl. My parents stopped me they were like no no you can't because like in Indian societies it's not acceptable to be, for like a kid to be dressing up like the opposite gender". This shows that as mentioned earlier, she too was expected to do "boy" things simply because the societal influence was such that she was not allowed to do what she wanted, and was therefore shunned when she asked.

Normally, people seem to ignore the early years of the individual's lives. She stated, "at 3-5 years, people think it's a phase but actually that's when the child knows because that's when the norms of gender are being put on you; boys do this and girls do this". However, it is at these ages that the children begin to really understand what it means to be a boy, and what it means to be a girl. Accordingly, the gender is presupposed by the society and the individual is brought up in a similar way, of course, one that is normative and acceptable by the society at that point in time.

2. Sibling Envy

Social transitioning is difficult for every family. She stated, "I always felt like my sister wasn't being thankful enough because I wasn't allowed to do those things. Guy's weren't allowed to do those things". This sense of confusion regarding why her sister was allowed to do certain things but she was not, often seemed to upset her and changed her way of looking at things. According to her, "it was really tough for me growing up seeing my sister getting all the things I wanted and not being able to have them is tough. So that's most of my childhood- tough".

3. Pubertal Issues

Adolescence is a particularly hard age, since the body begins to change and adapt gender specific features (breasts, changes in genitals, menses, etc.). Transgender individuals have reported, "I was disgusted by (hair, breasts...etc.)". Many transgender individuals are aware of their issue by this age, but lack the means and agency to effect any change. This has been changing in recent years where some transgender youth are more "out", have supportive families and are able to access services.

The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India

In some cases, medication is available to “delay” puberty until the individual is old enough to decide whether or not to transition. This has the benefit of essentially avoiding the trauma of experiencing the physical effects of puberty in the unwanted gender.

For the participant, she went through puberty as a male. At the age of 16, she decided to come out as transgender and share her story. She stated, “My features are going like all over the place because I finished puberty as a male and now I’m restarting as a female. So, my body has already gone through all its changes. So, to go through all of them again is really confusing for my body and I get really weak and lethargic and I get stomachaches and headaches”. Therefore, upon starting the Hormone Replacement Therapy, she began the sex change procedure. She has been on the medicines for the same for about two-three months now and is still undergoing therapy.

Societal Influences

Society has a great role to play in terms of understanding any individual who belongs to the LGBTQ community. **Transgender inequality** is the unequal protection transgender people receive in work, school, and society in general. Transgender people regularly face transphobic harassment. Ultimately, one of the largest reasons that transgender people face inequality is due to a lack of public understanding of transgender people.

1. Struggling with Stereotypes

Sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) popularized the theory of “doing gender.” This theory sees that gender identity is something we do- it is a *performance* and an *achievement* that people put a lot of work into, rather than some innate biological state of being. People do gender by the way they dress, the way they talk, the way they move their bodies, the types of leisure activities they engage in their spare time, through their division of labor at home, at work and in every other context. Early knowledge on doing gender comes from childhood socialization. Subsequent life experiences teach us, often through trial and error, what the norms and expectations are for masculinity and femininity in different social settings.

She says, “I’m just a walking stereotype like, I’m such a common girl. Just how society has made me. It’s like, “okay, we’ll accept you as a woman now but since you’re a woman now, you have to do all of these things. You have to cross your legs, you have to sit straight, you have to smile always, you have to be at your best, you have to be clean””. These are all stereotypes of how a woman ought to be, or how a woman should be. This therefore expresses the presupposition of gender onto the individuals by the society, which in turn shapes who we become by the end of the day.

2. Lack of acceptance

It has been understood that for her too, the societal influence has been grave as well. For any transgendered individual, the only reason as to why they often seem to contemplate about whether they should ‘come out’ is because of what the society will think and accordingly say.

The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India

People are always concerned with how they are looked at and addressed in society; no one wishes to have a poor reputation no matter what the situation might be.

It is no wonder that transgenders and other people who do not fit into the normative paradigm with respect to their sexual preferences; orientations etc. typically face a lot of rejection and antagonism from the society. It therefore has an impact on their happiness, mental health and movement in society. Zimmerman therefore states, “Doing gender takes work: you need to learn what’s expected of you as a “man” or as a “woman.”” The expectations of the society determine how we ought to behave in order to be accepted.

3. Hardships Faced

As mentioned earlier, it is not easy to undergo a sex change. For one, it not only affects the person biologically, but also socially as well as psychologically. The transgender community in India today receives a lot of antagonism and rejection as well as discrimination as they do not fit into the normative paradigm set by the society.

She stated, “I know someone who is a transgender woman in India and she was bullied and discriminated against so much so that she went back to being a boy. That's like scary. It's really scary”. She also stated, “People are literally looking at me like what are you doing with your life”. This shows that in society today too, despite how advanced, modernized or even globalized we may call ourselves; there is always room for stigma and discrimination. Being a transgender is hard. It is difficult to find acceptance within the society simply because there are a lot of people who still do not accept the LGBTQ community and will therefore always discriminate against them.

Going to school can be quite a battle as well. There are people who are immature and not entirely sensitive to what others might be going through. During the Interview, she recalled, “There was this one point in time where this kid just hit me because I wasn’t answering him on whether or not I was gay. Like I just wasn’t answering and he hit me”. She stated that this was one of the worst days at school, one she would never forget.

When one finds it difficult to feel comfortable in his/her own skin, depression is not uncommon. She stated, “I was very suicidal. I attempted suicide twice because I was quite miserable”, which goes on to explain how difficult it must have been for her to have faced all this and that too, in constant battle with her own body. It also explains the level of depression she underwent during this entire process of the gender-sex change. She further explained, “I would cry a lot. It helped me. I don’t know why I was depressed, you know?” which helps us understand the kind of pain she went through where her depression was so deep that she herself was unable to reason with her own self with respect to it.

Self-Perception

Gender transition is not easy. Taking a decision and actually standing by that decision is what often makes people go back to how they were. It is important for one to have the strong

internal locus of control where he/she understands that once this entire process begins, there is no going back and thus, he/she is solely accountable and responsible for the consequences that will have to be borne later on in life. One has to have a positive self-concept and a high deal of self-efficacy in being sure about taking such a stand.

1. Enhanced Self-Esteem

The participant stated, “I’m so much stronger; I’m so much more independent. I used to depend on my friends so much, because I was always so insecure. But now I am so confident”. Even at the mere age of 16, she realized that this transition is not just about sex changing. It is more than that. She is finally going to be in touch with her real and authentic self, something that she has wanted to for the past 15 years of her life. She further stated, “Today, I know that if people judge me, I don’t care because I’m happy and others’ opinions literally don’t mean anything to me”. For a young transgendered woman to have this much faith in oneself is commendable simply because it is during this adolescent age that people often understand the conceptions behind identity crises and the effects that they have on the life of the individual.

2. Public Scrutiny

She is one of the country’s youngest transsexuals as well. She stated, “It’s a lot of responsibility because a lot of people look at me and ask me a lot of these questions and I don’t know everything, I’ve only been on HRT for this long. Like 2.5-3 months, I don’t know that much about it. It takes time for your body to make the change, you know. Also, because I’m the youngest, I feel like I don’t have so much experience in the world to know stuff. It’s a lot of responsibility because everyone’s like looking at you and asking you questions and stuff”. Her perception of her own self is also based on the fact that because she is one of the youngest, she has to set examples for other people who might not be as sure as she is in terms of carrying out the sex change procedure.

3. Physical and Psychological Attributes

In terms of her physicality, she has been taking the Hormone Replacement Therapy for around three months now. This therapy increases the levels of estrogen in her body and reduces the production of the testosterone hormone for her to become more feminine. She stated, “I feel so much happier, like now that my body is changing and the fat is being deposited in the right places, like I’m getting that figure you know, the female figure. I’m like so much happier, I can see myself becoming a woman”.

When asked what she couldn’t do as a boy but is able to now, she stated, “Probably grow my hair. I know it’s a stupid and an insignificant thing but like having long hair is so much nicer. I’ve always loved long hair. I also love getting my nails done, my waxing done”. This explains her mere sense of relief and happiness in the fact that she is finally being allowed to do what she has always yearned for: to be a woman.

The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India

Psychological happiness is often defined in terms of self-awareness and self-acceptance. For her, once she accepted herself for who she really was, there was no way she would be unhappy. She stated, “I’m really trying to break this stigma. Once I accepted myself and when I gave the whole speech thing, it really helped me understand myself better. It helped me accept myself. And then I could move on from there. That was the best part, when I accepted myself”. This explains how self-acceptance can play such a vital role in helping the individual be happy. It must have been hard enough not being happy in one’s own skin, but once she began to accept herself and all that was there to her, she found happiness.

In the Bem Sex Role Inventory, she scored the Femininity dimension as a 7 and the Masculinity as 1, which shows that she feels more of a female than a male and therefore identifies with feminine traits rather than masculine ones.

Sense of Support

When undergoing the transition of sex change or any stressful situation, social and emotional support is of utmost significance for the individual going through the process. Whenever it is that people find themselves in stressful situations, or crises in their lives or even conflicts as such, it always helps when there are people helping the individual so that he/she does not feel like he/she has to handle the situation at hand alone.

1. Familial Support

For the participant, her strongest sense of support was her mother. She stated, “It’s ridiculous what people will say to her. So, she’s, like for her to have gone through all of that and still come out to support me, she’s my biggest supporter. There’s no one else. Not even my dad is as strong as that. She’s held my hand through everything”. Her mother has even held her hand through the blood tests for HRT, through X-rays, through doctor. Having a supportive parent in a time like this can help any individual face whatever he/she is going through without further complications.

She says, “my mother hasn’t raised me as a girl. She’s raised me as a lady. My motto in life is, *‘I was born a Boy, raised a Man. Became a Woman and emerged a Lady’*. My family is very conservative. If you’re a boy, you’re a gentleman. If you’re a woman, you’re a lady. There’s no concept of boy/girl”.

2. Peer Acceptance

In terms of her friends, they have all been extremely supportive. In the interview with NDTV as well, her friends were present and some of them have even gone with her for therapy to the psychologist and the psychiatrists. She stated, “I actually felt so much better after crying with like a close group of friends. We’re a group of 7, so we all just cry with each other”. This was one of her coping strategies whenever she felt like she didn’t know what to do, or she didn’t know how to handle the situation at hand and that too, alone.

Wishes, Desires and Futuristic Goals

Like every other individual, she too has certain wishes and desires that she wants to fulfill at some point in her life. She stated, “I want to have 14 kids. I plan on becoming a housewife. Also, I want to own a library, a hospital and a school. It’s a far shot but I really want to own a country. I also want to be a model. Like a runaway model”. She further explained how these are not merely wishes or desires, but actual goals that she plans on accomplishing.

She will be going for her Sex Reassignment Surgery after her class 12-board examinations, which will make her a transsexual woman. She will then be able to start her menstrual cycle, give birth and live the rest of her life as a woman.

One of her main goals is to inspire people. She wishes to help someone out there who is contemplating the same and has the same concerns as she did at a point in her life. Because she is one of the country’s youngest transsexuals, she feels like it is her responsibility to help others, although it is difficult because she does not know of anyone who has gone through the hormone replacement therapy, and that too at such a young age.

A lot of people have approached her with various questions and concerns. She stated, “All I tell them is- make an informed decision because this is irreversible and it is life changing. There’s no going back”. She is strong enough as well as mindful enough to know that this change is something she will never be able to bring back, she has known for long enough that this is what she wants and is working towards emerging as a lady.

Upon understanding the role of the Indian Government in the matter, On April 15th 2015, the Supreme Court finally acknowledged India’s large male-to-female transgender minority by announcing the existence of a “third gender” and enabling them to register as such on government documents like voter ID cards. This has been a big change for the Indian society as there will finally be acceptance towards the third gender, that is, transgenderism.

Research Question: “What are the challenges faced and coping styles employed by transgendered youth in India?”

The participant chosen for the present study has had to face various kinds of challenges while growing up and she continues to do so. The challenges are in the form of difficulties within school, confusion of self and identity, and the struggle with stereotypes among others. In the life of any transgender, there are certain points to be addressed- the moments of realization, the decision of actually going through with the change, and lastly, the surgery. The stereotypical struggle is one that often enforces the psychosocial stigma attached with being transgendered. Thus, there are various issues to be considered before one officially ‘comes out’ as a member of the LGBTQ community.

Coping mechanisms often involve support from close relationships such as family and friends. When one is faced with a stressful life situation, a sense of social support enables the individual to cope with the situation in an effective and productive manner. In the case, the

The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India

participant mentioned that her main coping style was crying with her close group of friends. She stated initially that this felt like a cathartic event wherein she didn't feel judged for being different, and she felt a great level of acceptance therein.

Suggested Interventions

In terms of interventions, for any transgender individual, counseling is important. This is because there are various concerns that people may develop over the course and changing your sex or gender is not just about changing your sex or gender. It is much more than that, there is a lot that goes along with this change. The way people look at you, the way you look at yourself along with the kinds of social and psychological relationships one builds with others, they are all affected by this change.

The participant mentioned that she had been going through counseling for the past three years with psychiatrists and family therapists in New Delhi. Seeking out social and professional support is the number one factor in decreasing anxiety and depression in transgender individuals. Therefore, finding a transgender-affirmative therapist really helps to deal with the stresses that he/she has to encounter.

This case can be understood using the **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**. Usually, in such cases, the level of self-efficacy is reduced. Early in the transition process, many transgender individuals experience a sense of hopelessness about the future, believing that transitioning is an impossible task. As people move further along in the transition process, these feelings begin to change as they realize that they have the power to follow through with their transition.

Cognitive reframing is an important intervention that can be used. This refers to looking at the given situation in a new light. For example, reframing the difficulty one experiences while transitioning as a source of personal strength and resilience.

Another technique of CBT is the Acting "As if", because no one feels confident all the time. However, if one walks out of the door with a smile on his/her face, emotions tend to catch up with the actions, which can help the transgender individual feel more in control of the situation at hand.

Lastly, in terms of education and advocacy- many transgender individuals find great joy and meaning in doing education and advocacy for the transgender community. Someone further along in the transition process can find a new source of meaning in helping someone new to the process talk through the initial anxiety and offer him or her hope for the future.

Being a transgender is hard, but constantly fighting a battle within your own self with respect to your body and corresponding psyche is harder. Studies indicate that almost all transgenders do not regret transitioning and they feel like they were finally living as their true self. All the

The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India

hardship was worth the pay off and the best times in their life were being honest about whom they were through their gender transition. It is no doubt that she too, feels the same way.

CONCLUSION

The present research study serves as an impetus for further research on individuals belonging to the LGBTQ community. It delves into the various kinds of stressful experiences that the subject went through and how she coped with them, at such a young age. It must also be kept in mind that one ought to be sensitive when dealing with such issues. The participant has braved a multitude of events and surpassed the comments that were cast on her. Inspiring others became her motto. She has battled through this inner conflict and found strength and courage to face everything. Overall, the study gives a holistic picture into the life of the subject.

REFERENCE

- Apa.org. (n.d.). The Psychology of Transgender. [online] Available at: <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2015/11/psychology-transgender.aspx> [Accessed 18 May 2018].
- Joseph, D., 2013. Social Exclusion of Transgender: Problems and Prospects. *Indian Social Science Journal*, 2(1), p.73.
- Kosciw, Joseph G., Elizabeth Diaz, and Emily Greytak., 2007. National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN, 2008. Web. 26 Nov 2008
- West, C. and Zimmerman, D.H., 1987. Doing gender. *Gender & society*, 1(2), pp.125-151.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my participant for being such an important part of this study, and for continuing to be an inspiration to many.

Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

How to cite this article: Chawla, A (2018). The Hidden Identity: Exploring Experiences of one of the youngest Transgender Woman in India. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 6(3), 145-158. DIP:18.01.096/20180603, DOI:10.25215/0603.096