

Adolescent Identity Struggles, Vocational Guidance and Career Counselling: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical stage of human development that needs special attention and direction. Psychologists identify this period as quarter-life transition due to the silent struggle and crisis many adolescents face in this crucial period. Identity creation is the major psychosocial task identified by Erikson and Marcia who made elaborate studies on adolescents. If proper guidance is not provided, adolescents struggle and wobble in their steady growth and identity creation. Influenced by peers, adolescents are confused and confronted by realities which are beyond their aptitude and interests. As career choice takes precedence in identity creation, identifying the aptitude and interests and, relating this to their vocational preference plays a major role. This case study elaborates the identity struggle and the role of vocational guidance and counselling intervention in helping an adolescent in his growth and development.

Keywords: *Adolescent Development, Identity Creation, Vocational Guidance, Career Choice, Career Counselling*

Adolescent period is a critical stage in human development. It is a transition period from childhood to adulthood. This period is also a time of crisis and change, often labelled as quarterlife transition, with its own challenges and tasks (Janetius & Mini, 2015; Shilpa, 2012). It is hard to define the period chronologically because psychologists differ in their understanding and attribution of years and months. However, psychologists uniformly understand that it starts with puberty and continues until some social independence is achieved. The differences in chronological descriptions are only arbitrary age designations, not significant; also, neither psychological nor biological maturity is reached so precisely or at a specific day or month in an individual. The physical, social, psychological, intellectual, emotional and other developments are also conditioned by socio-economic, cultural and geographical factors that need to be taken into consideration (Bronenbrenner, 1979; Smith,

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Cowie & Blades, 2011). The table below gives the stages of human development by different psychologists.

Table No. 1 Stages of human development

Stage		Years by different psychologists			
Infancy	Neonate	0-28 days	0-1 years	0-3 years	0-1 years
	Infant	0-12 months			
Childhood	Early	1-3 years	2-3 years	3-6 years	1-3 years
	Middle	3-5 years	4-6 years	6-8 years	3-7 Years
	Late	6-11 years	7-12 years	9-11 years	7-11 Years
Adolescence	Early	12-16 years	13-19 years	12-20 years	11-15 years
	Middle				15-20 Years
	Late	17-21 years			
Adulthood	Young	18-39 years	20-34 years	20-35 years	20 -30 Years
	Middle	40-60 years	35-65 years	35-50 years	30-45 Years
	Mature			50-80 Years	
	Late	61 + years	65+ years	80+ Years	45-60 Years
Old Age	Early				60-75 Years
	Middle				75-90 Years
	Late				90 + Years

The process of adolescent development is so unique and therefore varies from individual to individual. Development progression in adolescence is not conditioned by time and period rather it is a process of achieving autonomy in thinking, attitude, belief, and decision making for an effective social interaction and personal growth identification in a specific socio-cultural context. This is a stressful struggle in which adolescents create their identity, explore their abilities, interests and the likes, which sometimes lead them into a confused juncture (Shilpa, 2012). This psychological dilemma in adolescent development, therefore, is a transition struggle between childhood and adulthood, calls for parental guidance, assistance, and supervision.

Erik Erikson's theory sheds some good glimpses of adolescent's developmental struggles especially in coherence with social demands that they face, leading to identity creation (Erickson, 1968). As adolescents grow physically, they see their sexual organs develop to maturity; new expectations arise in them, compelling to be interpersonally and socially competent in comparison to their peers. Life can be challenging and stressful due to this new feeling of maturity, psychological condition and the transition towards adulthood. Erikson also believes that peers have a strong impact on the development of ego identity (Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). All these place them in a fragile position for a delicate dance with family members, teachers, and elders and often seen as rebellion (Janetius & Mini, 2015).

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Together with the conflicts with the parents and family, confusion and illusion lead them towards career goals and future life without fully realizing their identity and inner strengths (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). Although they seem to be in control over their life situation, they falter and wobble in their almost every decision making, due to lack of clarity on their aptitude, natural talents and also career path (Janetius & Shilpa, 2016; Mini & Janetius, 2013).

This case study elaborates the struggles of a rural adolescent boy and the psychological counselling he received for vocational guidance that paved the way for his talents identification, identity creation, and future career goal setting.

CASE PRESENTATION

Mr. X (the subject) is an eighteen-year-old boy from a middle-class family. His father met with an accident before ten years and is bed-ridden. The mother is not employed. The subject has a younger sister who is studying in the high school. The whole family stays with the boy's grandfather (father of his mother) and depends on him for all their economic needs and daily sustenance. The grandfather is a 73-year-old retired government college professor, who has two sons and one daughter. His wife and the family of younger son stay in the same house. In order to shoulder the heavy economic woes of the family, the grandfather is now working in a private college for a meagre salary for the last 10 years.

The subject was brought up by his grandfather in a pampering permissive parenting style. He justifies his permissive parenting with the empathetic thought that the boy never experienced full family love, care, and guidance. The subject scored 80% marks in SSLC and considered by the teachers as an above average student. He joined Higher Secondary Education (plus two) in Mathematics and Computer Science in view of joining Engineering after the completion. Since his father is fully confined to bed and his grandfather's parenting is permissive, the subject slowly became a disobedient, uncontrollable youth in the family.

As the Mathematics teacher found him poor in doing homework and other mathematical problems in the class, she requested the grandfather to arrange Math tuition in the evening. First, the subject refused to go for tuition, later he agreed to go with a condition that he is given a scooter to travel. The family bought a scooter for him and, in the course of time, started to skip the tuition classes and roam around with his friends. In the second year of his plus two, he started to complain in the morning stomach-ache or headache and developed another technique to skip the classes. When his grandfather took him to doctors, after various medical checkups, doctors would tell that there is nothing wrong with the body.

Meanwhile, the subject started a new lifestyle: never studies at home, completely ignored Maths tuition, spends most of the evenings watching TV (mainly WWF actions or comedy channels) till he falls asleep. During holidays, he goes to play cricket with his friends in the nearby playground. During the class days, starts watching TV in the morning and hurriedly run to school or skip the classes with some lame excuses. When rebuked by his mother and

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grandfather couple of times, he threw the remote control of the TV and broke it. In this baffling situation, he demanded the family members buy him a mobile phone and promised that he would go to school regularly. With the overall economic burden on the head, his grandfather relented and bought a Smartphone for him. His addiction to the *Watsapp* messenger and video games crept in as the next challenge for the family to tackle. Few weeks before the public exams, he stopped going to school altogether and refused to write the exams. He started to threaten and blackmail the family members that he would run away from home if he is forced to write the exam or anyone interferes with his life. The family consulted an astrologer and they suggested that the subject had two years of bad spell due to some planetary movements; he gave confidence that everything would be over by two months.

Once the summer holidays were over, the subject came with a new idea of joining Polytechnic with his 10th standard exam marks. His grandfather consulted some of his colleagues in the college and few suggested him to take the subject to some professional psychological counselling rather than admitting him in the Engineering or Polytechnic College. Out of his excessive love for the grandson, the grandfather did not heed to any of the suggestions given by his colleagues and admitted him for a Diploma in Mechanical Engineering by borrowing some money from the local money lender that is paid back monthly with interest.

The student started to show some new enthusiasm to go to college and the family thought that the problems were almost over and were happy. They also recalled what the astrologer said about the planetary movements that affected the subject in the past two years. Four months of Mechanical Engineering in the Polytechnic College passed without any incidents. The subject had a finger injury while closing the door of the college bus as it was customary for him to stand in the door and travel in the college bus. He was taken to the hospital for a mild fracture in the thumb that made him stopped going to college on medical grounds. Once his finger is cured, he refused to attend the college saying that he wants to become a sports person. The family was completely upset about the subject's new decision as the grandfather had paid considerably a huge amount as capitation as well as the annual fee in the college.

He stayed at home with his own itinerary that is, eating, watching TV, going with friends for cricket and sleeping. Six months passed now, he came with yet another idea to become a professional singer and musician. He argued that some of his friends suggested that he has a good voice. At this juncture, the family seriously decided to consult a psychologist. After some consistent persuasion, the subject agreed to meet the psychologist for psychometric testing to identify his natural talent so that the psychologist can guide him in his future career.

PSYCHOMETRIC ASSESSMENT

Interest and aptitude play a vital role in the professional and career success of an individual. Interest is the likeness of an individual towards a job or profession or workplace, whereas, aptitude defines how much inner potential and natural talent a person has. The unified aptitude and interest based career path will lead a person to success. With this philosophy in

mind, *Davis's Battery of Differential Abilities (DBDA)* was administered to the subject by the psychologist.

Davis's Battery of Differential Abilities (DBDA) is a standardized psychometric test for objectively measuring what a person is able to do at the time of assessment. DBDA has been revised three times since its publication in 1947 (Rosenthal, 2007). It provides a standardized procedure for measuring the multiple aptitudes for educational and vocational guidance purposes. DBDA has a high predictive validity. It measures the aptitude in eight domains, namely, Verbal Ability (VA), Numerical Ability (NA), Spatial Ability (SA), Closure Ability (CA) and Clerical Ability (CL), Reasoning Ability (RA), Mechanical Ability (MA) and Psychomotor Ability (PM).

The DBDA manual gives the following descriptions of different abilities it measures (Vohra, 1994).

Verbal Ability (VA) refers to the comprehension of words and ideas, or a person's ability to understand writing language.

Numerical Ability (NA) refers to the ability in manipulating numbers quickly and accurately, in tasks involving addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, squaring, dealing with fractions etc.

Spatial Ability (SA) is concerned with perceiving spatial patterns accurately and following the orientation of figures in a plane or space.

Closure Ability (CA) primarily refers to the ability to see quickly a whole stimulus when parts of it are missing, or to complete the items.

Clerical Ability (CL) is concerned with making rapid evaluations of features of visual stimuli to identify or differentiate the sameness or difference of paired groups of letters and numbers.

Reasoning Ability (RA) refers to the skills to apply the process of induction or to reason from some specific information to a general principle.

Mechanical Ability (MA) is the basic understanding of mechanical principles, simple machines, tools, electrical and automotive facts.

Psychomotor Ability (PM) refers to precise movements requiring eye-hand coordination under highly speeded conditions.

TEST RESULTS AND COUNSELLING INTERVENTION

The subject came in time to the college counselling centre for psychometric testing and was polite and courteous during the test. The test was administered by two psychology interns in the counselling centre. The percentile score in the test results shows that the subject is *low* in almost all the categories of DBDA except Closure (CA) and Psychomotor (PM) ability. In CA and PM, he scored *average*. CA is the ability to identify or detect a known pattern (a figure, object, word, or sound). PM refers to the ability to have precise movements requiring eye-hand coordination under highly speeded conditions. The percentile score compares the ability of the subject with the same age group of students and figures out his ability to perform. Taking into consideration many extrinsic factors like social exposures, education, as

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well as personality characteristics and the family background of the subject, the scores were interpreted by the lead psychologist.

Based on the DBDA test score analysis, some possible jobs and career options are identified. The possible jobs for people with similar intelligence are: Air Traffic Controller, Police, Fire and Ambulance Dispatcher, Speech-Language Pathologist, Archaeologist, Airline Pilot, Co-pilot, and Flight Engineer, Police Detective, Police Patrol Officer, Database Administrator, Environmental Compliance Inspector, Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technician, Network and Computer Systems Administrator, Forensic Science Technicians and jobs of similar nature.

The test results were explained to the subject and some orientation was given on his test scores. The role of aptitude and interest and the need for developing specific skills in the unique natural talent of an individual was clearly explained. He was made to realize the current confused state of mind and also the activities he did in the past years for the career choice were discussed. He was given an opportunity to decide about his career and future life situation based on his identified abilities. After a couple of counselling sessions using humanistic approach, the subject decided to complete his plus two with high marks and promised to get further counselling assistance to clarify his future course of action.

The study also brings out the importance of the following facts:

- a) Goalless, focus less rebellious life is part and parcel of adolescent development and quarter life transition that needs proper psychological guidance.
- b) Parental supervision is vital for adolescents in identity creation and career planning.
- c) If adolescents clearly understand the nature of their problem they will orient their future course of action in a healthy way.
- d) Psychological assistance plays a crucial role in identifying the talents for better talent management and human capital development.

CONCLUSION

This case study presents an unsupervised, non-goal oriented adolescent's struggle in identity creation and talents identification for future career goals. The subject was not aware of his inner abilities and was carried away by peer influence, the various casual comments his friends make and thus created a false image of self. Once realized his aptitude and strengths through psychometric testing, the subject was awakened. The continuing therapy to set right orientation towards future paved the way for a change in his attitude and outlook that gave the subject some clarity on identity and commitment towards goal-oriented future.

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