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Inside the Teenage Mind

Unraveling the Psychology of Adolescence

Edited by Ruziana Masiran



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Contributors

Freeda Jusino-Sierra, Maria Carolina Klos, Marilyn Monroy Castro, Obinna Osita Ike, Rebeca Mirales-Rios, Ruziana Masiran, Viviana Noemi Lemos

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Meet the editor



Dr. Ruziana Masiran is a distinguished psychiatrist with a passion for family, child, and adolescent mental health. Following an impactful tenure with the Malaysian Ministry of Health, she transitioned to the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at Universiti Putra Malaysia, where she assumed her role in teaching undergraduate medical students and postgraduate trainees, blending academic rigour with clinical insight. Driven by an enduring passion for child mental health, she then pursued a Ph.D. in Psychological Medicine, exploring the effectiveness of parenting programs in improving emotional and behavioural outcomes among Malaysian children. Today, she continues to serve at Hospital Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah, where she integrates education, research, and clinical practice to advance the well-being of children and families.

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Preface

Across cultures and contexts, adolescence continues to fascinate researchers and practitioners due to its profound role in shaping human experience and societal well-being. *Inside the Teenage Mind – Unraveling the Psychology of Adolescence* attempts to explore the psychological processes that underpin the unique experiences of this developmental stage. It brings together contemporary perspectives on the challenges that shape adolescents' journeys toward identity and resilience, through interdisciplinary contributions that span theory, empirical research, and lived experience.

The first part of the book, “Psychosocial Growth and Role Discovery”, introduces the fundamental processes that characterise adolescent development, including cognitive maturation, emotional regulation, and social adaptation. It highlights how these interrelated domains contribute to the formation of identity and autonomy during this transitional period. It also explores the phenomenon of role confusion, a term in Eriksonian theory that refers to the uncertainty about personal and social identity that may manifest in adolescents' behaviours, relationships, and sense of purpose.

In the second part, “Adversity, Identity, and Inner Growth”, this book explores the crucial role of self-compassion as a protective factor that nurtures emotional regulation and overall well-being. The discussion then explores role identity formation and its challenges, culminating in a qualitative analysis of identity negotiation among Latina adolescents engaged in sports. Subsequently, the chapter brings readers to the sensitive dynamics of disclosure and silence regarding adolescent sexual abuse, spotlighting the psychological, relational, and cultural influences that shape these experiences. Collectively, these findings highlight resilience as a multifaceted construct essential to fostering healthy adolescent development.

Inside the Teenage Mind – Unraveling the Psychology of Adolescence offers insights that can empower and motivate educators, clinicians, researchers, and policymakers in their crucial role of fostering healthy youth development, inspiring them to make a positive impact on adolescents' lives. May it be a valuable resource in supporting adolescents as they grow and develop.

Ruziana Masiran
Department of Psychiatry,
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences,
Universiti Putra Malaysia,
Serdang, Selangor

Section 1

Psychosocial Growth and Role
Discovery

Introductory Chapter: Understanding Adolescent Development

Ruziana Masiran

1. The Journey and The Paradox of Adolescence

Adolescence has often been referred to as a transition period, where an individual is no longer a child, but not yet an adult. It is a time marked by profound transformation and exploration during which the individual crosses the threshold between a state of dependence and another state of independence. Therefore, we can consider adolescence as the peak of life when critical aspects of human development, such as rational thinking, self-identity, emotional regulation and relationship formation, are budding. According to Arnett [1], adolescence traditionally ends once young people have taken on adult roles; however, the role-taking process appears to be increasingly delayed in industrialised societies, due to extended years of education, changing family dynamics, as well as socio-economic and cultural shifts.

Although adolescence may sound complex, we should not reduce the psychology of adolescence to a checklist of milestones. We should view adolescence as a process of change at a personal and social level. For adolescents, it may feel like stepping into an unfamiliar landscape with shifting ground beneath their feet. For parents, teachers, extended families and communities, this phase of life can be equally challenging because it requires understanding, patience and empathy. At its core, adolescence is about navigating the surprising contradictions. This is the time when an intense desire for independence meets a stronger need for connection. In addition, adolescence is full of the adrenaline rush of excitement along with the uncertainty of responsibilities. Another striking aspect of it is how adolescents may appear mature and independent in some moments, yet impulsive and uncertain in others. Adolescents are capable of deep moral reasoning but are also highly emotionally reactive to peer pressure and social comparison. Heightened susceptibility to peer influence and hypersensitivity to social rejection increase the likelihood of both risky and prosocial behaviour in the presence of peers [2]. These apparent contradictions reflect the dynamic interplay of biological, psychological and social changes during adolescence.

2. Adolescents' environmental systems

At the biological level, advances in neuroscience reveal that the adolescent brain is uniquely sensitive to experiences of reward [3], novelty and social influence [4]. This heightened plasticity makes adolescence a period of remarkable opportunity

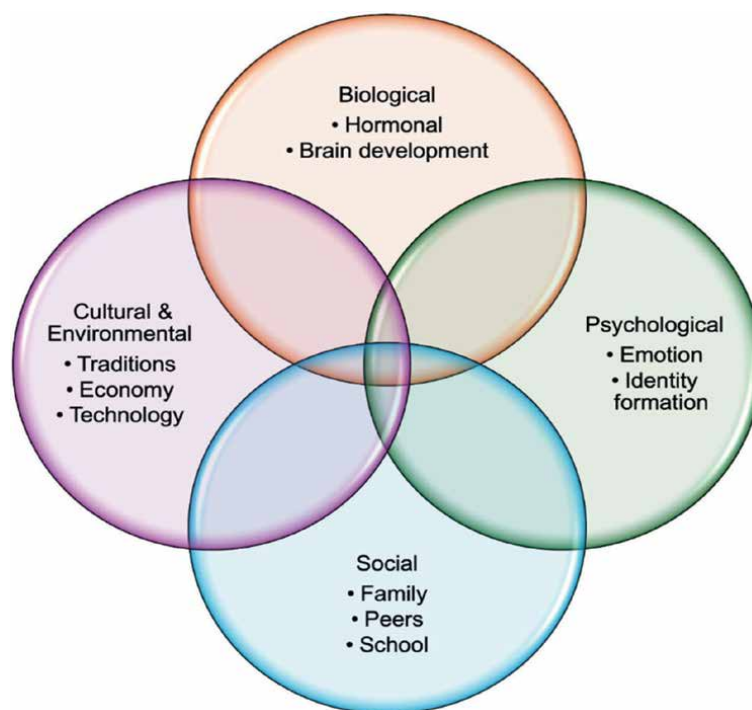


Figure 1.
Overlapping influences on adolescent development.

for learning and growth as well as a vulnerable time for risk-taking and mental health challenges.

At a social level, the experience of going through adolescence is hardly influenced exclusively by peers. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which emphasises the dynamic interactions between adolescents and their nested environmental systems, shows that parents, family, school, communities and culture can influence adolescents' growth and adaptation [5]. These multiple layers of environmental influences are illustrated in **Figure 1**; overlapping circles emphasise that adolescence is not shaped by a single factor alone. Adolescents are more likely to thrive by developing resilience, curiosity and a sense of purpose if the environment is supportive. In contrast, social or economic instability, neglect or exclusion can heighten risks for emotional difficulties and unhealthy coping strategies.

We must not forget that in today's world, adolescents are growing up in a rapidly changing digital landscape. There is an unclear boundary between virtual and real life. There is also a massive influence of social media in shaping adolescents' self-perception, body image and self-identity exploration. While these platforms provide opportunities for self-expression and become an outlet for self-belonging, they might bring challenges such as cyberbullying, negative social comparison and information overload [6].

3. Understanding the challenges and opportunities

Adolescents face challenges and opportunities that vary widely across individuals and societies. Socio-economic inequalities, access to education and mental healthcare,

exposure to violence or discrimination and the availability of supportive adult figures all shape outcomes during adolescence. For some adolescents, this period is marked by joy, discovery and opportunity. For other adolescents, it may be clouded by adversity or instability. We know how early life events contribute to the development of many mental illnesses that first emerge during adolescence [7]. Therefore, early recognition and support can make a profound difference in the long-term well-being of adolescents who have mental illness [8].

Although adolescence can be a fragile period, many positive qualities, such as resilience, creativity and empathy, can be nurtured and developed. In this book, we invite readers to approach the psychology of adolescence from both developmental and relational perspectives. The former perspective enables us to view adolescence as a dynamic process of change, encompassing cognitive, emotional and social domains. The latter perspective sees each adolescent's journey as woven into the networks of family, peers, schools and culture. It is time that we move beyond stereotypes of adolescence as a time of "storm and stress" and see adolescence as the most vibrant and transformative stage of life. Ultimately, the psychology of adolescence is the psychology of "becoming." Understanding this stage with empathy and nuance not only benefits adolescents but also enriches our collective appreciation of human growth across the lifespan.

Author details

Ruziana Masiran
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

*Address all correspondence to: ruziana_m@upm.edu.my

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Chapter 2

Role Confusion and Adolescence

Obinna Osita Ike

Abstract

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by significant physical, emotional, and cognitive changes as individuals transition from childhood to adulthood. One of the central challenges during this period is resolving the psychosocial conflict of identity versus role confusion. Adolescents grapple with questions of self-identity, seeking to establish a coherent sense of who they are and their place in the world. Role confusion arises when individuals struggle to integrate various aspects of their identity, such as values, beliefs, career aspirations, and social roles. This developmental task is significantly influenced by familial relationships, peer interactions, cultural expectations, and the often-overlooked societal pressures. Positive outcomes, such as a well-defined identity, foster self-confidence and purpose, while unresolved role confusion can lead to feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and difficulty in future decision-making. This chapter explores the dynamics of identity formation and role confusion, emphasizing the importance of supportive environments and opportunities for exploration during adolescence to facilitate a successful transition to adulthood. Understanding these processes is essential for educators, parents, and mental health professionals in guiding adolescents through this transformative phase.

Keywords: adolescence, development, identity crises, role confusion, well-being

1. Introduction

The transition into adolescence marks a critical stage in human development, characterized by profound psychological, emotional, and social changes that warrant careful consideration. During this period, individuals grapple with the task of identity formation, often experiencing a sense of role confusion as they navigate the multifaceted expectations imposed by family, peers, and society at large, which have varying influences that shape their personal experiences [1]. Adolescents may find themselves caught between childhood and adulthood, which can lead to uncertainty about their future paths and self-concept, prompting us to ponder the societal factors contributing to this tumult. This internal conflict can manifest in the exploration of different ideologies, behaviors, and social affiliations, all of which indicate not merely a desire for belonging and acceptance, but also an active engagement in self-discovery [2]. According to Alberts and Bennett [3], as adolescents strive to establish a coherent sense of self amidst these challenges, one must consider how reconciling their emerging identities with external pressures can exacerbate significant stress and anxiety. Therefore, understanding the complexities of role confusion during adolescence

is not only essential for personal development but also critical for recognizing the broader societal implications that carry forward into adulthood, influencing how individuals engage with the world around them [4].

However, adolescence is recognized as a pivotal developmental stage characterized by significant physical, emotional, and social transformations, typically occurring between the ages of 10 and 17 [5]. This period is distinguished not only by the quest for identity and autonomy but also by the varying experiences that individuals encounter as they transition from the dependency of childhood to the independence of adulthood. The significance of adolescence in human development lies primarily in the profound exploration of self-concept, peer relationships, and societal roles, all of which can vary markedly across diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts [6]. During this time, individuals often grapple with role confusion as they seek to understand their position within broader societal frameworks while managing emerging responsibilities and expectations. Navigating adolescence is often marked by a profound search for identity, during which young individuals encounter numerous factors that can contribute to role confusion [7]. This period is characterized by significant physiological, emotional, and social changes, leading adolescents to question their roles within various contexts, including family, peer groups, and society at large. Influences such as changing family dynamics, societal expectations, peer pressure, and cultural background can complicate this process as adolescents struggle to align their self-perception with external demands [6, 8–10]. However, research indicates that the autonomy adolescents seek to experience can significantly influence their self-determination and the complexities of their identity formation [11]. Further, it is critical to examine how these complexities of challenges and experiences among adolescents lead to divergent developmental pathways. This is pertinent because adolescence is a critical stage for the development of emotional regulation and social skills, which are essential for future interpersonal relationships and personal well-being [12]. Therefore, comprehensively understanding adolescence is vital—not only for recognizing its complexities but also for appreciating how it lays the foundation for subsequent stages of human development, shaping both individual identity and societal contribution in nuanced ways.

2. Theoretical model for understanding role confusion among adolescents

In examining role confusion within various social frameworks, it is essential to establish a robust theoretical framework that encapsulates the interplay of individual behaviors and external societal influences. Theories such as agency theory, stewardship theory, and contract failure theory provide a multi-dimensional lens through which the dynamics of role confusion can be analyzed. However, to have a nuanced understanding of role confusion, Erikson [13] psychosocial stages of identity development serve as critical frameworks for understanding the complexities of adolescence, particularly in the context of role confusion. This is pertinent because psychosocial stages underscore the significance of identity versus role confusion as a pivotal challenge during this developmental period. According to Erikson, successfully navigating this stage involves forming a cohesive self-concept while reconciling various social influences—a process that is often fraught with tension and uncertainty. According to Tettey et al. [14] and de Carvalho and Veiga [15], these stages of psychosocial development provide a framework for understanding the complex

dynamics of identity formation, particularly during adolescence. This period, encapsulated in the fifth stage—identity versus role confusion according to Erickson [13], highlights the struggle young individuals face as they seek to define themselves against societal expectations and personal aspirations. This is pertinent because adolescents often grapple with conflicting roles, including those influenced by peers and family, leading to a critical exploration of identity [16]. Furthermore, research indicates that identity resolution during emerging adulthood can predict later developmental trajectories of intimacy, generativity, and integrity across adulthood, suggesting that struggles with role confusion may have long-term implications [17]. Aligning with the above proposition, Marcia [18] described four identity statuses representing different points in identity development, which help form an identity by exploring different identity alternatives and committing to other ideas and values. These four statuses include (1) identity diffusion (role confusion—where a person has not explored or made identity commitments; (2) identity foreclosure, which involves committing to an identity without exploring other options, often as a result of peer pressure, conformity, cultural expectations, or parental pressure; (3) identity moratorium, which encompasses a period of active exploration where an individual tries new things and seeks out alternatives; and (4) identity achievement, which involves having explored different options and then making a commitment to form an identity. However, this particular status transcends beyond adolescence. Thus, the significant relationships formed during this time illustrate how interactions with peers can both support and complicate identity development. Hence, Erikson's theory underscores the impact of social dynamics on self-identity formation in a rapidly changing world.

However, Erikson's theory applies to varied contexts and adequately encompasses the diverse experiences of adolescents in contemporary society. For instance, qualitative research by Reynold and Shepherd [19] highlights the impact of confusion about feelings and relationships on identity formation during adolescence. This correlation gives insight into the extent to which identity development addresses the specific social contexts that exacerbate role confusion. Similarly, personal narratives, such as those of individuals reconciling bicultural identities, further illustrate the ongoing quest for self-definition amidst external expectations [20]. These narratives not only affirm the relevance of Erikson's theory but also challenge us to consider how multiple cultural and social influences can complicate the identity development process. Thus, elucidating the profound influence of social dynamics on the identity development process during this formative stage.

3. Definition of role confusion and its significance in adolescent development

Role confusion, a concept first articulated by Erik Erikson, refers to the inability to establish a clear sense of identity, often arising during the tumultuous phase of adolescence. The concept of role confusion, a term frequently associated with developmental psychology, particularly resonates in exploring individual identity as shaped by various social contexts. It primarily refers to a state in which an individual experiences uncertainty regarding their social roles and expectations, leading to a crisis in self-concept. Role confusion refers to the uncertainty individuals experience regarding their social roles and expectations, which can significantly impede personal and professional development. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent during

transitional life phases, such as adolescence and early adulthood, when individuals confront multiple and often conflicting societal pressures. The impact of role confusion extends beyond personal identity to influence interpersonal relationships and professional development as individuals grapple with societal definitions of success, responsibility, and belonging. This critical period is not merely a backdrop for exploration and experimentation; it encompasses complex psychological processes where young individuals actively grapple with conflicting social expectations and pressures. This struggle can lead to significant uncertainty regarding their roles within society, raising essential questions about how they perceive themselves and how they believe others perceive them. The significance of role confusion is profound, as it can hinder emotional and social development, leading to maladaptive behaviors in adolescents [21]. Therefore, understanding role confusion is essential because it not only facilitates healthier development but also equips adolescents with the skills needed to navigate their transitional phase more effectively, fostering resilience, and adaptability in a rapidly changing world.

4. Factors contributing to role confusion among adolescents

Navigating adolescence is often marked by a profound search for identity, during which young individuals encounter numerous factors that can contribute to role confusion. This period is characterized by significant physiological, emotional, and social changes, leading adolescents to critically analyze and question their roles within various contexts, such as family, peer groups, and society at large. As adolescents grapple with these myriad influences, it is essential to understand the factors contributing to role confusion, as this not only shapes their present behaviors and relationships but also lays the groundwork for their adult identities. These factors include:

1. Psychological development stages
2. Social influences
3. Peer pressure and social media
4. Family dynamics

4.1 Psychological development stages

According to Erik Erikson's theory, individuals pass through eight distinct stages of psychosocial development, each characterized by a specific conflict that must be resolved for healthy psychological growth [22]. During adolescence, the pivotal stage of identity vs. role confusion becomes particularly salient as individuals grapple with their emerging identities in relation to societal expectations. This stage is where the findings from recent empirical studies become particularly relevant. For instance, research indicates that factors such as emotional intelligence and self-acceptance can significantly influence the development of a coherent identity [12]. Thus, failure to navigate this stage effectively can lead to persistent role confusion, where individuals struggle to establish a coherent sense of self [23]. This confusion can manifest in difficulties with decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and self-esteem, ultimately impacting mental health [4]. Therefore, recognizing the significance of

these developmental stages and the psychological factors at play elucidates the underpinnings of role confusion, highlighting the need for supportive interventions that facilitate identity exploration and resolution of psychosocial conflicts. For instance, a lack of clear identity may result in increased anxiety and isolation, ultimately impeding one's ability to form meaningful connections and make informed life choices [24, 25].

4.2 Social influences

As adolescents navigate the complexities of their developmental stage, social influences play a pivotal role in shaping their identities and mitigating role confusion [26]. However, it is essential to critically assess how these influences can vary in impact for different individuals. Peer pressure, interactions within family dynamics, and the pervasive impact of social media contribute significantly to their self-perception and behavioral choices, but these influences can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. For instance, while social media influencers have emerged as formidable figures in adolescents' lives, often dictating trends and lifestyle choices, it is crucial to question the extent to which these choices genuinely reflect the adolescents' own values versus those imposed by external sources. This external influence can lead to identity conflicts and confusion over acceptable behaviors and norms [27]. Furthermore, cultural elements also frame adolescents' understanding of self, suggesting that their experiences are deeply embedded within specific sociocultural contexts. Researchers emphasize the necessity of culturally sensitive programming to address mental health outcomes, highlighting the importance of recognizing diverse cultural perspectives in shaping identity formation [28]. Consequently, the interplay between these varied social influences and cultural contexts underscores the importance of understanding how adolescents derive their sense of identity, ultimately illustrating that their experiences are often a collision of external expectations and internal aspirations [29]. This critical examination promotes a more nuanced understanding of adolescent development, one that acknowledges the complexity of their social environment and its implications for personal growth. Aligning with the above postulation, Hatano et al. [30] asserted that the complexity of adolescence social environment leads to diverse and dynamic pathways in their educational and interpersonal dealings.

4.3 Peer pressure and social media

Peer pressure and social media play pivotal roles in shaping not only adolescents' self-concept but also societal perceptions [8, 10, 31]. With the rapid proliferation of digital platforms, adolescents are continuously bombarded with carefully curated images and ideologies, raising questions about the authenticity of these portrayals and the potential impact they have on feelings of inadequacy and confusion regarding their identities. Social media, in particular, serves as a ubiquitous stage for peer comparison, prompting adolescents to grapple with the pressure to conform to perceived norms and standards established by their peers [32]. This phenomenon is further exacerbated by a significant lack of adequate guidance from caregivers, teachers, and mentors, which can lead adolescents to disproportionately rely on their peers for validation. It is essential to consider how the absence of appropriate support systems can result in adverse psychological consequences, such as heightened anxiety and distorted self-image. Moreover, as adolescents confront these challenges, they may find themselves in a state of role confusion, struggling to reconcile the quest for authenticity with the powerful pull of social acceptance. This intricate interplay

underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how peer dynamics and social media interactions can profoundly influence identity development [33, 34].

4.4 Family dynamics

The intricate nature of family dynamics plays a pivotal role in shaping adolescents' sense of identity, often influencing their experiences of role confusion during this critical developmental phase [35, 36]. This is critical because family as the foundational social unit, transmit values, beliefs, and expectations, which subsequently impact the ways adolescents perceive themselves and their future. Research [37] suggests that various factors, including independence and expressiveness within the family environment, positively correlate with vocational identity, thereby minimizing indecision in career choices. However, it is important to question whether these correlations hold true across diverse family structures and cultural contexts. Conversely, dysfunctional familial interactions may lead to internal conflicts and ambivalence, resulting in significant career decision difficulties among adolescents, as evidenced by the prevalence of indecisiveness and a lack of information about occupational pathways [38]. This invites further exploration into the specific dynamics at play within these dysfunctional relationships. Consequently, the interplay between supportive family structures and emerging individual needs is essential for mitigating role confusion, guiding youths toward clearer self-concepts and career objectives as they navigate the complexities of adolescence. By analyzing the nuances of these family dynamics, we can gain deeper insights into how best to support adolescents in this formative stage of their lives. This insight is evidenced in "*parenting styles and family relationships*." The influence of parenting styles and family relationships is pivotal in shaping adolescents' self-perception, significantly contributing to the emergence of role confusion during this critical developmental stage [39]. For instance, authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and structure, fosters a sense of autonomy and self-efficacy, thereby reducing indecision and confusion regarding one's identity [40]. This leads us to consider how different parenting approaches can materially affect youths' psychological resilience. In contrast, authoritarian or neglectful parenting may lead to lower self-esteem and increased anxiety about one's social roles, exacerbating role confusion that can result in self-harming behaviors [41]. It raises an important question: how do the characteristics of family dynamics modify the impact of parenting styles? Additionally, the quality of familial relationships not only impacts adolescents' psychosocial development but also interacts with their vocational identity and career decision-making processes [9]. As adolescents navigate the complexities of their emerging identities, the dynamics within the family unit and peer group—marked by independence and expressiveness—play a crucial role in either supporting or hindering their journey toward a coherent self-concept [42, 43]. This interplay suggests that a multifaceted approach is essential in understanding how these various elements come together to influence self-perception. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of these factors is essential to addressing role confusion in adolescents.

In sum, role confusion in adolescents necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the key factors that contribute to this developmental challenge, moving beyond superficial observations to deeply examine their underlying implications. Central to this issue are identity formation, peer influence, and the evolving dynamics of family relationships, all of which interact in complex ways. Identity formation is

often marked by experimentation and exploration, which can lead to significant uncertainty about self-concept and life choices; thus, recognizing the positive and negative aspects of this phase is crucial for understanding its impact. Concurrently, peer influence plays a significant role, as adolescents navigate social pressures and seek validation from their peers, frequently resulting in conflicting values that can complicate personal beliefs. Furthermore, the nuances of familial communication and support deeply affect an adolescent's sense of security and belonging, underscoring the importance of assessing both quality and frequency of such interactions. These factors collectively create a complex landscape of confusion, making it imperative for caregivers, educators, and mental health professionals to foster open dialogue and provide supportive environments that consider each adolescent's unique circumstances. By addressing these influences holistically, adults can assist adolescents in navigating their identities more effectively, ultimately reducing feelings of role confusion and promoting healthier developmental trajectories while remaining attentive to the variations in individual experiences.

5. Implications of role confusion to adolescents well-being

As adolescence is a transformative period characterized by significant physical, emotional, and social changes, during which individuals grapple with identity formation and role exploration, adolescents often encounter role confusion—a phenomenon wherein they struggle to ascertain their place within various social constructs, such as family, peer groups, and educational institutions. This confusion can significantly affect their development, and it is crucial to critically examine its underlying implications [17]. This is pertinent because if left unaddressed, role confusion can have profound implications for overall well-being, manifesting as anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of self-worth. These outcomes, in turn, may impede the adolescents' ability to form meaningful relationships and make informed life choices, further complicating their journey to adulthood. Therefore, understanding such implications is of paramount importance for parents, educators, and mental health professionals alike, thus laying the groundwork for healthier psychological development and resilience in adulthood.

6. Psychological impacts of role confusion

The phenomenon of role confusion during adolescence can significantly diminish emotional well-being, leading to a cascade of psychological challenges. As adolescents grapple with their evolving identities, the inability to form a coherent self-concept can instigate feelings of anxiety and depression, fundamentally impacting their social interactions and academic performance. For instance, adolescents experiencing role confusion may exhibit impaired decision-making skills, resulting in difficulties in pursuing life goals and enhancing distress levels [44]. Furthermore, the psychological ramifications of role confusion extend beyond immediate emotional distress, manifesting in long-term developmental issues such as career confusion and diminished self-esteem [45]. Consequently, the interplay between role confusion and psychological health illustrates a critical need for supportive interventions aimed at helping adolescents establish clearer identities, thereby fostering resilience and facilitating

healthier pathways toward adulthood. Addressing these challenges can significantly bolster adolescents' overall well-being and enhance their capacity to navigate future complexities.

However, this psychological impact is felt more on “*self-esteem and identity formation*.” This is evident because, during this critical developmental phase, the interplay of societal expectations and personal aspirations becomes paramount, as it significantly shapes how youth perceive themselves and their place in the world. For instance, Mueller [46] research indicates that adolescents labeled as mental health patients may struggle to maintain a positive self-concept due to the pervasive societal stigma associated with such labels, which further complicates their identity formation. This raises the question of how much influence external perceptions can exert over an individual's self-worth. Conversely, exposure to supportive environments can foster resilience and enhance self-esteem. For instance, insights into the psychosocial adjustment of marginalized groups, such as those with visual impairments, reveal that self-esteem and identity are closely tied to one's perceived abilities and societal perceptions [47]. This portrays how societal structures can either hinder or help the formation of a positive identity. This underscores the need for a proactive approach for effective interventions aimed at facilitating healthy identity development and boosting self-esteem among adolescents navigating the complexities of role confusion, underscoring the need for a proactive approach to support their growth.

7. Social impact of role confusion

The implications of role confusion extend significantly into the social realm, profoundly impacting adolescents' relationships and interactions. As young individuals navigate their identities, confusion regarding their roles may lead to difficulties in forming stable peer connections. This struggle can manifest in increased anxiety and social withdrawal, which not only exacerbates feelings of isolation but also raises questions about the long-term effects on emotional health and resilience. Such role ambiguity can hinder one's ability to engage authentically with peers, thereby fostering a climate of misunderstanding and stigmatization that can have detrimental effects on both self-esteem and group dynamics. Additionally, while adolescents may increasingly turn to online communities for validation and support, one must critically consider how these environments, although potentially affirming, can complicate their social development by promoting echo chambers rather than fostering genuine connections. Overall, role confusion can create substantial barriers to healthy social interactions, impeding the critical support systems necessary for well-being during this formative stage of life. This is exemplified in its influence on “*peer relationships and social integration*.”

Peer relationships and social integration are critical components of adolescents' well-being, significantly influenced by their role identities. During this developmental stage, individuals often grapple with role confusion, which can manifest in difficulties in establishing and maintaining friendships. Research [48] indicates that adolescents with higher trait emotional intelligence and robust social-emotional skills tend to exhibit prosocial behaviors, thereby fostering healthier peer interactions and reducing emotional and behavioral difficulties. Thus, these skills, either inherently developed or cultivated through targeted interventions, facilitate positive relationship-building, allowing adolescents to navigate complex social dynamics effectively. Additionally, the interplay between cultural attitudes and social integration further

underscores the importance of peer relationships. For instance, children who embrace both cultural maintenance and intergroup contact display the most prosocial behaviors, enhancing their social networks [49].

Invariably, the implications of role confusion on adolescents' well-being are both profound and multifaceted, thereby necessitating urgent and informed attention from educators, parents, and policymakers. As noted in existing literature, a supportive environment that fosters open discussions about role expectations can significantly mitigate these negative outcomes, thereby enabling teenagers to cultivate a healthy sense of self.

8. The importance of resolving role confusion for healthy development

Studies [15, 29, 50, 51] have documented that during this formative period, individuals grapple with questions of identity, social roles, and personal values, which significantly influence their ongoing development. However, successfully navigating these uncertainties enables adolescents to cultivate a coherent and stable sense of self while promoting emotional resilience [17]. On the contrary, the failure to resolve role confusion can lead to profound identity crises, which may result in difficulties in forming meaningful relationships and in establishing a clear sense of direction in life [7]. As young adults progress, a well-defined sense of identity undeniably enhances their ability to face challenges, make informed decisions, and contribute positively to society [50]. This suggests that individuals who address their role confusion are not just benefiting personally but are also better equipped to engage constructively within their communities. Thus, addressing role confusion not only aids in individual development but also fosters a more adaptable and engaged adult population, which underscores its pivotal role in shaping future generations. These observations highlight that focusing on role resolution during adolescence is imperative for cultivating not just individual success, but also a healthier social fabric.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, adolescence serves as a pivotal developmental stage characterized by the inherent tension between identity formation and role confusion, a time when young individuals are tasked with defining who they are amid external and internal pressures. The various pathways through which adolescents navigate this essential transition are not only influenced by family dynamics and societal expectations but also by the individual's unique experiences and personal reflections. Research indicates that during this period, individuals frequently grapple with divergent identity commitments and explorative behaviors, which reflect the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of personal development.

However, the challenges faced during adolescence can lead to significant mental health issues, such as eating disorders, drug addiction, societal alienation, and maladaptive cognition, often manifesting as responses to societal pressures regarding self-worth and revealing deeper issues related to identity and acceptance. Additionally, the interplay of exploration and commitment during these formative years is crucial, emphasizing the critical need for supportive environments that foster healthy development and encourage critical reflection on societal norms. As today's adolescents confront the myriad influences shaping their identities, it becomes

increasingly important to understand this critical phase, as fostering resilience and well-being in future generations relies on recognizing the complexities of their experiences and addressing the various factors that contribute to their overall mental health.

Author details

Obinna Osita Ike
Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria,
Nsukka, Nigeria

*Address all correspondence to: obinna.ike@unn.edu.ng

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Section 2

Adversity, Identity, and Inner Growth

The Role of Self-Compassion and Compassion in Adolescent Flourishing

Maria Carolina Klos and Viviana Noemi Lemos

Abstract

Suffering is an inherent part of every stage of human development, but adolescence presents challenges that not only increase the possibilities of experiencing it but also shape patterns in how emotional pain is addressed. At the same time, this stage offers unique opportunities for growth and flourishing. Self-compassion and compassion are key psychological resources that promote social, psychological, and emotional well-being. This study examines their role in the flourishing of Argentinian adolescents. A total of 679 adolescents (70% female), aged 13 to 19 ($M = 15.11$; $SD = 1.52$) completed the Brief Self-compassion Scale, the Compassion Scale, and the Multidimensional Flourishing Scale. Pearson's r correlation analyses, hierarchical regressions, and structural equation models were conducted. Results showed significant associations between the dimensions of self-compassion and the dimensions of flourishing, as well as between the dimensions of compassion and flourishing. Self-compassion emerged as a stronger predictor of flourishing than compassion, with self-kindness and kindness as the most influential dimensions. Kindness was also found to mediate the relationship between self-kindness and flourishing. These findings underscore the importance of self-compassion and compassion as resources for fostering flourishing and promoting well-being during adolescence. Adolescents who treat themselves kindly tend to treat others kindly, enhancing their overall flourishing.

Keywords: compassion, self-compassion, flourishing, social well-being, psychological well-being, emotional well-being, adolescence

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, characterized by rapid and intense biological, cognitive, psychological, and social changes [1, 2]. In the field of psychology, two main approaches can be used as lenses to observe adolescents: (a) the classic viewpoint, also known as “storm and stress” [3], which focuses on psychopathology and proposes risk-reduction interventions. From this position, which is currently valid, the adolescent is seen as a problem that needs to be solved. (b) Emerging perspectives, such as positive youth development [4, 5]

and positive psychology [6], emphasize strengths and introduce interventions aimed at promoting well-being. From this approach, the adolescent is seen as a person with abundant opportunities to develop resources for flourishing personally and relationally [7]. This study aligns with the latter approach.

Personal suffering and exposure to others' suffering occur throughout the entire developmental cycle. For this reason, it is relevant to consider resources that allow effective coping, especially during adolescence, a stage when identity is consolidated and relational patterns are established [2, 8].

Compassion is a response to suffering (whether one's own or someone else's), that triggers cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes. It involves identifying distress, connecting emotionally instead of avoiding it, and taking action to alleviate it [9]. Compassionate responses integrate kindness, understanding that suffering is common to humankind, and a balanced perspective amid suffering [10, 11]. Therefore, compassion and self-compassion, as opposed to the avoidance of suffering, not only function as adaptive coping resources but can also foster flourishing by enhancing social, psychological, and emotional well-being. This study aims to deepen the understanding of the role self-compassion and compassion play in adolescent flourishing.

1.1 Compassion for others and oneself

There is consensus around three main aspects of compassion: noticing (the suffering or distress of the other person), feeling (affective connection, feelings of warmth toward the other person), and acting (motivation to alleviate suffering). Aligned with this, Jazaieri et al. [12] define compassion as a multidimensional process comprising four components: awareness of suffering (cognitive empathy), sympathetic concern related to being emotionally moved by someone else's suffering (affective component), the desire of alleviating that suffering (intention), and a response or the willingness to help alleviate that discomfort (motivation-action).

Compassion can be understood as either a state or a trait [9]. As a state, compassion refers to a situational response triggered by a specific context. As a trait, it reflects a consistent tendency to respond compassionately across various situations, implying a transversal style to time and context [13]. Studies further highlight that compassion may be directed toward others or oneself, the latter known as self-compassion [10].

Building on a recent review, compassion (both for others and for oneself) can be defined as a cognitive, affective, and behavioral process involving (a) acknowledging suffering, (b) understanding the universality of suffering in the human experience, (c) empathizing with the person who is suffering and connecting with one's own emotional discomfort, (d) tolerating uncomfortable emotions that arise in response to the suffering person (e.g., anguish, rage, and fear) with openness and acceptance, and (e) being motivated to act to alleviate the suffering [14].

In this study, the theoretical-operational framework is based on the contributions of Pommier et al. [11] for compassion and Neff [10] for self-compassion. Both constructs include the following aspects: (a) kindness (or self-kindness in the context of self-compassion), (b) common humanity, and (c) mindfulness. Kindness involves caring for others and supporting those in need, while self-kindness refers to treating oneself with compassion rather than self-criticism. Common humanity emphasizes recognizing suffering as a universal human experience and fostering connection rather than isolation. Finally, mindfulness entails maintaining a balanced perspective in the face of suffering by avoiding overidentification or detachment, staying present,

and attending to the suffering; in other words, not refraining from getting lost in suffering and being willing to listen and pay attention [10, 11].

1.2 Benefits of compassion and self-compassion

Social relationships are essential for well-being, and social disconnection and loneliness are associated with psychopathological symptoms [15, 16]. Compassion for others enhances social connections and expands the perception of interpersonal support by involving important affiliative goals [15, 16]. Compassion is currently incorporated into various psychological interventions (i.e., [17, 18]), promoting positive social interactions, subjective well-being, and a sense of purpose and meaning in life [19]. Similarly, self-compassion is linked to well-being [15], not only through reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety [19, 20].

Self-compassion does not replace negative feelings with positive ones. Instead, it involves a cognitive-emotional mindset that allows one to respond to negative experiences with kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. This perspective accepts and integrates suffering as a natural part of life [20].

Although compassion and self-compassion are directly associated with well-being and indirectly associated with psychopathological symptoms, their relationship remains unclear [21]. Some studies suggest a direct connection between self-compassion and compassion [22, 23], while others propose they are distinct. For example, individuals may exhibit self-compassion without being compassionate toward others or vice versa [13, 15, 24].

1.3 Flourishing

The study of compassion is currently regarded as a key area of interest in positive psychology due to its strong association with health and psychological well-being [25, 26].

When examining well-being, two predominant approaches emerge: (a) the hedonic perspective, which focuses on subjective well-being or “feeling good”, and (b) the eudaemonic perspective, which emphasizes psychological well-being or “functioning well”. Flourishing provides an integrative framework that incorporates both hedonic and eudaemonic components of well-being [27, 28].

Various theoretical approaches address the concept of flourishing [29–32]. This study draws on the framework developed by Keyes [29, 33] and operationalized by Mesurado et al. [34] within the same theoretical framework. From this perspective, a thriving and flourishing life entails the presence of emotional, psychological, and social well-being [33]. Emotional well-being refers to “feeling good”, which encompasses experiencing happiness, interest in life, and satisfaction [29]. In this dimension, people are expected to balance positive and negative emotions [34]. Psychological and social well-being reflect “functioning well” both personally and interpersonally [29]. The distinction lies in the focus: psychological well-being pertains to the self (“me and I”) in private and intimate contexts, while social well-being relates to group interactions (“we and us”) and reflects a positive contribution to a larger social structure [35].

The absence of mental illness does not imply the presence of mental well-being in adolescents. Thus, alleviating suffering through treatment or prevention does not necessarily lead to a flourishing life. Psychological interventions, such as acceptance

and commitment therapy (ACT), that incorporate compassion-based meditations can cultivate a disposition to act in ways that benefit both personal and relational well-being [35].

2. The role of self-compassion and compassion in adolescent flourishing

2.1 Aim of the study

Adolescence presents critical challenges at both personal and social levels, as well as opportunities to develop resources—both individual and interpersonal—that contribute to flourishing lives. This study aims to explore the role of self-compassion and compassion in adolescent flourishing. Specifically, the objectives are: (a) to analyze the relationship between the dimensions of compassion and flourishing, (b) to examine the extent to which self-compassion and compassion predict flourishing, and (c) to test a theoretical mediating model that includes the variables with the greatest predictive weight for flourishing.

2.2 Research questions and hypotheses

1. Is there a relationship between the dimensions of compassion (for oneself and others) and the dimensions of flourishing (social, psychological, and emotional well-being)?

H1a: There is a direct and significant relationship between the dimensions of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) and the dimensions of flourishing.

H1b: There is a direct and significant relationship between the dimensions of compassion (kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) and the dimensions of flourishing, and an indirect relationship between the dimension indifference (in compassion) and the dimensions of flourishing.

2. To what extent do self-compassion and compassion predict flourishing in adolescents?

H2: The dimensions of self-compassion and compassion significantly predict the flourishing of adolescents.

2.3 Materials and methods

2.3.1 Design

The study design was *ex post facto* and cross-sectional.

2.3.2 Participants

The project was reviewed by the ethics committee of Universidad Adventista del Plata (UAP) and approved under resolution No. 99/22.

In the study, 679 Argentinian adolescents aged 13 to 19 ($M = 15.11$; $SD = 1.52$) participated. The sample was non-probability and purposive. Adolescents were recruited

from four public educational institutions in Argentina. Based on the information provided by the educational establishments, the inclusion criteria for participants were as follows: (a) adolescents had to be regularly attending school; (b) they had to have their participation authorized by their parents and/or legal guardians through an informed consent form; and (c) they had to voluntarily provide their consent to participate.

2.3.3 Instruments

2.3.3.1 Brief self-compassion scale (SCS)

The Argentinian version of the Brief Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; [10, 36, 37]) was administered. This self-report scale consists of 12 items that assess thoughts, emotions, and behaviors associated with self-compassion. The scale operationalizes the components of self-compassion as follows: self-kindness (e.g., “When I am having a really bad time, I give myself the care and love I need”) versus self-judgment (e.g., “When I see aspects of myself I don’t like, I criticize myself”); common humanity (e.g., “When I am discouraged and sad, I remember there are a lot of people around me who are feeling the same”) versus isolation (e.g., “When I am facing a difficulty, I tend to think that other people have it easier”); and mindfulness (e.g., “When something painful happens, I try to keep a balanced vision of the situation”) versus overidentification (e.g., “When something bothers me, I feel that my emotions overwhelm me”). Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always) in response to the question: *How do I usually behave toward myself in difficult times?*

The Argentinian version of the Self-Compassion Scale demonstrated satisfactory evidence of validity. The factorial structure, assessed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), showed adequate fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 1.30$; GFI = .93; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .029). Similarly, reliability was high, with a composite reliability index for the overall score ($CR = .91$) and for each factor: self-kindness versus self-judgment ($CR = .83$), common humanity versus isolation ($CR = .72$), and mindfulness versus overidentification ($CR = .76$) [37].

2.3.3.2 Compassion scale (CS)

To assess compassion, the Argentinian version of the Compassion Scale [11, 38] was used. This scale consists of 16 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always). The instrument evaluates four dimensions of compassion: kindness, common humanity, mindfulness, and indifference.

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of the Argentinian version of the Compassion Scale demonstrated adequate fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 1.77$; CFI = .97; TLI = .95; NFI = .93) and acceptable error indices (RMSEA = .04, 90% CI [.03,.05]). The internal consistency of the Compassion Scale, assessed using Omega’s H coefficient, was satisfactory (Coefficient H = .72) [38].

2.3.3.3 Multidimensional flourishing scale

Flourishing was assessed using the Multidimensional Flourishing Scale [34]. The scale operationalizes three dimensions of flourishing: social, psychological, and emotional well-being. It consists of 12 items, with responses recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree) for the dimensions of social

and psychological well-being, while the emotional well-being dimension uses bipolar adjectives.

The scale demonstrates satisfactory psychometric properties for assessing flourishing in the Argentinian population, aligning with the three theoretical dimensions observed in the empirical model. Internal consistency, assessed using Omega's H coefficient, was high for both the overall scale (coefficient H = .97) and for each dimension: social well-being (coefficient H = .89), psychological well-being (coefficient H = .92), and emotional well-being (coefficient H = .91) [34].

2.3.4 Statistical analyses

The correlations between the dimensions of the variables under study and the hierarchical regressions were performed using SPSS 25, while the structural equation modeling was conducted in RStudio with the "lavaan" package.

2.4 Results

2.4.1 Analysis of the correlations between the dimensions of self-compassion, compassion, and flourishing

2.4.1.1 Self-compassion

Pearson's r correlation analyses revealed that the overall self-compassion score was directly and significantly correlated with social well-being ($r = .37, p < .01$), psychological well-being ($r = .52, p < .01$), and emotional well-being ($r = .55, p < .01$). Direct and statistically significant associations were also observed between the dimensions of self-compassion and social well-being: self-kindness ($r = .33, p < .01$), common humanity ($r = .31, p < .01$), and mindfulness ($r = .29, p < .01$). Similarly, positive and statistically significant correlations were found between the dimensions of self-compassion and psychological well-being: self-kindness ($r = .47, p < .01$), common humanity ($r = .39, p < .01$), and mindfulness ($r = .44, p < .01$). Finally, the correlations between the dimensions of self-compassion and emotional well-being were significant and direct: self-kindness ($r = .51, p < .01$), common humanity ($r = .36, p < .01$), and mindfulness ($r = .48, p < .01$) (see **Table 1**).

2.4.1.2 Compassion

Pearson's correlation analyses identified direct and significant correlations between the overall compassion score and social well-being ($r = .34, p < .01$), psychological well-being ($r = .18, p < .01$), and emotional well-being ($r = .14, p < .01$). Similarly, direct and significant correlations were found between the dimensions of compassion and social well-being: kindness ($r = .32, p < .01$), common humanity ($r = .23, p < .01$), and mindfulness ($r = .28, p < .01$). An inverse and significant association was also observed between the dimension of indifference and social well-being ($r = -.10, p < .01$).

Direct and significant associations were observed between the dimensions of compassion and psychological well-being: kindness ($r = .19, p < .01$), common humanity ($r = .16, p < .01$), and mindfulness ($r = .12, p < .01$). No significant correlation was found between the dimension of indifference and psychological well-being.

Variable	Dimensions	Social well-being	Psychological well-being	Emotional well-being	Flourishing total
Self-compassion	SC Total	.37**	.52**	.55**	.60**
	Self-kindness	.33**	.47**	.51**	.55**
	Human humanity	.31**	.39**	.36**	.44**
	Mindfulness	.29**	.44**	.48**	.51**
Compassion	C Total	.34**	.18**	.14**	.26**
	Kindness	.32**	.19**	.18**	.27**
	Common humanity	.23**	.16**	.07	.17**
	Mindfulness	.28**	.12**	.09*	.19**
	Indifference	-.10**	-.04	-.05	-.07

*Note: *p < .05, **p < .01.*

Table 1.
Correlations between the dimensions and overall scores of compassion (for others and oneself) and flourishing (social, psychological, and emotional).

Finally, Pearson's r coefficients revealed one direct and significant association between the dimensions of compassion and emotional well-being: kindness ($r = .18$, $p < .01$) and mindfulness ($r = .09$, $p < .05$). Correlations between the dimensions of common humanity, indifference, and emotional well-being were not statistically significant (see **Table 1**).

2.4.2 Analysis of the predicting role self-compassion and compassion play in flourishing

Compliance with the assumptions required for conducting regression analyses was assessed. The residual analyses indicated satisfactory results regarding normality, independence, linearity, and the absence of multicollinearity between variables. Subsequently, three hierarchical regression models were tested with the following structure: in the first block, the dimensions of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) were included. In the second block, the dimensions of compassion (kindness, common humanity, mindfulness, and indifference) were added to the equation. The dependent variables for each regression were the dimensions of flourishing: social, psychological, and emotional well-being.

2.4.2.1 Self-compassion, compassion, and social well-being

Results indicated that the general model explained 25% of social well-being variance. The first model showed that self-compassion dimensions explain 15% of social well-being. The dimensions of self-kindness and common humanity were significant predictors of social well-being. The dimensions of compassion added 10% of the variance explained to the second model, implying a significant change in it. In this case, to the dimensions of self-compassion that were significant predictors of social

well-being in the first model, the dimensions of compassion of kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness were added. The dimension of mindfulness (of self-compassion) and the dimension of indifference (of compassion) were not found to be significant predictors of social well-being (see **Figure 1** and **Table 2**).

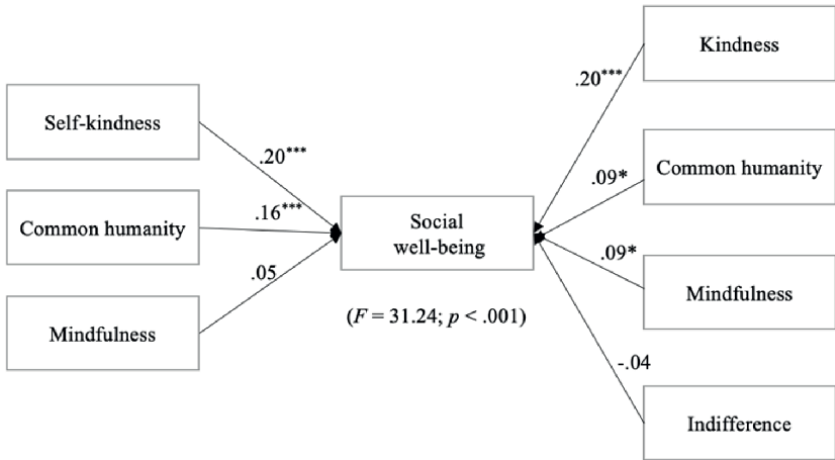


Figure 1.
Dimensions of self-compassion and compassion as predictors of social well-being.

Variable	B	95% CI for B		SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		LL	UL				
Social well-being							
Step 1						.15	.15***
Constant	2.46***	2.44	2.67	.11			
Self-kindness	.15***	.08	.21	.04	.22***		
Common humanity	.17***	.09	.24	.04	.19***		
Mindfulness	.03	−.04	.11	.24	.05		
Step 2						.25	.10***
Constant	.99***	.52	1.46	.24			
Self-kindness	.14***	.08	.20	.03	.20***		
Common humanity	.14***	.07	.21	.04	.16***		
Mindfulness	.04	−.03	.10	.04	.05		
Kindness (C)	.19***	.11	.27	.04	.20***		
Common humanity (C)	.10*	.07	.18	.04	.09*		
Mindfulness (C)	.11†	.01	.20	.05	.09†		
Indifference (C)	−.04	−.01	−.02	.03	−.04		
Psychological well-being							
Step 1						.28	.28***
Constant	1.97***	1.71	2.23	.13			
Self-kindness	.26***	.18	.34	.04	.29***		
Common humanity	.22***	.13	.31	.04	.19***		

Variable	B	95% CI for B		SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		LL	UL				
Mindfulness	.15**	.05	.24	.05	.15**		
Step 2						.30	.02***
Constant	1.19***	.60	1.78	.30			
Self-kindness	.24***	.17	.32	.04	.27***		
Common humanity	.19***	.11	.28	.04	.17***		
Mindfulness	.16***	.07	.25	.05	.17***		
Kindness (C)	.19***	.09	.30	.05	.15***		
Common humanity (C)	.09	-.01	.19	.05	.06		
Mindfulness (C)	.08	-.19	.04	.06	.05		
Indifference (C)	-.02	-.09	-.05	.04	-.02		
Emotional well-being							
Step 1						.30	.30***
Constant	1.52***	1.24	1.79	.13			
Self-kindness	.31***	.23	.40	.04	.32***		
Common humanity	.15**	.05	.25	.04	.12***		
Mindfulness	.22***	.13	.32	.05	.21***		
Step 2						.33	.02***
Constant	1.26***	.62	1.90	.30			
Self-kindness	.30***	.21	.38	.04	.30***		
Common humanity	.14**	.04	.24	.04	.11**		
Mindfulness	.25***	.15	.35	.05	.23***		
Kindness (C)	.26***	.15	.37	.05	.18***		
Common humanity (C)	.05	-.01	.06	.05	.03		
Mindfulness (C)	-.12	-.25	-.05	.06	.08		
Indifference (C)	-.03	-.12	.04	.04	-.03		

Note: CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. (C) = compassion. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2.
Dimensions of self-compassion and compassion as predictors of social, psychological, and emotional well-being.

2.4.2.2 Self-compassion, compassion, and psychological well-being

The general model explained 30% of the variance in psychological well-being. In the case of the first model, the dimensions of self-compassion explained 27% of the psychological well-being. More specifically, the dimensions of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness were found to be significant predictors of psychological well-being. In the second model, the dimensions of compassion added 20% of the explained variance, implying a significant change in it.

The dimension of kindness (of compassion) was added to the dimensions of self-compassion that were significant predictors of social well-being. The dimensions of compassion: common humanity, mindfulness, and indifference, did not significantly contribute to psychological well-being (see **Figure 2** and **Table 2**).

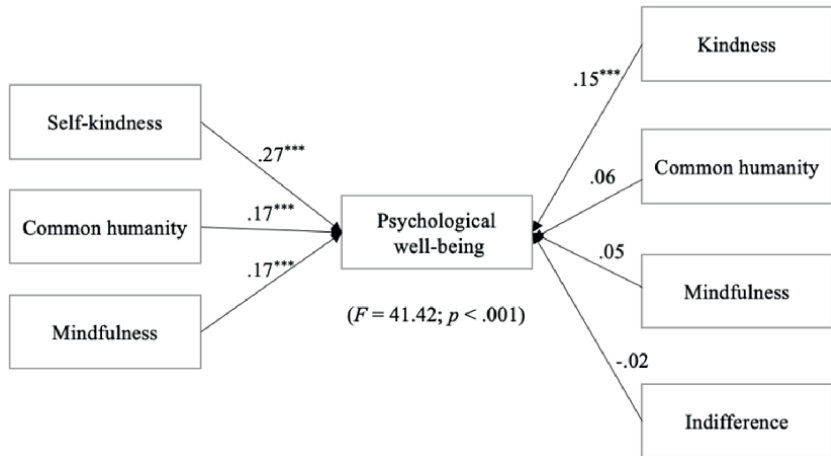


Figure 2.
Dimensions of self-compassion and compassion as predictors of psychological well-being.

2.4.2.3 Self-compassion, compassion, and emotional well-being

The results showed that the general model explained 33% of the variance in emotional well-being. The dimensions of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) accounted for 30% of the variance in emotional well-being, with significant predictive weight. The addition of the dimensions of compassion in the second model contributed an additional 2% to the explained variance, resulting in a significant improvement to the model. Among the dimensions of compassion, only kindness emerged as a significant predictor of emotional well-being, alongside the significant predictors from the first model (self-compassion dimensions). The other dimensions of compassion—common humanity, mindfulness, and indifference—were not significant predictors of emotional well-being (see **Figure 3** and **Table 2**).

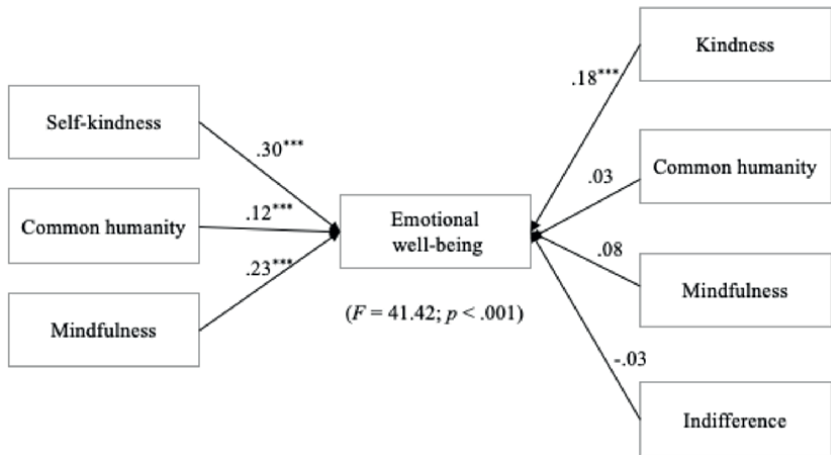


Figure 3.
Dimensions of self-compassion and compassion as predictors of emotional well-being.

2.4.3 Analysis of the mediation of kindness between self-kindness and flourishing

Considering the dimensions of self-compassion and compassion with the greatest predictive weight in flourishing, the mediating role of kindness in the relationship between self-kindness and flourishing was examined. The analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) demonstrated a satisfactory fit between the proposed model and the empirical data ($\chi^2(41) = 123.94, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 3$; CFI = .96; TLI = .95; NFI = .94; IFI = .95).

Additionally, the error value was found to be within acceptable limits (RMSEA = .05). As shown in the **Figure 4**, both self-kindness and kindness toward others have a direct influence on flourishing. Moreover, kindness is identified as a mediating factor in the relationship between self-kindness and flourishing.

2.5 Discussion

The results of this study highlight the relationship between the dimensions of self-compassion, compassion, and flourishing in adolescents. Among the dimensions of self-compassion and compassion, self-kindness and kindness, respectively, contributed the most to explaining social, psychological, and emotional well-being. Given that the way individuals relate to themselves tends to be reflected in their relational patterns with others, and considering that self-kindness and kindness were the most influential aspects of self-compassion and compassion in relation to flourishing, a mediation model was proposed. This model demonstrated a good fit within the sample of adolescents assessed. The analysis indicated that kindness mediates the relationship between self-kindness and flourishing.

These findings suggest that self-compassion and compassion independently contribute to flourishing, while also interacting through a mediating pathway involving self-kindness and kindness. Kindness, as an element of both self-compassion and compassion, incorporates positive and concrete behavioral components of connection—with oneself and others—particularly in contexts of suffering. Therefore, an inclination to engage in kind self-dialogs contributes to extending kindness to others, which, in turn, positively impacts flourishing.

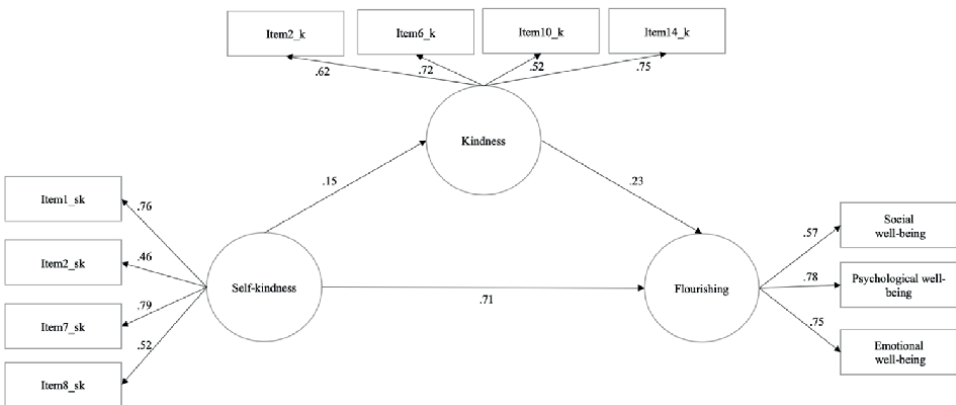


Figure 4.
Model of kindness mediating between self-kindness and flourishing.

2.5.1 Support for hypotheses

The hypotheses proposed in this study are detailed, along with the support given by the results.

H1a: There is a direct and significant relationship between the dimensions of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) and the dimensions of flourishing.

The results supported the proposed hypothesis, as all the dimensions of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) demonstrated a direct association with the dimensions of flourishing (social, psychological, and emotional well-being). These findings are consistent with previous research showing that self-compassion is linked to emotional and psychological well-being [20].

H1b: There is a direct and significant relationship between the dimensions of compassion (kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) and the dimensions of flourishing, and an indirect relationship between the dimension indifference (in compassion) and the dimensions of flourishing.

This hypothesis can be partially accepted. The dimensions of compassion—kindness and mindfulness—showed a direct correlation with all the dimensions of flourishing (social, psychological, and emotional well-being). This is consistent with previous research indicating that compassion is linked to well-being [15, 16, 19].

On the other hand, the dimension of common humanity had a direct association with social and psychological well-being, but its correlation with emotional well-being was not significant. This suggests that viewing others' suffering without judgment is associated with better personal and interpersonal functioning [29], but not necessarily with the experience of feeling well. This may be because common humanity does not inherently involve actions that provide positive emotional feedback. Instead, it relates to recognizing others as interconnected with oneself, which benefits eudaemonic well-being (psychological and social well-being).

Lastly, the dimension of indifference (in compassion) was indirectly correlated with social well-being and showed no correlation with psychological or emotional well-being. This indicates that indifference toward others' suffering can negatively impact social well-being, likely due to the social distance that arises when one avoids engaging with others' suffering.

H2: The dimensions of self-compassion and compassion significantly predict the flourishing of adolescents.

The proposed hypothesis can be partially accepted, as not all the dimensions of self-compassion and compassion significantly predict the dimensions of flourishing (social, psychological, and emotional well-being) in adolescents.

Regarding self-compassion, the dimensions of self-kindness and common humanity were significant predictors of social well-being, whereas the mindfulness dimension did not contribute to social well-being. For compassion, all dimensions (kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness), except indifference, had a direct effect on social well-being.

All dimensions of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) showed a predictive role in psychological well-being. In contrast, within the dimensions of compassion, only kindness contributed to psychological well-being, while common humanity, mindfulness, and indifference did not.

Lastly, all dimensions of self-compassion were significant predictors of emotional well-being. On the other hand, within the dimensions of compassion, only kindness contributed to the explanation of emotional well-being. Across all cases,

the dimensions of self-kindness (self-compassion) and kindness (compassion) consistently and significantly contributed to social, psychological, and emotional well-being.

2.5.2 Limitations and directions for future research

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, regarding the theoretical framework, it is important to note that this work is positioned within one of many theories and operationalizations of compassion. As a result, certain aspects of compassion characteristic of other conceptualizations may not have been considered, as they fall beyond the scope of this paper.

Second, the sample used in this research was non-probabilistic, meaning that randomness was not employed as a selection criterion. Additionally, the majority of participants were women. Future research should analyze whether gender differences affect the fit of the proposed model.

Third, the study design is *ex post facto* and cross-sectional, which means it does not include components that allow for longitudinal analysis. This limitation should also be considered when interpreting the results.

3. Conclusion

In summary, this research provides conclusions that address the questions: Is there a relationship between the variables under study? Furthermore, how are these variables related? The findings align with previous research on the topic and contribute to the ongoing debate about the relationship between self-compassion, compassion, and flourishing.

Regarding the relationship between these constructs, this study adds to the growing body of evidence indicating that self-compassion and compassion are linked to flourishing and play a predictive role in it [15, 16, 19, 20, 39]. The results highlight that specific dimensions of self-compassion and compassion play a more significant role in adolescent flourishing than others.

Self-kindness (a dimension of self-compassion) and kindness (a dimension of compassion) emerged as the dimensions most consistently contributing to social, psychological, and emotional well-being. Similarly, in the research conducted by Akin and Akin [39] on self-compassion and the flourishing of students in Turkey, self-kindness was also identified as the dimension with the greatest explanatory weight regarding flourishing.

In the context of the ongoing debate on the relationship between self-compassion and compassion—where some studies argue there is no association [24, 40], others suggest the relationship is weak [41], and still others assert a strong association [10, 42]—this study provides evidence showing that one dimension of self-compassion (self-kindness) and one dimension of compassion (kindness) fit within a mediating model of flourishing in adolescence. This indicates that self-kindness, through kindness, serves as a pathway to explain flourishing in adolescents.

How adolescents treat themselves—with kindness or hostility—can play a critical role in understanding the nature of their relationships with others (kind or hostile) and their impact on both “feeling good” (emotional well-being) and “functioning well” at personal (psychological well-being) and interpersonal (social well-being) levels.

When designing interventions to promote flourishing in adolescents, it is essential to ask: What aspects strengthen it? And how can it be strengthened? This study suggests that among the various pathways to promote flourishing, one involves self-compassion and compassion. Specifically, the pathway of self-kindness through kindness offers a meaningful explanation of flourishing in adolescents.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author details

Maria Carolina Klos* and Viviana Noemi Lemos
Centro Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Ciencias de la Salud y del
Comportamiento, Universidad Adventista del Plata (CIICSAC-UAP),
Libertador San Martín, Argentina

*Address all correspondence to: mcarolinaklos@gmail.com

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Chapter 4

Latina Adolescents Navigating Identity through Sport: A Qualitative Study

Marilyn Monroy Castro and Rebeca Mireles-Rios

Abstract

This qualitative study explores how Latina adolescent softball players develop psychological, social, physical, and cultural competencies through participation in sport. Drawing from both the Assets Framework for Positive Youth Development and Chicana feminist theory, this research centers the voices of three Latina girls (ages 12–14) who participate in a community softball league in a predominately Mexican American community in California. Data from a semi-structured focus group reveals that softball participation fosters resilience, leadership, and healthy body image while also serving as a platform for cultural expression and identity exploration. The findings reveal that when cultural expression is embraced rather than suppressed, softball creates a unique third space where youth development does not compete with cultural values but instead builds upon them. Implications are offered for educators, coaches, and researchers seeking to create inclusive, affirming, environments for girls of color in sports.

Keywords: Latina adolescents, sports participation, ethnic identity, familismo, positive youth development

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of the study

As the Latino population in the United States continues its projected rise, the healthy development of adolescent Latinas demands unprecedented attention [1]. Research shows that sports participation cultivates a plethora of developmental assets and competences, potentially contributing to the holistic well-being of young Latinas [2]. However, the existing literature largely addresses adolescent girls in sports as a homogenous group, erasing the unique experiences and distinct developmental outcomes that emerge when Latina youth engage in sports [3]. This systematic invisibility mirrors patterns of marginalization for girls of color in spaces such as academia and sports.

Sport participation during adolescence represents a significant developmental context that can profoundly influence identity formation, social relationships, and emotional well-being [4]. While research has established the benefits of sport for youth development, less attention has been paid to the specific experiences of Latina adolescent girls and how they navigate sport spaces that are often shaped by gendered and racialized expectations [5].

The period of early adolescence (ages 12–14) represents a critical developmental window when youth are actively exploring identity, developing more complex relationships, and building competencies that will serve them throughout life [6]. For Latina adolescents, this developmental period involves navigating intersecting identities related to gender, ethnicity, and emerging physical development. Sport contexts can provide unique opportunities for this exploration but may also present challenges related to stereotypes and cultural expectations [7].

1.2 Research question

This study examines how three Latina adolescent softball players navigate these complexities by asking: *What is the range of positive developmental outcomes for Latina youth participating in the sport of softball?*

1.3 Significance of the study

Research on Latina collegiate softball players reveals that athletic participation may act as a vehicle for cultural and ethnic identity formation [8]. This enriches our understanding beyond the traditional physical and social assets associated with sports. Studies focusing on Latino youth consistently demonstrate that a robust ethnic-racial identity serves as a protective force against discrimination, correlating with heightened self-esteem and resilience [9]. These findings position sports environments not only as sites for physical development but as terrains for the cultivation of complex identities. By centering the voices of Latina youth, this research aims to highlight the multifaceted and quickly evolving adolescent mind and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of culturally responsive youth development through sport.

2. Literature review

2.1 Latina youth and sports participation: Navigating structural barriers

Despite the robust literature documenting the myriad of benefits produced by sports participation, Latino adolescents find themselves systematically excluded from these developmental opportunities, participating at significantly lower rates than their White counterparts [10]. This participation gap emerges from social and economic systems of exclusion that have closed off access points to organized sports and effectively deemed girls of color as the “have-nots” in sports literature [11].

Structural barriers form the most visible obstacles to Latina athletic participation. For example, financial hardships, inaccessible facilities, language barriers, and transportation challenges have historically woven an impenetrable barrier [12]. These factors, however, represent only the surface layer of a more complex reality. For example, literature often frames traditional Latino familial values as impediments

to athletic participation [7]. This framing positions Latina adolescents as cultural misfits often forced to choose between honoring their family responsibilities, such as caring for younger siblings, and pursuing athletic aspirations [12]. This narrative of an inherent conflict between cultural values and sports participation perpetuates a broader pattern of invisibility, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion where Latino adolescents remain delegated to the margins of sports participation and sports scholarship, with very few studies having a specific focus on Latina athletes [1].

2.2 Developmental assets: Sports as an optimal terrain

Sports participation creates a unique developmental terrain where Latina adolescents can nurture critical competencies that extend far beyond physical skills. This terrain becomes particularly significant for young Latinas navigating the complex process of ethnic-racial identity formation, which demands sophisticated tools for negotiating multiple cultural worlds [13]. The Assets Framework for Positive Youth Development identifies three interrelated domains where growth occurs: psychological, social, and physical [14]. This framework helps capture the first layer of outcomes that sports participation produces for adolescent girls and Latinas, more specifically.

For young Latinas, psychological assets become essential tools for navigating cultural borderlands and resisting societal pressures that attempt to constrain their identities [15]. The cultivation of self-efficacy and confidence through sports participation offers a counternarrative to the gendered expectations traditionally associated with the Latino community. Latina athletes have oftentimes documented constructing alternative self-perceptions through their embodied experiences via sport [4]. The social dimension of sports participation enriches the developmental landscape by creating opportunities for meaningful relationships [16]. These relationships not only provide emotional support but also access to forms of social capital often not accessible to Latinas. Through team dynamics, these young athletes build networks that transcend neighborhood boundaries, develop conflict negotiation skills, and gain entry to social circles that might otherwise remain inaccessible [17]. In this way, sports become more than simply a recreational space; they transform into a site where new possibilities can emerge.

2.3 Ethnic identity development

Familism, a traditional and cultural anchor of the Latino culture, places the family unit at the epicenter of daily interactions [18]. As a result, this leads to many Latino families prioritizing family needs over individual needs and frequently engaging in their family members' emotional, physical, and financial support over their own. As a central tenet of Latino culture, this cultural dimension cannot be overlooked when examining the range of developmental outcomes of sports on Latina youth. The Latino cultural ethos defines individualism and instead embraces a collectivist way of being.

Developmental researchers have documented how familism's cultural pull shapes adolescent Latinas' psychological and material landscape [19]. These studies reveal that young Latinos immersed in strong familism values develop a heightened sense of responsibility and accountability to others' needs, which stand in stark contrast to individualistic modes of existence. Further studies have found that familism serves as a protective factor for Latino adolescents facing various stressors [20].

The literature remains conspicuously silent on two critical dimensions: how cultural values like familism infuse and transform Latinas' sporting experiences, and how athletic participation catalyzes ethnic-racial identity development. Sports offer a fertile ground for witnessing what Jamieson [21] recognizes as the performance of multiple subjectivities.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Integration of traditional sports framework and Chicana feminist theory

This study integrates two theoretical perspectives to create a comprehensive framework for understanding Latina adolescents' softball experiences. The first is a traditional sports assets framework [14], which encompasses three domains for competency development: psychological, social, and physical. The second is Chicana Feminist Theory, particularly focusing on lived experiences such as occupying third spaces and resisting being relegated to the margins [22], as well as Lugones' [23] concept of "curdling."

Lugones provides a critical lens for understanding how Latinas resist categorical thinking, refusing to separate their athletic and cultural identities into definable and policed categories. Rather than succumbing to a palatable identity, multiple identities curdle and resist splintering, coexisting. Lugones frames this as political resistance against what she calls the "logic of purity," arguing that societies that value purity inherently favor the dominant culture, marking anything outside dominant norms as impure.

The overlap between these theoretical perspectives creates an integration zone where key elements emerge: identity navigation, cultural expression, and resistance to fragmentation. This analytical perspective illuminates how young Latinas make sense of their evolving identities within the terrain of competitive sport. Rather than viewing the cultivation of athletic identity and ethnic identity as separate processes, this framework looks at their convergence.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

Grounded in Chicana feminist ways of knowing, this study is part of a larger study examining the mechanisms behind the ethnic identity development of a group of Latina athletes. This qualitative inquiry intentionally centers the lived experiences of Latina adolescent athletes on the softball fields of a predominantly Mexican American community. This approach was selected to capture rich, contextualized accounts of participants' experiences and to allow for interactive dialog that might reveal shared understandings, diverse perspectives, and collective meaning-making processes.

4.2 Researcher positionality

As a Latina researcher studying Latina youth in sports contexts, the primary author acknowledges her positionality and its potential influence on data collection

and interpretation. As a lifelong softball enthusiast who grew up playing in the same community league, she possesses cultural intuition to recognize the multidimensional developmental processes unfolding for these Latina athletes. However, this intimate connection to the research site demands attention to reflexivity throughout the research process.

4.3 Participants

This study focused on three participants from the 12U Division's All-Star team, a competitive subgroup within a five-team division. The larger study consisted of nine All-star participants who self-identified as Latina (ages 12–14), representing a range of generational and cultural experiences within the United States [24]. The league was chosen for its demographic composition and longstanding reputation for preparing players for collegiate-level softball. All participants played softball for multiple years.

For this analysis, three participants were selected based on their expressed interest in focus group participation and established rapport with each other and the first author. The participants are referred to by pseudonyms: Jasmine (age 12, Mexican and Puerto Rican heritage), Delilah (age 13, Mexican and Black heritage), and Evelyn (age 12, Mexican heritage). This diversity in mixed heritage backgrounds provided rich perspectives on navigating multiple cultural identities within athletic contexts.

4.4 Data collection

Approval was obtained through the university's Internal Review Board. Prior to beginning any data collection, written consent from parents and verbal assent from all youth participants were obtained. To establish trust and understanding within the softball community, we initially sought authorization from league leadership and coaching staff, subsequently completing all required volunteer protocols such as background screenings and mandatory safety certifications. During the regular playing season, the primary researcher maintained weekly presence at team practices to observe group interactions and develop relationships with both players and their families. When All-star activities commenced, field presence was expanded to twice-weekly attendance encompassing both practice sessions and competitive events.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews took place with each participant during the mid-point of All-star season. These conversations averaged 60 minutes in duration and occurred at the practice fields, focusing on participants' daily athletic experiences, peer relationships within the team, and the role of family in their sporting lives. A subsequent focus group was held at a nearby pizza parlor, allowing researchers to explore and expand upon themes that emerged from individual interviews. This collective conversation lasted roughly 90 minutes. Audio recording captured all data collection sessions, which were then transcribed word-for-word while maintaining rigorous confidentiality standards throughout the process.

4.5 Data analysis

Data analysis employed both narrative and deductive methodological approaches. NVivo software facilitated data organization and thematic examination. The initial analytical phase utilized predetermined coding structures derived from the Asset Framework for Positive Youth Development [14] to identify the presence of positive social, psychological, and physical assets among participants.

Expanding upon this initial framework, the subsequent analytical phase investigated family and cultural influences, particularly focusing on how participants balanced communal obligations and traditional generational expectations with personal athletic goals. Utilizing Jamieson's [21] research on Latina athletes as a theoretical guide, this stage analyzed the ways family relationships influenced athletes' identity development and sporting engagement.

The final layer examined instances of what Lugones [23] terms "curdling," or moments when participants wove together their cultural, ethnic, and athletic identity rather than compartmentalizing them amidst the context of softball. Identity themes emerged as fundamental elements, revealing how participants articulated multifaceted identities within their sporting contexts. Instead of viewing their experiences as segmented, the analytical process examined how participants integrated their ethnic heritage with their athletic growth, emphasizing the cultural foundations inherent in sport for young Latinas.

5. Findings

Integrating the Assets Framework [14] with Chicana feminist scholarship [22], this analysis revealed five interconnected domains of competencies developed through softball participation: (1) Psychological Assets Development, (2) Social Assets Development, (3) Physical Assets and Body Autonomy, (4) Cultural and Spiritual Identity Integration, and (5) Critical Social Awareness and Resistance. Rather than existing as separate categories, these assets demonstrate deep interconnectedness in participants' experiences.

5.1 Psychological assets development

Participants shared an understanding of how softball cultivates psychological competencies for complex social environments. These assets included resilience, work ethic formation, empowerment, and future-oriented responsibility.

5.1.1 Resilience and moral development

Delilah emphasized that sports shaped her into a "better person" because they taught her teamwork, a skill transferable to professions such as medicine, personal training, or construction. Jasmine demonstrated metacognitive awareness of softball's role in developing life skills: "...softball teaches you, like, little things. It helps you, like, be able to develop those type of skills that you're going to need for the real world and, and it also teaches you, like, about failure and winning, and how to take a loss and how to come back from it."

5.1.2 Work ethic and empowerment

The concept of working for and earning achievement framed participants' worldview. Jasmine emphasized: "It also teaches you nothing comes easy, like you have to work for it, and you can't just, like, expect results when you don't put the work in." She also stressed leadership: "It also teaches you about leadership...when you're on the field, you can't, like, be scared to say what you're thinking...because softball takes thinking." Jasmine further underscores this by sharing that one needs

to be “thinking fast on the run” in softball. This confidence in communication and quick decision-making also extended to their schoolwork, “like on school projects.” To this point, Evelyn further elaborated that softball teaches “working together and how to communicate when we don’t,” alluding to recalibrating efforts to communicate.

5.1.3 Future-oriented responsibility

The athletes described the importance of learning to be accountable in managing their training routines alongside balancing interpersonal dynamics on the field. Their reflections illustrate how showing up on time, handling mistakes, and communicating directly serve as preparation for future transitions into high school and beyond. Delilah poignantly stated: “You need to learn how to do all the stuff like yourself, because when you get to high school, it’s not gonna be up to the coaches or your parents. It’s gonna be up to you.” This reflects their early sense of responsibility and independence, highlighting how softball serves as a rehearsal space for developing these critical skills.

5.2 Social assets development

The social aspect of softball participation revealed understandings of relationship quality particularly among peer groups and general familial relationships.

5.2.1 Authentic relationships through shared adversity

Participants drew sharp contrasts between school and softball friendships. Jasmine explained: “I feel like you cannot see them for a while, but like instantly, like not time has passed when you’re with them...with sports, you’ve been through like the tough, like you’ve lost and you’ve won with them. You felt like pain with them, like you experienced different things that you wouldn’t normally experience with regular friends, and like, I’m sure you probably are great friends with, like friends at school, but it’s like you’ve gone through heartbreak, pain and loss and all of these different things with people that you’re friends with through sports.”

Delilah contrasted the depth of support between school friends and softball teammates during difficult times: “Like, if you lose a family member, they’re the ones that are there for you, not your school friends. Your school friends would be like, Oh, I’m sorry for your loss, but they won’t. They’ll just go back. Yeah, they’ll just go back to whatever they were doing in school or whatever they’re doing with their friends... and if you have your first heartbreak, your school friends aren’t going to be there for you.”

The participants emphasized that softball relationships required genuine choice rather than circumstantial proximity. Delilah explained: “In reality, they’re just there because they have to be friends with you, because they’re at the same school as you. Who are they going to talk to? But in reality, your softball teammates, they don’t have to talk to you on the team... They could just be like, what is the word?” Jasmine added: “They can tolerate you, but they won’t like.” Delilah continued: “They don’t have to speak to you as a friend... They could just, like, be like, Oh, you have to go to second base, or you have to go to third base, or go to first base, or go to the outfield, just say little things to you have to as a teammate. And they could just be a teammate, but not a friend.”

Jasmine reinforced this distinction about choice and commitment: “Like the season ends, they don’t have to be friends with you... continue talking to you.” However, they noted that when these relationships did develop, they maintained continuity despite separation, with Delilah explaining: “when we didn’t go to the same school, we saw each other every once in a while, and we always start from where we left off.”

5.2.2 Family relationship navigation

The girls shared candid reflections of their father-daughter dynamics. Two of the participants described fathers as coaches, emphasizing “tough love” and long car rides home dissecting performance. Delilah and Jasmine both acknowledged these challenging post-game conversations, with Jasmine noting: “It’s always such a long car ride” and Delilah adding “I’m not going to miss those car rides.” Despite this intensity, they recognized these interactions strengthened their relationships. Jasmine explained: “The time that we spend together working we come a little closer.” Evelyn chimes in “like connect,” and “inside jokes” add Jasmine.

Yet, they also expressed their discomfort with verbal affection, describing love as conveyed through action and shared routines rather than words. Jasmine revealed: “You know what’s weird is, like, I’ll be so honest. Like, saying I love you is so cringe to me, like, to my dad, I can’t, like, we’ll just be. It’s like a love hate relationship. I don’t even say I love you... It’s like a tough love.” Evelyn offered a contrasting but similarly constrained perspective: “It will be like a, ‘I love you’ and it be like ‘Oh, okay, I love you, too’. It’s not like an affectionate way though. It was just like an ‘I love you’ and ‘I love you, too.’” Jasmine agreed: “Yeah. Like, saying I love you is so weird to me.” When asked how she knew her father loved her without verbal expressions, Jasmine explained it through differential treatment: “it’s like a tough love, little things, like, if he gets my brother in trouble, but he doesn’t get me in trouble as much.” She emphasized the rarity of physical affection: “We rarely even give each other hugs. It’s very [different].”

This pattern contrasted sharply with mother-daughter relationships. As Evelyn noted: “With my Mom it’s different.” Jasmine clarified: “I wouldn’t say I’m more comfortable with my mom. It’s just a different relationship,” with Delilah agreeing: “It’s easier to talk to your mom than your dad.” The girls described their mothers as “loving” parents, though they acknowledged their disciplinary prowess.

5.3 Physical assets and body autonomy

Participants demonstrated an understanding of physical development, body image, and the relationship between effort and embodied results, revealing resistance to dominant beauty standards.

5.3.1 Philosophy of earned physical development

The girls voiced strong opposition to cosmetic procedures, articulating a philosophy centered on earned physical transformation through effort. Delilah declared: “I don’t believe in, like, the lip fillers. Like, the, what are they called? Where you make your boobs bigger and stuff. I don’t believe in that stuff because you should work for that in the gym.” To which Jasmine added: “You should have a goal in mind.” Evelyn provided a more practical lens, “You can work for

that, and not spend so much money,” Their critique extended beyond financial considerations to safety concerns and aesthetic authenticity. Jasmine noted the risks: “And, like so many disasters, like, if you get it done, there’s so many bad like,” with Delilah adding specific examples: “It can go on the side of your leg.” Jasmine shared a particularly vivid example: “I saw this video where this girl had, like, a butt thing. She had like, the extra butt, I don’t know, like it flipped and she showed it. It was so bad.” Delilah emphasized the importance of natural fit: “And for some people, it doesn’t fit their body, and that’s why you don’t do it. That’s why you don’t get it done, and that’s why you just do it as like, go to the gym every single day, have a goal and work on that goal every single day, instead of getting it done, because it’s more natural than when you get it done.”

5.3.2 Training and competence

Additionally, the participants discussed the importance of athletic training that extended far beyond casually going to the gym. Jasmine detailed her commitment to structured programming at Redline, a dedicated sports training facility: “It’s like a training facility, and you can take different classes. So you can say strength and agility, there’s like, basketball, softball. I don’t go to softball because softball is more like mechanics. It’s more like they teach you, like what 10U teaches you. So I go for strength and agility.” Her strategic choice to focus on strength and agility rather than basic mechanics revealed mature athletic decision-making: “and that’s where I learned, like most of like, how to different workouts, to use weights and stuff like that. So that definitely got me, like, faster, better footwork, stronger, definitely stronger.” Delilah’s approach emphasized personalized, intensive training through weekly sessions with a personal trainer: “I go to a personal trainer on Mondays to work my butt off.” This commitment to physical competence connected to broader themes of self-reliance, as Delilah emphasized: “Like, I feel like you should be going to the gym at like, sixth grade, at least, because my mom started me late. But you need to learn how to do all the stuff like yourself...”

5.4 Cultural, spiritual, racial identity integration

This theme examines how participants seamlessly integrated ethnic, religious, and athletic identities, demonstrating what Lugones [23] terms “curdling.”

5.4.1 Visible cultural expression

Jasmine proudly displayed Mexican, Puerto Rican, and U.S. flag stickers on her helmet, visibly touting her layered identities. When asked about her choice, she explained: “I did it. My mom bought the stickers. I also have a Puerto Rican flag on it... Yeah, and the USA one, just because, yeah, why not?” Evelyn described this positioning as being “in the middle” of cultural worlds, explaining: “Well, like, half Puerto Rican, half white, and then half Mexican.” This multiplicity created complex negotiations around racial categorization, as Jasmine discovered: “I was on a website where I could search up my grades, and I went on demographics, and I looked like, it was like, your race or whatever. And it was like, it was like, Mexican and Caucasian. I was like, What the heck? So I searched it up, and it was like, if you’re born here, you’re considered Caucasian.”

5.4.2 Spiritual practices in sport

Faith practices were implemented through both individual and collective rituals. Delilah added her personal ritual: “Every time I go up to bat I do the sign of the cross before I step in the batter’s box or I draw a cross because I’m Catholic, and I’ve always been Catholic, since I was born.” Jasmine described team practices: “Before every practice or every game we give thankfults. So like, I’m thankful for waking up today, like, basically just like, thanking God for what He gives us. And then we also, we say Our Father before. For our travel team, we say Our Father before every practice and every game. And then for like family stuff, it’s something that my family does.”

Delilah also discussed how her team navigated interfaith accommodations: “we’re not all Catholic, so we’re Christian and Catholic... And so we lock hands like, it’s like this, with our pinkies and we say the prayer... our Father hear us pray as we play this game today. Give us strength in all we do, to do the best that we can do, and then Amen.” The girls emphasized that these spiritual practices emerged from their own initiative rather than their parents or coaches. Delilah explained: “It’s not the parents, it’s not our coaches, it’s the girls, and if you don’t, if you don’t want to do it, you don’t have to say it... my whole team actually prefers to do it. So we do it every single game. But we would, we wouldn’t like talk mess about somebody that didn’t want to do if it’s not a part of their culture, but they still do it because they’re, they’re still trying to learn our culture and the way that we do things.”

5.5 Critical social awareness

Participants also demonstrated nuanced awareness of stereotypes, language politics, and socioeconomic structures, as they conversed with one another, revealing a sophisticated critical consciousness [4] that challenged dominant narratives about their communities.

5.5.1 Ethnic awareness

When describing their El Rio team composition, the girls noted limited diversity. When asked about team demographics, Jasmine responded: “It was mostly everybody was the same race, because everybody was just Mexican, except for Delilah, she’s black,” with Evelyn clarifying: “She is still, like, half Mexican.” Jasmine concluded, “It wasn’t that diverse. It was mostly one race.”

However, their observations extended beyond their own team to patterns they noticed across the sport. Jasmine observed: “I feel like I don’t see a lot of um, African American girls play softball.” The girls identified specific exceptions they had encountered: “There was this one team we played. They were all like black girls,” with Delilah adding details: “Oh, beach or something” and others confirming: “Oh yeah, Pasadena!... And Long Beach.” Jasmine synthesized these observations: “There’s not that many teams that have African Americans, but those two teams were like all African American girls.”

5.5.2 Stereotypes

The participants also critiqued gender stereotypes within their own communities, particularly those imposed on Latina girls. When discussing stereotypes about girls,

Delilah began: “that every girl likes to dress up and like, wear makeup,” with Evelyn adding: “Like a lot of makeup” and Jasmine specifying: “like cake face make-up.” Evelyn continued: “And like, it’s like, when they wear a lot of makeup and they give attitude, it’s just like” with Delilah adding: “And they have, like those long nails.” Jasmine synthesized these as “Latina stereotypes, like long nails, cake face, crop tops.”

The complexity of their relationship to these stereotypes emerged when Delilah acknowledged her own participation in some of the very behaviors she had critiqued: “Hey, the cakface and the croptops, don’t even play. I wear that stuff,” followed by laughter. This moment revealed the tension between recognizing stereotypes as reductive while also participating in cultural practices that might align with those stereotypes. Jasmine responded with an important clarification: “I’m saying like not every Mexican wears that but that’s a stereotype they have of us.” This exchange demonstrated their understanding that the problem was not the behaviors themselves, but rather the assumption that all Latinas must conform to these patterns or risk having their cultural authenticity questioned.

Notably, they recognized how these stereotypes served as tests of cultural authenticity. Delilah explained: “And if you don’t, if you don’t dress like that, or wear makeup like that, or have your nails like that,” with Jasmine completing the thought: “you’re not Mexican.” This extended to cultural celebrations, as Delilah noted: “And if you don’t have a quinceañera, you’re not Mexican, and if you’re like mixed, you can’t have a quinceañera cause like you’re not fully Latina, they’re like you’re not Latina, you’re black, you’re Asian, you’re white and Mexican. You should have a sweet sixteen because you’re white. And then White people say you can’t have a sweet sixteen, that’s our culture.” Their analysis revealed a sophisticated understanding of how cultural policing operates from multiple directions, constraining individual choice while demanding conformity to externally imposed expectations.

5.5.3 Language and power

When discussing team demographics, the topic led to a conversation on school demographics. Jasmine initially said: “We have a lot of beaners. I probably should say that we have a lot of Mexicans at our school.” When asked why she corrected herself, she explained: “Because it’s like racial to some people. I don’t really care.” This led to a deeper discussion about contextual usage and speaker positionality. Delilah clarified: “It’s a racial slur. It’s like calling a black person the N word, and... kind of, and it’s like calling a white person, like the B word, wait, no, the W word.”

Jasmine reflected on the differential impact based on speaker identity: “I just feel like it’s worse when, like, a White person calls a Mexican a beaner. I feel like that White person doesn’t have the right to say that cause they’re not Mexican.” Delilah agreed with this analysis of in-group versus out-group usage: “When a Mexican and a Mexican- it’s like you can say it back to them.” Jasmine added: “It’s not as like bad.” They contextualized this within their school environment: “everybody at school says it to us... yeah, everybody... but it’s like everybody’s like, they don’t take it to heart. They don’t take it to heart.” This discussion revealed their understanding of how racial language functions differently depending on speaker positionality and community context.

5.5.4 Socioeconomic awareness

The girls also demonstrated awareness of how economic conditions varied across different communities through their diverse experiences. When discussing what

makes a place “ghetto,” Delilah noted: “Because you hear gunshots,” though Evelyn provided perspective: “Ok, it’s not that serious.” Jasmine offered a more systemic definition: “The definition of ghetto is a lot of people... The reason why- Okay, so my mom explained it to me.” This led to her detailed explanation of overcrowding and economic necessity driving housing arrangements.

6. Discussion

Drawing from the Assets Framework for Positive Youth Development [14] and guided by Chicana feminist scholarship [22–24], this study examined how three Latina adolescent softball players develop competencies and navigate identity formation through athletic participation. The findings reveal five interconnected domains of development that extend beyond traditional sports-based assets to encompass culturally specific competencies essential for young Latinas navigating multiple identity contexts.

6.1 Interconnected asset development

The participants’ experiences demonstrate that asset development occurs not as discrete categories but as interconnected processes. Their development of psychological assets such as resilience and leadership directly informed their social relationship building, while their physical empowerment connected to cultural identity expression through visible symbols and spiritual practices. This interconnectedness challenges frameworks that compartmentalize developmental outcomes and suggests that supportive athletic environments foster holistic competency development for Latina adolescents.

The psychological assets participants developed aligned with established literature on sports’ developmental benefits [4], yet were articulated through culturally specific frameworks. Their understanding of “tough love” relationships with fathers, earned physical development through effort rather than cosmetic enhancement, and the integration of spiritual practices into athletic performance reflect how traditional developmental assets manifest within Latino cultural contexts.

6.2 Cultural assets as developmental strengths

This study’s most significant contribution lies in identifying cultural assets as distinct yet integrated developmental outcomes. Participants’ sophisticated navigation of ethnic-racial identity, demonstrated through practices such as displaying multiple cultural flags on equipment and implementing team spiritual rituals, represents what might be termed “cultural competency development.” These practices exemplify Lugones’ [23] concept of “curdling” or the refusal to fragment multiple identities into acceptable categories.

The concept of curdling manifests particularly through participants’ playful engagement with cultural stereotypes and racialized language. Their casual use of terms like “beaner” among themselves, accompanied by laughter and theoretical discussions about contextual appropriateness, demonstrates a form of cultural reclamation and resistance. This playful manipulation of potentially harmful language represents what Lugones describes as refusing the “logic of purity”; they neither completely reject nor fully embrace these labels, but instead transform them through

humor and intimate friendship. The depth of their relationships, developed through shared athletic experiences, creates a space where they can navigate these complex linguistic and cultural territories together with both seriousness and levity.

The participants' critical social awareness, including their nuanced understanding of stereotypes, language politics, and socioeconomic structures, reveals developmental outcomes that extend far beyond traditional sports literature [4]. Their ability to critique gender stereotypes while acknowledging their own participation in some criticized behaviors demonstrates sophisticated identity negotiation skills. Delilah's admission that she wears "cakface and the croptops" after critiquing these very stereotypes illustrates how curdling allows for simultaneous resistance and participation. Similarly, their analysis of racial language usage based on speaker positionality, understanding that "it's worse when a White person calls a Mexican a beaner" reflects an advanced understanding of power dynamics and in-group/out-group membership while maintaining the intimacy to joke about these serious topics among themselves.

6.3 Softball as third space

The findings support conceptualizing softball participation as creating a "third space" where traditional youth development assets and cultural identity development occur simultaneously rather than in competition. Participants did not experience tension between their cultural values (such as familism) and athletic participation; instead, they demonstrated how familial relationships were strengthened through shared athletic experiences, even when those relationships involved "tough love" dynamics.

This third space allowed participants to resist what Lugones [23] calls the "logic of purity" or the societal pressure to separate cultural and athletic identities into distinct, non-overlapping categories. Their integration of spiritual practices, cultural symbols, and ethnic pride into their athletic identities represents a form of resistance against assimilationist pressures common in traditionally White-dominated sports.

6.4 Reframing cultural values as assets

The study challenges research approaches that position Latino cultural values as barriers to athletic participation. Participants' experiences with familism, rather than creating obstacles, provided frameworks for understanding teamwork, responsibility, and collective success. Their spiritual practices enhanced rather than interfered with athletic performance, while their multilingual competencies and cultural knowledge represented resources for navigating diverse social environments.

This reframing has implications for how researchers approach studies of youth of color in sports contexts. Rather than measuring how successfully young athletes assimilate to dominant sporting cultures, research might examine how they transform and enrich those spaces through cultural contributions.

6.5 Limitations and theoretical considerations

While this study provides rich insights into three participants' experiences, its small sample size and focus on one sport in a specific geographic region limit generalizability. The participants' experiences within a predominantly Mexican American community may not reflect those of Latina athletes in more diverse or less culturally supportive environments. Additionally, the study's focus on All-Star level competition

may not capture experiences of recreational-level participants or those facing greater structural barriers to participation.

The theoretical integration of traditional developmental frameworks with Chicana feminist theory, while productive, requires further refinement. Future research should examine whether the concept of “cultural assets” applies across different sports, age groups, and levels of cultural community support.

6.6 Implications for practice and policy

These findings suggest that youth development programs and coaching practices should actively welcome and incorporate cultural expression rather than treating it as external to athletic development. Creating environments where young Latinas can display cultural symbols, practice spiritual traditions, and express ethnic pride may enhance, rather than detract from, traditional developmental outcomes.

For coaches and program administrators, this means recognizing that cultural identity expression represents a developmental strength that can contribute to team cohesion and individual growth. Training programs for youth sports personnel should include education on cultural assets and approaches to integrating identity.

The study also suggests implications for research methodologies. Future studies on youth development in sports contexts should examine the development of cultural competency alongside traditional asset frameworks, particularly for participants from marginalized communities. Longitudinal research could illuminate how these integrated assets function over time and across different life contexts.

7. Conclusion

This research reveals that when Latina adolescents participate in supportive athletic environments that welcome cultural expression, they develop interconnected competencies spanning psychological, social, physical, and cultural domains. Rather than requiring young athletes to choose between cultural authenticity and athletic achievement, supportive sports contexts can serve as sites where both forms of development occur simultaneously. These findings challenge deficit-based approaches to studying youth of color in sports and suggest new directions for both research and practice focused on asset-based, culturally affirming youth development.

Our novel focus on cultural assets advances the field by focusing on the ways that cultural expression and ethnic identity work together with traditional developmental competencies. In addition, we extend Chicana Feminist Theory into the context of adolescent sports, showing how the formation of identity and resistance can be seen even in athletic spaces. This contributes to the theoretical conversations around intersectional youth development and helps us understand the significance of community based sports programs on various aspects of development.

Lastly, the girls in the study transformed the softball field into a third space where growth, identity, and resistance co-exist and that show us how the benefits of sports participation extends beyond the physical to include the development of leadership, resilience, connection, and ethnic-racial identity. This challenges both sports literature and youth development literature that sometimes poses cultural identity as an obstacle to athletic participation [25, 26]. Most significantly, this study shows how Latina athletes reclaim physical spaces that have historically excluded them, thus transforming these spaces to affirm and provide a sense of belonging for these girls.

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Author details

Marilyn Monroy Castro* and Rebeca Mireles-Rios
University of California, Santa Barbara, CA, USA

*Address all correspondence to: marilynmonroy@ucsb.edu

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Perspective Chapter: The Revelation Process of Adolescent Sexual Abuse – What to Consider in the Face of Revelation, Reluctance, Retractation, and Never Speak?

Freeda Jusino-Sierra

Abstract

Child and adolescent sexual abuse have been widely studied. However, there is very little on the subject when seeking theories that explain the phenomenon of revelation. Theories help us understand and explain why things arise. In the case of child and adolescent victims of sexual abuse, their testimony is sometimes weakened because the professional who treats them may dominate the concepts of retraction and reluctance. Still, when they explain them in court, they lack a theoretical basis to help substantiate the case. In this chapter, several theories will be presented that could be useful in explaining the process of revelation. The triangulation of the conceptual, the empirical, and the normative will be the basis for the professional not to be biased. On the other hand, it is of little use to understand the theories if, for their application, one lacks knowledge of biopsychosocial, human rights, action through best practices, but above all, to see and unravel how everything has been constructed through the understanding of adults, without taking into account how childhood develops and how adultcentrism influences the best practices for the care of cases of child sexual abuse. Based on the above, this chapter exposes, in a general way, the theoretical approaches that could contribute to the preparation for the defense in court when an adolescent does not disclose his/her sexual abuse fluently. Therefore, this chapter could help expand on how to defend and attend to the process of revelation in a logical, relevant, and coherent way.

Keywords: biopsychosocial support, reluctance, retraction, revelation, scope of intervention

1. Introduction

The immediate and long-term mental health impacts of child sexual abuse have been well documented, and child sexual abuse is known to be associated with the higher rates of childhood mental disorders and personality disorders, anxiety disorders, and major affective disorders in adulthood [1]. But what happens if the professional adds to this the prejudice toward the adolescent population (which could well be seen from ageism, such as stereotypes [beliefs], prejudices [feelings], and discrimination [actions]) in which the adult voice takes precedence over that of adolescent (e.g., see Refs [2, 3]). What would happen if, within the process of revelation, the professional (forensic, clinical, legal) does not understand the ups and downs of a revelation? There may be reluctance and even retraction [4–7]. What would happen if the professional focuses on the explicit voice without assuming the context in which the revelation occurs [8–10]? To avoid biases in the intervention with adolescents, the professional must know (and dominate) the stages of development, but above all, place them within the cultural context of the adolescent who makes the disclosure. It is important to understand the dynamics of revelation from the “voice” of adolescents, and several theories can help to understand it. Leaving aside best practices due to ignorance or minimizing the adolescents as subjects of their rights [11] could lead to minimizing rights and making invisible the impact of sexual abuse in the short and long term.

2. Developmental stages: What to expect at revelation?

Several developmental stages can help understand adolescents’ natural behavior. The professional should not see them as a straitjacket, and it is recommended that they use several theories that can be linked explicitly to the particularities of the case, “your adolescent.” In addition, not only chronological age must be considered, but mental age, upbringing, society, and culture must also be considered where the revelation occurs. Therefore, child and adolescent development must be seen from physical, cognitive, social, and personality development perspectives.

2.1 Theory of cognitive development

This theory is based on intellectual skills, including learning, memory, language development, problem-solving, and intelligence. From 11 or 12 years of age to 18 or 19, adolescents are in the stage of formal operations (Piaget, see Refs [12, 13]). This mental process involves understanding and appreciating symbols representing meanings embodied in social communities and the physical world. Thus, formal (abstract) thoughts are marked by the appearance of hypothetical deductive reasoning [12–14]. At this stage, several ideas can be appreciated in different forms. If the professional who is working with the adolescent can understand this stage and know that by anticipating the future (whether it is to solve the problem, stay with the family, not be scammed, and predict the failure of justice or abandonment of those they love) they can retract, this would help in the defense of the case in court and the plan of services and treatment in the short and long term. Due to their level of development and understanding, the adolescent may well reveal the abuse to stop it. Still, they could also do so because they have known previous cases (not necessarily their own) that have triggered convenient results for them at a specific time. That is why it is

essential to interlace together different theories, considering the past and present of the adolescent. Nothing is taken in blankness, including the fact that blind interviews are not recommended [9].

2.2 Theory of social development and personality

It examines the enduring characteristics that distinguish one person from another and how interactions with others and social relationships develop and change over the course of a lifetime. Erikson, the main deponent, identified the identity vs. identity confusion stage to refer to adolescents [12, 13]. Here, virtue is “fidelity.” The adolescent must determine their sense of self. To form an identity, the “I” organizes the person’s skills, needs, and desires and helps adapt them to the demands of society. The search for identity comes into focus during adolescence and persists throughout life. Erikson saw the main danger of this stage as a confusion of identity or confusion of role, which can express itself by taking an excessively long time to reach adulthood [15, 16]. However, some amount of identity confusion is normal. So, when the professional sees the revelation of sexual abuse through this stage, they are relating that fidelity is important, but so is the search for identity. That fidelity could be seen as a precise and firmly rooted conviction of the authentic “I.” Adolescents are in a state of confusion, not knowing what lifestyle they should adopt, what they can expect from a relationship, and what behaviors are satisfying as they explore. Confidence acquisition occurs with the development of hope, will, purpose, and skills in the years before adolescence [13, 15]. When they are sexually abused, the question may arise if disclosure is the proper act for their life at that moment. Their life has been turned upside down by something that was not supposed to happen and that they had not been prepared to go through. In that sense of searching for identity, sexual abuse contributes to unbalance their world. Suppose the professional who attends them cannot assimilate that world. In that case, they will hardly be able to understand the process of revelation (which could include reluctance, retraction, or even “never speaking”). Elaborating on this theory would be key to understanding the phenomenon of acceptance and learning to live with what happened to them. But above all, they must know from their own “voice” what has happened and if this would put them at a disadvantage with their peers.

2.3 Theory of moral development

In the stage of post-conventional morality or principles of morality (13 years and older), the rules and expectations of others are different from those of the individual (Erikson, see Refs [12, 13, 17, 18]). Values are already defined in terms independent of each one according to their choice of principles. According to Kohlberg, at this level, true morality is achieved [12, 13]. The individual understands the possibility of a conflict between two socially accepted standards and tries to decide around them. Let us consider that this theory is distinguished by explicitly stating that lying can occur to obtain rewards or avoid punishment. So, when the professional visualizes the revelation, it will be essential to consider false positives. The sexually abused adolescent understands the illegality of sexual exploitation and can reveal it so that the aggressor does not hurt others; he/she can assess sexual exploitation, and in this way, he/she does what he/she thinks is correct [19]. The importance of the professional knowing and dominating this stage rests in understanding that reluctance could occur before and after the revelation. Moreover, keep in mind that society will play a significant

role. “What can society do for me? What can I do for society? Could the person who hurt me harm someone if I do not speak? What happens if I speak and they don’t believe me?” Here is a real debate for adolescents, as explained in this theory.

3. Revelation process: When it is understood, silence can be the “voice”

The declaration is a process, not an event. Many adolescents evaluate the environment before testifying because they are worried about the reactions of others [5]. Usually, they report a few details at first. Juveniles often delay their disclosures for long periods of time [7]. Among the types of revelation, there is [5]: (a) the immediate—they say it as soon as it happens or the next day (and is rare when it occurs within the family); (b) the delayed—when they wait a long time before the disclosure; days, weeks, months, and even years can pass; (c) the wavy statement—they gradually tell what happened; (d) the accidental declaration—although it occurs more in preschoolers since due to their stage of development adolescents are not aware of sexual abuse until it is explained to them; it also occurs in adolescents with a mental age similar to that of a preschooler; and (e) the withdrawal—when they talk about the abuse and then say it did not happen. There are three basic ones, and we will discuss them briefly.

3.1 Disclosure

Understanding the disclosure process is critical for the investigative process and the results that will lead to protection. There is no single pattern of disclosure. Disclosure occurs along a continuum from denial to non-disclosure, to reluctant disclosure, to incomplete disclosure, and the full recounting of an abusive incident. Some disclose less directly. The interplay of individual characteristics, interviewer behavior, family relationships, community influences, and cultural and social attitudes are key factors in when and how adolescents disclose abuse. Factors that help explain reluctance are age, relationship to the alleged offender, lack of parental support, gender, and fear of the consequences of having said what happened if they do not believe later. On the other hand, late revelation is common (see Ref. [6]).

3.2 Reluctance

Reluctance is when they do not want to (or cannot) talk about what happened. In a published study (see Ref. [20]), it was found that in adolescents, several factors increase reluctance to disclose abuse initially. Research focused on disclosures to adolescent victims of sexual abuse showed that they could anticipate the consequences of disclosure not only for themselves but for others. Adolescents were more aware that disclosure of abuse could involve the presence of child protective services as well as being a catalyst for legal proceedings. They reported that they feared disclosure would dismantle the family unit, negatively affect their parents, or bring negative consequences for the alleged perpetrator. Another peculiarity of reluctance is that adolescents are aware of the stigma and shame surrounding sexual abuse, especially intra-family sexual abuse (which is consistent with the developmental stages described above). Reluctance is also characterized by guilt and, as mentioned above, the fear of not being believed or of being blamed for the abuse. An adolescent survivor of sexual abuse who encounters contempt for

social discourse may react with feelings of scrutiny, guilt, and shame and become extremely sensitive to stigmas, engaging in behaviors of avoidance, silence, and isolation. Fear of stigma and stigmatization is a significant barrier to the quest for help (see Ref. [21]).

3.3 Retractation

Retraction is a broadly recognized phenomenon in cases of child sexual abuse. It is when something is said, and then what has been said is withdrawn. Several factors influence a retraction. For example, when adolescents disclose their victimization and remove themselves from their environment to protect themselves, they may decide to withdraw their accusations. When they recant, it can be a way of trying to put their world back to the way it was before anyone found out about the abuse. This behavior is often misinterpreted by professionals (forensic, clinical, legal) who may prematurely conclude that the abuse never occurred. The adolescents may have wanted the abuse to end, but they never imagined the consequences of disclosure for them and their families. The highest risks for retraction are non-supportive caregiver, vulnerability of the adolescent to adult family influences, age of the victim (the younger the age, the more it occurs), perpetrator in the home, and placement after disclosure [22]. As already mentioned in cognitive theory, adolescents can anticipate what may happen. Thus, the caregiver's reaction (or anticipatory reaction) directly impacts (a) the adolescent's willingness to reveal, (b) the timing of disclosure, and (c) the adult's reaction, which could lead to retraction.

4. Theories: First aid kit to understand and explain the process of “seeing” the “voices”

These theories will help us understand the dynamics of revelation from the “voices” of adolescents. The early experience of an adolescent's relationships could be viewed as a source of behavioral tendencies in addition to personal and social problems. The professionals weave this together with psychological and social understanding [23].

4.1 Psychoanalytic theory

Psychoanalytic theory could be used in the processes of retraction, reluctance, or when there is no congruence of the story with the emotions. It is essential to consider that this theory must be used with care as long as the professional is clear about how to explain the emotional and psychological development of the adolescent. Recognizing that theories are formulated to explain or understand various phenomena is important. Also, it is important to consider that theory is different from knowledge [23]. Theory involves thinking about something, while knowledge is a description of reality. Theory is different from practice. Practice needs theory to use knowledge: If we are going to do something, we need knowledge about the reality around us to act accordingly, but we need theory to help us interpret that reality [23]. Theories are ideas abstracted from experience and observation. In everyday use, theories explain why something happens, and in the case of human behavior, they explain why people behave as they do [24].

This theory was built (by its leading proponents: Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, and Otto Rank, among others) on the premise that unconscious needs or drives, primarily biological and sexual drives, are the central part of human motivation and personality. According to this theory, personality is the product of the struggle between three interacting forces that determine human behavior: the id, the ego, and the superego. However, this perspective chapter will elaborate on the defense mechanisms.

Sigmund Freud was the first to conceptualize defense mechanisms, while Anna Freud described them and expanded her study. In the twenty-first century, this must be adapted to the contemporary, and some defense mechanisms can help us understand the phenomenon of revelation in adolescents. Defense mechanisms (or “defenses”) are considered clinically valuable objects not only within the psychodynamic tradition but also in other theoretical orientations [25]. Defenses mediate the individual’s reaction to emotional conflicts and external stressors. Consider that these mechanisms help relieve the distressing effects of emotions. They are also unconscious, discrete, dynamic, reversible, adaptive, and even creative or pathological [25]. Defense mechanisms can occur automatically, partially, or totally outside consciousness [23, 26, 27]. A solid understanding of defenses can help understand adolescents’ strengths and difficulties. Defenses can range from the most adaptive (humor, altruism, sublimation, and suppression) to the least adaptive (denial, performance, projective identification, and cleavage) (see Refs [25, 26]). Defense mechanisms may be present in the “voices” of adolescents when they narrate (or do not narrate) the experience of abuse. This becomes relevant when a professional listens to an adolescent who, in his revelation, has ups and downs, struggles with their identity, and finds it difficult to express what has happened. This theory can be helpful to both the therapeutic process and judicial processes to explain the reason for late disclosure, retraction, reluctance, and possibly all of the above, with an unfortunately actual probability of never talking. Psychoanalytic theory could explain why adolescents act in one way or another, depending on the context in which they find themselves and how they have developed in their emotional and psychological states.

4.1.1 Anticipation

If adolescents know they are in a difficult situation, they can imagine what it will be like and plan how to deal with it. Therefore, adolescents who receive the support of their loved ones and society could have a triumphant revelation. On the contrary, if they anticipate the debacle, they may decide not to speak or, after having revealed themselves, go to retraction and/or reluctance.

4.1.2 Rationalization

Here is a matter of explaining behaviors or decisions with logical and socially acceptable reasons when, in reality, they are motivated by irrational emotions or desires. This serves to avoid censorship, feelings of guilt or remorse, and disappointment and to protect the positive image they have of themselves. If they had some eroticization, adolescents could mistakenly mistake that they consented to the abuse or that they enjoyed it. If that rationalization occurs, the abuse will not be revealed. If, on the other hand, they understand that the physical reaction is not the cause of the abuse, they could continue with the revelation.

4.1.3 Suppression

It consists of avoiding a thought, feeling, or desire that disturbs the person. It is a motivated forgetting that can be carried out consciously or semi-consciously. It differs from other defense mechanisms, such as repression and denial, since the person is unaware of feelings. In repression, the adolescent can voluntarily recover the thoughts they have tried to forget. At first glance, this is seen quite often. In my experience as a forensic interviewer and as an evaluator of allegations of child and adolescent sexual abuse, this was one of the primary defense mechanisms that were seen. Reluctant adolescents reported that they would not speak up because they were over it or had already forgotten about it. Suppression can be an adaptive defense mechanism in some circumstances, but when it comes to suppressing the experience of sexual abuse, it could have negative consequences on mental health. If internal conflicts are not adequately addressed, repressed emotions can manifest as anxiety, depression, or personality disorders [28, 29].

4.1.4 Reactive formation

It consists of replacing unacceptable thoughts, feelings, or behaviors with opposite ones. In a sexual abuse disclosure, the adolescent may feel angry but may act excessively happy to hide their anger. If the professional cannot anticipate or understand this defense mechanism, this entails a problem. This would disrupt justice for the adolescent because if the professional does not dominate this, he/she cannot defend the case in court. Reactive formation is a way to protect oneself from emotions that are considered dangerously uncontrollable. People who use this mechanism may have difficulty differentiating between thinking and doing. Also, it should be noted that some people laugh when they are nervous (which is a different defense mechanism). I also saw (frequently) this in my role as a forensic interviewer.

4.1.5 Denial

It consists of rejecting or ignoring a reality that is painful or unacceptable. It can be seen in about four facets: rejecting the existence of an unpleasant fact, admitting the fact but denying its consequences, minimizing the importance of a problem, and distorting reality to fit their beliefs or desires. Denial is classic in cases of retraction. The problem with this, when an adolescent is treated for suspected sexual abuse, is that denial can be a temporary solution that partially protects from pain but is not definitive. It can stop the adolescent from making the necessary changes to maintain his/her physical and psychological well-being.

4.1.6 Dissociation

Dissociation is characterized by a breakdown in the integrity of identity, consciousness, and memory functions in response to stressors. It serves as an unconscious defense mechanism [30]. In disclosure, understanding dissociation is crucial when adolescents are giving details. If, at the time of the sexual abuse, the adolescent was dissociating, it is almost certain that he/she did not record in his/her memory what was happening in a way that can easily extract it to conscious memory. The art is in the forensic interviewer's expertise and how it can

be explained in court. In this situation, the ideal is to take the case to an extended evaluation (assessing an allegation of adolescent sexual abuse, psychosocial evaluation, forensic evaluation) rather than relying solely on a recorded forensic interview.

4.1.7 Isolation

It consists of separating thoughts or emotions from their emotional content. An adolescent who has been sexually abused can talk about it coldly and distantly without showing any emotion. If the professional who treats the adolescent does not understand and does not dominate this defense mechanism, he/she could conclude a false negative. It should be taken into account that isolation can be a coping mechanism for anxiety and depression. In court, this type of mechanism must be explained with the extensive literature to ensure that the adolescent is seen as the subject of his or her rights. Although it was possible to analyze the reactions to adolescent sexual abuse with the twenty or so defensive mechanisms that exist, here only focused on what concerns revelation. Each professional is responsible for understanding the dynamics of disclosure and being able to explain why the adolescent's "voice" has different nuances.

4.2 Attachment theory

Under attachment theory (Bowlby, see Ref. [23]), it is possible to understand the reason why adolescents resist involving their caregivers in the story of sexual abuse. The first thing to understand is that there are different attachment styles. These patterns of behavior develop in childhood but reach adulthood based on their experiences with essential caregivers in childhood. One of the key concepts is "tuning." When it is absent, attachment behaviors are seen as disruptive or difficult [23]. If the abuse is by one of their caregivers or their caregivers do not believe in the abuse, the adolescent will feel betrayed and that they were not protected; this is the lack of healthy attachment. The basis of attachment theory is to see how people's behavior is affected by their attachment to other human beings. If, when the adolescent reveals the abuse, he/she manifests himself/herself as distanced from his/her caregivers, and the flag is raised to understand why. It would be natural that people have an innate need to be close to an attachment or figure that helps them maintain their psychological safety as a basis for a broader exploration of the world [23]. Remember that when people feel threatened by a difficulty or danger, their behavioral attachment system is activated, and they manifest proximity-seeking behaviors to achieve closeness with an attachment figure. Any defense mechanisms mentioned above can be activated when this is absent. So, let us not lose perspective that an insecure/anxious attachment style will imply the concern that the loved one will disappear, a situation often characterized as "fear of abandonment" [31]. This is key in retraction, reluctance, or never talking if the adolescents think that if they divulge, they will lose contact with the people they love.

4.3 Theory of mind

It is the ability that allows us to predict, understand, and explain the behavior of others based on what we think or know about the knowledge, beliefs, and desires of

others. Like any maturation process, its development is established according to different milestones or levels progressively reached with age and the complexity of social relationships [32]. Because it functions as a social strategy that allows us to interpret other people's behavior, when they are absent, there are difficulties in noticing events that require imagining what another person is thinking [33]. When adolescents have not developed the theory of mind, professionals must keep in perspective that they will not have the ability to assign attribute mental states (such as wishing, pretending, and believing) to others and not to themselves. Although it begins in early childhood and continues into adolescence, there is individual and cultural variation [34]. Here, the importance of preserving the individuality of each adolescent is highlighted. If an adolescent has developed the theory of mind, what the interviewer wants to hear can come about. The difficulty with this is when there is a lousy interviewer, a biased interviewer, or a persuasive defense attorney facing an adolescent tired of telling his or her story. However, let us look at it from the opposite side when adolescents have not developed the theory of mind. Those interviewing them (including lawyers) may think the adolescent is taking the story as a joke. Something interesting about those who do not have the theory of mind developed is that they can hardly be manipulated to answer questions to which they do not have the answers, so they do not usually guess. This involves executive functions, which allow us to establish, control, correct, and execute an action plan. These cognitive functions are essential for achieving goal-oriented behavior, planning, strategizing, encoding, processing relevant information in working memory, and determining subsequent steps in successive tasks (see Ref. [35]). The inability to understand the intentions of others can make an adolescent more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Another thing to keep in mind is that adolescents diagnosed with autism do not have developed the theory of mind.

4.4 Historical-cultural theory

Lev Vygotsky's historical-cultural theory states that human action, including thought, is mediated by tools and signs that are culturally constructed and socially used. In the conception of the development of the psyche, through the mediation of the word, it is understood that everything is part of the social product, so the functions of the psyche have to do with social changes [36]. The metaphor of constructing meanings would represent the best interpretation of learning. Therefore, the essence of constructivism would be to define learning as a personal construction of meanings based on personal experience. Cultural competence is one of the goals of any forensic interviewer or evaluator. If the professional is culturally competent, they can get the correct information through a culturally sensitive interview. With Vygotsky's theoretical contribution, it can be understood that humans' sense of being, personality, and behavior are formed through meaningful activity directed toward their natural, material, and sociocultural world from an early age. This will be crucial to understanding the revelation after obtaining a good family history assessment. Each individual has a story that is their own, and each family carries its history, secrets, and family traditions that will be transmitted from generation to generation [37]. Therefore, the adolescents not only "carry" their history but also carry with them the history of their ancestors. This leads us to the fact that generational sexual abuse affects the disclosure or non-disclosure of adolescents. With this theory, professionals can explain the possible development lines of adolescents, considering the social situation [38].

4.5 Ecological theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner [39, 40], a leading exponent of this perspective, assumed that individuals affected and were affected by their environments and how this linking of environmental forces in child development depended on environmental factors. Bronfenbrenner stressed that the ecological environment consists of structures nested together, with a developing person at the center of the structure, and that the structures of the systems are interconnected. Therefore, this interconnection affects a person's psychological growth, and their behavior would result from interaction with the environment [41]. Ecosystems can help us understand the dynamics of revelation. This is because contexts at multiple and intersectional levels form individuals. Five levels are highlighted in this theory.

4.5.1 Microsystem

It involves the people and elements of the environment that have direct contact with adolescents suspected of having been sexually abused that influence their lives and whose lives can be changed and/or influenced through interaction with them [42]. Here, the importance of compiling a good track record is again highlighted. The genogram will be ideal.

4.5.2 Mesosystem

It is the system that encompasses the interactions between microsystems, referring directly to the collaboration between the main microsystems [42] of the lives of adolescents who have been involved in sexual abuse. The mesosystem represents the direct links and interactions that occur within microsystems, and these interactions can be healthy or unhealthy and promote or inhibit better function [39–41]. Therefore, the professional must be attentive to the people around the adolescent, their interactions, and the support they may receive. Let us consider that one of the factors of retraction comes from the lack of support from people close to them.

4.5.3 Exosystem

It consists of those systems that affect the development of the individual and in which the individual does not participate (e.g., policies, government, social services, and children's institutions, among others). It refers to the broader formal and informal social structures in which, although adolescents have no influence, they impact their lives, well-being, and development [41, 42]. This layer includes where they receive forensic, clinical, and legal services. Hence, it is essential to be supported at all times so that the revelation can flow and the necessary help can be received. The form of (non)action on the part of the exosystem would put a successful disclosure at risk.

4.5.4 Macrosystem

The general sociocultural context includes the legal framework, cultural values, traditions, and principles. This level also includes various economic and social support types in different living situations [42]. The macrosystem represents the broader cultural context, including social norms and ideologies. To have an impact on individual well-being is necessary to intervene within these varied contexts. For example,

professionals who attend adolescent (at the forensic, clinical, and legal levels) play a key role in increasing or decreasing the psychosocial well-being of these adolescents who make disclosures of sexual abuse. It is in the macrosystem that cultural norms, traditions, attitudes toward social roles, and communication systems are understood. Leaving aside prejudice and adultism [43] would be a big step. So, how important is it to see adolescents as subjects of rights? Well, that is everything. Otherwise, each agency would work on its particular case without making connections between them. Each provides a stratified service and does not see the adolescent as a complete, holistic human being (see Ref. [11]).

4.5.5 Chronosystem

It includes both the chronology and aging of the life of that childhood and their family and considers historical changes in the sociocultural environment [42]. It reflects the evolution of a person over time, which, as Bronfenbrenner [40] stated, always has a temporal dimension. Through the chronosystem, human development can be viewed as a function of the interaction of the systems described above and helps to understand how processes within an individual or a family are affected by conditions outside of microsystems. Understanding the concept of chronosystem is particularly useful in considering the process of rehabilitation that adolescents experience after being abused and being removed from their families for disclosing the abuse. From here, see the importance of how social laws of removal/reunification influence adolescents and how much good or less good they can do to them.

5. Visibility vs. invisibility: The scope in the triangulation of literature

Visibility allows members of invisible groups to be seen and have their “own” voices heard. While visibility can provide individuals with credibility and a sense of authenticity, hypervisibility, and invisibility can be conceptualized as a form of identity-based abuse [44]. Dominant groups make some groups hyper-visible or invisible, and this is often supported by social structure. Hypervisibility can also be understood as “imposed visibility.” Any real or perceived failure can be interpreted as a confirmation of a negative stereotype. Hypervisibility through stigmatizing representations often follows social, cultural, and political invisibility. In the case of invisibility, the individual is not valued or even recognized. Existing institutions, traditions, and norms can create conditions that make some groups feel powerless and voiceless. Their experience is silenced and pushed out of the public space. This is the opposite of strategic invisibility, in which individuals choose to make themselves invisible to reduce the risk of being mistreated. Although visibility is often perceived as desirable in activism and social participation, it can bring more stigma and discrimination (see Ref. [44]). Thus, the most specific way to make a teenager’s story visible is to understand what an adolescent is. Through the “conceptual,” we can apply a *theory* as a set of ideas to explain the retraction and reluctance. However, the *model* is also a simplified representation of the retraction or reluctance to facilitate its understanding. If we saw it from a *perspective*, we could see that particular way of seeing or analyzing the revelation. This is only a third of the visibility. Through the “empirical” approach, we can see the situation across the lenses of practice reported in the studies. However, beware of this; if professionals see it as simple “Evidence-Based Practice [EBP],” they will be limiting the lens. EBPs are limiting if the

professional does not consider when the study was done, the specific population, and its culture; if the lens is fixed, it could fall into a confirmatory bias. However, seeing it as the “practice informed in studies” is letting go and understanding how to apply it to the specific situation of the adolescent the professional is attending. Finally, we have the “normative.” These norms will make those who attend leave aside their biases, judgments, prejudices, and attitudes. It is no longer about what professionals know, study, and learn to attend teenagers; it is also about what rules govern what the professional is doing. Nevertheless, professionals also have to be careful about this; if the norm makes the rights of adolescents invisible, “conceptual” and “empirical” values will be the key to making them visible.

5.1 Conceptual (framework that guides and structures)

When we talk about making it invisible, we are talking about adolescents’ lack of inclusion and participation in the issues that affect them. That includes the lack of incorporation of this group in developing social policies and services that directly impact their lives. The conception of childhood that has permeated social policies inscribes it as a good in the care of another adult who represents and protects it, which leads them to be invisible citizens. The voices of adolescents have been silenced in the essential social aspects that impact them. Their perspectives and aspirations are “made” invisible and denied (see Ref. [43]). However, on the other hand, there is public visibility and iconographic taboo, and the interdictions can be legal, moral, or technical. The iconographic interdiction concerning the identities of the victims, which is of the legal order, corresponds to the taboo created by the prohibition, which we hypothesize is of the sexual order. Cases of sexual abuse involving children and adolescents appear in the press in a constant but not sustained manner; the facts do not become stories. With this type of textuality, visibility begins to emerge, more in dialog with denunciation than with the classic formats of the graphic press (see Ref. [45]).

5.2 Empirical (studies and research)

Biographical approaches play a central role in unveiling these dynamics. They are oriented toward obtaining personal stories to illuminate the complexities of everyday interactions and micro-communicative encounters. Still, they also deal with people’s everyday personal interconnections and contextual and temporally linked stories. Narrative and biographical researchers illustrate the pervasiveness of everyday life storytelling and the complex process of adolescents telling stories on their terms, including how they tell others about immense personal traumas such as incidents of abuse. The concept of “small stories” emphasizes the complexities and contexts of adolescents’ “everyday” storytelling and the interpretation of narratives as “portals” through which researchers enter into the nuances of adolescents’ lived realities [46]. Observation methods, interviews, and writing with adolescents are used in ethnographic approaches. That helps as the analysis focuses on visibility among stigmatized groups of adolescents. Also, the role of the families and communities of belonging is considered, which, although in some cases encourages revelation, in others is the opposite [44]).

5.3 Normative (laws or institutional regulations)

All child and adolescent protection laws must be based on the doctrine of comprehensive protection and the focus on human rights: universality, enforceability,

and participation [47]. Laws must be constantly reviewed to avoid revictimization. When people, governments, or countries fail to protect children and adolescents under the laws that shelter them, it will be difficult to convince the adolescent that she or he is doing the right thing by disclosing his or her victimization. When there are no strong laws regulating agencies that serve the families of adolescents who have experienced sexual abuse, revictimization can be a real one. Laws that deal with child and adolescent sexual abuse must take into consideration the well-being of the children and adolescents involved, as well as that of their families. That is to promote that the interventions do not end up being as or more victimizing than the experience of sexual abuse itself [11]. When the constitutional system fails, the negative psychological, social, legal, and economic consequences left by the victim's relations with the criminal legal system suppose a frustrating conflict between the legitimate expectations of the victim and the institutional reality. It involves a loss of understanding about the psychological and physical act that has caused the criminal act, leaving them desolate and insecure and generating a loss of faith in the ability of the community, professionals, and institutions to respond to their needs (see Ref. [48]). Therefore, making visible the sexual abuse of adolescents is relevant. The scope of visibility has its limits. The situation is made visible without exploiting the adolescent since this could be detrimental to their biopsychosocial well-being. Here, an important role is played between society and the laws. That public space can have a fine line between asserting and violating rights.

6. Biopsychosocial support: What to know to be able to support?

It is important to note that sexual abuse is not only a form of abuse in adolescents. That is usually accompanied by psychological and physical abuse and various forms of abandonment. It is essential to consider the effect that abuse, in general terms, has on the biopsychosocial development of this population to understand the process of disclosure of adolescents. For example, in the guide, *Forensic Mental Health Evaluations When Child Maltreatment Is at Issue* [49] is postulated that evaluators should strive for their interview to have a biopsychosocial basis and an examination of the adolescent's mental state to gain a complete understanding of their functioning, mental health, perception of family relationships, strengths, harmful experiences, and other pertinent factors. On the other hand, a biopsychosocial model can help detect how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) exacerbate pain in adolescents [50]. Psychosocial assessments help to keep the rights of adolescents in focus. Biopsychosocial and environmental factors can protect people and their ability to adapt. So, the professional has to remember (when an adolescent reveals) the temperament of the people involved, family patterns, external supports, the broader social factors in the environment, critical turning points, and planning decisions to respond to them in good form. Thus, when professionals see adolescents in their proper context, they will consider the concepts linked to the psychosocial, physiological, genetic, and evolutionary factors.

7. Human rights-based interventions: The best interests of the adolescent

All types of intervention (forensic, clinical, and legal) must be executed from a human rights perspective. The principle of the best interests of the child and

adolescent must be considered, as well as the need for special protection and immediate attention that preserves the psychophysical integrity of each adolescent involved in an investigation [51]. The main problem in the traditional management of child and adolescent sexual abuse is that the agencies, each with a defined particular role independent of the others, have conceived the figure of the “young victim” as an additional “object” or “element” within their respective investigative processes, to which they resort to satisfy their institutional interests, not to compensate the violation of the human rights of the victimized adolescent. One of the most serious consequences of how services have been articulated to this population is the dehumanization of the adolescent involved, who, after being oppressed through the sexual violence that is understood that he may have suffered, becomes the object of another form of oppression, impotence, but this time with the State as the victimizer [52].

8. Best practices: The basis of what is legally defensible

In the field of child and adolescent sexual abuse, carrying out an ethical intervention becomes an essential foundation of professional practice on the theories, models, and techniques of intervention accepted by the professional community, which can be identified in professional journals, as well as in specialized texts in the field. Having a supervisor with several years of experience can help to maintain best practices. When the work is done independently, peer consultation will be meritorious. Interventions in this field, based on personal perceptions or subjective judgments, would not only constitute an unethical practice but could endanger the lives of the adolescent as well as the well-being of their families. The use of intervention manuals should be based on best practices in the care of juvenile sexual abuse [53]. The basis of a good practice intervention is not only ethically focused but also rights-based, gender-sensitive, and adolescent-centered. This aspect of care is critical to ensuring quality of service to those who have been abused. Care based on best practices contributes significantly to healing and recovery from the trauma of sexual abuse [54].

9. Subjects of their rights: Not objects of either law or adultism

Adultcentrism is a structure of oppression against children and adolescents that establishes, reinforces, and maintains the power of adults over this population group. From this perspective, children and adolescents are approached from the standpoint of incapacity and devoid of their attributes as subjects of rights. Power and issues related to children are established from the adult vision and logic, depriving them of voice, participation, inclusion, and control over their subjectivities and life projects. Adultcentrism operates against the fundamental principles of human behavior professionals by making children’s rights invisible (see Ref. [43]). The capitalist and patriarchal system, coupled with a strong adultism culture, highlights the values that are associated with adulthood (rationality, competence, capacity) and despises any contribution from the world of children and adolescents, and collaborates in sustaining and consolidating that subordinated, oppressed, and marginalized status to which the new generations are condemned [55]. Therefore, if the professional sees adolescents as subjects of rights, they can make interventions focused on children and adolescents, taking into account who they are, their culture, their environment, and how they respond to sexual abuse.

10. Conclusion

For professionals to be able to defend adolescents' cases in court, they must not only dominate the legal processes but also the theories that can be helpful in clarification. The credibility of the adolescent's testimony can hang by a thin thread because of how the processes of revelation take place and the lack of specialization in the theories to explain the phenomenon of revelation and its nuances. If the professional who defends adolescents in court does not dominate the theoretical basis, he/she will not be able to help the judge or jury. As we have seen in this perspective chapter, the use of theory should be focused on the adolescent who has been attending. To serve adolescents, professionals must dominate who adolescents are. Knowing that sometimes they speak... sometimes what they say is not understood by adults... and sometimes, they do not talk. It is essential to know adolescents' stages of development, combined with their culture, to validate their best interests. Professionals have to build a good history in which adolescents' sociohistorical background is made explicit to understand from their "own voice" how the process of revelation takes place. If the basis for reluctance and retraction is unknown, it could fall into false positives or false negatives.

On the other hand, biopsychosocial support will be essential to avoid retraction and promote recovery from the trauma of the sexual abuse received. Knowing the theories will help understand the dynamics, but it will also help present and defend the case in court to assist the trier of fact in making the best decision. When best practices are followed, adolescents are treated as subjects in their own right. The explanation of the theory must be individualized for "the adolescent" and "his/her (individual and proper) revelation" and not in the plural form for "the adolescent" and "the revelations" in general. Those "voices" must be heard from their individuality's essence. Expertise depends on many things, but one of the relevant ones is the audacity to explain. If the professional masters the theories that explain how the disclosure occurs, it is very likely that the court (judge or jury) will listen to "the voice" of the adolescent.

Author details

Freeda Jusino-Sierra
Beatriz Lassalle Graduate School of Social Work, University of Puerto Rico,
Puerto Rico

*Address all correspondence to: freeda.jusino@upr.edu

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Adolescence is one of life's most challenging phases. In a similar vein, dealing with adolescents is understandably difficult for many people, and potentially complicated for some. Nonetheless, adolescents can be surprisingly interesting and exciting to a few. This period is characterised by both opportunities and challenges, marking a sensitive phase for neurological maturation. There is a unique window of vulnerability during adolescence, resulting from an imbalance between rapidly maturing limbic systems, which process emotions and rewards, and the slower development of prefrontal systems responsible for effortful control, creating an inherent mismatch. This book examines how these developmental transitions impact intellect, personality formation, and social skills, offering insights into the neurobiological foundations underlying these significant changes. *Inside the Teenage Mind - Unravelling the Psychology of Adolescence* attempts to penetrate the inner world of adolescents, interpreting their behaviours, emotions, and decision-making processes through a psychological lens rather than moral judgment. Readers should appreciate how rapid physical changes and hormonal developments that facilitate significant learning and adaptation also render adolescents susceptible to environmental influences and psychological distress. Here, an intricate interplay of biological, familial, cultural, and societal influences that shape adolescent experience is decoded through experiments and observations. This book is a scholarly endeavour to synthesise empirical research with conceptual insights, bridging neuroscience, psychology, and psychosocial theory to advance a more nuanced and compassionate understanding.

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