**Growth and Development**

This paper written in my growth and development class has been useful in reminding me of the unique developmental needs of each child. While the paper focuses on gender identity, I believe it can be applied to dealing with student's career identity and personal-social identity development.

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**My Thoughts on Gender Identity and Development**

As I read the two articles about mothers being bullied and harassed by the parents of their young children’s friends, I was shocked by the fear of homosexuality that is so prevalent in today’s society. When blogger Sarah Hoffman discussed the pain that she felt when she realized that her 5-year old son was aware that people would perceive him to be weird because of his preferences, I was not only deeply saddened by her confession, but also very curious as to when will this entire controversy surrounding gay rights and homosexuality finally come to an end. More importantly though, I was disturbed by the fact that a child so young was already conscious of the fact that people would make fun of him for something that he could not control. And another shocking thing that I noticed while reading is that Hoffman failed to mention if any of his fellow classmates gave him any grief over his gender preferences. In other words, these were adults that were being highly judgmental and condescending to a parent that had nothing but her child’s best interests in mind. Needless to say, the responses from the adults in both of these articles were quite unsettling.

Moreover, these readings made me reflect on my personal thoughts about gender identity and development in early childhood. Initially, I honestly thought that I may have been one the parents that wondered why a parent would allow her young boy to dress in a tutu or any other stereotypical feminine outfit. However, once I noticed the error in my thoughts I realized that if young girls have the freedom to imitate their big brother, the star football player for Halloween, and that a young girl’s option to be a tomboy is not precursor to her leading a lesbian lifestyle once she gets older, then why can’t little boys be given that same convenience? Why is it that young, homosexual men are more likely to be taunted and killed for their lifestyle choices than young women? By no means do I believe that homosexual girls should also be subjected to the cruel treatment that the gay men do, but I am curious as to why young boys are unable to explore their preferences in a safe environment.

And why in the world are so many people concerned about a young child’s future sexual orientation? On one hand parents are griping and complaining about the fact that young children have so many technological gadgets that they’ve lost the ability to use their imagination and be creative, while on the other when a child wants to be different and think outside of the box they are met with so much resistance. Also, with the rather new phenomenon of the DL (DL stands for Down-Low; it is a term applied to mainly men that identify as straight, but have sex with other men. These men usually have wives, children, etc.), I even think we should appreciate the fact that these individuals are comfortable enough in their own skin to live the life of their choice publicly, instead of being ashamed about it and putting people at risk. These articles made me so upset when I heard that people were saying that Hoffman was “spreading gay” because she was being supportive of her son. No! It is people’s husbands and boyfriends that are spreading more important things such as STD’s and tearing families apart because they are too ashamed to admit and come to terms with their homosexuality and probably because they lived in hostile environments that didn’t allow them to explore what it was they really enjoyed.

Furthermore, these articles forced me to really think about the origins and basis of
gender identity and preferences. Are we really socialized into these roles? Are they genetic? If my mother and father gave me hot wheels and Tonka trucks would I have been destined to become a tomboy or would my current preferences for all things feminine eventually become obvious? Another thought that stayed with me while I was reading was that I wanted to know more about the connection between gender preference and identification and the development of a child’s sexuality. If I happened to like shopping in stores that are usually considered to be more masculine and have masculine interests is it certain that I would’ve become a lesbian? And if guys that are really in touch with their feminine homosexual because they really like guys or because they think it’s expected of them since everything else they do is considered to have a heavy female orientation?

I believe that there is so much gray area when it comes to topic of gender identity and sexuality. However, the most important theme that has resonated with me is that these issues should not even be considered when children are so young. I am appalled at the fact that so many parents seem to prefer that their children be ANYTHING else in life but gay. So a young boy wants to wear a dress? That’s fine. He grows up to be homosexual? That’s fine too. I’m sure not too many will be surprised and hopefully it wouldn’t change the way people interact with him. So what’s the excuse for the perfect child that’s straight but happens to molest young girls? Or maybe he abuses his wife? What if he gets a young girl pregnant? I guess everyone was too busy being worried about the sexuality of someone else’s child that the neglected the million and one things that could still go wrong if their child does happen to fit neatly into today’s gender norms. In short, parent’s main concern should be to raise productive citizens that are able to contribute and not be a menace to society instead of being overly concerned with whom they decide to sleep with. Because whether a child eventually identifies as boy or girl, straight or gay or anything else in between, there is still much work to be done in a child’s life.