Psychoanalysis And Gender Identity

This essay will look at gender identity in relation to psychoanalysis, and what psychoanalysis has to say regarding those whose gender identity does not conform to their gender roles. Thus providing an explanation to why some people assigned gender does not conform to their gender roles and what psychoanalysis explanation for this is.

What is Gender Identity?

Gender identity can correlate with assigned sex at birth or can differ from it. It depends on the persons own experience and sense of one's identity. A person can be male, female, transgender or gender queer. However, this essay will focus on normative based gender roles such as male and female and transgender people. Furthermore, gender roles or behavior are learned by individuals which correlate or are appropriate to their gender which are determined by prevailing cultural norms.

Transgender People

The term ‘transgender’ is an umbrella term to best describe those individuals whose gender identity or gender role does not conform to typical associations with their biological sex (APA, 2015). Those who identify as transgender are those who feel that their gender identity is not aligned with their biological sex and feel that they are in the wrong gender. Those who feel this way may experience gender dysphoria which is where an individual feels uncomfortable with their sex assigned at birth and experience gender incongruence and may involve a person being discontent with the social or physical aspects of their sex. As a result, they may socially or physically transition. Socially transitioning is more focused on the social aspect of becoming transgender such as coming out and changing one's appearance or name to better suit their gender identity. Physically transitioning is more complex as it involves the process of a person going through the transition of changing their gender to be in accordance with their gender identity this may involve taking hormones or undergoing surgery to achieve the look of their preferred gender (Raypole, 2016). Research suggests that many people are identifying as transgender every year and that the number of people identifying as transgender is increasing every year (Reed, Rhodes, Schofield, & Wylie, 2009). Although there is no robust data on the figure of how many transgender people there are, there is an estimation of there being around 200,000-500,000 transgendered people in the UK (GEO, 2018).

Gender Identity and Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis takes a complex view of identity, it is thought that there are hidden aspects of our identity which are influencers of our actions throughout our lives and that our gender identities are hidden within our unconscious. In Freud’s theory, he looked at the construction of ‘masculinity’ and suggested that a child attempts to make sense of itself through unconscious phantasy. Freud also believed that gender identity is unconsciously constructed through early childhood. Freud’s theory allows us to understand how we create and live out our gendered identities as ‘masculine’ and feminine’ men and women. Furthermore, Freud's psychoanalytic

theory of gender development suggests that gender development takes place during the phallic stage of his psychosexual theory of personality development which occurs between three and six years old.

Freud and Jung’s Idea’s on Gender

Freud proposed in his theory of psychosexual development that all children have an innate desire for their opposite-sex parent which in turn causes a feeling of anger and jealousy to the same-sex parent, this theory was first proposed by him, which he called the Oedipus complex or as proposed by Jung in his Theory of Psychoanalysis, the Electra complex (Halberstadt-Freud, 1998). Within Freud’s theory of psychosexual development two concepts were introduced these being; castration anxiety and penis envy. Castration anxiety was first mentioned by Freud in relation to the Oedipus complex which was to do with the fear of being emasculated and fear of losing or damage to a boy’s genital organ (Jakovljev & Matacic, 2005) because of incestuous wishes towards their mother and having fantasies of killing the father as they felt that they were in rival with them, they also feared that the father is the one who would castrate him (Jakovljev & Matacic, 2005, Taylor, 2016). Thus, because of their castration anxiety boys would then renounce their libidinal cathexis to their mother and begin to identify with their father. In contrast to this Freud believed that that girl’s discovery of the sexual distinction during the phallic stage led them to believe that they were castrated, thus holding her mother responsible for her lack of a penis and as a result would suffer from penis envy for the rest of her life. Overall Freud believed that castration anxiety in boys was what allowed the Oedipus complex to be resolved; In contrast to this Freud believed that it would be difficult for girls to ever get past the Oedipus complex as the two things they desired which are to have a penis or have their fathers child would be difficult to give up. Jung also introduced the same concept in his Theory of Psychoanalysis but called it the Electra complex for girls. He too had the same idea and suggested that during the phallic stage, girls developed penis envy. The discovery of the other sex’s genitals is believed to be the root of where the envy initially starts as they (girls) realize that her father and other men have a penis which is where the girls desire to have a penis initially developed. She would then blame her mother for her lack of penis and alike the Oedipus begins to have incestuous feelings towards the father.

Freud and His Theory on Transgender People

Freud construction of the Oedipus complex on homosexuality was that a homosexual boy would be carrying on identifying with the mother in the absence of a strong father, thus avoiding castration and making a narcissistic object choice (Freud 1905, 1910). Whereas a homosexual girl would then carry on identifying with the father as they desire to have a penis and taking her mother as the object of desire (Person, 1983). From taking this understanding from Freud’s theory on homosexuality the argument of transgenderism may be that if a male or female is unable to pass through the phallic psychosexual development stage, then they would get stuck in the stage which could be an explanation for them becoming transgender. For example the explanation for female to male transgender person would be that their inability to pass through the phallic stage of psychosexual development did not allow them to move past penis envy, thus the envy growing to a point where they decided that their assigned sex at birth was not aligned with their gender identity thus why they might have become transgender. In contrast to this but regarding the same concept boys who become male to female transgender individual’s in Freud’s perspective would be those who were not capable of identifying with their father

hence why they were unable to resolve their Oedipus complex. Similarly, Stoller (1974) theory also believed that it was important for boys to disidentify and overcome their identification with their mothers and begin to identify with their fathers for them to be able to achieve masculinity.

Homey and Jones

Additionally, Freud viewed masculinity as the innate or natural gender however; other theorists such as Horney and Jones disagreed with Freud's ideas and put forth their own theories on gender. Horney and Jones both disagreed with Freud in masculinity being the innate gender as they suggested that femininity was the primary gender. In a Freudian perspective, girls would turn to their father as they believed that their mother was the reason for them not being adequately equipped and not having a penis. Horney believed that girls having incestuous feeling towards their father or turning to their father is attribute to innate femininity as they have heterosexual feelings towards the other sex (their father) and suggested it was the awareness of the vagina that these feelings arose and not from the disappointment of the lack of penis like Freud suggested. Additionally, Jones (1935) supported Horney's notion that having a libidinal attachment to the father in the Oedipus complex was developed out of innate femininity. However, one may question Freud, Horney & Jones implications in psychoanalysis as Stoller (1968) study suggested that with boys and girls who were blind and had absences of their genitals were both found to have gender lines in correspondence with their biological sex. Thus suggesting that gender differentiation is not primarily due to the derogative of gender awareness or perception of the sexual distinction like earlier theorist suggested. Additionally, other theorists such as Stoller also disagreed in the male state to be one's natural state and current research also contradicts Freud's theory as we now can presume from Stoller's suggestions that it is the female state which is the natural state.

More on Transgender Theories

As earlier mentioned Stoller also agreed to the fact that a boy must overcome his identification with his mother and begin to identify with his father in order to achieve masculinity (Stoller, 1975). In addition to this, transgender identity issues are seen to be stronger in males and it is found to occur earlier (Person, 1983). Furthermore, signs of femininity in boys can be seen as early as a year. Whereas, masculinity in girls is rarely come across before three to four years of age. It often doesn't come to much surprise when boys have issues with their development due to femininity however for girls this is not so true (Greenson, 1968; Person, 1974). Development issues in boys may be more predominate due to the fact that if Stoller's assumptions are correct then we now know femininity is the natural state which in Stoller's opinion would make Freud's assumption of the male state being the innate gender wrong. Therefore with the knowledge of Stoller's theory it is understandable why males may be more prone to becoming transgender or homosexual as femininity is the natural state, thus in a psychoanalytic perspective if the dis-identification with a transgender boy's mother is not made and identification with their fathers not achieved than a boy will be more prone to becoming transgender in the future. Additionally, boys who live in families where there is no father figure would be more prone to becoming transgender as they don't have a man in the house or father figure to look up to as a father figure and to identify with thus there femininity becoming predominately stronger in the boy. Overall, boys are more prone to becoming transgender as it is easier for girls as they don't need to dis-identify with their mothers whereas the boys do in order to achieve the degree of masculinity. However, there is no evidence for the 'masculine or

‘feminine’ state being the natural state and that gender is innate like Horney and Jones proposed, yet it is important to take into consideration that femininity is found to occur in males earlier and more frequently than in girls (Person, 1983).

Overall in this essay, we illustrated what is it to be transgender and how a transgender person may experience feelings of dysphoria which is associated with their feeling of discontent with the social or physical aspect of their gender. We also looked at theorist in relation to what they had to say and what their opinion was on gender. Overall we were able to distinguish the differences in psychoanalysis on theorist suggestions or beliefs on gender in relation to boys and girls and their opinion on what gender was the natural or ‘innate’ gender. Freud suggested that masculinity was the natural gender, whereas Stoller believed that it was femininity that was the natural state in both boys and girls and theorist such as Horney and Jones also believed that femininity was the ‘innate’ gender or state. Due to Stoller’s theory on gender identity and the matter of boys showing femininity from as young as one year old, one may question the validity of Freud’s theory and question whether or not masculinity is the natural or innate gender. Additionally, due to lack of research and no robust evidence or data regarding the topic, there is no conclusion for which gender is the innate or natural gender or whether there even is an innate or natural gender in male and female boys and girls. However, from a scientific biological perspective all human individuals chromosome combinations begin their development from the same starting point which is as a female chromosome, for example, a female chromosome is XX which is how human individuals start off, however, a boys chromosome will then become XY (Pardue & Wizemann, 2001). Therefore, we can assume that from a biological perspective theorist who believed that femininity is the innate or natural gender could be correct but this perspective is solely based on a biological perspective.

Therefore, based on the biological perspective and theorist perspective on gender it could be inferred that femininity is the innate or natural gender as there is more evidence for femininity than for masculinity being the innate or natural state of gender. It is also important to consider the fact that girls need not dis-identify with their mothers as that is their gender where as boys need to disidentify with their mothers and look to their fathers and be able to identify with them in order for them to achieve masculinity. Furthermore, we were also able to find out in theorist opinions such as Freud, Jung and Stoller how an individual may become transgender and it was found that many theorists had similar opinions and believed that individuals who become transgender were due to with the concept of identification and dis-identification. Therefore regarding theorist idea’s for one to become transgender it is due to them not being able to dis-identifying with their mother’s during the phallic stage and in relation to girls it is due to them not being able to identify with their mothers and continuing to identify with their fathers.

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