Genderism Psychology Theories within Modern Society

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Abstract

This essay identifies and discusses some of the factors based on Genderism Psychology theories that may affect physical and psychological development of an individual; it then considers the effects on the family and a wider society. The focus for this work is to use a selection of theorists and their theories to demonstrate social conflict between gender, age and sexual orientation. This includes the challenges which are situated by society and how consequences of an individual’s behaviourisms can cause a person to reshape their personality in order to fit into what is considered normality. As a result of using a correspondence of theories from a variety of theorists it supported that sociology can affect behaviour. Therefore it can develop negative outcomes in relation to the impact behaviourism can cause on an individual's childhood. By the use of comparing and contrasting the different theories it can be determined how a person would react to conflict as they age into adolescence and adulthood based on genderism and sexuality.

Key words: Genderism, psychological development, social influence, behaviourisms, behaviourist theorists.

Introduction

The evolutions of humanity’s behaviourisms are directly linked towards how individuals develop socially, mentally and physically throughout their life span. The psychodynamic approach, which corresponds with Erik Erikson’s Eight Stages of Man (Beckett and Taylor, 2010) implies that humanity moves through stages which conflicts between biological and sociological expectations resulting in adjustment dilemmas. There are a variety of factors which contribute to social influences and behaviour including gender, sexuality and age and how these elements, for an individual, can be tailored into
social acceptance and how these aspects highlight how sociology can affect behaviour. Theorist Sigmund Freud who believed the human personality was split within three stages, which Erik Erikson later expanded on (Fleming, 2004), speculates how an individual acts when the three stages are equally balanced or unbalanced therefore reflecting on the behaviour towards social difficulties. The speculation of how sociology can affect behaviour can be explored by using several theories and sources which have observed behaviour changes due to problems within social interventions and what is considered to be a form of normality in society (Boyd, 2007).

**Genderism**

Society has an impact on a person’s behaviour that continues from childhood into adulthood. Bernal and Knight (1993) state that adolescence is the more noticeable stage where an individual begins to adapt and learn their identity which could result in role confusion. This theory is supported by Becket and Taylor (2010) who identified Erik Erikson’s Eight Stages of Man and the characteristics an individual may present during that age period. It could therefore be argued that a person’s identity has been shaped since their birth into childhood and that by adolescence they are already the person they were determined to become. It is therefore that person’s nature to how they developed and their gender does not influence their social acceptance but how they were nurtured therefore implying that the gender identity of a child was determined by the child’s upbringing, surrounding environment, and the way the child was treated during growth (Bader, 2014).

It has been found that children are very aware of the importance placed on the social category of gender, and highly motivated to discover what is for boys and what is for girls (Fine, 2014). The majority of the human population is stereotyped based on their gender and what social expectancy they should have; this can include employment, clothing and behaviours (Blackstone, 2003). This stereotypical interpretation begins at the birth of an infant; a male infant will be presented with blue toys, clothes, materials and characteristically masculinity influenced toys such as cars, trains, workshop benches and tools, whereas female infants are typically presented with quite the opposite. As the child grows and develops they become part of the stereotypical gender role and learn to recognise what is considered the normal practice and play for their gender.

**Discussing Theorists**

Edward Thorndike was a behaviourist theorist who first began the development of the law effect which was later expanded on by Skinner (1938) who enhanced the theory, later naming it Operant Conditioning as interpreted by Mcleod (2007). This approach is used subconsciously by the majority of people, especially those raising children, as this theory is based on reinforcing certain behaviour by substituting actions with consequence.
In relation to Erik Erickson’s Eight Stages of Man stated by Hensch, Shaffer and Kipp (2009), when a child reaches the age of six years they will start developing and experiencing the emotions in relation to initiative and guilt. This would have an impact on their behaviours regarding their gender roles in society. By this stage the child will be exploring their own activities and adjusting to what they believe is right and wrong. This will include what they feel they can or cannot achieve by their gender.

Demanding too much of the child can begin to affect their cognitive development causing feelings of guilt instigating a change in their behaviour (Bussey and Bandura, 1999). Beckett and Taylor (2010, p.35) stated that Erik Erikson expressed how “unfavourable reactions from others may cause feelings of inadequacy and inferiority”. Both theorists specialised in the psychodynamic approach; this is where Freud developed his three areas of the human personality. The super-ego which influences morality, the ego that focuses on reality and the human conscious and the ID which is the subconscious part of the human mind that does not have concern over ethics and indulgences in sexual pleasure (Berg, 2003).

Jean Piaget was a theorist who studied the human mind and was especially interested in younger children’s ability to develop mentally. He was intrigued by children’s thought progression and how they would give wrong answers to perfectly logical questions (McLeod, 2009). In order to understand the children’s thought process he developed four stages to understand a child’s state of mind. In accordance with Piaget’s theories of cognitive development, the first stage starts from 0-18 months where he states a child’s reactions are all sensory and develop their knowledge from their surrounding environment by their senses alone. The pre-operational stage, which is based around 2-7 years suggests that children of this age still cannot think logically therefore use language, symbols and words in order to recognise their surroundings. By the ages of 7-11 years the child should have a clear understanding of logic as long as they are able to see and touch however cannot engage in logical arguments, this is the third stage and known as concrete operational. Lastly, formal operational is basically being able to understand logic in all its forms and this usually begins from 11 years and beyond (Learning Theories and Models Summaries, 2014).

The cognitive theory is the expansion of awareness and realisation however it is believed that the development of knowledge is a spontaneous process, tied to the whole process of embryogenesis (Piaget, 2006) stating that knowledge is in fact nature and learning is nurtured as it is provoked by everyday occurrences and situations.

William Reiner’s Research
As both theories support each other it can be suggested that sexuality and gender are both nature. This theory can be supported by a study, which was conducted by a researcher named William Reiner (2000) at John Hopkins Children’s Centre. During this study Reiner followed the birth and lives of fourteen male children who were born with normal XY chromosomes and male genitals however without a penis, a rare genetic defect called cloacal extrophy. Despite the infants still having normal male hormones the parents of these children opted for reconstructive surgery rendering the male children to appear female instead. It was found in these children that between the ages of 5 and 16 the reassigned female children had eventually reassumed their male identities. All the subjects in the study still showed typical male characteristics throughout their lifespan despite being raised female (Hopkinsmedicine, 2014).

These studies suggest that male gender identity is directly related to normal male patterns of male hormone exposure in utero. These children demonstrate that normal male gender identity can develop not only in the absence of the penis, but even after the removal of testicles or castration at birth, and unequivocal rearing as female (Bader, 2014). This transformation can have a wide effect to society and family causing confusion and frustration. If the female child has a more significant interest in the colour blue rather than the stereotypical pink for a female child then that child may become the subject of demands and disapproval by society resulting in behavioural changes in order for that child to feel more accepted, however this could result in insecurity. The emotional changes could be a result of an imbalance of Freud’s three personality stages. The individual’s super-ego can become dominant potentially causing them to feel neurotic resulting in anxiety and depression.

Gender Roles

In connection to the theories, it states gender roles can therefore be a result of genetic determinism, however the debate about sexuality is still an ongoing factor over whether this is caused by the environment or an individual’s genotype (Biederman, 2014). An individual’s masculinity and femininity can become challenged by their relationships, especially those with an age gap or same sex relations. An individual’s sexuality can cause disruption in society, same-sex couples must sometimes adapt to conditions that are hostile to or devalue their relationships. These include the psychological effects of political campaigns against same-sex marriage (APA, 2014). The impact this can have on an individual is immense and can have an effect on their physical and physiological development. Society’s behaviour towards homosexuality has changed a lot through the years as it was illegal in the UK until 1967 and still is in many countries. Same-sex partnerships have become legalised in the UK and the USA, however despite these laws these types of relationships are still targeted negatively (Pew Research Centre, 2011).

Adolescence, according to Becket and Taylor (2010) is when the person will begin to identify with their gender role followed by intimacy and isolation through early adulthood. These factors are consistent with how society can make an individual with
different sexual orientation feel due to purposely being alienated causing the individual to become vulnerable. This type of behaviourism can be directly linked to the humanistic approach although this approach is rejected by behaviourist and psychodynamic theorists. The humanistic approach centres on being able to have free expression and intentionality. McLeod (2014) states that Carl Rogers implied that an individual's behaviour is connected to their inner feelings and self-concept. The free will of an individual in society who is against gay rights stems directly on themselves and is not based on any learnt behaviour or personality traits. If a person is denied the right to express their sexuality freely due to not fitting into what the society sees as acceptable, then their well-being will without a doubt become at risk; including depression, anxiety and suicidal tenancies (CDC, 2014).

Gender roles and sexuality are connected closely together and can both be discriminated against. Gender categorisation is automatically placing an individual in a set stereotyped by their sex. As the child develops and reaches an age where operant conditioning is related to punishment and consequently they may begin to feel unfulfilled by their gender therefore relating to the opposite sex by cross dressing or the desire to act like their different-sex parent (Blakemore, Berenbaum and Liben, 2009). Although the humanistic theory can explain the intolerance society has towards certain members of the public it does not explain why this behaviour originated in the beginning therefore debating whether this sort of behaviour began from a single stimulus. This is an example of classic conditioning, first experimented on by Pavlov by studying the salvation in dogs when presented with food and the sound of a bell (Pavlov, 1960). This shows a direct link between a natural response and a stimulus.

In relation to how a response is stimulated if a family are generally homophobic then this behaviour would have begun and been learnt throughout the generation of the family or friends. Companionships can be a lead cause in behaviour changes especially if an individual is bullied or peer pressured into doing something they would not usually do; an example of this could be indulging in a relationship the person does not feel comfortable with, usually with a different sex partner as this is what society considers normal. This type of peer pressure could be considered intimidating therefore that individual could show indications of personality and behaviour changes due to feeling vulnerable because of their social circle.

Conclusion
The impact on gender, sexuality and age can accumulate together and be linked through several theories. These can range from behaviour being genetic, learnt through environmental factors or simply by free will. The effectiveness of sociology reflecting behaviourism is easily portrayed and certain social dilemmas can represent that and they can all accompany each other. It can be concluded that different individuals will react with different mannerisms when confronted with a sociologic predicament; these behaviours can affect a person’s life, wellbeing and future. Although gender roles, sexuality and age can be closely linked, they can all demonstrate different methods of behaviour changes that are relevant to how an individual reacts to the problem that concerns them. Therefore, the reflection of an individual’s community and how they are treated by society will have an impact on their actions, whether these actions have been compelled by rebelling, mental health or vulnerability caused by the society or the fear of being alienated.

References

