

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER

I. Gender identity perspectives: PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORIES

- Gender identity
- Gender identity as psychological achievement
 1. Freud
 - Identification with same-sex parent
 - Healthy adult development = disidentification with mother
 2. Chodorow
 - Critical of Freud
 - Culturally bound
 - Male-biased
 - Gender differences stem from different ego boundaries
 - Females: similarity, connection
 - Males: dissimilarity, separation, “not feminine”
 - Consequences
 - Women more secure in their gender identity
 - Masculinity in opposition to femininity leads to devaluation of women

- Women prefer connection; men prefer separation/distance

3. Contributions

- Gender and sexual orientation is accomplished

4. Criticisms

- Links gender identity and sexuality
- Largely untestable
- Culturally and historically grounded
- Reinforces stereotypes and notion of difference

II. COGNITIVE THEORIES

- Assumptions
 1. Individuals use categories to understand their social environment
 2. Human cognitive capacity is limited
 3. Reduces amount of effort needed for interaction
- Schema – cognitive structure (or “lens”) that helps people assimilate and organize perceptions

A. Gender-Schema Theory

- Gender differentiation is the result of gender schemas
- Gender schemas
 1. make us ready to interpret incoming stimuli in a way that is consistent with the gender schemas that we have
 2. provide a mechanism by which individuals can compare themselves to prototype
- Why is gender such a central category for thinking about others?
 1. one of the first learned
 2. easily discernable

3. centrality to social organization

- Other qualities of gender schemas
 1. gender polarization
 2. androcentric
 3. heterosexuality sub-schema

E. Consequences – why do we care?

1. easily activated
2. direct attention – see consistency
3. understanding -> behavior -> stereotype confirmation

F. Inevitable?

1. control them
2. change them