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Beverly Fagot and Carrie Rodgers

GENDER SOCIALIZATION. Identification theories, social learning theories, and social-cognitive developmental theories will be discussed as they relate to gender socialization.

Grand Theories of Gender-Role Socialization: Identification Theories

In the Freudian view, identification is the psychological mechanism by which children acquire complex sets of both behaviors and beliefs through the incorporation of the personality of another person into their own. To the extent that children identify with their same-sex parent, identification is the process by which children incorporate their parents' gender-role behaviors into their own identity system (Freud, 1933/1964). As a consequence, and as long as women and men engage in different patterns of behaviors and roles, girls and boys will be motivated to acquire different complexes of behaviors, attitudes, mannerism, and goals.

Over the past seventy years, Freud's ideas have been reworked into a number of modified theories differing from one another primarily in terms of the psychodynamic processes assumed to underlie and motivate the identification process. For example, Freud argued that fear of castration and the Oedipus conflict motivated little boys to identify with their fathers. More recently, feminist psychodynamic theorists such as Chodorow (1978) argue that gender awareness and gender identity motivate children to identify with their same-sex parent.

It is very difficult to either prove or disprove either the existence of identification or its power in the socialization process. Social learning theorists, in particular, have questioned the need for a global construct such as identification to explain behavior. Clinical theorists disagree and cite case studies and other clinical evidence to support their point of view (e.g., Fast, 1984). The continuing heat of this debate is a testament to how difficult it is to use scientific methods to study such covert and broad psychological constructs as identification.

Grand Theories of Gender-Role Socialization: Social Learning Theories

Cognitive social learning theorists (e.g., Bandura, 1977) argue that gender-role behaviors are learned by reinforcements (rewards and punishments) and observational learning.

Reinforcement. Learning theorists suggest that children are rewarded differentially by their parents and their society for exhibiting behaviors appropriate to their gender role. As a result, gender-appropriate behaviors take on greater value for the child and are exhibited with greater frequency. Reinforcements also inform girls' and boys' expectations regarding which behaviors are likely to yield either rewards or disapproval and rejection. Anticipated rewards and punishments, in turn, influence whether or not they engage in particular behaviors (Ruble & Martin, 1998). To the extent that gender becomes an important cue regarding which behaviors will be rewarded and which will be punished, females and males learn to expect different consequences for the same behaviors.

Finally, rewards and punishments shape the patterns of interpersonal behaviors and attitudes found among adults (Deaux & Major, 1987). Females learn not to be assertive in their interactions with males. Males learn that they should be the initiators of intimate relations and that they should engage in risky behavior to impress their peers. Girls learn that success in life is a successful husband who can take care of her and her children. Boys learn that success is a good job and an attractive female partner. These attitudes then shape the goals and aspirations of boys and girls as well as the types of interaction patterns they are comfortable with as adults.

Modeling and Observational Learning. Social learning theorists also suggest that individuals learn by watching the behavior of those around them (models) especially if the models are reinforced for their behavior. But individuals do not imitate all of the behaviors they observe. Instead, individuals are more likely to imitate the behavior of someone of their own sex than of someone of the opposite sex (Bandura, 1977).

Extensive empirical evidence exists to support the importance of reinforcement and observational learning in gender-role socialization (Ruble & Martin, 1998). Peers in particular provide strong reinforcement for gender stereotypic behaviors (Maccoby, 1998).

Grand Theories: Social-Cognitive Developmental Theories

Social-cognitive developmentalists argue that children play an active role in their own socialization (e.g., Kohlberg, 1966; Ruble & Martin, 1998). That is, children are motivated to learn gender roles because they want to master the demands of their culture in order to become "good" members of their society. Advocates of the social-cognitive perspective believe that early in life children learn that people can be classified as either females or males. They also learn that they, themselves, are either a female or a male. At this point most children incorporate their gender into their identity (their sub-

jective view of whom they are). Once the knowledge of gender and gender identity emerge, social cognitive theorists believe that children begin to use gender as a social category. That is, they organize much of the social information available to them according to gender. In keeping with their active view of the child, these theorists assume that children create these categories and seek out the information needed to fill out the content of each category (that is, male and female). In building up the content of these categories, children are assumed to use all available information.

Having formed these gender-role categories, children then strive to become like the categories they have created. They imitate behaviors they assume to be important characteristics of their gender and adopt attitudes congruent with their image of a "good" boy or girl. For social-cognitive theorists, this process of monitoring one's own behavior is the crux of gender-role acquisition. Ample empirical evidence supports these assumptions and predictions (Ruble & Martin, 1998).

Developmental Changes

Social-cognitive theorists believe that children's understanding of gender roles and scripts is tempered in part by their level of cognitive development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1996). The quality and rigidity of these concepts change with the child's age. For example, because 3-year-olds are very concrete in their thinking and because they tend to overgeneralize newly discovered facts, they hold very rigid beliefs regarding gender roles (e.g., doctors simply cannot be women, and nurses simply cannot be men). In addition, because beliefs and behaviors are not well integrated during the preschool years, children's behaviors are likely to be more under the influence of direct reinforcement contingencies than gender-role schema.

Similarly, social-cognitive theorists suggest that gender-role transcendence (overcoming one's gender stereotyped notions of appropriate behavior for males and females and overcoming one's identity with the traditional gender role) depends on cognitive abilities not common in individuals prior to the adolescent and adult years. Most individuals do not develop the cognitive capacity to imagine new social orders until they reach adolescence. At this point, adolescents are capable of questioning the validity of traditional gender roles and can begin to modify their own gender-role identity. Whether they will engage in this questioning and reevaluation depends on the social environment in which they live. Social-cognitive developmentalists assume that change in social-cognitive structures depend on both cognitive development and the necessary social stimuli. Social-cognitive structures will change only to the extent that the information in the social environment is incompatible with the existing social schema. Consequently, individuals will continue to hold stereo-

typed gender-role schemas until they have both the cognitive capacity to imagine a different schema and the opportunity to observe examples of gender-role transcendence. In addition, it is unlikely that individuals will seriously consider the alternative unless encouraged to do so by their social groups. If the individual lives in a culture that has well-defined gender roles and rigid rules governing behavior, then she or he will develop rigid gender-role concepts as a young child and these concepts are likely to remain rigid throughout the individual's life. In contrast, if the individual lives in a society with more egalitarian gender-role prescriptions, then gender-role concepts should become less rigid and more tolerant of variation as the person grows older.

But even in the optimal social environment, this process of change and reevaluation may not proceed smoothly. Eccles and Bryan (1994) suggested that there may be times in people's development when individuals cling to more rigid views of their world. Early adolescence is likely to be such a time because individuals are forced by social and physical changes to move from a largely sex-segregated social system into a heterosocial world. They must learn new ways of interacting and must establish new social hierarchies based on popularity with members of the opposite sex. To cope with these changes, early adolescents may cling to the rigid ideas they acquired early in life about male-female interactions. Furthermore, society may increase its pressure to conform to gender-role stereotypes. But, as individuals gain confidence in their new social roles, as they gain the cognitive skills necessary to imagine a new social order, and if they are encouraged to question traditional role and values by their peers and other key socializers, the process of derigidification should begin again in later adolescence.

[See also Gender Roles.]

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Jacquelynne S. Eccles

GENDER STEREOTYPES. See Stereotypes.

GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY AND PHILOSOPHY.

The philosophical foundation for the family therapy movement that rose to prominence in the 1970s under the influence of the anthropologist Gregory Bateson was provided by General Systems Theory (GST). The philosophical legacy of GST remains alive within family therapy, which is often called *systemic* or *systems therapy*, terms that makes the influence of GST explicit. Family systems theorists extended and applied certain principles derived from GST, namely, holism, circular or cybernetic causality, and an epistemology that eliminated the distinction between the observer and the observed.

Definition and Scope of GST

The biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy is credited with formulating GST. In *General Systems Theory* (New York, 1968), as in his earlier articles, he defined a system as "sets of elements standing in interaction" (p. 38), and he set the goal of GST as the search for "those principles which are valid for 'systems' in general" (p. 32). In their edited volume *General Systems Theory and Psychiatry* (Boston, 1969), psychiatrists William Gray, Frederick Duhl, and Nicholas Rizzo emphasized how GST seeks general structural "isomorphisms" (or corresponding parts) among systems of all sorts. They defined GST as "a new approach to the unity-of-science problem" (p. 7), although their focus on mental health led them to seek isomorphisms among "biological, behavioral, and social phenomena and sciences" (p. 37). James G. Miller, who coined the term "behavioral science" in 1949, attempted to develop an interdisciplinary or "general theory of behavior" and then a "general living systems theory."

Doctrine of Holism

GST advances a holistic rather than a reductionistic approach to the scientific study of all systems. Von Bertalanffy specified that the whole is not reducible to the sum of its parts, and he led other systems theorists toward an "organismic approach" that emphasized such concepts as wholeness, growth, differentiation, integration, and hierarchical order. According to Gray, Duhl, and Rizzo, the goal of GST was to find the "organizing relationships themselves that result from dynamic interaction and make the behavior of parts different, when studied in isolation, than when studied within the whole" (p. 11). James Miller similarly claimed that the state of each element in the system is determined by the state of the other elements in that system. Gregory Bateson also expressed this concern when he emphasized the search for "the pattern which connects," a phrase echoed by many family systems theorists and therapists in the 1980s.

The general systems theorists' holistic focus on pattern, relationship, order, information, and organization had close ties to developments in the discipline of cybernetics, which informed their thinking. According to systems theorist and family therapist Bradford Keeney, Norbert Wiener, Warren McCulloch, Heinz von Foerster, Gregory Bateson, and John von Neumann were among the scientists involved in a series of meetings in the 1940s that came to be titled "Feedback Mechanisms and Circular Causal Systems in Biological and Social Systems." Feedback is a key concept of cybernetics, which the mathematician Norbert Wiener, in *Cybernetics* (New York, 1948), defined as "the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal" (p. 19). (W. Ross Ashby was also influential in defining this new discipline.) Cybernetics examined how the output of a system is fed back into the same system in the form of information or input that regulates the (functional) pattern or organization of the system as a whole.

Circular Causality, Stability, and Change

Systems as wholes were said to maintain themselves through homeostatic or self-regulatory mechanisms involving circular or cybernetic feedback loops. Thus, traditional linear, cause-effect (A → B) sequences came under attack as an erroneously reductionistic way to understand the nature of systems as wholes. Von Bertalanffy emphasized this in saying that the problem of (living) systems consists in the interaction of many variables; simple linear, one-way, cause-effect sequences do not apply because of the goal-directed or teleological nature of those systems. William Gray and Nicholas Rizzo, in *General Systems Theory and Psychiatry* (Boston, 1969), linked cybernetics, information theory, and GST when they said that the "most fundamental property