Influence of Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory Regarding the Transgender Narratives in suppression of Transgender Identities in the Early Adolescence Age

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Abstract
The purpose of the current article is to review identity development of personality in the early adolescent age. To accomplish this task, identity development in childhood is analyzed by utilizing Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory of development. Through this study the researcher found that society plays a major role in shaping and suppressing identities, especially the deviant ones. The article explains how the transgender identity is suppressed or masked in early childhood age to fit in the ‘normal’ society.

Keywords: Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory, Transgender, Early Adolescence Age, Society, Identity.

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Introduction
A child’s sexual orientation and societal influence is perhaps the most debated topic in psychology. Sigmund Freud formulated the theory of psychosexuality with reference to the mind state and stages through which the child attains adulthood. Freud in 1905 proposed that the psychological development of a child takes place in a series of fixed psychological stages: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. These stages represent libido, which is roughly translated as sexual drives or instincts. It happens at various parts of the body. “Freud believed that life was built around tension and pleasure.” (“Chapter 10 Notes: Development Across the Life Span”) Freud also believed that all tension was due to the build-up of libido (sexual energy) and that all pleasure came from its discharge.

Freud used the term sexual in a very general way to mean all pleasurable actions and thoughts. Psychosexual development of a human being is through which the sexual energy accumulates and is discharged as we mature biologically. The first five years of an infant is said to be crucial to the formation of adult personality. The id must be controlled in order to satisfy social demand; this set up a conflict between wishes and social norms. The ego and superego develop in order to exercise this control and direct the individual to fit into the societal norms.

There are conflicts in the process of development of a child from its infancy to adulthood. Each psychosexual stage is associated with a particular conflict that must be resolved before the individual can successfully advance to the next stage. Each conflict’s resolution requires the use of sexual energy and the more energy expended at a particular stage, the more important characteristics of that stage remain with the
individual as he or she matures psychologically. To substantiate this point, Freud uses the example of military troops on the march. As the troops advance, they are met by opposition or conflict. If they are successful in winning these conflicts and oppositions, then most of the troops (libido) will advance to the next stage. If the stage is not completed successfully, the child becomes fixated on that particular erogenous zone and either over- or under-indulges once he or she becomes an adult.

The surrounding of the child has a very deep influence on his or her mental development process. The psychosexual theory focuses mainly on the binary concept of sexuality or is more concentrated upon the heteronormative society. Thus, the deviation from the standard norms of accepted form results in stigma. The child will be labelled as abnormal or will be considered as a victim of behavioral disorders. As a result the signs of deviant sexuality is suppressed and is made to change so that the child is fit to be a ‘normal’ one in the society.

The movie The Danish Girl and the book Lili: A Portrait of the First Sex Change gives a glimpse of the protagonist’s childhood experience which reinstates the above point to be true. In the movie, when Einar aka Lili’s wife asks about the previous abnormal sexual encounter, the protagonist narrates his childhood experience. “It was that boy Hans, back in Vejile. She fell for him. He kissed her. But then my father came in and smacked Hans down.”(Hooper, 48:22). The feminine identity of Einar got suppressed and it got fixated as a memory. Later it was never discussed, and the parents never bothered to find out why their son was dressed up as a girl that day. The child was forced to accept the parents’ wish. Thus, the desire of his original self-remained in his subconscious mind.

The above instance shows the influence of society upon the individual development and the standardization of sexual orientation and individual identity.

Methodology

Erik Erikson modified Freud’s theory by emphasizing social nature of development than its sexual nature. “Freud believed that personality is shaped only in childhood whereas Erikson suggested that personality development takes place all through the life.” (“9.2 Lifespan Theories - Psychology | OpenStax”) Erikson suggested that how we interact with others is what affects our sense which he called as the ego identity. Erikson proposed that in each stage of our life there is a psychosocial task that we must complete in order to feel a sense of competence to advance later in life. He formulates eight stages of development which each individual should go through in order to complete his or her lifespan. At each stage of an individual there is a task or a conflict. The successful completion of each developmental task results in a healthy personality and competence. Failure in these tasks or conflicts leads to the feeling of inadequacy.

An infant of twelve months showing unpredictable anxiety and fear when exposed to an unfamiliar surrounding is an example of such conflicts. Infants are dependent upon their caregivers; these caregivers play an important role in formulating a sense of security and trust. Here trust versus mistrust is the outcome of the conflict. Unresponsive caregivers who ignore the baby’s needs engender the feelings of anxiety, fear, and mistrust. Their baby may see the world as unpredictable.

Now, to substantiate it more, the instances from the movie as mentioned above add more to the fixation or inadequacy of the protagonist in completing his sense of sexuality in childhood. The little girl became a sense of fantasy or repressed sexuality in the mind of the child. In the beginning chapters of the book Lili: A Portrait of the First Sex Change, the protagonist describes a scene from the childhood. It was an interval time when one of his girl classmates had put her hat on the head of Einar just for fun. “Doesn’t look like a proper girl?” she cried, and my comrades laughed with me.”
His Latin teacher caught Einar and he was thrashed furiously for this nonsensical activity in class. There ended his childhood memory of feminine misjudgment and later on in his adolescent years he was like the rest of the boys. From the above description it is clear that Einar’s feminine side got suppressed and he was forced to accept his identity as male. “For the rest I was in the thick of all the fights. I deliberately displayed special daring. Many bruises were the result of this ambition.” (Elbe location 677). Here the protagonist or the victim struggles to overcome his inner sexual self in order to survive in the „normal“ society. Erikson’s theory was an extension of Freud’s of psycho sexual and psycho analytic theory which is formulated on the basis of societal influence on individual development. The development of an individual is linear in nature but circular in terms of societal development. When both these theories were formulated, the world had developed and was beginning to tolerate the sexual minorities. The constant struggle of the boy is clear in his description of childhood. He acted all tough and got bruises all over the body, and he tried to develop a bass voice and these are all part of the ego identity that Erikson had talked about. In order to sustain a place in the standard norms of society, Einar tried to be masculine. Another instance from the book proves the same point to be true. “Incidentally I went on long walks with my sister. And when I knew no one was likely to see me- as in the wood close to the town-I pushed her dolls pram, which always accompanied us”( Elbe location 677). This reinstates the point that society plays a major role in individual’s sexuality and preferences.

Sociology has played an important early role, especially through the contributions of symbolic interactionism and theory to the study of sexuality, refusing to treat sex as „natural“ or as biologically given. Social constructionist perspective is an interdisciplinary enterprise in which, constructionism has posed significant challenges to the conventional thinking about sexuality. This newly formulated approach located sexuality in relation to other social institutions, emphasized the importance of subjective meanings in the study of sexual conduct. And it demanded a greater attention to the historical and cultural specificity of sexual typologies that otherwise get taken for granted, such as the division of the world into homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual and transgender. Sociological theory of sexuality and psychosexuality should go hand in hand. Psychoanalytic theory which is a broader discipline of psychosexuality helps in the understanding of the issue on a deeper level.

Society plays an important role in developing the outcomes of the repressed identity crisis. Identity is a socialized sense of individuality. As Berger and Luckmann maintain, identities are, at the same time, willed creations, and constraining structures. Societies have histories in the course of which specific identities emerge but these histories are however made by men with specific identities. To paraphrase Marx’s thought on identity, people make their own identities, but they do not make them as just as they please.

Sexual identity is much less theorized compared to other identities such as racial, ethnic, class based or gender based identities. The concept of contemporary sexual identity should include sexual preference or orientation, erotic role identity and the conscious identification of self with social sexual typologies. Sexual preference or orientation is referred in psychoanalysis as the „object choice“, where the gender of the partner is the same as or different from one’s own; whether gender is, or is not an important criteria. This preference or orientation is stable or variable. The concept is further extended to include other characteristics such as physical, behavioral, and emotional and statuses such as class, race and ethnicity. The identification of self with social sexual typologies often gets confused. The labels such as gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, exhibitionist, sadomasochist,
fetishist etc.... These self-identifications are not necessarily their sexual preference or orientation.

The book *Lili: A Portrait of the First Sex Change* also has hidden sexuality outbreaks. The book gives subtle nuances of sexual suppression and gender identity crisis in general. The protagonist Einar aka Lili describes his appearance in childhood to be “As a little chap I had long, fair locks, snow white skin, and dark eyes.... I played with eleven girls in my kindergarten; I was the cleverest in knitting and embroidery. As an eight-year-old, my two brothers teased me for my girl’s voice. I took this very much to my heart and made effort to acquire proper youthful bass.” (Elbe location 648)

This gives the idea of an abnormal feature in the ideal male self. Another instance proves that there is something special about the child. "When bathing with boys of my own age, I would often blush at seeing my own somewhat slim and delicate youthful body reflected in the water beside the sturdy and not particularly well-proportioned youthful bodies of the others". The child made deliberate efforts to be a male. He, at his age was not fully conscious about the sexuality. The transsexual female Lili herself agrees to this account. “Looking back on things now, it seems as if my childish voice was my first dissimulation (Elbe location, location 567)

The confusion of identity is dominant both in the movie and in the text. As studies has proved the transgender or intersex person develops a certain kind of inclination from the childhood itself. But society plays an important role in suppressing this deviant form of identity. Because of his brothers, Einar had to push himself harder to fit into the constraints of society. The question of identity is rather confusing in the case of Lili Elbe.

The identity of Einar is expressed as a normal male at first. Towards his middle age he started experiencing strange things. The idea of deviant gender identity is only realized when he poses as a model for his wife’s painting. In the book *Lili: A Portrait of the First Sex Change*, it is expressed as a sudden revelation and in the movie also it is shown as an epiphanic realization. The suppressed identity started to show off as another individual Lili and was very different from the Einar everyone knew. The movie gives a vague account of the transformation of Einar with the instance of cross dressing that the couple has done just for fun.

When the condition became severe Einar started to experience physical changes. He started having cramps in stomach and nose bleeding. They visited many doctors and had run many tests. Doctors never accepted his condition as a disease. They qualified this condition as a mental illness. There is an instance in the book where the test result of lab was shown. It was written that Einar was schizophrenic and was pervasive. The medical field at that time was not ready to accept a deviant form of human anatomy.

The curiosity of Einar resulted in his readings of sexual pathology. The conclusion he found was that, although his external organs were those of a male and quite normal, his body contained the internal sexual organs of a female in addition.

The common fact about intersex people is that they have a dominant gender and have a sexual preference. In this particular case we can see a shift of dominant identity and sexual preference. When Einar was in his twenties, he met Gerda. He says that “it was love at first sight” (Elbe location 682) He had the sexual orientation towards women, so they were normal couple or maybe he never had the idea about his actual preference.

**Conclusion**

In Gerda’s and Einar’s love story, Gerda always had an upper hand. On their first meeting when Gerda said hello to Einar he blushed and it was Gerda who initiated the conversation and asked him out for date. There is a part where Gerda says “I kissed...
him, it was the strangest thing, and it was like kissing myself” [17:33]. The audience gets an unusual vibe in the description of their love. The overall analyses prove that the character Einar was passive in nature. He was a landscape artist. He drew the sceneries of Vejile where he had spent his childhood.

The earlier phase of this confused identity is portrayed as dual personality. Einar was doubtful about his life. Freud’s theory of psychosexuality and Erikson’s psychosocial theory coincide at this point. The childhood fixation became his repressed gender identity. The child tried succeeding his task or conflict as Erikson has said but got affected psychologically that is, when little Einar tried to have a bass sound and tried to be like normal, he was trying to be a part of the normal society. He got succeeded in that. However, his inner self was repressed.

After „Lili” was born, she came occasionally in Einar’s and Gerda’s life as a third person. Einar felt that Lili was a twin, sharing his body. Gerda became close to Lili and became the artistic muse of Gerda. Lili became the mysterious cousin of Einar at parties and balls, enjoying herself and attracting males making other females jealous. This cross-dressing happened several times. She became popular among Gerda’s and Einar’s friends. She had a separate identity which was entirely different from that of Einar.

Soon there arose a conflict with Einar and Lili, dominant and repressed identity. He felt that he should liberate Lili the conflict became crucial and he even thought of ending his life. This personality split resulted in internal conflicts. His identity crisis resulted in physical changes. Science has named this as Dissociative identity disorder which was previously known as multiple personality disorder. Here the readers get confused whether the protagonist is suffering from such a mental issue or not. Though the protagonist is a transsexual female, the sexual orientation or preference is examined in detail in the next chapter.

As mentioned above Einar was an artist. He drew the places where he once lived or has gone as a child. When he felt the change, he could no longer recreate his landscapes as before and he says that his skill was gone. When the repressed identity dominated, there arose a sense of insecurity making things more complicated. Einar struggled to retain his male identity for Gerda but the more he tried to control Lili the more she became dominant. In his forties he realized that he could never live a normal life. He was not Einar, but Lili and he needed a break from the struggle.

It took twenty long years for his realization. Finally, Einar decided to give his body to Lili. The whole sense of confusion and multiple personality disorder was a defense mechanism of victim to survive the unpleasant truth. He wanted to maintain a place in the society at first, so they made Lili his cousin, the socially constructed identity; Einar was overpowered by his repressed identity Lili, which is the real identity of Einar.

In later years Lili’s sexual orientation is clearer and more defined. She had undergone sex reassignment surgery and became a trans female. She had an affair with a man. She died in a surgery, an attempt to transplant uterus so that she can function fully as a female. Socially constructed gender roles often put sexual minorities in great difficulty. This oppresses their freedom of expression resulting in psychological fixation which is the major problem that Einar has faced.

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