

## Psychological Perspectives on Gender Development (Kimmel, chapter 4)

Freud's theory of gender development, involving interaction between the id, ego, superego and the external environment, has been very influential. Freud argued that people moved through oral, anal and genital stages. At the genital stage people become masculine or feminine.

Key points about Freud's theory: (1) Gender identity and sexuality are psychological (not biological) achievements that take place within the family. These achievements are "difficult, precarious, and full of potential pitfalls." (2) Gender identity is linked to sexual orientation. Homosexuals have failed to develop properly. (3) Traditional gender stereotypes are evidence the development was successful.

"If gender identity and sexual orientation were accomplished, not inherent in the individual, then it was the parents' fault if things didn't turn out 'right.'" The resulting research into how parents could ensure proper development led to the M-F test, which measured masculinity-femininity on a continuum. This was the foundation of sex role theory.

Some feminist scholars have attacked Freud and developmental psychology spin-offs, while others have embraced alleged differences between men and women.

Kimmel argues that gender differences are not so much internalized as interpersonal and environmental. This is why gender-neutral experiments may fail to find many differences.

Sex role theory eventually collapsed under a number of criticisms: It is politically conservative and coercive; the masculine role is "internally contradictory and inconsistent"; its claims were not supported by research.

Joseph Pleck argued that "the male sex role itself was the source of strain, anxiety, and male problems. Psychology was thus transformed from the vehicle that would help problematic men adapt to their rational sex role into one of the origins of their problems."

Kimmel adds additional problems with sex role theory: it posits two monolithic entities, ignoring different masculinities and femininities; it ignores the (power) relationship between masculinity and femininity; it ignores the gendering of institutions.