

Final Assignment #3

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SOWK 696: Shane'a Thomas

Fall 2016

### **Transgender Identity Formation**

Transgender, or gender variant, is a blanket term for an individual who does not fit into the gender binary standard, including transexual, gender-queer, or bigender (Wright, 2011). According to Wright (2011), three identity theories best address identity formation within a transgendered individual. These three theories are “queer theory, the generalized identity development model for marginalized populations, and the transsexual identity development model” (Wright, 2011, Abstract). Gender-queer labeling allows for the promotion of inclusion and emotional well-being, asserting that gender and sexual orientation are fluid categories of identity that are not restricted to mainstream gender binary norms (Wright, 2011).

The marginalized populations generalized identity development model has five stages: conformity, dissonance, resistance & immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness (Wright, 2011). The development model revolves around the minority group first attaching some negative view from the majority culture onto the minority self and internalizing these negative feelings (Wright, 2011). Next, an individual moves through a dissonance due to the negative beliefs taken on within the conformity stage at which point the angst created by this stage is projected back on to the majority culture due to felt injustices (Wright, 2011). Once this emotional stage has passed, an individual moves into an introspection, creating acceptance or self identification within the marginalized population, which eventually leads to an inner harmony know as integrative awareness (Wright, 2011).

Lastly, a 14-stage identity formation created by Devor is meant to most accurately define transgender identity formation based on Devor’s personal transsexual experience (Wright, 2011). The 14 stages revolve around witnessing and mirroring which Devor place as crucial formative actions based off observed interactions of both gender binary and transgender individuals.

Devon's 14 stages of formation are as follows: "abiding anxiety, identity confusion about originally assigned gender and sex, identity comparison about original assigned gender and sex, discovery of transsexualism or transgenderism, identity confusion about transsexualism or transgenderism, identity comparisons about transsexualism or transgenderism, tolerance of transsexualism or transgenderism identity, delay before acceptance of transsexual or transgender identity, acceptance of transsexual or transgender identity, delay before transition, transition, integration, acceptance of post-transition gender and sex identities, and pride" (Wright, 2011, p.25). These 14 stages depict a detailed account of how individuals gain, process, and incorporate information within emotionally integrative levels. Only by moving through these stages does an individual truly encounter emotional well-being and internalized identity.

### **Gender Dysphoria**

A multi-gender model of identity will be helpful to establish in order to formulate a correct and fitting identity structure within the United States legal framework that includes transgendered individuals. Currently, the psychological system has a mental illness classification within the DSM-V called gender dysphoria which encompasses deviations between the social gender and biological sex of an individual (Acton, 2014). A three step therapeutic process of actualizing identity helps a transgendered individual gain medical support for achieving emotional and personal well-being by harmonizing social gender and biological sex (Acton, 2014). This process currently includes experience within the desired gender binary, hormone injections to match the desired sex, and genitalia surgery as fitting the desired sexual characteristics (Acton, 2014). Once these hormone replacements or surgical transitions have been undertaken, an individual is know as transsexual and may choose to identify as such or not.

### **Transgender History**

Within aboriginal cultures individuals identified as two-spirited or “visibly sex/gender variant” were considered “ceremony leaders, teachers and healers,” yet it was the western colonization that enforced a binary sex & gender system upon these cultures (Irving, 2013, p. 323). The mismatched systems of Western and Aboriginal cultures lead to sometimes undesired assimilation, elitist ideological proselytizing, and ultimately disrespectful violation of cultural norms within the aboriginal way of life. According to Flores (2015), a British study has proven the positive effects of having interpersonal contact with a transgender person as a friend or family member. This increased interaction raises awareness of transgender issues and decreases the likelihood of prejudice towards the community as a whole or towards transgender individuals (Flores, 2015).

The social stigma attached to the mainstream culture about being transgender can cause negative attitudes within the transgender community, especially in relation to health care and economics (Flores, 2015). The high frequency of bullying that happens towards transgender individuals combined with legal institutional ignorance can leave transgender persons to strongly consider suicide if projected self-loathing or isolation becomes too strong (Steinmetz, 2014). Transgender individuals seeking support in shifting these attitudes, both within and outside the immediate community, look to political advocacy organizations in order to shift political and legal understandings of the challenges and threats faced nationally (Flores, 2015).

In order to gain traction for policy changes beneficial to the rights of transgender individuals, positive public sentiment must be raised (Flores, 2015). Celebrity discussion-setters like Laverne Cox, an openly transgender woman who speaks out in support against bullying and for policy advocacy, are needed on a national platform while day-to-day transgender allies are needed at local and community levels (Steinmetz, 2014). Gaining the support of other minority

groups who have previously advanced political and legal changes for their own cause can help the transgender community adopt successful campaign strategies as well as grow advocacy and ally bases of support (Flores, 2015).

### **Transgender Rights Gaps**

According to Acton (2014), the judicial & legal systems within the United States often define sex & gender in terms that are too rigid to meet the needs of transgender individuals. Hosting a system that defines chromosomal, anatomical, and hormonal distinctions as the basis for legal proceedings, the courts — with an ill-equipped lexicon — typically do not incorporate the social gender and postoperative sex identities which the medical and psychological fields strive to help transgender individuals affirm (Acton, 2014). This mismatch in understanding and definition causes legal and emotional distress within the transgender community in addition to the social isolation that may have already been present given everyday discrimination faced by being societal outliers. Curbing the gap between the legal system and the medical system will be the only way to effectively incorporate transgender-identifying individuals within the national safety net of freedom which the United States is meant to offer.

### **Harsh Precedence**

Multiple court cases throughout the United States have raised detail-upon-detail of a transgender individuals genital, anatomical, and physical structure in attempts to categorize transgender individuals within gender binary terms. One postoperative individual was asked specifics as to the ability to perform penal-vaginal intercourse, the answer thus justifying a rationale for the court to approve or disapprove a marriage (Irving, 2013). Another court used the justification that because the individual was “created” male that any ruling to the contrary would not be possible and the Kansas Supreme Court strictly excluded male-to-female

postoperative individuals fitting into “female” rights due to inherently missing anatomy (Acton, 2014). For many transgendered individuals, the ability to define personal identity in a social and legal framework is of the utmost importance (Acton, 2014). Again and again, the court’s interchangeable and binary usage of sex and gender as well as anatomical and chromosomal scrutinizing of individuals dis-serves the transgender and transexual communities.

### **Next Steps**

Gaining moral, political, and economic rights for the transgender community has not and will not be easy. As with same-sex marriage, women’s suffrage, or the abolition of slavery, small victories will be accompanied by even larger setbacks, and it will only be with persistence, advocacy, and increased public awareness & insistence that institutional change will happen (Karasic, 2016). Community- and familial-level advocacy and support must gain ground through creative outlets such as spoken word, performance art, solidarity by sports teams or social media engagement. Social workers, political activists, and elected officials alike all play key roles in supporting transgendered individuals towards gaining moral, political, and economic rights. These rights will ensure the free and safe expression of gender and sex identities which should be civic privileges afforded to all engaged citizens within the United States.

## References

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