

**Your topic:** Essay: Developmental Psychology (weighting of 30% of the final grade) you are expected to write a 1500 word essay with the essay question drawn from one of the Block 2 topics. While you are expected to describe key elements of relevant theories and research, some evaluation will also be required. Essay title: 'Compare and contrast TWO theories of gender role development. Make use of examples from the psychological research to illustrate your discussion.' You must include the word count at the end of your essay.

**Your topic's description:** psychology

**Your educational level:** Guaranteed First Class

**Referencing Style:** Oxford Referencing

**Number of page:** 6

**Words:** 1500

Compare and Contrast two theories of Gender Role Development

[Writer's Name]

[Institute's Name]

## Compare and Contrast two theories of Gender Role Development

### Introduction

Gender role development refers to the procedure of children learning behaviours, approaches, appeals' emotional responses and causes which are socially described as suitable for members of their sex. Gender is one of the most earliest social categories that people apply to themselves and others. Judgements made about the self-relate to judgments made about ones gender. Gender affects choices made relating to toy preferences, games and playmates. Boys tend to be more rigidly gender stereotyped in early years but in adolescence, girls become more gender stereotyped. This could be attributed to the heightened sense of self consciousness and the media. The paper will compare and contrast two theories of gender role development with the help of examples.

### Discussion

Girls show more variability in their sex type behaviours then boys. This refers to the fact that boys are under more pressure to conform to traditional gender roles<sup>1</sup>. This is harmful, as men who are strained to pursue success and power and restrict affectionate behaviour experience relational dread and feel emotionally adrift. Therefore, it is important for men to be involved in childcare as it encourages sensitivity and nurturing.

---

<sup>1</sup> Harris, A., 2005, Gender as soft assembly, Analytic Press

## Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

According to Freud, gender role development occurs during the phallic stage where children identify with their same sex parent. The Oedipus complex occurs in 3-6 year old boys. Sons possess sexual feelings for their mothers and as a result resent their fathers who are viewed as their rival. The son fears that his father will find out and castrate him. He then represses his feelings for his mother and identifies with his father as a role model of masculinity. By identifying with his father, the son learns how to act as a man.

This is a unique way to interpret gender role development in boys. It is important to note that this theory was based on a play by Sophocles. King Laius was told by the oracle that his child will murder him and marry his wife so when Oedipus was born the king ordered a shepherd to kill him. The shepherd could not do this and instead placed him in the care of another king and queen where Oedipus grew up as a prince. He visits the oracle and is told of his fate to avoid this he leaves. On his journey he meets king Laius, they quarrel and Oedipus kills him. He then meets the sphinx a creature who asks travellers a riddle and if they cannot answer it correctly she kills them. Oedipus solves it and the sphinx kills her<sup>2</sup>. Out of gratitude the town gives Oedipus Jocasta (his real mother) to marry. They have two sons and two daughters. Eventually Oedipus finds out what he has done and gauges his eyes out. This act was interpreted by Freud as the equivalent of castration. Freud's personal experience related to this play and therefore he based his theory on it. Many people believe it cannot be generalised to every boy.

Girls suffer from an Electra complex. Girls are originally sexually attached to their mothers. However when girls realise they do not have a penis they blame their mothers and shift

---

<sup>2</sup> Okin, S. M., 2008, Justice, gender, and the family, Basic books

their affection towards their fathers. To attract their fathers girls look at their mothers as role models and develop feminine attributes.

It is widely debated that Freud had a personal experience due to which he came up with theory of gender role development<sup>3</sup>. However, there are many people who disagree with the Freud theory as they believe that not every child goes through this kind of development. People are of the view that boys and girls do not feel sexually attracted to their opposite-sex parent in anyway, and that Freud theory is baseless and does not have any type of proper proof.

#### Kohlberg's Cognitive Development Theory

This theory addresses the problem of social learning theory by stating that children actively socialise themselves by looking for same sex models to gain gender appropriate information. There are three stages to acquire a stable gender identity. Firstly, by 3 years children possess a basic gender identity and can accurately label themselves as a boy or girl. Gender stability develops thereafter and lastly from 5-7 years gender consistency is achieved. This refers to children realising that gender is stable across time and situations<sup>4</sup>. Only after this stage can children seek out gender appropriate information. A problem with this theory is that it has been proven that 3 year olds already learnt specific gender roles. Furthermore, adjustments after gender reassignment is harder after three years supporting the view that socialisation occurs by age three.

---

<sup>3</sup> Van Wagner, K., 2006, Kohlberg's theory of moral development, Retrieved December, 13

<sup>4</sup> Hyde, J. S., 2005, The gender similarities hypothesis, *American psychologist*, 60(6), 581

### Comparison of Freud's and Kohlberg's Theory

The similarity amongst the Freud's and Kohlberg's theory is that in both the theories, children are able to identify with which parent they associate with. The boy will be able to associate with his father, whilst the girl will be able to associate with her mother. In Freud's theory, children identify with whom they relate with more during the phallic stage; and in Kohlberg's theory, children are able to socialise more easily by looking at their same sex models or parent to help gain better gender appropriate information. An example that can be used here is the way little girls dress up. They look up to their mothers and grasp the ways, she dresses herself by using various make-up stuff, jewellery, and clothes. The little girls then follow the same pattern and try to imitate their mothers. This is how the Freud theory and Kohlberg theory are in comparison to each other.

### Contrast of Freud's and Kohlberg's Theory

There are various aspects of Freud's and Kohlberg's theory that is in complete contrast to each other. For start, boy and girls both feel attracted to their opposite-gender parent. Boys will feel attracted to their mothers, sexually, i.e.; and girls would feel attracted to their fathers. They would start to envy their same-sex parent for the reason that they would want complete attention of the opposite-sex parent and would not want to share it with any other person. However, with the passage of time, children would eventually realise that they associate more with the same-sex parent rather than envying them which would lead to nowhere<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the girls initially are attracted to their mothers sexually but with the passage of time, they would become attracted

---

<sup>5</sup> Jackson, C., & Pearson, R. (Eds.), 2005, *Feminist visions of development: gender analysis and policy*, Routledge

towards their fathers due to which the girls try to imitate their mothers and try to dress up like them in order to gain attention from their fathers.

The Kohlberg's theory talks about socialisation factor that takes place with children opting for same sex gender role model. The gender role development takes place in the form of children choosing their same-sex gender for inspiration and becoming like their role model. Boys would look up to their fathers or some male model from whom they can get inspired and do better in life; whilst girls would look up to their mothers or some female model from whom they can get inspired and imitate them in a way so they can be like them. This is more of cognitive factor. Psychologically, children are more into the thinking of becoming whom they like more. At young age, children tend to develop a certain liking towards one of the parent<sup>6</sup>. They would listen to either the mother or the father and would not pay heed to any kind of advice from the other parent. For instance, if the boy is paying attention to his father's words because of thinking to be like his father in future; he would not pay much attention to what his mother is saying. He would not take into consideration what his mother is telling him or how he should be behaving. For that child, his father's words and actions would be all that would matter to him.

## Conclusion

The paper has discussed the gender role development with respect to Freud and Kohlberg's theory. The Freud theory talks about how boys and girls are attracted to their opposite-sex parent and tend to dislike the same-sex parent. Even though, the children are able to identify with their same-sex parent, at a certain stage the children tend to dislike them for the

---

<sup>6</sup> De Lauretis, T., 2008, Freud's drive: Psychoanalysis, literature and film, Palgrave Macmillan

reason that they become attracted to the opposite-sex parent and prefer to have their complete attention to themselves. Gender role development takes place in this form when children begin to identify to their own gender and with which parent, they associate more. The Kohlberg's theory is the cognitive development theory which talks about the gender role development in the sense that children starts to associate their own gender with the same-sex gender and choose a role model to be inspired from. Boys and girls choose the respective genders for their role model and try to imitate them in order to become like them. This has more to do with cognitive aspect rather than any other factor. Psychologically, children start to develop attachment towards the same-sex parent as they start to imitate them and get inspired to be like them.

Word count – excluding citations – 1501 words

## References

Harris, A., 2005, *Gender as soft assembly*, Analytic Press

Okin, S. M., 2008, *Justice, gender, and the family*, basic books

Hyde, J. S., 2005, the gender similarities hypothesis, *American psychologist*, 60(6), 581

Jackson, C., & Pearson, R. (Eds.), 2005, *Feminist visions of development: gender analysis and policy*, Routledge

De Lauretis, T., 2008, *Freud's drive: Psychoanalysis, literature and film*, Palgrave Macmillan

Van Wagner, K., 2006, Kohlberg's theory of moral development, Retrieved December, 13