What are the influences affecting children's acquisition of gender roles?


5 Theoretical approaches

Psychoanalytic perspectives

Freud - Oedipus Complex

Chodorow (1978)

girls able to continue to identify with mothers => "strong sense of interpersonal relatedness" (p151)

boys by contrast become more independent because must separate from mother.

Problem: lack of empirical evidence (p151)

Emphasise: Early childhood is an important time in development gender identity.

Social learning processes - Mischel

Schools, media, people transmit idea of gender to children.

Behaviourist approach

"Learning takes place through conditioning, rewards and punishment, and observation of the behaviour of others" (p152)

Evidence that fathers in particular encourage "gender-typed activities" (p152) (partic. for boys).

- This could be fairly significant. Activities encourage people to act in different ways (p153)

Importance "observational learning" (p154)

- Watching others, media

Research: Bandura (1960) video aggressive behaviour shown to pre-school children? acted differently after
BUT difficulty proving connection. Experiments (not accurate reflection everyday life?) (P.155)

Problem: Why does children's view of gender change with age.

eg young children's views often more stereotyped than parents. (156)

Social cognitive theory
Bandura

sense of gender identity affected by environment

BUT with time children "internalize the standards of behaviour appropriate for males and females" (P.157)

older children less dependant on external sanctions. They internalize the standards and decide themselves how it is appropriate to act.

Cognitive-developmental theory
Kohlberg. "I am a boy, therefore I want to do boy things, therefore the opportunity to do boy things (+ to gain approval for doing them) is rewarding." (P.89)

Kohlberg it is around age 6/7 once children have a secure understanding of "gender consistency" (P.151) → children actively seek out what it means to be a boy/girl.

A "the question is not whether cognition is important—everyone agrees that it is—but which particular cognitions should be emphasised" A (p.161)

Gender-schema theory.
Martin and Halverson—1981
Once children can label themselves as a boy/girl (about 3 years old) they actively seek out info about what this means. They are trying to make sense of the world. Schema = "A mental structure that guides the processing of info. + experiences" (p.163)

2 schemas
"in-group-out group" and "own sex" (p.163)

Evidence (Bradbard et al (1986))
1. Children looked more at object they were told for their own sex.
2. 1 week later remembered more about objects labelled as being for own sex.
3. Misremembered info that did not fit gender schema.

- Older children understanding distinction between maleness and masculinity, femaleness and femininity.
- Also more able to take into account several sources of info - less bound by schemas.