STS 210 Experiential Assignment

I hosted a dinner party with my roommates and my friends and there are six people in total. Most of them are international students and atheist while only one friend is Christian. Half of them either have a part-time job or work as an intern. There are one male and five female friends. Two people identify themselves as LGBT group and same sexual orientation but they have different gender expression. One person dresses and talks in a more masculine way while the other dresses in a way around the middle of the masculinity and femininity. During the meeting, we not only explored the important gender-related concepts, including the gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and biological sex, but also discussed their independence and fluidity (Murphy, D. M., & Simons-Rudolph, A., 2017).

Gender Identity: gender expression & sex

After understanding the definition of gender identity, they realized that they didn’t usually ask people’s gender identity when they first met because it seemed rude to do so. When they met someone, they usually categorize people based on the first impression. It’s easy to make wrong assumptions and distort the reality, but it’s a quick way to process and interpret the information. This process is defined as social categorization. In the origins of social categorization, categorizing others enables people to interpret interactions and predict actions, but discrimination and prejudice are usually the inevitable negative consequences (Liberman, Z., Woodward, A. L., & Kinzler, K. D. 2017). In this case, I asked if they met a person whose biological sex is different from gender expression, how they would make the assumption of gender identity. There are two assumptions of gender identity they made when meeting a person.

The popular assumption, not so surprisingly, is based on gender expression. Most of them would assume the person’s gender identity correlates with the gender expression instead of the sex. They thought if one person identifies himself/herself to be male or female, s/he will tend to behave in a way that correlates to the self-defined identity, which is intuitive to reason. One reason is that gender identity is changeable. However, the biology sex is what people are born with and they cannot change it. The gender expression is also changeable and reflects one’s value and desire, so the gender identity is more likely to relate the changeable gender expression. In addition, they also discussed the conformity issues. The conformity pressure from the community forces people to behave based on their sex. When a person behaves in an unexpected way, people sometimes attach negative labels or form a negative impression. Therefore, a person needs to be brave enough to behave against the traditional beliefs, and the bravery probably comes from the gender identity. In Everitt and his colleges‘ article, they also discussed the political issue related to conformity pressure. The nonverbal language’s influence on political voting is different for women and men because of the gender-based stereotypes. For example, the communal traits are strongly related to the gender stereotype(Everitt, J., Best, L. A., & Gaudet, D., 2016).

On the other hand, one friend believed the gender identity is more relevant to the sex because people are told to behave and think in certain ways based on the biological sex. She believed that social influences, such as parents and peers, will impact how teenagers define themselves. Additionally, many people may just like certain clothes and appear to be more feminine or masculine. She used herself as an example. She usually behaves in a more masculine way but she still defines herself as female because that’s what twenty-year experience made her. She was raised to be a girl and treated as a female in society. It’s really natural for her to self-define as the female in adolescence. However, the masculine clothes and behaviors are her recent preferences. They are just short-term choices compared with the twenty-year experience. It’s easier to change personal likes rather than personal beliefs in adulthood. In Inga Becker and his college’s article, they found that teenagers have different gender experience in adolescence and girls are more likely to behave differently from the gender(Becker, I., Ravens-Sieberer, U., Ottová-Jordan, V., & Schulte-Markwort, M. 2017).

Biological Sex & Gender Identity

Another topic they were really interested in is the biological sex since I mentioned the sex was not multiple choice question. I showed several short YouTube videos to them. They were really shocked by the fact that 1.7% of babies are actually intersexed(Murphy, D. M., & Simons-Rudolph, A. 2017). Intersexuality is not a new thing. The intersexuality exists since the beginning of the human existence. Two friends said they’ve read books with this concepts but they thought it’s just fictitious because they’d never heard about it in real life. People feel comfortable to discuss race, gender, cultures, but very few people will talk about the intersexuality. Intersex people usually experience the stigma because of the lack of awareness.

I asked them two questions: (1) how do you feel if you were an intersexed person and your parents choose your biological sex for you? (2) What will do if you have an intersexed baby? Two of them said it’s hard to imagine themselves as intersex people. It probably would not change their lives too much since they’re satisfied with who they are. Two friends stated that they wished to be born as the opposite sex because of the gender dysphoria or the homosexuality, so when knowing their sex was chosen by the parents, they would feel relieved because they found the reason for their unusual thoughts. In addition, one of them showed the willingness to change the sex. The other two girls had interesting opinions. One girl had an interesting opinion. She said she would prefer her parents to choose the sex for her. She was raised as a girl but her gender identity is around the middle of the spectrum. She said there were times when she wished to be a boy but she’s glad to be a girl now. If the parents let her decide the sex, it’s hard to pick one side. Additionally, it’s also difficult for the parents to choose the appropriate parental strategies if the sex of the baby was undetermined. The other girl said if the parents choose sex for her, she would be disappointed but understanding. It’s the same as if she was lesbian, they would still try to persuade her to "become" straight by all means. It is possible that their choice ends up being "wrong" - enslaving her from being her true self and resulting in a life-long unhappiness. Either you are happy with it or not, there needs to be a period of awareness, adaptation, and niche-finding. This struggle will become part of my life. Moreover, if her parents didn’t choose the sex for her, she wouldn’t be ashamed and would appreciate this unique trait. She would keep my body as what it naturally was and not receive any physical operations.

For the second question, four of my friends said they would have chosen the sex for their kid because of the stress and stigma in the society. However, two of them changed their minds after watching the videos because they realized how the intersex people had struggled because of the surgeries in their childhood. They would raise the child in a neutral way and let the child determine the sex when they’re old enough. Interestingly, the girl who preferred the parents to make the decision choose to let the child choose their own sex. The reason she gave is respect to autonomy. It’s a unique chance that is not given to most of the babies. She wanted her children to have the opportunity after really knowing themselves. The girl, who would remain as natural as possible and didn’t want any surgeries, was very likely to choose their gender for them at their early stage. Firstly, she thought being identified with a sex was better than not being identified with any gender. It reduces growth concerns at an early age. Secondly, biological sex is not everything, there is also more important things to cultivate: sexual orientation, personality, pursuits, beliefs, etc. Lastly, being intersex already means their gender is neither pure female or male, so neither choice is 100% correct. If she made the decision for them, there were more chances that they adapt to their chosen gender because of the social environment. However, if they feel the need to do physical operations to change their gender back, she is always supportive.

Moreover, one friend highlighted that if we’re all open about this topic and discuss it openly, there will be less misunderstanding and less stigma. As the majority group, we don’t realize the existence of the minority group because we don’t experience the difference. The minority group realizes the difference every day but some people pretend to fit in the majority (Murphy, D. M., & Simons-Rudolph, A., 2017). One said people who know the situation in the majority group should be responsible to raise the public awareness and provide support to the minority group. Additionally, we should be open-minded and be ready to accept the facts that are different from and even opposite to our beliefs. It’s also essential for the intersex people to let their voice be heard.

Reference

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