Rivera, Victoria: Depolarizing Gender

Instead of having the intended effect of fully compartmentalizing attempts to compartmentalize people into the acceptable roles of man and woman the enforcement of a gender dichotomy in society also causes gender divergence in both directions (I changed the wording because your presentation suggested this is what you mean). Women in particular are susceptible to participating in this phenomena, and have more social leeway to partake in certain aspects of masculinity due to the patriarchy and the dominance of men (Abate 2011). Since hegemonic masculinity is valued above all other gender performances, when men choose to participate in femininity, they come under more scrutiny and often receive more backlash than the opposing scenario (Sanchez 2016). These male femininities and female masculinities come in various forms and result in different social statuses depending on the environment in which they are enacted.

Tomboyism, for example, is most successfully enacted in the earlier stages of life. Young girls who identify more with masculinity rather than femininity generally do not experience strong criticisms as do young boys who practice feminine behavior (Abate 2011). The tomboy self can be described by two separate, although not wholly unconnected, concepts: choosing masculinity, or rejecting femininity. Choosing masculinity as a girl is seen generally as a gender choice, especially when continued later on in life (Burn 2005). Rejecting femininity, however, especially when practiced later on in life, has been shown to be a marker of sexual identity, namely lesbianism (Carr 2005). Both of these types of tomboyism create a gray area in which women are not required to adhere strictly to femininity.

On the other hand, sometimes this performance is not beneficial to women. In the workplace, masculine women suffer from a number of struggles related to their gender performance, on top of any other prejudices such as race or ethnicity. The inherent gender nonconformity of women who don’t physically present as masculine are viewed as a threat to others in the environment, and are typically perceived as lesbians, despite whatever their actual sexuality is (Dozier 2017). Coping strategies for these women follow two general patterns: either avoiding these conflicts altogether, whether it be by job choice or identifying with a friendly subculture, or conforming and overcompensating as much as possible (Nguyen 2008). There are even reports of women simply giving up and passing as men in order to avoid the stress of constantly trying to reaffirm their gender to others (Dorier 2017).

Despite what it would seem, not every instance of non-binary gender expression is beneficial, as it’s been shown that there are cases that those who don’t conform to societal gender expectations are stigmatized for it (Bordeaux-Silverstein 2016). I’m a bit surprised by how you structured the previous thought-- I think the general expectation is that non-binary gender expression more often than not leads to negative consequences for people. In the grander scheme of things, it’s possible that it similarly has adverse effects a bit confused by this sentence. The perception of these performances itself reinforces the idea that there are only two gender scripts that can be practiced: women that don’t abide by traditional femininity are immediately seen as masculine, rather than as diversifying femininity (Bordeaux-Silverstein 2016). A response given to this dilemma is the degendering of society, in which people will no longer have genders by which to identify themselves, but merely be people brought up with traits and characteristics that have nothing to do with biological markers of sex or typically gendered characteristics (Lorber 2013). Although this might be unfathomable in today’s society, this utopia where one of the many social divides currently propagated is completely removed is certainly something to strive for. A good overview with a good list of sources.

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