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Summary of Yamada Sonomi's Narrative Analysis to the Concept of X-Gender

This research conducted by Yamada Sonomi of the Nagoya City Central Care Center for Disabled Children interviews two adults—nicknamed “K” and “S”—who are associated with Gender Identity Disorder (GID). Yamada conducts “semi-structured” interviews with the individuals to gain insight on their "experiences of gender dysphoria" and their "thoughts on the concept of X-Gender." X-Gender is a concept in Japan which one doesn't perceive themselves as male or female—like the concept of “non-binary” in America. The issues with the classification GID is important because GID includes X-gender and Transgender individuals in the same category. This dangerous classification is similar to a catch-all term for people who show discomfort toward their gender. Like the acronym of LGBTQ+, it groups different identities together, and the struggles of each group are combined as a result. This causes a major misrepresentation of X-gender and Transgender individuals in Japanese society.

The study follows a framework provided by a paper authored by Reissman in 2008. In their framework for narrative analysis, they define three types of analyses: thematic, structural, and dialogic. Thematic analysis focuses on "told" content from the interviewee and tries to understand the subjective meaning behind each case's experiences. Structural analysis focuses on the "telling" from the interviewer. Finally, dialogic analysis focuses on the interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee. As for the content of the interview, each subject was given a card organized into the two themes focused on one's experiences with gender dysphoria and their thoughts on the X-gender concept. However, after interviewing K, they got a bit off topic and had to include a third theme for them which discusses their discomfort with gender norms.

The participant nicknamed "S" has their interview displayed first. S began identifying with X-gender in college after educating themselves on the topic. They expressed that they felt different from others, and from age 4 onwards they had an extreme discomfort with their gender. As a result, they began disassociating with conventional first-person pronouns, and began using terms such as "uchi" 内 for their pronouns. However, in social settings using this as a pronoun was confusing to some, so S began to use "I" as a pronoun to colleagues, and "uchi" as a pronoun when in public. When they entered junior high school, they felt specifically uncomfortable about the gender-coded uniforms. Being biologically female, they were expected to wear skirts, and they expressed to their friends that they didn't want to wear it. Despite resisting, they eventually complied and wore the uniform. S did not wear any type of men's clothing until mid-college-- thinking it was just normal for them to wear women's clothes. Despite this they still made efforts to make themselves appear more "boyish."

As for romantic relationships S has had a few—albeit confusing—relationships with men and women. They had a male-partner who they viewed more as a friend, resulting in a break-up

due to unequal feelings. They got entangled with a female partner who was serious with them, but S felt as though they couldn't follow through with it, so they broke up again. S's problem with relationships is that it enforces gender. Especially in the union of marriage where each partner is expected to take on a gendered role in the relationship.

S learned about the concept X-gender in college and identified as “Female to X” (FTX). Upon realizing this, S became more comfortable in their skin and in men's clothes. However negative remarks from their mother claiming they looked like a man, prompted more uneasy feelings—heightened by the nature of them being closeted to their mother. Thus, in the most comfortable way they could, they came out to their mother in what they describe as “waves.” They explained to them their story of discomfort and gender from adolescence, and their mother was surprisingly cordial in her reactions. They no longer called S a “man” for dressing the way they do and were glad that they came out.

As for work, S's mother pushed her to take on a clerical job, but S wanted to work in an environment where they could work in more gender-neutral clothes-friendly environments. However, S doesn't want to work in an office and wants to do a physically active job. S continues to express that they want to live the rest of their life not being associated with gender, but unfortunately society makes it hard. For example, women at work often remark that they would “look prettier if [they] dressed up more,” which is unnecessary in their opinion.

As for their gender identity, despite identifying as X-gender, S also feels that on a spectrum they tend to stray toward male gender influences. In addition, they get uncomfortable when words like “sister” are used and prefer neutral terms. Most importantly though, S describes their identity as a “process of elimination” where they can’t associate wholly with male or female, so they fall into X-gender. So, they are unsure if the concept of X-gender is a good fit for them or not.

The interview then shifts over to the participant nicknamed “K.” K's gender identity came into question when they started to have feelings for women at a young age despite being biologically female. However, they had no intentions with dating the same sex at first—believing that homosexuality didn’t exist. Instead, they felt as though they “wanted to be a man,” which would imply a more transgender identification. The thought process was that if they became a man, then they could date women. However, as they began to educate themselves more, they realized they aren't transgender and don’t want to be a man anymore. Around the third grade K made friends with people of sexual minorities, which helped their confidence. K was interested in music groups and wanted to “dress up as a female member of the group,” thus prompting them to do feminine-coded things such as grow longer hair, and wear makeup and skirts. This made them believe they were a woman. However, as K approached the dating scene, they became more uncomfortable with their identity. Male partners would demand them to present themselves more feminine. This swayed K to identify as a lesbian for some time. As a lesbian, K still faced discomfort as other lesbian colleagues would judge them for being a lesbian that dresses like a man. This made them question again if they were a man or woman, before realizing that they wanted to identify as X-gender to reduce their associations with male or female genders.

As for their views on the X-gender concept they think that it's a "mysterious" concept. In their mind X-gender people such as themselves are "inconclusive" in terms of their gender identity. To them, they don't want to be seen as a gender in general. K feels as though X-gender also includes multiple identities such as: gender-neutral, asexual, and bisexual—making it tricky to define. K expressed that there should be a creation of a term to describe X-gender relationships. Stemming from their own confusion when dating a partner who may have a more concrete definition for their gender in terms of the male-female dualism, they find it confusing to identify as X-gender but be perceived as lesbian by others due to the nature of their relationship. Thus, if there was a term to describe an X-gender relationship—on the same magnitude as homosexual—they would use it "without hesitation."

As for their discomfort with gender norms, K provides an anecdote. K debated whether they wanted to job hunt but knew that they would have to dress in feminine uniforms for both the job hunt, and the subsequent position they were hired to. In fact, K wore a suit while working part-time and felt as though they never wanted to do that again. K also feels uncomfortable when they are required to act feminine or is treated as a woman. For example, when with a male partner to participate in a drinking-party with colleagues, he made them dress feminine and attempted to chivalrously walk them home late at night. This interaction made them feel uncomfortable due to the male partner enforcing gendered responsibilities onto them.

After the interviews Yamada summarizes and combines the paradigms from both interviews. They noticed "Gender Dysphoria Manifested as a Social Obstacle" in both interviews. This paradigm was characterized by the subject's narrative revolving around their love life and social life. Yamada also notes "the encounter with the concept of gender that can define the self" as another paradigm. Both subjects underwent a constant alteration in gender identities before eventually settling with the X-gender concept. This constant alteration in identity was misunderstood as sexual orientation when in reality it was a discomfort with their gender identity. Another paradigm that was noted was the convenient self-identification with X-gender. For both S and K they associate with X-gender due to its convenience as a catch-all term for people with similar issues. However, both subjects aren't to be confused as wholly neutral, as both subjects express a leaning toward a specific direction on the gender spectrum. Finally, Yamada notes the difficulty in understanding X-gender. As mentioned, X-gender has many identities nested within the term such as asexual and bisexual. These terms make it hard to capture the true scope of individuals with gender dysphoria and individuals questioning their sexual orientation.

Yamada Sonomi makes positive contributions to the understudied topic of X-gender individuals in Japan. Their interviews empower X-gender individuals to give their perspective on what it is to be a X-gender adult and the experiences they had to triumph through during adolescence. The research also is careful in its definition of terms, carefully grasping the true meaning, and explaining discrepancies with terms. Such as the term GID which tends to group Transgender and X-gender individuals, or the term X-gender which groups together gender-neutral, asexual, and bisexual individuals.

Work Cited

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