

The definition of self identity sociology essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Developing one's identity is a lifelong process. The definition of self-identity, according to psychology is the conscious recognition of the self as having a unique identity. I chose to focus my research on the area of adolescent identity, or youth between 12 and 19 years of age, because that is when so many huge decisions are made that affect a person's life and the direction in which it is going.

Upon my research, I have discovered that this is an ever evolving theory. There is so much research and information on this particular subject, that it couldn't possibly be covered in one paper. Many of the theorists build on each other. Henri Tajfel's developed social identity theory. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is one of the best-known theories of personality. And Urie Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological systems theory to explain how everything in a child and the child's environment affects how children grow and develop. There are many other theorist who have affected the way we look at identity as well. And there are many theorists in whom the above theorists have observed and built upon. Erikson's theory has stages, much like Freud and Piaget. One theorist who elaborated on Erikson's theory was James Marcia.

Tajfel's research consisted of two laboratory experiments that focused on in-groups and out-groups to determine the discrimination of out-groups and the inherent self-esteem boost the participants received when they awarded their own groups, even though they were anonymous, with the most money. He determined that there are three mental processes involved in evaluating others as " us" and " them," or in-groups and out-groups, and that these processes take place in a particular order. First is categorization. We

categorize objects in order to understand and identify them, this includes our social environment. We find things out about ourselves according to the categories we belong to. The second stage is social identity. We adopt the identity of the group we have categorized ourselves belonging to and create an emotional bond to this group. From there, we attach our self-esteem to this group membership. The third and final stage is social comparison. Once we have categorized ourselves, and developed an identity attached to that group, we tend to compare our group with other groups. Our self-esteem is wrapped up in this group, so we need to make sure that we are viewed as favorable in the eyes of other groups. If we are not, then hostility and competition forms between groups to determine the "better" group or groups.

Essentially, we are fighting for our identity. This is especially true for teenagers. There are so many groups that determine young people's identity. Religion, race, gender, activities, etc. all play an important role in how people define themselves.

The next theorist is Erik Erikson. He based all of his work on case studies, and at times was criticized for his lack of formal research. Some felt that he lacked credibility because of his lack of research, but Erikson based his stage-theory on what he had observed in his life as well as case studies. Erikson developed a theory based on stages, which many researchers and theorists have built upon. One of the main elements of Erikson's psychosocial stage theory is the development of ego identity. Ego identity is the conscious sense of self that we develop through social interaction. According to Erikson, our ego identity is constantly changing due to new

<https://assignbuster.com/the-definition-of-self-identity-sociology-essay/>

experiences and information we acquire in our daily interactions with others (Cherry 2012). Erikson also believed that a sense of competence motivates behaviors and actions. Each stage, Erikson feels, can create competence or crisis, or a turning point in one's development. Each quantitative stage presents its own achievements and challenges. The stages are as follows, with a focus on Identity versus confusion, but because his theory is built on stages, it is important to mention the stages leading up to the adolescent identity stage. The first is Trust vs. Mistrust, because an infant is entirely dependant on their caregiver, they build a sense of trust if they are properly cared for, or mistrust if they are neglected, rejected, or abused. The second stage is Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt. This stage refers to potty training and food choice. When children successfully complete this stage they either feel secure and confident or inadequate or doubt themselves. The third stage is Initiative vs. Guilt. These are the preschool years when they begin to assert themselves and discover a sense of control and power over others. If successful they feel capable, if they fail they feel that sense of self doubt and guilt. Stage four is Industry vs. Inferiority. Children begin to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities through their social interactions (Cherry, 2012). When children are encouraged by their parents and teachers they develop a sense of competence and a belief in their abilities. This brings us to the stage of Identity vs. Confusion. This is the important stage, at least as far as we are concerned. During their adolescent years, children develop a sense of self by exploring their independence. There are several contributing factors to the formation of identity. As adolescents enter puberty their cognitive skills and physical abilities increase. When teens become more independent they tend to get involved in

<https://assignbuster.com/the-definition-of-self-identity-sociology-essay/>

more neighborhood, community and school activities. Erikson believed that these changes make adolescents begin to explore their future jobs, their relationships and their beliefs. According to Erikson, identity has been formed when a person can evaluate themselves and their environment and links them together expressively. When a person struggles with this identity link, that is when the issues of role confusion occurs. Role confusion causes an individual to question their characteristics, their sense of self and their perceptions of others. Due to changing physical, cognitive, and social factors, nearly all adolescents experience some form of role confusion (Kroger, 2004, as quoted by Sokol, 2009).

Identity helps each of us to find our place in the world. It provides us with a sense of belonging, a sense of self, and gives us each a sense of direction. Identity is what makes us move in a particular direction. Identity is what gives us reason to be. Erikson clearly believed that having a solid sense of identity is crucial to further development. Without a true sense of identity, adolescents tend to choose a lifestyle that has negative consequences, because they lack self respect or feel that they don't deserve a better life.

The theorist James Marcia, based on Erikson's theory, came up with four Identity Statuses of psychological identity development. His main idea is that personal choices and their social commitments determine ones identity. It is important to clarify that these are NOT stages, but statuses that can happen in any order or not at all. Marcia's four statuses are, first, Identity Diffusion, this is when an adolescent doesn't feel like they have a choice in things pertaining to themselves, when in reality, they just haven't made one, or is not willing at that time to make a commitment to one choice or another.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-definition-of-self-identity-sociology-essay/>

Second, is Identity Foreclosure, this is when an adolescent is willing to satisfy others by committing to certain roles, values, or plans for the future. This is not an identity crisis, these individuals are just choosing to conform to what others want for them. The third status is Identity Moratorium, which is when the adolescent is in a crisis, exploring various commitments and is ready to make choices, but has not made a commitment to these choices yet. The final status is Identity Achievement, this is when an adolescent has gone through an identity crisis and has made a commitment to a sense of identity that he or she has chosen.

We have all experienced this in our lives. There is not a single adult that can honestly say that they went through their entire youth knowing exactly who they were and who they were going to become. It is a process, a learning curve. I daily duty filled with action and reaction. Every day teenagers, and adults, have to reevaluate certain aspects of their identity bases on what works and what doesn't work.

Our final theorist is Bronfenbrenner, his theory is that every aspect of life, every little piece of our existence affects who we are. We are each in the middle of a giant circle. Directly around us is our microsystem, this entails our families, school, everything we see and deal with daily. Next is the exosystem, this is the pieces of one's life out of their direct range, such as parents work place, extended family, neighborhoods, etc. The final circle is the macrosystem, this is where culture and attitudes come into play, for example, war, the economy, and government. Although these things are outside the individual's personal circle, they are still affective in molding and shaping adolescent identity.

To sum up all of the research and theories above, it is safe to say that every facet of one's life has an impact on a person's identity in one way or another. Through their upbringing, culture, social roles, and environment, adolescents develop their identity. They learn to rely on those they can trust and build perceptions about the things that they know and the things that they don't know. Their cognitive abilities have reached a point in the adolescent years where they can determine for themselves their own paths based on their own views and opinions, even though much of their thought processes are affected by the values that have been instilled in them. Parents and caregivers play a tremendous role on religion, social status, environment, education and future. Teachers also play a role in the development of a teenager's identity. Through the use of clear expectations and positive praise, a teacher can increase their student's self-esteem. They also have the ability to encourage positive group choices through group projects and student awareness. Teachers are also powerful role models and can create a strong learning environment that encourages cognitive growth and can increase the desire for students to pursue higher education. Teachers can make a difference in their student's lives and help them develop a strong sense of self and identity. The most important thing a teacher can do is to know their students.

Resources

Cherry, K (2012). Stages of psychosocial development: Psychosocial development in

preschool, middle Childhood, and adolescence. Retrieved from
http://psychology.about.com/od/psychosocialtheories/a/psychosocial_2.htm

Feinstein, S. (2007). Teaching the at-risk teenage brain. Retrieved from
<http://chapters.scarecrowpress.com/15/788/1578866464ch1.pdf>

Gilgun, J (1993). Erik erikson and the use of case studies. Retrieved from

Marcia, J. E., (1966), Development and validation of ego identity status,
Journal of

Personality and Social Psychology 3, pp. 551-558. Retrieved from <http://iws2.collin.edu/lstern/JamesMarcia.pdf>

McLeod, S. A. (2008). Social identity theory. Retrieved from [http://www.](http://www.simply)
simply

psychology.org/social-identity-theory.html

Sokol, Justin T. (2009) " Identity Development Throughout the Lifetime: An
Examination of

Eriksonian Theory," Graduate Journal of Counseling Psychology: Vol. 1: Iss. 2,
Article

14. Retrieved from [http://epublications . marquette. edu/gjcp/vol1/iss2/14](http://epublications.marquette.edu/gjcp/vol1/iss2/14)

Tahfel, H. (1970). Experiments in intergroup discrimination. Scientific
American, 223,

96-102 Retrieved from <http://www.holah.karoo.net/tajfestudy.htm>

Woolfolk, a., Perry, N. (2012). Child and adolescent development. Upper
Saddle River, NJ:

Pearson Education Inc.