

# Social and cultural impacts on individual behaviour



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## The Developing Self

Within this essay I will be looking at how an individual's identity is socially constructed and how social and cultural factors could adjust an individual's behaviour. I will then assess factors and challenges an individual will experience throughout a specific life stage and then discuss how an individual will adjust and respond to these challenges. I will then compare and contrast two theoretical models that will help a counsellor understand the challenges an individual is facing within that life stage. Finally, I will assess the significance of the life span through a theoretical perspective and their implications to the counselling process.

Millennials were born between the early 1980's and ending in the early 2000's. They are also known as generation Y or the "eco boomers" (Crandell, Crandell and Zanden, 2012). Millennials have the need to be wanted and are the generation which is most valued (Crandell, Crandell and Zanden, 2012). An example of this would be the law required drivers to have "baby on board" signs if there was an infant within the vehicle (Crandell, Crandell and Zanden, 2012). They have similar skills and desires to generation X due to having a high level of social between the two generations however, they have differences such as they have a better sense of being team players (Crandell, Crandell and Zanden, 2012). Dr Jeffery Arnett (2000) stated that there has been a major change between the shift from adolescence to early adulthood. Due to development within societies and research the phase between 18-24 has been branded as the emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000). The development within society has brought up change such as individuals postponing events such as marriage and parenthood and concentrating more

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on their self-development and they are more likely to explore within their life for example; job roles and relationships (Arnett 2000).

Some of the characteristics a millennial will have include; millennials are more likely to stay within a job role for 3 years (KPMG 2017). Due to many ways of being able to get a job such as networking, online job searching and peer to peer comparison they are more likely to explore to find a job they find suitable for themselves (KPMG 2017). Millennials are tech savvy they are labelled as the generation which is always connected. Due to globalisation millennials were able to experience factors such as exploring other cultures, a variety of people, more opportunities to travel and information in comparison to other cultures (KPMG 2017). This has given them more of an advantage as they are open-minded towards diversity (KPMG 2017).

There are many reasons an individual between this age range may come to counselling. One of the reasons could be due millennials being so dependent on technology and social media this could have an effect of their self-image. Social media has become such a big factor of individuals lives, that an individual may start to conform to the way others portray their lives over social media so they can fit in. Conformity is described as “ yielding to group pressures” (Crutchfield, 1955). This could cause an issue for an individual between this age range because if the individual’s real self doesn’t match their ideal self, they may will face an incongruence which could lead to the individual having low self-esteem (Rogers 1959). An example of this could be, a young female who spends most of her time on social media will witness other females around her age who have a specific look for example, a tiny

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nose, big lips and always looks presentable (Jacobson, 2019). This would have an effect on the individual's self-esteem because ideally, they may want to look like the females on social media however the way they look or their style may not match the social media models (Jacobson, 2019). This could lead to the individual wanting to change the way they look or becoming insecure (Jacobson, 2019).

Another reason an individual between this age range may come to counselling could be because this generation has the highest percentage of having mental health issues. In the past the topic of mental health was a taboo situation people felt ashamed to talk about mental health however, now it isn't seen as a shameful topic and people are talking about mental health "issues" openly now (Shout Out UK, 2018). There are many factors an individual between this age may face mental health "issues" (Shout Out UK, 2018). One factors that could have an effect on an individual could be economic pressure. Within the early 2000's there was a change within the economic climate for example the prices of homes increased this made it difficult for individuals to buy homes so instead they started to rent homes (Shout Out UK, 2018). On top parents of the millennials (baby boomers) would put pressure on their children as they thought renting homes was a form of wasting money (Shout Out UK, 2018). This led to a culture of disposable income (Shout Out UK, 2018). Individuals would rent homes and spend the rest of their income on their social life. This sometimes led to other issues such as substance usage (Shout Out UK, 2018). This was a dangerous combination (Shout Out UK, 2018). Currently in Britain there is an increase of hospitalization and death due to drugs such as cocaine (Shout

Out UK, 2018). On the other hand, millennials who invested their money and bought homes were struggling and became financially unstable (Shout Out UK, 2018). Current political decisions such as Brexit are going to make it even more difficult for individuals to invest in buying a house (Shout Out UK, 2018).

Conditions of worth is defined as “ the terms on which one receives approval from significant others’ (Feltham and Dryden 1993: 34). This could be used by a counsellor to have a better understanding of their clients who are within this age range. If a counsellor has a client who is a child of a baby boomer their client may feel they need to act a certain way to receive approval from their parents. For example, when there was a massive change within the economic climate in 2000’s. Parents who were born in the generation of the baby boomers were encouraging their children to invests in homes. However, the individuals who listened to their parents and invested in homes were struggling and became financially instable. This is an example of conditions of worth because they followed their parent’s advice as they thought they would gain approval.

Erik Erikson created the 8 psychosocial life stages (Erikson, 1963). Within each life stage Erikson suggested an individual will experience a crisis and depending on how the individual deals with the crisis will determine their future personality development (Erikson, 1963). This could have a positive or negative affect on the individual’s development (Erikson, 1963). A millennial would be most likely within the intimacy vs isolation stage (Erikson, 1963). This crisis occurs between the ages of 18 to 40 (Erikson, 1963). Erikson described this as the adult stage of development. Within this stage an

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individual will form intimate relationships (Erikson, 1963). Within this stage if the crisis is overcome successfully the individual will be able to maintain loving and committed relationships (Erikson, 1963). However, if this crisis is not completed successfully the individual will become isolated and they will struggle to create and maintain meaningful relationships (Erikson, 1963).

Previous crisis' which were not completed successfully could remain and follow through the individual's life (Erikson, 1963). For example, between birth and the first year of the individual's life they will fall under the basic trust vs mistrust life stage (Erikson, 1963). If the individual's care givers were constantly present and emotionally available, the individual will be able to trust the world and feel safe (Erikson, 1963) However, if the individual was mistreated or the care that was provided wasn't adequate enough the individual will feel unsafe and they will be unable to trust the world (Erikson, 1963). Based on how the individual overcome the crisis will remain with the individual throughout their life (Erikson, 1963).

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory has many positive factors. One is this theory gives assurances that an individual will experience growth even though they may experience a crisis. It shows that even if an individual doesn't overcome the crisis they face within a stage they will develop a maladaptive reaction however, there is a chance they will overcome it within another stage (Shultz & Shultz, 2005). This is beneficial for a counsellor who is dealing with a client within the intimacy and isolation life stage as their client may feel as if they are trapped within this stage and may not be able to create intimate relationships. However, by using this theory and other interventions can promote change and eventually resolve this conflict.

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Another positive would be Erikson's theory has a deterministic approach. Erikson states that within the first four stages of an individual's life they are hugely influenced by others views and opinions. However, within the last four the individual has free reign (Shultz & Shultz, 2005). The counsellor could use this understanding and allow the client to have autonomy. Finally, Erikson stated that our personality is developed through learning and experiences. An individual's goal is to develop and maintain a positive ego identity (Shultz & Shultz, 2005).

There are some positives to this theory however, this theory has been criticised for not paying any attention towards emotional and cognitive development (Louw, 1998). It has also been criticised for being too ambiguous when it comes to describing the causes of development. He has been labelled as giving "*descriptive overview*" when it comes to explaining social and emotional development. He doesn't explain in detail how and why development takes place (Shaffer, 2009).

On the other hand, Gail Sheehy further developed and modified this theory. Gail Sheehy stated that women who are turning 50 without developing any major health illnesses are living up to 92 years old (Sheehy, 1995). Also, men are living until they are 81. she quoted "*the territory of the mid-forties, fifties and sixties and beyond is changing so fundamentally it now opens up whole new passages and stages of life.*" (Sheehy, 1995). She categorised adulthood into three stages; provisional adulthood which is between the ages of 18 to 30, first adulthood which is between 30 to 45 and finally second adulthood which is between 45 to 85 (Sheehy, 1995)

Gail Sheehy would identify millennials as being within the first stage (Sheehy, 1995). She branded this stage as being the provisional adulthood or the “try out 20’s”. Within this stage there are two contrasting goals (Sheehy, 1995). The first one is the individual having the longing to explore and the second goal the individual would want to obtain is the desire for stability (Sheehy, 1995). Traditionally, an individual during this stage would finish their studies, move away, start their career or start a family (Sheehy, 1995). However, Gail Sheehy stated that adolescence stage has been prolonged, and individual is most likely to experience a major change during the age of 30 (Sheehy, 1995).

Here are some of the challenges of the quickly shifting world an individual may face during this stage; society has changed their mindset towards marriage (Sheehy, 1995). Many individuals are prolonging marriage or deciding not to get married (Sheehy, 1995). Another change Sheehy identified was the main issues were; war, socialism and nuclear bombs (Sheehy, 1995). However now issues have become internal which include factors such as; drugs, violence and guns (Sheehy, 1995). This has led to the world becoming more violent and individuals feeling unsafe within communities (Sheehy, 1995). Another issue that has occur the rich are getting rich and the poor are getting poorer (Sheehy, 1995). People have less job opportunities due to their being a high level of competition (Sheehy, 1995).

Abraham Maslow created the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). This is a five-tier pyramid and within each tier there are specific requirements an individual need for basic physical survival (Maslow, 1943). These needs will

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motivate an individual's behaviour (Maslow, 1943). Every requirement within the tier would need to be fulfilled so they can move up each level and eventually move up to become self-actualized (Maslow, 1943). The five categories include; physiological needs this includes food, drink, shelter, clothing warmth, sex and sleep (Maslow, 1943). The second stage is safety (Maslow, 1943). Within this stage an individual needs security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear (Maslow, 1943). For example, due to the change within the economic climate and individual may become financially unstable so they lack stability. This will restrict the individual from moving up within the hierarchy. The third stage within the hierarchy would be love and belongingness such as friendships, intimacy, loyalty and acceptance (Maslow, 1943). For example, in the Erikson life stage a client within this age range would be within intimacy vs isolation stage. However, if the conflict isn't resolved they may find it difficult to create and maintain relationship. This would then lead them to not being able to move up with Maslow's hierarchy of needs because they are lacking the sense of love and belongingness. The next stage is esteem this involves the individual having esteem for themselves and gaining respect from other (Maslow, 1943). For example, an individual within this age range may have low self esteem due to not looking like the models they see on social media. The final stage is self-actualisation, Maslow stated this is when an individual has reached their full potential (Maslow, 1943).

An advantage of Maslow's hierarchy of needs it interprets an individual's behaviour and motivation so it could be easily understood (Reference, 2019). Another advantage of this theory would be this theory can be applied to

the current society (Reference, 2019). For example, if an individual has an understanding of what basic needs, they are lacking they will become aware and put them needs into place to help them move towards becoming self-actualized (Reference, 2019). However, a major disadvantage of this theory would when Maslow created the hierarchy, he only studied a narrow part of the population and generalised his findings (Reference, 2019). For example, in different cultures the words such as self-esteem and security have different meanings (Reference, 2019). So, its difficult measure individual's needs (Reference, 2019).

There are many similarities with Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Erikson's theories. One of the similarities would be both theories emphasis on the idea of social and personality development. Another similarity would be they both focus on stages of development within an individual's life. Even though there are some similarities with both theories there are also some differences. One of the differences would be Erikson looks at potential crisis' an individual will face (Erikson, 1963). He stated that that an individual would need to overcome the crisis successfully so they can develop properly and this could affect the individual later within another life stage (Erikson, 1963). However, Maslow's hierarchy of needs concentrates on the self-actualization idea (Maslow, 1943). This theory states that behaviour and learning is determined by the hierarchy (Maslow, 1943). On the other hand, Erikson believes that an individual will experience life stages at a specific age range (Erikson, 1963). Whereas Maslow believes an individual needs to obtain basic needs to move up within the hierarchy to become self-actualised (Maslow, 1943).

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