

Eriksonian psychosocial tradition and social identity theory



Several psychological theories have attempted to provide a definition of identity and an explanation of the processes that develop it. Many theorists see identity development as a means for an individual to explain the present as a bridge from the past to the future, agreeing that identity consists of both individual and social elements. This essay aims to consider the contributions and implications posed by two different associated fields of study; the Eriksonian Psychosocial tradition and Social Identity Theory.

Erikson's Psycho-social method was the first identity theory to provide an explanation between our self image (psycho) and the others in the community (social). He proposed individuals must have a stable sense of 'core identity', as failure to do so would mean the individual may be subject to an 'identity crisis'. This is not to say that people must never experience a conflict of interest between individual needs and social demands. In fact Erikson argued that only by the successful resolution of these 'normative crises' is the achievement of identity possible. He went on to identify eight stages in this life-long development of identity, marked by a distinct conflict, for which successful, normative crisis resolution would result in a favourable outcome. According to Erikson, the most important conflict takes place during adolescence, the fifth psychosocial age. Here the individual re-evaluates everything that was established in childhood by enduring "psychosocial moratorium". During this socially approved period of uncertainty, the individual can experience with different social roles and consequently personality, self concept and self worth, may all be altered.

Psychosocial Theory is a persuasive model. It is both accessible and relevant, resulting in Erikson being highly regarded amongst psychologists. He has <https://assignbuster.com/eriksonian-psychosocial-tradition-and-social-identity-theory/>

been described as a visionary, providing a basis for the work of James Marcia on different forms of identity. The theory is still relevant in today's modern life, due to its " utility in many professional arenas [such as] clinical, theoretical and empirical" (McKinney, 2001). Erikson has had a huge impact in child development, resulting in teachers, parents and counselors drawing on ideals of his to support their work. Theorists such as Mary Ainsworth, who studied attachment in infancy explained concepts similar to those of Erikson, offering credibility to his work. The approach has been useful for understanding and explaining how personality and behaviour manifest, and therefore has become a much-used tool in dealing with conflict management and in general self-awareness. It also provides a convincing explanation for many current issues, such as bullying in school. During stage 5.... and current racial issues and why it can cause so much aggression and understanding of motives behind terrorism.

However the theory does not go without criticism. Santrock (2004) highlights research which suggests that identity formation does not begin or end in adolescence, that the conflict is notably less dramatic than proposed, and that in fact some individuals go through their teenage years without any real problems at all. It therefore seems that Erikson may have placed too much emphasis on adolescence. This may be due to Erikson's own personal experiences having an effect on his interpretation of results. His young life was fraught with problems, not least being tall and blond and living in a Jewish neighbourhood, with a Jewish step-family. This need for acceptance and the conflict associated with being different became important themes in his theory.Based on field work, so reliable as in own environment;

He studied combat crises in U. S. soldiers during World War II, child-rearing practices in Native American communities and social behavior in India.

There are two basic problems with the psychosocial approach to identity.

Firstly that large social groups were ignored because although Erikson believed person and social were interlinked, he treated them separately. And secondly Erikson focused on individual identities to explain how people identify with individual groups.

Sit:- 700 words - get down to 200!

Social identity theory (SIT) aims to resolve some of these problems highlighted with the psychosocial tradition, by producing a social rather than individual focus on identity, emphasizing on the way we compare ourselves to others. Concerned with when and why individuals identify with, and behave as part of, social groups, adopting shared attitudes. Tajfel, the founder of the theory, directly challenged Erikson's concept that group behaviour could be explained by looking at the psychology of individuals. He studied the relationships between people and proposed two separate sub-systems; Personal Identity (describing oneself as a friend or parent for example) and Social Identity (in instances such as referring to gender, race or religion). Their alternative theory suggested a distinctive level of collective psychological processes. This meant that people acted as group members as well as individuals. Their central idea was that behaviour and identity operated on a continuum based on situation, ranging from the highly individual and unique at one end (purely interpersonal), to the collective and common at the other (purely intergroup). The theory's fundamental idea is

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that identity is drawn from self-categorisation, when describing characteristics from our social group. This provides labels for ourselves, in turn providing rules for our behaviour. The category in which we place ourselves is called the "ingroup". There is a sense of elitism and a tendency to exclude others; the "outgroup". Tajfel research aimed to consider this discrimination between the groups, by proposing superficial differences, he split participants into initial groups and subjected them to he concluded that this was sufficient enough to generate prejudices. This has been demonstrated, for instance in one example where school boys were placed in groups based on preference for abstract painters such as Klee or Kandinsky. Even using this trivial basis for grouping, and despite the fact that the school boys didn't know who was in the groups, the boys allocated more resources towards ingroup members than outgroup members. In addition, the resources were given to other individuals in a group instead of the group as a whole, so the boys were not just giving resources to themselves out of self-interest.[13] This experiment was especially interesting because it challenged other models of intergroup interaction which are based on the idea that discrimination between groups happens because there is a clear reason for it, such as a competition for resources or a conflict of interests between the groups. Sit proposes that the reason for this discrimination is because of the need to belong to a group, that are distinctive and have a high status, it boosts self-esteem by making the other group inferior however Sit argues that the resistance to this prejudice can result in some individuals seeking to improve their status by using social ability or leaving behind their social group. Others may accept social change, by social creatively, a

redefinition of the group or through social competition, actively denouncing alternative social ideas in regard to a particular group.

People don't like being in the out group; so one answer is Moving to another group, but requires social mobility to be practicable. For instance, this may be viable in the case of social class or a job, but not so much in groups based on race or gender for example. Social mobility is at the individualistic end of the social behaviour continuum suggested by social identity theory. At the other end of the continuum, group level strategies focus on direct competition. But for this to be possible, there needs to be a belief that change is genuinely possible as well as desirable. In addition, group members need to perceive the current relationships with other groups to be unjustified. Finally, if neither of the above two options are viable, members of groups wishing to change their status may decide to compare themselves using different criteria where they compare more favourably, or focus on comparisons with a different group compared to whom they fare better. People can also choose to redefine the negative elements of their group identity, or even redefine the group identity itself. These actions are not as effective as the others described above, but do allow group members to contend in a small way with the undesirable current perception of their group.

Good bits

Attempts to explain prejudices and self esteem, where Erikson did not.

Self-categorization theory grew from Tajfel and Turner's early work on social identity. It is a development of social identity theory, specifically in the part <https://assignbuster.com/eriksonian-psychosocial-tradition-and-social-identity-theory/>

of the relationship between group behaviour and self-concept that describes the social cognitive processes that create social identity effects. The theory describes how people define themselves at a group level but also at an individual level.[4][15] It considers group and individual identities to be at different levels of self-categorization, and more distinct from each other than social identity theory does. For instance, individuals can have several different group identities (e. g. gender, occupation, or nationality) and also several different individual identities depending on context (e. g. how someone considers themselves as a male or how they consider themselves compared to their colleagues at work).[16][17] This concept of a hierarchy of different identities replaced the continuum in social identity theory, and allowed an individual an unlimited range of identities based on context.[18] The salience of a particular group identity is based on how accessible a categorization is to an individual, and how well it fits the social context (e. g. bearing in mind what the individual wants to achieve with their behaviour, or what they did last time they were in the situation). For instance, when discussing political issues in a conversation, nationality may become more salient.[19]

Bad trivialise issues such as disability

Ethical ?

Labtest unreliable?

Can results be applied to real life situations.

Some criticisms cos it treat groups as individuals (see box on pg 66)

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Conclusion:-

Although Erikson's theory of identity development is widely cited, other theories provide important knowledge about identity and its development. However Erikson's work is as relevant today as when he first outlined his original theory, in fact given the modern pressures on society, family and relationships - and the quest for personal development and fulfilment - his ideas are probably more relevant now than ever. Erikson was keen to improve the way children and young people are taught and nurtured, and it would be appropriate for his ideas to be more widely known and used in day-to-day life, beyond the clinical and counselling professions. Erikson's psychosocial theory is. As with any concept there are critics, but generally Erikson's theory is considered fundamentally significant. Erikson was a psychoanalyst and also a humanitarian. So his theory is useful far beyond psychoanalysis - it's useful for any application involving personal awareness and development - of oneself or others. Social learning theories expand the constructs of self concept and self worth as the basis of self description in late childhood. Cognitive development theory describes the age-related processes leading to a child's limitation before adolescence and competence during adolescence for establishing identity. Researchers investigating Erikson's theory of identity development have provided important modifications to the theory.