

Perspectives of human growth and development



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The purpose of this essay is to compare and contrast two competing psychological theories of human behaviour and to focus on at least one stage of human development. The area of human development that this essay will explore is young adulthood. The two competing theories will be Erik Erikson's 'Eight stages of human development' and Abraham Maslow's 'Humanistic theory of self-actualisation'.

Erikson's 'Eight stages of human development' are an extension of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory. Freud developed his psychoanalytic concept during the early part of the nineteenth century. The basic assumption of the theory is that most of our 'behaviour stems from unconscious processes' (Atkinson et al : 11). Freud is seen as the founding father of the psychoanalytic movement.

Freud's work was very extensive and some of the topics of his theories are the human psyche, sexual desire and the unconscious mind. Freud's theory concerning the human psyche could be divided into three parts: ID, ego and the super ego. (Scott J. Marshall G. (ed) 2009).

Freud's other main theory was the unconscious mind. He talked of the unconscious mind as being like an iceberg with most of its structure being below the surface and hidden. Freud felt that the unconscious mind could be split into three parts, the conscious, preconscious and unconscious. It was his investigation into this that became a cornerstone of modern day psychoanalysis. (Scott J. Marshall G. (ed) 2009).

Another of Freud's theories was his five stages of psychosocial development. They are the oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, latency stage and finally

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the genital stage. All of these stages take place during childhood. Erikson extend Freud's five stages of psychosocial development into eight stages that extend over the full life cycle rather than just childhood. He also felt that the ego exists from birth. (Scott J. Marshall G. (ed) 2009).

Erikson's theory talks of a 'sequence of psychosocial stages' that take place throughout life. Each stage is punctuated with a 'crises' which must be passed to attain that skill or personality trait. These eight stages are Infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood and old age. The 'crises' that corresponds with each stage are basic trust V basic mistrust, autonomy V shame and doubt, initiative V guilt, industry V inferiority, identity V identity confusion, intimacy V isolation, generativity V stagnation, integrity V despair. (Erikson E. and Erikson J. 1998).

As the person passes through each of these stages they will either pass or fail and this will leave them with a lasting feeling 'ego strength' or the feeling of inadequacy (www. psychology. about. com). The 'ego strength' or the feeling of inadequacy is cumulative and will affect our sense of self at each stage. Once a stage has past it cannot be revisited. (www. psychology. about. com)

Abraham Maslow's 'Theory of self-actualisation' is a humanistic theory. Humanistic theories were first developed by Carl Rodgers during the 1950's. It is based around the individual and their own drives and desires. It states that we are all inherently good and are striving to improve ourselves. Maslow stated that 'Psychology should be about showing everyone how they can fully achieve the highest motives, the greatest knowledge, the fullest

understanding and the finest control and appreciation of the emotions of which they are capable'(Davenport: 46).

To demonstrate this theory Maslow developed the 'hierarchy of needs'. The central concept of this theory is that there are stages in life that you must master to be able to progress onto the next stage. A person although constantly striving to improve themselves can get held up at a stage and will not be able to progress. The stages we pass through according to Maslow are the basic Biological and Physiological needs - air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep, etc. The next layer is Safety needs - protection from elements, security, order, law, limits, stability, etc. The third layer is Belongingness and Love needs - work group, family, affection, relationships, etc. The fourth layer is Esteem needs - self-esteem, achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, managerial responsibility, etc. The final layer and the ultimate goal is Self-Actualisation. Maslow describes Self-Actualisation as 'achieving ones potential'. ([www. simplypsychology. pwp. blueyonder. co. uk](http://www.simplypsychology.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)).

Self-Actualisation can be attained through anything that ultimately satisfies and fulfills your potential. Maslow stated 'Musicians must make music, artists must paint, poets must write if they are to be ultimately at peace with themselves' (Maslow: 22).

Maslow listed a group of people that he felt had Self-Actualised. He was interested in their personal characteristics, the way they viewed themselves and the way others viewed them. It was from this list of people that he

developed his theory. The list contains such people as Einstein, Dalai Lama and Abraham Lincoln.

Although these two theories seem outwardly very different, they do have some similarities.

There is no empirical evidence to either theory, as both are based around internal drives and desires within the mind. The results are based upon 'subjective interpretation' and are therefore impossible to quantify (Davenport: 19).

Both theories have 'stages' that the individual will have to pass through. Although these stages happen at different ages they both share the concept of how we progress and evolve as we get older. Erikson described his stages as 'crises' whereas Maslow called his 'steps' (www. simplypsychology. pwp. blueyonder. co. uk).

Each of the theories is based around experiences that we have gone through in life, and the way they shape our future. Erikson talks of ego strength and Maslow of our ability to self-actualise.

Although we have shown some similarities between the two theories there are far more differences.

Psychoanalytical theories are formed around the 'human psyche' (Davenport: 26). This differs from humanistic theory as it refers to all life, not just human. 'The principle characteristics of all organisms' (www. allanturner. co. uk). Rodgers talks of a sack of potatoes in a cellar and the way they strive to reach the light.

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Erikson feels that the personality is deep rooted within in our subconscious and that failure is cumulative. Whereas Maslow's approach states that the personality continues developing during the whole life span and is 'much easier to change' (Eysenk: 429).

Maslow's 'Theory of self-actualisation' states that we are constantly changing the stage we are at on our quest for self-actualisation. It states we move up or down through his stages. This differs from Erikson's theory as his are age related and once a 'crises' has been past it cannot be resolved later without extensive psychotherapy.

Another of the differences is that psychoanalytical theories focus upon abnormal behavior and development where as Maslow's humanistic psychology focuses on the development of healthy individuals.

With Erikson's theory if you fail a crisis you still move on to the next stage but carrying a sense of inadequacy. Whereas with Maslow's model you can become trapped at a developmental stage and will be unable to progress until you attain that skill or quality. (www. allpsych. com)

Erikson's theory states everyone will pass through the entire crisis levels during their life cycle whereas with Maslow's theory states that some steps will never be reached, the organism may stay at the basic level of biological and physiological needs and progress no further.

Another difference between the two theories is that Maslow's theory has an ultimate goal which you work towards whereas Erikson's is set in crisis you pass through.

The purpose of this essay was to compare and contrast two competing psychological theories of human behaviour. The two theories that were chosen were Erik Erikson's 'Eight stages of human development' and Abraham Maslow's 'Humanistic theory of self-actualisation'. These were chosen due to the fundamental differences of the approaches to human development they relate to. Erikson's theory came from a psychoanalytical background, where we are born as a blank canvas and develop our personality during our childhood. Whereas Maslow's theory is from a humanistic background, and takes a far more holistic approach to development and of our 'uniqueness'. (www. simplynumbers. com). It also shows our potential to develop over the whole life cycle and not just during childhood. This essay has shown that although there are some similarities between the two theories there are a far greater number of differences. The similarities it shows are only relatively superficial and that due to opposing nature of the two basic theories the differences are far greater.

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