Theorist report: psychoanalytic theory

Psychology, Child Development

Abstract

The work done by psychoanalyst Erik Erikson built on the five stages of development Sigmund Freud theorized, believing they didn't go far enough. He identified what he believed were eight distinct stages of human development that continued throughout an individuals life. His research took into account the effects of society and culture on individual psychological development.

Erikson's theory placed " less emphasis on sexual urges as the drivers of development and more influences on social influences such as peers, teachers, schools and the broader cul-ture" (Sigelman and Rider, 2014). He also theorized that each stage could continue while another one was taking place at the same time, though the success of the individual relied on what he called a successful completion.

Keywords: Erik Erikson, Sigmund Freud, human development, psychoanalysis

Theorist Report; Erik Erikson – Psychoanalytic Theory Background and Overview
Psychologist Erik Erikson did most of his work following the work of Sigmund Freud, and entered the field only after encouragement from Freud's daughter who he would study with. While influenced by Freud's theories, Erikson believed that the environment a person grew up in was important in how they developed. " Whereas Freud's stages stopped with adolescence, Erik-son believed that psychosocial growth continues during the adult years" (Sigelman and Rider, 2014), as such he expanded upon freud's five stages that concluded with the genital stage, and added three additional stages that

continued throughout the human life-span. " His theory of psy-chosocial development is centered on what is known as the epigenetic principle, which proposes that all people go through a series of eight stages" (Cherry, 2018).

Erikson believed that it wasn't just early childhood events that shaped the adult, but events that took place throughout life. While Freud's theory focused on psychosexual development, the work of Erikson centered on psychosocial development. Erikson emphasized the role culture and society has on development and the conflicts that take place within the ego itself. He believed that development takes place in stages, one after another as the individual resolves problems that are social in nature but can overlap. The distinct stages are ones every human passes through from birth to death, and are therefore universal across cultures. Erikson expanded on Freud's work but believed that at each stage the individual faces a conflict, which may or may not be resolved. If there is a favorable outcome, it's known as a virtue.

When a stage is completed, a healthy personality forms with the development of funda-mental virtues. If however one does not complete a stage, they would be left with an unhealthy sense of self that can be determined later. Erikson saw each conflict centered on either develop-ing a psychological quality or failing to develop it. During each conflict the potential for growth is as high as the potential for failure. Erikson believed that how an individual deals with issues from earlier in life will determine how they will resolve issues later in life. This was a connection he made

between thinking in the present, and earlier unresolved or resolved developmental is-sues. The eight stages Erikson developed are:

- Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust: As a baby, they will develop either basic trust with their parent and the world around them or will grow to view the world as a dangerous place.

- Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt: Phase in early childhood when children either develop a sense of competence and independence, or shame and doubt about their abilities.

- Initiative vs. Guilt: Children in preschool years develop a sense of initiative if they're able to explore and do things on their own. If they're made to feel guilty for making their own choices the child will develop a sense of guilt.

- Industry vs. Inferiority: In school age a child begins comparing themselves to others and they develop either a sense of industry, or feelings of inferiority.

- Identity vs. Role Confusion: During this period, teens begin questioning their place in the world and developing their goals. If parents give them autonomy they're able to develop their own identities, but if they're punished for doing so they may have role confusion.

- Intimacy vs. Isolation: The development of strong relationships in early adulthood helps to de-velop intimacy, but those who fail at this task may become isolated.

- Generativity vs. Stagnation: People who develop a sense of purpose excel during this period in middle–age, but those who find no purpose or value in their activities may stagnate.

- Ego integrity vs. Despair: Stage where those in later life look back on their lives fondly, or feel a sense of regret and despair. Evaluation I've come into my education with an extremely limited knowledge of psychoanalysis, but what I've learned thus far is the value of Freud and Erikson's theories.

While I find benefit in aspects of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, I believe it's limited in it's scope and less flexible in relation to development. I too don't believe Freudian psychosexual theory goes far enough into the later stages of human development. I believe Erikson's theory is more complete, and ties to-gether important psychosocial development across the entire lifespan, not just up to age 13. I ap-preciate Freud's belief in the importance of early childhood development, and the ability of the human mind to suppress various thoughts and experiences. I believe there's a great deal of per-sonality development that takes place in the earliest stages as well as experiences that fall into our unconscious mind. Human development will generally happen within a broad timeframe, but can be accelerated or slowed depending on the environment around the individual which in-cludes society and the culture they're a part of. While there's a theoretical framework provided by Erikson, much like the work of others including Konrad Lorenz, how it's put into practice is vague. In particular how the individual moves from one-stage to another, and what is needed to master the virtues.

In Practice Erikson's approach would be beneficial in the ways I try and help my clients, as we try to understand from the past what's influenced an individuals current state of mind, and how they interact with the world. If for

example a client came in and was timid, procrastinated and seems overly obedient we might start looking at what they remember from their childhood between the ages of 6 and 12. There's a general framework Erikson's theory details that can be overlaid with a clients own timeline to see what potentially may need to be worked through and processed. That understanding can give insights as to where the client may be ' stuck', and not yet to a point where the virtues Erikson described, have been earned and can allow for a healthy transition into the next stage of social development. In working with my clients I would also use aspects of art-therapy as a means of bringing some of the unconscious to the conscious, a mode that also pays tribute to his earlier pursuits which fortunately, he put aside so he could study psychology.

Conclusion

There are many aspects of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development that mirror the earlier works of Sigmund Freud's psychosexual. Unlike Freud however, Erikson believed that the social interactions in human development were the driving forces and not the psychosex-ual. Over the course of his work he expanded Freud's five stages of development to include three additional stages which he believes more accurately reflects our social development that contin-ues throughout our life.