

Adult faith development theories

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Faith is holistic introduction or orientation of a person mainly concerned with the person's relationship to the immediate environment. James Fowler, a professor in psychology came up with a theory aimed at explaining the development of faith in human beings at each stage of life. The theory is known as Faith development theory.

Every theory brought forward by any researcher has its own strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, faith development theory has weaknesses and strengths too. Fowler describes the theory in six stages. The following successive paragraphs illustrate the weaknesses and strengths of the theory as well as its comparison with another theory, that of Middle age adulthood which was put forward by Jean Piaget and his five counterparts. Faith in the context is not religious in its content as one may think or imagine.

It focuses on how a person makes critical and sensible decisions in life. The theory is mainly concerned with the development of an individual's faith through six distinctive invariant, hierarchical, and sequential stages. The stages are; intuitive stage or projective faith stage, mythic or literal faith stage, synthetic or conventional faith stage, individual or reflexive faith stage, conjunctive faith stage and finally the universalizing faith stage. In this paper, the fifth stage or the conjunctive faith stage will be taken into consideration, and studied in a detailed manner. The description of this stage will be in reference to Australian people living in Sydney.

An individual reaches fifth stage at the age of 40-65 years. It is referred to as the midlife of a person. The person begins to distinguish between what one believes and what is true. He or she begins to realize symbols, stories, and

teachings of his or her traditions. The following are the strengths of faith development theory.

Distinguishing between what one believes and what is true is an important factor in such stage. The person is able to know, through learning, facts such as death and distinguish it from beliefs like eternity. This is in accordance to the Australian Catholic Psychologist, Crawford. Symbols realized by the person at this age are those that are meant to Witten the person. Such symbols may include sign languages by the elderly in the society.

They also learn the languages used by the younger generation in order to facilitate communication between them as they have a responsibility to take care of them. Understanding the youths, is one of the unique tasks an individual undergoes at this stage. Under such a situation, the person may involve in social activities that are not age selective like church services. Teaching them on certain issues like the Bible can facilitate the knowledge of this generation to a better level. The consequence of this is that mutual understanding between these two generations will be boosted and communication of important messages as well as the complaints or suggestions by the younger generations will be taken care of. The impact of this will be an overall development in the society.

Strengths of Faith Development Theory (40-65) Various psychological researches by psychological experts have proven, with ample evidence that the theory is worth being a fact. Its applications in the field of psychotherapy has always been successful and received immense trust by the applicants. Fowler tries to put a lot of empirical evidences to confirm his theory. He

conducted the interviews in which he used people of almost all the ages from zero to eighty-eight. His students did the same and produced the same conclusions as his. This provides a good basis that the theory can be valued to some extent.

If at all, the outcome of the two researches on different people and environments were different, then his theory would be considered a mere imagination by a normal man. These behaviors of people similar to the theoretical overview are enough evidence or strength that the theory is valuable. The middle age theory of faith development, according to the theorist, Lavinson, is divided into three distinct periods of development. In the first period, creation and maintenance of a new life structure take place. The second is characterized by adjustment. It is also the transition period.

The third and the final period is that of consolidation. Many people during this stage lead personally satisfying, socially valuable, and energetic lifestyle. Many individuals at this age also develop the capacity of being more maturely creative, open minded and purposeful. More researches have proven that the theory has become influential in certain fields such as pastoral care, Christian teachings, and pastoral psychology. Any contact with the theory has power to stimulate and fascinate.

It has also contributed to a lot in the progress of practical theology. The theory has been applied in fields such as theology and other religion related functions. An example of this is derived from the Australian society in Sidney. According to Sr. Carmel Leavey, a senior psychology researcher in Sidney, stated in his book, “Sponsoring Faith in Adolescence,” that most children

after research was done on the impact of the teachings on moral values in the church that most of the children learnt a lot through the portrayal of good characters compared to before.

The theory has also been applied in the Australian schools teaching the Religious educations. It has been used to identify changes that students undergo as well as that by the tutors in order to determine a good working environment with enough understanding among the existing parties.

Weaknesses of Faith Development Theory (40-65) Fowler's theory has had many criticisms from different thinkers who have put forward challenges of the theory with various evidences. According to the article in the British Journal of Psychology, arguments are put across that James Fowler's theory had a lot in common with the already existing Piaget's theory. Thus, the theory was not his original work but a simple derivative of Piaget's idea of cognitive human development. Moreover, Fowler himself, through his empirical testing of his theory, leaves most of the investigative basis or footslogging to his students.

Students of ages lower than forty carrying out investigations on behavior of people whose ages are higher. This also provides a fundamental basis for the critical questioning of the appropriateness of the theory. Fowler's modernist approach is also questionable. His overarching explanation together with its content and form separation has greatly faced post modernity challenges, which are challenges faced by individuals who have gone past the middle age period (above 65 years). Examples of such problems are contradictions of their long and well-known beliefs, which they are used to.

Each generation come with its new ideas and reasons behind them. Most of the time, the reasons do not embrace or entertain aspects or culture of the then gone generation. Such a challenge faced by the old at the mentioned age bracket is what is termed as postmodern challenge. Fowler's attempt and efforts in the subordination of post modernism into faith development through presentation of post modernity developmental interpretation always failed. Among the empirical studies of Fowler's model of the six stages, only the first two have found the empirical support, so far. The two were mainly based on the cognitive development stages of Piaget.

The existing graphs and tables in the book, " Stages of Faith and Religious Development," show a validation of the first four stages, however, lack of enough and convincing statistical verification of these stages proved it untrustworthy and unconvincing. In addition, there was no publication of the study in any journal for proper reference. The ordering of the stages from one to six has also been questioned. The first and the stages consist of a group of ages zero to seven and the second group beginning from age eight. Most of the psychologists such as Jean Piaget came up with an argument that child development between the age of three and that of eight or nine years is the same due to their reasoning similarities.

They also argue that development in a child is mostly affected by environment and the age factor plays little role in influencing psychological or emotional development of a child. The critiques argue that the ordering was mainly based on a particular Christian faith group, Protestant, but not in accordance to his definition of faith. Theory of Faith Development Verses Theory of Middle Age Development The proposers of this theory are; Jean <https://assignbuster.com/adult-faith-development-theories/>

Piaget, Erick Erickson, Sigmund Freud, Lawrence Kohlberg, Melanie Klein, and Carl Jung. The theory of Faith Development has been broken into six stages in hierarchical order while that of Middle Age Development has no breakdown but a single thesis and its explanation. Both theories provide explanations of human development in different aspects of human life such as theological, religious, psychological, and ministry. Individual children at the age of zero, according to Piaget undergo the process of preoccupation, which involves understanding, and learning activities mainly based on how they respond to different situations.

A child who had been burnt after taking a hot object will definitely dread any other hot object. Such a response is very important in this stage of development. Fowler's theory of Development on the other hand talks of a child having self awareness at this age. Self-awareness in terms of anything dangerous and others like opposite sex and death. This in accordance to the study done on the Australian city, Sidney which revealed that most of the Australian children under the age of eight shown high level of awareness especially to anything that looked harmful. Theological Aspects of Faith Development Theory The framework of Fowler's theory has received many scrutiny and critical evaluation from various theological angles.

All these scrutiny have aimed at the reconstruction of the theory through several modification suggestions. A doctor in theology, Mark Durrett, did an investigation on Fowler's roots of theology. He concluded that Fowler had his theological roots from Niebuhr H. Richards. However, according other theological experts such as One Park, Fowler does not show any justice or

concern to the discussion of Niebuhr on the inevitable and the dark side of human nature.

This is a clear relationship between theology and the theory. The middle adulthood stage is the stage where an individual begins to embrace his or her traditions and learns certain important symbols of life. Therefore, at this stage, an individual also tends to psychologically believe on certain existing theological values. These values vary from denomination to denomination mainly among the various societies. Psychological Aspects of Faith Development Theory As stated earlier, it is at this stage when a person begins to integrate and embrace the polarities or the opposites in their lives. They learn a lot through thinking mainly by reflection of their experiences.

Nevertheless, there are some elements, which are not related to age in any way. Thus, individuals at the middle stage of development (40-65 years) like any other person of other age groups, automatically undergo through these psychological processes. Examples of such elements are the psychological beliefs in given rules and regulations of some denominations. The practice has been experienced in Australian city, where Catholic has taken over a great population leaving a smaller number to other denominations. Other forms of psychological aspects analyzed in this theory as well as that of Middle Age Development by Piaget and his team involves one main psychological aspect of individuals at this particular age bracket.

They have a natural or inherent responsibility to solve simple and complex tasks. They may be the ones that involve younger generation or the older ones. They do handle such problems in different ways like financially, for

instance, caring for or paying school fees for their kids. Sociological aspects of Faith and Development Theory At middle age, individuals develop certain sociological aspects, which are evident among them. They learn certain important aspects of sociology such as culture. This is where the understanding of societal cultural beliefs takes place.

According to Erick Erickson, it is the age usually referred to as stagnation age, as observed in Sidney, Australia. The stagnant individual definitely ceases to be an important or reliable member of the society. Such a person is under the care of other stronger people, probably of younger ages.

Erickson goes ahead to explain the reason behind the stagnation as over- extensiveness of a person. Here, he implies that some people become so generative that they do not even get enough time to contribute well to the society. Ministry Aspect of Faith and Development Theory The two theories have wide similarities in terms of ministerial applications in the current world.

Just as stated in theological aspects, the theories have been used to explain some of the current occurrences in the religious matters.[Some, for instance in the Australian city, Sidney question the necessity of religious practices like baptism. Others talk of the need for special dressings. Individuals within this age bracket, try to shed off some of the old beliefs in matters pertaining to spiritual; and ministerial issues. They reason, analyze their past, and make corrections appropriately.

Conclusion According to above arguments on the theoretical theses, it can be confidently concluded that the two theories explaining the middle age

development have a range of similarities and differences. These similarities and differences have many effects to the human life today. Therefore, James W. Fowler, Jean Piaget and his five colleagues, are described as heroes and profound contributors to the world of sociology, psychology, ministry and theology. They have managed to achieve this feat through extensive and thorough research.