

Erikson's psycho- social crisis confronted



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Erik Erickson, is known as one of the most prominent researchers in the area of human behavior, as it relates to personality development and social interaction. His theory on development called the " Eight Stages of Man" is a set a crises that must be undergone during different times throughout the lifespan. With all eight stages there can be adaptation and normal adjustment to the crisis presented or there may be difficulties with dealing within the crisis, leading to maladaptive behavior.

This is important to note in the field of psychoanalysis, the area where Erikson practiced, because using this theory, a therapist may assist a client by referring back to a stage, where development may have been stunted. The stages in order are; trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, accomplishment/industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and finally ego integrity versus despair.

I would like to further explore the crisis of identity versus role confusion and the role it has played in my own life. Many people are familiar with the saying " identity crisis", so it is the easiest to both explain, personally, and to have others relate to, more easily. The crisis of identity versus role confusion comes to a person in their lifespan, around adolescence. It is at this point in a person's life, where choices are laid in front of them and choices must be made. Teenagers are inundated with social pressures that pull them to choose what kind of adult they will be, although they are not yet adults.

This can be highly confusing as teens struggle to define their own sense in how they fit in the world of such things as politics, religion, and other groups that they may identify with. Without understanding where you fit in in the

groups around you, it is impossible to really know yourself. This stage allows you to practice what works in your social interactions with others and what doesn't work. You discover what areas you feel comfortable in, in relation to interactions with others, such as what church you feel comfortable with or if you even feel comfortable with religion at all.

It is at this time you ask yourself " who am I? " and must work to find out the answer. This stage is full of frustration and one can either fill in the blank as to their own identity or remain confused and develop problems. As long as an adolescent has the freedom to experiment with roles, lessened anxiety and pressure from authority figures, ways to achieve goals in the community, along with other helpful and unobtrusive avenues of exploration, this crisis can be overcome.

But events like excess anxiety toward the teen due to anxiety from parents in their changing role in one another's life, limited access to vocational exploration or cultural institutions, or unfair sanctions on healthy role experimentation (such as with sexual orientation) can seriously hinder growth and disallow a teen to move forward. This is an area that I am familiar with, as are all teens, who struggle to decide not only who we are, but where we stand in the world, and where we are going on from that point.

When I was in high school, I was an intelligent student on the advanced placement track, ready intellectually to go to college. However, my parents could not afford to send me and my counselors did not try to seek out scholarships for me, despite my pleas. I became angry and upset with society at large. I looked around and saw students, who were not very intelligent, but they had money and they were going to college, but students

like me, who could not afford it. This made me wish that I was not intelligent, because it did me no good, I felt like I fit in nowhere.

I was too poor to be part of the group of kids going to college and to intellectually curious to fit in with the kids, who did not want to go to college. I fought and I struggled with teachers, family, friends, everyone, because of this anger. I turned from an idealist to a very cynical person, who became prone to getting in trouble and rebelling against society itself. I did not understand the fairness of rich and poor and how inequality like this could be a dead-end road. In the end of this crisis, I realized that I had to be my own person, a stronger person, someone who had to rely on my own assets and use them.

I grew up. I found ways to go to college (grants, loans, internships) and then I became an activist for people like me, who feel the same negative way. I continuously study how to help people and have learned that I fit in best with others, who have faced adversity, and now want to help others. I feel more comfortable with people, who are intellectuals and do not look down upon others for any reason. I have found out who I am, where I fit in, and where I am going. But, it certainly was not easy.

In closing, I would like say that I have found the study of Erik Erikson's crises very interesting, especially the identity versus role confusion crisis. I could easily understand and relate to this crisis and this makes the theory seem much more legitimate. There are seven other crisis too, and looking at them through the same lens as this crisis and using it to help people understand how to do better and feel better seems like the best approach to this theory.

It has much potential for use in the world of therapy and can be understood and used by people, even unfamiliar with psychology, as well.