

1 Erik Erikson and Adolescence

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Abstract

Erik Erikson was a Psychologist and a Psychoanalyst, he introduced his theory of psychosocial development in the 1950s. The purpose of this study was to look into the stage of ego development in adolescence from age 13 through 19. Adolescents at this stage have an ego crisis and must develop a sense of who they are, and develop an identity for themselves versus role confusion. Their ego strength is to accept their belief in fidelity. “For many years Erik's theory was best known for its designation of the “identity crisis” of adolescence.”

3 Erik Erikson and Adolescence

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Erikson was one of the most influential Psychologists of the twentieth century, and is best known for his famous theory of psychosocial development and the concept of the identity crisis.

In this paper I will present the fifth stage of Erik Erikson's ego development concerning adolescence, from his theory on Psychoanalytic Ego Psychology and how the stages of adolescence influence the development of their identity. Adolescents are eager to explore their personal identity and a sense of self. This is a crucial period in the developmental years.

Adolescence presents the identity crisis, when this crisis is mastered it leads to the experience of intimacy to the final outcome of fidelity.

4 Erik Erikson and Adolescence

According to Erikson's theory he explained that our personalities are influenced by the social experiences we gain throughout our lives. Biological change is something new that adolescence experience, these changes started out with noticeable body change. This change is called puberty, it is the process of physical changes through which a child's body is going into adulthood. The first sign is rapid height growth, pubic hair and underarm hair is noticed. Body odor is also evident and some suffer from an outbreak of facial acne, these changes are due to hormone change in the body.

Some girls start their menstrual cycle from as young as nine years old, and their body shape begins to take on the form of a young lady. Boys also start having changes from about the age of nine as well, their testicles start growing, most boys experience changes in their voice. These changes in their biological development continues in boys up to the the age of eighteen, and in girls up to the age of sixteen.

Psychological change can be a frightening experience. According to Erikson, the main task of adolescents is to solve the crisis of identity versus role confusions. During the crisis there is a lot of confusion that occurs in this stage of development. It gets overwhelming for adolescents to figure out their identity in finding out where they fit in through this developmental period. The identity crisis somewhat depends on psychobiological factors, which leads to a clear relationship between body structures, thought and actions, that would help in sense of the awareness of who they are.

Social changes are also dramatic during adolescence stages as they are preparing into adulthood. According to Erikson, adolescents live through an identity crisis and they may need help in adjusting to the new environment of the adult world. Sexual orientation and self-esteem

5 Erik Erikson and Adolescence

also develop at that period and have a certain influence on their future life, they may even be an uncertainty in the area of their gender identity. Boys may be attracted to boys, and girls are attracted to girls as well. This can cause a role confusion by not understanding what to do, they may develop a feeling of shame and embarrassment, that can lead them to become isolated.

When an individual remains unsure about their identity, desires, beliefs and roles, they may be left with feelings of confusions or insecurities about themselves and the future. They may not be sure which path to choose and what path to avoid. These role confusions may continue even in adulthood. Adolescents who struggle in consciously adopting a positive role in their lives struggle in the future as well.

Some young adolescents have undergone suffering where a developmental crisis was indicated. When it comes to adolescents making their own decisions, sometimes they don't know where to start, so this is where adult interveners such as parents, educators and significant others, such as a pastor, or even a counselor can assist in the development of positive, healthy identities among adolescents. The stage of adolescence can be very fearful, thus making the individuals confused, insecure about the circumstances in life. They need to identify the priorities in life, in career, relationships, society, and to set goals to achieve them as an adult. With appropriate encouragement and support by the social surroundings, they will be successful in understanding their personal identity and shall come forth with a coherent sense of self.

The specific strength emerging in adolescence is fidelity; it maintains a strong relation both to infantile trust and to faith that is matured. Fidelity is indicated as a commendable quality of adolescent ego strength which is appropriate for mankind's process of change which stems from the interaction of past inheritance. However, like all the other basic virtues, it can only

6 Erik Erikson and Adolescence

originate from a life step in a process with the individuals and the social energy of a loyal community.

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7 Erik Erikson and Adolescence

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