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Identity Formation & Self Esteem in Early Adolescence: A Study of Associated Development Issues

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Abstract

In today's world everything is changing at a very fast pace. There comes a lot of difference between what were the conditions half a century ago. Today's environment, living style, economic, social and political conditions are changed. It is really difficult to be in rhythm and at pace with the ever-changing and chaotic world. This type of atmosphere creates identity crisis among the human beings. Children and most especially adolescents suffered from this phenomenon at a great length. Wars, revolutions, natural disasters etc. put adolescents at risk for great harm.

In the present paper an attempt has been made to discuss the development issues in early adolescences with regard to identity formation and self-esteem.

Keywords: human development, identity, integrity, confusion, crisis, commitment.

Introduction

Early adolescence is a period of obvious human development and growth which occurs between childhood and adolescence. Adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood, it's when the form of attachment with their parents change as the child begins to seek autonomy from their parents and at the same time they need to keep their sense of relatedness to them. At the beginning of the adolescence the parent-child conflict approaches its peak. During this significant stage of the life cycle, young adolescents, 10 - 15 year olds, experience rapid and momentous developmental change. During this phase of young adolescent's education, to understand and respond to the distinct developmental characteristics is crucial. According to Schoon, "A person is not a composite of isolated attributes, but instead resembles a system of characteristics". Identity formation, also known as individuation, is defined as the development of the distinct personality of individual characteristics that are possessed by one, by which one is recognized or known. Such traits include a sense of uniqueness from others and a sense of identity within society. From research we see that development is physical, cognitive or psychosocial is unique for every child. Some young people develop in certain areas faster than others but that does not mean that a slower or a faster development than the average is not uncommon. "The assumption that the potential for development continues throughout life raises the question of what we mean by development. Are we to say that change and development are synonymous?"

Eric Erikson Theory of Psycho-social Development

Eric Erikson (1902-1994) was a German born, American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst well known for his theory on psychosocial development of humans. The intrinsic affirmation affiliated with Erikson's theory of psycho-social development is that the personality is tenacious over the lifespan as the individual matures biologically and cognitively. Bee H. & Boyd D. refer to lifespan perspective as *"the current view of developmentalists that changes happen throughout the entire human lifespan and that changes must be interpreted in light of the culture, and context in which they occur"*. At

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each stage of development there is an associated set of developmental tasks. The fundamental element to a successful route through life's stages is the distinction of the social environment. Erikson referred to this development in terms of the Epigenetic Principle, an organic perspective. He referred to this in his book "Identity, youth and crisis" (1968), and used it to encompass the notion that we develop through an unfolding of our personality in predetermined stages, and that our environment and surrounding culture

influence, how we progress. Erikson explained the factors which have been linked with healthy identity development, these include: security, trust, safety with having the freedom to explore their environment. According to Erikson, "to achieve a healthy personality, an individual must successfully resolve a crisis at each of the eight stages of development. Each stage centers around a specific crisis or conflict between competing tendencies".

Table 1: Erikson’s Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development

Stage	Crisis/Phase	Description
First	Trust versus Mistrust	Infants learn either to trust the environment (if needs are met) or to mistrust it.
Second	Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt	Toddlers acquire self-confidence if they learn to regulate their bodies and act independently. If they fail or are labeled as inadequate, they experience shame and doubt.
Third	Initiative versus Guilt	Preschoolers (aged 3-5) acquire new physical and mental skills but also learn to control their impulses. Unless a good balance is struck, they become either unruly or too inhibited.
Fourth	Industry versus Inferiority	Children (aged 6-11) acquire many skills and competencies. If they take pride in these, they acquire high self-esteem. If they compare themselves unfavorably with others, they may develop low self esteem.
Fifth	Identity versus Role Confusion	Adolescents must integrate various roles into a consistent self-identity. If they fail to do so, they may experience confusion over who they are.
Sixth	Intimacy versus Isolation	Young adults must develop the ability to form deep, intimate relationships with others. If they do not, they may become socially or emotionally isolated.
Seventh	Generativity versus Self-absorption	Adults must take an active interest in helping and guiding younger persons. If they do not, they may become preoccupied with purely selfish needs.
Eighth	Integrity versus Despair	In the closing decades of life, individuals ask themselves whether their lives had any meaning. If they can answer yes, they attain a sense of integrity. If they answer no, they experience despair.

Most adolescents get along well with their parents is, in one sense, surprising; after all, there are growing sources of conflict between parents and children during these years. In particular, parents must come to terms with the fact that their children are turning rapidly into adults, and this means giving them the increasing freedom they seek- at least up to a point.

Erikson believed the behaviour of the main caregiver (usually the mother) is critical to the child's resolve of this crisis, the caregiver must be consistently loving, and must respond to the child predictably and reliably. He goes on to state that "infants whose early care has been erratic or harsh may develop mistrust". It was Erikson's belief that throughout one's lifetime, they experience different conflicts or crisis. Each of the conflicts can arise at a certain point in life and needs to be successfully resolved before progression to the next of the eight stages. Failure to successfully complete a stage can result in a reduced ability to complete further stages and therefore a more unhealthy personality and sense of self. These stages can be resolved successfully at a later time.

The most crucial stage in Erikson’s theory of adolescence is: the crisis of *identity versus confusion*. At this time of life, teenagers ask themselves, "Who am I?", "What am I really like?", "What do I want to become?" In other words, they seek to establish a clear *self-identity*- to understand their own unique traits and what is really of central importance to them. These, of course, are questions individuals ask themselves at many points in life. According to Erikson, though, during

adolescence it is crucial that these questions be answered effectively. If they are not, individuals may drift, uncertain of where they want to go or what they wish to accomplish. Adolescents adopt many different strategies to help them resolve their own personal identity crises. They try out many different roles- the good girl/boy, the rebel, the dutiful daughter/son, the athlete- and join many different social groups. They consider many possible social selves- different kinds of persons they might potentially become. Out of these experiences they gradually piece together a cognitive framework for understanding themselves- a self-schema. Once formed, this framework remains fairly constant and serves as a guide for adolescents in many contexts.

The Marcia Theory of Identity Crisis

Marcia is another significant theorist who elaborated upon Erikson's perception of identity crisis and identifies confusion. James Marci, a Canadian clinical and developmental psychologist took Erikson's theory further. He described the process as having four basic, main steps on the continuation of identity development; the structure is designed to classify adolescents into one of four main stages of identity. The identity statuses are used to pinpoint the progression of an adolescent's identity formation. In Marcia's theory, he states that identity is "whether an individual has explored various alternatives and made firm commitments to: an occupation, religion, sexual orientation and political values. Following is the four identity statuses by James Marcia.

Table 2: Marcia’s Four Statuses of Identity

Sr.no.	Status	Description
1	Foreclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A commitment is made without exploring alternatives. • Based on parental ideas and beliefs that are accepted without question.
2	Identity Diffusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neither explore nor make commitments • Many become socially isolated and withdrawn
3	Moratorium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the midst of the crisis but whose commitment are either absent or are only vaguely defined • Characterized by the active exploration of alternatives.
4	Identity Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced a crisis, undergone identity explorations and made commitments. • From diffusion through moratorium to identity achievements.

		Identity status			
Position on occupation and Ideology		Identity moratorium	Identity foreclosure	Identity diffusion	Identity achievement
Crisis		Present	Absent	Absent	Present
Commitment		Absent	Present	Absent	Present

Fig 1: Marcia's Four Statures of Identity

Marcia's theory does not conclude that each adolescent will go through and encounter all four identity statuses. Some may experience only one or two identity statuses throughout their adolescence. Furthermore unlike Erikson's, Marcia's theory takes into account multidirectional movement between and among the various identity statuses. For example, an adolescent may experience a traumatic event such as their parents separating, or an assault, which may cause them to re-assess their perception of the world and its value system. The type of crisis may result in them reverting to a previous enacted identity status as to adjust to this new situation.

These are four identity statuses proposed by Marcia, furthering Erikson's theory. Marcia described the process as having four main, reoccurring steps. Identity formation has two key parts: Crisis and Commitment. Marcia suggested that identity involves the adoption of ideals and values, sexual orientation and work possibilities. He formulated the idea of status which allowed for a more fluid conception of identity formation.

Based on the studies which have derived from Erikson's & Marcia's Theories there is a need to examine the pro's and con's of both theories. Erikson's can be ambiguous about the causes of development and his theory does not have a universal structure for crisis resolution. Erikson's theory is more a depictive overview of human social and emotional progression that does not comprehensively explain why or how this advancement occurs. Furthermore Erikson does not clearly explain how the outcome of one psychosocial stage influences personalities at a later stage. Then on the more positive side of Erikson's theory is, it's ability to bring together important psychosocial developments across the entire lifespan. Also "Erikson was more positive than Freud as he believed that negative outcomes in a stage could be resolved at a later date. Unlike Erickson's stage theory, Marcia's theory accounts for multi-directional movement among and between the various identity statuses. Finally Marcia formulated the idea of status, which allowed for a more fluid conception of identity formation.

Lawrence Kohlberg Theory of Stages of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg, an American psychologist best known for his work on the Theory of stages of moral development, also known as a stage theorist. Kohlberg's theory was developed from the research and principles of Jean Piaget's identity development. Previously, Piaget suggested a two-way theory of moral development (moral realism and moral relativism). Kohlberg's moral development is focused on the cognitive process rather than

the actual moral actions of a person. Continually people who are able to cognitively discuss appropriate moral choices do not always exhibit moral behaviour. Furthermore, persons can know the right moral decisions to make and decide to respond in the opposite manner. Kohlberg's moral judgement development seems to have a parallel relationship between age and stage. "Before the age of ten years of age a child believes rules are fixed, handed down by a higher authority (such a parent or adult) and subject to change. After the age of ten, the child realizes that rules are flexible and can be modified, with the agreement of others. Kohlberg based his theory on interviews he conducted with children and adolescents regarding moral reasoning. He then devised 'moral dilemmas', the answers to which were used to categories moral development. Following figure 1.2 shows the levels and stages of Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

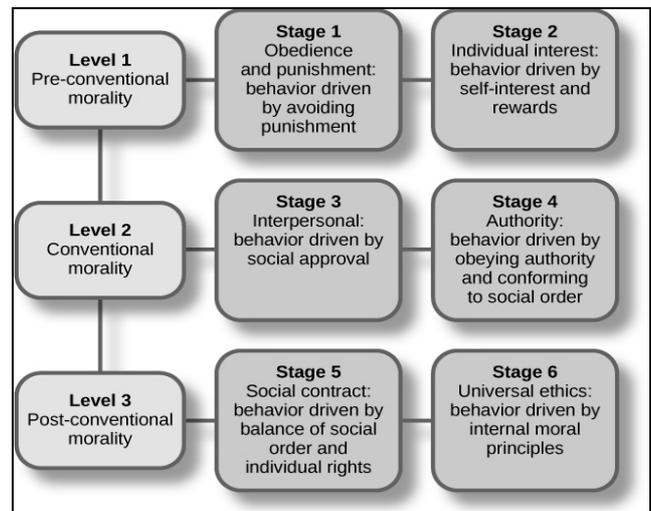


Fig 2: Levels and Stages of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Various theorists have criticized Kohlberg's theory, by those who placed more emphasis on learning moral behaviour and by those who believe moral reasoning is based mostly on emotional factors rather than on their ideas of fairness and justice.

Conclusion

To conclude we can say that young adolescents call for educational experiences and schools try to care for their physical, intellectual, emotional, psychological, moral, ethical, social developmental and spiritual characteristics. Parents, guardians, practitioners and others who work with young adolescents need to be aware of both obvious and subtle changes in their developmental characteristics. Changes like these can give adults intuitive into the demands facing young adolescents and emphasize possible logic for transference in their capabilities and behaviour. Educators and career guidance counselors and policymakers today need to persevere with their support of initiatives that allow young adolescents with developmentally appropriate environment and learning experiences.

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