

THEORIES OF LEARNING

7. IDENTITY THEORIES

7.1. Interpersonal Identity Development

Social relation can refer to a multitude of social interactions, regulated by social norms, between two or more people, with each having a social position and performing a social role. In sociological hierarchy, social relation is more advanced than behavior, action, social behavior, social action, social contact and social interaction. Social relations form the basis of concepts such as social organization, social structure, social movement and social system.

Interpersonal identity development is composed of three elements:

- **Categorization: Labeling others (and ourselves) into categories.**
- **Identification: Associating others with certain groups.**
- **Comparison: Comparing groups.**

Interpersonal identity development allows an individual to question and examine various personality elements, such as ideas, beliefs, and behaviors. The actions or thoughts of others create social influences that change an individual. Examples of social influence can be seen in socialization and peer pressure. This is the effect of other people on a person's behavior, thinking about one's Self, and subsequent acceptance or rejection of how other people attempt to influence the individual. Interpersonal identity development occurs during exploratory self-analysis and self-evaluation, ending at various times with the establishment of an easy-to-understand and consolidative sense of self or identity.

During the interpersonal identity development an exchange of propositions and counter-propositions occurs, resulting in a qualitative transformation of the individual in the direction of the interaction. The aim of the interpersonal identity development is to try to resolve the undifferentiated facets of an individual. The individual's existence is undifferentiated but this, upon examination, is found to be indistinguishable from others. Given this, and with other admissions, the individual is led to a contradiction between self and others, thus forcing the withdrawal of the undifferentiated self as a truth. In resolution of this incongruence, the person integrates or rejects the encountered elements. This process results in a new

identity. During each of these exchanges which human beings encounter as they go through life, the person must resolve the exchange and then face future exchanges. The exchanges are recurring, since the changing world constantly presents exchanges between individuals and thus allows individuals to redefine themselves.

7.2. Collective Identity, Social Support, and Family

The term collective identity is a sense of belonging to a group (the collective) that is so strong that a person who identifies with the group will dedicate his or her life to the group over individual identity. In other words, he or she will defend the views of the group and assume risks for the group, sometimes as great as loss of life. The cohesiveness of the collective goes beyond community, as the collective suffers the pain of grief from the loss of a member.

Individuals gain a social identity and group identity by their affiliation. This is from membership in various groups. These groups include, among various categories:

- family
- ethnic
- education and occupational status
- friendship
- dating
- religion

One of the most important affiliations is that of their family, whether they be biological, extended or even adoptive families. Each has their own influence on identity through the interaction that takes place between the family members and with the individual person. Information regarding possible identities of possible selves comes from various contexts that surround adolescents and temporal commitments are tested and practiced in interaction with others. Researchers and theorists basically state that an individual's identity (more specifically an adolescent's identity) is influenced by the people around them and the environment in which they live. Also if a family does not have integration this seems to help create identity diffusion (meaning that an individual has not made commitments and does not try to make commitments). This is true for both males and females. These concepts prove that a family has influence on an individual no matter if the influence be good or bad.

7.3. Erickson's Stages of Development: Overview

Many theories of development have aspects of identity formation included in them. Erikson's belief is that throughout each person's lifetime, they experience different crises/conflicts. Each of the conflicts arises at a certain point in life and must be successfully resolved for progression to the next of the eight stages. The particular stage relevant to identity formation takes place during adolescence (ages 12-20), this stage is called "Identity versus Role Confusion".

The Identity vs. Role Confusion stage consists of adolescents trying to figure out who they are in order to form a basic identity that they will build on throughout their life. The primary concerns of a basic identity for this theory are social and occupational identities. Once an adolescent has accomplished the task of figuring out "who they are", they are ready to enter the next stage of Erikson's theory "Intimacy versus Isolation" where they will form strong friendships and a sense of companionship with others. If the Identity vs. Role Confusion crisis is not solved, an adolescent will be confused about their identity and the roles they should have as adults. The idea is that failure to form one's own identity leads to failure to form a shared identity with others, which could lead to instability in many areas as an adult. The identity formation stage of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is a crucial stage in life.

Favorable outcomes of each stage are sometimes known as "virtues", a term used in the context of Erikson's work as it is applied to medicine, meaning "potencies." Erikson's research suggests that each individual must learn how to hold both extremes of each specific life-stage challenge in tension with one another, not rejecting one end of the tension or the other. Only when both extremes in a life-stage challenge are understood and accepted as both required and useful, can the optimal virtue for that stage surface. Thus, trust and mistrust must both be understood and accepted, in order for realistic 'hope' to emerge as a viable solution at the first stage. Similarly, 'integrity' and 'despair' must both be understood and embraced, in order for actionable 'wisdom' to emerge as a viable solution at the last stage.

7.4. Details: The Eight Stages

The Erikson life-stage virtues, in order of the eight stages in which they may be acquired, are:

1. **Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust** - This stage covers the period of infancy. 0-1 year of age, which is the most fundamental stage of life. Whether or not the baby develops basic trust or basic mistrust is not merely a matter of nurture. It is multi-faceted and has strong social components. It depends on the quality of the maternal relationship. The mother carries out and reflects their inner perceptions of trustworthiness, a sense of personal meaning, etc. on the child. If successful in this, the baby develops a sense of trust, which “forms the basis in the child for a sense of identity“. Failure to develop this trust will result in fear in the baby and a belief that the world is inconsistent and unpredictable.
2. **Autonomy vs. Shame** - Covers early childhood around 1–3 years old- Introduces the concept of autonomy vs. shame and doubt. During this stage the child is trying to master toilet training.
3. **Purpose: (Initiative vs. Guilt - Preschool / 3–6 years)** Does the child have the ability to or do things on their own, such as dress him or herself? If "guilty" about making his or her own choices, the child will not function well. Erikson has a positive outlook on this stage, saying that most guilt is quickly compensated by a sense of accomplishment.
4. **Competence: Industry vs. Inferiority (School-age / 6-11 years)** Child comparing self-worth to others (such as in a classroom environment). Child can recognize major disparities in personal abilities relative to other children. Erikson places some emphasis on the teacher, who should ensure that children do not feel inferior.
5. **Fidelity: Identity vs. Role Confusion (Adolescent / 12-18 years)** Questioning of self with the questions, Who am I, how do I fit in? Where am I going in life? Erikson believes, that if the parents allow the child to explore, they will conclude their own identity. However, if the parents continually push him/her to conform to their views, the teen will face identity confusion.
6. **Intimacy vs. Isolation** - This is the first stage of adult development. This development usually happens during young adulthood, which is between the ages of 18 to 35. Dating, marriage, family and friendships are important during the stage in their life. By successfully forming loving relationships with other people, individuals are able to experience love and intimacy. Those who fail to form lasting relationships may feel isolated and alone.
7. **Generativity vs. Stagnation** – This is the second stage of adulthood and happens between the ages of 35-64. During this time people are normally settled in their life and know what is important to them. A person is either making progress in their career or treading lightly in their career and unsure if this is what they want to do for the rest of their working lives. Also during

this time, a person is enjoying raising their children and participating in activities, that gives them a sense of purpose. If a person is not comfortable with the way their life is progressing, they're usually regretful about the decisions and feel a sense of uselessness.

8. **Ego Integrity vs. Despair** - This stage affects the age group of 65 and on. During this time an individual has reached the last chapter in their life and retirement is approaching or has already taken place. Many people, who have achieved what was important to them, look back on their lives and feel great accomplishment and a sense of integrity. Conversely, those who had a difficult time during middle adulthood may look back and feel a sense of despair.

On ego identity versus role confusion, ego identity enables each person to have a sense of individuality, or as Erikson would say, "Ego identity, then, in its subjective aspect, is the awareness of the fact that there is a self-sameness and continuity to the ego's synthesizing methods and a continuity of one's meaning for others". Role confusion, however, is, according to Barbara Engler in her book *Personality Theories*, "the inability to conceive of oneself as a productive member of one's own society". This inability to conceive of oneself as a productive member is a great danger and it can occur during adolescence, when looking for an occupation.