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Research Essay

Back in the 1950s, Erik Erikson argued that many adolescents and young adults experience a tumultuous identity crisis.

Erik Erikson introduced the *Psychosocial Development Theory* that is mentioned in the psychoanalytic approaches to psychology. This theory evaluates the idea that individuals go through the eight stages of psychosocial development. In this essay, the adolescent stage (identity vs. role confusion) and young adulthood (intimacy vs. isolation) will be evaluated in relation to identity formation, identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, and identity achievement. Identity is defined as the answer to the question 'who am I?'. James Marcia (Kroger & Marcia, 2013) expanded Erikson's theory by focusing on two essential processes in achieving mature identity: exploration and commitment. Exploration refers to the process by which adolescents consider and try out alternative beliefs, values, and behaviours in an effort to determine which will give them the most satisfaction. Commitment refers to the individuals' choice to pursue, for example, particular political and religious beliefs, usually as a consequence of exploring the options. These theories relate to individuals experiencing a tumultuous identity crisis as they analyse how development through the eight stages is critical to a development of identity. Identity in adolescence and young adults is dependent on the educational environment and micro-influences, which both serve to develop psychosocial resources and identity status.

Identity formation is the journey in which individuals feel the need to explore and commit to the options and ideas in society. According to Adams et al., (2006), the three identity styles are the approaches available for identity formation, which includes diffuse-avoidant, normative, and informational. The diffuse-avoidant style resulted in poor decision making and coping skills, negative reactions, low internal motivation, and low self-esteem (Adams et al., 2006). Characteristics of the normative style include agreeableness, situation awareness, and low self-agency, ultimately creating an individual that has not explored but rather committing to an

externally chosen identity likely formed by micro-influences. Informational processing refers to an individual that has explored opportunities presented to such an extent that the arsenal coping strategies are available in any situation. An individual with this identity style is also likely to have strong self agency and esteem (Adams et al., 2006). The Australian Longitudinal Life-Patterns Research Project followed individuals throughout adolescence and adulthood. The results identified that young individuals often experience multiple and non-linear pathways to forming an identity (Margretts & Hoy, 2018). This study interviewed individuals to determine their identity status, and then assessed the number of psychosocial resources each individual appeared to have (Adams et al., 2006). The results showed that a positive family and education environment, one that allows for exploration and self-commitment, will create individuals who have a larger arsenal of psychosocial resources. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, specifically the adolescent and young adulthood stages, sets the stage for two crises to occur. The outcome of these crises helps individuals to understand their role, conflict, and resolution for identity formation, or may lead to further role confusion.

Negative identity outcomes are demonstrated by individuals that develop a diffuse identity and a foreclosed identity. Identity diffusion occurs when an individual does not demonstrate any interest in choosing and exploring an identity for themselves (Margretts & Hoy, 2018). From society's point of view, the adolescents in this phase are viewed as people that do not have internal motivation to extend themselves beyond simply achieving pleasure and avoiding pain. Whereas, identity foreclosure describes an individual that skipped exploration and committed to the existing values, ideas and beliefs of their micro-influences, often their family. Consider two individuals. Individual A is developing a diffuse identity and Individual B is foreclosing their identity. Individual A has unresponsive parents and has and does not experience crises throughout their life. Additionally, they experience distance from their parents and feel that they cannot be like them or please them in any way (Zacarés & Iborra, 2015). A key example of an

individual developing a diffuse identity is when they are asked about their political alliance, their reaction is non-committal and careless for the victor (Zacarés & Iborra, 2015). Contrastingly, Individual B experiences an authoritarian parenting style and is constantly with their family in all social situations. They can only achieve a pleased parenting response by going with their parent's existing ideals and beliefs. Because of this approach, the individuals avoid opportunities for exploration for their own identity (Margretts & Hoy, 2018). Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory shows a crisis for adolescence between identity and role confusion, and for young adults there exists a crisis between intimacy and isolation. Applying these crises to Individual A and B, it can be seen that Individual A (diffusion) is role confused, due to lack of exploration and commitment, and already experiences isolation in their family situation. On the other hand, Individual B has a firm identity, though without exploration, and maintains their intimacy with their family through this foreclosure decision. These are examples of negative identity outcomes as considered by Western Culture. It is important to consider that Identity Foreclosure is a not positive outcome in cultures such as extreme muslim faith in the past (Mohamad, et. al, 2020). Through exploring individuals A and B, that are identity diffused and identity foreclosed, it has been made distinct how impactful the educational environment and micro-influences are in forming an identity within an individual.

When an individual has opportunities to explore, that individual is more likely to commit, which itself leads to identity achievement. This outcome is the best result for adolescence and young adults in western culture. Reaching identity achievement during adolescence and young adulthood requires micro-influences, such as the home environment, to allow those individuals to explore opportunities presented and to find a 'true sense of self'. James Marcia (1980) expanded on Erikson's Psychosocial theory by examining the identity statuses, including identity achievement. Marcia presented the idea that individuals who have actively explored the

opportunities presented to them in life are better equipped with their psychosocial resources through life's adversities (Mohamad et al., 2020). To further examine this idea, a study was conducted that experimented the parental influence (micro factors) on adolescence identity achievement. It was hypothesised that the micro influence will be positively associated with an increased identity achievement status. To test this hypothesis, 1012 students from both 10th and 12th grade were examined and the identity achievement was measured against the Identity subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory. Results depicted that emotional support and parental knowledge of the daily activities the adolescents participate in is associated with a higher identity achievement status (Sartor & Youniss, 2002). This gives weight to the argument that identity achievement is influenced by the opportunities and support from micro-influences. When adolescents and young adults are supported by their parents in the opportunities that arise with ageing in life, the more likely they will advance into the identity achievement status as they have been allowed to explore and choose their own pathway. In obtaining identity achievement, individuals have increased preparedness in their psychosocial resources such as skills, beliefs, and talents as a result of exploring opportunities presented in the educational environment and from micro-influences (APA PsycNet, 2022). Through the process of identity achievement, individuals obtain psychosocial resources and identity status through the educational environment and micro-influences.

The educational environment and micro-influences are significant in shaping an individual's identity. Marcia's extension on Erikson's theory, including the ideas of exploration and commitment, are critical for identity achievement. Identity formation is the process of an individual exploring and committing to opportunities and ideas in their society. Identity diffusion is when individuals have chosen to avoid exploration and commitment and therefore remain in a state of role confusion, whereas identity foreclosure occurs when individuals have rejected opportunities to explore and their identity is 'pre-planned' usually from micro influences. Identity

achievement is when individuals have explored the opportunities and ideas that are presented from society and have reflected on these experiences in order to form an identity. In the process of building psychosocial resources, it is critical that individuals in the Western Culture apply an informational approach and are supported by micro-influences.

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