

Culture, Identity and Education M5X02165 Assignment 2

Critically evaluate the factors that affect the formation of identity in early childhood and adolescence

Within the world, every human will experience transition periods of their life in which they will develop themselves in many different aspects such as identity. Although identity is developed over every individuals' holistic lives, the development within the childhood and adolescence stage is vital. Erik Erikson, a developmental psychologist cited in Klimstra et al. (2009 P. 150) highlights that the most important developmental stage in adolescence is identity formation. This highlights that identity development has many positives in the development of a child. This piece of writing will look into why theorists believe that identity development is crucial in childhood and adolescence. In short, identity development is the process in which people start to develop a basic understanding of themselves and their own personal views and paths in life. Throughout history, forming an identity has been a simple process in which children would follow the cultural views and ideologies of their parental guardians whereas in today's society, there are many different factors which impact identity development. (Cote and Levine, 2002 P. 1) This highlights that identity development is changing in conjunction with society and the current cultural norms. Thus, meaning that there are now more factors that can be evaluated when identity formation within childhood is examined. Cooper (2014 P. 281) states that 'Identity is not fixed or singular, but multi-faceted and reflects a range of social, cultural and political influences' This highlights that in today's society identity is not just shaped by the individual, but the experiences and cultures of life as well.

Identity is shaped into two different categories. First being primary identity. Primary identity is the characteristics an individual experience in their early life. For example, gender and disability. The second type is the secondary identity. This differs to the primary identity as secondary identities are developed as people grow and experience different circumstances such as new jobs or new cultural developments. There has been extensive research on identity development and its importance over the years with many theorists having different views on the topic. The first theorist, Piaget, cited in DeVries (1997 P. 4) states that children have many stages of cognitive development in which they become more aware of social surroundings and environments around them. This highlights that children may have to develop to

understand their own identity. This could also highlight that children learn from their elders which in turn, can shape their identity to some degree. Erikson (1995 P. 221) states that the full identity cannot exist in a child without the nurturing from their parental figures. This highlights that although identity is developed through child experiences, guidance is needed to ensure full identity development. Although nurturing is needed, in today's society there are many different factors which impact identity formation meaning that nurturing may not have as great of an effect. For example, gender can play a large part in the identity formation within children. Kornienko et al. (2016 P. 1578) explains that children start to understand their own gender identity by the middle of their childhood. This may mean that children will start to see the gender stereotypes and normalities which may affect the way the children see themselves or portray themselves. In today's society there is a growing number of children who describe themselves as transgender, non-binary or gender fluid. (Diamond 2020 P. 110) Although this is becoming more common, these children may experience many factors that could affect their identity development. Diamond (2020 P. 110) expresses that children who are uncertain of their gender identity from birth may experience very strong emotional distress within their childhood. This is down to the gender stereotypes that society holds which may make children feel uneasy with their gender identity. This may mean that children will not portray their preferred identity thus, meaning unhappiness and uncertainty. Diamond (2020 P. 111) emphasises this by stating that the familial acceptance and society's acceptance can lead to long lasting mental health problems. On the other hand, there is also a range of support children for who are struggling to find or portray their gender identity. Bonfatto and Crasnow (2018 P. 29) state that the NHS provide support for children under eighteen who need support during their gender identity development. This highlights that the effect gender can have on identity development can be lowered with support and nurturing. This supports Erikson's theory in which he states that identity development within children needs to be supported and children need to be nurtured. Erikson (1995 P. 221) On the other hand, some children may not respond to the nurturing due to lack of confidence in their identity. A second theorists view on gender is Kohlberg. Ventress (1975 P. 12) states that Kohlberg believes that male children have more interest in male role models as they have more masculine interests and values. Today, currently this has changed as many males have many different attitudes and interests in life. Some

males having less masculine than others. This emphasises that Kohlberg's view on gender identity is somewhat outdated. Although, his view may be outdated, some children may find that masculine role models can help with their development.

Kohlberg, (1966 P. 88) cited in Ventress (1975 P. 11) believes that all children can identify their self-labels by the age of 2-3. This statement is also outdated as children can develop their own views and opinions on gender identity as they grow up and face different life experiences. Gender identity is one of the biggest factors that can affect individual development overall.

A second factor that can influence identity development in childhood and adolescence is sexuality. This can be a factor that changes identity development for many different reasons. It is very known that sexual prejudice and homophobic abuse is still present within the current day. Hall and LaFrance (2012 P. 35) describe how young males in society use words such as 'gay' to describe something stupid or worthless. This emphasises how individuals within their childhood may experience some negative response to their sexual identity. This could cause adverse problems to individuals within their childhood and adolescence as they may feel like they have to hide their true identity within themselves. Although, in current times it is becoming more common for people to embrace their sexuality and be more open about the factor. Research shows that sexual prejudice is more prevalent in males for many different reasons. (Hall and LaFrance 2012 P. 36). Hall and LaFrance (2012 P. 36) state that Males are more likely to use derogatory terms to describe gay men and women as it is a desire for men to prove their masculinity and heterosexuality. This stereotype negatively affects male individuals who are not sure on their sexual identity as they will feel intimidated to show and portray their true identity. The Social Identity Theory made by Tajfel (1978) portrays that

'Individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and that such identifications work to protect and bolster self-identity.' (Islam 2015 P. 1781)

This statement shows that people who struggle to portray their sexual identity may end up portraying their sexual identity to find comfort in others going through the same struggles. Thus, having many positives of people confining in each other and feeling part of their social group. Although sexuality can have negative effects of individuals within childhood and adolescence there can also be positives of people feeling part of a group based on their own identity. This will give people a sense of pride. Tajfel (1978) also stated that stereotyping is a normal cognitive process as

humans have the tendency to group. This may have negatives on sexual identity as grouping certain parts of society will highlight the differences in the group compared to others. Hall and LaFrance (2012 P. 42) state that the SIT is a useful framework to predict that homophobic communication is going to occur as when there is a concern over the hetero identity within men, it is more common to receive homophobic communication. On the other hand, in the current day where different sexual identities are more common it could make young people more confident in themselves. Sexual identity can have an impact on identity development but is more common in the current society.

The final factor that affects the development of identity is race and ethnicity. Although race is mainly based on physical characteristics, every race may have different cultures and views also. Young children of all different races will have completely different identities to others. This could be down to life experiences or parental guidance. Rivas-Drake et al. (2017 P. 710) highlights that ethnic-racial identity is now very important in the current day in our diverse society. Within schools' children will form many different and diverse friendships meaning an experience of many different cultures and views (Rivas-Drake et al. 2017 P. 710) This could change some young people's identity development as they may change their own views on certain aspects of life. Rivas-Drake et al. (2017 P. 711) states that the Erikson (1995) framework explains that youth's ethnic-racial identity develops as they explore and further their knowledge on their own identity. This shows that ethnicity and race definitely have an impact on a child's identity as they learn things about themselves as they experience their own culture to a further degree. Another aspect of Race and ethnicity that could cause changes to a child's identity development is discrimination. Like the other factors discussed, many youths of different races and ethnicities experience discrimination. Toro, Hughes and Way (2020 P. 1) state that 'The majority of ethnic-racial minority youth report having experienced ethnic-racial discrimination' This statement highlights that children of ethnic minorities may have very bad experiences within their childhood and youth. This could be detrimental to some individual's identity development as they may have bad experiences in education meaning a complete change of their identity development due to negative experiences in life. Toro, Hughes and Way (2020 P. 3) emphasise this by using framework called the Looking Glass Self written by Cooley (1902). The framework suggests that individuals shape themselves on how other

people see themselves. For example, if someone has experienced discrimination, they will believe the negative comments expressed to them. This will have a big effect on their identity development as they may not be able to express themselves how they would like to. Thus, making people doubt their own identity. Tajfel (1978) and his SIT framework can also be used with this factor as children and youth of the same race and ethnicity may look to each other to help develop their identity.

Although race and ethnicity can have some negative effects on identity development, many will feel pride and joy being within their own specific culture. The pride can help children develop their identity further as they become more aware of their culture and identity.

In conclusion, identity development within children and youths can be altered and affected by many different factors in their lives. All three of the factors discussed within this writing explain that none of them are more important than the other but some may be more common. For example, race and ethnicity issues are more common than gender issues but it does not mean that gender has less of an effect on identity development. Identity is developed by a number of things but experiences in life can also have a large effect on the identity of children. The development of identity within childhood and adolescence is the most vital development of identity an individual face. This is because their identity that is made from a young age will be brought with them throughout their life. On the other hand, experiences in later life may alter their identity slightly but will not have as detrimental of an effect on their holistic life.

Reference List

Bonfatto, M, Crasnow, E (2018) Gender/ed identities: an overview of our current work as child psychotherapists in the Gender Identity Development Service. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* Vol. 44. P. 29. Available at: <https://web-a-ebshost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=d1030a50-f32e-414d-a4bb-65f0a1cde6c4%40sessionmgr4008> Last Accessed: 15th January 2021.

Cooper, V. (2014). Children's developing identity. In: Reed, M. and Walker, R. eds. *A Critical Companion to Early Childhood*. London: Sage, P. 281. Available at: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/39730/3/Children%2527s%20dev%20identity%2014.03.14.pdf> Last Accessed 15th January 2021.

Cooley, C. H. (1902). *Human nature and the social order*. New York, NY: Scribner

Cote, E. J, Levine, G. C (2002) *Identity, Formation, Agency and Culture: A Psychological Synthesis*. Psychology Press. P. 1. Available at: <https://web-b-ebshost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=3211eafe-734b-4e13-a19d-f2c60dfaf8b9%40sessionmgr103&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=129658&db=nlebk> Last Accessed 14th January 2021.

DeVries, R (1997) Piaget's Social Theory. *American Educational Research Association*. P. 4. Available at: <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/pdf/1176032.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Acf701f240faae0437fb5df8a2326105c> Last Accessed 17th January.

Diamond, M. L (2020) Gender Fluidity and Nonbinary Gender Identities Among Children and Adolescents. *Child Development Perspectives*. Vol. 14. P. 110-111 Available at: <https://srcd-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/doi/epdf/10.1111/cdep.12366> Last Accessed: 15th January 2021.

Erikson, H. E, (1995) *Childhood and Society*. New Edition 20th April 1995. P. 221.

Hall, J, Lafrance, B. (2012) "That's Gay": Sexual Prejudice, Gender Identity, Norms, and Homophobic Communication. *Communication Quarterly* Vol. 60. P. 35-36.

Available at: <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=b4e9bfd1-f470-47d2-b8d7-77986b86bf32%40sessionmgr4007> Last Accessed 16th January 2021.

Islam, G (2015) Social Identity Theory. *Encyclopaedia of Critical Psychology*. P. 1781. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281208338_Social_Identity_Theory Last Accessed: 16th January 2021.

Klimstra, A. T, Hale III, W. W, Raaijmakers, W. A. Q. Branje, T. J. S, Meeus, J. H. W (2009) Identity Formation in Adolescence: Change or Stability? *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 39. P. 150. Available at: <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/article/10.1007/s10964-009-9401-4> Last Accessed 14th January 2021.

Kohlberg, L. (1966). A cognitive-developmental analysis of children's sex-role concepts and attitudes. In E. E. Maccoby (Ed.), *The development of sex differences* Stanford: Stanford University Press. P. 88.

Kornienko, O, Santos, E. C, Martin, L. C, Granger, L. K. (2016) Peer Influence on Gender Identity Development in Adolescence. *Developmental Psychology* Vol. 52. P. 1578. Available at: <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=96ed6239-7feb-426b-a1a0-c8d844517b91%40sdc-v-sessmgr01> Last Accessed: 15th January 2021.

Rivas-Drake, D, Umana-Taylor, J. A, Schaefer, R. D, Medina, M. (2017) Ethnic-Racial Identity and Friendships in Early Adolescence. *Child Development* Vol. 88. P. 710-711. Available at: <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=1165e949-5cd3-4696-87cb-d6f92dab2e0a%40sessionmgr4006> Last available: 17th January 2021.

Tajfel, H. (1978). The achievement of inter-group differentiation. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), *Differentiation between social groups*. London: Academic Press.

Toro, D. J, Hughes, D, Way, N (2020) Inter-Relations Between Ethnic-Racial Discrimination and Ethnic-Racial Identity Among Early Adolescents. *Child Development* Vol. 00. P. 1-3. Available at: <https://srcd-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/doi/epdf/10.1111/cdev.13424> Last Accessed 17th January 2021.

Ventress, K (1975) *A Cognitive Developmental Study of Children's Sex-Role Development*. Available at: https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/handle/11427/12458/thesis_hum_1975_1975_ventress_k.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y Last Accessed 16th January 2021.