

Psychological Lifespan Theories

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1. Introduction

In psychology, lifespan development is an exploration of the changes that human beings undergo from the moment they are conceived to the moment they die. Development is a lifelong process that has a scientific backing behind it. There are three domains of development in psychology and they include physical, psychosocial and the cognitive domain. Psychological theories revolve around the question of whether development is continuous or discontinuous. Other theories also focus on answering the question of how many course of development exist. The most common argument in psychology is the nature or nurture debate. While nature suggests that people are born in some way and live proving the gifts they were born with, nurture argues that a leader is not born, but bred. The latter suggests that the environment has a lot to do with how a person turns out. This paper critically evaluates Erikson's theory of a psychological lifespan as compared to Freud's theory, both of which we had looked at on the surface in our group presentation, but that we now focus more deeply on. The paper also discusses a psychological phenomenon that I find most exciting, and I relate the same to my daily life. Finally, I discuss how I will be applying the psychological perspectives learnt in this module as a professional in my career as a health and social care professional.

2. Psychological Lifespan theory

Erikson takes a lifespan approach in his lifespan theory. According to Erikson, development of an individual continues even when they are in their old age. His is a psychosocial theory of development. He focuses on the social, rather than the sexual nature of development. Erikson argues that our interaction with other people affects our ego identity or put simply, our sense of self (Schonbucher, Weber and Landolt, 2017 pp. 520-535). Our main motivation is derived from the need to be competent in certain areas of our lives. According to the psychosocial theory, there are eight major stages of development. In every stage, there comes a task or conflict that we are required to solve before moving to the next social stage. When we achieve the desired results, we achieve a sense of competence and this leads to a healthy personality. However,

failing in any stage of social development gives us a sense of inadequacy and we feel like we did not do our best or worse still, that we were not good enough for the task.

Erikson opines that trust is the most basic stage of development and it happens at infancy, when the child is at twelve months. The task at that stage is trust and mistrust. Infants depend so much on their caregivers, and would develop a sense of trust towards sensitive and responsive caregivers. A sensitive caregiver enables the child to have a sense of belonging and believe that the world is a safe place to be in. A child then gets to two years and starts being conscious with their environment. At that point, they crave autonomy. Erikson goes on to describe the complex stages in a child's life, until they get to their teenage years and have to make tough life decisions that build or break their self-esteem.

When an individual gets to early adulthood, they have to choose career paths and help in developing other people as well. They then get in their late 40s to their early 60s and have the desire to be generative. That is the stage that requires people to find a footing in their own lives as well as get involved in the development of other people's lives (Hoare, 2019 pp. 183-187). People who go through this stage successfully have a feeling of generativity, while those who do not may feel like they have been stagnant in life. The last stage in life according to Erikson is when an individual is in their late 60s and to the end of their lives. The task is to either have feelings of integrity or despair. An individual reflects on all the things that they have done in life. People who are successful have a sense of integrity, while those who are not successful have regrets and feelings of despair.

On the other hand, Freud's theory of psychosexual development provides that development is a discontinuous process and a child passes through a series of stages. If a child does not get proper nurturing, they may be stagnant in their development. We would however still go for Erikson's theory, because growth is a lifelong process.

3. Psychological Phenomenon

There are several psychological phenomena that we covered in the module. Psychological phenomena are manifested in how human beings behave and respond to situations. In this paper, we analyze the Hawthorne effect. The effect is demonstrated by individuals improving their behavior and even performing better in school and at work when they realize that they are receiving attention from superiors, their colleagues or clients. The theory was first proposed by Kirsten Rohrs Schmitt (ÖZKENT, 2021). This phenomenon often leads to an intrinsic bias when conducting a study, because the subjects will modify their behaviour when they realise that they are being watched. The study shall therefore record the wrong or overstated results. In healthcare, for instance, when clinicians know that they are being watched, they treat patients better. Study has been severally carried out in this area and has proved to be true overtime. The origin of this phenomenon was in 1920 at Hawthorne works, an electric telephone industry. The researchers analysed and found out that lighting led to an increase in the output of manufacturing. In healthcare, the healthcare workers improve in their hygiene when being watched. Clinicians would also be seen taking a keen interest in hand disinfection processes and properly documenting patient details. The reason for the changes in attitude is because clinicians understand that the hospital can lose its accreditation if they are found on the wrong side and subconsciously, they understand that if this happens, they would all lose their jobs. The phenomenon is therefore built around the fact that it is not all about being perfect at taking care of patients, it is about keeping their jobs. Psychologically, that implies that workers can modify their behaviour to suit a situation, to save themselves. All that is in their subconscious mind. Scrutiny raises an individual's awareness and leads to an improvement in their focus and vigilance. The presence of supervisors also amounts to a decrease in the time spent on factors that are unrelated with work. The effect leads to general poor results because healthcare professionals modify their behaviour from time to time at the expense of the patients. Understanding this phenomenon is effective in our career as caregivers, as we are well versed with behavioral changes of our patients when they are aware that we are observing them. The

effect is real and when the behavioral changes of people when they are watched are observed keenly, this could create a good insight on how to improve the quality of healthcare in hospital facilities.

4. Reflection

The knowledge that we have acquired in this module goes a long way beyond campus to shape our career as health and social healthcare professionals. We are most likely to get leadership roles at some point in our profession. We shall utilise Erikson's theory of psychosocial development to know at what stage in life our colleagues and patients are, so we can respond to the stages appropriately (Maree, 2021 pp. 1107-1109). For instance, a patient in their teenage years needs to be advised on the direction to take so that they do not get to their mid-sixties with feelings of despair and resentment. On the other hand, a patient in their sixties needs reassurance that what they did when they were younger was enough and that they did the best they could under the circumstances that they were in. They also need to be reminded to maximize on their sunset years, rather than wishing that they could have done better things in their prime years.

The psychological phenomenon that we have discussed in this paper shall also be instrumental in our profession. We are now able to analyze when our junior colleagues modify their behavior when they realize that they are being watched closely (Zeren, 2012 p. 2447). This knowledge is essential in cultivating diligent behavior at all times and ensuring that we help and satisfy patients.

We are still students currently, When we go for my clinical attachment, we will use the knowledge to understand the stages that patients are in and to help them accordingly. We understand that we may face some challenges and criticism from within, especially reflecting on the Hawthorne effect. We will ensure to be vigilant at all times and not only when we have someone watching us. This may be a psychological reaction, but we shall do our best in controlling it because we have the knowledge of its existence. In our future career as healthcare

providers, we shall use the knowledge obtained from this module to enhance our work in creating mental health awareness among our patients. We shall be well versed with how people feel in their stages of development and we have a place to start from. We believe that this knowledge is life-changing.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper analyzes Erikson's theory of psychosocial development in depth, clearly going through all the life stages. We are never too old to learn something new or to experience new emotions. That would be the summary if we were asked to review Erikson's theory. The paper also narrowly highlights on Freud's theory, who believes that learning only takes place in the young stages of life and discontinues thereafter, and the individual has to live with how they were nurtured in their early stages. While Freud's theory may be correct, it does not give room for improvement.

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