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Abstract

In this essay, I have researched Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development and what examples he exemplified in his explanation of life cycles through the eight stages¹. To prove his psychosocial development theory clearly, I examined my cousin, Burcu's development from infancy to young adulthood. Throughout the essay, my main purpose is to determine the question; how can we observe Erikson's life cycles and its effects on our example? As I won't be able to witness her old ages, I do not have chance to interpret her psychosocial development according to Erikson's last stages. The reason of choosing Erikson's theory as an extended essay subject is that I have a deep interest of the things that give shape to human character and since I have begun to search psychosocial development, I believe that a person can easily be affected by his past while shaping his future. In my opinion, Erikson's theory is quite interesting in a way of reflecting the development of human's as I have clearly witnessed it through my cousin. The most crucial thing that I've deduced from Erikson's theory is that if a person can solve the crisis he meets during the cycles, that person will reach the psychosocial maturity. If a person is successful in his achieving, he will easily overcome the problems which may appear in the future. Erikson's main aim was to maintain a series of crisis from infancy to late adulthood, showing reasons which affect one's ego identity. Erikson claimed that each crisis became crucial at its own stage but each arises in a less obvious form throughout life. In a nutshell, when I was writing this essay, I was deeply influenced by his sayings and started to delve into the subject in order to verify his theory.

¹ The chart of Erikson's life cycles is given in the bibliography section.

Introduction

Erikson's theory is very clear to observe and search the psychological approach of a person with the combination of both internal and social aspects of personality. This is the reason that I choose his theory in investigating the psychological growth of my cousin Burcu. Throughout the different stages of Erikson, Burcu was only able to achieve one. This stage was trust/mistrust. Her failing in other stages comes from her unresolved conflict at the early childhood stage. Here, one of the differences between Freud and Erikson becomes apparent. Erikson's theory doesn't focus on just one stage to make it essentially more important than others, unlike Freud. With this point of view, the idea of life-span development (the development of self is constantly shifting by the changing social atmosphere of the individual) is mainly given by the Erikson's theory. With these points in mind, when the individual confronts conflicts, he/she has a chance to go back to previous conflicts to find its source. At this point, we are confronted by the ego identity which is defined as "the consciously experienced sense of self"(Carver, Scheier, 2004). The strength of this ego identity in each person, plays a crucial role in determining person's demeanor when he/she confronts with a repeated conflicts. From the description mentioned above, it's seen that the ego identity can change dynamically in response to social environment. As there is a link between a person's confidence and ego identity, inevitably it'll also change from one situation to the other.

The words "competence" and "inadequacy" have an imminent place in Erikson's theory. He believes in the idea which bring the feeling of competence can be achieved by the people who are moving towards actions, in opposite to the idea of feeling inadequacy which is moving away from those feelings. In other words, when a person feels competence, it means

that the conflict is surpassed, whereas when a conflict is failed he/she would feel inadequacy. According to Erikson, the main aim in each stage to provide the balance between the opposite conflicts. He specifically claimed that some portion of the unavoidable response in a conflict must be kept for healthier psychosocial growth. For instance, if a person has completed infancy stage with 100% trust will have grown poor judge of character and trust to everyone. To sum up, all these conflicts that one inevitably suffers from are turning points; because they may immediately turn person into vulnerable one from great potential of growth identity.

Having given and created some notion about Erikson's psychological theory, it's time to start investigating the life of my cousin Burcu through different stages.

Infancy Stage

The first stage is infancy roughly the first year. This stage includes the most fundamental crisis of life, a sense of *basic trust versus basic mistrust*. In this stage, expectedly, the infant is completely dependent on others to meet its most major needs. If the needs are met in a proper way at this stage, the infant develops a sense of trust and security. These needs can be categorized as being fed easily, sleeping well, loving and caring. To teach infants to "trust" that they will return caretakers should leave the infant alone for short periods without causing too much distress. On the other hand, when the balance of care is unsympathetic and unloving, then the psychological conflict of the infancy is resolved on the negative side. Mistrust is mostly reflected by fitful sleep, fussiness in feeding, constipation and greater distress when the infant is left alone. These negatively provide that the infant protects itself by withdrawing from people and also the things around it. In another words, the sense of trust is extremely prominent by providing a basis for believing and accepting that the world and the relationships are predictable. At this stage, it's very crucial to create the thin line which lies between trust and mistrust. Otherwise, for instance, having a predominance of

trust over mistrust gives rise to the ego strength hope which is a kind of optimism of life. To make direct observation about this stage in Burcu's life, I would have been at least 14 or more years older than her, unfortunately I'm not. Nevertheless, since she is my close cousin I was able to get information about those times from my relatives. I was never told that she was a mischievous child and there was also no information about any economical problem at the time. Due to the fact that she and I were the new generation in our family, they showed us an immense attention and care. That's why; I came to the conclusion that her infancy conflict was resolved in a balance leans trust. Therefore, according to Erikson, she must have gained the ego strength hope from such balances.

Early Childhood Stage

The second stage focuses of children's efforts begins to shift to gaining control over their actions. It's mainly about creating a sense of *autonomy in actions versus shame and doubt* linked to being able to act independently.

Erikson agreed that the parent's manner of toilet training is essential for psychological health. According to Erikson, acquiring control over bladders a way of gain feelings of autonomy. But this is just one way to express it. Children want to decide for themselves, not just in toileting, but also in interacting effectively with people and objects, having feelings of autonomy and competence are strengthened. On the contrary, if the efforts resulted as a failure, ridicule or if the parents do not let the children act on their own, it is inevitable to have the feelings of shame and doubt. For this reason, the parents should meet child's assertions of independence with tolerance and understanding. It has been seen that, children who'd been securely attached, explored more than those who'd been less securely attached. If the children emerge from infancy without adequate trust and healthy sense of individuality in caregivers, the seeds are sown for adjustment problems. Adults who have difficulty in establishing

intimate ties and who always doubt their own ability to meet new challenges with the children, may not promote a sense of basic trust develop as autonomy later on. Burcu started this conflict with advantages because of her success in the first stage, until her parents got separated. The balance is which is towards autonomy, slowly shifted to shame and doubt as she started to live with her mother. According to the elders in the family, in this period she withdrew herself from autonomous actions with the effect of her mother's working schedule. She procured the feeling of solitude, while her grandfather was always there to thwart the "identity diffusion"(pearson,296) conquered her life.

To begin with, some researches have observed whether having a sense of basic trust during the first year fosters later initiative. It was evaluated that, those who had been securely attached were quicker to show in communicating with someone else than those who had been insecurely attached (Lütkenhaus, & Grossmann, 1985). To illustrate, during a game involving a failure, those who had been securely attached expected to increase their efforts, whereas the others decreased their efforts. For this reason, it's very obvious to say that, the sense of basic trust seems to provide an established substructure for the sense of purpose.

Pre-School Stage

In this stage, it's prominent to be capable of controlling your actions. To question the objects in the world without any hesitation, leads to an increasing desire to make things happen, in short a desire for power. This stage also conforms to Freud's genital stage which he saw oedipal conflicts appearing here. Erikson mainly focused on Freud's depiction as a metaphor for an extensive power struggle between parents and child. "*Oedipal conflict tend treat Freud's depiction as a metaphor for a more extensive power struggle between parents and child, who by now has become willful. It is the power on which Erikson focused.*" (Carver, Scheier, 2004).

The major conflict in this stage is about initiative vs. guilt. Children who have a sense of initiative are able to impose their developing sense of desire on their surroundings. They begin to act on their curiosity and explore the world by asking about the things going on around them. Both being curious and asking too many questions can become tiresome to adults and their powerful actions can cause others pain. On the other hand, if the initiative is always exposed to disapproval, feeling of guilty will occur. But if this stage is managed well, the child emerges the sense of purpose and that will destroy their feasible feeling of fear for future.

Pre-school conflict for Burcu was completed with ups and downs. As I mentioned above, she started this part of life with disadvantages. It's because of that her previous conflicts ended in an unfavorable balance. After the separation of her parents, she began to see her grandfather as a "father figure". However, when she was approximately 5 years old, loss of her grandfather had a huge effect on her life. This could be accepted as an inducer of the feelings and timidity and shyness. She returned to her toys and according to the information from her teachers, even in school she has always been very quiet child who would not participate any action unless suggested by her teacher. For instance, as they told me, she never took any part in any theatrical shows. I would tie her demeanors to the idea that in this stage her balance was towards the guilt. According to psychologists, her increased vulnerability might be an example for "troubled family relationships" (Oltmanns, Emery, Taylor, 2006) which is shaped by the social factors and also impressed the next stages.

At this period, Erikson mentions that the child is absolutely ready to learn more than ever. For him, this period has a conflict and he called it *industry versus inferiority*. The child tends to share things more planned and organized instead of annoying and forcing the others to do things. Because the feeling "industriousness" is not just doing things, it's doing things those others value and accept as appropriate. Contrary to preschool period, the child begins to

imitate and behave as his/her own friends not his/her parents. He develops the feeling that he should be the best between his friends. The school experience is aimed to teaching children to become productive and responsible members of society. In these years, child's intellectual skills are first tested and they are incited to do well in school. The school experience also involves learning social roles and developing sexual roles, children are beginning to learn the nature of adult work.

There are two options for the child; first one is, he will obtain the feeling of the industriousness and he will be crowned. These kinds of children are more able to distinguish the roles, getting better grades and they participate in the social activities more than the others. On the other hand, second one is he will not succeed in his behavior or he will be frustrated. Therefore he will gain the feeling of inferiority. Erikson claimed that this stage plays a prominent role while the child develops his intellectual skills and it also reflects all his life. He called the acquired feeling in this stage as *competence*.

The conflicts in this stage are almost the most repetitious conflicts in one's life. Burcu was no exception to such argument. This argument comes from the academic success of an individual may change drastically as the level of the education gets higher. If academic achievement of Burcu were put on a graph, it would be a declining one from 100% success to 70% at university level. This may not seem a big change; however, once this is observed from the academical point, it becomes inevitable to observe this change also in her personal life. This is coupled by stating that there are no extracurricular achievement's in Burcu's life. As I have remembered, at this stage, she didn't have any permanent friends in her life. She was afraid to establish her relationships with others. This might come from her aptitude to the failures from previous stages of Erikson's. This indicate that in the conflict between inferiority and superiority has not been fully resolved and it seems as she maintained her school age stage more and more, she leans to the side of inferiority.

School Stage

The next period begins with the physical changes of puberty. In this period the person tries to get used to the changes in his body and tries to define himself. The adolescent has to find his place in the world and determine that what role will fit his identity. Erikson called the suffering crisis in this stage as *identity versus role confusion* (Carver, Scheier, 2004).

To become a strong person after the adolescence period, the adolescent tries to lead a relation the self-conceptions from previous stages or he must consider the all views which he acquired from the previous stages, so that a full sense of identity emerge. For Erikson, if a person fails to form an integrated identity, the result is role confusion. It's reflected in an inability to select a career.

According to Erikson, the role confusion is an ordinary thing that puberty can experience. This period of crisis involves the questioning of the previous ideas and the beliefs and exploration of the new life styles and its consequences determine the life and the views of the adolescent which he will obtain through his life. This conflict at adolescence may take longer than the other stages to overcome it. According to the researches about this topic, in this stage, individual collects the information and insight from his previous experiences. Then he integrated them with what others think about him (it becomes more important when an individual fails in previous conflicts) and filters this through how he sees himself. The identity and role confusion generally depends on whether this sequence is done correctly or not. If it's completed as a failure, it will probably reflect his/her career.

Erikson's ideas about the development of identity have been mainly conducted by James Marcia². For Marcia, an identity crisis is exploring different ways of viewing oneself and

giving serious thought to the implications of those views. As it plays and shapes the rest of the individual life, he separates identity status into four groups. First one is identity achievement; it is the commitment after experienced a period of crisis. Second one is moratorium; it indicates the person who is in crisis, but has no commitment. Third one is foreclosure; it is the commitment but with little evidence of crisis. The last but the hardest group to characterize is identity diffusers; in this stage neither commitment nor crisis is observed. They generally see their parents distant from them which bring up the trust problems in the following stages. Since the existence of these statuses, the people's reflections are beginning to gain some meaning(Wagner, 2006).

From a distance Burcu was seen as belonging to the group called "foreclosure". After her mother and father were separated, she started to develop a good, intimating relationship with her mother who had a prominent role in Burcu's career. Regardless of her declining grades (as I mentioned in previous conflicts), she managed to get into a business school in Turkey. However, apart from her career choice; her identity confusion wasn't resolved fully. It appears as Anorexia Nervosa (eating disorder) at this stage. It mostly started at the age of 13 as she developed "troubled family relationships" which increases her vulnerability; and it still continues with yearly intervals. Throughout my memory, I clearly remember her when she suffers from this crisis. As she was grown, she became obsessed with controlling her eating habit. She had not problems completely with her appearance, her behavior can be interpreted as eating is the only thing she can control in her intrusive family

2 James E. Marcia is a Canadian developmental psychologist at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada. Marcia studied psychological development and mostly focused on adolescent psychosocial development. Erikson had suggested that the normative conflict occurring in adolescence is the opposition between identity and confusion. Marcia elaborated on Erikson's theory by suggesting this stage consists neither of *identity resolution* nor *identity confusion* as Erikson claimed, but the extent to which one both has explored and committed to an identity in a variety of life domains including politics, occupation, religion, intimate relationships, friendships, and gender roles.

(Minuchin et al, 1978) where she couldn't prevent her parents from separating or her grandfather from dying.

Adolescence

The conflict in the next stage concerns the ultimate desire for *intimacy versus isolation*. This period includes the early adulthood when people are exploring their own personal relationships. According to Erikson, it was vital that intimacy is a close relationship with a sense of commitment to that person. Those who succeed in this step will develop relationships that are secure and committed. Erikson also believed that the consequences of having a strong sense of identity, is again related to the capability of intimacy. There was a clear bond between strong identity incapability of intimacy. Men with stronger identities are more likely to have married in eighteen years. Among the married couples, those with strong identity are less likely to divorce (Oltmanns, Emery, Taylor, 2006).

The opposite pole of this stage is isolation. They generally feel a relationship threatening their sense of separate identity. They show a lack of love. The isolation can be also considered as a social and emotional isolation. Those people who stand apart from social groups fail to develop a sense of belonging. In other words, they're hard to get to know and are likely to remain lonely.

Young Adulthood

The last stage that is relevant to Burcu is young adulthood. As it is could be predicted, this stage is the most important part of one's life. It determines the relationships whether one can form an excellent bond with others or not. Forming an excellent relationship is accepted as intimate relationship and to develop it, there should be a sense of commitment to the partner. Contrary to this, signs of isolation mean that failing to make such commitments in relationships. It's obvious that forming intimacy relationships is derived from the conflict of love, which should have been gained in previous conflicts.

From the surface as I witnessed, Burcu seems to be surrounded by many friends and also I don't recall a time since she was 14 that she did not have a boyfriend. However, in this point, Erikson states about the pressures that one can suffer on the commitment part. Not to experience these pressures one should be a competent self who struggles for the commitments even it requires sacrifices. When the social interactions of Burcu's are observed from Erikson's point of view, the number of relationships that could contain real commitments would decline to zero. To illustrate, I realized that every year I visit her, I'm confronting with different faces around her. This shows me that she has some problems in maintaining a relationship for a long period of time. Apart from these people, it seems that her only long-lasting relationship is with me. She always complains me about how she felt isolated and could only open to me. Due to her fear of commitment, in this stage she begins to escape from relationships by studying and working hardly. However, even she works very hard to cover her hidden feelings, because of the guilt that she adopted from the previous stages, she has revealed the symptoms of panic attack and anxiety disorders, especially when she has to make crucial decisions or she will perform in front of a group of people. According to psychologists, anxiety is an innate response to separation an isolation (Carver, Scheier, 2004), so it explains clearly that feeling of anxiety is unsurprisingly appears in an individual who has suffered from separation and loneliness in his life. These had also seen in her previous stages. For example, when she was attaining the university entry exam, just one or two months before the exam, she felt racing in her heartbreak and difficulty in breathing. Not only the example that I have taken into consideration, but also the researches about Erikson's life cycles, have shown that the effects of the cycles are differently observing and developing from human to human.

Conclusion

As I have mentioned in the beginning, I could not have chance to comment on my cousin's experience with later stages of Erikson, such as generality versus stagnation and ego integrity versus despair. These two stages, even if they could ever be resolved without failure, it'll be seen in our future lives. Despite missing two stages of Erikson's, I believe that Erikson's theory of psychosocial development explains many aspects of my cousin's life. The main thing in Erikson's theory is that he states that each stage reflects its acquisitions to the others which I completely agree with him after I have analyzed my cousin's personal life. In other words, it shows me that the interrelated nature of the conflicts creates a relation of possibilities in developing a permanent identity. The notion that an individual can be confronted with the same conflict numerous times with the changing social environment, gives the person the opportunity to create a fresh new start in shaping and determining his/her own identity. This last fact alone accepted as chance for many of the positive changes in Burcu's and also other people's lives, even after certain stages are failed.

In conclusion, psychosocial theories emphasize the idea that personality is intrinsically social and that the important issues of personality concern how people relate to others. Erikson's object relations theory proposes that, postulated series of crises from infancy to late adulthood, giving rise to ego strengths that influence one's ego identity; the consciously experienced sense of self. Creating a picture of a change and evolution across the life-span, that would be nearly impossible to derive from the other viewpoints. The psychological viewpoint clearly adds something of great importance to our understanding of personality (Carver, Scheier, 2004). As it's accentuated in the essay from the living example, Burcu, the observations and behaviors of my cousin are verified the requirements of Erikson's

life cycles. I can sincerely deduce from the resemblance between Erikson's cycles and my cousin's suffers, the effects of the previous stages have not completely disappeared from person.

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Stage	Ages	Basic Conflict	Important Event	Summary
<u>1.Oral-Sensory</u>	Birth to 12 to 18 months	Trust vs. Mistrust	Feeding	The infant must form a first loving, trusting relationship with the caregiver, or develop a sense of mistrust.
<u>2.Muscular-Anal</u>	18 months to 3years	Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt	Toilet training	The child's energy is directed toward the development of physical skills,including walking, grasping, and rectal sphincter control. The child learns control but may develop shame and doubt if not handled well.
<u>3. Locomotor</u>	3 to 6 years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Independence	The child continues to become more assertive and to take more initiative, but may be too forceful, leading to guilt feelings.
<u>4. Latency</u>	6 to 12 years	Industry vs. Inferiority	School	The child must deal with demands to learn new skills or risk a sense of inferiority, failure and incompetence.
<u>6.Young Adulthood</u>	19 to 40 years	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love relationships	The young adult must develop intimate relationships or suffer from isolation.

Chart 1: Adapted from Erikson's 1959 *Identity and the Life Cycle* (**Psychological Issues** vol 1)