Psychological Theories Paper

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Developmental Psychology is a field that studies the changes that occur in a person over a lifetime. These changes include not only the physical, but the emotional, cognitive and social changes and advancements that occur in the course of a lifetime. This is one of the more inclusive fields of psychology that in its theories will incorporate many factors. And still, as with most of the field of psychology in general, it has been built and tested mainly on a small sample of the world population, western industrial mostly middle class subjects (Segall,1999). As such, the developmental theories are ethnocentric. As defined by Merrian-Webster dictionary (2011) this means "characterized by or based on the attitude that one's own group is superior". Since the theories were built on a very specific ethnic population in a multicultural view, we cannot assume without further investigation that these theories are universal and apply to the development of all people, of all ethnicities. To illustrate this point this paper will discuss cross-cultural aspects in Erikson's Theory of Development. We will also discuss the ways in which our ethnocentricity affects the way we interact with others who are different than us.

Erikson's Theory of Development

In the developmental theories of psychology we find many ethnocentric limitations that emphasize Western culture, therefore the developmental milestones are predicted according to life in Western industrial culture. Erik Erikson (Erikson,1968) developed one of the most well known theories of psychosocial development. In this theory development is achieved in steps over the course of a lifetime. The goal of development is to achieve ego identity, a sense of self that is developed through social interactions. At each of these steps that encompass an individual's life from infancy to the onset of old age, there is a conflict. In order to achieve the next step of development of identity, the conflict must be resolved.

German born Erikson immigrated to the US, where Erikson's theory was developed. As such it is a theory that suffers ethnocentricity, built through research and clinical treatment of the European American population. Research has shown that cultural differences are found in the development through the Eriksonian stages. According to Erikson identity formation is an important step for adolescents, McClain (1975) found significant mean differences between adolescent subject in Tennessee and those in France and Spain. Findings have been recently made in a study comparing Taiwanese and American teenagers . Cheng (2004) examines the differences in the concept of self between cultures and how this effects the achievement of the developmental step. In Western culture the Self is defined in the context of separation, while in Eastern culture the self is defined in terms of connectedness. This cultural difference affects the way the developmental steps of identity formation are achieved in the different cultural setting. In Western culture self seeking and uniqueness will be encouraged and considered a natural step in development, as defend by Erikson in the stages of identity Achievement and/or identity Moratorium. In comparison in Eastern Cultures, individuals are much more encouraged to join the group and follow norms. Identity development will be defined more through processes that allow connections to others, such as identity Foreclosure and identity Diffusion.

Ethnocentric Perceptions and Their Affects on Social Interactions

Erik Erikson believed that at birth there exists an innate quality of personality that is built in stages and based mainly upon the culture and family in which one is raised (Santrock, 2008). In our culturally diverse world children and adolescents who have their own ethnocentric perspective will need to be able to take the perspective of others from different ethnic groups to be able to increase their empathy, and understanding of the other group's culture, in addition to valuing their own culture. Research suggests that racial-ethnic identity exploration is normative

during adolescence (Quintana, 2007). It shows that adolescents will have a developmental increase in their ethnic identity, but it is gradual and subtle. Research is also showing that this increase in culture identity does not support an ethnic identity crisis, as originally thought. In fact, developmental research "has shown overwhelmingly that the various forms of adolescent crises that were anticipated by developmental theory are not indicative of normative development" (Holmbeck &Hill, 1988). The trigger for racial identity exploration is usually brought about by a child's or adolescents encounter with racism. Developmental theorists describe the encounter as an experience in which the individual "confronts the reality of racism" and therefore can no longer deny that racism does not affect them. (Quintana, 2007). One might think that racial stigmatization would cause low self-esteem or self loathing in children and adolescents, but studies do not support this. Studies do support the theory that adolescents who focus on the positive aspects of their ethnic group have a higher pattern of self-esteem (Quintana, 2007). This all suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship between racial identity and the perceptions of discrimination.

Conclusion

Ethnocentrism occurs when a society allows its cultural ways to become so deeply ingrained that there is difficulty for the society to think that there are alternative ways of life. Behavior of other groups is judged by the standards of the culture. Ethnocentrism has the power to lead to negative perceptions, stereotypes and actions against ethnic minority populations. In early development stages, it appears that socialization has a positive effect on the children, thus reducing the chance of race becoming a barrier (Nagayama Hall, 2010). The middle/late childhood stages seem to be the period when a child begins to experience racial and ethnic barriers. These barriers can affect the child's self-esteem and academic performance. Exploration

of an individual's ethnic identity is said to increase during the start of adolescence and decrease as the adolescent becomes older and secure with his or her ethnic identity (Nagayama Hall, 2010).

Biases, stereotypes and negative perceptions trend to restrict individuals who are considered to be in a minority population. These individuals can be the subject of discrimination not only from their cultural peers but from many other cultures as well. Ethnocentric perspectives can have an effect on many individuals. While cultural groups may never come to a mutual appreciation and understanding of other cultural groups, the ethnocentric limitations can be minimized if the individuals of the groups can keep an open mind and try to embrace the traditions and beliefs of other cultures.

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