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ADOLESCENCE:SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

James Marcia (1991, 1994, 1999, 2002) expanded on Erikson's theory of identity formation. Specifically, he focused on two essential processes in achieving a mature identity:exploration and commitment. Erikson's observations about identity were extended by Marcia, who described four identity statuses:identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievement. The present article describes the features of these four categories of identity status. It is concluded with the description of the formation of ethnic and racial identities. Ethnic and racial minority students are confronted with the challenge of forming an identity while living in two worlds – the values, beliefs, and behaviors of their group and those of the larger culture. These are highlighted in the present speculative article.

Keywords: Adolescence, Identity Confusion, Ethnic Identities, Racial Identities, Identity Statuses.

INTRODUCTION

In psychosocial theory of development, Erikson emphasizes on the relationship between society and the individual. It is a theory that connects personal development (psycho) to the social environment (social). He believed that development pass through eight life stages, each of which involves a central crises. Adequate resolution of each crisis leads to greater personal and social competence and a stronger foundation for solving future crises. In the first two stages, an infant must develop a sense of trust over mistrust and a sense of autonomy over shame and doubt. In early childhood, the focus of the third stage is on developing initiative and avoiding feelings of guilt. In the child's elementary school years, the fourth stage involves achieving a sense of industry and avoiding feelings of inferiority. In the fifth stage, identity versus role confusion, adolescents consciously attempt to solidify their identity. According to Marcia, these efforts may lead to identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, or achievement. Erikson's three stages of adulthood involve struggles to achieve intimacy, generativity, and integrity.

In the adolescence, the students develop capabilities for abstract thinking and understanding the perspectives of others. Physical changes also occur as they approach puberty. Thus, with developing minds and bodies, young adolescents face the central issue of constructing an identity that will provide a firm basis for adulthood. Although a sense of self develops since infancy, but in adolescence conscious effort is made to answer the question : "Who am I ?"

Identity refers to the organization of the individual's drives, abilities, beliefs, and history into a consistent image of self. It involves deliberate choices and decisions, particularly about work, values, ideology, and commitments to people and ideas (Miller, 2011 ; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). If adolescents fail to integrate all these aspects and choices, or if they feel unable to choose at all, role confusion threatens.

Identity Confusion

Modern technocrats have speculated that establishing a separate identity is complicated for adolescents today because they are constantly connected to others through cell phones especially in the ages of 9 and 13. The chance to solve problems, experience autonomy, and handle situations on one's own is the basis for achieving identity and mature judgments. But the tethered child with enormous connectivity with others will never be alone. Adolescents can create new identities and keep multiple personalities "alive" through online life simulations sites. Some students even confused with their "life mix", a mash

up of what they live online and what they live in real life. For some adolescents, the boundaries may be unclear and easily crossed. Connectivity also "offers new possibilities for experimenting with identity, particularly in adolescence, the sense of a free space, what Eric Erikson called the moratorium" (Turkle, 2011, p. 152). Thus, constant connectivity complicates achieving a separate identity and autonomy.

Erikson's life-span development approach has been useful in understanding adolescence period and developing concepts of self. But feminists have criticized his notion that identity precedes intimacy, because their research indicated that for women, identity achievement is fused with achieving intimacy (Miller, 2011). Even recent research has focused on identity issues not fully explored by Erikson – racial and ethnic identity. Ethnic minority students have to "sift through two sets of cultural values and identity options" to achieve a firm identity, so they may need more time to explore possibilities – a longer moratorium in Erikson's terms (Markstrom – Adams, 1992 ; p. 177). Some psychologists consider ethnic identity as a "master status," one that dominates all other identity concerns when judging the self (Herman, 2004 ; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010).

Identity Statues

Erikson's observations on identity formation have been usefully extended by Marcia's notion of identity statuses (1966, 1980, 1991, 2002). These are styles or processes "for handling the psychosocial task of establishing a sense of identity" (Waterman & Archer, 1990, p. 38). Marcia identified four identity statuses. The attainment of a mature identity depends on two variables: crisis and commitment. "Crisis refers to times during adolescence when the individual seems to be actively involved in choosing among alternative occupations and beliefs. Commitment refers to the degree of personal investment the individual expresses in an occupation or belief (1967, p. 119).

Marcia established four identity statuses that vary in their degree of crisis and commitment:identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievement. The last two are generally thought to be more developmentally mature than the earlier two statuses because individuals exhibiting moratorium and identity achievement have either evaluated alternatives and made a commitment or are actively involved in obtaining and evaluating information in preparation for a commitment (Marcia, 2001). The brief description of each identity type in given in Table 1.

Table 1 reveals that the more mature identity statuses are slow to evolve and are found in a relatively small percentage of individuals. Further, an identity status is not a one-and-for-all accomplishment; it can continue to undergo developmental change in adulthood (Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2005). Lastly, because identity is an amalgam of commitments from a number of different domains, only a small percentage (about 20%) of adolescents will experience it. An adolescent is more likely to be firm in occupational choice than to be decisive in gender role or religious values (Waterman, 1988).

Implications:Search for a Sense of Identity

Adolescents may exhibit characteristics of different identity status types. Some may drift aimlessly; others may be distressed because they realize they lack goals and values. Some students may have self-chosen commitments; others may have accepted the goals and values of their parents. If some students seem depressed or bothered because they are unable to develop a satisfactory set of personal values, then it is better to consult psychologist or counselor. In addition one might use the techniques that might help these students to experience at least a degree of identity achievement.

The components of identity that Erikson stressed are acceptance of one's appearance, knowledge about where one is going, and recognition from others. Role confusion is most frequently caused by failure to formulate clear ideas about gender roles and by indecision about occupational choice. At the high school level, individual differences are either ignored or discouraged and negative feedback greatly outweighs positive feedback (Toch, 2003). Teacher can contribute to their sense of positive identity by recognizing them as

individuals and praising them for their accomplishments. If a particular student lacks recognition from peers because of abrasive qualities or ineptness, teacher might help the student to develop to encourage social skills. Class discussions centering on changes in attitudes regarding masculinity, femininity, and family responsibilities might be able to reduce identity problems resulting from indecisiveness about gender roles. Teacher can encourage boys to become more sensitive to the needs of others and girls to be more achievement oriented. This approach that combines traditional "masculine" and "feminine" behaviors is called psychological androgyny (Steinberg, 2005).

Sometimes online bulletin board writing can be conducive to explorations of sensitive issues because it provides a slightly slower, more thoughtful pace and also offers and equal voice to male and female students. An online discussion that is carefully moderated by an experienced teacher can both model and explore the

territory of psychological androgyny (Woodhill & Samuels, 2004).

Teachers may also help students in taking decisions about occupational choice by providing them with information about their intellectual capabilities, personality traits, interests, and values.

Ethnic Identities

Phinney, J. (1990, 2003) describes four outcomes for ethnic minority youth in their search for identity. They can try assimilation, fully adopting the values and behaviours of the majority culture and rejecting their ethnic culture. At the opposite end, they can be separated, associating only with members of their ethnic culture. A third possibility is marginality, living in the majority culture, but feeling alienated and uncomfortable in it and disconnected from the minority culture as well. The final alternative is biculturalism (called integration), maintaining ties to both cultures. There are at least three ways to be bicultural. One could alternate between the two cultures, being fully "majority" in one's behaviour in one situation and fully "minority" in other situations. In other words, one could blend the two cultures by finding values and behaviours that are common to both and acting on them. Finally, one could fuse the two cultures by truly merging them into a new and complete whole (Phinney & Devich – Nevarro, 1997).

Ultimately, whatever the identity outcome is, having strong positive feelings about one's own ethnic group seems to be important for good mental health (Steinberg, 2005). In fact, Marks, et al., (2011) have determined that bicultural adolescents who form strong, positive multiethnic identities have higher self-esteem, fewer mental health problems, and higher academic achievement than peers with a single ethnic identity or an undeveloped multiethnic identity.

Some psychologists have used Marcia's identity statuses to understand the process of forming an ethnic identity. Children may begin with an unexamined ethnic identity, either because they have not explored at all (diffusion) or because they have accepted the identity encouraged by others (foreclosure). Many European American

Identity Status	Crisis	Commitment	Characteristics
Identity Diffusion	Little serious thought given to occupational choice, gender roles, values, hence yet to experience crisis.	Ideas about occupation, gender, roles, values are easily changed as a result of positive and negative feedback, hence commitment is weak.	Not self-directed ; disorganized, impulsive, low self-esteem ; avoids getting involved in school work and interpersonal relationships.
Fore-closure	Never suffer from doubts about identity issues, hence crisis is not experienced.	Has accepted and endorsed the values of his parents, hence commitment is strong.	Close-mined, feels superior to peers ; strong identification with and more dependent on parents and other authority figures for guidance and approval.
Mora-torium	Has given some thought to identity related questions, hence partially experienced crisis.	Has not achieved satisfactory results, hence commitment is weak	Anxious, dissatisfied with school ; daydreams, engages in short-lived relationships ; may reject parental and societal values temporarily.
Identity	Has considered and explored alternative positions regarding occupational choice, gender roles, values, hence crisis is fully experienced.	Has made self-chosen commitments to at least some aspects of identity, hence commitment is strong.	Introspective ; more planful, rational, and logical in decision making ; high self-esteem ; deals stress effectively ; builds close inter-personal relationships.

SOURCE : Blisker & Marcia (1991) ; Cramer (2001) ; Hoegh & Bourgeois (2002) ; MacKinnon & Marcia (2002) ; Marcia (2002)

Table 1. James Marcia's Four Identity Statuses

adolescents could fit the unexamined category. A period of ethnic identity exploration (moratorium) might be followed by a resolution of the conflict (identity achieved).

Racial Identities

Determining a racial identity may be even more complicated for biracial or multiracial adolescents. The parents they live with, the life of their neighborhood, their appearance, and experiences of discrimination or support can influence these adolescents' decisions about racial identity. Psychologists think that these challenges help multiracial youth to develop stronger and more complex identities, but researchers argue that these challenges present an extra burden in an already tough process (Herman, 2004). The outcome depends in part on the support adolescents receive in facing the challenges.

Cross, W. (1991); Cross & Cross, 2007; DeCuir-Gunby, (2009) devised a framework that specifically addresses framework that specially addresses African American racial identity (Woolfolk, 2012). The process he calls nigrescence (process of developing a Black identity) has five stages

- Pre-encounter: At this stage, adolescent value other aspects of their identity, such as religion, profession, or social status.

- Encounter: This stage is often triggered by encounters with overt, covert, or institutional racism. For instance, when an African American is assaulted by police, or sees news reports about such assaults, then they open their eyes to the reality that race matters in society. Then they become attuned to their Blackness.

- Immersion / Emersion: This is a transition that may cause adolescents to be anxious about "becoming the 'right kind' of Black person" (Cross, 1991, p. 202). They are eager to understand their racial heritage more deeply. In response to encounters with discrimination, the adolescents identify their lives with Blackness. They buy books on Black experiences and socialize mainly with other African Americans.

- Internalization: Adolescents are firmly connected to and highly secured in their sense of racial identity. They don't worry about others views. They are confident in their own standards of Blackness.

- Internalization – Commitment: In this stage an adolescent continued to internalize, show interest in and commitment to Black affairs. Such adolescents plan their lives to connect to their Black racial identity. For instance, a painter dedicates his life to paint only Black images or a researcher dedicates her life to study only African American educational experiences.

Ethnic and racial minority students are confronted with the challenge of forming an identity while living in two worlds – the values, beliefs, and behaviours of their group and those of the larger culture. Most explanations for identity development describes stages moving from being unaware of differences between minority group and majority cultures, to different ways of negotiating the differences, and finally to an integration of cultures.

Special efforts are to be made to encourage racial and ethnic pride, i.e., a positive self-concept about one's racial or ethnic heritage, since it is the foundation of a stable identity (Spencer & Marksfrom-Adams, 1990). In one study, researchers found that African American preschool students whose homes were rich with African American culture had more factual knowledge and better problem-solving skills. Children who are proud of their heritage revealed few problem behaviours (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002). In other research, positive racial identity was found to be related to higher self-esteem and fewer emotional problems for both African American and White adolescents (DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, & Hardesty, 2002). For all students there is an ethnic heritage. Richard Milner (2003) has pointed to the importance of racial identity development and awareness. When majority of adolescents are knowledgeable and secure about their own heritage, they are more respectful to the heritage of others. Thus, exploring the racial and ethnic roots of students should foster both pride in self and acceptance of others (Rotherham-Borus, 1994).

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