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Dynamics of Identity Crisis

The term identity crisis was first used by theorist Erik Erikson to refer to a stage of development where adolescents struggle to make meaning of who they are and what role they have to play in the society (Erikson 113). At this stage, a child is faced with a lot of options on whom they are and who they should become. Erikson is the most accomplished theorist in the field of child development; he was raised as a Jew but had a look, thus he always felt like an “outsider” of the two cultures. Considering the scholar’s studies and affirmations by other intellectuals, culture plays a significant role in the development of any individual. Culture can therefore not be ignored when it comes to the development of the character of a child. A child’s personality development is dependent on the proper integration of cultural expectations and personal attributes.

Identity crisis has been associated mostly with adolescents aged between 14-15 years; a stage in the life where they have very little knowledge of who they are or what they want to become in future (Erikson 118). At this stage of life, it is crucial for a child to get the full support and understanding of parents or guardians present in their lives. Where support and understanding lacks, there is often a conflict between parents and teenagers at this age bracket.

This stage of personality development has been proven to be quite important in any individual's life. Adolescents that successfully "find themselves" during this stage materialize to people with great personalities; they end up being confident, having high self esteem and above all are well equipped to face later realities of life (Schultz 78). Besides having a well developed character, such individuals experience fewer problems when it comes to loyalty and commitments in their future relationships; which brings us to the aspect of fidelity.

Scholars unanimously agree that fidelity is an important quality that should be developed in an individual at this stage of life. Fidelity is important because it forms the basis of an individual's future relationships with other people (Erikson 147). Schultz (208) insists that a consistent character directly impacts on the level of any person's loyalty to relationships of any nature.

It is also important to note that at this stage of life adolescents have a great desire for total freedom to explore, but in as much as parents wish to let their children explore all the options in life, a child in that stage is still quite dependent and thus close monitoring and guidance is mandatory. In most cases this is where conflicts arise, because the child feels that the parent is trying to control their lives while in real sense, the parent is just trying to direct the child in to the right direction.

In their quest to explore, teenagers at this age bracket easily succumb to peer pressure (Erikson 122). A child at this stage considers his/her friends to be the only consolation and the only people that "understand" what they are going through. As a result, they take refuge under the wing of 'friendship'. While it may seem as a safe haven for the child; it is every parent's worst nightmare especially if the peers are of questionable character.

Identity crisis has been known to breed juvenile delinquency, drug abuse and general hostility in the character of adolescents (Schultz 212). These are just a few of the consequences of the confusion that children face at this age. Additionally, there are some factors that have been known to intensify/fuel the intensity of identity crisis. One such factor as mentioned earlier is cultural identity.

The theorist Erik Erickson always felt as an outsider, he was raised as a Jew but appeared Scandinavian; the lack of sense of belonging is what could be termed as cultural identity crisis. Cultural identity is the sense of belonging to a certain culture, where a person fits in and feels that they are in the right place. A teenager that feels that they don't fit in the culture that they are raised in is likely to suffer intense identity crisis because, as they try to figure out their social and occupational identity, they have to struggle in equal amount to satisfy the cultural obligations of a culture that they do not blend in.

In most scenarios, teenagers from a different culture easily fall in the trap of identity crisis, because of the common stereotypes that exist in that society. You will find that a teenager of African-American origin will always be treated with suspicion even though he/she has a good character. It is such implications that tend to blow up the issue of identity crisis.

Looking at the issue of identity crisis from another angle, it comes to my attention that some of the factors that have traditionally been believed to develop the identity of individuals may be a bit outdated. It is obvious that today's teenager is a totally different breed from a teenager who was raised say in the 90s or 80s. In this age, by the time a teenager is 13 years he/she is exposed to numerous resources that have the capacity to change how they perceive events, circumstances and the society as a whole. This is different from a while back where a

child was expected to automatically accept and adapt to the roles and identity given to them by the society.

The current society is progressively accepting variant teenage personalities or rather the society is allowing them to take up identities that are befitting their aspirations and needs. The liberal nature of the society allows for diversification of characters of a child and also adults. The dynamics of today's society and culture definitely has an impact on the development of a child's personality and identity. However, these dynamics impact behavior of an individual in a different way. Identity crisis gives an opportunity for character development, while on the other hand; the same may lead to dire consequences. It is therefore the duty of the society as a whole to offer guidance to teenagers. However, guidance alone may not be enough especially at the times that we are in – the information age. It is important to be open minded to the new options that cultural diversification has offered the society to allow the children to explore and be all that they can be in their lives.

We do not need to be geniuses to realize that conservativeness and rigidity towards the changes in the 21st century will only lead to a rebellious young generation. A permanent solution would be to change the angle at which the issues of identity crisis have been looked at before. Incorporate the new dimensions like exploration of available options and letting go of inhibitions such as stereotypes and conservativeness.

Works Cited

Erikson, Erik, "*Identity Crisis*" in *Autobiographic Perspective*", 1970. Print.

Schultz, David. *Theories of Personality*, New York: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009. Print

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