

Older Adult Development Interview Reflection

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Application of Erikson's Theory to an Older Adult Interviewee

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which developed in the mid-20th century, was groundbreaking because it extended the concept of development across the entire lifespan, unlike many earlier theories that focused solely on childhood. Integrity vs. Despair is the eighth and final stage, typically occurring around age 65 and on (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2022). During this stage, individuals reflect on their lives and either feel a sense of integrity or despair based on their experiences. They achieve a sense of integrity if they feel they have led a meaningful and fulfilling life, including satisfaction, acceptance, and wisdom. They can look back with a sense of accomplishment and peace. Conversely, if they feel regret, shame, or disappointment about their life choices, they experience despair. This can lead to feelings of bitterness, depression, and hopelessness.

Interview

For Erikson's theoretical reflection assignment, I interviewed my father, who will be 80 years old in one month and appears as sharp as he was 20 years ago. He is an impeccable husband, father, and friend. He is a veteran who served in the Vietnam War and is still a practicing veterinarian to this day. He is still active in his community with friends and his wife of 29 years. He often plays games and cards and engages in mentally challenging activities such as crossword puzzles, golf, and trivia. He tends to an extensive garden, frequently fishes, and has difficulty sitting too long. However, he states that as he has aged, it has gotten easier to sit longer to watch the news, a football game, or a golf match.

My father was a world-champion Scottish athlete, competing all over the world from the age of 50 to 65. During this time, he felt he was in the best physical shape of his life, which did not begin to diminish until about four years ago when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Those treatments and medication left him feeling more fatigued than usual. The cancer had recently metastasized into his chest, and while the radiation and medication have the cancer under control, fatigue is still the downside. Nevertheless, as he has aged, he prioritizes regular checkups for his heart, lungs, overall wellness, and his wife's health.

Growing up, he had a lot of friends. They rode bikes, hunted, and were active boys. Since elementary school, he has remained extremely close with many friends, particularly his best childhood friend, whom he speaks with a few times a week. After the Vietnam War, he relocated to California. He started a practice and felt he did well balancing work and play as a young veterinarian in Southern California. His friends were active and fun professionals, competitive in nature, and they supported each other's growth as they excelled in their respective fields. He confidently says he always surrounds himself with talented and accomplished individuals and describes him and his wife's friends as top-notch people. Throughout his life, he has consistently sought out that same friendly competition, engaged in networking, and drawn inspiration from like-minded individuals while also being mindful of inharmonious people, avoiding conflict and lack of self-improvement or growth.

However, he has faced many challenges in his life, including business setbacks, tax issues, financial struggles, a divorce, and distance and time away from his children. Despite these difficulties, he believes it is vital to acknowledge the hardships in life and focus on the positive aspects and achievements. He learned to rely on himself during tough times and now feels physically, mentally, and financially comfortable in his life, living close to his children and grandchildren. My father states that you must be able to take the bad with the good, and there will be misery in life. He knew that only he could escape a mess in hard times and had to have faith in himself.

Theoretical Reflection

Erikson's psychosocial theory emphasizes the importance of social and cultural influences on personality development throughout the lifespan (McLeod, 2024). Even in the most challenging moments, when all my father had was himself, those influences still played a significant role in his development. In the Integrity vs. Despair stage, these interactions can influence how individuals view their life achievements and failures. Positive social relationships can reinforce a sense of integrity, while negative interactions might contribute to feelings of despair (Cherry, 2023). He has surrounded himself with supportive, accomplished, life-long companions and continues to build upon his repertoire of allies, reinforcing his sense of integrity.

An individual's cultural background provides a framework for what is considered a successful or meaningful life, and these cultural values can impact how individuals evaluate their own lives in the Integrity vs. Despair stage of psychosocial development (Heine, 2019). Surrounding himself with like-minded philanthropists has led my father to reflect on his roles within those contexts. Supportive environments can foster a sense of belonging and accomplishment, contributing to a favorable resolution of this stage. Additionally, the era and society in which a person lives can affect their experiences and opportunities. My father was affected by the financial recession of the 1980s, along with other major life stressors, which took him years to recover from. Surmounting significant historical and personal events may have influenced his resilience and contributions during those times, shaping his sense of integrity.

If an individual feels conflict or despair in late adulthood, interventions can help achieve a sense of integrity. These can include life review or reminiscence therapy, which encourages reflection on life achievements and activities that promote social engagement and a sense of purpose. Activities like volunteering can enhance feelings of generativity, and social support

groups can reduce feelings of isolation and despair. Interventions like meditation, mindfulness, and creative activities can reduce stress and help individuals process their emotions and experiences. Lastly, counseling can help individuals work through unresolved issues and regrets, fostering a sense of closure and acceptance.

Ethical and culturally sensitive counseling strategies are essential to promoting resilience, development, and wellness in older adults. This involves respecting autonomy, maintaining confidentiality, and promoting cultural competence, relevant interventions, and community engagement (ACA, 2014). Additionally, promoting resilience and wellness includes life review and reminiscence therapy, social support, mindfulness and stress reduction techniques, physical activity, and proper nutrition. Integrating these strategies effectively supports older adults in achieving a sense of integrity and well-being in later life.

Conclusion

Erik Erikson believed that each stage of development involves a psychosocial crisis that arises from the interaction between the individual's psychological needs and the demands of society (Bailey, 2022). My father is an impeccable example of triumphantly navigating through these eight stages in times of crisis. During the interview, he addressed positive and negative life experiences with pride and resolution, which demonstrates Erikson's sense of integrity. These experiences highlight the feeling of living a purposeful life. His life stories exemplified peace, wisdom, success, and acceptance. Although there may have been moments in his life where he felt defeat, regret, and hopelessness, he understood there was hope, and according to Erikson's theory, individuals do not always experience just integrity or despair (Cherry, 2023). Instead, most healthy individuals experience a balance between each as they begin to make sense of their lives.

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