Psychosexual Development: Erickson vs. Freud

 In the theories of development, Freud’s psychosexual theory and Erikson’s psychosocial theories are two noticeable theories. Besides, these theories deal with various stages of development, starting from infancy to adulthood and emphasize their significance as well. Freud was born in 1856 in a Jewish household; however, he grew up as an Austrian Neurologist, whereas Erikson was given birth by a Jewish woman in 1902. Erikson's psychosocial theory is influenced by Freud's psychosexual theory nonetheless, but it has its similarities and differences as well. The personality development stages in both the theories are given different names, and they also contrast in the approaches that the theorists have adopted to explain these stages. Six This essay revolves around the comparison and contrast of the six basic personality development stages.

The first stage in Freud’s psychosexual theory is known as “Oral stage," and in this stage, a child draws pleasure or id by engaging in the activities of tasting, sucking, and eating (Freud, 2015). However, if a child fails to engage in these activities, "oral fixation" can occur, which may create the problems of nail-biting or eating disorders at some later stage (Freud, 2015). Erikson shared Freud's this belief that the process of personality development starts through predetermined stages, and if a child faces a problem in this stage, it may create difficulty in developing trust issues in the coming stages. However, the very first stage or early stage in Erikson’s theory is called “trust versus mistrust stage” (Erikson, 1968). In this stage, child is dependent on his caretakers for the fulfilment of his basic needs. Besides, his sense of the world is reinforced through the behavior of his parents or caretakers (Smith & Vetter, 1981).

The second stage is known as the "Anal stage” of development in the psychosexual theory, and according to Freud, children (aged 1 till 3), who successfully complete this stage gain control over their bladder and bowel movements (Freud, 2015). However, he also states that those children who remain successful in this stage may grow up to untidy and disordered. Erikson has named this stage "autonomy vs. shame and doubt age" (Erikson, 1968). He shares the same belief as Freud that in this stage, children develop self-sufficiency because he can eat and relieve himself on his own. However, such a child who is not self-sufficient in this very stage may grow up to doubt his abilities. Both the psychosexual and psychosocial theories stress that from age 1 to age 3, children start getting independent for their needs, such as bowel movements and eating. This sense of independence starts inducing wisdom in them, and they are less dependent on their caretakers as compared to the oral and trust vs. mistrust stage (Fadiman et al, 1976).

When a child enters in his pre-school years, he is in the “phallic stage” according to the psychosexual theory, and this stage studies the development of children from age 3 to age 6 (Freud, 2015). Freud asserts that in this stage, the “libido energy” manifests itself in the sexual reproductive organs of the children. The children start categorizing themselves with their same-sex parents, and boys go through the "Oedipus complex," whereas girls experience the Electra complex. Quite the contrary, Erikson gives the idea of the "initiative vs. guilt" stage and proclaims that children base their instincts based on their environment (Erikson, 1968). Those children who pass this stage feel more purpose-driven, and those children who face difficulty in developing a sense of purpose adopt the passive emotion of guilt. Unlike psychosexual theory, this theory focuses on the environment as a key factor in personality the development of a child.

Children falling in the age period of 7 to 11 years are considered in a transitional phase, which links their childhood stages with the adolescent stage. He refers to this stage as a "latent period” (Freud, 2015). In this period, the libido energy decreases, and children actively engage themselves in learning new activities or taking up some hobbies such as making new friends in school and playing sports. Besides, in this stage, children learn self-confidence and social skills. Similarly, Erickson also states this new development in children as "industry versus inferiority stage," the sense of competence and skillfulness occur during this stage (Erikson, 1968). Moreover, children feel accomplished if they succeed in this stage; on the other hand, children who struggle may develop low self-esteem issues (Franz & White, 1985).

In the phase of adolescence, both psychosexual and psychosocial theories agree on the point that teenagers develop a unique sense of identity. In Freud’s perspective, this stage is important in developing a clear sense of sexuality in both the genders. This stage is known as the “genital stage” (Freud, 2015). Teenagers invest them in romantic companionship based on their sexuality and sexual preferences. This stage plays a defining role in developing the emotions of love, kindness, and empathy because these emotions remain with an individual until his death. Failing to develop these emotions and responses may result in a fragmented, passive, and ignorant sense of personality development. Likewise, Erikson has extensively explored this stage and named it "identity versus role confusion" because, in this stage, teenagers take on different tasks and perform various roles depending on their sense of identity (Erikson, 1968). Contrasting with the previous stages of development, the successful completion of this stage depends on the support received from elders and peers. In this stage, reassurance is integral because it acts as a drive to form a better identity. Teenagers who do not receive the required encouragement and reassurances from their family and friends are more likely to develop a negative sense of their identity (Chodoff, 1966). Moreover, they are not purpose-driven and struggle with a fragmented self.

The last and final stage of personality development is known as adulthood, and the opinion of both Freud and Erikson highly contrasts with one another. Freud proclaims that personality development in the genital stage remains dominant in adulthood, as well. Besides, the sense of identity developed in that stage remains forever with an individual. He also recognizes the role played by the oral, phallic, and latent stages in the personality development of a person as an adult. On the other hand, Erikson states that the process of development continues in adulthood too because this is a lifelong process. He has divided adulthood into three stages; the first stage is "intimacy vs. isolation," which deals with the idea of romantic affection and companionship in young adults (Kline, 2013). The second stage is referred to as the "generativity vs. stagnation" stage, which occurs in adults who are middle-aged and contribute to the betterment of society and take care of their infants. The final stage is of "integrity vs. despair"; in this stage, elders reflect on the choices they made when they were young. These choices can be good or bad, and their idea of life stems from this because they either feel accomplished or disappointed by life (Erikson, 1968).

Psychosexual and psychosocial theories have their similarities and differing opinions concerning the personality development of an individual. The importance of social skills and social learning in the early childhood stages are highly stressed by both the theorists (Chodoff, 1966). They believe that these stages ensure a positive and good sense of identity as an adult. Likewise, they also think that a low sense of identity occurs when children lack in meeting the criteria of good personality development in the early stages of their childhood. They are more likely to fall prey to the adverse behaviors of smoking, anger management issues, and apathy. Freud’s psychosexual theory is much focused on the idea of “id” and “libido energy” as key factors in the personality development of a person (Freud, 2015). However, the psychosocial theory is famous for its exclusive attention to the role played by the environment and family structure in the personality development of a child. Contrasting with Freud’s opinion that the genital stage remains constant in adulthood too, he also proclaims that personality development is a lifelong process, and changes manifest itself in an adult till his death. The purpose of both theories is the assessment of personality growth at every developing stage.

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