

The stages of psychosocial development

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The eight stages of psychosocial development, proposed by Erik Erikson, attempt to describe how people develop psychologically and socially throughout their life. Each of the stages described by Erickson has a critical conflict or dilemma that creates a particular psychosocial crisis. These crises serve to either develop a quality or fail to develop it. The first stage is the stage of “ trust versus mistrust” (Newman & Newman, 2011). It occurs between birth and the second year of life. An infant is entirely dependent on parents.

Therefore, the dilemma that infants face at this point in their lives is whether or not they can trust the world. At this stage, an infant will develop trust in the world if parents constantly provide him or her with food, protection, affection, and attention. For example, a loving father, mother, or caregiver who constantly plays with a child, provides him or her with food, and rarely punishes him or her, will help the child develop trust. On the other hand, if caregivers are inconsistent in providing a child with food, if they treat him or her cruelly or even engage in physical abuse, the child will develop mistrust of the society. The second stage of psychosocial development is called “ autonomy versus shame and doubt” (Newman & Newman, 2011).

It occurs approximately between the second and the fourth year of life. At this stage, a child is gaining control of his or her body, learns to walk, talk, and even use the bathroom. Children are very exploratory of their environment. The critical dilemma of this stage involves questioning whether it is right to be oneself. If parents support and encourage a child to be adventurous and explore the environment at this stage, the child develops autonomy and confidence.

On the other hand, overtly restrictive parents who keep on chastising a child for trying new things will make him or her develop shame and doubt. The third stage is “ initiative versus guilt,” and it occurs approximately until the fifth year of life (Newman & Newman, 2011). In this stage, the critical dilemma that a child faces is whether or not it is right for him or her to be autonomous and assert own power and control. If parents and teachers encourage children’s efforts and help them choose tasks that they can accomplish, children develop initiative and confidence. On the other hand, when parents dismiss children as silly, bothersome, or leave them to choose impossible tasks, it kills their morale, and as a consequence, children develop guilt. The fourth stage in psychosocial development is “ industry versus inferiority” (Newman & Newman, 2011).

In this stage, the critical question is whether or not one can fit into the world and be competent in things he or she does. One gradually gives up childishness and begins to get a sense of satisfaction from accomplishing productive tasks. If a child is encouraged, congratulated, and recognized for his or her accomplishments, the child develops competence and confidence in his or her skills. Conversely, children who receive little or no attention for things they do doubt their abilities and develop a sense of inferiority. The fifth stage, “ identity versus confusion,” occurs approximately between the ages of 12 and 19 (Newman & Newman, 2011).

In this stage, the critical question concerns who one is and what he or she can become? Here, an adolescent tries to develop a sense of self and explore his or her independence. If adolescents find a niche in the society, something they are good at and appreciated for, then they may develop a sense of

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identity early and settle for it. On the other hand, if adolescents remain unsure about what they believe and what they want, they continue to feel insecure and their identity crisis persists. The sixth stage is called “intimacy versus isolation,” and it occurs approximately between 20 and 24 years of age, but it may last even up to 40 years (Newman & Newman, 2011). It strongly depends on whether or not a person has developed a sense of personal identity.

The critical dilemma lies in one’s ability to love and commit his or her life to someone. If one is ready to blend his or her identity with someone else, make compromises and sacrifices for someone else, an individual will develop intimacy with that person which may lead to a life commitment. Conversely, if a person experiences rejection and inadequacy or if he or she is unwilling to sacrifice for the sake of another person, isolation may occur as a result. The seventh stage is “generativity versus stagnation” (Newman & Newman, 2011). The critical dilemma of this stage is whether people can make their lives count. In this stage, if a person lives his or her life in a way that he or she raises a good family or engages in activities that enable societal development, then a sense of generativity develops.

On the other hand, a person who is egocentric and unwilling or unable to contribute to societal development adds to a sense of stagnation. The eighth and final stage of psychosocial development is “ego integrity versus despair” (Newman & Newman, 2011). During this stage, the critical dilemma is retrospective and involves questioning whether one could have lived his or her life any differently. If people look back into their lives and they see that they have led a happy and productive life, then they develop a sense

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contentment and integrity. If a sense of regret, unattained goals, and disappointments is overwhelming, a person may develop a feeling of despair. This stage extends from late adulthood up to death.

Erickson's stages are valid with reference to my life. In my life, I have developed a sense of trust in my parents because they were always there for me, and that trust continues up to date. I remember when I was about four years old, I was very playful and curious, and my parents often encouraged me, but they occasionally told me not to do certain things. It lent credence to the stage of autonomy versus shame and doubt. Between my twelfth and nineteenth years, I got to discover my abilities and talents and have developed a sense of identity.

As I grow older, I have developed a need to love, and it is reflective of the stage of intimacy versus isolation. However, Erickson's stages of development are not always relevant. This is because they are rigid, and the time frames described for each one of them are a little inflexible. Moreover, some stages usually come before others, and others may, in fact, span through a longer period than suggested. For instance, intimacy often comes much earlier than identity, and it may last for a much longer period (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010).

Moreover, some people develop a sense of identity much earlier or later in their lives. Therefore, the stages of development described by Erikson do not always describe individual experiences that happen in real life.