



Identity and Identity Crisis

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Describe the key determinants of children's self-esteem

Outline Marcia's theory of Identity Status

Describe the conditions where identity crises occur

Describe the common challenges people face in their mid-life (mid-life crisis)

Learning Objectives

At the end of the lecture, student should be able to:

- Describe the key determinants of children's self-esteem
- Outline Marcia's theory of Identity Status
- Describe the conditions where identity crises occur
- Describe the common challenges people face



Part 1

Social & Identity Development in Childhood



Before the search for identity

According to Erikson's theory, childhood is a period where we learn to be a functioning member of the society

Once we achieve some level of will, purpose, and competency, we can then start to really explore our unique identity

Rather than search for one's identity, children are more likely to seek self-esteem

Erikson's Stages Two to Four

Autonomy versus Shame & Doubt:

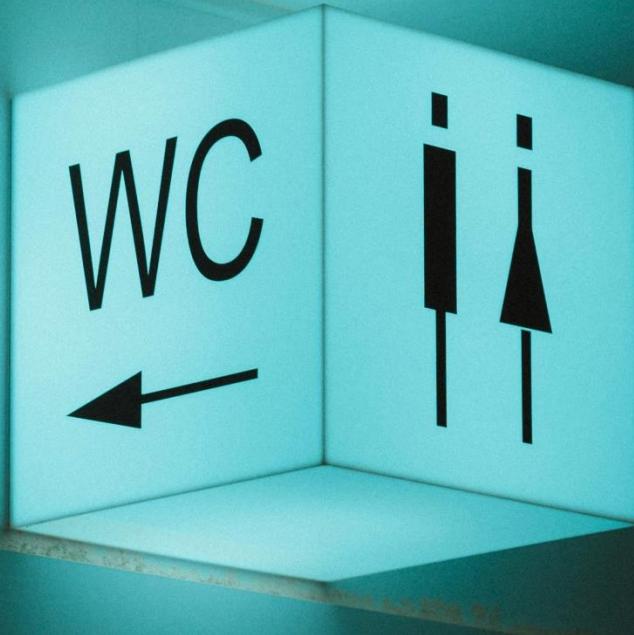
Learn to control oneself and make own decisions → Will

Initiative versus Guilt:

Learn to pursue goals → Purpose

Industry versus Inferiority:

Learn to be productive → Competency



Toilet Training as Developmental Task

Newborns do not control their bowel

Between 18-24m, most children are able to control their bowel enough to use a toilet for urination & defecation

Sense the need for urination or defecation → control bowel while walking to toilet & removing clothing → do it at the toilet





Exploration & Play as Developmental Task

Slightly older children often engage in behaviours in order to achieve a goal, or if they just feel like doing it

They initiate play, practice new skills, try new things, explore their own abilities, and exercise control over their environment

Eventually, they'll learn that they can be their own boss rather than just follow instructions



Surviving School as Developmental Task

School is a new environment with new peers as well as many challenges and competitions

Children want to gain a sense of achievement – that they can rise to the challenge set by the society

Ultimately, they might learn the feeling of competence, and know that they are not inferior to other people



Self-Esteem in Preschoolers

Preschoolers usually have high self-esteem, unless their developmental tasks were successful due to various reasons

In particular, some child-rearing practices might lead to feelings of “Shame & Doubt”, “Guilt”, and “Inferiority”

E.g., being laughed at for soiling → shame



Self-Esteem in Older Children

Once children go to school, their self-esteem is much more determined by social comparison in the following domains:

- Physical appearance (strongest correlation to overall self-worth)
- Academic competence
- Social Competence (peers & parents)
- Physical / athletic competence (games & sports)

A photograph of a father and daughter washing their hands together at a kitchen sink. The father, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, stands behind his young daughter, who is wearing a pink sleeveless top. They are both focused on the task at hand. A stainless steel faucet is running, and a dish rack filled with dishes is visible in the background. Some potted plants are on the windowsill to the right.

Child-Rearing Practices (Attachment)

Responsive and secure parents (offer protection and support to child when the child needs them) → secure attachment

Unresponsive parents → avoidant attachment (the child learned that the presence of the parents is not helpful)

Overprotective parents → resistant attachment (the child learned that they should not leave the parents, and is angry if the parents leave them)

A photograph of a father and daughter washing their hands together at a kitchen sink. The father, wearing a light brown long-sleeved shirt, stands behind his young daughter, who is wearing a pink sleeveless top. They are both focused on the task at hand. A stainless steel faucet is running water into a white ceramic sink. In the background, there is a dish rack filled with clean dishes and some green plants on the windowsill.

Child-Rearing Practices (Esteem)

Controlling parents → sense of inadequacy → lower self-esteem

Overindulgent parents → overly high self-esteem → unrealistic evaluating of own competency and own demands

Authoritative parents (i.e. responsive and demanding) → children feel accepted and able to evaluate their own behaviours against reasonable standards



Mastery-oriented

- Success is attributed to ability & effort (internal & changeable)
- Failure is attributed to insufficient effort/ task too difficult (external or changeable internal factors)

Learned helpless

- Success is attributed to luck (external)
- Failure is attributed to (lack of) ability (internal & unchangeable)

Achievement-related attributions

Mastery-oriented:

- Success is attributed to ability & effort (internal & changeable)
- Failure is attributed to insufficient effort/ task too difficult (external or changeable internal factors)

Learned helpless:

- Success is attributed to luck (external)
- Failure is attributed to (lack of) ability (internal & unchangeable)

A photograph showing the back of a young child wearing a bright yellow hooded raincoat and a light blue backpack decorated with cartoonish animal faces. The child is walking away from the camera through a field of dry, brownish grass. The background is slightly blurred.

Tool 75: Self-Esteem (in Children)

A child's behaviour can be explained by their level of self-esteem – which can in turn be explained by the demand (and approval) of their parents, as well as self-evaluation

Child-rearing practices might lead to either a mastery-oriented, a learned helpless child, or something in between

A close-up, profile photograph of a woman's face and upper torso. She has dark, slicked-back hair and is looking upwards and to the right. Her makeup is dramatic, featuring dark eyeliner and mascara. She is wearing a bold, matte red lipstick. Numerous small, round, white pearls and diamonds are scattered across her skin, particularly on her forehead, cheek, and shoulder. A single, dark red rose with green leaves is positioned near her right shoulder. The background is a solid, vibrant red.

Part 2
Identity Status &
Identity Crisis



Identity (i.e., Personal Identity)

Personal identity (or just identity) is an individual's sense of self

"Who am I?" or "I am a _____ so I act in this way." or
"I am a _____ and I want to continue to be so."

Identity includes a sense of continuity, a sense of uniqueness from others, and a sense of affiliation (incl. personal, ethnic and national, religious, gender etc.)

A close-up, over-the-shoulder shot of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a red blouse, reading an open book. The book is titled 'Proverbs' and has several columns of text on each page. Her hands are visible holding the pages open.

Forming of Identity

The formation of identity is not very objective; some are given to us by our parents and can be driven by different types of factors

- Biological (state of one's body, sensation, body image, etc.)
- Psychological (one's memories, goals, values, beliefs, etc.)
- Social (one's social roles, social groups one belongs to, etc.)



Adopting an Identity

Adolescence is a time when most people first question the identity they have previously given (and adopted)

Identity like being a heterosexual person, or a Catholic, or a hardworking student, or a musician

As a result, we try out different identities (or at least learn about them and try out different aspects of them) to see what fit us



Identity Crisis

Identity Crisis can be the result of

- the lack of identity,
- conflicting identities, or
- a premature commitment to an unsuitable identity

This not only happens in adolescence, but throughout our adulthood as we continue to choose to (or force to) abandon or adopt different identities



James Marcia's Theory of Identity Status

James Marcia proposed that for each particular identity, we can be measured along 2 dimensions

Commitment:

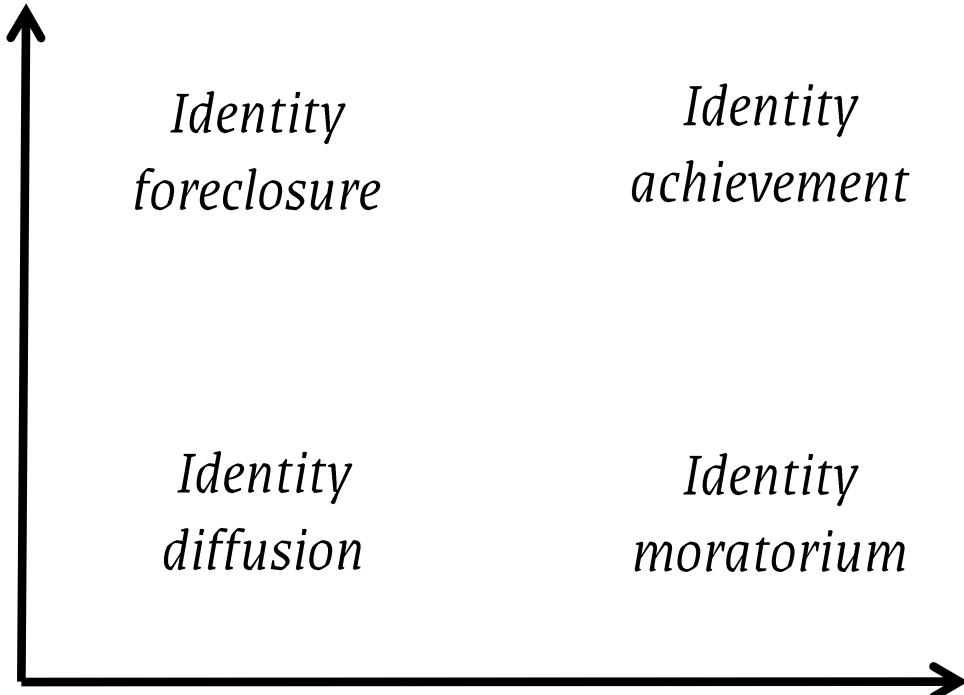
Degree by which one commits to one particular identity

Exploration:

Degree by which one explores different alternatives



Commitment



Marcia's Identity Status

2 Dimensions roughly give rise to 4 states/status

Identity Diffusion:
Neither committed to values and goals nor actively trying to reach them)

Identity Foreclosure:
Committed to values and goals without exploring alternatives



Marcia's Identity Status

2 Dimensions roughly give rise to 4 states/status

Identity Moratorium:
Still in the process of exploring;
not yet made definite
commitments

Identity Achievement:
Having already explored
alternatives, committed to a
clearly formulated set of self-
chosen values and goals



Identity versus Ego Diffusion

Pre-teen children can form their own identity, and can also try on different roles and identify with different groups

However, teens are usually the most active in search for identity – try to find their authentic self

Changing identity from what was prescribed by their parents earlier, or new identity due to new circumstances



Tool 76: Marcia's Identity Status

A person's behaviour might be explained by how much they are exploring an identity and how much they are committed to it

Commitment vs exploration:

- Identity Diffusion
- Identity Foreclosure
- Identity Moratorium
- Identity Achievement



Tool 77: Identity Crisis

A person's behaviour might be explained by the fact that they are going through an identity crisis

Crisis can be the result of the lack of identity, conflicting identities, or a premature commitment to an unsuitable identity



Part 3

Before, During, and after Midlife

A photograph showing the silhouettes of many people, likely graduates, standing on a hillside and throwing their graduation caps into the air. The sky is a warm orange and yellow from a sunset. The caps are scattered across the sky.

Emerging Adulthood (18-25yo)

Becoming adult: taking responsibility for yourself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent

Both mental health and self-esteem usually improves

Possible identity crisis if need to transition from a well-performing student/adolescent into a poor-performing worker/adult

A photograph of a bride and groom from behind, walking away from the viewer through a field of tall, golden grass. The bride is wearing a white wedding dress with a long train and lace sleeves, and the groom is in a dark suit. They are holding hands. In the background, there are mountains and a bright, setting sun.

Career, Marriage and/or Children

People (especially women) are sometimes pressured to choose by a certain age – depending on the social norm, culture, and practical considerations like childcare, maternity & paternity leave, laws about work—life balance, & financial resources

Possible identity crisis if there is conflict between the identity of being a parent and being a professional; or having to abandon the identity of being a professional



Mid-Life Crisis?

How would one react to:

Deterioration of physical fitness

Menopause / andropause

Deterioration of sex. function

Knowing that you only have 40 years of life left

Children leaving home / children getting married?

Stuck in an unsatisfactory job

Stuck in an unsatisfactory relationship

Need to take care of both young children & ageing parents



Mid-Life Crisis as an Identity Crisis

Needing to abandon the identity of a mother that takes care of her children, or a successful professional, or being a physically fit person, or a sexually active person, or a physically attractive person, or part of a happy marriage, and so on

Alternatively, deciding that one does not like one's current identity of being a spouse, or being a [professional of a particular field], or being a stable and slightly boring person, and so on

Sandwich Generation

Refers to people who need to care for multiple generations – both above and below them at the same time

Stress of caregivers for children include lack experience & knowledge, and the fact that there is always more that can be done for one's children





Stress for Caregivers for Elderly

Lack preparation (the need for elderly care could arise suddenly)

Uncertain duration and scope of responsibility

Change of lifestyle and career (social isolation)

Burning out and role overload

A close-up photograph of a woman's face. She has dark hair and is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. Her right hand is resting under her chin, supporting her head. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on her forehead and nose against a dark background.

Mid-life crisis or not

Not all people define it as crisis but as turning point (more likely to be related to challenging life event than age, but also can be affected by changing of perspective and disillusionment)

Life evaluation is common during middle adulthood but changes may not be drastic

A close-up photograph of a woman's face. She has dark hair and is looking slightly upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. Her right hand is resting under her chin, supporting her head. The lighting is soft and focused on her face, while the background is dark and out of focus.

Respond to Mid-life crisis/evaluation

Improve physical health, or accept it

Religion and spirituality

New job, or new challenges in current job

New relationship or improve it

Get help, or set new expectation on life

New identity

A close-up photograph of a middle-aged man with white hair, smiling warmly at the camera. He is wearing a dark blue ribbed sweater over a white collared shirt. His right hand is resting against his chin, and he is holding a newspaper or magazine open with his left hand. The background is blurred, showing foliage and sunlight filtering through trees.

Transition towards Retirement

Stable period after a successful mid-life transition – intended to be fulfilling, since it can be spent rejuvenating and enhancing oneself and one's life

However, eventually physical & mental changes become more prominent, as does the reality of retirement – which might trigger another identity crisis

A photograph of a person from behind, looking up at a vast, star-filled sky. The person's arm is raised, pointing towards the stars. The scene is filled with dust and light, creating a dramatic and contemplative atmosphere.

Tool 78: Mid-Life Crisis

A person's behaviour might be explained by the fact that they are going through a mid-life crisis (or something similar)

It is a turning point resulted from challenging life events, or from changes in physical, social, and existential circumstances



Part 4

Explaining and Suggesting Behaviours

Scenario 1

Henry, 18, is a year one university student. He was a very good student in secondary school, and obtained great grades in the public examination.

However, now that he got into university and lives away from his parents, he seems to lose interest in studying. He often skips lectures, and is more interested in extra-curricular activities.

His parents were surprised that he is not getting good grades for many of the courses he took, and are even more surprised when he dyed his hair green and started wearing earrings and a nose-ring.

Ingrid, 30, is a very successful and hardworking medical officer. Although busy, she enjoys her work very much.

However, her parents are very eager for her to get married and “start a family”. She has a stable boyfriend, and she understands that her parents would really like to have some grandchildren, but she is not that keen to have children yet. In fact, she is also not entirely sure she wants to marry his boyfriend – at least for now.

Scenario 2

Moreover, she knows that having children is kind of bad for her career. She is sure that she can still put 100% effort into her work even if she has a child, but she knows that not all her bosses would think in the same way.



Part 5

Behavioural Change

Canice, 55, lecturer

Canice, 55, has been working as a lecturer in a local university for 25 years. He does not have any chronic illness, but recently he has been taking up several health-compromising habits. These include drinking whisky and sake regularly and speeding. His more healthy hobbies include swimming, watching old movies, and playing boardgames.

Case 16

He has been married for 30 years. One of his children (and her family) just emigrated to the UK; the other child just got married and moved out. He is a bit bored of his job, and understands that there is little chance of a promotion before he retires. The main reason why he has not yet quitted his job is because he is attracted to one of his younger colleagues.



Part 6

Conclusion



Child's self-esteem (affected by parenting style & comparison with peers)

James Marcia's Identity Status
Exploration x Commitment

Mid-life Crisis
Deterioration of fitness & function
Existential crisis
Change in role
Satisfaction about job & relationship
Sandwich generation & stress

Conclusion

A child's self-esteem are largely affected by the parenting style of the parents, and later comparison with peers

According to James Marcia, a person's identity status depends on one's commitment and exploration

Mid-life crisis (or something similar) is a turning point resulted from challenging life events, or from changes in physical, social, and existential circumstances

A photograph of a library aisle. On both sides, there are tall metal bookshelves filled with books. The books are arranged vertically, showing their spines. In the foreground, the shelves are filled with books. In the background, the shelves are mostly empty. Above the bookshelves, several lightbulbs are hanging from the ceiling by wires, casting a warm glow. The lighting is dim, creating a quiet and focused atmosphere.

Reading / References

Boyd, DR & Bee, H (2019). Lifespan development (8th ed.). Chapter 12.2 Self-Concept in Adolescence; chapter 14 Social and Personality Development in Early Adulthood; chapter 16.3 Midlife Career Issues. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Appendix: Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

According to APA Dictionary of Psychology

Basic Trust versus Mistrust

“During this stage, the infant either comes to view other people and himself or herself as trustworthy or comes to develop a fundamental distrust of his or her environment. The growth of basic trust, considered essential for the later development of self-esteem and healthy interpersonal relationships, is attributed to a primary caregiver who is responsively attuned to the infant’s individual needs while conveying the quality of trustworthiness, whereas the growth of basic mistrust is attributed to neglect, lack of love, or inconsistent treatment. The child must experience both trust and mistrust to know how to truly trust.”

APA Dictionary of Psychology

<https://dictionary.apa.org/initiative-versus-guilt>

Autonomy versus Shame & Doubt

“During this stage, children acquire a degree of self-reliance and self-confidence if allowed to develop at their own pace but may begin to doubt their ability to control themselves and their world if parents are overcritical, overprotective, or inconsistent.”

APA Dictionary of Psychology

<https://dictionary.apa.org/initiative-versus-guilt>

Initiative versus Guilt

"In planning, launching, and initiating fantasy, play, and other activity, the child learns to believe in his or her ability to successfully pursue goals. However, if these pursuits often fail or are criticized, the child may develop instead a feeling of self-doubt and guilt."

APA Dictionary of Psychology

<https://dictionary.apa.org/initiative-versus-guilt>

Industry versus Inferiority

[During this stage,] the child learns to be productive and to accept evaluation of his or her efforts or becomes discouraged and feels inferior or incompetent."

APA Dictionary of Psychology

<https://dictionary.apa.org/initiative-versus-guilt>

Identity versus Identity Confusion

“During this stage, the individual may experience a psychosocial moratorium, a period of time that permits experimentation with social roles. The individual may “try on” different roles and identify with different groups before forming a cohesive, positive identity that allows him or her to contribute to society; alternatively, the individual may identify with outgroups to form a negative identity or may remain confused about his or her sense of identity, a state Erikson calls identity diffusion.”

APA Dictionary of Psychology

<https://dictionary.apa.org/initiative-versus-guilt>

Intimacy versus Isolation

“During this period, individuals must learn to share and care without losing themselves; if they fail, they will feel alone and isolated. The development of a cohesive identity in the previous stage (see identity versus identity confusion) provides the opportunity to achieve true intimacy, but the development of identity diffusion makes it harder for individuals to achieve a positive outcome at this stage.”

APA Dictionary of Psychology

<https://dictionary.apa.org/initiative-versus-guilt>

Generativity versus Stagnation

“Generativity is the positive goal of middle adulthood, interpreted in terms not only of procreation but also of creativity and fulfilling one’s full parental and social responsibilities toward the next generation, in contrast to a narrow interest in the self, or self-absorption. Also called generativity versus self-absorption.”

APA Dictionary of Psychology

<https://dictionary.apa.org/initiative-versus-guilt>

(Ego) Integrity versus Despair

“In this stage, the individual reflects on the life he or she has lived and may develop either integrity—a sense of satisfaction in having lived a good life and the ability to approach death with equanimity—or despair—a feeling of bitterness about opportunities missed and time wasted, and a dread of approaching death.”

APA Dictionary of Psychology

<https://dictionary.apa.org/initiative-versus-guilt>



~ End of Lecture ~

