



Identity and Identity Crisis

Health Psychology (CMED2006)

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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 common challenges people face in their mid-life (mid-life crisis)
- Describe the conditions where identity crises occur



Part 1

Social & Identity Development in Childhood



Before the search for identity

According to Erikson's theory, childhood is a period where 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)



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)



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



Achievement-related attributions

	Mastery-oriented	Learned helpless
Success is attributed to:	<i>Ability & effort (internal, changeable)</i>	<i>Luck (external)</i>
Failure is attributed to:	<i>Insufficient effort/ task too difficult (external or changeable internal factors)</i>	<i>Ability (internal, UNCHANGEABLE)</i>



Tool 75: Self-Esteem (in Children)

A child's behaviour can be explained their level of self-esteem – which can in term 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



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.)



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

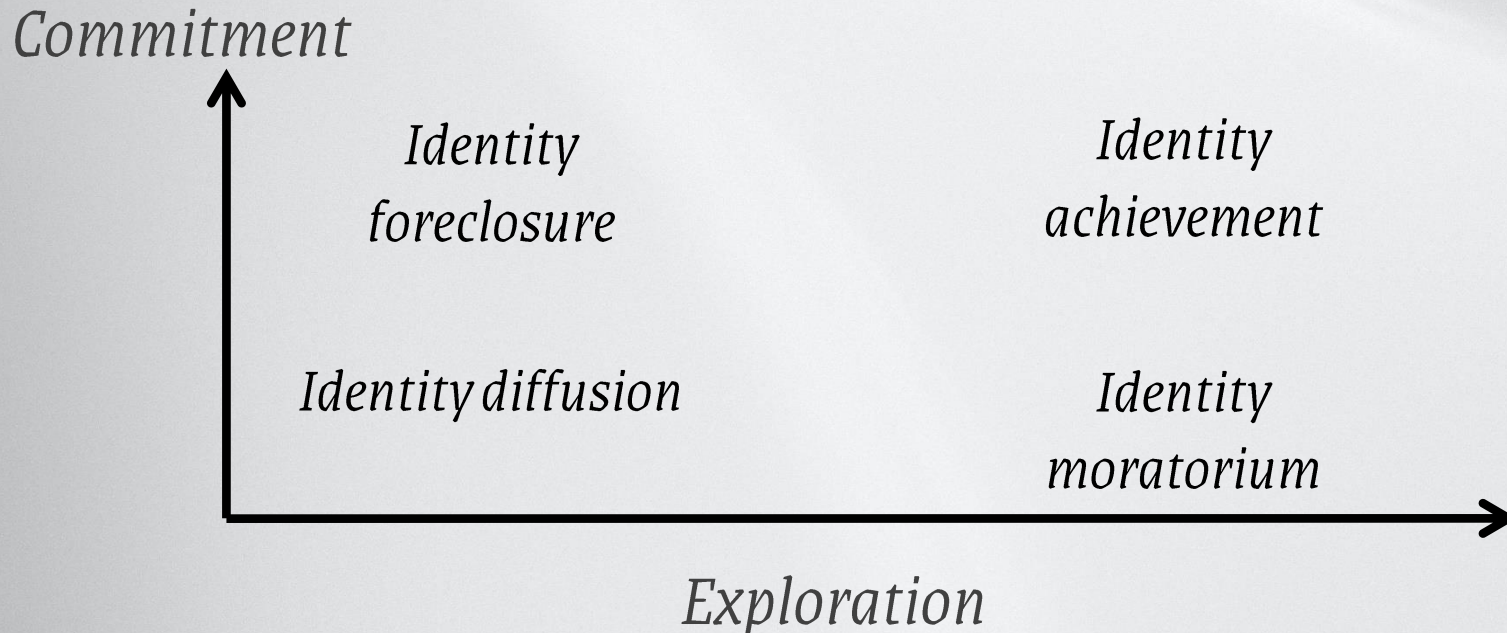
Commitment: Degree by which one commits to one particular identity

Exploration: Degree by which one explores different alternatives



Marcia's Identity Status

2 Dimensions roughly give rise to 4 states/status





Marcia's Identity 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
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 versus exploration



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



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



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, and 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 sexual function

Knowing that you only have 40 years of life left



Mid-Life Crisis?

How would one react to:

Children leaving home / children getting married?

Stuck in an unsatisfactory job

Stuck in an unsatisfactory relationship

Need to take care of both young children and 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



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



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



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



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 & 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.



Scenario 2

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.

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



Case 16

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.

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 8

Conclusion



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



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 ~