Erik Erikson’s Life Span Theory of Development

Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development
(Stages as “Chapters” in a life)

Stage 1. Trust vs. Mistrust (Infancy up to about the first year of life) Major question to be answered is How can I be secure?

The relevance of Harry Harlow’s research with Rhesus monkeys. Is attachment the result of classical conditioning? (Mother becomes associated with food, therefore mother’s company is preferred?) Or....

can attachment be viewed as a drive?
Harlow’s research with monkeys and surrogate mothers provides evidence for a drive argument. Monkeys share the need for contact comfort with other species, particularly the human species.

(Note that monkeys reared in isolation experience maturation difficulties).
Enter John Bowlby  (Do me and yourself a favor and remember that name. He is an extremely important figure in developmental psychology).

Bowlby’s notion of infant attachment systems. An evolutionary system geared to infant survival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is the caregiver near, attentive and responsive?</th>
<th>Felt security, love confidence</th>
<th>Playful, less inhibited, smiling sociable</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>no</td>
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Separation distress, anxiety experienced

Attachment behaviors are activated, ranging from simple monitoring to intense protest, clinging and searching.
Stage 2. Autonomy vs. shame and doubt (approximately 1-3 years of age). Major question faced is “How can I be independent?”

Mary Ainsworth laboratory-based research on Bowlby's behavioral attachment systems is relevant to this stage of development.

Mary Ainsworth Strange Situation

Results in categories of attachment styles

A-Babies: anxious-resistant (ill-at-ease upon arrival, and, upon separation, become extremely distressed. When reunited, they are difficult to soothe, and exhibit conflicting behaviors that suggest they want to be comforted, but are annoyed with the caregiver at the same time)

B-Babies: Secure (become upset when parent leaves the room, but upon return, they are easily comforted and resume play)

C-Babies: Avoidant (don’t appear to be very upset by separation and, upon reunion, actively avoid contact with parent)

D-Babies: Disorganized (a fairly recently introduced category that I will ignore in this lecture)
Do attachment styles predict later behavior?

At ages 3 and 4, there is some evidence that B-Babies are more independent, possess a greater sense of mastery, are better at pretend play, are better problem solvers, and adjust easily to strangers.

Whereas,

A- and C-Babies are more aggressive (particularly boys), more disruptive, tend to victimize other children, seek attention, and are more dependent (particularly girls)

A note on Parenting Styles
- Authoritative-high standards, warm, responsive
- Authoritarian-controlling
- Permissive- warm, undemanding
- Indifferent-uninvolved

Is there any transfer of infant attachment styles to adult attachment styles?

There is some research suggesting that the classification system can be applied to adults in their relationships. That is there are anxious/resistant adults, secure adults, and avoidant adults. It is impossible to know at this point if there is a direct line of development from infancy to adulthood in attachment styles but let’s think for a moment about working models
I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, others want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being. (avoidant)

I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me. (secure)

I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner, and sometimes this scares people away. (anxious/resistant)
Stage 3: Initiative vs. Guilt (ages 3 to 5 or 6)
Major questions to be faced: How can I be powerful? Am I a good or bad person?

Lots of pretend play during this period of development

Some research suggests that boys practice “agency” and girls practice “communion”

Stage 4: Industry vs. Inferiority (ages 6-12?)
Major questions asked: How can I be good at something? How can I be capable?

Learning the tools and practicing society’s rules. How am I special? Where do I fit in?
What are my areas of competence?

Stage 5: Identity vs. Role Confusion (adolescence and beyond) Main question: Who am I? This is the big one folks.

Some ingredients of identity include commitments to roles, determining one’s beliefs and values, one’s ideology (religious, political, etc.), developing relationships (am I my relationships?), and how do I want my life to work out?
At Stage 5, Piaget’s 4th stage of cognitive development has kicked in. It is called Formal Operations. One is able to imagine hypotheticals (that is, able to imagine oneself in the future and think about imaginary alternatives).

Erikson’s four Identity Statuses elaborated upon by James Marcia

- Identity Foreclosed
- Identity Diffusion
- Identity Moratorium
- Identity Achieved

Mark my word, identities change throughout the life course.

Stage 6: Intimacy vs. Isolation (early adulthood) Central question – How can I love? (I wonder if that question reactivates attachment styles)

Carol Gilligan argues that Stages 5 and 6 are not separable for most women.
Stage 7: Generativity vs. Stagnation
(middle adulthood) Main question – How can I give a gift? What sort of gift do I have to offer.

Dan McAdams’ Research on “generative” adults. Finds that generative adults are
• more involved in their children’s education
• are more conscious about passing on their values
• have broader friendship networks
• show more social responsibility
• report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction

Stage 8: Integrity vs. Despair (old age)
• Looking back
• Life review
• mirror gazing
• wisdom