Identity: Can you see the real me?

The Real Me
Erik Erikson & Identity Development

- Identity represents the fifth stage in Erikson's 8 stages of the life cycle

- From Erikson's *Identity: Youth and crisis*:

  “The evidence in young lives of the search for *something and somebody to be true to* can be seen in a variety of pursuits more or less sanctioned by society. It is often hidden in a bewildering combination of shifting devotion and sudden perversity, sometimes more devotedly perverse, sometimes more perversely devoted. Yet in all youth’s seeming shiftiness, a seeking after some durability in change can be detected…”

Thanks to Professor Don Hartmann, University of Utah, for some awesome slides
More of Erikson’s Notions:

- Adolescents can experiment with various roles and senses of self trying them out or on, and seeing which ones they (and their peers) like.
  - Identity involves a variety of aspects: gender, sexual, occupational, political, religious, moral, etc.
  - Identity concerns do not begin, nor end, with adolescence. But they are pivotal during that period.

- As a result of this experimentation (of their identity crisis — that is where it comes from), a new sense of self is consolidated.

- The adolescent who does not resolve this crisis of identity enters a phase of identity confusion/diffusion.

- —resulting in either isolation, or losing one's identity in the crowd.
How does personality form?

Through a series of 8 dialectical conflicts that, over the lifespan, produce 8 cardinal virtues of character...

...according to Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Development.
Identity Development; Introduction:

Identity is clearly an important topic in adolescence. Some theorists (e.g., E. Erikson) essentially equated issues of identity with adolescence.

The extremes of youth:

...These extremes, particularly in times of ideological confusion and widespread marginality of identity, may include not only rebellious but also deviant, delinquent, and self-destructive tendencies. However, all of this can be in the nature of a moratorium, a period of delay in which to test the rock bottom of some truth before committing the powers of the mind and body to a segment of the existing (or a coming) order (Identity: Youth and crisis. 1968, p. 235-36).
James Marcia:

From Marcia’s “Ego identity development,” 1980:

Although some identity crises are cataclysmic and totally preoccupying, identity formation usually proceeds in a much more gradual and unconscious way. It gets done by bits and pieces…The decisions may seem trivial at the time: whom to date, whether or not to break up, having intercourse…Each of these decisions has identity-forming implications.…

....Of course, there are ways in which one can circumvent the decision-making process: one can let previously incorporated, parentally based values determine one’s actions; one can permit oneself to be pushed one way or the other by external pressures; or one can become mired in indecision. (pp. 60-61).
Marcia’s Operationalization of Erikson’s Notions:

Marcia: identified *crisis* and *commitment* as the major variables leading to a state of identity. These two factors generated his four-fold classification of statuses, or modes of resolution, extending Erikson's theory:

identity diffusion,
foreclosure,
moratorium,
and achievement
Marcia’s 2 X 2 Identity Classification:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Commitment</th>
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<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
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| Crisis/Exploration/Motivation | High       | Low       |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| High                          | Achievement| Moratorium|
| Low                           | Foreclosure| Diffusion |
What the four statuses might look like:

- **Diffusion**: I haven't chosen the occupation I really want to get into, but I'm working toward becoming a _____ until something better comes along. When it comes to religion, I just haven't found any that I'm really into myself.

- **Foreclosure**: I guess I'm pretty much like my folks when it comes to politics. I follow what they do in terms of voting and such. I've never really questioned my religion. If it's right for my parents, it must be right for me.

- **Moratorium**: I just can't decide how capable I am as a person and what jobs I'll be right for. There are so many different political parties and ideals, I can't decide which to follow until I figure it all out.

- **Identity Achievement**: A person's faith is unique to each individual. I've considered and reconsidered it myself and know what I can believe.
Moratorium or Foreclosure?

DOONESBURY

Ms. Caucus, I still don’t understand why you left your husband. Didn’t you have a nice home and loving children?...

Yes, Boopsie, but for me, the role of little homemaker was stifling. I suddenly became aware that I was defining myself strictly in terms of others—my husband and kids.

It became important to me to have something of my own, to be involved in a personal passion...

Oh, yes, I know how important that is...

I myself am active in the area of cheerleading.

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Results:

- Experiences anxiety with involvement in immediate, right-now sensation
- More feelings of inferiority, alienation, and ambivalence; poorer self-concept; less clear sex-role identification.
- In general, less mature in cognitive complexity, emotional development, and general social development
- Less cooperative, more manipulative and deceptive.
- Associates with other uncommitted teens and adults.
- Least likely to have intimate, long-term relationships.
- Perceives parents as rejecting; youth and mother both describe the other as unaffectionate.
- More likely to occur in cases of personality disorder, intellectual deficit, drug addiction.
Foreclosure:

**Produces:**

- More use of denial and repression.
- Quiet, orderly, and industrious lifestyle. Endorses authoritarian values (obedience, strong leadership and respect for authority).
- Often come from warm and affectionate homes (!?), and the kids continue to be dependent upon their parents.
- Constricted personalities, rigid in their commitments.
- **BUT** – May also result in some who come from rigid, authoritarian, militaristic parents.
- **OR** – … is the result of traditional, Western or Non-western cultural upbringing.
Have a seat Kermit. What I'm about to tell you might come as big shock...
Moratorium:

- **The most anxious, and exploratory.** Lack well-defined goals and values; self-conscious.

- **Appear to be comfortable with others, and are generally socially adept and effective.**

- **Feelings of guilt and difficulty in maintaining dignity are common -- seem torn between values.**

- **High perceived companionship, physical affection, and support of parents.**

- **Parents perceive child as independent.**

- **Extends typical adolescence into emerging adulthood, especially if one goes to college.**
Identity Achievement: *Creates:*

- A harmonious balance between individuation and social needs for relatedness/affiliation.

- High perceived companionship, physical affection, and support of parents.

- Parental perceptions of high levels of independence.

- Self-confidence, security, social adeptness, emotional maturity, advanced ego development.

- In the healthy adult the ego can gradually take on the functions of the id and superego.

- More intimate and long-term relationships; better management of impulses; less defensive, less anxious, less neurotic guilt.

- Note role of authoritative parenting in promoting identity achievement.
Critiquing Marcia:

- Marcia has oversimplified Erikson's notions of identity.
- There are many facets to identity: gender, ideology, religion, occupational/educational plans, etc.
- When individuals are assigned to one of the four cells in the table, all the domains are typically not considered.
- People do not typically “achieve identity” by some pre-ordained age, but refine and articulate identity as they mature throughout 20’s, into 30’s and beyond.
  - Critiquing the critique
- Identity development is very powerfully culturally and ethnically determined.
Ethnic Identity Development:

- The ability to identify with one’s own and others’ racial or ethnic group
- Depends on awareness of the permanence of ethnic identities
- Beliefs and values associated with ethnic identity
Note the difference between social and emotional loneliness. Both are subjective, but one more so than the other. - Robert Weiss