Psychosocial Theory

- Stages of Development
- Developmental Tasks
- Psychosocial Crisis
- The Central Process for Resolving the Psychosocial Crisis
- Radius of Significant Relationships
- Coping Behavior

What is a Theory?

- A theory is a logical system of interconnected statements that attempts to explain some broad-ranging phenomenon.
- Provides a framework for organizing and understanding many pieces of information.
- Provides us with the questions that can guide research.
- Should be **internally consistent, testable, and parsimonious.**

Psychosocial Theory

- Psychosocial theory considers human development as a product of the interaction between the individual and society. The theory is based upon **six** organizing principles:
  1. Stages of development
  2. Developmental tasks
  3. Psychosocial crisis
  4. Central processes for resolving the crisis of each stage
  5. Radiating network of significant relationships
  6. Coping
Stages of Development

- **Stage** - a period of life characterized by a specific underlying organization.
  - Every stage is in some way different from those before and after it;
  - each new stage builds upon the previous stages;
  - each stage is unique in terms of the skills and abilities we bring to that stage, the nature of the challenges we face, and the new skills and abilities we develop within it.

Stages Within Psychosocial Theory

- Prenatal [conception - birth]
- Infancy [birth - 2 years]
- Toddlerhood [2-3 years]
- Early School Age [4-6 years]
- Middle Childhood [6-12 years]
- Early Adolescence [12-18 years]
- Later Adolescence [18-22 years]
- Early Adulthood [22-34 years]
- Middle Adulthood [24-60 years]
- Later Adulthood [60-75 years]
- Very Old Age [75 years until death]

Additional Notions Regarding this Stage Theory

- The stages of development follow the **epigenetic principle**, which holds there is a plan for growth built into each of us, and we will move through the stages of development and face the challenges characterized by each stage so long as we have the support from our environment that we need.
- There is no going back to an earlier stage (though one can revisit issues and conflicts from previous stages and rework the meaning of those experiences based on the resources available at a later stage).
Developmental Tasks

- Developmental tasks consist of a set of skills and competencies that contribute to increased mastery over the environment.
- These tasks define healthy, normal development at each age in a particular society, and typically represent accomplishments in the physical, cognitive, social and emotional domains of development, as well as development of the self concept.
- Success at one stage contributes to success at subsequent stages.

Psychosocial Crisis

- A psychosocial crisis arises as a person makes psychological adjustments to social demands at each stage of development
- Crisis refers to a normal set of stresses and strains.
- The tension that characterizes each crisis comes out of experiencing expectations from society that exceed the individual's skills.
- Each crisis is defined by a continuum, from positive to negative, with the outcome representing a balance or integration of the two opposing forces.

The Central Process for Resolving the Psychosocial Crisis

- Central Process - a mechanism that links the individual's needs with cultural requirements at each stage (e.g., imitation during toddlerhood; identification during early school age).
- Basic idea: there is some developmental process or mechanism built into the system that makes it possible to resolve the conflict of the stage.
Radius of Significant Relationships

- Each of us experiences an ever-changing network of relationships as we move through our lives.
- At first, the number of significant relationships is very small (e.g., parents), then the number and variety of relationships increases (as we grow older), and when we move into later life the number decreases once again.
- The people in these significant relationships make most of the demands on the individual (i.e., they transmit society's message and produce the tension that drives development.

Coping Behavior

- Coping behaviors are active efforts to resolve stress and create new solutions to the challenges of each stage of development.
- Coping involves three components:
  1. Ability to gain and process new information
  2. Ability to maintain control over one's emotional state
  3. Ability to move freely within one's environment
- Coping behaviors are the source of new, original, creative, unique and inventive behaviors.

Prime Adaptive Ego Qualities

- Prime adaptive ego qualities - mental states that develop as the result of the positive resolution of a stage's psychosocial crisis.
- Provide us with resources for coping in the next stage, and form a basic orientation toward the interpretation of life experiences (e.g., hope during infancy, competence during middle childhood)
- Core Pathologies
  - Core pathologies are destructive forces that may develop when a given stage's crisis isn't resolved in a positive manner (e.g., withdrawal during infancy, inertia during middle childhood)