

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THEORIES

John Piaget stages of cognitive development looked at how children construct a mental model of the world. Piaget didn't believe in the concept of 'fixed' intelligence, arguing that it instead relied on cognitive maturation which was influenced by environment and socialisation. Piaget's theory broke down this evolution of maturity into four developmental stages, each stage focusing on how children and, subsequently adults, acquire knowledge.

SENSORIMOTOR STAGE: BIRTH TO 2 YEARS

The earliest stages of cognitive development rely on sensory experiences which toddlers respond to through motor responses, reflexes and their basic senses, learning about the world through looking, grabbing, listening and sucking. Children grow rapidly through this stage and their experiences are immense and vast: they start to understand that their actions can cause changes in the world around them and come to terms with object permanence (i.e. things continue to exist even when they aren't seen).

In accordance with their abilities, children learn basic human functions such as crawling, walking and language (i.e understanding certain terms and words, understanding noises are a form of communications, etc.). By assigning names and words to other objects, children learn that they're independent objects which are separate from all other objects in the world which, if sentient, have individual perceptions which are different from their own.

PREOPERATIONAL STAGE: AGES 2 TO 7

The preoperational stage is where children begin to develop characteristics, memories and opinions. They build on the foundational understanding of language from the previous stage and begin to think symbolically and use words and pictures to communicate and play creatively. Whilst they have fantastic imaginations, they still don't comprehend logic fully. For example, you could offer a child a £1 coin or five pennies worth 5p. A child is more likely to take the 5 pennies because they believe there's more value in their quantity rather than their economic value. Whilst they still understand the idea of different perspectives, they're not at a stage where they can empathise and adopt other people's perspectives.

CONCRETE OPERATIONAL STAGE: AGES 7 TO 11

This is the age where logic begins to play a role in children's thinking, despite them still being very literal. As their egocentrism starts to disappear and they begin to engage in the art of conversation, reasoning and logical interpretation. Through conversation, they begin to comprehend different perspectives, develop empathy and come to terms with their own thoughts and opinions and how they compare with others' thoughts and opinions.

FORMAL OPERATIONAL STAGE: AGES 12 AND UP

During this stage, abstract thought and the ability to contemplate, problem solve and draw up hypotheses. Their minds are now capable of embracing philosophical concepts such as politics, morality, ethics, social issues and theories. Cognition is now capable of not only perceiving and empathising with multiple perspectives but also capable of drawing up multiple solutions to issues, critical thinking, systematic planning and scientific reasoning.

An alternative theory to Piaget's is that of Erik Erikson. Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory was inspired by Freud's controversial theory of psychosexual development. His theory argued that the ego positively influenced development by mastering ideas, skills and attitudes at



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each stage. He claimed that there was always conflict at each stage of development which a child needed to overcome in order to grow into a mature, well-developed adult.

TRUST VS. MISTRUST: 0-1 2 MONTHS

This is the period where babies learn to trust adults who meet their survival needs. Because babies are dependent upon adults for survival, they invest trust in those who respond and meet its primitive needs and, subsequently, develop a belief that the world itself is also safe. Parents or guardians who neglect children during this stage in any shape or form risk instilling a sense of anxiety, mistrust and fear in a child who will ultimately go on to see the world as unpredictable and unstable. The more severe the neglect in this stage, the deeper a child's mistrust and fear of the world will be.

AUTONOMY VS. SHAME/DOUBT: 1-3 YEARS OLD

During this stage of life, toddlers learn that their actions have consequences in the world around them. They begin to establish independence and preferences in life for things like toys, food and clothes. If they are denied their autonomy in some way, such as being forced to eat foods or wear clothes they don't like, they may begin to doubt their tastes and preferences and feel shame for liking (or disliking) what they do.

INITIATIVE VS. GUILT: 3-6 YEARS OLD

When children join a school and start making friend groups, children have both the physical and mental opportunity to initiate interactions, games and activities. Parents who allow their children to explore and initiative to talk and play with others help their child embrace ambition and responsibility. Those who are overcontrolling and do not give their children the freedom to explore risk stifling confidence in children who breed feelings of guilt for being 'inadequate'.

INDUSTRY VS. INFERIORITY: 6-12 YEARS OLD

This is the age when children begin to compare themselves to their peers, developing either a sense of pride and accomplishment or inferiority and inadequacy based on their looks, homework, talents or cultural/racial background. Children who do not learn to accept the difference between themselves and others or have negative experiences being compared with others by peers or parents may develop an inferiority complex which will follow them into adulthood.

IDENTITY VS. ROLE CONFUSION: 12-18 YEARS OLD

According to Erikson, an adolescent's main task is developing a sense of self. Adolescents explore a variety of roles, purposes, relationships, goals and ideas in order to answer the questions they're struggling most with: "Who am I?" and "What do I want to do with my life?" Those who are successful at this stage develop a strong sense of identity, whilst those who do not try; or struggle to commit to anything they invest their time and energy into doing or being; or feel pressured to conform to their parents' ideas for the future may develop a weak sense of self.



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INTIMACY VS. ISOLATION: 20-40 YEARS OLD

After we've tackled (or have at least started to address) the complicated relationship we have with ourselves, our primary concern turns to how we share our life with others. Those who have complicated and unstable relationships with themselves may find they have difficulty with intimacy as an adult and are at greater risk of feeling lonely and emotional isolated.

GENERATIVITY VS. STAGNATION: 40-60 YEARS OLD

By the time people hit their 40s, they've usually lived a life of relationships and self-exploration which leaves them battling generativity vs. stagnation. Generativity relates to a person's life's work and significance which they demonstrate through meaningful commitments which contribute to greater society as a whole. Those who don't extend themselves to a deeper meaning end up feeling stagnated and disconnected from themselves and others.

INTEGRITY VS. DESPAIR: 60-DEATH

Erikson argued that this stage in life is one of reflection: people evaluate whether or not they feel satisfied or dissatisfied with the life they lived. Those who are proud of what they committed their lives to feel they lived an integral life, whereas those who are filled with regret and shame may feel as though they wasted their time and are haunted with feelings of depression and despair.

