
Erikson Lifespan Retrospective

The subject of the interview revolving around Erik Erikson's Theory of Development is named Aaron Hatch. He grew up on a farm in Clinton, Utah for most of his life and attended Brigham Young University to earn his Bachelor's degree as a seminary teacher for the Church of Jesus of Latter-day Saints. He met his wife Patty while finishing his degree and together they had eight children, four boys, and four girls. Instances that proved or disproved Erikson's theories found were from his stories. To give more background on the general explanation of the Theory of Development, "Erikson was one of the first to propose a life-span model of human development which included eight successive psychosocial stages. Each stage is associated with an inherent conflict or crisis that the individual must encounter and successfully resolve to proceed with development" (Sokol, 2009, pg.2). Erikson set up each stage of development to coincide with certain ages or stages of life. The eight stages are, in order, are trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame & doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair.

Trust vs. mistrust occurs in babies from birth to 1-year-old. Babies either trust that others will satisfy their basic needs, including nourishment, warmth, hygiene, and physical contact, or they start to develop mistrust about the others trying to show care towards them. They feel secure when food and comfort are provided with "consistency, continuity, and sameness of experience" (Erikson, 1993a, p. 247). The question asked was, when growing up, was he closer to his mother or father (if neither, who was his "grown-up" of choice), and why was this the case. As a child, Aaron was closer to his mother because she was "always the spiritual leader in my house. She was loving and never yelled." Because he felt loved and cared for, he felt he could rely on her the most and was able to maintain a close relationship with her.

Autonomy vs. shame & doubt appears about the 1-3-year-old range. At this stage, children either become self-sufficient in many activities which include, going to the bathroom on their own, feeding themselves, walking, and talking. Toddlers want autonomy over their actions and their bodies. Without it, they feel ashamed, and they doubt themselves. When asked how his parents praised and criticized him, Aaron gave two stories to demonstrate what his childhood was like. In terms of praise, he said, 'My mother always had my pictures on the wall, and my step-father was always kind. And by kind, I mean that he always reinforced what I believed in and encouraged me to keep trying.'

When he talked about criticism, he gave this story. 'One day my father was smoking, as he usually did, and Johnny asked, 'Dad, why do smoke? Don't you know it'll kill you?' My dad responded with, 'So what? Why the hell do you care?' and Johnny said, 'Well, I don't want you to die, I love you, daddy.' My father started yelling at us, saying we don't know anything and called us names. He swore more than he usually did. Then he went back inside and started drinking. My uncle was the one who helped us for the rest of the day.' Because of these experiences, Aaron Hatch said that he based his philosophies on the fact that he felt loved with his mother and step-father and that whatever he did, whoever he was with, that love would be kept alive.

Initiative vs. guilt takes place between the ages of 3 and 6 when children either try to undertake

adultlike activities or internalize the limits set by their parents. They feel either adventurous or guilty. Young children are the optimists of the world, believing they have exceptional physical abilities, are more skilled, are smarter, know more, and put themselves as stronger, more robust, and higher socially than is actually the case. That protective optimism helps young children try new things. As Erikson predicted, their positive self-concept protects young children from guilt and shame and encourages them to keep trying and to learn. As a child, Aaron pursued his goal of getting a shetland pony because he wanted it. He worked extra hard doing little tasks and saving up as much as he could, but it still was not enough to get one. A little while later, after seeing his hard work, his mother and step-father gave him the pony for his birthday. When he told his friends what had happened, they all congratulated him and said it was a good idea, and because of their support, he ended up sharing the pony with all his friends.

Industry vs. inferiority is when children, about 6-11 years of age, busily practice, and then master new skills, or they feel inferior as if they are unable to do anything well. At this stage, merely trying new things is no longer sufficient. Sustained activity that leads to pride in their accomplishments is the goal. They are intrinsically motivated to finish an assignment, memorize a word, and so on. Likewise, they enjoy collecting and counting whatever they find—perhaps things like seashells and stickers. That is industry. “Overall, children judge themselves as either industrious or inferior—deciding whether they are competent or incompetent, productive or useless, winners, or losers. Self-pride depends not necessarily on actual accomplishments but on how others, especially peers, view one’s accomplishments. Social rejection is both a cause and a consequence of feeling inferior” (Rubin et al., 2013). Aaron was asked to share experiences about school, his favorite subjects, hobbies, and sports, and whether or not his parents supported him in these endeavors. He said, “I did not have a favorite subject; in fact, I hated school, but I did okay nonetheless. I did ride my pony a lot, and I was a good basketball player, so my mother and step-father came to my games all the time.” He loved it when they came to his games; it made him happy, almost as if he could play basketball forever.

Identity vs. role confusion is found most prominently during adolescence. 'Working through the complexities of finding one's own identity is the primary task of adolescence' (Erikson, 1968/1994). Adolescent's crises can resolve when they have reconsidered the values of their parents and culture in order to achieve their identity. They accept some and 'throwaway' others. With their new autonomy, teenagers maintain cohesion with the past so that they can move to the future, establishing their identity. The subject of the interview was asked, what does he identify as, his response was, 'I would say I am a pretty darn good basketball player. I am a pretty good athlete.' Aaron identified as an athlete because, despite his mother's affinity for theatre, he explored sports more and took a liking to basketball.

Intimacy vs. isolation occurs when young adults seek companionship and love or become isolated from others, fearing rejection. Erikson explains, “The young adult, emerging from the search for and the insistence on identity, is eager and willing to fuse his identity with others. He is ready for intimacy, that is, the capacity to commit himself to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they call for significant sacrifices and compromises” (Erikson, 1993a, p. 263). All intimate relationships (friendship, family ties, and romance) have much in common—in both the cognitive and emotional needs and behavior. When asked about any long-time girlfriends, he said, “When I was young, I believed myself to be one of the most attractive people ever, and I thought I could get any girl. So, in the first grade, I lined up all the girls and kissed each one of

them. After I kissed them, all I wanted to do was kiss them again. One of the girls, Karen, became my elementary and middle school girlfriend.” When Aaron was looking for a future spouse as a young adult, he wanted her to be athletic as well as attractive. He also said, “Looking back, I realize that as much as I wanted someone who was not afraid to play basketball, it was also important to have a testimony. I met my wife, Patty, on a blind date. She was a member of the church, and I felt a strong connection with her. I proposed to her in Temple Square, it was amazing.” His eagerness in trying to find a spouse and in forming a connection with Patty helped motivate him to finish his degree and pursue a career that could benefit both them and their future children.

Generativity vs. stagnation is seen often in middle-aged adults. They have a desire to contribute to future generations through work, creative activities, and parenthood, or they stagnate. Adults extend the legacy of their culture and their generation with ongoing care, creativity, and sacrifice. Generativity is expressed by caring for the younger generation. However, generativity occurs in ways other than child-rearing. Meaningful employment, significant creative production, and caregiving of other adults also avoid stagnation. For Aaron, his way of being generative was being a father and being a seminary teacher. As a father, he desires to be loving and supportive of his children. He talked about how they kept a close bond, saying, “evening table was a big part of our relationships. We talked about movies a lot and other things we did together.” He chose to be a seminary teacher because he wanted to increase his spirituality, and it felt good to do it. He sees being educated in any field a blessing, and it very important to him.

Integrity vs. despair is typically demonstrated in older adults as they try to make sense of their lives, either seeing life as a meaningful whole or feeling regretful at goals never reached.

The word integrity is often used to mean honesty, but it also means a feeling of being whole, not scattered, comfortable with oneself. 'The virtue of old age,' said Erikson, 'is wisdom, which implies a broad perspective.' In this last stage, life brings many, quite practical reasons for experiencing despair: aspects people wish had been different; experiences in the present that cause pain; aspects of a future that are uncertain. Self-theory may explain why many of the elderly strive to maintain childhood cultural and religious practices. Aaron stated the part of his life that he is most satisfied with is “that I know Joseph Smith was a prophet. I would not have done anything differently.” When asked to explain if he is where he thought he'd be, he said. “Yes, because I knew that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is true, and it guided me throughout my life.” Aaron Hatch wants everyone to know that the way to a happy life is by having a testimony. His mother and step-father helped keep him on the path until he could know for himself what he wanted, and he wanted to share his knowledge with his family and all who would listen.

Looking at Aaron Hatch's life through the lens of Erikson's theory of development has made me realize how different everyone's life is. Aaron's experience is not mine and is not the same as anyone else's. Because even though Erikson list only two polarities at each stage, there are so many outcomes that can come from each stage; not everyone is going to be at either extreme but will have times their feelings and behavior shift and will not be consistent. I do believe that Erik Erikson was accurate in his way of portraying the pathways of life. However, I also believe that some stages can occur at different times in life or can occur more than once. For example, identity concerns could be lifelong. Identity combines values from childhood with the current context. Since contexts change, many adults reassess all types of identity

(sexual/gender, vocational/work, religious/spiritual, and political/ethnic). The process of seeking intimacy begins in emerging adulthood and continues lifelong. Isolation is especially likely when divorce or death disrupts relationships. Nevertheless, for every stage, the pressure between the two opposing aspects produces growth mentally, physically, and spiritually.