UNIT III

Self and Others

Foundational Concept: Biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors influence how we think about ourselves and others.

Self-Identity

SELF-CONCEPT AND SELF-ESTEEM

The **self-concept** is the collection of internal evaluative schemas that a person holds about her- or himself. These individual **schemas** (e.g., "I am a good driver," "I am bad at math") collectively make up a person's self-concept. Unlike the self-concept, an individual's **social identity** comprises solely external characteristics, such as group memberships (e.g., gender, ethnicity, and religious faith), occupational role, and family role, and the value that the individual places on belonging to each of those roles or groups. But it is important to note that there are actually many different types of **identities** that define an individual. Some of the most obvious are demographic identities (gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation), but there are also identities of choice such as social relations (friend, acquaintance, enemy), family relations (parent, spouse), geographic location (resident of northeastern United States, Italy, Mexico), and occupation. The sum total of all of these is an individual's **self-identity**, which is an integration of internal evaluations (e.g., self-concept, beliefs about one's traits and characteristics) and external characteristics (e.g., relationships, roles, group memberships).

The self-concept drives a person's **self-esteem**, or feelings of value to the world and to those with whom the person interacts. Because a person's schemas include how effective he or she is at maneuvering in the world, these schemas are usually learned

from the interactions with the surrounding world. A person who has high levels of **self-efficacy** (belief in the ability to achieve goals successfully) and an **internal locus of control** (the feeling of being in control of current life and future goals) is more likely to have better self-esteem. A person who has low self-efficacy beliefs (e.g., "I couldn't succeed even if I tried, so why bother?") and an external locus of control (e.g., "Even if I do everything right, my car will probably break down and I'll miss my test anyway.") is more likely to have low self-esteem and a self-concept that is rooted in feelings of failure.

High self-esteem may not always be fully appropriate. If a child is continually given easy tests and never needs to work for a goal, he or she may develop an overabundance of self-esteem. This could lead to an **identity crisis** (a mismatch between internal self-concept and external signals) when the child enters a difficult academic or work setting that challenges his or her success schemas (e.g., "I'm so smart and don't have to work for it.")

IDENTITY FORMATION

In the process of developing an identity and a self-concept, an individual progresses through certain stages on the way to creating an adult identity. According to the Soviet Belarusian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, the road of child development is not a smooth path. He believed that there are long periods of stability, punctuated with crises that spur development. Vygotsky's **zone of proximal development (ZPD)** describes how children learn by observing adults. In Figure 7-1, the internal circle is what a child can complete on his or her own, the middle circle is what the child can do with assistance (ZPD), and the external circle is too far beyond the child's understanding. The zones are constantly changing as the child grows and increases cognitive and
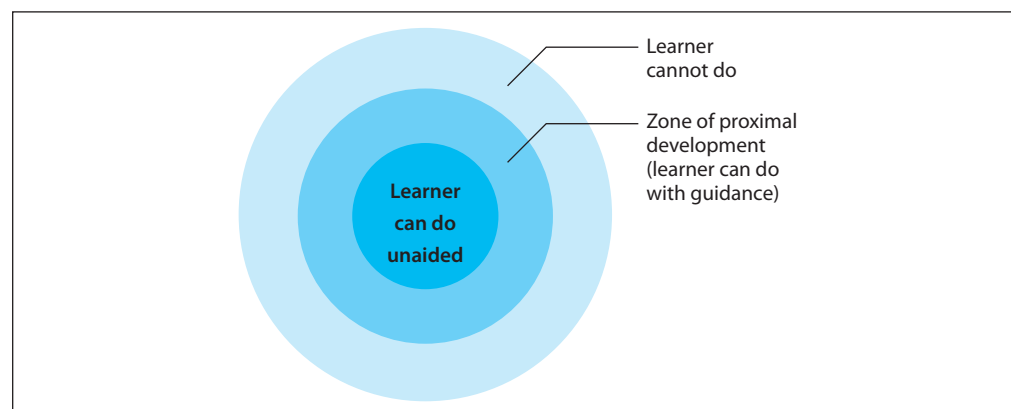

FIGURE 7-1 Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

physical skills. Upon becoming an adolescent, he or she gains the ability to understand abstract concepts and is better able to contemplate different identities and alternative future roles.

The German-born American developmental psychologist Erik Erikson was one of the first to recognize that identity formation does not end when a person reaches adulthood, but continues throughout the person's lifetime. Erikson's research suggests that if a person reaches each identity milestone at the appropriate time, he or she will generally be content (See Table 7-1). But when there is a disconnection between age and stage of development, there can be internal conflicts that cause psychological difficulties.

TABLE 7-1   Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development.

Stage	Age	Primary Life Event	If Successful
Trust vs. mistrust	Birth–18 months	Feeding	Form a loving, trusting relationship with caregiver
Autonomy vs. shame/doubt	2–3 years	Toilet training	Develop a sense of control over the body and a sense of independence
Initiative vs. guilt	3–5 years	Independence	Develop self-efficacy in the environment and a sense of purpose
Industry vs. inferiority	6–12 years	School	Integrate into a larger social network and develop competence in academics
Identity vs. role confusion	12–18 years	Social relationships	Develop personal identity and a sense of self and values
Intimacy vs. isolation	19–40 years	Close relationships	Develop intimate, strong, supportive relationships
Generativity vs. stagnation	40–65 years	Work, parenthood, mentorship	Develop things or ideas that are a lasting positive contribution to the world
Ego integrity vs. despair	65 years to death	Reflection on life	Feel a sense of fulfillment and completeness to life's work

The American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg recognized that along with the development of identity, the development of moral reasoning and values is also critical. Kohlberg identified six stages in three levels of moral development (See Table 7-2). He determined the level of moral reasoning by asking a complex ethical question. The level or stage is determined not by the answer to a moral question, but by the reasoning that a person uses to produce that answer. It is important to note only 20–25% of adults ever achieve Stage 5, and only a handful of individuals have reached Stage 6.

TABLE 7-2   Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development.

Level 1		Preconventional Morality	Base moral decisions on the likelihood of receiving a reward or punishment
	Stage 1	Obedience and punishment	
	Stage 2	Egocentric	
Level 2		Conventional Morality	Base moral decisions on societal rules and social norms
	Stage 3	Good child	
	Stage 4	Authority and social order	
Level 3		Postconventional Morality	Base moral decisions on personal values and principles
	Stage 5	Contractual-legalistic	
	Stage 6	Conscience	

EARLY ATTACHMENT AND SOCIALIZATION

The individuals who surround a growing child will naturally influence that child's identity formation. If children are raised by actively involved parents, rather than by uninvolved or highly critical parents, they tend to be more comfortable developing independent identities. At a young age, children will initially take on "play" roles that mimic the adults around them. They will imitate the roles they see in their family as part of practicing different identities in preparation for adulthood.

The impact of early attachment on identity formation also holds true in the animal world. The American psychologist Harry Harlow performed a famous series of studies on the formation of mother-infant attachment in rhesus monkeys. He created two artificial monkey "mothers," one made of bare wire and the other made of soft terry cloth. The wire mother provided milk for the baby monkeys, but the terry-cloth mother provided no food. Harlow placed the two mothers in cages with baby rhesus monkeys to see whether mother-infant attachment would take place. He theorized (incorrectly) that based on evolutionary principles, the baby monkeys should prefer the food-bearing wire mother over the terry-cloth mother, even if the soft terry-cloth version were more emotionally comforting than the bare-wire version. Harlow was surprised when the baby monkeys repeatedly attached to the comforting terry-cloth mother, even though it provided no food to them. This study helped developmental psychologists understand that attachment to caregivers depends on more than simply providing food and that emotional comfort is the primary motivator for infants in attachment.

Early socialization has a direct effect on identity formation. According to studies by Canadian-American developmental psychologist Mary Ainsworth, the type of

attachment that a child feels at an early age toward caregivers can have a lifelong influence on attachment characteristics (See Table 7-3). A **securely** attached child feels free to explore the environment but will return to the caregiver periodically for comfort and connection. A child who has an **anxious/ambivalent attachment** style will often avoid leaving the caregiver for fear the caregiver will leave or pay no attention to them. A child with an **avoidant/rejecting attachment** style will not connect with the caregiver at all, only exploring the environment but not interpreting the caregiver as a safe place in times of fear. These styles of childhood attachment are carried into adulthood. They affect a person's interactions with friends and romantic partners. They can also affect how a person grows and develops an identity and the level of security the person feels in "trying on" different self-concepts with the onset of adolescence.

TABLE 7-3   Caregiver and Attachment Styles.

Caregiver Style	Infant Attachment	Adult Attachment
Responsive: good relationship between the caregiver and the child	*Securely attached*: willing to explore a new environment but returns to the caregiver periodically for security	*Secure*: comfortable with establishing close relationships
Rejecting: not responsive to the child's needs; distant and cold	*Avoidant*: insecure bond with caregiver; tends to ignore the caregiver; no separation anxiety	*Avoidant*: avoids emotionally close relationships; may ask more of romantic partners than is willing to give emotionally
Ambivalent: inconsistent "hot and cold" caregiving style dependent on the caregiver's mood at the moment	*Anxious/ambivalent*: insecure bond with caregiver; may not explore a new environment due to strong separation anxiety	*Anxious/ambivalent*: strong desire for close relationships but also strong fear of abandonment; may rush into intimate relationships

As children grow and enter school age, they encounter a larger social network. At this age, children become more influenced by **groups**. These include both the group that the children most closely identify with **(reference group)** and those around them. The reference group will be important to the individual's identity for the rest of his or her life, either because of maintaining a connection to that original group or intentionally separating from it. The role of the in-group/out-group relationship (e.g., What is "me"? What is "not me"?) and the value that the person places on different groups can change the direction of identity formation. If a person is part of a peer group that is comfortable with its identity formation and provides positive support, he or she is less likely to feel inferior to peers, regardless of the societal judgment of that peer group (e.g., "jocks," "nerds," "geeks"). In positive identity development, the exact "type" of

group is less important than whether or not the individual feels comfortable in that peer group and the stability of that peer group.

Culture will strongly influence identity formation because of the influence of culture on the schemas that a person develops as part of his or her self-concept. For example, the individual's role in a culture may be valued differently based on gender (girls versus boys), the understanding of sexual orientation (accepting versus shaming), age (youth versus adult), even the individual's skills (academic ability versus athletic prowess). The values of society can strongly influence how individuals view themselves, their self-concept, and their self-esteem.