

Vaillant Stages

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will identify the Vaillant theory of psychosocial development, focusing on the Vaillant stages. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Criticisms of the Theory of Psychosocial Development
2. Additional Stages
3. Additional Aspects

1. Criticisms of the Theory of Psychosocial Development

As with many psychological theories, Erikson's theory of psychosocial development receives some criticism. There are some who believe his theory does not explain everything completely. There are those who believe that his theory focuses too much on early development, and not enough attention is paid to the later stages. Critics feel that too much gets lumped together in broad categories that span many years.

A lot of theorists since Erikson have tried to fill in the blanks and add information and stages to those later parts of life. One such psychologist is **George Vaillant**. Vaillant is an American psychologist and a professor at Harvard. His focus is on aging and the later development of people. His studies focus particularly on men. It is important to note that a lot of the generalizations and the ideas that he's propounding aren't necessarily focused on everybody—they're focused more specifically on men.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

George Vaillant

Curator of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, American author, Psychologist

2. Additional Stages

Vaillant's additional stages begin around the young adult stage, between Erikson's stages of intimacy and generativity. The stage that Vaillant adds is called "career consolidation."

This is when a young adult is attempting to establish their own competence in their area of work or study. They are trying to master their profession and acquire a positive reputation.

This is a little bit different from the ideas of generativity that Erikson suggested. The person is not necessarily solely focused on the contribution they're making towards others. There is a bit more of an internal focus as well.

After career consolidation is Erikson's stage of generativity vs. stagnation, which is mid-adulthood. Here, Vaillant suggests another additional stage he termed the "keepers of meaning." This occurs when men enter their 50s and 60s. During this stage, they begin to display that concern for the next generation, like in Erikson's idea of integrity vs. despair, which comes later.

However, the focus of the "keepers of meaning" stage is the need to pass on their culture and traditions to the next generation, and to teach others what they've been learning throughout life.

3. Additional Aspects

When a man is in his 70s, during Erikson's integrity vs. despair stage, Vaillant adds another aspect to this stage. In addition to being reflective of their life, Vaillant suggests that men become very spiritual during this time.

Vaillant also expanded on the idea of maturity. Maturity refers to the display of certain characteristics that are deemed "appropriately developed" for an adult.

➦ **EXAMPLE** For example, displaying forgiveness or gratitude are abilities that might not come earlier in life, but that an older adult should be able to display if they're a well-adjusted or adapted person.

This idea of maturity comes from an additional idea of defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are a very Freudian psychoanalytical or psychodynamic idea.

They are the different ways that people deal with stress. Vaillant suggests that these defense mechanisms might differ in degrees in development. There might be immature and mature ways of dealing with issues. When we age, we should be able to develop or mature these defense mechanisms into healthy or useful types of mechanisms.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Earlier in life, a person may develop a defense mechanism of repression and try to keep negative feelings away completely. Later in life, as the person matures, they may develop suppression which only keeps the negative feelings away until the person is in an appropriate environment to deal with them.



SUMMARY

As with many theories, there are **criticisms of the theory of psychosocial development**. Some say that the later stages Erickson describes are too broad and include too many years. One psychologist, George Vaillant, expounded on his ideas.

Vaillant suggested **additional stages**. He suggested a stage between intimacy and generativity

called "career consolidation." He also suggested a stage called "keepers of meaning." This stage is focused mostly on men between 50 and 60 years of age. Vaillant also added **additional aspects** to stages. His theory states that men at the integrity vs. despair stage also develop a sense of spirituality. He also proposed that as people mature, their use of defense mechanisms matures as well.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Erick Taggart.



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