“ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE”: THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF THE HARD STAGE AND SOFT STAGE PARADIGMS IN ADULT DEVELOPMENT

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WHAT I WILL COVER TODAY

• A review of the key tenets of the “hard stage” paradigm

• A review of the key tenets of the “soft stage” paradigm

• Why I think both are helpful

• A prospective conciliation and rapprochement
HARD STAGE PARADIGM IN ADULT DEVELOPMENT – DEFINITIONAL FEATURES

- **STAGES** = invariantly sequenced equilibria (stable structural arrangements), which progress in a defined, universal sequence
- Change is discontinuous: shows a profile of “punctuated equilibrium”
- Each stage is more integrated and more complex than the previous one
- These are function of organismic, structural, organismic and biological properties that are fundamental to being human
- Non-reversible (unless cognitive degenerative disease)
- Culturally and historically invariant in sequence and structure
- Described using formal structural and mathematical terms
Heinz Werner: Orthogenetic Principle

“Wherever development occurs it proceeds from a state of relative globality and lack of differentiation to a state of increasing differentiation, articulation, and hierarchic integration.”
CURRENT FIELD OF HARD STAGE THEORY

Model of hierarchical complexity

- Michael Commons

Ego development stage theory

- Bob Kegan
- Bill Torbert
- Ken Wilber
- Suzanne Cook-Greuter
- Gisela Labouvie-Vief

Post-formal cognition: Dialectical thinking

- Tatiana Bachkirova
- Jennifer Garvey Berger
- Michael Basseches
- Michael Commons

Transpersonal / integral hard stage theory
A KEY METAPHOR: ASCENT AND VERTICALITY
SOFT STAGE THEORY: DEFINITIONAL FEATURES

- **STAGES** = heuristic concepts that permit clear and concise communication about time-bound phases of the life-course
- They are tied to specific ages and life events, and are often initiated by transitions or crises that are also age-specific
- What is optimal or adaptive – i.e. positive development - is age-specific

- More like ‘waves’ than stages – they can overlap and reverse in adulthood
- Soft stages change in content and timing over historical periods, following social trend such as age of starting parenthood, and changes in the average length of the lifespan
  - e.g. generativity
"ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE"
BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
(FROM AS YOU LIKE IT, SPOKEN BY JAQUES)

All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms;
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress’ eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon’s mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin’d,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper’d pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well sav’d, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.
HISTORICAL ROOTS OF SOFT STAGE THEORY

Links to history and sociology

Bernice Neugarten
CURRENT FIELD OF SOFT STAGE THEORY

Jeff Arnett
Emerging adulthood / young adults

Dan McAdams
Life stories / generativity

Margie Lachman
Midlife

Seth Schwartz
Older adults / later life

James Marcia
Neo-Eriksonian identity theory

Sheung Tak Chen

Cynthia Darling Fisher
Eriksonian stages assessment

KEY METAPHOR: SEASONS
WHAT IS THE SCOPE FOR FUTURE INTEGRATION OR SYNTHESIS OF THESE PARADIGMS?
WHY BOTH PARADIGMS ARE HELPFUL

HARD STAGE PARADIGM AND ITS SEARCH FOR UNIVERSALS
- Understanding those features of adult development that are considered optimal outcomes across cultures:
  - Responsibility
  - Virtue
  - Fundamental cognitive abilities
  - Wisdom
  - Emotional wellbeing
  - Integration, wholeness
- Posits universals and cross-cultural invariant theories that consider what we all have in common as adults

SOFT STAGE PARADIGM AND ITS SENSITIVITY TO AGE AND PLACE
- Sensitivity to the changing nuances of the life span;
  - The flux and flow of the lifespan
  - The age that someone is
  - The life events that define their existential milieu
  - Cross-cultural differences
- The give-and-take between the physical world, culture, developmental epigenetics
- Understanding particular phases and transitions of the life course as intrinsically bound to age and the lifespan
- Understanding why certain developmental phenomena cluster so heavily in certain age ranges

BUT DO WE NEED STAGE CONCEPTS FOR EITHER OF THESE?
EXAMPLE RESEARCH INTEGRATION: EGO DEVELOPMENT IN MIDLIFE


EXAMPLE REAL-WORLD INTEGRATION: U3A
OPPORTUNITY FOR INTEGRATION IN ADULT THERAPY

• Therapy and coaching are practiced in most cultures and across all age groups with the same (essentially Piagetian, orthogenetic) objectives of
  a) personality or ego integration (vs fragmentation)
  b) helping individuals achieve their ideals (i.e. reduce discrepancy between actual state and ideal state, and hence feel more integrated)

• And yet lifespan sensitivity and cultural sensitivity is essential to psychotherapy – the therapist must be fully person-centred and sensitive to the cultural and personal idiosyncrasies of the client

• REQUIRES A “BOTH-AND” FOCUS: We are all the same AND we are all different (Gordon Allport)
ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?