A Bronx Tale

“The choices you make will shape your life, forever...

the greatest gift of all, the saddest thing in life, is wasted talent.”

Psychology 370 / Krista H. Renella
Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Stage Development Theory

With an emphasis on:
- Trust vs. Mistrust
- Identity vs. Role Confusion
- Intimacy vs. Isolation
- Generativity vs. Stagnation
Sonny LoSpecchio
Wealthy Italian-American mafia boss in Bronx, NY during the 1960's

Has not had a healthy fulfilling romantic relationship since adolescence
Would rather be feared than loved

Murders a man on a busy street but is saved from prison by witness named Calogero who lies to protect him.
Out of respect to Calogero, he takes him under his wing
Tries to reinforce the importance of school, family and choice of friends

Mistrusts everyone in his life
Isolates himself from those who desire to become close to him
Quotes philosopher Maccavelli by saying availability is important to his career and safety
Erik Erikson

- (1905 – 1994)
- Born in Frankfurt, Germany
- His mother and him were left by his biological father before Erik’s birth
- His mother remarried a Jewish M.D.
- Had his own identity crisis as a child when he had trouble fitting into a predominantly Jewish culture with his Nordic appearance
- Met Anna Freud in the 1920’s
- She encouraged him to study child psychoanalysis in Vienna
- In 1933, he immigrated to the United States

- Believed that personality is shaped over the life span (experiences later in life can heal problems in early childhood)
- After studying Yurok and Sioux children, he correlated personality growth with parental and societal values
Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages

**Childhood**
- Trust vs. Mistrust
- Autonomy vs. Doubt & Shame
- Initiative vs. Guilt
- Industriousness vs. Inferiority

**Adolescence**
- Identity Cohesion vs. Role Confusion

**Adulthood**
- Intimacy vs. Isolation
- Generativity vs. Stagnation
- Ego Integrity vs. Despair
Sonny’s Stage Conflicts

- Trust vs. Mistrust
- Intimacy vs. Isolation
- Identity Cohesion vs. Role Confusion
- Generativity vs. Stagnation
In this stage, the infant must form a loving, trusting relationship with the caregiver, or they will develop a sense of mistrust.

Sonny is struggling with completely trusting and confiding in the people around him.

After building a relationship with Calogero for over 10 years, he still has trouble of trusting Calogero especially in one incident with his car.

When the car is returned to Sonny’s house a bomb-like object is found which Sonny assumes may have been placed by Calogero.

Sonny is unable to see that Calogero views him as a father-figure and would never do him any harm.
Identity vs. Role Confusion

- During this stage, the teenager must achieve a sense of identity in occupation, sex roles, politics, and religion.
- We can see that his role as a mafia boss has not been a healthy choice to make.
- If he had positively dealt with this stage conflict, we could presume that he may have studied philosophy and possibly become a teacher/professor.
- His identity as a mafia boss provides him with no sense of security or accomplishment.
Intimacy vs. Role Confusion

- The young adult at this stage must develop intimate relationships or they will suffer feelings of isolation.
- Sonny states, “You’re only allowed three great women in your lifetime. They come along like the great fighters, every ten years. Sometimes you get ‘em all at once... I had my three when I was 16... What are you gonna do? That’s the way it goes, you know?”
- His belief that he is allowed three women in his lifetime is his way of justifying that fact that he is alone in his thirties. We can see from his statement that there is a hint of sadness when he says, “What are you gonna do?”
- It also seems that he feels lack of motivation to strive for a healthy happy relationship and that he has no control of the events in his life but rather a force beyond him is controlling every event.
Generativity vs. Stagnation

- Between the ages of 40-65, parenting is a major focus. Each adult must find some way to satisfy and support the next generation.
- We can see that Sonny had begun to reach this level of generativity before he was killed.
- He wanted to teach Calogero to be a wiser man than he was.
- He encouraged Calogero to stay away from guns, his racist violent friends, and to pursue a love interest even if she was African-American.
- As Erikson believed, experiences later in life can heal problems from early childhood.
- Before Sonny was killed he was attempting to heal old wounds through love and generosity.
Conclusion

- Erik Erikson’s Theory effortlessly summarizes Sonny’s struggle through four of Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages.
La Fine