Intentional Development of Personality and Social Maturity

"We are dominated by everything with which our self becomes identified. We can dominate and control everything from which we dis-identify ourselves". [18] Roberto Assagioli (2000)

Stage Developmental theory

"A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions."

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr

Development means a progressive series of changes that occur in an orderly, predictable pattern as a result of maturation and experience. The study of developmental psychology is essentially understanding how humans learn, mature, and adapt. In fact, it has found personality formation to be malleable, continuing throughout life, and is influenced by how individuals create meaning for themselves or make sense of new information. The numerous existing theories of developmental stage theory aim to provide an account of development throughout life including physical, cognitive, social, intellectual, perceptual, personality, and emotional growth. In this chapter, we will be exploring primarily a constructivist point of view of personality development. Individual constructivism is when a person constructs knowledge through the cognitive processing of their experiences rather than only by memory of facts. Social constructivism is how individuals construct understanding through an interaction between the knowledge they bring to a situation and the social or cultural exchanges within that content.

In the West, the conventional mature and 'adult' worldview is of a linear, rational model of reality using abstract or formal operations usually reached by early adulthood. Therefore, throughout the adult years, most people cognitively process their experience from the most rational, conventional and prevailing perspective known to them. How a person's cognitive world transforms is ascertained by stage developmental theory. According to the theory, stages unfold in a particular order, each gaining greater complexity and refinement than the last. Constructivism proposes that the world we know is constructed in our mind through our ongoing interaction with external reality, and as our interactions with that reality become more complex, we construct more refined worldviews. Cognitive shifts, whether the result of new experience or deliberate mediation, produce with increasing and discerning objectivity, schematic disruptions and significant changes in our apprehention of the environment, ourself, and our interaction with the world. Even though it is the same world, we recognize and understand it differently. Therefore, each subsequent developmental stage is a larger perspective on reality, discriminating greater intricacy, differentiation and interconnections.

The issue of maturity is important to the Buddha. Emphasizing the important effect of social

interaction and suitable support for one's wholesome cognitive development, the Buddha often recommended especially for beginners on the Path to avoid interacting with bàla or 'fools'. Other translations of bàla or 'fool' into English are 'young child' or 'immature person'. As written in Balavagga: "The Spiritually Immature" (Verses 60-75)[2] and Panditavagga: "The Spiritually Mature" (Verses 76-89)[3]. For example, '*By not meeting fools one can be happy all the time. The one who keeps company with fools will be sorry for a long time. It's painful to live with fools, like always being with the enemy.*' (207) When a foolish or immature person does not get what they desire, or when there is something they dis-like occurring, they become ill-willed, often resentful or jealous. The result of this aversion is negative mental activity, leading to more harmful behavior or aggressive behavior such as complaints or curses as well as belligerent physical behavior. The bàla are at a loss of what the Right way is and what the right conditions for living are. They do not know how to treat themselves and others wisely because they are ignorant about the three basic facts of existence: Impermanence or Change (*anicca*); Suffering or Unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and Not-self or Insubstantiality (*anatta*).

On the helpful side, the Buddha also advised, "*To associate with wise, noble people*"; a Noble person is an arahant or others who have developed themselves well according to the principles of the Eightfold Path. As we see illustrated in the Samdhinirmocana Sutra, *"Bhagavan, having seen these things, I thought this: 'All these sons and daughters of good lineage have not sought out the ultimate, the subtle character completely transcending difference or non-difference from compounded things. They are all immature (bàla), confused, unclear, unskilled, and they are ignorant.'"* [19] (Power, 1995) Also, in SN 12.19 (Bala-pandita Sutta: The Fool & the Wise Person)[4] the Buddha was asked, "*What distinguishing factor is there between the wise person & the fool?"*: *The Blessed One said, "The ignorance with which the fool is obstructed, the craving with which he is conjoined, through which this body results: that ignorance has not been abandoned by the fool; that craving has not been destroyed. Why is that? The fool has not practiced the purified life for the right ending of suffering...The wise person has practiced the purified life for the right ending of suffering...'*. The Buddha emphasizes the potential for and actual transformation from an immature to a mature mind attained through an individual's cognitive shift following the intentional sequences of ego development of the Eightfold Path.

The descriptions of Arahants or psychologically mature people in the Buddhist tradition gives a perspective of the resulting positive attributes that develop by successfully traversing the ego developmental stages provided by Eightfold Path. Phra Payutto's book 'Buddhadhamma' [20] (Payutto, 1995), divides the description of Arahants into four areas:

- **Physical development (*bhāvita-kāya*):** they have a healthy, contented, and respectful relationship to things and to nature; they mindfully experience things directly by way of the five senses, and in a way that fosters insight. They consume things with moderation, deriving their true benefit and value. They are not obsessed or led astray by the influence of preferences and aversions. They are heedful and nurture wholesome states.

- **Moral development (*bhāvita-sīla*):** They act virtuously by keeping to a moral code and living harmoniously with others. They use their physical actions, speech, and livelihood for self-development, for assisting others, and for building a healthy society while avoiding oppressing others or to create conflict.

- **Mental development (*bhāvita-citta*):** they have developed their mind to be lucid, joyous,

bright, spacious, and happy. Their minds are cultivated in the virtuous qualities, like goodwill, compassion, confidence, gratitude, generosity, perseverance, fortitude, patient endurance, tranquility, stability, mindfulness, and concentration.

•**Wisdom development (*bhāvita-paññā*):** they have trained in and developed wisdom, resulting in an understanding of the truth and a clear discernment of things according to how they really are. They apply wisdom to solve problems, to dispel suffering, and to purify themselves from mental impurities. Their hearts are free from distress.

Stages of Ego Development

Psychologist Robert Kegan also discusses the topic of psychological maturity and positive personality transformation in his book, "The Evolving Self" [21](Kegan, 1982). Using a stage developmental perspective, he describes a theory of how people become progressively more socially mature across their lifespan. Kegan says that as we grow from being a baby into an adult, we become more socially mature and through maturation, we become progressively less subjective and more objective, and thus able to understand better the complexity of the social world. This expanded awareness is a result of an emerging from being entrenched in one's subjective egotistical perspective and, hence, increasing the ability to see things from multiple perspectives. We can see similarities of Kegan's definition of mature personality qualities to those listed before of the devoted practitioner of the Eightfold Path. According to Kegan, beneficial characteristics of maturity include the following:

- •Being spontaneous and giving direct responses in present
- •Not being obsessively influenced by our past
- •Comprehending people more directly than what we project onto them
- •Seeking information rather than relying on assumptions
- • Updating ourselves through our everyday experiences and using this to wisely inform us
- • Having equanimity of mind that is rarely disturbed under great strain

Mark Dombeck, Ph.D., in his article "Robert Kegan's Awesome Theory of Social Maturity" [22] (2007) suggests that using Kegan's analysis, the culmination of an evolving mature personality is, '*Where does this progression end? Theoretically, it ends in some kind of Buddha-like state of enlightenment, where everything that can be understood objectively is understood objectively and there is no more subjectivity to be embedded in anymore.*' Kegan's earlier theory described five developmental stages or orders of mind: The Impulsive Mind, Instrumental Mind, Socialized Mind, Self-Authoring Mind, and Self-Transforming Mind. Later, in the book, "In Over Our Heads" (1994) [23], Kegan extends his perspective on psychological development used in the earlier five developmental stages for a newer "orders of consciousness" scheme. He states that all of us actively construct our own reality and that these constructs evolve qualitatively with increasing complexity over time. He developed a model depicting five levels of consciousness; each successive level incorporates more complex ways of knowing. A post fifth level has also been suggested by others including Kim Pearce in his article, CMM and the Evolution of Social Consciousness.[5]

Briefly these levels are:

First order consciousness: Impulsive—Perceives and responds by emotion. Describes awareness, which is fixated upon sensation, movement, and impulse. It is awareness but it is not really yet a self.

Second order consciousness: Imperial—Motivated solely by one's desires. Describes awareness of self as a singular point of view without any real comprehension of others as independent selves.

Third order consciousness: Interpersonal—Defined by the group.

Describes a sense of self which is aware of both self and other as independent needful beings all of which are (or ought to be) guided by a consistent set of values.

Fourth order of consciousness: Institutional—Self-directed, self-authoring. Describes a self-determination, tolerance and acceptance of formerly rejected aspects of self and society.

Fifth order of consciousness: Inter-individual—Interpenetration of self-systems. Describes the self-transforming mind, the individual has learned the limits of their own inner system and the limits of full identification with any one inner system in general.

Post fifth order consciousness Transcending Subject/Object—This order of knowing dissolves the subject/object split; the individual experiences no distinction between self and others through the dissolution of the subject into the object. Enlightened sages have attempted to describe the ineffable oneness of life that this Emptiness awakens in consciousness.

Like Kegan, scholar and consultant Susanne R. Cook-Gruenter proposes that stages of ego development encompass increasingly complex perceptions of the self and others [24] . Cook-Gruenter, 2013) These include:

Figure 1: Illustration from Cook-Greuter´s article "Nine levels of increasing embrace"

 Characteristics of the transformation of Ego stage development are:

•Conscious preoccupations move from the concrete to the abstract;

 •Time orientation shifts from the immediate to the long term;

 •The perception of other people, initially organized around simple dualities (e.g., nice vs. mean) becomes increasingly complex, encouraging a greater toleration of individual differences.

These changes are accompanied by increasing psychological awareness and recognition of one's own internal motivations.

 Cook-Greuter asserts that by making a conscious and determined effort in adulthood, the more complex and mature cognitive features have the following results:

> •We become capable of an integrated analysis of all relevant factors - we can review the situation in terms of a network of cause-and-effect relationships, extrapolate ideas, and approach the problem from a new point of view.

> • As our minds develop, our thinking becomes more complex. This complexity refers to the number of separate factors and variables which need to be taken account of. Analysis of a situation or issue recognizes the connections and relationships among these elements, and is necessary to see the full picture and all its implications. People

who are capable of cognitive complexity are multidimensional in their thinking.

- People capable of complex thinking tend to take in more information and form more well rounded impressions than less complex persons. They are more flexible and fluent with creative ideas in novel situations. Less complex minds are prone to polarize on an issue and stick with the established solutions of others; because they cannot perceive counter-arguments they are more open to persuasion.

- As one progresses in level of Ego development there is increased variability in self-experience. It has been found that at lower levels of Ego development, evaluation of negative aspects of the self was more restricted compared to the positive aspects. Higher levels of Ego development are associated with greater recognition of negative aspects of self - there is more willingness to introspect in a realistic manner and to come to terms with Shadow aspects of the personality.

- Our cognitive ability also impacts human relations. People capable of a range of cognitive complexity from basic to advanced can relate happily to both a dustman and a university professor. Those with a low level of cognitive complexity stick to their own - they may experience problems of self esteem when they talk to people with more sophisticated minds, and they are prejudiced when they look down on people more basic than themselves.

- Our ability to think about and integrate complex issues also relates to our ability to make ethical decisions. Systems of 'morality' are, essentially, a complex set of rules, with multiple levels of reward and punishment, aimed at regulating the behavior of those in a particular society. Such systems have their origins in the distinctly human ability to make reasoned choices, to make decisions about our human nature and what we wish to become. Morality is thus the embodying of particular values and options in ourselves and in our communities. However, the complexity of ethical issues do not readily present simple "right" or "wrong" solutions. It requires considerable intelligence to take account of multiple simultaneous ethical perspectives and to find harmony between dissonant value systems.

Regarding ego transcendence Cook-Grueter wrote, '*These later stages (ego development) imply a more conscious union with whatever is present in life while also expanding the ability to make meaning in more complex ways. Genuine, lasting ego transcendence is not the rule for ordinary folks given the current, everyday cultural context. Consistent, unflinching, open attention to one's habits of mind and heart can bring about insights into the processes of meaning making as well as more frequent contact with transpersonal states of consciousness. Although individuals at the Construct-aware and the Unitive ego stages have deconstructed the earlier illusion of the separateness of knower and known, they are still mostly grounded in the symbolically-mediated way of knowing. For permanent development to the postsymbolic higher stages of consciousness to occur, people seem to need conditioning and consistent immersion similar in kind, duration, and intensity as that which was necessary to acquire the language habit. By ego transcendence, I mean the disidentification with the representational or personality self not the synthetic function of the ego, which likely continues. '* [25] (Cook-Gruenter, 2000)

Her ego development anaylsis, similar to the Buddha's, is clear that cognitive liberation is gained

when people realize the essential inter-connectedness of all phenomena and how inhibitions, mental objects, self-identities and our personal as well as cultural narratives about life and nature are totally cognitively constructed. Much dukkha is relieved when the automatic habits of mind and heart from past memory, as well as aversions and desires based in the future, are replaced and transcended with a mindful, non-critical awareness in the now. Recent research at the Young Adult Development Project in the state of Massachusetts, USA, revealed that enthusiasm, affection, concern and neutrality were directly associated with the higher stages of Ego development, whereas sadness and anger were inversely correlated with Ego development. These associations were similar for both genders.[6]

Like the Ego Development Stage theories, a person on the Eight-factor Path or Middle Way also progresses with a cognitive development that transforms in relatively discrete stages, with each apprehending greater subtlety and refinement than the last. The Path's goals are specific to transform, refine and purify our minds through the training of compassion, concentration, and insight. Even though enlightenment is sometimes not considered a process of attainment, the Buddha clearly taught that the Middle Way is a graduated path towards the achievement of *Awakening*. Bhikkhu Bodhi stated, '*The Buddha presents his teaching in the form of a gradual training. Buddhist discipline involves gradual practice and gradual attainment. It does not burst into completeness at a stroke, but like a tree or any other living organism, it unfolds organically, as a sequence of stages in which each stage rests upon its predecessor as its indispensable foundation and gives rise to its successor as its natural consequent.*' [26] (Bodhi, 1978).Indeed, at the highest level of the Buddhist discipline, the eight factors of the Path function simultaneously. Transformation from one order to the next, according to Buddha, like Kegan and Cook-Greuter, is about changing the very form of the meaning-making system—making it less egocentrically subjective and more refined, discerning and objective.