The Life-Span Approach

Most personality theorists devote some attention to the way personality develops over time. Some describe stages in the development of specific aspects of personality; others propose general patterns of growth. Theorists differ about the time period during which they believe personality continues to develop. For example, Freud wrote that personality evolves through a sequence of steps until the age of 5. Jung argued that middle age was the most important time of change for the personality.

The life-span approach, represented here by the work of Erik Erikson, focuses on the development of the personality over the entire life span. His theory attempts to explain human behavior and growth through eight stages from birth to death. Erikson believed that all aspects of personality could be explained in terms of crises or turning points we must face and resolve at each developmental stage.

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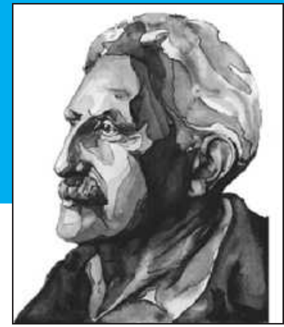
chapter 6

Erik Erikson: Identity Theory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The personality is engaged with the hazards of existence continuously, even as the body's metabolism copes with decay.

—Erik Erikson

The Life of Erikson (1902–1994)
Personal Identity Crises
Child Development Studies
Identity Confusion

Psychosocial Stages of Personality Development
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Autonomy versus Doubt and Shame
Initiative versus Guilt
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Identity Cohesion versus Role Confusion: The Identity Crisis
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The work of Erik Erikson has had a profound influence on psychoanalysis as well as the general culture. Erikson's books have sold hundreds of thousands of copies, and his picture appeared on the covers of *Newsweek* and the *New York Times Magazine*, unusual recognition for a personality theorist. His book on the origins of militant nonviolence, *Gandhi's Truth*, received the 1970 Pulitzer Prize for excellence in nonfiction writing, and he achieved this prominence without ever earning a university degree.

Trained in the Freudian tradition by Freud's daughter Anna, Erikson developed an approach to personality that broadened the scope of Freud's work while maintaining its core. Although he offered significant innovations, his ties to the Freudian position were strong. "Psychoanalysis is always the starting point," he said (quoted in Keniston, 1983, p. 29). Erikson "publicly defined himself as a loyal

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Freudian, even as he departed substantially from orthodox psychoanalytic theory" (Anderson & Friedman, 1997, p. 1063).

Erikson extended Freud's theory in three ways:

1. He elaborated on Freud's stages of development. Freud emphasized childhood and proposed that personality is shaped by approximately the age of 5, but Erikson suggested that personality continues to develop in a succession of eight stages over the entire life span.
2. Erikson placed greater emphasis on the ego than on the id. In Erikson's view, the ego is an independent part of the personality; it is not dependent on or subservient to the id.
3. Erikson recognized the impact on personality of cultural and historical forces. He argued that we are not governed entirely by innate biological factors at work in childhood. Although they are important, they do not provide the complete explanation for personality.

The Life of Erikson (1902–1994)

Personal Identity Crises

It is not surprising that the theorist who gave us the concept of the identity crisis experienced several crises of his own. Erikson was born in Frankfurt, Germany. His Danish mother, from a wealthy Jewish family, had married several years earlier but her husband disappeared within hours of the wedding. She became pregnant by another man, whose name she never revealed, and was sent to Germany to give birth, in order to avoid the social disgrace of a child out of wedlock. She remained in Germany after the baby was born and married Dr. Theodore Homburger, the infant's pediatrician. Erik did not know for some years that Dr. Homburger was not his biological father and claimed that he grew up unsure of his name and psychological identity. He retained the surname Homburger until age 37 when he became a U.S. citizen and took the name Erik Homburger Erikson.

Another crisis of identity occurred when Erik started school. Despite his Danish parentage he considered himself German, but his German classmates rejected him because his mother and stepfather were Jewish. His Jewish peers rejected him because he was tall and blond and had Nordic facial features. He earned only mediocre grades but he showed some talent for art and after graduating from high school he used that ability to try to establish an identity. He dropped out of conventional society and traveled extensively in Europe, reading, recording his thoughts in a notebook, and observing life around him. He described himself as morbidly sensitive and neurotic, even close to psychotic. Many years later one of his daughters wrote:

> My father suffered terribly from the sense that his real father had abandoned him and had never cared to know him. He struggled with a depressive tendency all his life. His childhood experience of abandonment and rejection had left him plagued with self-doubt. He felt deeply insecure and unsure of his footing. He craved constant support, guidance, and reassurance from others. (Bloland, 2005, pp. 52, 71)

Erikson studied at two art schools and had his work exhibited at a gallery in Munich, but each time he left formal training to resume his wandering, his search for an identity.

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Later, when discussing his concept of the identity crisis he wrote, “No doubt, my best friends will insist that I needed to name this crisis and to see it in everybody else in order to really come to terms with it in myself” (Erikson, 1975, pp. 25–26).

As with many personality theorists we can find a correspondence between Erikson’s life experiences, particularly in childhood and adolescence, and the personality theory he developed as an adult. A biographer noted that what Erikson “saw and felt happening to himself (as with Freud’s examination of his own dreams, memories, fantasies) became the ‘research’ that enabled a flow of ideas, articles, books” (Friedman, 1999, p. 16).

Child Development Studies

At the age of 25, Erikson received an offer to teach at a small school in Vienna established for the children of Sigmund Freud’s patients and friends. Freud was attracting patients from all over the world. Being wealthy, they settled in Vienna with their families for the duration of their psychoanalysis. Erikson later confessed that he was drawn to Freud in part because of his search for a father. It was then that Erikson’s professional career began and that he felt he had finally found an identity.

He trained in psychoanalysis and was analyzed by Anna Freud. The analytic sessions were held almost daily for 3 years; the fee was $7 per month. Anna Freud’s interest was the psychoanalysis of children. Her influence, plus Erikson’s own teaching experiences, made him aware of the importance of social influences on personality and led him to focus on child development. After he completed his program of study, he became a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute.

In 1929, attending a masked ball in Vienna, Erikson met Joan Serson, a Canadian-born artist and dancer who had been analyzed by one of Freud’s disciples. They fell in love, but when she became pregnant, Erikson refused to marry her. He explained that he was afraid to make a permanent commitment and he believed that his mother and stepfather would disapprove of a daughter-in-law who was not Jewish. Only the intercession of friends persuaded him that if he did not marry Joan, he would be repeating the behavior pattern of the man who had fathered him and condemning his child to the stigma of illegitimacy, which Erikson himself felt so keenly.

When he did decide to marry Joan, he did so three times, in separate Jewish, Protestant, and civil ceremonies. Joan abandoned her career interests to become Erikson’s lifelong intellectual partner and editor. She provided a stable social and emotional foundation for his life and helped him develop his approach to personality. Erikson’s half-sister commented that “He would have been nothing without Joan” (quoted in Friedman, 1999, p. 86). Erikson agreed.

In 1933, recognizing the growing Nazi menace, the Eriksons immigrated to Denmark and then to the United States, settling in Boston. Erikson established a private psychoanalytic practice specializing in the treatment of children. He also worked at a guidance center for emotionally disturbed delinquents and served on the staff of Massachusetts General Hospital.

Erikson began graduate work at Harvard, intending to obtain a Ph.D. in psychology, but he failed his first course and decided that a formal academic program was unsatisfying. In 1936, he was invited to the Institute of Human Relations at Yale University, where he taught in the medical school and continued his psychoanalytic work with children. Erikson and a Yale anthropologist collaborated on a study of the child-rearing practices of South Dakota’s Sioux Indians. This research reinforced his belief in the influence of culture on childhood. Erikson continued to expand on his ideas at the Institute

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of Human Development of the University of California at Berkeley. Unlike many psychoanalysts, Erikson wanted his clinical experience to be as broad as possible, so he sought patients from diverse cultures and saw those he considered normal as well as those who were emotionally disturbed.

Identity Confusion

In his observations of American Indians in South Dakota and in California, Erikson noted certain psychological symptoms that could not be explained by orthodox Freudian theory. The symptoms appeared to be related to a sense of alienation from cultural traditions and resulted in the lack of a clear self-image or self-identity. This phenomenon, which Erikson initially called identity confusion, was similar to the condition he had observed among emotionally disturbed veterans after World War II. Erikson suggested that those men were not suffering from repressed conflicts but rather from confusion brought about by traumatic war experiences and by being temporarily uprooted from their culture. He had described the veterans' situation as a confusion of identity about whom and what they were.

In 1950, Erikson joined the Austen Riggs Center in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, which was a treatment facility for emotionally disturbed adolescents. Ten years later he returned to Harvard to teach a graduate seminar and a popular undergraduate course on the human life cycle, retiring in 1970. At the age of 84 Erikson published a book about old age. Even after a lifetime of accomplishments, honors, and accolades, however, he felt, according to his daughter, disappointed with what he had achieved. "It was still a source of shame to this celebrated man that he had been an illegitimate child" (Bloland, 2005, p. 51).

Log On

The Life and Work of Erik Erikson

A discussion of Erikson's life and work.

Psychosocial Stages of Personality Development

psychosocial stages of development To Erikson, eight successive stages encompassing the life span. At each stage, we must cope with a crisis in either an adaptive or a maladaptive way.

epigenetic principle of maturation The idea that human development is governed by a sequence of stages that depend on genetic or hereditary factors.

crisis To Erikson, the turning point faced at each developmental stage.

Erikson divided the growth of the personality into eight **psychosocial stages**. The first four are similar to Freud's oral, anal, phallic, and latency stages. The major difference between their theories is that Erikson emphasized psychosocial correlates, whereas Freud focused on biological factors.

Erikson suggested that the developmental process was governed by what he called the **epigenetic principle of maturation**. By this he meant that inherited forces are the determining characteristics of the developmental stages. The prefix *epi* means "upon"; thus, development depends upon genetic factors. The social and environmental forces to which we are exposed influence the ways in which the genetically predetermined stages of development are realized. In this way, personality development is affected by both biological and social factors, or by both personal and situational variables.

In Erikson's theory, human development involves a series of personal conflicts. The potential for these conflicts exists at birth as innate predispositions; these will become prominent at different stages when our environment demands certain adaptations. Each confrontation with our environment is called a **crisis**. The crisis involves a shift in

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perspective, requiring us to refocus our instinctual energy in accordance with the needs of each stage of the life cycle.

Each developmental stage has its particular crisis or turning point that necessitates some change in our behavior and personality. We may respond to the crisis in one of two ways: a maladaptive (negative) way or an adaptive (positive) way. Only when we have resolved each conflict can the personality continue its normal developmental sequence and acquire the strength to confront the next stage's crisis. If the conflict at any stage remains unresolved, we are less likely to be able to adapt to later problems. A successful outcome is still possible, but it will be more difficult to achieve.

However, Erikson believed that the ego must incorporate maladaptive as well as adaptive ways of coping. For example, in infancy, the first stage of psychosocial development, we can respond to the crisis of helplessness and dependency by developing a sense of trust or a sense of mistrust. Trust, the more adaptive, desirable way of coping, is obviously the healthier psychological attitude. Yet each of us must also develop some degree of mistrust as a form of protection. If we are totally trusting and gullible, we will be vulnerable to other people's attempts to deceive, mislead, or manipulate us. Ideally, at every stage of development the ego will consist primarily of the positive or adaptive attitude but will be balanced by some portion of the negative attitude. Only then can the crisis be considered satisfactorily resolved.

Erikson also proposed that each of the eight psychosocial stages provides an opportunity to develop our **basic strengths**. These strengths, or virtues, emerge once the crisis has been resolved satisfactorily. He suggested that basic strengths are interdependent; any one strength cannot develop until the strength associated with the previous stage has been confirmed (see Table 6-1).

basic strengths To Erikson, motivating characteristics and beliefs that derive from the satisfactory resolution of the crisis at each developmental stage.

Trust versus Mistrust

The oral-sensory stage of psychosocial development, paralleling Freud's oral stage of psychosexual development, occurs during our first year of life, the time of our greatest helplessness. The infant is totally dependent on the mother or primary caregiver for survival, security, and affection. During this stage the mouth is of vital importance. Erikson wrote that the infant "lives through, and loves with, [the] mouth" (1959, p. 57). However, the relationship between the infant and his or her world is not exclusively biological. It is also social. The baby's interaction with the mother determines whether an attitude of trust or mistrust for future dealings with the environment will be incorporated into his or her personality.

Table-6-1 **Erikson's stages of psychosocial development and basic strengths**

STAGE	AGES	ADAPTIVE VS. MALADAPTIVE WAYS OF COPING	BASIC STRENGTH
Oral-sensory	Birth–1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope
Muscular-anal	1–3	Autonomy vs. doubt, shame	Will
Locomotor-genital	3–5	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose
Latency	6–11	Industriousness vs. inferiority	Competence
Adolescence	12–18	Identity cohesion vs. role confusion	Fidelity
Young adulthood	18–35	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love
Adulthood	35–55	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care
Maturity—old age	55+years	Ego integrity vs. despair	Wisdom

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If the mother responds appropriately to the baby's physical needs and provides ample affection, love, and security, then the infant will develop a sense of trust, an attitude that will characterize the growing child's view of himself or herself and of others. In this way, we learn to expect "consistency, continuity, and sameness" from other people and situations in our environment (Erikson, 1950, p. 247). Erikson said that this expectation provides the beginning of our ego identity and he recalled that he had formed such a bond of trust with his mother.

On the other hand, if the mother is rejecting, inattentive, or inconsistent in her behavior, the infant develops an attitude of mistrust and will become suspicious, fearful, and anxious. According to Erikson, mistrust can also occur if the mother does not display an exclusive focus on the child. Erikson argued that a new mother who resumes a job outside the home and leaves her infant in the care of relatives or in a day care center risks promoting mistrust in the child.

Although the pattern of trust or mistrust as a dimension of personality is set in infancy, the problem may reappear at a later developmental stage. For example, an ideal infant–mother relationship produces a high level of trust, but this secure sense of trust can be destroyed if the mother dies or leaves home. If that occurs, mistrust may overtake the personality. Childhood mistrust can be altered later in life through the companionship of a loving and patient teacher or friend. The basic strength of *hope* is associated with the successful resolution of the crisis during the oral-sensory stage. Erikson described this strength as the belief that our desires will be satisfied. Hope involves a persistent feeling of confidence, a feeling we will maintain despite temporary setbacks or reverses.

Autonomy versus Doubt and Shame

During the muscular-anal stage at the second and third years of life, corresponding to Freud's anal stage, children rapidly develop a variety of physical and mental abilities and are able to do many things for themselves. They learn to communicate more effectively and to walk, climb, push, pull, and hold on to an object or let it go. Children take pride in these skills and usually want to do as much as possible for themselves.

Of all these abilities, Erikson believed the most important involved holding on and letting go. He considered these to be prototypes for reacting to later conflicts in behaviors and attitudes. For example, holding on can be displayed in a loving way or in a hostile way. Letting go can become a venting of destructive rage or a relaxed passivity.

The important point is that during this stage, for the first time children are able to exercise some choice, to experience the power of their autonomous will. Although still dependent on parents, they begin to see themselves as persons in their own right and they want to exercise their newfound strengths. The key question becomes how much will society, in the form of parents, allow children to express themselves and do all they are capable of doing?

The major crisis between parent and child at this stage typically involves toilet training, seen as the first instance when society attempts to regulate an instinctual need. The child is taught to hold on and let go only at appropriate times and places. Parents may permit the child to proceed with toilet training at his or her own pace or may become annoyed. In that case, parents may deny the child's free will by forcing the training, showing impatience and anger when the child does not behave correctly. When parents thus thwart and frustrate their child's attempt to exercise his or her independence, the child develops feelings of self-doubt and a sense of shame in dealing with others. Although the anal region is the focus of this stage because of the toilet training crisis, you can see that the expression of the conflict is more psychosocial than biological.

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The basic strength that develops from autonomy is *will*, which involves a determination to exercise freedom of choice and self-restraint in the face of society's demands.

Initiative versus Guilt

The locomotor-genital stage, which occurs between ages 3 and 5, is similar to the phallic stage in Freud's system. Motor and mental abilities are continuing to develop, and children can accomplish more on their own. They express a strong desire to take the initiative in many activities. Initiative may also develop in the form of fantasies, manifested in the desire to possess the parent of the opposite sex and in rivalry with the parent of the same sex. How will the parents react to these self-initiated activities and fantasies? If they punish the child and otherwise inhibit these displays of initiative, the child will develop persistent guilt feelings that will affect self-directed activities throughout his or her life.

In the Oedipal relationship, the child inevitably fails, but if the parents guide this situation with love and understanding, then the child will acquire an awareness of what is permissible behavior and what is not. The child's initiative can be channeled toward realistic and socially sanctioned goals in preparation for the development of adult responsibility and morality. In Freudian terms, we would call this the superego.

The basic strength called *purpose* arises from initiative. Purpose involves the courage to envision and pursue goals.

Industriousness versus Inferiority

Erikson's latency stage of psychosocial development, which occurs from ages 6 to 11, corresponds to Freud's latency period. The child begins school and is exposed to new social influences. Ideally, both at home and at school, the child learns good work and study habits (what Erikson referred to as industriousness) primarily as a means of attaining praise and obtaining the satisfaction derived from the successful completion of a task.

The child's growing powers of deductive reasoning and the ability to play by rules lead to the deliberate refinement of the skills displayed in building things. Here Erikson's

Children take pride in developing new skills and abilities.

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ideas reflect the sex stereotypes of the period in which he proposed his theory. In his view, boys will build tree houses and model airplanes; girls will cook and sew. However, whatever the activities associated with this age, the children are making serious attempts to complete a task by applying concentrated attention, diligence, and persistence. In Erikson's words, "The basic skills of technology are developed as the child becomes ready to handle the utensils, the tools, and the weapons used by the big people" (1959, p. 83).

Again, the attitudes and behaviors of parents and teachers largely determine how well children perceive themselves to be developing and using their skills. If children are scolded, ridiculed, or rejected, they are likely to develop feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. Praise and reinforcement foster feelings of competence and encourage continued striving.

The basic strength that emerges from industriousness during the latency stage is *competence*. It involves the exertion of skill and intelligence in pursuing and completing tasks.

The outcome of the crisis at each of these four childhood stages depends on other people. The resolution is a function more of what is done to the child than of what the child can do for himself or herself. Although children experience increasing independence from birth to age 11, psychosocial development remains mostly under the influence of parents and teachers, typically the most significant people in our life at this time.

In the last four stages of psychosocial development, we have increasing control over our environment. We consciously and deliberately choose our friends, colleges, careers, spouses, and leisure activities. However, these deliberate choices are obviously affected by the personality characteristics that have developed during the stages from birth to adolescence. Whether our ego at that point shows primarily trust, autonomy, initiative, and industriousness, or mistrust, doubt, guilt, and inferiority, will determine the course of our life.

Identity Cohesion versus Role Confusion: The Identity Crisis

ego identity The self-image formed during adolescence that integrates our ideas of what we are and what we want to be.

Adolescence, between ages 12 and 18, is the stage at which we must meet and resolve the crisis of our basic **ego identity**. This is when we form our self-image, the integration of our ideas about ourselves and about what others think of us. If this process is resolved satisfactorily, the result is a consistent and congruent picture.

Shaping an identity and accepting it are difficult tasks, often filled with anxiety. Adolescents experiment with different roles and ideologies, trying to determine the most compatible fit. Erikson suggested that adolescence was a hiatus between childhood and adulthood, a necessary psychological moratorium to give the person time and energy to play different roles and live with different self-images.

identity crisis The failure to achieve ego identity during adolescence.

People who emerge from this stage with a strong sense of self-identity are equipped to face adulthood with certainty and confidence. Those who fail to achieve a cohesive identity—who experience an **identity crisis**—will exhibit a confusion of roles. They do not seem to know who or what they are, where they belong, or where they want to go. They may withdraw from the normal life sequence (education, job, marriage) as Erikson did for a time or seek a negative identity in crime or drugs. Even a negative identity, as society defines it, is preferable to no identity, although it is not as satisfactory as a positive identity.

Erikson noted the potentially strong impact of peer groups on the development of ego identity in adolescence. He noted that excessive association with fanatical groups and cults or obsessive identification with icons of popular culture could restrict the developing ego.

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Adolescents who experience an identity crisis do not seem to know where they belong or what they want to become.

Anthony Redpath/Corbis

The basic strength that should develop during adolescence is *fidelity*, which emerges from a cohesive ego identity. Fidelity encompasses sincerity, genuineness, and a sense of duty in our relationships with other people.

Intimacy versus Isolation

Erikson considered young adulthood to be a longer stage than the previous ones, extending from the end of adolescence to about age 35. During this period we establish our independence from parents and quasi-parental institutions, such as college, and begin to function more autonomously as mature, responsible adults. We undertake some form of productive work and establish intimate relationships—close friendships and sexual unions. In Erikson's view, intimacy was not restricted to sexual relationships but also encompassed feelings of caring and commitment. These emotions could be displayed openly, without resorting to self-protective or defensive mechanisms and without fear of losing our sense of self-identity. We can merge our identity with someone else's without submerging or losing it in the process.

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People who are unable to establish such intimacies in young adulthood will develop feelings of isolation. They avoid social contacts and reject other people, and may even become aggressive toward them. They prefer to be alone because they fear intimacy as a threat to their ego identity.

The basic strength that emerges from the intimacy of the young adult years is *love*, which Erikson considered to be the greatest human virtue. He described it as a mutual devotion in a shared identity, the fusing of oneself with another person.

Generativity versus Stagnation

Adulthood—approximately ages 35 to 55—is a stage of maturity in which we need to be actively involved in teaching and guiding the next generation. This need extends beyond our immediate family. In Erikson's view, our concern becomes broader and more long-range, involving future generations and the kind of society in which they will live. One need not be a parent to display generativity, nor does having children automatically satisfy this urge.

Erikson believed that all institutions—whether business, government, social service, or academic—provide opportunities for us to express generativity. Thus, in whatever organizations or activities we are involved, we can usually find a way to become a mentor, teacher, or guide to younger people for the betterment of society at large.

When middle-aged people cannot or will not seek an outlet for generativity, they may become overwhelmed by "stagnation, boredom, and interpersonal impoverishment" (Erikson, 1968, p. 138). Erikson's depiction of these emotional difficulties in middle age is similar to Jung's description of the midlife crisis. These people may regress to a stage of pseudo-intimacy, indulging themselves in childlike ways. And they may become physical or psychological invalids because of their absorption with their own needs and comforts.

Care is the basic strength that emerges from generativity in adulthood. Erikson defined care as a broad concern for others and believed it was manifested in the need to teach, not only to help others but also to fulfill one's identity.

Ego Integrity versus Despair

During the final stage of psychosocial development, maturity and old age, we are confronted with a choice between ego integrity and despair. These attitudes govern the way we evaluate our whole life. Our major endeavors are at or nearing completion. We examine and reflect on our life, taking its final measure. If we look back with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, believing we have coped with life's victories and failures, then we are said to possess ego integrity. Simply stated, ego integrity involves accepting one's place and one's past. If we review our life with a sense of frustration, angry about missed opportunities and regretful of mistakes that cannot be rectified, then we will feel despair. We become disgusted with ourselves, contemptuous of others, and bitter over what might have been.

At 84, Erikson reported the results of a long-term study of 29 people in their 80s on whom life-history data had been collected since 1928. The book, *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, indicates in its title Erikson's prescription for achieving ego integrity (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986). Older people must do more than reflect on the past. They must remain active, vital participants in life, seeking challenge and stimulation from their environment. They must involve themselves in such activities as grandparenting, returning to school, and developing new skills and interests.

As an older person himself, Erikson said that generativity (the focus of mature adulthood) was even more important than he had thought when he was first developing his

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theory. "Much of the despair [of older people] is in fact a continuing sense of stagnation" (quoted in Cheng, 2009, p. 45). Generativity, developed in the seventh stage of life, may be the most important factor contributing to ego integrity in the eighth and final stage.

The basic strength associated with this final developmental stage is *wisdom*. Deriving from ego integrity, wisdom is expressed in a detached concern with the whole of life. It is conveyed to succeeding generations in an integration of experience best described by the word *heritage*.

Basic Weaknesses

basic weaknesses Motivating characteristics that derive from the unsatisfactory resolution of developmental crises.

maldevelopment A condition that occurs when the ego consists solely of a single way of coping with conflict.

Similar to the way basic strengths arise at each stage of psychosocial development, so may **basic weaknesses**. We noted earlier that the adaptive and maladaptive ways of coping with the crisis at each stage are incorporated in the ego identity in a kind of creative balance. Although the ego should consist primarily of the adaptive attitude, it will also contain a share of the negative attitude.

In an unbalanced development, the ego consists solely of one attitude, either the adaptive or the maladaptive one. Erikson labeled this condition **maldevelopment**. When only the positive, adaptive, tendency is present in the ego, the condition is said to be "maladaptive." When only the negative tendency is present, the condition is called "malignant." Maladaptions can lead to neuroses; malignancies can lead to psychoses.

Erikson expected that both conditions could be corrected through psychotherapy. Maladaptions, which are the less severe disturbances, can also be relieved through a process of re-adaptation, aided by environmental changes, supportive social relationships, or successful adaptation at a later developmental stage. Table 6-2 lists the maldevelopmental characteristics for each of the eight stages.

Table-6-2 Erikson's maldevelopmental tendencies

STAGE	WAY OF COPING	MALDEVELOPMENT
Oral-sensory	Trust	Sensory maladjustment
	Mistrust	Withdrawal
Muscular-anal	Autonomy	Shameless willfulness
	Doubt, shame	Compulsion
Locomotor-genital	Initiative	Ruthlessness
	Guilt	Inhibition
Latency	Industriousness	Narrow virtuosity
	Inferiority	Inertia
Adolescence	Identity cohesion	Fanaticism
	Role confusion	Repudiation
Young adulthood	Intimacy	Promiscuity
	Isolation	Exclusivity
Adulthood	Generativity	Overextension
	Stagnation	Rejectivity
Maturity and old age	Ego integrity	Presumption
	Despair	Disdain

Source: Adapted from *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, by Erik H. Erikson, Joan M. Erikson, and Helen Q. Kivnick by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Copyright © 1986 by Joan M. Erikson, Erik H. Erikson, and Helen Kivnick.

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Questions about Human Nature

A personality theorist who delineates basic human strengths possesses an optimistic view of human nature. Erikson believed that although not everyone is successful in attaining hope, purpose, wisdom, and the other virtues, we all have the potential to do so. Nothing in our nature prevents it. Nor must we inevitably suffer conflict, anxiety, and neurosis because of instinctual biological forces.

Erikson's theory allows for optimism because each stage of psychosocial growth, although centered on a crisis, offers the possibility of a positive outcome. We are capable of resolving each situation in a way that is adaptive and strengthening. Even if we fail at one stage and develop a maladaptive response or a basic weakness, there is hope for change at a later stage.

We have the potential to direct consciously our growth throughout our lives. We are not exclusively products of childhood experiences. Although we have little control during the first four developmental stages, we gain increasing independence and the ability to choose ways of responding to crises and to society's demands. Childhood influences are important, but events at later stages can counteract unfortunate early experiences.

Erikson's theory is only partially deterministic. During the first four stages, the experiences to which we are exposed through parents, teachers, peer groups, and various opportunities are largely beyond our control. We have more chance to exercise free will during the last four stages, although the attitudes and strengths we have formed during the earlier stages will affect our choices.

In general, Erikson believed that personality is affected more by learning and experience than by heredity. Psychosocial experiences, not instinctual biological forces, are the greater determinant. Our ultimate, overriding goal is to develop a positive ego identity that incorporates all the basic strengths.

Assessment in Erikson's Theory

Erikson agreed with certain of Freud's theoretical formulations but deviated from Freudian thinking in his methods of assessing personality. Erikson questioned the usefulness and even the safety of some Freudian techniques, beginning with the psychoanalytic couch. To Erikson, asking patients to lie on a couch could lead to sadistic exploitation. It could create an illusion of objectivity, foster an overemphasis on unconscious material, and engender excessive impersonality and aloofness on the part of the therapist. To promote a more personal relationship between therapist and patient and to ensure that they viewed each other as equals, Erikson preferred that patients and therapists face each other and be seated in comfortable chairs.

In dealing with his patients, Erikson relied less on formal assessment techniques than did Freud. Erikson occasionally used free association but rarely attempted to analyze dreams, a technique he called wasteful and harmful. He believed that assessment techniques should be selected and modified to fit the unique requirements of the individual patient.

In developing his personality theory, Erikson used data obtained primarily from play therapy, anthropological studies, and psychohistorical analysis. For work with emotionally disturbed children and in research on normal children and adolescents, Erikson chose play therapy. He provided a variety of toys and observed how children interacted with them. The form and intensity of play revealed aspects of personality that might not be manifested verbally because of a child's limited powers of verbal expression.

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We mentioned earlier Erikson's anthropological studies of American Indians. Living among these groups to observe them, Erikson recorded their behavior and interviewed them at length, particularly with regard to child-rearing practices.

Psychohistorical Analysis

psychohistorical analysis The application of Erikson's lifespan theory, along with psychoanalytic principles, to the study of historical figures.

Erikson's most unusual assessment technique is **psychohistorical analysis**. These analyses are essentially biographical studies. Erikson used the framework of his lifespan theory of personality to describe the crises and the ways of coping of significant political, religious, and literary figures, such as Gandhi, Martin Luther, and George Bernard Shaw. Erikson's psychohistories typically focus on a significant crisis, an episode that represents a major life theme uniting past, present, and future activities. Using what he called "disciplined subjectivity," Erikson adopted the subject's viewpoint as his own to assess life events through that person's eyes.

Psychological Tests

Although Erikson did not use psychological tests for personality assessment, several instruments have been based on his formulations. The Ego-Identity Scale is designed to measure the development of ego identity during adolescence (Dignan, 1965). The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire, also for adolescents, contains 32 items to measure the dimensions of exploration and commitment (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995). The Loyola Generativity Scale (see Table 6-3) is a 20-item self-report inventory to measure the level of generativity or stagnation in adulthood (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992).

Research on Erikson's Theory

Erikson's primary research method was the case study. By now you are familiar with the weaknesses of this method—the difficulty of duplicating and verifying case material—but you also know that much useful information can be obtained through this technique. Erikson argued that case histories yield many insights into personality development and can help resolve a patient's problems.

Table-6-3 Examples of items from a scale to measure generativity

Do these apply to any middle-aged people you know?

1. I try to pass along to others the knowledge I have gained through my experiences.
2. I do not believe that other people need me.
3. I believe I have made a difference in the lives of other people.
4. Other people say I am a productive person.
5. I believe I have done nothing that will survive after I die.
6. People come to me for advice.
7. I believe that society cannot be responsible for providing sustenance and shelter for all homeless people.
8. I have important skills that I try to teach others.
9. I do not like to do volunteer work for charities.
10. Throughout my life I have made and kept many commitments to people, groups, and activities.

Source: Adapted from D.P. McAdams & E. de St. Aubin (1992). A theory of generativity and its assessment through self-report, behavioral acts, and narrative themes in autobiography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *62*, 1003–1015.

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Play Constructions

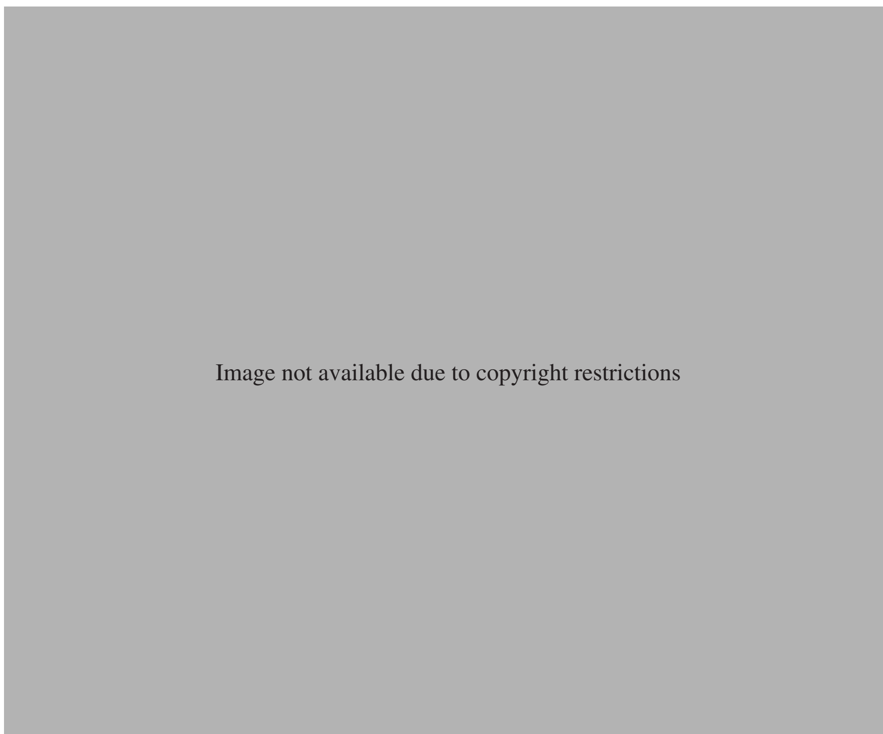
play constructions A personality assessment technique for children in which structures assembled from dolls, blocks, and other toys are analyzed.

Erikson used play therapy to conduct research on his theory, focusing on what he called **play constructions**. In one study, 300 boys and girls, ages 10 to 12, were asked to construct a scene from an imaginary movie using dolls, toy animals, automobiles, and wooden blocks. The girls tended to build static, peaceful scenes that contained low, enclosed structures. Intruders (animal figures or male figures, never female figures) tried to force their way into the interiors. By contrast, the boys focused on exteriors, action, and height. Their creations tended to be action-oriented, with tall towering structures and cars and people in motion (see Figure 6-1).

Trained as an orthodox Freudian, Erikson interpreted these play constructions along the psychoanalytic lines. He wrote:

> Sexual differences in the organization of a play space seem to parallel the morphology of genital differentiation itself: in the male, an external organ, erectable and intrusive in character … in the female, internal organs, with vestibular access, leading to a statically expectant ova. (Erikson, 1968, p. 271)

In other words, based on the determining effect of biological differences, girls would build low enclosures in which people are walled in, and boys would build towers.



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Erikson has been criticized for this view, which suggests that women are victims of their anatomy and that their personalities are determined by the absence of a penis. Erikson admitted that differences in play constructions could also result from societal sex-role training, in which girls are less oriented toward action, aggression, and achievement than boys are.

One replication of this study used younger children, boys and girls between the ages of 2 and 5 (Caplan, 1979). The results failed to support Erikson's findings. No significant sex differences were reported in the building of towers and enclosures. This raises the possibility that sex-role training was more complete in Erikson's 10- to 12-year-olds. Perhaps the younger children in this later study had not yet been sufficiently indoctrinated in the behavior society expected of them.

More than 50 years after Erikson's research on play constructions, traditional gender stereotyping with regard to toys and play behaviors persists. Most children still prefer gender-based toys. Boys typically play with trucks, soldiers, and guns. Girls typically play with dolls, jewelry, and toy kitchen implements.

These patterns of toy preferences have been found to exist as early as age 2 and are still taught and encouraged by many parents. It is the parents who purchase most of their children's toys (though often at the child's urging). Parents praise children for playing with the appropriate gender-typed toy and discourage them from playing with toys intended for the other sex. The message is learned quickly. One psychologist observed a boy who "had been playing with a race car and its driver when the driver's helmet fell off revealing long blond hair. The driver was a woman. The boy dropped the race car like it was a hot potato" (Martin, 1999, p. 49).

Studies show that fathers treat boys and girls in a more stereotypical way than mothers do. Thus, it is primarily the fathers who teach and reinforce gender-based play. They also instruct their sons and daughters in other gender-typed behaviors and attitudes. Fathers tend to reward passive, compliant behaviors in girls and assertive, aggressive behaviors in boys (Quiery, 1998).

Trust and Security

Erikson emphasized the importance of developing an early sense of trust if we are to achieve feelings of security and well-being later in life. This position has received strong research support (see, for example, Jacobson & Wille, 1986; Londerville & Main, 1981; Sroufe, Fox, & Pancake, 1983).

Studies of infants aged 12 to 18 months showed that those who had a strong emotional bond with their mother (therefore presumed to be high in trust) functioned, when observed 3 years later, at a higher social and emotional level than infants whose attachment to their mother was less secure. Children with a well-developed sense of trust were also more curious, sociable, and popular. They were more likely to be leaders at games and showed greater sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others. Those low in trust were more withdrawn socially and emotionally, reluctant to play with other children, less curious, and less forceful in pursuing goals.

A study of 50 survivors of the Holocaust who were interviewed some 30 to 40 years after the end of World War II (1945) showed that they had dealt successfully with all of Erikson's proposed psychosocial stages except the first: trust versus mistrust. Their view of other people included significantly more mistrust than trust (Suedfeld, Soriano, McMurtry, Paterson, Weiszbeck, & Krell, 2005). However, the fact that they were able to cope with the later developmental crises confirms Erikson's notion that positive events at later stages can counteract or overcome negative early experiences.

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The Psychosocial Stages

Other research has been concerned with the psychosocial developmental stages. Children aged 4, 8, and 11 were asked to make up stories based on several test pictures (Ciaccio, 1971). The stories were analyzed to determine which psychosocial stage they reflected. The results supported the themes proposed in Erikson's theory. For example, the stories of the 4-year-olds concerned autonomy (the stage just completed). Similarly, the stories of the older children reflected their developmental stages.

Psychohistorical analysis of the diaries, letters, and novels of Vera Brittain, a British feminist and writer, from age 21 into middle age, showed an initial concern with ego identity. This changed over time to a concern with intimacy and then generativity (Peterson & Stewart, 1990). These changes are in line with Erikson's developmental theory.

A study using the Inventory of Psychosocial Development, a test designed to assess adaptive and maladaptive development in Erikson's first six stages, found a significant relationship between happiness and adaptive development at each stage (Constantinople, 1969). Another study showed a high correlation between maladaptive development in the first six stages and a sense of alienation and uprootedness (Reimanis, 1974). These findings offer support for Erikson's work as does a study of adults ages 18 to 25 in Canada. That research found that the period of emerging adulthood was a time of increased psychological well-being (Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006).

Psychologists tested Erikson's belief that positive outcomes in resolving the identity crisis are related to positive outcomes at prior developmental stages (Waterman, Buebel, & Waterman, 1970). Adolescents who developed trust, autonomy, initiative, and industriousness (adaptive ways of coping) in the first four stages of psychosocial development displayed a high level of identity cohesion rather than role confusion. Adolescents who had not resolved their identity crisis and who experienced role confusion had not developed adaptive ways of coping in the earlier stages.

Three groups of men in Canada (ages 19–25, 35–55, and 65–87) were asked to take self-report measures of identity, self-worth, and psychological distress. The results confirmed Erikson's theory. The younger men experienced the highest levels of distress while the older men had the lowest rates of distress. This is in line with Erikson's view that "the older the individual, the better one is able to cope with life's challenges due to exposure and resolution of earlier psychological dilemmas" (Beaumont & Zukanovic, 2005, p. 77).

When adults in Britain ages 62 to 89 were asked to recall memories from earlier times the results supported the psychosocial developmental stages. Memories of their first decade of life focused on issues of trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry. Memories of their second decade (ages 11–20) dealt with identity issues while memories from young adulthood centered on intimacy. Thus, recollections of each succeeding period centered on those situations Erikson foresaw as crucial to development (Conway & Holmes, 2004).

Adolescent Development

An extensive research program on the adolescent stage of development identified five psychosocial types, or statuses, for that period (Marcia, 1966, 1980). These are identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, identity diffusion, and alienated achievement.

Identity achievement describes adolescents who are committed to occupational and ideological choices. A study of college students found a positive correlation between achieved identity status and objective measures of commitment (Streitmatter, 1993). These students had developed a strong ego identity. They were stable, concerned with

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realistic goals, and able to cope with changing environmental demands. They performed better on difficult tasks than adolescents experiencing role confusion. These stable adolescents majored in more difficult areas in college, attracted to courses in engineering and the physical sciences (Marcia & Friedman, 1970).

Male and female teens who reached the identity status earlier in adolescence were found to be more likely to have a stable intimate romantic relationship in their twenties (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). They were less likely to engage in binge drinking, illegal drug use, and high-risk sexual behaviors than those who had not achieved identity status (Schwartz et al., 2010).

A study of high school students found that the identity achievement status correlated highly with self-esteem and positive forms of coping. It represented the most psychologically and socially mature identity status (Markstron & Marshall, 2007). And a large-scale research program including more than 120 studies found that identity achievement status rose over late adolescence and young adulthood, in line with Erikson's theory (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010).

There is also evidence that adolescents who engaged in serious contemplation about what they wanted to do with their lives, and so were more likely to achieve an identity, had parents who provided direction and control in a loving and caring way, in contrast to parents who were either too permissive or too authoritarian (Berzonsky, 2004).

Moratorium, the second adolescent status, describes people who are still undergoing their identity crisis. Their occupational and ideological commitments are vague. They hold ambivalent views toward authority figures, alternately rebelling and needing guidance from them. Their behavior ranges from indecisive to active and creative (Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989; Podd, Marcia, & Rubin, 1968). They also tend to daydream, to believe in supernatural phenomena, and to enjoy behaving childishly (Bilsker & Marcia, 1991).

Foreclosure describes adolescents who have not experienced an identity crisis but who are firmly committed to an occupation and an ideology. However, these commitments often have been determined for them by their parents and do not result from the adolescents' deliberate choice. These teens tend to be rigid and authoritarian and have difficulty coping with change (Marcia, 1967). However, a study of 23 male and 37 female college students showed that those in the foreclosure status tended to be achievement-oriented and to focus their energy toward external rather than internal goals (Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992).

The *identity diffusion* status characterizes people who have no occupational or ideological commitments in adolescence and who may not have experienced an identity crisis. Their chosen lifestyle may actively reject commitments and in the extreme may result in aimless drifting. These adolescents have distant relationships with their parents, whom they see as indifferent and rejecting (Waterman, 1982).

Several studies of adolescents in Greece, Belgium, and the United States in the identity diffusion status showed that they ranked lower in psychological adjustment and subjective well-being and higher in unstable self-image and interpersonal relationships. They were also more likely to engage in impulsive and self-destructive behavior, to show an excessive need for attention, and to have grandiose fantasies (Crawford, Cohen, Johnson, Sneed, & Brook, 2004; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, & Vansteenkiste, 2005; Vleioras & Bosma, 2005).

The fifth status, *alienated achievement*, describes adolescents who have experienced an identity crisis, have no occupational goal, and cling to beliefs that are critical of the social and economic system. Their commitment to this rationale precludes any career that would entangle them in the very system they oppose. As students they tend to be cerebral, philosophical, and cynical (Marcia & Friedman, 1970; Orlofsky, Marcia, & Lesser, 1973).

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Four of these statuses, in the following order (identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement), represent increasingly successful resolutions of the identity problem. Erikson predicted that people who are close to achieving or who have achieved an integrated ego identity will have greater ego strength than those who are farther from resolving their identity dilemma. That prediction was supported by research on college men (Bourne, 1978a, 1978b).

A study of high school students found that those who were more heavily involved in extracurricular and volunteer activities were higher in the ego strength of fidelity than were those not so involved (Markstrom, Li, Blackshire, & Wilfong, 2005).

In other research, sex differences were found in the resolution of the identity crisis. Men in one study showed a tendency toward separation and detachment from other people; women showed a tendency toward connection and attachment to others (Mellor, 1989). Other studies support and extend that finding, showing that male identity focuses on individual competence and knowledge whereas female identity is more centered on relating to others. In other words, when women establish an identity, they depend heavily on social relationships. Men focus more on self and individual skills and abilities (Curry, 1998). Data from teenagers in the Netherlands also suggest that female adolescents form an identity at an earlier age than male adolescents, but that most males achieve some level of identity by the end of the teen years (Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2010).

You may recall your own adolescence as a turbulent and stressful period. Three key elements for this developmental stage have been identified as follows.

- Conflict with parents, characterized by a forceful resistance to adult authority;
- Mood disruption, characterized by a volatile emotional life, mood swings, and episodes of depression; and
- Risky behaviors, characterized by reckless, rule-breaking, and antisocial behavior that may harm themselves and others.

A study in which 155 adolescents kept diaries of their daily interactions over a 2-week period showed that 31 percent of their interactions involved conflicts with other people. The teenage subjects reported that conflicts with their parents were more important to them, and more emotionally intense, than were conflicts with their peers (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2000).

Studies tracking individuals from childhood to adolescence found that many of those who experienced depression and other emotional problems during the teen years had also suffered some form of psychological distress as children. This suggests that difficulties reported in adolescence do not necessarily arise because of adolescence (Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

HIGHLIGHTS: Research on Erikson's Ideas

Children with a well-developed *sense of trust* tend to be:

- Well-developed socially and emotionally
- Popular
- High in curiosity
- Sensitive to the needs and feelings of other people

Adolescence includes the following types or *statuses*:

- Identity achievement
- Moratorium

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- Foreclosure
- Identity diffusion
- Alienated achievement

Adolescents high in *identity achievement* tend to:

- Have a strong sense of ego identity
- Be concerned with realistic goals
- Score high in self-esteem
- Establish mature romantic relationships in young adulthood

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Virtual Identity

Computer games and Internet sites may afford adolescents a unique, high-tech opportunity to do precisely what Erikson said was so necessary at that developmental stage: to try different roles to see which offers the best fit. And when surfing the Web, one can do so anonymously. This is exemplified in the role-playing game called *Dungeons and Dragons*, which allowed young people to take on fictional personas to act out complex fantasies.

The word *dungeon* is part of a specialized computer vocabulary to denote a virtual place. Virtual places shared by a number of computer users simultaneously are known as multiuser dungeons or MUDs. MUDs allow a player to interact with others and also to build a personal virtual world whose imaginary characters interact with others. Participants can play roles as like or unlike their real selves as they choose without revealing their real identity. "You can be whoever you want to be," one writer noted. "You can completely redefine yourself if you want" (Turkle, 1995, p. 184). That is precisely what Erikson urged us to do during adolescence, to experiment with different identities.

A study of MUD players in Germany, average age 25, found that interpersonal attraction among the players increased the longer they played, as did the intensity of their social identification with the virtual community (Utz, 2003). The degree of identification with their virtual world was thought to be as intense and satisfying as identifying with the real world and thus can provide a means of studying social interaction patterns, expressions of identity, and sex differences in play among children (Calvert, Strouse, Strong, Huffaker, & Lai, 2009).

Of course this can lead to the danger that a person could become so absorbed in a virtual identity that it comes to replace the true developing self. But that can also happen in the real world by adopting a different persona. The point is that for some adolescents the Internet offers a secure way of trying to establish an identity.

Research in Australia demonstrated that children and adolescents who score high in loneliness and social anxiety were far more likely to communicate online with others about personal and intimate matters than children and adolescents who score lower in loneliness and anxiety (Bonetti, Campbell, & Gilmore, 2010). Other data show that one's personal home page plays an important role in identity formation. These researchers concluded: "Children who create personal home pages have strong feelings of mastery and use personal home pages to express who they are in a way that may be more comfortable than telling people face-to-face" (Schmitt, Dayanim, & Matthias, 2008, p. 504).

Gender and Ego Identity

Erikson believed that social and historical factors affect the formation of ego identity, which in turn affects the nature of the personality. The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s provided a real-world laboratory in which to test the effects of social forces. Specifically, psychologists asked whether women then at the adolescent stage of

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psychosocial development, the time of striving for an ego identity, were more influenced by the women's movement than women who were older at that time. It was assumed that the identity of the older women already had been formed.

Two studies answered yes. Both chose women who had graduated from one of three colleges during the 1940s to mid-1960s. Data were gathered from interviews, questionnaires, and self-report personality tests. Women attending college when the women's movement began were found to have greater aspirations. They valued their independence more than did the older women and eventually attained higher levels of education, job status, and income. They were more assertive and self-confident in middle age than were women who had passed through the adolescent stage before the advent of the women's movement (Duncan & Agronick, 1995; Helson, Stewart, & Ostrove, 1995).

One legacy of the women's movement is that more adolescent women today include a career orientation as part of their ego identity. This viewpoint has been found to affect dating behavior as well as age at the time of marriage (Matula, Huston, Grotevant, & Zamutt, 1992). Questionnaire studies of several hundred women college students revealed that those who are career oriented tend to marry later in life. They date less while in college and are more wary of committed relationships. The same study found the opposite situation for men. Questionnaire results for 56 college men revealed that the stronger their career identity, the more committed they were to a dating relationship. Indeed, they were unlikely to become involved in a dating relationship until they felt a definite commitment to an occupation.

Additional longitudinal research studied women who graduated from college in the 1960s and the men they married. It focused on changes in their emotional life over time, specifically,

- Changes in positive emotionality (PEM), defined as an active, happy involvement in one's work and social environments, and
- Negative emotionality (NEM), characterized by feelings of stress, anxiety, anger, and other negative emotions.

Measures of these two factors, taken at various ages from late 20s to middle 50s, showed that in young adulthood women tended to score higher on NEM than did their spouses and to score higher on PEM in late middle age. These findings were interpreted by the investigators to indicate that women showed greater feelings of social power, accomplishment, and breadth of interest, along with reduced stress and alienation, once the period of child rearing ended. Thus, social factors were seen to influence the affective dimension of ego identity (Helson & Klohnen, 1998).

Erikson defined identity consolidation as the process of dealing successfully with the social realities of adult life. This involves making adjustments to the changing demands of our social world. He believed that identity consolidation usually occurs during the 20s, as people assume adult responsibilities of marriage, family, and career. A study of women college graduates evaluated at ages 21 and 27 found that those who ranked high in ego resiliency and had found an identity in marriage were higher in identity consolidation than those who did not meet these criteria (Pals, 1999).

A study of women ages 22 to 60 found a positive relationship between their readiness and willingness to change and changes in their identity commitment at different developmental stages. Looking ahead and contemplating life changes was positively linked to the likelihood of exploring a different identity later in life (Anthis & LaVoie, 2006). Some women must also deal with changing physical realities of adult life, such as body image in breast cancer patients after surgery. A study of these women in Britain found that the alteration of body image led to an identity crisis that was difficult to resolve (Piot-Ziegler, Sassi, Raffoul, & Delaloye, 2010).

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The Identity Crisis

Some research has focused on the timing of the identity crisis. Erikson suggested that it began around age 12 and was resolved, one way or another, by approximately age 18. However, for some people the identity crisis may not occur until later. In one study, up to 30 percent of the research participants were still searching for an identity as late as age 24 (Archer, 1982).

Also, college may delay the resolution of the identity crisis and prolong the period during which young adults experiment with different roles and ideologies (Cote & Levine, 1988). When college students were compared with people of the same age who held full-time jobs, it was found that employed persons had achieved ego identity at an earlier age than students had. The students remained longer in the moratorium status (Adams & Fitch, 1982). Additional research suggests that the construction of a person's identity may even be a continuing process that occurs over the entire life span (McAdams, 2001).

Generativity

Research on the adulthood stage of psychosocial development has shown that generativity in middle age is positively correlated with power and with intimacy motivation (McAdams, Ruetzel, & Foley, 1986). Thus, as Erikson's theory predicts, generativity evokes the needs to feel close to others and to feel strong in relation to them. Another study associated generativity with nurturance (Van de Water & McAdams, 1989). All these are necessary characteristics for teaching and mentoring the next generation.

Generativity in middle age appears to be significantly related to having experienced warm, affectionate parenting in childhood (Franz, McClelland, & Weinberger, 1991). Research supports the importance of both mother and father to a child's emotional well-being. Middle-aged adults who scored high in generativity tended to believe in the goodness and worth of human life and to feel happier and more satisfied with their own life than did people who scored low in generativity (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; Van de Water & McAdams, 1989).

Other studies extended these findings. People high in generativity scored higher on extraversion, conscientiousness, altruism, competence, dutifulness, and openness to new experiences than people low in generativity (Cox, Wilt, Olson, & McAdams, 2010; Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997). Those high in generativity were more likely to be involved in satisfying social relationships, feel attached to their community, and be more emotionally stable (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998). Also, those high in generativity were more likely to have successful marriages, greater success at work, and more close friendships. They displayed more altruistic behavior than those who scored low on generativity (Westermeyer, 2004). A study of adults in Belgium showed that those high in generativity were also high on extraversion, agreeableness, openness to new experiences, and conscientiousness (Van Hiel, Mervielde, & De Fruyt, 2006).

A strong positive association has been found between generativity and psychological well-being; this held for people at midlife who did not have children as well as for those who were parents. This relationship between generativity and well-being was highest among people who reported satisfaction and success from their job and career, however, rather than satisfaction and success as a parent (Clark & Arnold, 2008; Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008).

Two longitudinal studies of college-educated women tested and observed at intervals from ages 31 to 48 found that those who were high in generativity at midlife scored significantly higher in emotional well-being than those low in generativity (Vandewater, Ostrove, & Stewart, 1997). Another longitudinal study of college-educated women

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found that those who valued social recognition and achievement had more fully developed identities in their 40s, and were significantly higher in generativity, than were those who did not value social recognition and achievement (Helson & Srivastava, 2001).

Additional research on college-educated women in their 40s found that, as Erikson predicted, generativity was higher during that stage of life than it was when the women were in their 20s. However, this study also reported, contrary to Erikson's view, that the level of generativity remained at the same level in these women well into their 60s (Zucker, Ostrove, & Stewart, 2002).

In a related study, college-educated women who scored high in generativity at age 43 maintained that level 10 years later. They also demonstrated a higher level of care-giving to their aging parents and reported a higher level of care for their spouses and children than did women scoring low in generativity at age 43 (Peterson, 2002).

When a group of 70 men and women were asked to describe the major themes of their life, persons who had previously scored high on the Loyola Generativity Scale revealed different issues from persons who had scored low. Common themes of the high scorers included some event of good fortune in their early life, sensitivity to the suffering of others, a stable personal belief system, and clear goals for themselves and for society. Low scorers did not record any of these themes (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997).

A group of middle-aged adults were asked to write accounts of personally meaningful episodes from their past, including events that were high points, low points, and turning points. Those who scored high in generativity were far more likely to describe scenes in which a negative life experienced was transformed into a positive redemptive experience. Those who scored low in generativity tended to describe the opposite, in which a positive life experience was transformed into a negative life event. Those high in generativity also scored significantly higher on measures of life satisfaction and self-esteem than did those low in generativity (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). Thus, we may conclude that, as Erikson's theory suggests, generativity offers many benefits in the midlife years.

However, large-scale cultural changes may have a negative impact on the attitude of younger generations toward their elders, which may prevent useful mentoring activities from occurring. Research in Hong Kong found a marked decrease in generativity among older people who felt out of touch with the developments of modern technology. They felt obsolete with regard to the Internet and social media and so were unable to relate to and mentor young generations. They came to believe they were not valued or respected, which led to a disengagement from generative goals and behaviors (Cheng, 2009).

Maturity

Erikson believed that people in the maturity and old age stage of psychosocial development spend time recalling and examining their life, accepting or regretting past choices. A study using 49 psychologists as research participants found that most of their memories were of college and early adult years, the period involving the greatest number of critical decisions that affected the course of their life (Mackavey, Malley, & Stewart, 1991). Other research found that elderly subjects who scored high in ego integrity devoted time to reviewing their life to resolve troubling issues and come to a better understanding of their circumstances. In general, persons scoring low in ego integrity reported that they did not engage in such self-examination (Taft & Nehrke, 1990). Studies of adults in their 50s and 60s found that, as Erikson predicted, acknowledging regrets

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and missed opportunities related directly to life satisfaction and physical health for both men and women (Torges, Stewart, & Duncan, 2008; Torges, Stewart, & Miner-Rubino, 2005).

A study in Belgium of adults in their 60s and 70s found that the achievement of ego integrity was linked to high feelings of subjective well-being, positive psychological health, a lower fear of death, and less bitterness and resentment (Van Hiel & VanSteenkiste, 2009).

A comparison of the younger and older stages of the life span in a sample of adults ages 17–82 found that older people were far more concerned with generativity and ego integrity, and less concerned with ego identity, than were younger people. These findings support Erikson's views. The results also found a significant positive correlation between age and subjective well-being; in general, older people were happier than younger people (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). A study of men and women in Australia ages 55 to 93 showed that continued involvement in family and community activities led to continued feelings of generativity well into old age (Warburton, McLaughlin, & Pinsker, 2006).

In another study, younger adults (ages 25–35) were compared with older adults (ages 60–85). The research showed no significant differences between the groups in reported frequency of life reflections. However, the reasons for reflecting on life events did differ. Younger people engaged in reflection to gain self-insight and find solutions to current problems. Older people reflected on their past to evaluate their lives and achieve a sense of ego integrity (Staudinger, 2001a, 2001b).

HIGHLIGHTS: Research on Erikson's Ideas

Establishing a *virtual identity* online:

- Allows you to try on different identities
- Can be as satisfying as establishing an identity in the real world
- Can play both a positive and a negative role in identify formation
- May be used more by people who are lonely and socially anxious

Formation of *ego identity in women*:

- Was influenced (for those at the time) by the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s
- Is more influenced by career concerns
- Is linked to the willingness to change
- May be affected by changes in body image

People high in *generativity* tend to be:

- Happy and satisfied with their lives, and successful in their marriages and careers
- Extraverted, conscientious, and open to new experiences
- High in self-esteem

People high in *ego integrity*:

- Spend quality time examining their past
- Can acknowledge regrets and missed opportunities
- Have few feelings of bitterness and resentment

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Gender differences in aging may make it more difficult for women than for men to engage in a dispassionate process of reflection, or taking stock of life, such as Erikson described. This was demonstrated in research involving adults in their 60s. Men reported much higher levels of identity, certainty, confidence, and power than women did (Miner-Rubino, Winter, & Stewart, 2004). The so-called double standard in society considers aging as more negative for women and sees women as “old” at an earlier age than men. For example, whereas a 50-year-old male actor may still be offered thoughtful, mature, and powerful movie roles, a 50-year-old female actor may be stereotyped as a widow or grandmother, if she is offered movie roles at all.

In addition, women tend to live longer than men, so they are more likely to have to deal with issues of illness and incapacity, bereavement, loss of social support, and reduced income. This may contribute to the observation that women’s retrospective reviews of their lives are often less positive than those of men and more likely to lead to the condition Erikson noted as despair in later years, rather than ego integrity (Rainey, 1998).

Ethnic Identity

One aspect of ego development not considered by Erikson is the impact of ethnic identity. Research on this topic consistently shows the importance of racial or ethnic identity to minority groups; denying one’s racial identity can be stressful (see, for example, Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007). Many studies of Latino, Asian, and Black teenagers in the United States and in Canada show clearly that a strong ethnic identity is related to psychological well-being, high self-esteem, strong social bonds, and good academic motivation (Chae & Foley, 2010; Kiang, Witkow, Baldomar, & Fuligni, 2010; Smith & Silva, 2011; Usborne & Taylor, 2010; Whittaker & Neville, 2010; Yap, Settles, & Pratt-Hyatt, 2011).

Research involving Black adolescents showed clear, consistent, and strong relationships between racial identity and psychological health. Those who scored high on racial identity were also high in subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and self-esteem (Constantine, Alleyne, Wallace, & Franklin-Jackson, 2006; Pillay, 2005). A study of Black, Asian, and biracial teens found that self-esteem was highest among Blacks and lowest among Asians. The self-esteem of the biracial adolescents was significantly lower than for Blacks and significantly higher than for Asians (Bracey, Bamaca, & Umana-Taylor, 2004). Thus, racial identity appeared to be a stronger and more important factor for self-esteem among Black adolescents than among biracial or Asian adolescents.

Group esteem (that is, how people feel about being members of their racial or ethnic group) has been shown to increase in African-American and Latino-American teenagers during the period of early and middle adolescence. Group esteem among White students remained stable; it measured high at both the beginning and the end of the period studied (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006).

Other research found that Black adolescents high in ethnic identity expressed less positive attitudes toward drugs and more positive attitudes toward school, which were related to positive behaviors at school. Those who scored high on a measure of anti-White attitudes were far more likely to use drugs, have negative attitudes toward school, and misbehave at school (Resnicow, Soler, Braithwaite, Ben Selassie, & Smith, 1999). Students who experienced more racism reported higher stress and lower psychological functioning than those who experienced little or no racism (Bynum, Burton, & Best, 2007).

A study of Black women and Hispanic women found that identity confusion (a conflict in identity between one’s minority culture and the majority culture) may lead to

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eating disorders. Identification with a North American model of beauty that emphasizes extreme thinness created in some women a tendency to exhibit disorders such as anorexia. The researchers suggested that this condition resulted from an attempt to emulate the appearance standards of the ideal woman of the majority White culture (Harris & Kuba, 1997).

Studies of Asian-American and Hispanic-American adolescents confirm that ethnicity is central to forming an ego identity. A strong ethnic identity was associated with high self-esteem and with better peer and family relations (Phinney & Chavira, 1992). A study of Hispanic-American teens found that those who attended predominantly White schools reported significantly higher levels of ethnic identity than those who attended more ethnically balanced schools (Umana-Taylor, 2004). Other research found that a strong ethnic identity commitment among Latinos served as a buffer or protector against stress and also enhanced subjective well-being and academic achievement (Chang & Le, 2010; French & Chavez, 2010; Torres & Ong, 2010). Young Asian-Americans with high ethnic identity showed stronger resistance to drinking alcoholic beverages and smoking marijuana than Asian-Americans with a higher degree of assimilation into the majority culture (Suinn, 1999).

One model of ethnic identity for African-American adolescents is the Revised Racial Identity Model proposed by William Cross. He published the 64-item Cross Racial Identity Scale to measure the developmental stages of his model. Research has shown the scale to be a valid test of ethnic identity (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). Cross posits four stages in the development of a psychologically healthy Black identity (Cokley, 2002): Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization.

The *pre-encounter stage* includes three identity clusters. The pre-encounter assimilation identity contains little racial awareness or racial identity. The pre-encounter miseducation identity internalizes negative stereotypes about being Black. The pre-encounter self-hatred identity involves holding highly negative views about Blacks, resulting in anti-Black and self-hating attitudes.

In the *encounter stage* the person is subjected to racism or discrimination, which causes a shift in the adolescent's worldview. The *immersion-emersion stage* proposes two identities. The immersion-emersion intense Black involvement identity celebrates everything Black as good and desirable. The immersion-emersion anti-White identity views everything White as evil and wrong.

The *internalization stage* also consists of two identities. One is Black nationalism, which adheres to a pro-Black Afrocentric perspective, whereas the multiculturalist inclusive identity embraces not only a Black identity but also other types of ethnic, racial, and gender identity.

A study of Black men (average age 20) showed that those in the pre-encounter stage of their ethnic identity reported significantly less self-esteem, greater psychological distress, and lower psychological well-being than those in the internalization stage (Pierre & Mahalik, 2005). And a study of Black college students found that as racial identity proceeded from the earliest through the more mature stages of this model, the level of defense mechanisms changed from the least sophisticated and immature defenses to more mature ones. This is what could be predicted as a person's racial identity becomes more fully developed (Nghe & Mahalik, 2001).

The importance of this kind of minority ego identity development model lies in the recognition of ethnic identity as a vital component of ego identity and in the suggestion that ethnic identity develops over a series of stages, similar to the concept of the psychosocial stages. As we noted, Erikson did not deal directly with the concept of ethnic identity, but this model adheres to the developmental pattern he proposed.

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Gender Preference Identity

Another aspect of ego identity not considered directly by Erikson is gender preference identity, which may affect overall ego identity and vary as a function of ethnic identity. For example, a study of White, Black, and Hispanic children (average age 11) found that the Black and Hispanic children reported far more pressure for gender conformity than did the White children (Corby, Hodges, & Perry, 2007).

Researchers have proposed that homosexual or gay identity develops over a series of stages, similar to the way Erikson and others explained the development of ego identity or ethnic identity. One model lists four stages in the development of gender preference identity (Frable, 1997).

1. Sensitization. This stage, which occurs prior to adolescence, refers to one's initial perception of being different from peers of the same sex.
2. Identity confusion. This adolescent stage is marked by the confusing, perhaps frightening, realization that one's feelings and thoughts could be characterized as homosexual.
3. Identity assumption. During this stage the person comes to believe that he or she is homosexual and begins to accept the beginnings of a gay identity.
4. Commitment. In this stage the person fully accepts the gay identity as a way of life.

Studies have shown that people who score high on gay identity self-report inventories also score high on measures of mental and emotional well-being and express no desire to alter their identity or to conceal it from other people (Frable, 1997). A study of homosexual and bisexual men found no differences in self-esteem, emotional well-being, and general level of adjustment between those who believed they were stigmatized socially because of their gender preference and those who did not feel so stigmatized. However, men who kept their gender preference less visible in their social behaviors scored higher in self-esteem and well-being than men who were more openly gay in their social behaviors (Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997).

Those who have conflicts over their gender preference have been found to experience negative psychological effects. These include low self-esteem, stress, the use of neurotic defenses, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse as well as feelings of failure, guilt, and pessimism (Liu, Rochlen, & Mohr, 2005).

A study of male inmates in a medium-security prison found that those whose personality style included a strong need for personal relationships had less gender role conflict. "This need for others may override their homophobia or fear of appearing feminine" in a culture such as prison, which typically dictates a wariness of forming close relationships with other inmates. Those whose personalities showed less need for personal contact had greater gender role conflict about homosexual tendencies (Schwartz, Buboltz, Seemann, & Flye, 2004, p. 63).

HIGHLIGHTS: Research on Erikson's Ideas

People of ethnic minorities who score high in *ethnic and racial identity* tend to:

- Score high in subjective well-being and self-esteem
- Have less positive attitudes toward illegal drugs
- Get along well with family and peers
- Perform better in school
- Experience less stress

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Gender preference research shows that:

- Black and Hispanic children feel great pressure to conform to gender roles
- Conflicts over gender preference are related to low self-esteem, guilt, and stress
- Those high in gay identity show high self-esteem and no desire to change

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Reflections on Erikson's Theory

Erikson's substantial contributions to psychology include the recognition of personality development throughout the life span, the concept of the identity crisis in adolescence, and the incorporation in his theory of the impact of cultural, social, and historical forces. However, his system does not lack critics. Some point to ambiguous terms and concepts, conclusions drawn in the absence of supporting data, and an overall lack of precision (Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981; Waterman, 1982). Erikson agreed that these charges were valid and blamed them on his artistic temperament and lack of formal training in science. He wrote, "I came to psychology from art, which may explain, if not justify, the fact that at times the reader will find me painting contexts and backgrounds where he would rather have me point to facts and concepts" (Erikson, 1950, p. 13).

A more specific criticism relates to the incomplete description of the developmental stage of maturity, which Erikson attempted to correct in his 1986 book (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986). Also, some psychologists question whether personality development after age 55 is likely to be as positive as Erikson suggested with his concept of ego integrity. For many people, this stage of life is characterized by pain, loss, and depression, even for people who develop the basic strength of wisdom.

Erikson's position on sex differences, as revealed in his interpretation of the play-constructions research, has also come under attack. What he saw as biologically based differences in personality for boys and girls, emerging from the presence or absence of a penis, could as well be cultural differences or the result of sex-role training. Erikson later admitted these possibilities.

Erikson's developmental stages may not be applicable to women. When social psychologist Carol Tavris read Erikson's description of his so-called stages of *man*, she wrote, "It was worrying. I wasn't having any of my crises in the right order…. My identity was shaky, although I was no longer a teenager, and I hadn't married when I was supposed to, which was putting my intimacy and generativity crises on hold" (Tavris, 1992, p. 37).

Some critics charge that Erikson's personality theory does not apply to people in reduced economic circumstances who cannot afford a moratorium in adolescence to explore different roles and develop an ego identity. This stage may be a luxury available only to those with the means to attend college or take time out to travel (Slugoski & Ginsburg, 1989).

Erikson showed little interest in responding to his critics. He recognized that there are many ways of describing personality development and that no single view was adequate. His influence grew through his books and the work of succeeding generations of psychologists, psychiatrists, teachers, and counselors who found in his ideas useful ways to describe personality development from infancy through old age. His ideas have been recognized in both professional and popular circles. *Time* magazine called him the "most influential living psychoanalyst" (March 17, 1975), and *Psychology Today* described him as "an authentic intellectual hero" (Hall, 1983, p. 22).

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His concepts are useful in education, social work, vocational and marriage counseling, and clinical practice with children and adolescents. His work "continues to prove meaningful for contemporary psychology and social thought" (J. Clark, 2010, p. 59). The Erikson Institute for Early Childhood Education was established at Chicago's Loyola University.

The field of life-span developmental psychology, which has seen a massive increase in research and theory in recent years, owes much of its spark to Erikson's approach, as does the current interest in developmental problems of middle and old age.

In addition, Erikson's method of play therapy has become a standard diagnostic and therapeutic tool for work with emotionally disturbed and abused children. Youngsters who cannot verbalize the details of a physical or sexual attack can express their feelings through play, using dolls to represent themselves and their abusers.

Chapter Summary

Erikson suffered several personal identity crises and developed a personality theory in which the search for identity plays a major role. He built on Freud's theory by elaborating on the developmental stages, emphasizing the ego over the id, and recognizing the impact on personality of culture, society, and history. The growth of personality is divided into eight stages. A conflict at each stage confronts the person with adaptive and maladaptive ways of coping. Development is governed by the epigenetic principle; each stage depends on genetic forces but the environment helps determine whether they are realized.

The oral-sensory stage (birth to age 1) can result in trust or mistrust. The muscular-anal stage (ages 1 to 3) leads to an autonomous will or to self-doubt. The locomotor-genital stage (3 to 5) develops initiative or guilt. The latency stage (6 to 11) results in industriousness or inferiority. Adolescence (12 to 18) is the stage in which the ego identity is formed (the time of the identity crisis), leading to identity cohesion or role confusion. Young adulthood (18 to 35) results in intimacy or isolation. Adulthood (35 to 55) leads to generativity or stagnation. Maturity (over 55) is expressed in ego integrity or despair.

Each stage allows for the development of basic strengths that emerge from the adaptive ways of coping with the conflicts. The basic strengths are hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom. Maldevelopment can occur if the ego consists solely of either the adaptive or the maladaptive tendency.

Erikson presented a flattering, optimistic image of human nature. We have the ability to achieve basic strengths, to resolve each conflict in a positive way, and to consciously direct our growth. We are not victims of biological forces or childhood experiences and are influenced more by learning and social interactions than by heredity.

Erikson's assessment methods were play therapy, anthropological studies, and psychohistorical analysis. His research relied on case studies. There is considerable research support for the first six stages of psychosocial development and for the concept of ego identity. However, the identity crisis may occur later than Erikson believed, and attending college may delay resolution of the crisis. Other research confirms the importance of developing a sense of trust early in life, and the benefits of generativity in middle age. Among minority group members, the formation of ethnic identity in adolescence may affect the development of ego identity and influence subsequent behavior. The Cross Racial Identity Model describes four stages in the development of a psychologically healthy adolescent Black identity. Gender preference identity may also affect characteristics of ego identity. People who have conflicts about their gender preference appear to be less psychologically healthy than people who experience no such conflicts.

Criticisms of Erikson's theory focus on ambiguous terminology, incomplete descriptions of the psychosocial stages, and poorly supported claims of male-female personality differences based on biological factors.

Review Questions

1. Describe the kinds of identity crises Erikson experienced in childhood and adolescence. Note how they were reflected in his theory.
2. In what ways is Erikson's theory similar to and different from Freud's theory?

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3. What did Erikson mean by the concept of identity confusion? What evidence did he find for it among Native Americans? Among combat veterans of World War II?
4. How does Erikson's epigenetic principle of maturation account for the effects of genetic and social factors on personality?
5. Describe the role of conflict in the stages of psychosocial development.
6. What are two ways of responding to the crisis that develops at each stage of growth?
7. Describe the four childhood stages of psychosocial development. Discuss the effects of various parental behaviors on the possible outcomes of each stage.
8. Contrast identity cohesion and role confusion as adaptive versus maladaptive ways of coping during adolescence.
9. What is the major difference between the first four developmental stages and the last four developmental stages?
10. What factors affect the development of ego identity? Why do some people fail to achieve an identity at this stage?
11. How can the conflicts of the adult stages of psychosocial development be resolved in positive ways?
12. Describe the concept of generativity and give an example of how it can be achieved.
13. What are the two ways of adapting to maturity and old age? How can a person achieve the positive way of adapting?
14. Describe the basic strengths at each stage of psychosocial development.
15. Distinguish between the two types of maldevelopment. How can these conditions be corrected?
16. How does Erikson's image of human nature differ from Freud's?
17. What methods of assessment did Erikson use in developing his theory?
18. Based on the results of his play-constructions research, what did Erikson conclude about sex differences in personality? On what grounds can we criticize these conclusions?
19. Describe research findings on the development of ego identity in adolescence and on generativity in middle age.
20. Discuss how the ethnic identity of ethnic-minority adolescents can affect the formation of ego identity as well as subsequent attitudes and behavior.
21. How can online role-playing games help adolescents establish an ego identity?
22. In what ways do people high in generativity differ from people low in generativity?
23. According to Erikson, what role did generativity play in old age, the last stage of development?
24. Describe the proposed stages for the development of gender preference identity.
25. What criticisms have been made of Erikson's approach to personality? What is your opinion of his theory relative to the others you have studied so far?

Suggested Readings

Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton. A collection of essays covering child-rearing practices, family life, and social and cultural structures, illustrating their relationship to personality development. The book was an instant success with scholars and the general public.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton. Erikson's classic work on the identity crisis and ways of coping with conflict at this stage of development.

Erikson, E. H. (1987). *A way of looking at things: Selected papers from 1930 to 1980*. New York: Norton. A collection of Erikson's writings on children's play constructions, adult dreams, cross-cultural research, and development over the life cycle. Edited by Stephen Schlein.

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Wallerstein, R. S. (1995). Erik Erikson (1902–1994). *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, *76*, 173–175. Obituaries and tributes to Erik Erikson.

Josselson, R. (1996). *Revising herself: The story of women's identity from college to midlife*. New York: Oxford University Press. In an outgrowth of Erikson's theory, this longitudinal account compiled from interviews traces the cultural changes in women's roles and identities in the last third of the 20th century.

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