

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory

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Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory is comprised of eight stages, ranging from birth through adulthood (Berk, 2014). Central to each stage is a crisis where individuals work toward a positive or negative resolution. Although a negative resolution of a stage does not guarantee negative resolutions for future stages, a negative resolution could influence the outcome of future stages. Erikson is considered a neo-Freudian and used Freud's theory of personality as a foundation for his own. However, Erikson's theory is termed a psychosocial theory because the focus is on individuals' relationships with others.

The first stage is basic trust versus basic mistrust (Erikson, 1963). Beginning at birth, infants develop either trust or mistrust about their surroundings. Infants with responsive caregivers will develop a sense of trust about their environment whereas those without responsive caregivers will develop a sense of mistrust.

The second stage is autonomy versus shame and doubt (Erikson, 1963). From 1 to 3 years old, children begin to make their own decisions. When caregivers offer choices, children will develop autonomy. However, when caregivers are too restrictive or punish children's decisions, children will develop shame and doubt about their decisions.

The third stage is initiative versus guilt (Erikson, 1963). From 3 to 6 years old, children interact with other children, children develop a sense of purpose. Children with supportive caregivers will develop initiative. Children with parents who are too restrictive will develop guilt.

The fourth stage is industry versus inferiority (Erikson, 1963). From 6 to 11 years old, children must learn about societal rules. Children who learn the rules of society develop industry whereas those who do not learn the rules of society develop inferiority. Learning typically occurs in the context of school.

The ages for the remaining four stages follow developmental periods rather than precise ages. During adolescence, individuals enter the identity versus role confusion stage (Erikson, 1963). Adolescents who develop an understanding of who they are will develop identity whereas those who do not will develop role confusion.

During early adulthood, individuals enter the intimacy versus isolation stage (Erikson, 1963). Individuals in early adulthood develop intimacy when they form close relationships with others, such as in marriage. Those not able to establish close relationships with others develop isolation.

During middle adulthood, individuals enter the generativity versus stagnation stage (Erikson, 1963). Individuals in middle adulthood develop generativity when their focus shifts to the next generation. Those who focus on themselves instead of children or those younger than themselves develop stagnation.

Finally, during late adulthood, individuals enter the ego integrity versus despair stage (Erikson, 1963). In the last stage, individuals are reviewing their lives. Those who do not have regrets develop ego integrity. Those with regrets develop despair.

References

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