

ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY

Erikson does not talk about psychosexual stages, he discusses **psychosocial** stages.

His ideas, though, were greatly influenced by Freud, going along with Freud's ideas about the structure and topography of personality but whereas Freud was an id psychologist, Erikson was an ego psychologist. He emphasised the role of culture and society and the conflicts that can take place within the ego itself, whereas Freud emphasised the conflict between the id and the superego.

At all stages Erikson claimed that the individual develops on three levels simultaneously: Biological, Social and Psychological (representing the organism, membership of Society and Individualism respectively).

His model was a lifespan model of development, taking in 5 stages up to the age of 18 years and three further stages beyond, well into adulthood. Erikson suggests that there is still plenty of room for continued growth and development throughout one's life.

Erikson put a great deal of emphasis on the adolescent period, feeling it was a crucial stage for developing a person's identity (see Hayes, pg. 784-787)

ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

1. Basic Trust Vs Basic Mistrust (birth - 1 year): Is the world a safe place or is it full of unpredictable events and accidents waiting to happen? Erikson claimed that in this stage the child will develop a sense of basic trust in the world and in his ability to affect events around him. The development of this depends on the behaviour of the child's major caregiver. If the care the child receives is consistent, predictable and reliable then the child will develop a sense of trust which he will carry with him to other relationships. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of **hope**. However, if the care has been harsh or inconsistent, unpredictable and unreliable then the child will develop a sense of mistrust and will not have confidence in the world around them or in their abilities to influence events. This child will carry the basic sense of mistrust with him to other relationships.

2. Autonomy Vs Shame and Doubt (2 - 3 years): The child is developing physically and becoming more mobile. Erikson says that this is the point at which the child can develop a certain amount of independence/autonomy. It is at this stage that the child needs support from parents so that repeated failures and ridicule are not the only experiences encountered. So, the parents need to encourage the child to becoming more independent whilst at the same time protecting the child so that constant failure is avoided. A delicate balance is required from the parent they must try not to do everything for the child but if the child fails at a particular task they must not criticise the child for failures and accidents (particularly when toilet training). The aim has to be "self control without a loss of self-esteem" (Gross, 1993). Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of **will**.

3. Initiative Vs Guilt (3 - 5 years): These are particularly lively, rapid-developing years in a child's life. According to Bee (1992) it is a "time of vigour of action and of behaviours that the parents may see as aggressive". The child takes initiatives which the parents will often try to stop in order to protect the child. The child will often overstep the mark in his forcefulness and the danger is that the parents will tend to punish the child and restrict his initiatives too much. It is at this stage that the child will begin to ask many questions as his thirst for knowledge grows. If the parents treat the child's questions as trivial, a nuisance or embarrassing or other aspects of their behaviour as threatening then the child may have feelings of guilt for "being a

nuisance". Too much guilt can make the child slow to interact with others and may inhibit their creativity. Some guilt is, of course, necessary otherwise the child would not know how to exercise self control or have a conscience. A healthy balance between initiative and guilt is important. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of *purpose*.

4. Industry (Competence) Vs Inferiority (6 - 12 years): Children are at the stage where they will be learning to read and write, to do sums, to make things on their own. Teachers begin to take an important role in the child's life as they teach the child specific skills. It is at this stage that the child's peer group will gain greater significance and will become a major source of the child's self esteem. The child now feels the need to win approval by demonstrating specific competences that are valued by society. If the child cannot develop the specific skill they feel society is demanding then they may develop a sense of inferiority. Some failure may be necessary so that the child can develop some modesty. Yet again, a balance between competence and modesty is necessary. . Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of *competence*.

5. Identity Vs Role Confusion (13 - 18 years): This is a major stage in development where the child has to learn the roles he will occupy as an adult. It is during this stage that the adolescent will re-examine his identity and try to find out exactly who he is. Erikson suggests that two identities are involved: the sexual and the occupational. According to Bee (1992), what should happen at the end of this stage is "a reintegrated sense of self, of what one wants to do or be, and of one's appropriate sex role". During this stage the body image of the adolescent changes. Erikson claims that the adolescent may feel uncomfortable about their body for a while until they can adapt and "grow into" the changes. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of *fidelity*.

6. Adult Stages: Erikson described three adult stages. **Intimacy Vs Isolation, Generativity Vs Stagnation and Ego Integrity Vs Despair.** The first concerns the adult's need to set aside the independent identity in order to develop an intimate relationship with another, the second concerns the adult's need to bear and rear children or do something creative or leave one's mark upon the world in some other way; the third involves accepting who you are. The final is probably the most difficult! . Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of *wisdom*.