

Erik Erikson

Erickson's theory is a psychosocial theory. His theory holds that development is a sequence of central life crises. In each of these crises, there is a possible favorable outcome and a possible unfavorable outcome. Psychosocial theory emphasizes emotional development and interactions with the social environment. Erikson believed that development occurred through resolutions of conflicts between needs and social demands; these conflicts occur in stages.

According to Erikson, the first conflict, which takes place in the first year of life, is that of **trust versus mistrust**. If resolved successfully, the child will come to trust his environment as well as himself. If mistrust wins out, the child will often be suspicious of the world, possibly throughout his life.

The second stage is **autonomy versus shame and doubt** (1-3 years). The favorable outcome here is a feeling of will and ability to exercise choice as well as self-restraint. A child will have a sense of competence and autonomy. The unfavorable outcome is a sense of doubt and lack of control, feeling that what happens to one is the result of external influences rather than one's own volition.

The next psychological conflict confronted is **initiative versus guilt** (3-6 years). Favorable outcomes include purpose, the ability to initiate activities, and the ability to enjoy accomplishment. If guilt wins out, the child will be so overcome by the fear of punishment that the child may either unduly restrict him or may overcompensate by showing off.

If the crisis of **industry versus inferiority** (6-12 years) is resolved favorably, the child will feel competent, will be able to exercise his abilities and intelligence in

the world, and to affect the world in the way that the child desires. Unfavorable resolution results in a sense of inadequacy, a sense of inability to act in a competent manner, and a low self-esteem.

During adolescence, the conflict between **identity versus role confusion** emerges. This stage encompasses what Erikson termed 'psychosocial revolution'. The favorable outcome is fidelity, the ability to see oneself as a unique and integrated person with sustained loyalties. Unfavorable outcomes are confusion of one's identity and a kind of amorphous personality that shifts from day to day.

The main crisis of young adulthood is **intimacy versus isolation**. Favorable outcomes are love, the ability to have intimate relationships with others, the ability to commit oneself to another person and to one's own goals. If this crisis is not favorably resolved, there will be an avoidance of commitment, a kind of alienation and distancing of oneself from others and one's ideals. Isolated individuals are either withdrawn, or only capable of superficial relationships with others.

Stage seven of Erikson's theory is the conflict of **generativity versus stagnation**, middle age. The successful resolution of this conflict results in an individual capable of being a productive, caring, contributing member of society. If this crisis is not overcome, one acquires a sense of stagnation and may become self-indulgent, bored, and self-centered with little care for others.

Finally, old age with approaching death brings about the crisis of **integrity versus despair**. One reflects on his life with either a sense of integrity or with a sense of despair. If favorably resolved, we will see wisdom, which Erikson defined as detached concern in life itself, assurance in the meaning of life, dignity, and an acceptance of the fact that one's life has been worthwhile; the individual is ready to face death. If not resolved favorably, there will be feelings of bitterness about one's

life, a feeling that life has been worthless, and at the same time, fears over one's own impending death.