

# Analysis of erikson's theories on development essay sample

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



Key Elements of Erikson's Theory" Erik Erikson believed that we develop in psychosocial stages versus psychosexual stages that Freud developed" (Santrock, 2008, p. 23). " The word ' psychosocial' was Erikson's term that he derived from the words psychological meaning mind and social meaning relationship" (Chapman, 2007). Erikson was concerned with how personality and behavior is influenced after birth. Erikson stood strong on his belief concerning nurture and experience.

The key element within Erikson's theory was ego identity. According to Erikson, " the ego identity was our conscious sense of self development through all processes of social interaction" (Ratti, 2008). Within Erikson's key elements were eight stages that unfold and develop as we go through life. " In each one of the stages a distinctive developmental task confronts individuals with a situation that must be worked through in order to have a constructive outcome" (Santrock, 2008, p. 23).

Erikson's concept significantly incorporated cultural and social aspects; this helped Erikson's eight stages of theory develop into a powerful representation. " Each stage involves a crisis of two opposing emotional forces. Each one of the crisis stages relates to a corresponding life stage" (Chapman, 2007). When individuals pass through each stage successfully they achieve a healthy balance between two opposing forces. If an individual does not pass through a stage successfully they develop a tendency towards the opposing force which then becomes a behavioral tendency.

There are eight stages that develop within the key elements of Erikson's theory. The elements are: Trust versus mistrust which represents the infant

stage, autonomy versus shame and doubt which represents the toddler stage, initiative versus guilt which represents the preschool stage, industry versus inferiority which represents the schoolchild stage, identity versus role confusion which represents the adolescent stage, intimacy versus isolation which represents the young adult stage, generatively versus stagnation which represents the mid-adult stage, and integrity versus despair which represents the late adult stage (Santrock, 2008, p. 24).

“ Erikson strongly believed that an individual's personality can and is effected by experiences throughout childhood and into adulthood” (Ratti, 2008). Each of Erikson's key element stages has both a positive and negative region. In a healthy situation the positive region will dominate.

Pros of Erikson's Theory of Development Erik Erikson created his theory on the stages of psychosocial development in the 1950's based on other theories from the infamous Sigmund Freud. For this theory especially, his changes included describing the impact of social experience throughout an individual's lifespan, rather than Freud's belief of psychosocial development only in early childhood (Van Wagner, 2008). Though there are a few criticisms of his theory, it was partial in laying the foundation that development occurs across ages, “[it] unfold[s] as we go through life” (Santrock, 2008, p. 23). Instead of focusing too much on the sexual undertakings as the cause of development, he focused on positive outcomes for negative crises. One of the most realistic aspects of his theory of the eight stages of development is the idea that each stage consists of conflicts

and is necessary for any healthy developing human to pass through (Van Wagner; Wikia Inc., 2008).

Included in this theory is the concept that any stage not fully completed will likely become an issue later in life. This is commonly used when figuring out any underlying problem. Erikson takes Freud's theory a step further in stating that early childhood experience is important, but the individual develops with a social context (Wikia Inc., 2008). With Erikson's stages, even with cultural differences in child development, infants still successfully complete these stages within a normal age range. For instance, cross culturally all infants go through intimacy versus isolation (CDI, 2007). For some countries, that stage may occur as early as 15 where it is culturally appropriate to get married at that age. In other countries, like the U. S., that stage may occur at a later age - maybe closer to 17 years. Nonetheless, children across the world go through these stages (Boeree, 2008).

Researchers can not say the same about Freud's five stages because they were culturally biased toward young males. This basis can not be used for evaluating the general public. This brings us to another pro of Erikson's eight stages. His stages of development can be measured more accurately than other (such as Freud's) psychoanalytic theories. Erikson's stages give researchers a framework of sequences in which to establish a pattern. For instance, you know a child has to do abc before getting to xyz. That can be validated and defined if you know an infant has to crawl before he can walk and run.

One of the most common examples of social context is the infancy stage (birth to 18 months) regarding trust versus mistrust (Wikia Inc., 2008). Part of Erickson's theory describes this concept being present throughout an individual's life. If this trust stage is not fully addressed, taught, and handled properly the individual will be affected negatively. This negative affect could prevent learning and maturing into a fully developed person that never fully assimilates in society (Wikia Inc.).

Another benefit of Erickson's theory is included in the toddler stage (18 months-3 years) regarding autonomy versus shame and doubt. The idea that a child discovers that he/she is no longer attached to his/her caregiver and strives for independence explains almost perfectly the reasoning behind the terrible two's and the power struggle between the child and caregiver (Wikia Inc., 2008).

A key point of Erickson's theory highlights why individuals who have struggled with the healthy resolution of early phases have so many difficulties when the same issue/situation reoccurs in adulthood. In addition, the theory provides answers for practical application (Wikia Inc., 2008).

Erikson's theory gives parents a way to determine if their child is having developmental delays or problems. Each stage is age specific and can help improve developmental issues.

This theory can help reflect on occurring issues, and be a guide to assess teaching and child rearing practices. This includes the ability to nurture and facilitate a healthy emotional and cognitive development (Wikia Inc., 2008).

Although Erikson's theory may have some flaws, his theory is innovative and gave rise to other developmental theories. With the knowledge of Erickson's eight stages of psychosocial development, life is easier to understand for the past, present, and ensuring a better future.

Cons of Erikson's Theory of Development One of the major criticisms of developmental psychology is that they often fail to give credit for taking into account the effects of genetics. A weakness in Erikson's developmental theory is that Erikson's stages of life are not necessarily so sterile as to apply to everyone uniformly. No single approach is able to address the needs generally presenting in the office of a therapist. Someone that is born with a mental disability may never progress to the third or fourth stage, because they are not physically, psychologically, or physiologically capable of progressing past and beyond those stages.

Erikson's theories on development seem to suggest that once a conflict is resolved in its appropriate stage, this conflict will never have to be dealt with again. In the research conducted for the development of this paper, it was not found anywhere in Erikson's theories that perhaps, these challenges may resurface even if the conflicts are initially resolved.

Erikson produced a few charts. However he never produced a fully definitive matrix. The closest he came to a matrix was a grid format, which he suggested be used as worksheets (Chapman, 2007). Erikson's theory, much like Freud's does not provide an adequate explanation for how development

comes about. Erikson's theory describes development better than it explains it (Sigelman & Rider, 2006, p. 35).

Probably the biggest weakness in Erikson's theory on development is that it is difficult to test, and gather empirical results/data (Sigelman & Rider, 2006, p. 35). Much of the data that supports psychoanalytic theories is gathered from the reconstruction of an individual's past. The accuracy of these recollections is unknown, and cannot be proved (Santrock, 2008, p. 24). Because it is difficult to test Erikson's theories from an empirical and scientific perspective, it makes it difficult to prove or disprove Erikson's theories of development.

Application Erik Erikson's theory of eight stages of development is very helpful when gauging your child's development. In addition, Erikson's theory assists teachers or daycare providers with their student/charge's developmental process by knowing what crisis the child is facing. When new parents have an infant, they know their baby is facing the trust versus mistrust stage for the first year. By being aware of this stage, they can develop the infant's trust, something that may last a lifetime. If parents do not build up this trust in the infant, then he or she will have an unresolved trust crisis resulting in a mistrust of the world around them.

Daycare providers have a crucial role in the infant's crisis of trust versus mistrust. If the provider does not encourage trust by attending to the child's needs, they are setting the child up to fail and thus the child will have a negative viewpoint of the world. By not resolving the crisis of trust, the child

may be vulnerable and may have a negative perspective of the world.

According to John Santrock, the stages are not “catastroph[ic], but a turning point marked by ...increased vulnerability and enhanced potential”

(Santrock, 2008, p. 23).

During the ages of one to three years old, children go through the stage of autonomy versus shame and doubt. If the parents and caregivers allow the child to discover their self on their own with positive reinforcement, the child will “assert their independence” (Santrock, 2008, p. 23). Yet, if the child is met with harsh punishment or restrained, he/she will become shameful or doubtful of his/her behavior. There are many well-meaning parents who want to protect their child, but who may end up hindering the child's development if he or she is not allowed to explore.

Early childhood brings forth Erikson's third stage of development: initiative versus guilt. In a preschool setting, a child has rules to follow and is given responsibility for their behavior, taking care of their work area, bathroom habits and personal items. By giving positive feedback on a child's behavior on how he/she handles themselves in social situations, the teacher and/or parent is developing a child's initiative. Parents or teachers, who dole out too much punishment, especially without giving the child other choices to make, will cause the child to feel guilty or anxious about asserting themselves.

Middle to late childhood is geared towards knowledge and intellectual skills. It is during this stage that parents and teachers need to reinforce confidence in the child's learning abilities, even if this means getting extra help for



subjects in which the child is struggling. A child who is failing in any or all subjects, in turn, feels like a failure. This causes the child to lose his/her desire to learn. While teachers can have 30 children to monitor, regular parent/teacher conferences or communication can mean the difference for each child between inferiority and industry.

Adolescence is the final stage in Erikson's childhood developmental theory. During this stage, the adolescent is faced with the crisis of identity versus identity confusion. There are many parents who will give their child too much freedom or not keep the lines of communication open during this crucial stage to adulthood. Adolescents have many questions and doubts about who they are. Parents need to help their child explore different personas or try on different hats so the child can figure out who they are. Likewise, parents who force an identity onto a child may cause the child's identity to become confused. In turn, the child may completely rebel into something not safe such as drugs or gangs.

In addition to parents, an adolescent's teacher can also be a positive influence by opening lines of communication with their students. A student, who does not feel comfortable talking to his/her parents about vocational or romantic aspects, can confide in a teacher. If this teacher responds positively and helps the adolescent to explore those avenues, the child can successfully create an identity. On the other hand, if a teacher brushes the adolescent off, that teacher may have closed communications with that child and inadvertently continued the child's identity confusion.

Conclusion The many different approaches to psychology explain the vast types of behavior and give us insight from varying vantage points. Erikson's eight character-forming crisis stages emphasize the sequential significance. Many people find this concept of humans sequentially developing throughout life, to be both helpful and realistic. This theory offers optimism for the future. Erikson champions the opportunity for positive change and development throughout a lifespan with little to no emphasis on reviewing life with blame or regret. He consistently asserts that personality is not stagnant, nor is it cemented in childhood.

Personality as well as identity can be a work-in-progress. Erikson's theory empowers self-efficacy and helps to build healthy bridges for a relatively clear and stable sense of who one is, in relation to the larger society. Wikia Inc., 2008, succinctly reports: Every adult, whether he is a follower or a leader, a member of a mass or of an elite, was once a child. He was once small. A sense of smallness forms a substratum in his mind, ineradicably. His triumphs will be measured against this smallness, his defeats will substantiate it. The questions as to who is bigger and who can do or not do this or that, and to whom-these questions fill the adult's inner life far beyond the necessities and the desirabilities which he understands and for which he plans. - Erik H. Erikson (1904-1994), U. S. psychoanalyst. *Childhood and Society*, ch. 11 (1950).

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