

# Erikson's theory in today's culture: reflection

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A person's personality directly affects how he conducts himself and ultimately, how he will live his life. In more ways than one, then, personality helps direct a person towards success. Having said this, it is no wonder that the development of a person's personality has long been the subject of psychological research. Of the many theories in personality and child development, Erik Erikson's is one of those that have stood the test of time. Perhaps this is largely due to the fact that unlike most theories, his covers the whole life cycle of man.

It also helped that amongst the rather purist concepts - of nature vs. nurture phenomenon - his recognizes both the effect of internal development (of the body and the mind) and the influence of the outside world to a person's personality. However adaptive Erikson's psychosocial stages are, though, it is still important to reexamine it alongside our culture today, in order to gauge how effective and accurate it still is. On a general viewpoint, the main tenet of Erikson's philosophy - that there are specific traits developed (or lost) in a particular stage in a person's life - still holds even when analyzed alongside our ever-developing culture.

This means that on most counts, contemporary culture has strengthened Erikson's theory - not negate or redefine it. For example, that the viewpoint of a person with regard to how trustworthy the world is shaped during the early years is still true (whether that occurs exclusively during infancy is up to now subject to verification): recent studies of incidents of suicides show its relation to the formation during the early years of the basic belief I have earlier mentioned.

Likewise, it is still true that a sense of autonomy is developed during the toddler years - when we learn to walk on our own, and feed and bathe ourselves. The continuous development of our educational system supports the two subsequent stages - play age and school age - in Erikson's theory: indeed, it is during the time we start going to school and widening our circle that we develop initiative and the value of industry.

As for the next stage, adolescence, it still is the case that during these years - in our struggle for independence from parents; in our attempt to develop romantic relationships and strengthen our ties with friends; in our quest to find the answer to the question " Who am I? " - we develop a deeper sense of our identity. I mentioned that on most counts, Erikson's theory holds. There are several points in his work, however, that are redefined by a change in our culture. One of the most glaring changes would be in his stage of young adulthood.

While it is true that during this time we seek love and a deeper relationship, more and more of the American youth opt to stay single until their thirties. Whereas before starting a family occurs at this stage, now having kids occurs more in Erikson's next stage - middle adulthood. In my opinion, the high incidence of divorce nowadays, and the lure of leading a life devoid of the immense responsibility married life entails, instills in us the belief that having a family takes careful planning and thus, takes time.

Upon examining Erikson's theory, it is prevalent that he sees his stages as having a linear path; that is, the stages - and the development of the traits he singled out for each stage - occur one after the other, with each one

having a direct effect on the stage it precedes. In simpler terms, then, if a person failed to develop trust in infancy, he will have a hard time cultivating autonomy in the next stage, if he even ever does. Such a pessimistic way of putting things, I believe, is doomed to criticism and negation in itself.

How many times have we heard of success stories, of people who rose above a troubled childhood to find love and success in their adult lives? Erikson, it seems, failed to take into account the strength of the human spirit to rise above any predicament. If there is one characteristic of our culture and our world today that may hinder us from successfully navigating through Erikson's psychosocial stages, it is their being fast-paced.

In an environment where success is predominantly measured by what you own, we are driven to lead lives that place personal relationships in the back seat. Given this fact, it is possible that more and more of us will fail to resolve a crisis or two in the "right time", as outlined in Erikson's work. I believe, however, that despite this fact, in the end we will still tackle the issues inherent in our struggle to form our identity, and we will still be able to resolve them all.