Erik Erickson’s Theory of Personality Development

“Ego Psychology”

Sociocultural Paradigm

Who is Erik Erickson?

- Born Erik Homburger June 15, 1902
- B. Invited to train as a child analyst by Anna Freud (1927)
- C. Married April 1, 1930
- D. No advanced degrees except Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute in 1933
- E. Became U.S. citizen in 1939; changed last name to Erikson
- F. Died on May 12, 1994

Basic Eriksonian Concepts

- **Ego Psychology**: Developed functions, needs, and properties of the ego

Erikson’s Theory

- Biological in belief that there are innate drives to develop social relationships and that these promote survival
- Divided life span into eight psychosocial stages, each associated with a different crisis to resolve
- Outcome of each stage varies along a continuum

Erik Erikson (1902 - 1994)

- Psychosocial Stages of Development
  - Trust vs. Mistrust *infancy*
  - Autonomy vs. shame and doubt *1-3yrs.*
  - Initiative vs. guilt *preschool yrs.*
  - Industry vs. inferiority *elementary school yrs.*
  - Identity vs. identity confusion *adolescent yrs.*
  - Intimacy vs. isolation *early adulthood*
  - Generativity vs. stagnation *middle adulthood*
  - Integrity vs. despair *late adulthood*

Basic Eriksonian Concepts

- **Epigenetic Principle**: everything that grows has a [genetic] plan
- **Crisis**: an important turning point with varying degrees of positive/negative outcome
  - Positive resolutions strengthen ego [reverse for negative]
- **Ritualizations**: recurring [culturally approved] patterns of behavior that reflect beliefs, values and customs of a culture
  - Harmonious interplay between unfolding stage needs and social / cultural environment
- **Ritualism**: false, meaningless, exaggerated ritualizations [do not bond people together]
  - Example: appropriate respect for vs. idolizing persons with titles

Ego Psychology

- Developed functions, needs, and properties of the ego
Stage 1 (birth - 1)  
**Trust vs. Mistrust**

- Infants must rely (physically/emotionally) on others for care.
- Consistent and dependable care giving and meeting infant needs leads to a sense of trust.
- Infants who are not well cared for or rejected will develop mistrust.

**Basic Trust**
- faith in the predictability of the environment
- optimism about the future

**Basic Mistrust**
- suspicious, fearful, and overly concerned with security

**Primary Ritualization**
- Numinous: ways mother recognizes infant, creates desire to seek relationships

**Ritualism**
- Idolism: exaggerated numinous, blind idol worship

Stage 2 (1-3 years)  
**Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt**

- Children are discovering their own independence and awareness of their emerging skills, strong desire to do things “by myself.”
- Need to be taken seriously as one works to master physical environment while maintaining self esteem.
- Those given the opportunity to experience independence will gain a sense of autonomy.
- Children that are overly restrained or punished harshly will develop shame and doubt.

**Autonomy**
- gain control over bodily functions and coordination
- ability to suppress some aggressive tendencies

**Shame & Doubt**
- self-doubt about ability to control body
- hostile rejection of all controls (internal & external).

**Primary Ritualization**
- Judiciousness: learns to discriminate right and wrong, internalizes parental sanctions

**Ritualism**
- Legalism: righteousness, desire to punish and humiliate “offenders”

Stage 3 (4-5 years)  
**Initiative vs. Guilt**

- Children are exposed to the wider social world and given greater responsibility.
- Sense of accomplishment comes with freedom and opportunity to initiative ideas, actions and to plan events, play and intellectual pursuits.
- Feelings of guilt can emerge if the child is made to feel too anxious or irresponsible about self initiated activities and ideas.

**Initiative**
- parental support for trying new things leads to joy in exercising initiative and taking on new challenges

**Guilt**
- feelings of guilt, unworthiness, and resentment may occur if scolded for exercising initiative

**Ritualization**
- Authenticity: role experimentation, make-believe play, begins to distinguish what is real vs. not real

**Ritualism**
- Impersonation: real self is confused with roles played, child becomes the role vs. genuine person
Stage 4 (6-11 years)

Industry vs. Inferiority

Stage of life surrounding mastery of knowledge and intellectual skills as well as physical and social tasks

Sense of competence and achievement leads to industry

Feeling incompetent and unproductive leads to inferiority

**Industry** (Confidence)
- learning the skills of personal care, productive work, and independent living

**Inferiority**
- failure to learn these skills leads to:
  - feelings of mediocrity, inadequacy, and low self-sufficiency

Industry vs. Inferiority

Ritualization

- Formality: must have real skills, do things the proper way

Ritualism

- Formalism: too much focus on technique, no focus on the point of a task [students who want to learn vs. make As]

Stage 5 (adolescence)

Identity vs. Confusion

**What is Identity?** Values, beliefs, and ideals that govern an individual's behavior

Begins the quest for a unique identity, separate from parents and others

The task is to solidify a sense of self and where s/he is going in life

Testing and integrating many roles (child, sibling, student, athlete, worker) into a self-image

Positive outcome: a self-made positive identity

Negative outcome: confusion, no real sense of self, or a negative identity

Virtue: FIDELITY

4 Possible Outcomes of an Identity Crisis

- Identity achievement: Successful resolution of identity crisis - the state of having developed well-defined personal values and self-concepts. Their identities may be expanded and further defined in adulthood, but the basics are there. They are committed to an ideology and have a strong sense of ego identity.

- Identity foreclosure: Choice of an identity that pleases others - the adolescent blindly accepts the identity and values that were given in childhood by families and significant others. The adolescent's identity is foreclosed until they determine for themselves their true identity. The adolescent in this state is committed to an identity but not as a result of their own searching or crisis.

- Moratorium: Still exploring various roles, but have not chosen one yet - adolescent has acquired vague or ill-formed ideological and occupational commitments; he/she is still undergoing the identity search (crisis). They are beginning to commit to an identity, but are still developing it.

- Identity diffusion: Avoid considering role options in any conscious manner - the state of having no clear idea of one's identity and making no attempt to find that identity. These adolescents may have struggled to find their identity, but they never resolved it, and they seem to have stopped trying. There is no commitment and no searching.

Identity vs. Role Confusion

Identity crisis: A period of intense self-examination and decision making; part of the process of identity formation

Identity formation: The development of a stable sense of self necessary to make the transition from dependence on others to dependence on oneself

Four possible outcomes of Identity Crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Identity Moratorium</th>
<th>Identity Foreclosure</th>
<th>Identity Diffusion</th>
<th>Identity Achievement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</table>
Identity vs. Role Confusion

- Ritualization
  - Ideology: must act in accordance with an ideology or life philosophy, a ‘game plan’ for life

- Ritualism
  - Totalism: unquestioning lock on overly simplistic ideology, ideologies of authority figures, heroes, groups

Intimacy vs. Isolation

- Ritualization
  - Affiliation: engages in rituals for making caring, productive adult relationships (marriage)

- Ritualism
  - Elitism: isolation = relating only to like-minded people, snobbery status consciousness, no true social intimacy

Stage 6 (young adulthood)

Intimacy vs. Isolation

- Love
  - Time for sharing oneself with another person
  - Capacity to hold commitments with others leads to intimacy
  - Intimacy
    - the ability to form close, loving relationships; to care deeply for another person
    - The ability to give and receive affection
    - Resolution of earlier crisis lays foundation for intimacy
  - Failure to establish intimacy leads to feelings of isolation, loneliness, incompleteness, self absorption

Stage 7 (middle adulthood)

Generativity vs. Stagnation

- Care
  - Generativity
    - Caring for others in family, friends and work leads to sense of contribution to later generations
    - Experience of joy in major activities of life
  - Stagnation
    - a sense of boredom and meaninglessness
    - Failure to remain productive and creative
    - Drab routine
    - Dullness, resentment
    - Preoccupation with self only

Middle Adulthood:

Generativity vs. Stagnation

- Ritualization vs. Ritualism
  - Generationalism: the ways older adults transmit important aspects of culture to the young
  - Authoritarianism: power of adults is used for selfishness, not for the good of the community

Stage 8 (late adulthood)

Integrity vs. Despair

- Wisdom
  - Successful resolutions of all previous crises leads to integrity and the ability to see broad truths and advise those in earlier stages
    - “A feeling that one’s life has been meaningful and worthwhile”
    - “Acceptance of one’s life”
    - “A sense that life is complete and satisfactory”
    - “Little fear of approaching death”
  - Despair arises from feelings of helplessness and the bitter sense that life has been incomplete
    - Despair at loss of former roles and missed opportunities
    - Fear approaching death
Ego Integrity vs. Despair

- Ritualization vs. Ritualism
  - Integralism: final integration of previous ritualizations, sense of immortality from transmitting culture, life/death put into perspective
  - Sapientism: false sense of wisdom, the "unwise pretense of being wise," a false sense of having all the answers, done as an ego protection for previous conflict resolution failures

Rethinking the Eighth Stage

- ON OLD AGE I: A CONVERSATION WITH JOAN ERIKSON AT 90
- Erikson's ninth stage is for people who make it past their mid-eighties. It involves despair vs. hope and faith. As the oldest of the old face their failing bodies they develop a new sense of self. The favored outcome is wisdom and transcendence "to go beyond the universe and time"

GOAL OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

- A. Goal: Ego strengthening for effective coping
- B. Encourage growth of missing (or weak) virtues
- C. Little interest in releasing unconscious conflict

ERIKSON VS. FREUD

- Development (life-long, identity focus)
- Anatomy as Destiny (yes and no)
- Ego Psychology (focus on ego, not id)
- Unconscious Mind (moderate emphasis)
- Dream Analysis (minimal emphasis)
- Psychotherapy (develop lost virtues)
- Religion (shared world image & hope)

CRITICISMS

- Difficult to test empirically
- Overly optimistic view of humans
- Support of the status quo (urging us to gain things through possibly meaningless rituals)
- Excessive moralizing (too Christian, too conservative)
- Failure to properly acknowledge influences on his theory (mostly Adler and Horney)

CONTRIBUTIONS

- Expansion of Psychology's Domain (easily understood, common terms)
- Considerable Applied Value (high 'face validity,' used in many disciplines)
- Development of Ego Psychology (development across the life-span, focus on healthy and neurotic persons)