

Appendix A

A Really Short Version of Erikson's Stage Theory

Here is an outline of how *in the best of all possible worlds*, key people love a child into having the tools needed to be relatively well-equipped for life and relationships.

- **TRUST & HOPE:** Reasonably dependable, reliable, kind-hearted nurture allows a child to feel secure, to trust that needs will be met, and to experience hope about life and faith, first in people and eventually, perhaps, in some greater transcendent power. [When care is inconsistent or provided without a good attachment, the outcome is relative insecurity, mistrust and hopelessness.]
- **AUTONOMY & WILLPOWER:** Encouragement of the older infant's assertiveness within the bounds of safety, of course, fosters the beginnings of autonomy/independence and enthusiasm for applying himself or herself to a goal—which at first is as simple as getting across the room to a toy or reaching the cup on the table or eating one food instead of the other. This is the earliest manifestation of willpower and it can be either encouraged or stifled. If the child is already trusting and hope-filled, they are more likely to assert their will in ways the caregivers can appropriately affirm. [When caregivers are excessively controlling or stifling of the child's freedom to be assertive, the outcome is relative self-doubt.]
- **INITIATIVE and the pursuit of PURPOSE:** In the midst of wanting to assert autonomy, the toddler gradually becomes more and more aware that they are quite a separate individual from the nurturer and because that relationship is the source of everything he/she needs for physical and emotional survival, this realization prompts a vague concern about whether it's okay to venture forth. If encouraged to pursue the things that interest them, to try out new options, to risk stretching the limits as they feel inclined to do so, the child's confidence is likely to grow as will the belief that they can freely come and go from the nurturer as their base camp as they pursue whatever goals arise. (When a person is pursuing a goal, they have a sense of purpose.) [If the caregiver openly or subtly conveys they are wounded by the child's increasing ability and desire to strike out on their own, the child will feel guilty about becoming a separate person with wants of their own apart from the caregiver.]
- **INDUSTRY (DILIGENCE) and COMPETENCIES:** Strictly speaking, the ability to grasp an object with their hand is a competency, so infants are engaged in this quest quite early. The older toddler, however, becomes very intent on learning to do new things that signify "I'm getting to be big and strong and able to do things!" Hope, willpower, inner freedom to pursue purposes—all of these add momentum and encouragement to the quest for mastering new skills and knowledge-sets. As the child's body and brain continue to mature, the accumulation of cognitive, physical, and social competencies pour supplies

into the inner water bottle where a sense of self-worth rises and falls in response to how the person thinks about the emerging and functioning self. [Mistrust, self-doubt and guilt in any degree and combination hold a child back in the pursuit and acquisition of competencies in various arenas of life. Consequently, they are likely to actually *be* inferior on certain measures and/or to evaluate themselves as inferior. Whether based on objective performance measures or on misperception based on self-doubt and guilt, such negative self-evaluations put holes in the bottom what I have called the inner self-worth water bottle.

Each ego strength becomes a resource that increases a person's likelihood of engaging life's next/other challenges well. Life challenges you to use the resources and by doing so, they become more and more a part of who you are as a person. When life knocks you down and deals a blow to any of the tools—i.e. when someone betrays your trust, when exercise of independence gets you in trouble, when pursuing an interest or dream or idea costs you relationship with someone who just couldn't "go there" with you, when an effort to accomplish something ends up in failure—when these experiences come along in life, it can be really hard on the sense of self-worth, even if the trust or willpower, etc. were off to pretty good starts. If they were shaky to begin with, set-backs can make you feel even more like the rug's been pulled out from under you. Those are the times you need concrete evidence that you are treasured anyway by the key people in your life. That's when sustenance from others helping you over the rough spot can really strengthen your trust in humanity. That's when love in the form of support, sometimes teaching or coaching, sometimes the insights and feedback that may be hard to hear but which can help us with a course correction, can help you learn from your mistakes.

- **IDENTITY and LOYALTY/FAITHFULNESS:** Hopefully, as an adolescent begins to fully engage questions about the values that will guide them and the goals worth pursuing, they have accumulated enough of the already-named resources to work with. The self's need to begin resolving these larger questions takes on greater urgency as launching from home approaches. If the true self has been encouraged and supported all along, it will move into this quest with a good supply of resources for the tasks ahead. By late adolescence, some true selves already know "what they want to do with their lives" and others don't. The Nurture Loves and Challenge Loves are uniquely needed in this decade-long (sometimes life-long) process of deciding who to be, what to stand for and how they want to affect the world around them—their identity, formed around self-chosen values to which they want to be loyal or faithful. [Confusion about these things can persist even if the person is listening to their true self, but the confusion is likely to be stronger and persist longer if they lack the ego strengths or began to form a false (accommodating) self earlier in life.]
- **INTIMACY and MUTUALITY:** As a young adult moves toward launching from home and becoming their own separate center of gravity for life, the desire for trustworthy companionship on the journey is the deepest longing of their true self. If their true self has been nurtured and supported all along and they have a good enough supply of the ego strengths, they are well-prepared to develop Intimate relationships—to risk opening up and being known emotionally, intellectually, socially, physically, spiritually, and psychologically and to make room for knowing another person or persons in those ways.

Developing companionships at this level helps a person explore their true self further and consolidate their identity. When a connection grows at this deep level of knowing and being known (intimacy), the other person's well-being matters to you as much as your own, Erikson's definition of mutual love or mutuality. [A person's capacity for intimacy and ability to love in this fully mutual way is greatly affected by how much basic trust/hope/faith is at their core and the degree to which they experience themselves as operating out of a true, authentic self. If their core is porous or they feel inauthentic because they began long ago to operate out of a false self, they are likely to remain largely hidden from their peers. Such a person may prefer a lifestyle without much social interaction, but even if they are apparently sociably engaged in the world and even if they get into a committed pair-bonding relationship, their true self will experience isolation and loneliness. Literature and life are filled with examples of people who are "saved" by the love of another person who "sees or senses" their True Self and "tames" them by providing the Nurture Love and Challenge Love that were missing earlier in life.]

- **GENERATIVITY and CARE:** Technically, adolescents on the other side of puberty can generate new life, but Erikson used the word Generative to characterize adulthood with its focus on creating a family and/or being productive in the world of work. The ability to Care for others by nurturing and raising a family is a key part of generativity, but it is much more inclusive of the ways adults contribute positively to the world around them. In terms of my own framework, the best Care manifests an ability to attune to others and respond willingly with Nurture Love and Challenge Love appropriate to their needs. [Those who lack the ability because of missing ego strengths or lack the willingness because of excessive preoccupation with the self are likely to experience what Erikson calls stagnation—their lives produce little of value.]
- **INTEGRITY and WISDOM:** At some point in the aging process, an adult begins to slow down in their participation in generativity and care for the world around them. Sometimes this is linked with formal retirement from a job or career. At other times it may be prompted by an illness, injury or general deterioration of health. Whatever the timing, some version of a retrospective review of life begins to take place, and inevitably, there is an assessment dimension to it. If the person has lived consistently with consciously chosen values for the most part, the mix of fulfillment and regret will likely yield a sense of integrity and there's a good chance they will be regarded as a source of wisdom about life.

As I have already explained, it is utterly misleading to look at Erikson's stage theory in the stair-step chart form so typical of psychology textbooks. Even though he is the one who presented us with that kind of visual presentation of his work, it perpetuates the beginning psychology student's naïve misunderstandings about resource development being over and done and then you move on.

It is more helpful and accurate to visualize the accumulation of ego strengths using a modification of the baseball diagram, clearly showing where the resilience comes from. Picture each core ingredient permeating the outer layers to the extent each was added as the ball was forming. Then, whatever is in your baseball, that's the ball you take with you into the game of life. You take that into the opportunities to form intimate relationships, make a new family, and

participate in the world around you. By no means is this a perfect image either, since the depth of layers is misleading and you can't see how each resource permeates the other ones. But if you could imagine each ego strength inside the ball emanating an energy uniquely its own that radiates to and through the other layers, you'd get the idea.



