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## CHAPTER 6\_

### ERIKSON'S PSYCHOANALYTIC EGO PSYCHOLOGY

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## Ego Psychology: Liberalizing the Psychoanalytic Position

- **Ego psychology:** theory that the ego is not always controlled by biological impulses, but often functions independently of these urges, thereby providing the individual with an opportunity for creative action and positive growth

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## The Epigenetic Principle

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- **Epigenetic principle:** development unfolds in a predetermined sequence across a series of stages
  - Each stage is marked by a particular psychosocial **crisis:** a crucial period in which a decisive turn one way or another is unavoidable
  - **Virtues:** qualities or strengths that emerge from successful resolution of the crises

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## The Stages of Ego Development

Stage	Crisis	Ego Strength
Oral-Sensory	Basic trust versus mistrust	Hope
Muscular-Anal	Autonomy versus shame and doubt	Will
Locomotor-Genital	Initiative versus guilt	Purpose
Latency	Industry versus inferiority	Competence

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## The Stages of Ego Development (cont'd.)

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Crisis</b>	<b>Ego Strength</b>
Adolescence	Identity versus role confusion	Fidelity
Young adulthood	Intimacy versus isolation	Love
Middle adulthood	Generativity versus stagnation	Care
Late adulthood	Ego integrity versus despair	Wisdom

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## Research Support for the Theory of Ego Development

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- Highly industrious children:
  - More motivated to succeed in school and obtain higher grades
  - Stronger preferences to make and do things rather than to engage in fantasy by making things up
  - More content with their school experiences

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## Research Support for the Theory of Ego Development (cont'd.)

- Ego identity adolescence
  - **Identity diffusion:** individuals who are not actively in crisis about their life goals and have not made any commitments about them
  - **Foreclosure:** individuals who have never experienced a crisis concerning their goals have nevertheless made firm commitments concerning them
  - **Moratorium:** individuals are actively considering alternatives to resolve crisis issues
  - **Identity achievement:** individuals have undergone a period of crisis and consequently have developed firm commitments concerning their life goals

## Research Support for the Theory of Ego Development (cont'd.)

- Extensions and refinements of Marcia's ego identity statuses
  - Most research on ego-identity statuses has been based on White university samples
    - Minority populations in America have been growing at a rapid rate, so there is a need to conduct research that taps into the unique **ethnic identity concerns** of these populations
    - The struggle for these minority groups is to form an identity in relation to a majority White culture, which often discriminates against them
    - The latest research indicates that a healthy solution is to develop a **bicultural identity**: strong sense of ethnic belonging accompanied by positive attitudes toward those aspects of the majority culture that are psychologically healthy

## Research Support for the Theory of Ego Development (cont'd.)

- Intimacy in early adulthood
  - **Intimate individuals:** relationships are characterized by depth and commitment
  - **Preintimate individuals:** deep relationships, but are reluctant to commit themselves to enduring relationships
  - **Stereotyped individuals:** relationships are shallow and exploitative
  - **Pseudointimate individuals:** those who have enduring relationships, but whose relationships lack depth
  - **Isolated individuals:** individuals who have withdrawn from social relationships
  - **Merger individuals:** people who have lost their sense of identity and who live through their partners

## Research Support for the Theory of Ego Development (cont'd.)

- Generativity statuses
  - **Generative style:** highly committed to their work and to the care of young people
  - **Conventional style:** adults' concern for the development of the younger generation is selective because they seek to guide and nurture only those young people who mirror their values and goals
  - **Agentic style:** contribute to society through their work, but are primarily concerned with their own growth and not the growth of young people
  - **Communal style:** neglect their own personal development as they indiscriminately sacrifice themselves for the younger generation
  - **Stagnant style:** adults who make little or no effort to develop their skills or to nurture the younger generation

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## Therapeutic Assessment Techniques

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- Erikson adopted a more egalitarian and personal stance toward his patients than did Freud
- Same techniques as Freud, but interpretations center around the search for identity
  - Free association
  - Dream analysis
  - Transference

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### Theory's Implications for Therapy

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- Neurotics and psychotics have confused identities and lack a sense of mastery over their experiences
- Their egos are fragmented and weak
- They are unable to relate well to others or to take their place in society
- These difficulties are an outgrowth of their failure to resolve successfully one or more of the crises inherent in their life cycles

## Evaluative Comments

- **Comprehensiveness:** broad scope
- **Precision and testability:** not very precise and very difficult to test adequately
- **Parsimony:** too simplistic; too much reliance on the identity construct
- **Empirical validity:** solid empirical support for the last four stages; need more research focus on the first four stages
- **Heuristic value:** major contributions to disciplines such as philosophy, religion, cultural anthropology, historians, psychology, psychiatry, and social work
- **Applied value:** has high-applied value in many disciplines including child psychology and psychiatry, marriage counseling, education, vocational counseling, and social work