Identity, Youth, and Crisis Study Guide

Identity, Youth, and Crisis by Erik Erikson

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Identity, Youth and Crisis, written in 1968, is one of the most important works on the psychology of adolescence in the twentieth century. It aims to synthesize the individualistic methodology of Freudian psychoanalysis with the other social sciences. Erik Erikson (1902-1994), the author and a Danish-German-American psychologist was one of the most significant theorists in human psychology of his day. In 1950, he rose to prominence as a result of his book, Childhood and Society, a central text in the study of child development. Identity, Youth and Crisis follows eighteen years later; but at a theoretical level, it picks up where Childhood and Society left off.

In Childhood and Society, Erikson develops a famous periodic analysis of child and youth psychological development which he first applied to children. Initially, he built upon Freud's five stages of development but in later work such as Identity, Youth, and Crisis, his conception of development became less Freudian. For Erikson, each child and youth must navigate eight stages of development that are characterized by identity crises. The focus of Identity, Youth and Crisis is to deepen Erikson's concept of personal identity and explain its relation to what he calls ego psychology.

Erikson's theory of ego psychology holds that the ego, an unconscious mental process, constantly synthesizes information from inner and outer perception into a coherent whole that can be managed. In this way it brings together the inner world of the individual with the outer social world and acts as the boundary between the two. The ego constructs identity, which has both an individual and a social element. One of Erikson's main emphases in Identity, Youth and Crisis is that the identity crisis of the adolescent is severe. The adolescent has developed enough of an identity to be self-reflective and yet he must navigate between a desire for uniqueness and a desire to join significant social groups, culture and society. Psychological dysfunction in youth occurs when a number of factors, but most often anxiety arising from the challenges of development, causes the youth to veer too far off in either direction, leading to deviancy on the one hand and totalitarian submission on the other.

Identity, Youth, and Crisis is composed of a number of articles that Erikson wrote over the course of his career following Childhood and Society in 1950, but they are nonetheless tied together. In the prologue, Erikson introduces his concept of identity and explains its theoretical virtues and that it is constructed with the aim of integrating individual and society. Chapter 2, Foundations in Observation brings out some concrete cases of the theory mentioned in Chapter 1 and outlines a theory of totalitarian psychology.

Chapter 3 explains Erikson's famous eight stage life-cycle theory of ego development and Chapter 4 discusses ego malfunction in the form of 'identity confusion' and 'identity diffusion.' Chapter 5 is a 'theoretical interlude' that covers a number of issues about the proper use of psychological concepts. Chapter 6 focuses on the challenges facing contemporary youth in the late 1960s, Chapter 7 on female psychology and the growing women's movement, and Chapter 8 on race and national identity psychology.

Chapter 1, Prologue

Chapter 1, Prologue Summary and Analysis

Since Erikson first started writing about identity crises, the term has become widespread. Luckily it has mostly been used to denote not total psychological breakdown but a turning point, which is closer to the psychologist's conception. Identity crises are focused in particular on adolescence and young adulthood. Erikson is skeptical about applying the concept to nations or religions.

Identity crises are over-diagnosed, in Erikson's view, so he returns to the original concept by focusing on what identity feels like to an individual when she becomes conscious of it. Identity consists in a subjective sense of invigorating sameness and continuity. Identity exists within an individual's core but also in his community's core. Identity formation involves a process of reflection and observation that works on all levels of functioning. Within this process, the individual compares judgments he makes of himself to judgments made about him by others. The process is always changing and developing. It also involves increasing differentiation and becomes more inclusive over time, ultimately encompassing all of humanity.

The traditional psychoanalytic method cannot grasp identity because it cannot integrate the environment. To remedy this, it needs to be merged with social psychology. Erikson believes his profession should understand identity formation contextually and socially because identity is partly rooted in comparing conceptions of self with the reactions of others. Thus human identity can change even when historical circumstances change.

Turning towards the youth of today, Erikson notes that youth are always more noisy and obvious in most generations, but that today they exhibit exaggerated identity-consciousness. Erikson's observations of the youth of the sixties leads him to claim that they display their identity crises openly, not just internally.

Erikson finds it natural to hold that identity crises are most common among adolescents. In adolescence, the ideological structure of the environment becomes embedded in the ego. Without embedding, the adolescent ego cannot understand his experience and connect it with his capacities and expanding environment. Thus, the adolescent is always closer to the historical uniqueness of his day than the child or the adult. Studying adolescence is studying cultural history. Erikson argues thatclinicians should take into account that today's flamboyant and open identity confusion may obscure genuine identity confusion not caused by historical change alone.

A significant feature of today's youth is the absence of parents and individuals who define the values for the young to rebel against. Parents in fact often impress the young by remaining stuck in adolescent stages of development. The problem is that adolescents than have little 'identity strength' to mimic. Erikson admits that he and his colleagues may not be aware of the relevant sources of identity strength for youth. This

is partly due to the fact that psychologists focus on the extremes of humanity and not on normal human development.

Since adults provide little in the way of cultural 'consolidation' for youths to internalize, they leave cultural change to scientific and technological developments while other values remain surprisingly stable. A new ethics must catch up with progress. Without a new ethic, identity is formed by interaction with science and technology alone. Erikson believes that in doing so, youth put their existence on the line and risk losing everything of moral value in life.

Today's neo-humanism helps to make youth more aware of identity problems. The 'peacenik' style of identity consolidation combines a medieval conception of community with modern ideas of civil disobedience and nonviolence. This dislike of regimentation and military enthusiasm cannot coexist alongside an increasing comfort with technology-led cultural change. Youth have demonstrated their ability to move beyond technology and accept hardship and discipline when moved by real and universal needs, such as in the Civil Rights movement. Nonetheless, Erikson worries that without leadership, or at least leadership that can be resisted, the young humanists will be irrelevant and languish in 'strictly episodical' consciousness expansion.

Due to scientific and technological change, a new generation will grow up confronting radically new practical possibilities to endorse new forms of thoughts. No traditional form of 'being older' will become institutionalized for youth to step into or even to resist. Old forms of life will simply be left behind and new forms constructed. The emergence of young-adult specialists is the result of this trend, as people in age closest to the youth are the ones who can best understand them. Choice and identity will become common values.

The need for psychological identity is the product of biological evolution. Authority-acceptance is a core part of it and identity formation cannot be separated from it. Man has now long survived by dividing himself into pseudo-species of race, tribe, and religion and so on. But the first half of the 20th century has shown that the existence of pseudo-species in the modern age has the capacity to destroy us all. If youth do not grow up, they may not develop the adult ethic that can help humanity survive. And without identity there is nothing to transcend towards individuality.

Erikson plans to focus on youth, identity and crisis in order to understand identity deeply enough to handle the above discussed problems. He encourages the reader not to expect a developed methodology of integrating the work of the last two decades. The world changes too fast for that.

Chapter 2, Foundations in Observation

Chapter 2, Foundations in Observation Summary and Analysis

All too often psychologists treat social dynamics and the effects of external social elements like ethnicity and historical era on identity as 'surface' effects. Erikson objects on the grounds such a focus prevents synthesis with the social sciences. Chapter 2 includes some observations that try to bridge the gap.

After a brief discussion of Freud, Erikson explains how an identity can be frustrated and disintegrated when its role in a group is changed. He and a colleague observed this phenomenon in the personalities of Sioux Indians being reeducated by American civil servants. Their egos were frustrated because they could not integrate steps towards a tangible future for their social group. Erikson calls an 'ego identity' the psychological aspect of a person that integrates steps towards a goal within a particular social reality. While personal identity concerns a conscious feeling, ego identity concerns the fact that one's individuality has a style that overlaps with that of significant others' identities. Ego identity is important for balancing the demands of the group with one's own passions and instincts.

A historical period offers individuals a limited number of models to integrate identity. Erikson discusses how these models can affect identity formation even a generation after they disappear. There are subtle methods of acquisition. Parents can often trigger these transferences in their children and they can also help children formulate an 'evil ego identity' or the identity a child wants to avoid and struggles to distance him from. This often happens with ethnic stereotypes. Sometimes these ethnic stereotypes are imposed on members of the ethnic minority, creating feelings of inferiority. Body image is often intimately tied up with this acquired identity. These associations can only be undone by reworking the associations. Erikson then discusses some cases.

In many cases, what Erikson calls 'ego synthesis' fails because the ego ties together elements that prevent it from having a positive self-image. Erikson covers some cases of disintegration of the synthesis due to trauma such as in wartime. Strong egos, contrary to popular belief, are not ones that are constantly bolstered. In fact, they do not need bolstering and are not affected by it. Rather, they are well-developed and integrated into a group which will then transmit identity development to the next generation. These egos become products of their time despite their strength because they form by testing their current reality against their identity.

The psychoanalyst is right to understand the ego's task as a ceaseless and essential process that maintains existence and organizes it. It consists in a biological process and a social process, whereby both body and community membership are defined. The ego process is the principle through which individuals keep their personalities coherent.

Each process is dependent on the other. Pathology is produced when one of these systems comes out of mutual recognition.

The final section of the chapter focuses on the nature of ego and identity under totalitarianism. It appears that childhood and youth predispose men for totalitarianism. The tendency arises from society's implicit child-training systems that keep individuals alive and safe but also uses them as incubators and preservers of the uniqueness of society. Totalitarianism in the early 20th century was not the result of a merely infantile level of society. Instead the totalitarian disposition is best understood as a universal human potentiality and is related to all parts of human nature.

Totalitarianism requires a paralyzing sense of the legitimacy of absolute state power. It requires having a conversion-like experience resulting in inner change. The ego generally evolves out of a period where a unified subjective experience is associated with the balance of physiological processes that occurs in infancy. Wholeness is thereby associated with equilibrium and health which in turn generates the need to extend wholeness to the community. Wholeness also generates a sense of basic trust which is required to maintain a sense of wholeness in the first place. Adults are needed to preserve wholeness and wholeness also produces religious belief and membership. Despite these tendencies, the modern Western sense of identity has weakened. Yet the need for wholeness remains and totalitarianism comes to power by promoting a vision of social revolution leading to the wholeness of society. The totalitarian state is the state to end all states; it promises permanent wholeness.

Real life tensions often pressures individual conscience to make difficult decisions. To avoid such decisions, individuals sometimes divide decisions and groups into crude "good" and "evil" categories and this can lead to the demonization of some race or class. This demonization is characteristic of totalitarianism. Young people need wholeness socially and sometimes wander to find one. This produces a need for inner identity and the young person looks for it to feel whole. Sometimes this process handed over to others. Modern societies ask the individual to define himself, whereas totalitarian societies, like primitive ones, takes this process over. It is the fear of the loss of identity that makes people easy to indoctrinate and control.

Avoiding totalitarianism requires having courage to take command of one's identity. A universal human identity may yet arise to help with this process.

Chapter 3, The Life Cycle, Epigenesis of Identity

Chapter 3, The Life Cycle, Epigenesis of Identity Summary and Analysis

Understanding identity requires understanding its development over the lifecycle. Erikson sees the identity crisis as an intrinsic part of maturation and divides distinct periods of identity formation in terms of identity crises and how the individual copes with them. Each period has both an inner and outer conflict from which an individual can emerge with a stronger or weaker identity. A healthy personality is one that actively masters the environment, shows personality uniqueness and can know reality. The identity lifecycle is somewhat adapted from biology. Personality develops through predetermined steps to interact with a widening range of important individuals and institutions. Each successive crisis involves a radical change of perspective, a turning point.

The first stage occurs in infancy and involves the mutuality of recognition. It opposes trust and mistrust. Children quickly learn whether they can have a sense of basic trust or mistrust and a sense of basic trust is the cornerstone of any vital personality. Infants usually develop the sense of basic trust from interactions with their mother and the reliability of met needs. Children incorporate what is offered to them and this stage is associated with the Freudian oral stage.

In general, each stage brings the following: expanding libidinal needs, a widening social radius, new and distinct capacities, the developmental crisis raised by dealing with the foregoing and sense of estrangement that arises with a sense of different and then a new kind of psychosocial strength that results from struggling with the crisis.

The second stage brings early childhood and the will to be oneself. It is associated with the Freudian anal stage and contrasts autonomy with shame and doubt. The agent that can 'let go' achieves confidence and a sense of himself as in control. The one that cannot loses autonomy and experiences shame and doubt. Compulsive personalities can develop during this time, as can impulsive personalities.

The third stage arrives near age three and involves the anticipation of social roles. Children can now move around more freely and make basic use of language. These abilities permit the dramatic expansion of imagination. This produces a sense of initiative that can be grown or muted. Children can either experiment with roles or fixate on them and when their initiative fails they feel guilt. This stage is associated with the possibility of being intruded upon as a block of initiative and is tied to the Freudian phallic stage.

The fourth stage arrives by school age and involves task identification. Individuals can experience apprenticeship or work paralysis depending on how successful they are in their endeavors. This can produce either industry or a sense of inferiority. Children turn their initiative into real plans and acquire a sense of industry if things go well. They can attune to a culture's technology at this time. However, industrious children can overly conform to a conception of being a good worker as comprising the whole of life.

Stage five is adolescence and contrasts identity with identity confusion. Adolescents face many contrasts here, such as task identification versus a sense of futility, the anticipation of roles versus role of inhibition, the will to be oneself versus self-doubt and mutual recognition versus autistic isolation. At this point, the human can will freely and has an unlimited imagination often coupled with the desire to make something work. Due to all of these conflicts, adolescents face serious conflicts and can endure severe tests to identity. Identity confusion is a serious challenge.

The sixth stage continues in adolescence and contrasts intimacy and isolation. Humans experience sexual polarization during this period if they are healthy and must learn to fit within a particular conception of their gender. The less healthy do not clearly differentiate into a sex identity. A crisis of intimacy arises when individuals strike out for deep human connections, and often romantic connections with others. Children can acquire a sense of isolation if they are rejected and feel like they are 'nobody.' Sometimes the rejected experience disinstantiation or a desire to destroy anything dangerous to one's own identity. Sexuality and generativity become live possibilities at this stage and lay at the forefront of consciousness. This stage continues into adulthood.

The seventh stage contrasts generativity and stagnation. The adult has to figure out whether she will successfully produce something worthwhile, say, in her family or profession or whether her plans will stagnate. She will contrast being a leader or a follower with confusion about the authority role one plays. A sense of generativity and a sense of stagnation are possible here.

In old adulthood, the elderly begin to look backward on the fruit of the previous stages. They will look back on their lives with integrity, despair or some combination. Some old people are proud of what they have achieved in life and within themselves but others are full of regret. Most are somewhere in between. Wisdom is achieved with this perspective and it also gives form to a living tradition where the elderly have perspective on their place in time and space.

Erikson concludes the chapter by maintaining that psychosocial strength depends on a total process that controls the life cycle and generations in the future and the structure of society, and does so all at once. The individual life cycle, the generational life cycle and the whole of society all evolve together.

Chapter 4, Identity Confusion in Life History and Case History

Chapter 4, Identity Confusion in Life History and Case History Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 begins with excerpts from George Bernard Shaw's sketch of his early adult personality and identity fifty years after the fact. Erikson brings out several elements, such as the fact that Shaw despised his family's snobbery. Shaw was also exposed to much music-making as a child but he found this to be intrusively noisy. Shaw felt that while he cared much about being moral he did not feel like himself when he was good. He conceived of himself as the complete outsider, outside of all social institutions. Erikson is impressed that Shaw could integrate all the complex elements in his life.

Erikson then turns to William James, who was obsessed with what he called 'morbid psychology' his entire life. His youth was full of emotional strains and struggles for sanity. James came to maturity slowly and had a long identity crisis. He came out of it by deciding to be self-governing and strengthen his ego through 'doing, suffering, and creating.'

Since there are few scientific case studies, Erikson must use the foregoing examples to generalize about ordinary individuals. The adolescent process for these men only ended when they subordinated childhood identities to a new identity brought about when they became sociable and found an apprenticeship. Both men displayed a prolonged adolescence as a kind of 'psychosocial moratorium' in which they experimented freely with roles for themselves. Erikson thinks their insights hold across persons and that each society and culture institutionalizes a certain moratorium for the majority of its young people.

Eventually the adult settles on an identity through identification but the mechanism of identification does not merely tie together earlier stages. Instead, older forms are subordinated to newer forms. In childhood, children can look to community members to get a sense for how their development will go.

Several mechanisms combine to help to ego grow and move forward through available models. First, there is introjection, or incorporating another's image. If an agent feels safe, he can reach out to other stages of development. Childhood identifications depend on the child satisfactorily interacting with trustworthy representatives of the future models. Identity formation arrives when identification is no longer useful. It occurs when a former identity is repudiated and absorbed into a new configuration. Community identification of the individual matters a lot here. Crystallization of identity occurs when an individual knows who he is but later uncovers discontinuity in his development that undermines his previous certainty. The final identity is fixed when adolescence ends. It

then moves beyond being a mere sum of identifications with past individuals. Yet it includes them all and organizes them into a coherent whole.

A functional ego integrates both the psychosexual and psychosocial aspects of a phase of development and bridges unavoidable inconsistencies within personality development. These crises push one forward through an evolving identity formulation. The final assemblage is a formidable task. Adolescence is a normative crisis and includes fluctuation in ego strength and high growth potential. The final assembly will bring the most confusion and suffering. Sometimes this process of formation is experienced but ideally it is simply experienced as psychosocial well-being and 'knowing where one is going.'

With the picture of a healthy identity formation process in hand, Erikson explains how disturbances occur. Instead of using career to construct their identity or doing so themselves, agents have others authorize them to move forward so they can avoid anxiety. Acute identity confusion manifests when young individuals are exposed to experiences that demand physical intimacy, occupational choice, energetic competition, and psychosocial self-definition at the same time. This often leads to paralysis which limits actual choice and commitment. But illness still commits one to a particular path of identity formation.

Erikson then explains each pressure. Intimacy stress leads to identifying with a leader while delayed adolescence leads to swings between feeling like a baby and like opportunities have been lost. A sense of workmanship is often undermined and a work identity disintegrated. Some who lose their identity become hostile to roles offered as proper or good in one's community. Patients often choose negative identity, an identity perversely based on roles that were presented to them as hated and dangerous yet real. Negative identification is a method of carving out an identity niche to handle ideals that are excessive. It is a way of gaining mastery. Erikson then covers some features of parents of those who suffer from identity confusion and how negative parental reaction often reinforces the process.

Individual childhood and cultural history are related as well. Cultures and generations offer youth paths to development that can help them form their identities. But cultures can also exacerbate or reflect identity confusion such as romantic generations that are obsessed with images of the past who display time confusion as individuals. Erikson then gives other examples such as doubt, shame, role fixation, work paralysis, and apprenticeship. Cultures can even cause identity regression.

Ideologies are important because they offer youth simplified perspectives that can avoid time confusion and that tie the inner world of ideals and evils with the social world of goals and dangers. Ideologies permit uniformity of behavior in order to counter identity consciousness. Ideologies produce inducements to collective experiments, introduce an ethos of prevailing technology, produce a geographic-historical world image, a rationale for a sexual way of life and submission to leaders who are unambivalent. Without ideological commitment in a way of life, youth suffer from value confusion which can be dangerous.

Ideologies have a bad name. They are merely sets of organizing principles for identities and social philosophies. They are simplified conceptions of what is to come and help to express an inescapable inner need. They become meaningful combinations of the new and old in a group's ideals and this can point in conservative and radical directions. Ideologies that are totalizing can help the infantile superego regain territory from adolescent identity. It also helps to regain the sense of cosmic wholeness lost to modernity. Erikson then discusses the role of ideology in Hitler's life and in the life of the kibbutz.

Freud and James were initially used in the book to help articulate what a vital sense of identity feels like and can now help look beyond identity in the form of the subconscious' manner of handling crises. Erikson then discusses Freud's dream of Irma as an illustration and then William James's terminal dream. Dreams help to illustrate the direction an individual is going in handling an identity crisis.

Chapter 5, Theoretical Interlude

Chapter 5, Theoretical Interlude Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5 turns towards some theoretical questions. Erikson remarks that the idea of identity is tied to the idea of a self-concept of self-system. As a self-concept and system, the ego produces a continuity of self-representation which is again an identity. The ego is forward-looking in that it understands where it wishes to go and the place it wishes to take within society at large. Ego identity, for Erikson, involves testing, selecting, and integrating self-images drawn from psychosocial crises of childhood in light of one's future ideology. Ego-Identity results from synthesizing on the frontiers of the ego, merging self with the environment. Erikson also explains why in subsequent years he has replaced the idea of identity confusion with identity diffusion since one is not confused about which identity one has but rather has a diffuse identity that does not actively integrate the environment.

Identity resistance occurs when the ego resists integrating new elements from the environment. It often arises in therapy where the patient resists the therapist because he is worried that the therapist will destroy the weak core of his identity and impose his own. The patient can also adopt reactive identity elements if the therapist is not careful.

Philosophers and psychologists have created nouns like "The I" or "Self" which in Erikson's view are confusing fictions. The "I" is what reflects on or contemplates the body, personality, and social roles of the person. These elements produce a composite self though they are often disjointed and distinct from one another. Sensing this distinction among elements of the self violates a sense of ideal self. However, The "I" is not the ego and should not be confused with it. The ego is a domain of inner agency that produces a coherent existence. The "I" is all-conscious but the ego is not conscious. We see it working but never look at it directly. The counterweights to the ego are the id, superego and environment. The environmental counterweight lacks specificity and allows varied responses. But it helps to explain that the outer world of the ego is comprised of the egos of others.

One problem with psychoanalysis is that its use of biology is shallow and inaccurate. It fails to recognize that the ego cannot exist without a rich, human social organization. Many now think that humans are predisposed to interact with the environment. Erikson reviews some literature on the subject and points out that this feature of humanity must be examined empirically. The ego is not isolated but takes part in a communality that links egos in mutual activation. The ego process and the social process are somehow tied.

Defining the ego requires understanding how others differ from the individual. In this way, historical reality and context directly impact the ego's process of self-integration. Erikson again discusses the difficulty psychoanalysis has with integrating these ideas

and comments on his own move away from psychoanalytic ideology. Erikson wishes to plot a new course but understands that in doing so he risks being as one-sided as those from whom he developed.

Chapter 6, Toward Contemporary Issues, Youth

Chapter 6, Toward Contemporary Issues, Youth Summary and Analysis

Erikson resists the idea of characterizing modern youth as pathological or lacking virtue. Instead, he wants to understand why youth are searching for something to be true to in areas not sanctioned by society. This search may appear perverse but there is something normal in it. Youth often experience an estrangement from existence which is evidence of identity diffusion. Youth desire to have unique and differentiated identities. Often cultures and individuals will be led to absolutize their values, make them universal, perfect and sublime in an attempt to achieve this differentiation.

In youth, ego strength comes from the confirmation of individual and community, from community recognition of youth as bearing fresh energy. This process includes physical growth and the acquisition of the ability to procreate, the desire to be 'on the go' and 'searching for something.' Youth try to balance fidelity and diversity, recognize a need for loyalty but also a need to respect distinctiveness. These priorities must be balanced to avoid obsessiveness and relativism.

Identity is particularly important when there are a wide range of possible identities available. The anxiety caused by the demand to develop a distinct identity is manifested in identity diffusion through an excessively prolonged adolescent moratorium. Youth also resist the idea that they are determined by what went on before because they are threatened by the idea that they cannot choose identities of their own. Many swing therefore between devoted conformity and extreme deviancy as dysfunctional modes of developing themselves and integrating into the community.

The sketch of the psychopathology of youth helps to make sense of their need for a new identity and their doubt of their elders which sometimes leads to dangerous behavior. Youth become isolated and they are often tortured by a need for love. The isolated sufferer wants to be true to himself and often becomes a joiner. Youth are often driven into an extreme version of their condition and so may find identity in their withdrawn selves.

Older generations can use the youth's need for joining to satisfy the need for fidelity. This is often used by political undergrounds. The ideological idealism of these individuals has a juvenile element that attracts the young. The sources of meeting the fidelity need can be diverse. Individuals are confirmed in their identities by this process. The process also integrates the youth into his historical time period. Youth do this by finding identities that fit with their childhood and their ideology at the same time. Erikson then concludes the chapter by expressing concerns about how ideological needs of

intellectual youth are being filled by technological identity rather than intellectual cultivation.

Chapter 7, Womanhood and the Inner Space

Chapter 7, Womanhood and the Inner Space Summary and Analysis

A number of economic and practical reasons have led to more focus on woman's position in the world. Erikson thinks this is in part due to the threat of nuclear annihilation. He is also concerned that male 'emancipation' of woman has some darker elements and is not wholly sincere. One must explore the emotional reactions and resistances that block meaningful discussion. Feminists sometimes react strongly but many women react negatively and run back to old gender roles. Men are hesitant to respond. There are age-old psychological reasons for this.

For Erikson, the crucial stage of life where women achieve integrated female identity occurs when they leave the family. Adulthood begins with a capacity to receive and give love and care. Empathy and family are a central part of most feminine identities. However, the psychology of women does not begin here. Women grow up knowing that they are missing a penis and have a wound-like aperture in its place, but people have drawn ridiculous conclusions from this. Instead, inner bodily space more than compensates for a missing penis. Erikson then illustrates through observations of children at play.

Females emphasize the inner while males focus on the outer. The sexes have different psychological spaces. Controversy has arisen in response to his findings from older and young generations of scholars. Erikson again tries to bring together the symbolic, individual part of the story with the social factor. Men and women experience the ground plan of the body differently. They grow up with certain predispositions and predilections towards certain kinds of perceptions. A post-Freudian position holds that the complexes and conflicts that psychoanalysts uncover in the individual's breakthrough to human nature affect development but new experiences give rise to methods of resolving these crises in men and women. In women, one crisis arises in their relationships with their fathers. Women learn trust from their mothers and then turn to their fathers. Women are also often isolated by their inner productive space and develop a fear of remaining alone.

Erikson tries to illustrate his driving concept of an 'inner psychological space' in women in some features of social organization. Much of culture is built around protecting the woman's inner space; Erikson illustrates with some movies. Women tend to be tougher, more resistant to disease, and live longer. They can concentrate on immediate details and possess finer discrimination. They react more vividly, personally, and compassionately. They can content themselves with a small circle of activities and are less compulsive. Cultures seek to nurture these elements that help women develop their productive spaces for social survival and individual fulfillment.

One challenge for a woman involves knowing whether she can have an identity prior to knowing who she will marry and how she and her spouse will make a home. Much of a woman's identity is defined by her level of attractiveness to men and the sort of man she thinks appropriate for herself. Woman is not 'more passive' than Man because of biology. Instead, she endeavors to understand and reduce suffering and helps others withstand unavoidable pain. This has a downside in that women often permit themselves to suffer excessively.

Erikson thinks that, to some extent, anatomy is destiny because it defines a range of psychological and physiological functioning. However, history and choice fills out the rest of identity. Erikson then uses some examples to illustrate how biology and history are connected in women. Ego, Soma or a biological life cycle principle, and Psyche interweave and interact with the social environment or Polis. Erikson does not mean to "doom" women to perpetual motherhood or deny them political equality. A truly emancipated woman should embrace her uniqueness. Erikson then wonders how science and the humanities will change when women occupy, en masse, the rank and file of the Academy.

In the end, Erikson concludes, women will tend to identify the Ultimate with the Immediate and there is no need to object to this.

Chapter 8, Race and Wider Identity

Chapter 8, Race and Wider Identity Summary and Analysis

Racial liberation or national liberation usually arises from achieving a sense of identity or a 'revolution or awareness.' Erikson will thus restate some elements of the problem of identity and tie them to the relatively new awareness of the position of blacks in the United States in 1968 when this book was written. First, Erikson focuses on the psychology of the oppressed black in the writings of W.E.B. DuBois. He discusses the 'inaudible', 'faceless,' and 'nameless' black person. Preoccupation with identity is a symptom of alienation and a corrective trend in historical evolution. Such preoccupation is important because it is central to realizing man's specieshood, realizing the dream of universal brotherhood. Identity is naturally territorial and is hard to resist.

Erikson thinks that the focus of many black writers on the negative and confused has actually constructed as a method of forming identity among those who have been denied the opportunity. Identity-consciousness is overcome only by a sense of identity achieved.

One difficulty for blacks is the resistance of mothers to impel their children to be educated because they have been conditioned to keep their children away from what they naturally regard as futile and dangerous competition. Negative identity, conceiving of one's self in terms of what one is not, is destructive for blacks. Individuals that belong to oppressed groups are exposed to feelings of inferiority and self-hate. Oppressors have an interest in perpetuating this identity. In some ways this is continued when majorities recognize their oppression for what it is and dwell on their sins, which can confirm the minority's negative self image. Remorseful majorities must still be watched so that they avoid unconsciously repeated habitual patterns.

Black youth have particular struggles because they must form a new identity realizing that the old identity, which they value, was partly formed by the forces of oppression. Sometimes public policy saves blacks from having to integrate through their own choices. Identity development has a developmental stage in the individual but also a period in history. The crisis of black youth is the crisis of a generation and the crisis of the ideological soundness of its society. Identity is composed of past and future in both individual and society. Erikson questions that the black father is only a psychological 'absence.' It is important that strong mothers not be negatively stereotyped. Black males were systematically exploited as domestic animals and denied the ability to be responsible fathers. It created an imbalance of mother-father presence and produced a dysfunctional black family pattern.

Erikson recommends integrating blacks and other minorities into American society with a more inclusive identity. Blacks need to be able to be both self-certain as blacks and integrated as Americans, as difficult as that may be. Life history, and national history

must fit together. Erikson sees the path of history as driving towards more inclusive identity contained in modern religion and ideologies. Yet other forms of life and social roles compete for the ability to form black identity, such as technical skill, African identity, middle class, and so on. A religious identity element is there as well.

Erikson concludes by recalling his initial promise to show how concepts like 'identity' and 'identity confusion and diffusion' are indispensable to case histories, life histories, and history. He regrets leaving the issues in mid-discussion. However, the process of development must continue and it does not end with Erikson's book. Clinical and social work must continue.

Characters

Erik Erikson

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) is the author of Identity, Youth, and Crisis. Since Identity, Youth, and Crisis is a non-fiction book concerning Erikson's psychological theories, he is the most important person in the work. Erikson was born to Danish parents in Germany and his childhood led to his interest in the psychology of identity. In early adulated, he taught dancing and art in Vienna and met Sigmund Freud's daughter, Anna, who he underwent psychoanalysis with. He then became a psychoanalyst and a follower of Freud.

When Erikson received his college degree in 1933 his family moved to Denmark and later to the United States. Erikson then began a psychoanalytic practice. From 1933 to 1950, Erikson studied childhood development, putting together his landmark Childhood and Society. In this book, Erikson developed his unique methodology of integrating social science and psychoanalysis and developed the eight stage lifecycle of ego development applied in Identity, Youth, and Crisis. Erikson was a 'Neo-Freudian' psychology who developed what is called 'ego-psychology.' Erikson's concept of the ego understands human identity as produces by the ego process that integrates inner and outer experience in developmental stages.

Identity, Youth, and Crisis extends Erikson's application of ego psychology to the study of adolescence and the deepening of Erikson's conception of personal identity. Erikson defends his theory with case studies, often drawn from famous 19th and 20th century historical figures like George Bernard Shaw, William James, and W.E.B. Dubois. He also applies ego psychology to the study of contemporary challenges to Western youth, the liberation of women, and the rising black identity of his day.

Sigmund Freud

Erikson was a Neo-Freudian and a patient and friend of Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud. While Erikson's devotion to Freudian orthodoxy was most prominent early in his career, Freudian psychological theories continued to influence him throughout his life. For this reason, Freud is arguably Identity, Youth and Crisis's second most important person.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is perhaps the most famous psychologist in history. He was an Austrian neurologist who created psychoanalytic theory which is clinical psychology's first self-conscious school of thought. Freud created the theory of the unconscious mind and introduces the ideas of the subconscious, defense mechanisms, repression and penis envy into the popular culture. He was understood as a radical in his day for his new view of sexual desire as near the root of psychological motivation.

Freud was always known for his concept of transference, the interpretation of dreams, and much more. While his particular theories have fallen out of fashion, he had major influences on future schools of thought, including Erikson's school of ego psychology. Freud is particularly influential for his division of human motivations into the Id, Superego, and Ego, but Freud's Ego is more passive, balancing the animal desire of the Id with the oft-oppressive motives of the Superego. Erikson's major innovation is to make the ego into an active force of psychological integration of society and individual and of passion and moral control. Erikson also extends Freud's five stage theory of psychosexual development to eight stages.

The Adolescent

Erikson focuses on the adolescent to bring out the unique and intense challenges to identity that occur during adolescence when the individual must integrate all previous forms of identity into an adult consciousness.

George Bernard Shaw

Shaw (1856-1950) was a well-known Irish playwright whose struggles to build his own identity were of interest to Erikson and which Erikson uses to illustrate his conception of identity.

William James

James (1842-1910) was an important American psychologist and philosopher who, like Shaw, had major identity struggles as a youth that were also of interest to Erikson and which Erikson uses to illustrate his conception of identity.

Parents

Parents have an important role in helping their adolescents balance the need for fidelity and membership on the one hand with individuality and the need for uniqueness and diversity on the other.

The Social Group

Social groups like families, communities, and nations along with one's historical time periods help to define the roles that the ego will merge with in adolescence.

Irma

This individual is a patient of Freud's that Erikson uses to demonstrate his idea of identity confusion.

Late 1960s Youth

Late 1960s youth face the unique challenge of creating their own identities because technological change is happening so quickly that the identities of their parents are no longer feasible.

Late 1960s Women

While women's liberation is important to Erikson, he emphasizes the female identity will tend to be characterized by an emphasis on care, personal sacrifice, and 'inner space.'

Late 1960s Blacks

Late 1960s blacks need an ideology and collective identity to recover their own sense of self-worth and to produce a positive conception of their identity.

Totalitarian Children

Totalitarian children are those that political and social leaders have brainwashed by appealing to their need for fidelity.

Objects/Places

Freudianism

This is Sigmund Freud's psychological theory which had a deep influence on Erikson.

The Eight Stages of Man

This is Erikson's eight-stage theory of psychosocial development.

The Ego

The Ego is the set of active psychological motivations that integrate inner and outer perception and balance the Id and Superego, creating identity.

Ego Psychology

Ego psychology is Erikson's school of psychology which understands individual development in terms of the development of the Ego.

Identity

Identity is what is constructed at each period of life by the ego. The ego is an unconscious process while identity is the product of the ego which can be introspects, evaluated, and altered to some extent. Identities develop through identity crises.

Identity Diffusion and Confusion

Identity diffusion and confusion occurs when an individual fails to navigate an identity crisis, instead veering into a negative reaction and losing one's sense of self.

Identity Crises

Identity crises occur in each stage of psychosocial development as challenges to the ego's ability to integrate new experiences. When traversed properly, identity crises create a more developed ego.

Somatic, Ego and Social Processes

Three processes, physical, mental, and social that interact in a complex fashion and together generate identity.

Fidelity and Diversity

Adolescents face two needs. They are the need to belong and a need to be a distinct and unique individual. Balancing these two needs is often challenging and can lead to identity confusion when veering too far into one direction.

Technological Change

Technological change in the latter half of the 20th century poses challenges to healthy identity development, according to Erikson. It happens quickly and produces dramatic social change which makes developmental continuity between generations hard to secure leaving youth under great stress to develop identities and social roles for themselves.

Ideology

In the non-pejorative sense, an ideology is an organizing set of principles for governing a life that simplify the world and worldview so as to effectively process new information.

Case Studies

At the time of Erikson's writing, there was little by way of empirical evidence that Erikson could use to defend his theory. He therefore turns in part to autobiographical case studies.

Inner Space

Women tend to be more focused on 'inner space' or on the symbolic aspects of the inside of the body, the procreative spaces, and maintaining close families and communities, emotional intimacy, and so on.

Themes

The Concept of Identity and Ego Psychology

Identity, Youth and Crisis' primary aim is to flesh out a clinical conception of human identity and explain its relationship to Erikson's ego psychology. To explain identity, Erikson distinguishes it from a conscious self-conception. Instead, identity is the result of a process of individual identification and the interaction between the individual and society. Both society and the individual define identity. Further, identity is formed as a method of synthesizing all the information that is derived from inner experience and outer experience. Identity is socially and individually constructed but this construction proceeds through a natural, biological process.

Specifically, identity forms and deepens through what Erikson terms 'identity crises.' An identity crisis occurs during a period of life when the stresses of assimilating new information about the world brings about stress on an individual's self-conception and forces the individual to either increase or decrease in functionality. Identity crises are natural and in Erikson's view, come in eight stages throughout life. Psychopathology results when an identity crisis is not handled properly. Identity then is constructed biologically, individually, and socially in a continuously evolving process.

The ego, in Erikson's view, is responsible for the production of identity. Unlike Freud's passive concept of the ego simply balancing the moral control of the Superego and the passions of the Id, Erikson's concept of the ego is active and always engaged in creative synthesis. The ego operates unconsciously and acts at the boundary of individual and society and environment, resolving contradictions between mind and world and adapting identity in response to these contradictions. Identity is the social and conscious result of this process.

Identity Confusion and Youth

Each of the eight stages of psychosocial development brings about identity crises. The first stage, for instance, comes about when the infant is developed enough mentally to develop a sense of time. In this period, the infant must struggle with feelings of trust and mistrust. An identity crisis occurs when the infant's ego must decide whether to look at the world with an attitude of trust or with an attitude of mistrust. Good parenting experiences and a stable environment tend to generate an attitude of trust and bad parenting and instability the opposite. Identity confusion arises when this stage goes awry.

As the child grows into an adolescent, subsequent identity crises must be confronted. When an individual passes into adolescence, she must always have decided whether to see herself as autonomous or full of doubt, whether she takes the initiative or feels guilt for bad choices and whether she will be industrious or feel inferior. At this time the

adolescent must make a step into developing a concrete identity that will then connect with others while engaging in life projects and the like. More identity confusion is possible if the child's ego fails to handle each identity crisis appropriately.

The reason that Erikson focuses on youth is because they face four major ego choices at once: task identification versus a sense of futility, anticipation of roles versus role inhibition, the will to be oneself versus self-doubt, and mutual recognition versus autistic isolation. These stresses that hit the adolescent simultaneously pose a major risk of developing identity confusion and associated pathologies. One method of avoiding identity confusion is for adolescents to learn to balance a desire for group membership and approval with the freedom to carve out their own distinctiveness. Without group membership, they fall into deviancy. Without individuality, they become vessels for the control of others which at its worst manifests in totalitarianism.

Psychoanalysis, Social Science, and History

Erikson is not merely focused on identity, identity confusion, ego psychology and youth alone. He also focuses on a methodological theme about how clinical psychology should be done. Erikson became a psychoanalyst due to the influence of Anna Freud, Sigmund Freud's daughter. He was an orthodox Freudian initially and practiced psychoanalysis as one.

However, over time, Erikson became dissatisfied with psychoanalysts' methods of understand psychopathology. It was too individualistic, always looking inward and never to the social environment and historical circumstances of the individual with the pathology. One point of Identity, Youth, and Crisis is to make the cases at a theoretical level that psychoanalysis must be linked with the social sciences in order to fully make sense of the questions it poses about human development.

Erikson's concept of the active ego shows one method of linking the social world with the individual psyche. The ego generates identity through the challenges involves in assimilating the contradictions between minds and world. Since the ego is intrinsically disposed to interact with the world and absorb and organize social information, human identity is intrinsically social and can often be defined by one's society, through culture, technology, and the like. As a result, social science is needed to understand precisely what the ego is doing and how social factors result in identity development. Further, looking towards the social world more directly will give psychoanalysts more resources to make sense of psychopathology and ultimately combat it.

Style

Perspective

Since Erik Erikson is the author of Identity, Youth, and Crisis which is a non-fiction work of clinical psychological theory, the perspective of the book is wholly his. Erikson's early life was characterized by his interests in art and teaching art. Due to some personal struggles, he sought treatment with Anna Freud who turned his interests towards psychoanalysis and leading him ultimately to become a psychoanalyst.

As Erikson was heavily influenced by Anna Freud, her father's work left an indelible mark on Erikson's perspective. Erikson affirms the basic Id-Superego-Ego model that Freud advances and understands human motivational as more libidinal than the general public although significantly less than Freud. He also thinks that human biology carries with it a development process for the psyche, but his stages are less sexually oriented and have eight stages rather than five.

However, Erikson is also a critic of psychoanalysis, although not rejecting the school's most important insights. Erikson developed his own concept of the ego as an active agent rather than a passive balancer. Consequently, he was pushed towards thinking about how the ego regularly functions and thought it made the most sense to see the ego as synthesizing not merely information about the mind's inner life but also about the new social information the individual constantly receives from the world. This led to Erikson emphasizing that psychoanalysis is incomplete without significant clinical work and an interface with social science.

Tone

Erikson conceives of himself as a serious and scientific clinical psychologist and his tone reflects that self-conception. Much of the book is rather dry and full of technical jargon. However, Erikson prevents the phraseology from making the book incomprehensible. In fact, his tone is often quite clear and engaging, particularly when he analyzes case studies and uses vivid stories to illustrate his ideas.

The book is composed of rewritten articles so the tone will vary from chapter to chapter somewhat. Erikson is more vivid and inspired in shorter chapters aimed at making more focused points and that are derived from presentations, whereas the longer chapters often have the dryer, more scientific tone characteristic of the book.

However, Erikson often takes time out of his theoretical discussions to engage the social and political issues of his day. For instance, in Erikson's analysis of totalitarian psychologies, he becomes particularly sage-like, providing an analysis of how the totalitarian disposition is inherent in human begins. In later chapters, when Erikson focuses on the state of contemporary Western youth he expresses a degree of passion

not found in the rest of the book. He also expresses significant concern about the state of the youth culture throughout the book.

In the chapter on female psychology, Erikson's tone is careful, attempting to make clear that he is not embracing sexism by maintaining a view that female psychology is distinct. In the chapter on race and national identity, the tone turns harsher and more critical, displaying a suspicion of oppressor cultures and their inability to grasp the psychological damage they have done to the oppressed.

Structure

While Erikson states that Identity, Youth, and Crisis draws material from many of his articles, the reader should still view the book as an integrated whole. The chapters themselves focus on particular themes but they are nonetheless tied together. Each chapter contains a number of subsections that are tightly related as well. Although on occasion, Erikson will veer into new territory partly unrelated to previous discussion. Each chapter varies significantly in length and will often range over vivid case studies and stories and dryer discussions of theoretical matters.

The book begins with a preface and a prologue, the latter of which explains Erikson's focus on and interest in personal identity. Chapter two, "Foundations in Observation" ties Erikson's previous explanation of personal identity and its link to ego psychology with clinical work and case studies along with an analysis of totalitarianism. Chapter three, "The Life Cycle: Epigenesis of Identity" explains Erikson's eight-stage theory of childhood and adolescent development. He also explains the significance of the identity crisis of the adolescent. Chapter four, "Identity Confusion in Life History and Case History" analyzes empirical and theoretical aspects of the psychopathology that develops out of poorly handled identity crises such as identity confusion.

Chapter five, "Theoretical Interlude" moves to more abstract issues regarding the concepts employ in the book, such as the ideas of confusion, transference, the "I" and the role of ideology. Chapter six, "Toward Contemporary Issues: Youth" applies Erikson's ego psychology to a focused analysis of contemporary youth psychology. Chapter six, "Womanhood and Inner Space" applies ego psychology to female psychology and chapter eight, "Race and the Wider Identity" applies ego psychology to race and national identity.

Quotes

"As a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity, what I would call a sense of identity" (Chapter 1, 19.)

"The ethics of the future will be less concerned with the relationship of generations to each other than with the interplay of individuals in a scheme in which the whole life-span is extended; in which new roles for both sexes will emerge in all life stages; and in which a certain measure of choice and identity must be the common value, to be guaranteed in principle to every child planned to be born-anywhere" (Chapter 1, pg. 39.)

"The general neglect of these [social] factors in psychoanalysis naturally has not furthered a rapprochement with the social sciences" (Chapter 2, pg. 45.)

"I begin with the assumption that totalitarianism is based on universal human potentialities and is thus related to all aspects of human nature, wholesome and pathological, adult and infantile, individual and social" (Chapter 2, pg. 77.)

"To have the courage of one's diversity is a sign of wholeness in individuals and in civilization" (Chapter 2, pg. 90.)

"We may, in fact, speak of the identity crisis as the psychosocial aspect of adolescing" (Chapter 3, pg. 91.)

"Psychosocial strength, we conclude, depends on a total process which regulates individual life cycles, the sequence of generations, and the structure of society simultaneously: for all three have evolved together" (Chapter 3, pg. 141.)

"The final identity...fixed at the end of adolescence...is superordinated to any single identification with individuals of the past: it includes all significant identifications, but it also alters them in order to make a unique and reasonably coherent whole of them" (Chapter 4, pg. 161.)

"The loss of a sense of identity is often expressed in a scornful and snobbish hostility toward the roles offered as proper and desirable in one's family or immediate community" (Chapter 4, pg. 172-3.)

"In studying the ego's relation to changing historical reality, psychoanalysis approaches a new phalanx of unconscious resistances" (Chapter 5, pg. 225.)

"I am only too aware of the fact that in steering in a new direction one is apt to hold to a one-sided course, temporarily ignoring well-traveled courses and alternate directions suggested in the pioneer work of others" (Chapter 5, pg. 231.)

"In youth, ego strength emerges from the mutual confirmation of individual and community, in the sense that society recognizes the young individual as a bearer of fresh energy and that the individual so confirmed recognizes society as a living process

which inspires loyalty as it receives it, maintains allegiance as it attracts it, honors confidence as it demands it" (Chapter 6, pg. 241.)

"Fidelity without a sense of diversity can become an obsession and a bore; diversity without a sense of fidelity, an empty relativism" (Chapter 6, pg. 245.)

"The stage of life crucial for the emergence of an integrated female identity is the step from youth to maturity, the state when the young woman, whatever her work career, relinquishes the care receives from the parental family in order to commit herself to the love of a stranger and to the care to be given to his or her offspring" (Chapter 7, pg. 265.)

"True equality can only mean the right to be uniquely creative" (Chapter 7, pg. 291.)

"The alternative to an exclusive totalism...is the wholeness of a more inclusive identity" (Chapter 8, pg. 314.)

"A concept is only as good as the preliminary order which it brings into an otherwise baffling and seemingly unrelated phenomena-an order, furthermore, which reveals forces of restoration in the anarchy of crisis" (Chapter 8, pg. 320.)

Topics for Discussion

Explain Erikson's conception of identity. What are some differences between the clinician's conception of identity and the common conception?

Discuss some theoretical challenges Erikson grapples with in defining a useful concept of identity.

What's an identity crisis? Does Erikson think that an identity crisis is dysfunctional? If not, how is it functional?

What is identity confusion? How does it occur? How can it be avoided? How can it be fixed?

Explain Erikson's view on the relationship of psychoanalysis and social science. Why does the two sides need one another?

How does adolescence present a particularly challenging identity crisis?

How does Erikson use his theory of identity to address women's issues, race issues, and issues facing contemporary youth in 1968?