

this solution is prepared in the previous stage(s) and is worked out further in subsequent ones. Each stage is described in terms of the extremes of successful and unsuccessful solutions that can be arrived at during each particular stage, though in reality the outcome is often a balance between these extremes. For example, a sense of “basic trust” is the first component of mental vitality to develop in life, a sense of “autonomy” is the second, and a sense of “initiative” the third.

Erikson uses conflicts throughout development to describe human growth. According to Erikson, a basic strength can develop from resolving the intrinsic conflicts in each stage of development. At each successive stage the individual builds on the strengths previously developed. Unresolved issues from earlier stages can interrupt the resolution of later conflicts. Alternatively, the current psychosocial crisis can be an opportunity to rework unresolved conflicts from earlier stages.

For the last component of the healthy personality, a sense of “integrity” is necessary. In other words, the struggle or task of old age is the achievement of ego “integrity” in face of the despair of knowing that one’s limited life is near its termination. Erikson (1980) defined ego integrity as follows:

[Integrity] is the acceptance of one’s own and only life cycle and of the people who have become significant to it as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of substitutions. It thus means a new different love of one’s parents, free of the wish that they should have been different, and an acceptance of the fact that one’s life is one’s own responsibility. . . . Although aware of the relatively of all the various life styles which have given meaning to human striving, the possessor of integrity is ready to defend the dignity of his own life style against all physical and economic threats. For he knows that an individual life is the accidental coincidence of but one life cycle with but one segment of history . . . . I can add, clinically, that the lack or loss of this accrued ego integration is dignified by despair and an often unconscious fear of death (p. 104).

From the above description, the consolidation of the characteristics of an integrated ego in old age may result in the capacity to accept one’s anticipatory death. Fear of death reflects the lack or loss of ego integration; it is a state of despair which expresses the feeling that time is running out and a feeling of regret that it is too late to shape a new life. Ego integrity implies an “emotional integration” which is the cumulative product of having successfully resolved the earlier stages of development.

### Life Review/Reminiscence and Ego Integrity

Although Erikson suggested the task of old age, he did not provide a concrete method for how the elderly could accomplish integrity in the final stage of their life cycle. In order to achieve ego integrity several authors report that life review or reminiscence in work with the elderly is positively related to it (Boylin, Gordon & Nehrke, 1976, Carlson, 1984, Henkin & Walz, 1989, Cook, 1991, Peache, 1992, and Haight & Webster, 1995).

The concept of the life review is originally presented by Butler (Butler, 1963) and is characterized by the mental process of reviewing/reminiscing past experience, particularly “the resurgence of unresolved conflicts” (p. 66). The prevailing tendency is to identify reminiscence in the elderly with psychological dysfunction and to regard it essentially as a symptom. Yet Butler (1963) asserts that this reminiscence process occurs in all persons in the final years of their lives, although they may not be totally aware of it or may defend themselves from its presence. In late life, people have a particularly vivid imagination and memory for their past and can recall with early life events. There is a renewed ability to “free-associate and bring up material from the unconscious,” thereby the mental conflicts may be reviewed again.

The term “reminiscence” is sometimes confounded with nostalgia. Carlson (1984) asserts that nostalgia is most often used to signify a wish for something from long ago. The nostalgic person longs for time which they cannot return to. Nostalgia is characterized by yearning, bitterness and regret, in which the person wishes not only for a return to the past but also for the ability to alter the outcome of past events. The nostalgic person tends to idealize the past, or past loved object, and to perceive the past as more precious and valuable than