
DISCUSSION TOPICS

**ERIK H. ERIKSON:
A LIFE'S WORK**

Narration By

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and

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(38 Minutes)



DAVIDSON *films*

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INTRODUCTION

Best known for his identification of the eight stages of the life cycle, Erikson spent a lifetime observing and studying the way in which the interplay of genetics, cultural influences and unique experiences produces individual human lives.

This video combines biographical information about Erikson with his theoretical proposals to give students an understanding of the relationship between the life experience of a theorist and the work that is produced.

Archival footage illustrates Erikson's youthful experiences in Vienna teaching in a school, learning psychoanalysis from Anna Freud and his mid-life influential time with the Sioux. Newly shot footage support discussion of the life cycle and his biopsychosocial model.

We hope that you will send us topics for discussion that we may share with other instructors. Some of the topics can be used as essay questions, others as leads to discussion in class and still others are musings by the producer about what did not get into the videos. Please email us reactions and suggestions so we can continue to make the topics more useful.

Our email address is dfi@davidsonfilms.com.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Erikson was fundamentally a therapist. He saw patients in a variety of situations all of his professional life. In his opening statement in this video, he talks about the hope that society can be improved so therapy is not so necessary.
 - a. What do you think he means by this?
 - b. This writer thinks that he probably was talking about how children get raised as his training was as a child psychoanalyst.

- c. An interesting conversation might be comparing Erikson's image of healthful child rearing with that of B.F. Skinner as elaborated in WALDEN TWO. (Erikson would have highly approved of Skinner's parenting of his own children.)
2. The First World War was a watershed event for the history of Western Civilization. The optimistic sense of the nineteenth century, that science and technology could solve human problems, was shattered by the realization that science and technology could create better weapons along with vaccines and steam engines.

Humans were thrown back on their more social and psychological resources to make progress, something that is still a challenge almost a hundred years later. It is not just coincidental that psychology as an organized endeavor was a product of the twentieth century. Discuss.

3. Erikson identified himself with the psychoanalytic tradition that in recent years has been disparaged. What messages from this tradition still seem to have validity?
4. What experiences do your students have with the project method of education that, in part, came out of John Dewey's work? In recent years, it was a central idea of the British Infant School work of the 1960's and of Lillian Katz and Sylvia Chard's more recent work. Katz and Chard would have disapproved of Erikson's focus on the Eskimos as they think that projects should be focused on local, current issues for the students.
5. Erikson's brief visit to the Sioux reservation had a profound impact on his work, enabling him to incorporate people's social situation into his understanding. Are there parallels in other theorist's work? Vygotsky's work for the Uzbekistanis (though he had to cancel his trip to Uzbekistan because of illness) might be one.
6. This video tries to emphasize that the life stages don't have "good" and "bad" outcomes but that the two strands are always present and health is in the balance. (In the Davidson Films productions, ON OLD AGE I and II, the weaving that Joan Erikson designed based on the life cycle illustrates this point well. Obviously, Erikson was affected by Hegel's concept of the dialectic.)

Do your students have a tendency to see conflicts as in black and white? How does morality fit into Erikson's gray theory? Erikson's statement comparing Freud to Ghandi deals with this. What is the reaction of your students to this?

7. This video was made just after the Los Angeles riots sparked by the Rodney King judgment. Are there more contemporary examples of dealing with conflicts that are relevant to your students?
8. This video does not go into much depth about Erikson's later work. What is important for your students to know about it?

RELATED FILMS

Also Available from Davidson Films

This is one of nine films in the Davidson Films “Giants” series. The other titles in this series are:

B. F. SKINNER: A FRESH APPRAISAL

(1999) 41 minutes

PIAGET’S DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY: AN OVERVIEW

(1989) 25 minutes

VYGOTSKY’S DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION

(1994) 28 minutes

BANDURA’S SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION

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JOHN DEWEY: AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS LIFE AND WORK

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MARY AINSWORTH: ATTACHMENT AND THE GROWTH OF LOVE

(2005) 38 minutes

JOHN BOWLBY: ATTACHMENT THEORY ACROSS GENERATIONS

(2007) 40 minutes

DAVIDSON FILMS, INC. also produced two videos with Erik Erikson’s wife, **Joan Erikson**, in which she discusses the eight stages of the life cycle, and her husband’s and her experience with aging:

ON OLD AGE I: A CONVERSATION WITH JOAN ERIKSON AT 90

(1995) 39 Minutes

ON OLD AGE II: A CONVERSATION WITH JOAN ERIKSON AT 92

(1995) 30 Minutes
