
LEARNING GUIDE

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

Narration By

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and

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(38 Minutes)



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INTRODUCTION

This film illustrates three points about Erikson's work:

1. The importance of seeing all behavior in a social context. This is summed up by the bio-psycho-social model.
2. Erikson's introduction of ethical perspectives into psychology.
3. The life stages exemplify this push/pull nature of life with its inherent dichotomies. When one accepts the existence of these conflicts, one can start trying to resolve issues in non-violent ways.

ERIKSON'S EARLY LIFE

- Born June 15, 1902 in Frankfurt Germany to Danish parents who separated before his birth.
- Grew up in Karlsruhe, Germany. Was a teenager during the First World War. He used his stepfather's last name, Homburger, until the late 1930's.
- Did not do well in school and did not continue on to a university. He had eight years of traveling Europe as a wandering artist. He had cross-cultural experiences throughout his life.

VIENNA YEARS 1928 -- 1933

- Erikson taught in a small private school with Peter Blos who is also a noted writer on adolescence. Used the "project method" for curriculum organization. In today's terminology, the school was developmentally appropriate.
- Trained as a Montessori teacher.
- Studied psychoanalysis with Anna Freud. Erikson used Freud's model for a basis of his first four life stages.
- Married Joan M. Serson and had two sons.

EARLY U. S. DAYS 1933 -- 1950

- Erikson worked at Harvard University and Yale University in their clinics for disturbed children from 1933--1939. He had children construct scenes out of blocks and props, a method he used for both therapy and research all of his life.
- A daughter was born to the Eriksons.
- Visited the Sioux reservation in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, summer of 1938. Photos are contemporary, but not done by Erikson or his guide, Scudder Meekel. Realized that Freud's bio-psycho model was not adequate to describe the Sioux experience and stressed that all behavior has to be seen in a social context. Thus his Bio-psycho-social Model.
- Erikson came to California to work at the longitudinal study of the Institute of Child Welfare at the University of California. Practiced at the Veteran's Hospital in San Francisco. From his work with mentally ill veterans of W.W.II, his ideas of the importance of the "identity crisis" began to solidify. Reacting to Joe McCarthy and the actions of the Committee on Un-American Activities, he refused to sign a loyalty oath and left the University.
- Childhood and Society is published in 1950. Includes individual case histories, chapters on the Sioux and Yurok tribes, the Eight Stages, and biographical portraits.
 1. Infancy: Trust versus Mistrust
 2. Toddlerhood: Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt
 3. Early Childhood: Initiative versus Guilt
 4. Middle Childhood: Inferiority versus Industry
 5. Adolescence: Identity versus Role Confusion
 6. Early Adulthood: Intimacy versus Isolation
 7. Middle Age: Generativity versus Stagnation
 8. Old Age: Integrity versus Despair

ERIKSON'S LATER LIFE 1950--1994

- Both Eriksons worked at the private mental hospital, the Austen-Riggs Clinic, in Stockbridge, MA with our narrator, Margaret Brenman-Gibson from 1951-1961. Erikson served as a consultant at the University of Pittsburgh's Western Psychiatric Institute.
- Professor of Human Development at Harvard where he taught a very popular course on the life cycle. He taught there 10 years during the turbulent 1960's, returning in the 80's.
- Spent time in India researching GHANDI'S TRUTH. Erikson contrasted Freud's methods of psychotherapy with Gandhi's non-violent methods:
- *"In both encounters, only the militant probing of a vital issue can bring to light what insight is ready on both sides.... At the end, only a development which transforms both partners in such an encounter is truth in action, and such transformation is possible only where man learns to be nonviolent towards himself as well as towards others."*
- The Erikson returned in the Bay Area of California in the 1970's for a working retirement. Both Eriksons worked at Mt. Zion Hospital in San Francisco, training still another generation of child workers. Erikson led many seminars on a wide range of topics.
- The Erikson's came back to Massachusetts where Erik Erikson died in 1994, and Joan Erikson died in 1997.

OTHER ERIKSON BOOKS

- YOUNG MAN LUTHER (1958). A look at the identity crisis of this historical figure.
- IDENTITY AND THE LIFE CYCLE (1969).
- INSIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY (1964)
- IDENTITY: YOUTH AND CRISIS, a very enlightened look at adolescence which includes his "Womanhood and the Inner Space" and "Race and the Wider Identity" (1968)

- GANDHI'S TRUTH (1970). Is dedicated to Martin Luther King who was killed just before it came out. At one point Erikson writes a letter to Gandhi expressing his frustration over Gandhi's inability to come to terms with his sexuality and approach towards women.
- DIMENSIONS OF A NEW IDENTITY (1974)
- LIFE HISTORY AND THE HISTORICAL MOMENT, includes an autobiographical sketch (1975).
- TOYS AND REASONS (1977). Includes a discussion of nuclear age politics.
- THE LIFE CYCLE COMPLETED (1982) Revised in 1996, with an afterword by Joan Erikson expanding the life cycle with further stages in old age.
- A WAY OF LOOKING AT THINGS (1989), edited by Stephen Schlein, Ph.D. Includes previously uncollected papers including the early one we cite on Play and a memoir of his time at the Vienna school. Also includes some of his portraits.
- VITAL INVOLVEMENT IN OLD AGE (1989), with Joan Erikson and Helen Kivnik, Ph.D. Includes interesting retrospective of the stages with people they had studied forty years earlier.

H O N O R S

In addition to several honorary degrees, Erik Erikson's work has been honored by the founding of three institutions, which bear his name:

- The Erikson Institute in Chicago is a graduate program affiliated with Loyola University, which offers degrees in child development. It was founded in 1966
- The Erik Homburger Erikson Haus in Karlsruhe Germany is a public child psychiatric facility in Erikson's "hometown." It was founded in 1986.
- The Erikson Center of Cambridge, MA is a multigenerational community center with special emphasis on serving older people and teenage mothers.

Erikson spoke with accented English. His comments are transcribed for your clarification.

First passage

“Today we have to ask how can a society be created in which a number of symptoms can be prevented. Because once they are there, the chance of curing them is only a relative one. Furthermore, as you know very well, today psychiatry and psychoanalysis are supposed to cure the ills and evils of a society, which is not what they are made for.

“So I would apply psychoanalysis in a different way. I would try to learn from psychoanalysis how man develops and to learn to make some contribution, however small, you know, to a future world in which the ethics of the way the generations are related to each other will take care of individuals in such a way that psychiatry is not so necessary.”

Second passage

“ I met Scudder Meekel, you probably never heard of him, he died very young, and who was field representative of the commission of Indian Affairs. He simply said, “ Why don’t you come out to the Sioux Indians with me? Because there, the government is trying to send the Indian children to schools which are primarily staffed by non-Indians, in fact by Easterners. And the previous childhood of these children is not at all taken into account. And I think you could be helpful there.

“There was in Germany, Karl May, who wrote books which we as boys read avidly. So the moment I knew it was the Sioux, as we called them, I couldn’t stay away.

“For example, there was a handbook on the Sioux Indians put out by the government at that time which was 300 pages long and in that, half a page was devoted to childhood. And it was the easiest thing in the world to go out there and ask these grandmothers: Before the white man came, how were your children brought up? They loved to talk about it and they always wondered why nobody ever asked them.”

RELATED 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 (2003) 38 minutes

JOHN DEWEY: AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS LIFE AND WORK (2001) 40 minutes

MARIA MONTESSORI: HER LIFE AND LEGACY (2004) 35 minutes

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