

## Introduction

- Joan Erikson and her husband, Erik Erikson, devised the eight-stage life cycle when they were middle-aged. Both continued to reassess it throughout their work lives. When Joan became old, she strongly felt a need to redefine the eighth stage. She felt that they had originally romanticized old age.
- The first video (*Old Age I*) is her reworking that stage and her reflections on her experience of old age. Two years later, after the death of her husband, she discusses her thoughts about a ninth stage of life, extreme old age (*Old Age II*).

## On Old Age I: A Conversation with Joan Erikson at 90

- Erik Erikson's first published the Eight-Stage Life Cycle in his book *Childhood and Society*.
- The life stages are age-related, but the conflicts they represent are present in all ages of life. Out of the conflicts come strengths or virtues.

|                      |                              |            |
|----------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Infancy:          | Trust vs. Mistrust           | Hope       |
| 2. Toddlerhood:      | Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt | Will       |
| 3. Early Childhood:  | Initiative vs. Guilt         | Purpose    |
| 4. Middle Childhood: | Industry vs. Inferiority     | Competence |
| 5. Adolescence:      | Identity vs. Role Confusion  | Fidelity   |
| 6. Young Adulthood:  | Intimacy vs. Isolation       | Love       |
| 7. Middle Age:       | Generativity vs. Stagnation  | Care       |
| 8. Old Age:          | Integrity vs. Despair        | Wisdom     |

## The Eighth Stage Revisited

- Wisdom is the "virtue," or strength, that the Eriksons saw emerging in old age. Joan Erikson questioned this as she felt no one feels "wise," as he or she feels the virtues of the other stages.
  - Joan redefines *wisdom* in terms of "knowing how to."
  - Joan redefines *integrity* using the root of "tact."

## Practical Issues of Growing Old

- Prioritizing and letting go of the extraneous.
- Taking care of one's body.
- Retirement.
- Joy.
- Networking with other elders.
- Communicating with people who have lost language. NOT demented.
- Expecting death.

## Life Cycle Revisited

- The Life Cycle revisited as portrayed by the weaving:
  - One always has chances to work on unresolved issues: "Nothing is ever cut off."
  - Resiliency

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## On Old Age II: A Conversation with Joan Erikson at 92

### Changes in Joan's Life in the Last Three Years

- The move to a different community and an unsuccessful attempt to live in a group situation.
- Erik Erikson's death, and her comments on how we as a culture deal with the dead.
- Living situations for the very old.
- Criticism of remoteness of many elder housing projects.
- Importance of inter-generational contacts.
- Characteristics of good caregivers: importance of tact and touch.
- The withdrawn elder: his/her reasons and care.

### The Ninth Stage of Life: Very Old Age

- *Distonic* (negative characteristic) becomes dominant over the syntonic (positive).
- *Mistrust vs. Trust*: Can no longer trust one's body.
- *Shame and Doubt vs. Autonomy*: Conflicts with people one love's over issues of autonomy.
- *Guilt vs. Initiative*: Guilt over pushing own agendas, especially when they fail.
- *Inadequacy or Inferiority vs. Industry*: Overestimate own powers.
- *Role Confusion vs. Identity*: What is your role when others are helping order your life?
- *Isolation vs. Intimacy*: Yearn for intimacy but have isolation.
- *Stagnation vs. Generativity*: Push to give up plans and projects.
- *Despair vs. Integrity*: Risk of not being alive to possibilities, of giving up "one's indomitable core".

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**Related Films Also Available from Davidson Films**

*This is one of six films in Davidson Films' "Gerontology" series. The other titles are:*

- |  |        |            |
|--|--------|------------|
| • <i>Aging Successfully: The Psychological Aspects of Growing Old</i>                | (1998) | 31 Minutes |
| • <i>Erik H. Erikson: A Life's Work</i>  | (1991) | 38 Minutes |
| • <i>Older Brains, New Connections: A Conversation<br/>with Marian Diamond At 73</i> | (2000) | 30 Minutes |
| • <i>These Vital Years: A Conversation with Betty Friedan At 76</i>                  | (2000) | 24 Minutes |

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