

Erikson's View of Adolescence

Read the selection about Erik H. Erikson's view of adolescence, and answer the questions that follow. You may need to use another piece of paper. Be prepared for class discussion.

Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development concerns the crisis of identity versus role confusion which typically occurs during adolescence. Erikson suggests that during adolescence young people try to define themselves within their world and want to feel as though they belong in certain groups, yet they want to see themselves as unique and different from the group. According to Erikson, having an identity means being able to define and accept oneself and know what one wants to be in life. The person is committed to achieving goals and realistically evaluates his or her ability to achieve these goals. Further, Erikson believes that a person who has solved the identity crisis has developed values and is true to them.

Adolescence is a time of storm and stress for some teens because of the decisions that have to be made before maturing socially and psychologically and moving to the next stage of adulthood. These decisions regarding career, financial and emotional independence from parents, and mate selection often create uncertainty and result in identity confusion. To combat this confusion, adolescents may try on many different roles, make decisions too soon, and fall in love. However, Erikson believes that people cannot make these decisions wisely and cannot really be in love until their identities are clear. Erikson and other psychologists think there are certain tasks that need to be completed while establishing an identity. These tasks include accepting the physical changes that puberty brings, relying more on peers, moving away from parents for social and emotional support, establishing dating relationships, and making decisions related to career goals.

Although many adolescents feel they have established their identities by the end of high school, their identity is tested upon completion of high school, when they go to college or to the workplace and form new friendships. According to Erikson, these events challenge once again adolescents' views of themselves. Formation of self-concept and self-esteem are the real markers of the transition to adulthood.

1. What are three characteristics of establishing an identity?
2. What does it mean to have an identity?
3. What situation creates identity confusion?
4. How do adolescents try to solve their identity confusion?
5. What five tasks should adolescents complete in order to establish their identities?
6. What are some of the identity tests that adolescents face as they near completion of the stage?

