

Havighurst vs Erikson: Quick Reference Comparison

ROBERT HAVIGHURST

CORE FOCUS

What people must DO and LEARN

- Specific, observable tasks and skills
- External accomplishments
- Behavioral, action-oriented

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

- Educational psychology & sociology
- Pragmatic, applied orientation
- Focus on learning and socialization

STAGES/PERIODS

6 Life Periods

Multiple specific tasks per period

Concrete, observable achievements

SOURCES OF DEVELOPMENT

Three-Factor Model:

1. Physical maturation (biological)
2. Social/cultural expectations (environmental)
3. Personal values and aspirations (individual)

RESOLUTION OF CHALLENGES

- Task completed or not completed
- Relatively binary (success/failure)
- Tasks can be directly taught
- Clear achievement criteria

CULTURAL VARIATION

- Explicitly culturally variable
- Tasks differ across cultures
- More relativistic approach

ERIK ERIKSON

CORE FOCUS

What people must FEEL and BECOME

- Internal psychological conflicts
- Identity and ego development
- Emotional, psychological states

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

- Psychoanalytic & ego psychology
- Clinical, therapeutic orientation
- Focus on unconscious conflicts

STAGES/PERIODS

8 Psychosocial Stages

One primary crisis per stage

Abstract psychological conflicts

SOURCES OF DEVELOPMENT

Psychosocial Interaction:

- Epigenetic unfolding (biological program)
- Social relationships as context
- Identity formation as organizing principle

RESOLUTION OF CHALLENGES

- Resolved along continuum
- Not either/or, but degree of resolution
- Can revisit crises throughout life
- Both poles always present

CULTURAL VARIATION

- Presented as more universal
- Psychosocial conflicts transcend culture
- More absolutist approach

KEY SIMILARITIES: What Both Theories Share

✓ Stage Theories of Lifespan Development:

Both propose sequential, age-related progression; revolutionary for addressing entire lifespan (not just childhood)

✓ Social and Cultural Context:

Both rejected purely biological determinism; recognized culture's powerful influence and social relationships as crucial

✓ Normative Frameworks:

Both identify "typical" development at each age; provide benchmarks for understanding what's age-appropriate

✓ Sequential and Cumulative:

Earlier stages/tasks provide foundation for later ones; success builds on success; can't skip stages

✓ Critical Periods:

Both recognize sensitive times (Havighurst's "teachable moments"; Erikson's stage-specific crises)

✓ Holistic Approach:

Both consider multiple dimensions (physical, social, emotional, cognitive); person-in-context perspective

⚠ Historical Limitations:

Both developed from mid-20th century Western perspectives; based on white, middle-class populations; some elements dated