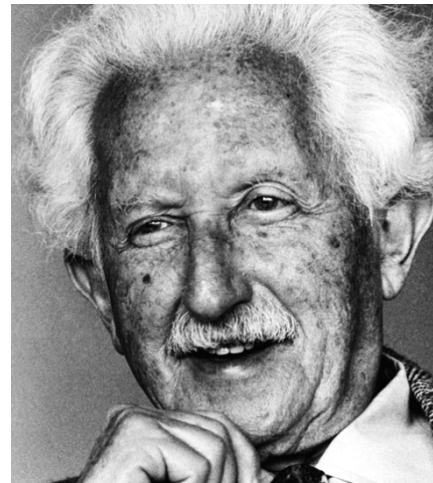

Person of the Month: Erik Erikson (1902-1994)

Ankit Patel¹

Born	15 June 1902 Frankfurt am Main, Hesse, Germany
Died	12 May 1994 Harwich, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, U.S.
Citizenship	American, German
Known for	Theory on social development
Fields	Developmental psychologist



Erik Homburger Erikson was a German-born American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst who pioneered in the world of child psychology by giving his development theory with his 'eight psychosocial stages'. He was born in Frankfurt in unusual circumstances in which his mother did not conceive him through her husband but he never got to know who his biological father was. It is said that the history of his birth is something that triggered the need in him to pursue the concept of identity and it is how he gave the world the psychological term 'identity crisis', a major contribution to the world of psychology and psychoanalysis. He grew up in Germany and came in contact with the world of psychoanalysis when he met Sigmund Freud's daughter Anna Freud. He studied psychoanalysis at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute but Nazi invasion of Germany led to his emigration to America. In America, Erikson found a wide scope to practice psychoanalysis on children in Boston and worked at various medical institutes, including the Harvard University and California University. He studied the psychology of children from various social structures, environments, emotional and psychological issues and compiled his observations in the most prominent book of his career, 'Childhood and Society'. Erikson is also credited with being one of the originators of Ego psychology, which stressed the role of the ego as being more than a servant of the id. According to Erikson, the environment in

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which a child lived was crucial to providing growth, adjustment, a source of self-awareness and identity. Erikson won a Pulitzer Prize and a U.S. National Book Award in category Philosophy and Religion for *Gandhi's Truth* (1969), which focused more on his theory as applied to later phases in the life cycle.

The Erikson life-stage virtue, in order of the eight stages in which they may be acquired, are:

1. Hope, Basic trust vs. basic mistrust
2. Will, Autonomy vs. Shame
3. Purpose, Initiative vs. Guilt
4. Competence, Industry vs. Inferiority
5. Fidelity, Identity vs. Role Confusion
6. Love, Intimacy vs. isolation
7. Care, Generativity vs. stagnation
8. Wisdom, Ego integrity vs. despair
9. Psychosocial Crises

Most Cited works

1. *Childhood and Society* (1950)
2. *Young Man Luther. A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (1958)
3. *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968)
4. *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origin of Militant Nonviolence* (1969)
5. *Adulthood* (edited book, 1978)
6. *Vital Involvement in Old Age* (with J.M. Erikson and H. Kivnick, 1986)
7. *The Life Cycle Completed* (with J.M. Erikson, 1987)

TIMELINE

- **1902:** Erik Erikson was born in Frankfurt, Germany to Karla Abrahamsen and Waldemar Isidor Salomonsen, who was a Jewish stockbroker. He was born to his mother under the circumstances where his mother had not seen his father for several months. He was registered as Erik Salomonsen at birth and there is no information available about his biological father. Shortly after he was born, his mother moved to Karlsruhe to become a nurse and got remarried to a pediatrician, Theodor Homburger.
- **1908:** Erik Salomonsen's name was changed to Erik Homberger.
- **1911:** Erickson was officially adopted by his stepfather, Theodor Homburger and he became Erik Homburger. The story of his birth was kept from him for a long time and he grew up not knowing who his real father was.
- **1930:** Erikson married Joan Serson Erikson and remained married to her until his death. They had 4 children together. His son, Kai T. Erikson is a prominent American sociologist.

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- **1931:** Erikson married Joan Mowat Serson, a Canadian dancer and artist whom Erikson had met at a dress ball. During their marriage Erikson converted to Christianity.
- **1933:** He received his diploma from the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute. This and his Montessori diploma were to be Erikson's only earned academic credentials for his life's work.
- **1933:** While Erikson was being trained in psychoanalysis, Nazis took over Germany and he had to leave the country. He first moved to Denmark and then emigrated to States where he became the first child psychoanalyst in Boston.
- **1933:** With Hitler's rise to power in Germany, the burning of Freud's books in Berlin and the potential Nazi threat to Austria, the Eriksons left an impoverished Vienna with their two young sons and emigrated to Copenhagen. Unable to regain Danish citizenship because of residence requirements, the Eriksons left for the United States, where citizenship would not be an issue
- **1936:** Erikson joined Harvard University and worked at the Institute of Human Relations, while teaching at the Medical School. Side by side, he was also studying a set of children on a Sioux reservation in South Dakota.
- **1937:** Erikson left Harvard and joined the staff of the California University in 1937. He associated with the Institute of Child Welfare there and opened his private practice. He also devoted his time in studying the children of the Yurok tribe.
- **1939:** He left Yale, and the Eriksons moved to California, where Erik had been invited to join a team engaged in a longitudinal study of child development for the University of California at Berkeley's Institute of Child Welfare.
- **1950:** After publishing the book, *Childhood and Society*, for which he is best known, Erikson left the University of California when California's Levering Act required professors there to sign loyalty oaths.
- **1950:** All of his observations of children of different environments and breeds led to compilation of the most famous book of his psychology career, '*Childhood and Society*' in 1950. The book introduced the world to the concept of 'identity crisis'.
- **1960:** He returned to Harvard as a professor of human development.
- **1960:** He went back to Harvard University and took the position of professor of human development and worked until his retirement and after his formal retirement he wrote on various subjects of psychology along with his wife.
- **1969:** Erikson won a Pulitzer Prize for the contribution in the field of psychology through his writings and a U.S. National Book Award in category Philosophy and Religion for his book '*Gandhi's Truth* (1969)'
- **1973:** The National Endowment for the Humanities gave an opportunity to Erikson to lecture at the Jefferson Lecture, the United States' highest honor for achievement in the humanities. His lecture was called "Dimensions of a New Identity".

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- **1973:** The National Endowment for the Humanities selected Erikson for the Jefferson Lecture, the United States' highest honor for achievement in the humanities. Erikson's lecture was titled "Dimensions of a New Identity"
- **1994:** Erikson died on May 12, 1994 in Harwich, Massachusetts. He and his wife are buried in the First Congregational Church Cemetery in Harwich.

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