

McAdams (2015)

**Chapter 10 • The Sense of an Ending: Final Chapters** (pp. 304-308)

- Human awareness of our mortality (eventually we all die) has psychological implications

*Erikson's Life Cycle: Final State of Psychosocial Development* (which some do not reach)

- At they moved into their 80s, Erik H. & Joan Erikson reformulated the last stage of his classic psychosocial stages of the life cycle as **wisdom** which is a culmination of all the previous stages (Goleman, 1988)
- GO TO TABLE ON NEXT PAGE



<b>The Completed Life Cycle</b>	
In the Eriksons' view, each stage of life is associated with a specific psychological conflict and a specific resolution. In a new amplification, lessons from each of the earlier stages mature into the many facets of wisdom in old age, shown in column at right	
<b>Conflict &amp; Resolution</b>	<b>Culmination in Old Age</b>
<b>Old Age</b> Integrity vs. despair; wisdom	Existential identity; a sense of integrity strong enough to withstand physical disintegration.
<b>Adulthood</b> Generativity vs. stagnation: care	Caritas, caring for others, and agape, empathy and concern.
<b>Early Adulthood</b> Intimacy vs. isolation: love	Sense of the complexity of relationships; value of tenderness and loving freely.
<b>Adolescence</b> Identity vs. confusion: fidelity	Sense of complexity of life; merger of sensory, logical and aesthetic perception.
<b>School Age</b> Industry vs. inferiority: competence	Humility; acceptance of the course of one's life and unfilled hopes.
<b>Play Age</b> Initiative vs. guilt: purpose	Humor; empathy; resilience.
<b>Early Childhood</b> Autonomy vs. shame: will	Acceptance of the cycle of life, from integration to disintegration.
<b>Infancy</b> Basic trust vs. mistrust: hope	Appreciation of interdependent and relatedness.

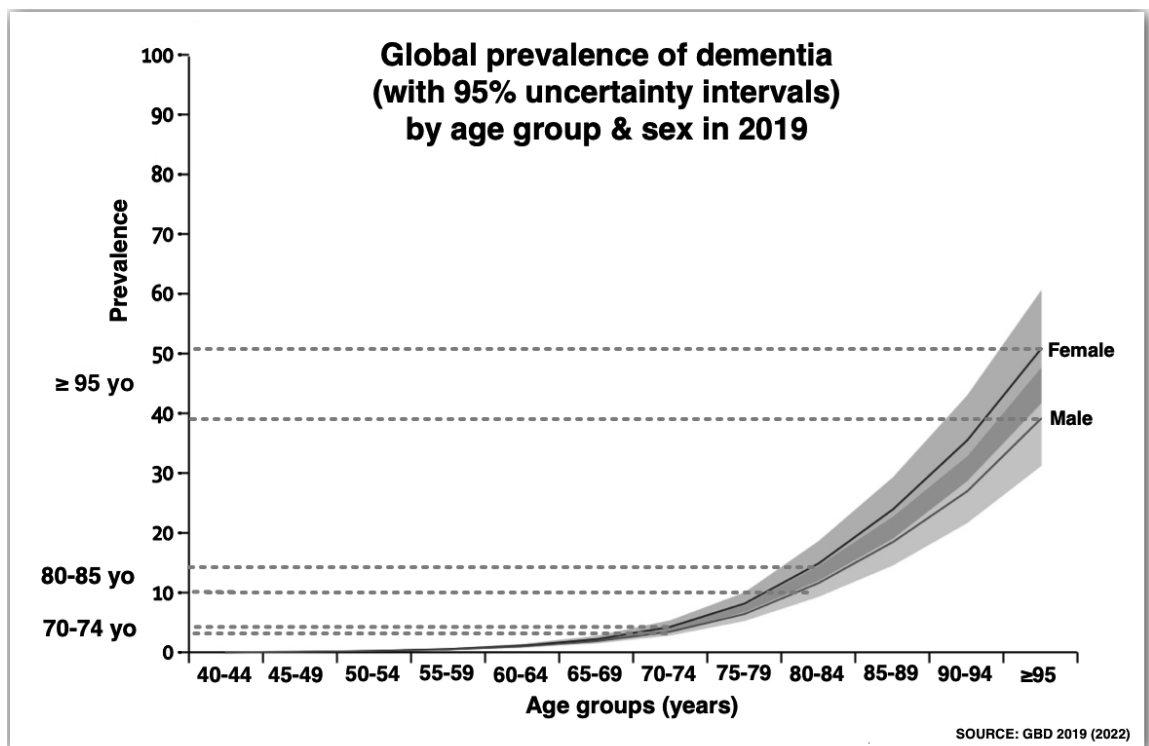
[Goleman, 1988, June 14 (© NYT)]

## Narrative Identity in Old Age

- A shift from author to reader (and critic) where “the person becomes the audience for his or her own life story” (p. 305)
- Relatively little research has been done on this stage of life in narrative psychology.
- Both religious traditions and Erikson suggest this can be “a most fulfilling period”
  - The attainment of *wisdom* (the components of which the Eriksons outline in the column on the right above)

## The impact of memory changes

- “With memory loss and increasing frailty, the oldest adults may find it more and more difficult to engage in the process of life narrative construction. The autobiographical author may tell fewer and fewer stories and expend less and less energy in the construction of narrative identity.



- Dementia (e.g., Alzheimer's disease) "scrambl[es] and eventually destroy[s] the material out of which narrative identity is to be made" (pp. 305-306).
- Authors with dementia tend to "fade away".

### Other changes

- Positivity bias: older people tend to emphasize positive and deemphasize negative emotions.
- Echoing the Eriksons, what matters most tend to be relationships: family, close friends, inner circle of companions.
- Often a loss of interest "in expanding their worlds in order to gain new experiences, meet new people, or learn new things" (p. 307).
- Long-term goals tend to be much less important. Some decline in cognitive abilities, particularly related to planning and following through on plans.
- Often a need to gain support of others to deal with daily life.
- There is research showing increases in "depressiveness, fatigue, and suspiciousness in old age" (p. 308). Some of this is probably the result of frustrations at not being able to do what one could do before.

### References

- GBD 2019 Dementia Forecasting Collaborators [GBD 2019] (2022) Estimation of the global prevalence of dementia in 2019 and forecasted prevalence in 2050: an analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019. *Lancet Public Health*, 7, e105-125. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(21\)00249-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(21)00249-8)
- Goleman, D. (1988, June 14). Erikson, in his own old age, expands his view of life. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/06/14/science/erikson-in-his-own-old-age-expands-his-view-of-life.html>