
In Their Own Words: Widowhood and Integrity vs. Despair

Program Overview

Widowhood is both an event and a new social status for the individual who experiences it. Widowhood can occur any time during adulthood, but it is most common in late adulthood. In this video, two widows and two widowers describe their unique experiences in losing their spouses of many years.

Integrity vs. Despair is the last psychosocial developmental task in the human life span as conceived by Erik Erikson. Mastering this task is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon. Success means experiencing a preponderance of integrity tinged with *realistic* despair. In this video, we will hear from eight seniors as they talk about their lives, how they feel they've been lived, and how they believe they will be remembered. The life review, reminiscing, and pondering how one will be remembered are all vehicles to achieving (or not achieving) integrity.

Introduction to this Guide

This guide is just that: a guide. It is not meant to encompass all the possible ways this video might be used. The underlying concept guiding the production of the video, however, was that it was designed with two different possible uses in mind.

One was as a supplemental accompaniment to the video *Late Adulthood: Death, Dying, Bereavement, & Widowhood* (see the preceding chapter in this Workbook) and *Late Adulthood: The Social Convoy* (also in this Workbook). As we listen to these seniors describing their lives, they illustrate for us many of the concepts presented in those videos. The suggestions for discussion and/or written assignments presented below are intended to help the instructor or group leader help participants or students make these connections.

The second use was as a stand-alone video designed for a wide variety of groups and settings. In this case, the revelations of the seniors in the video are intended to stimulate discussion and thought. The questions presented below are examples of the types of directions the group leader can take. Again, these questions are not meant to be the only possible ones.

Possible Discussion/Written Assignment Topics

1. Compare Anne and Nina's experience of becoming a widow.
2. Compare Phil and Jack's experience of becoming a widower.
3. Did you perceive any differences between the widows and the widowers?

4. Interview several widows and widowers, and compare their experiences with those seen in this video.
5. If you viewed the video Late Adulthood: Death, Dying, Bereavement & Widowhood, what points regarding widowhood were demonstrated in this video?
6. Review the literature on widowhood. How do these seniors compare with what you found?
7. Who has achieved Integrity in this video? Cite evidence for your choices.
8. Who has not achieved Integrity? Cite evidence for your choices.
9. Which of the seniors in this section of the video have done a life review? Cite evidence for your choices.
10. Interview several seniors and analyze their status in mastering the developmental task of Integrity vs. Despair.
11. Compare the process of mastering this task that the seniors you interviewed went through with that of the seniors in this video.
12. Interview several seniors and ask them the question, "How do you think you will be remembered?" Compare their responses to those in the video.
13. What was your reaction to Hy and Babs' preparations for their own demise?
14. What was your reaction to Eiko's talking about taking care of unfinished business and about letting seniors talk about death if they wish?
15. Do a search of the literature on Integrity vs. Despair. How do these seniors compare to what you found?
16. If you viewed the video Late Adulthood: The Social Convoy, how does the discussion of Integrity in that video compare with what you have seen in this video?