Some Thoughts on Play and Transcendence in the Life Cycle Theory: Based on the Theory of E.H. Erikson

Based on the life cycle theory of E.H. Erikson (1902-1994), this paper discusses the role of play in fostering the development of the self, together with its relation to the question of transcendence.

First, I consider the relationship between children’s play and the development of the self. The play of children assists them in acquiring the ritualization of the community to which they belong and becoming able to live adaptively. At the same time, it serves to heal psychological trauma received from their parents and others in their everyday environment.

Second, I examine adult play and its role. Play in adulthood consists largely of diversionary and recreational elements. Like children’s play, however, it is a source of energy to overcome present problem situations and achieve transcendence. Nevertheless, it can often be deceptive.

Third, I discuss play and transcendence in relation to the Buddhist concept of *yuge* (“playfulness”; a state in which one attains the ability to move freely outside the categories of time and space). An aged person becomes able to take a more cosmic and transcendent view when, by resolving the challenges of later life, he or she accepts the inevitability of death and achieves gero-transcendence, the task of the ninth stage added by J.M. Erikson to the original Erikson model. This mental state has elements in common with the Buddhist state of *yuge*: both represent an inner transcendence of which the subject is aware in his or her own mind.