

Group project for eriksons theory

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



Abstract Famed Psychologist Doctor Erik Erikson was born to Danish parents at the turn of the century in 1902, during his life he lived through the Nazi rule of his home town of Frankfurt Germany. After immigrating to America he then studied and practiced at Harvard in the 30's. He has helped explain in detail how personalities can be formed in his theory of 8 unique stages of development of the human personality. His unique perspective of human thought and reason helped coin the phrase "identity crisis" as it will be portrayed in this article through the use of fictional characters. The applied study of Erikson's Theory Introduction Erik Erikson was born to Danish parents in 1902 in Frankfurt Germany. One not so surprising reason for his interest in psychoanalysis psychology was Sigmund Freud. He later married his daughter Anna (Cherry, 2011). However, in contrast to Mr. Freud's study into the psychosexual development of human behavior, Erikson focused on understanding personality development. This was a road map that was laid out for future endeavors into personality analysis. Today many institutions of learning impart "Self-Report Inventories" which are used to analyze a person's personality usually in the form of bi-directional statements (Davis & Palladino, 2010). Erikson's Theory Defined and exemplified through fiction The first stage of Erikson's psychosocial theory is trust versus mistrust. In this stage, it is imperative that an infant learn to trust their caregivers to meet their needs such as feeding them, changing their diapers, putting clothes on them and loving them (Hockenberry, & Wilson, 2007). According to this theory, if an infant fails to learn to trust their caregiver this will result in fear and a belief that the world is inconsistent and unpredictable. A character from television that would best represent this stage is Lucas from

Private Practice. He begins life in the care of his mother after a traumatic birth and when he is several weeks old she leaves him with his father and subsequently disappears for the first twelve months of his life. His father does an excellent job caring for him; however, he dates several women during this time frame, leaving Lucas with inconsistent caregivers. The next stage of Erikson's psychosocial theory is autonomy versus shame and doubt (Hockenberry, & Wilson, 2007). During this stage, the toddler must gain a sense of self control. A landmark event during this time period is toilet training. Other events include toy, food and clothing preferences. If a toddler does not achieve a sense of autonomy during this time period, he/she will be left with a sense of inadequacy and self doubt. An example of a character that fits this description is Justin Buckman from the 1989 movie Parenthood, specifically the scene where he walks around the house with nothing on but a cowboy hat and holster. There is also another scene where he repeatedly hits his head against a wall. Through these scenes he is exerting his autonomy by deciding what he wants to do and wear without regards to what other people think. During the preschool years is the stage of initiative versus guilt. It is during this stage that a preschooler attempts to exert their power over their environment through play and other social interaction. If this is not achieved by the child, they will be left with a sense of guilt and self doubt. The cartoon characters The Backyardigans exemplify this stage. In each episodes of the television show one character takes the lead and they go on an "adventure" using play without ever leaving their backyard. The school age child will endure the psychosocial stage of industry versus inferiority (Hockenberry, & Wilson, 2007). During this stage, the school age

child will develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities through the encouragement and praise given to them by their parents and teachers. If this is not achieved, the child will be left with a feelings of doubt related to their abilities to contribute to society. Stephanie Tanner from the television show Full House exemplifies this stage of development. She is constantly seeking praise and encouragement from her family for her schoolwork and contributions to the household. The next stage of Erikson's psychosocial theory of development is identity versus confusion. The adolescent will spend much time exerting their independence and sense of self. If the adolescent is successful in this stage, they will emerge with a sense of self, independence and control over their future; however, if they fail during this stage, they will feel insecure and confused about themselves and their future (Hockenberry, & Wilson, 2007). An example of a character on television who is experiencing this stage is Jake from Two and a Half Men. In each episode, he struggles with who he is as a person. During early adulthood, a person will experience the stage of intimacy versus isolation. This stage focuses on the young adult forming close, secure relationships with others (Hockenberry, & Wilson, 2007). At this point, it is important to remember that to be successful with each stage of Erikson's theory; one must have been successful with the previous stage. With this said, if one wasn't successful in the previous stage of identity versus confusion they were left with feelings of insecurity and self doubt. This would lead to failure during the stage of intimacy versus isolation leaving the young adult lonely and depressed (Hockenberry, & Wilson, 2007). A movie character that is a prime example of this stage is Sonny Koufax from the 1999 movie Big

Daddy. In the movie, Sonny struggles to form meaningful relationships with several women however in the end he does end up marrying one woman. Next comes the stage of generativity versus stagnation (Hockenberry, & Wilson, 2007). It is during this stage that the adult focuses on their career and family. If they are unsuccessful during this stage, they will be left with feelings of being unproductive and unsuccessful in the world. Any character on the television show Grey's Anatomy will fit this stage. All of them are working hard to develop their career while attempting to develop and nurture their families. The final stage of Erikson's psychosocial theory is integrity versus despair. During this stage, the elderly person reflects back on their life and what they have done. If one is proud of their accomplishments, they will feel a sense of integrity; however if one feels like their life was wasted, they will be left with feelings of despair and bitterness (Hockenberry, & Wilson, 2007). Marie and Frank Barone from the television show Everybody Loves Raymond are excellent examples of this stage of development. At least once per episode, one of the two reflects back on the past and either feels proud or discouraged by that memory. Research, and Critique Studies referencing Erikson's Theory Gender Issues In a 1995 Article Titled " Reexamining Gender Issues in Erikson's Stages of Identity and Intimacy" Elisabeth Horst wrote in the Journal of Counseling and Development that Erikson's Theory lacked certain evolutionary characteristics. One such characteristic overlooked is his lack of changing cultural systems(Horst, 1995). In 1960 during the development of Erikson's Theory, women are portrayed as weak, and dependant on men as written by Carol Gilligan in 1982, who paints a very different picture of Erikson's

study than what was lead to believe in the 1960's(Gilligan, 1982). The focus of Horst's article is mainly on the stage of intimacy vs. isolation during early adulthood. Horst goes on to point out that sex is both contrastively and similarly experienced by both genders(Horst, 1995). Lastly, Dr. Horst (1995) presents many other studies that convey the message that Erikson's Theory lacks observable gender bias in respect to his own stage of intimacy vs. isolation(Horst, 1995). I personally believe that just like human technology should help shape our belief of what is real in the universe, I also feel that as our species becomes more complex in culture and in society the observable evidence we held to in the past should also be reworked to reflect what is observed in the present. Attachment and Care-giving In the article titled " An Ethological Perspective" Joan Stevenson-Hinde (1994), she comment that attachment behavior is observed under conditions of stress. She further lists the four why's of begavior as evolution, function, causation and development. Although no clear answer is given as to what stage is most representative of this article. However, in the beginning paragraphs Joan list's a quote from Mary Ainsworth (1991) stating that progress needs to be made in the development of the attachment theory among adults and other intimate bonds beyond infancy. Therefore, the most likely candidate would be Intimacy versus isolation. The article certainly serves to strengthen Erikson's theory, by allowing structured detail into attachment behavior study. One such incident involves an observation of 1 year olds who would organize their behavior system in four distinct interlocking patterns of waryness, fear, social ability, and exploration. It was observed that any one of those four could be " turned off or turned on" in any given

situation (Bretherton & Ainsworth, 1974). I certainly agree with the study, because it takes into account key evolutionary traits when analyzing psychological behavior. It allows not only implied reason into the actions taken by others in respect to the realm of the attachment theory, but it also backs it up with empirical evidence. Children in the Home Environment In the study "The Home Environment of Children in the US...", children were exposed to different variables in their home environment such as "parental actions, materials, events, and conditions" and see how it correlates with their overall well-being. The study is composed of two parts: Part 1 focuses on variations of age, ethnicity, and poverty status. Part 2 focuses on the "major aspects of the home environment such as maternal responsiveness, learning stimulation, and spanking." Parental home involvement has also been shown to be a significant predictor of children's academic achievement. Studies have shown that children who have a stimulating cognitive home environment score better on both math and reading (Bradley et al, 2001; Desimone, 2001). Though the home and the school appear to be two separate areas, they are inter-twined and interact in the developmental process of children's lives, therefore we must take a more careful and closer look at the interaction between the two. The study supports Erikson's psychosocial theory of development of identity versus confusion because children who develop a strong sense of self will have a more successful future. I am in accord with the study because if children came from broken homes, it would be distracting to them, therefore making them find him or herself a tad bit harder. Conclusion It is overwhelmingly obvious that Erikson's Theory of development is a pre-cursor to a much more matured

branch of psychology. His theory has been called sexist, biased and flawed by some. The study, as with anything must evolve to survive, today there are more studies to support certain aspects of his study. The previous small individual insights presented here are evidence that his study is still be scrutinized. Reference Ainsworth M. D. S. (1991) Attachments and other affectional bonds across the life cycle. London Routledge Bradley, Robert H., Robert F. Corwyn, Margaret Burchinal, Harriette Pipes McAdoo, and Cynthia Garcia Coll. 2001. " The Home Environment of Children in the United States Part II: Relations with Behavioral Development through Age Thirteen. " Child Development 72(6): 1868-1886. Bretherton, I. & Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1974) Response of one-year olds to a stranger in a strange situation New York: Wiley Cherry, K. (2011) Erik Erikson's Biography (1902-1994)About. com found April 18, 2011 from: [http://psychology. about. com/od/profilesofmajorthinkers/p/bio_erikson. htm](http://psychology.about.com/od/profilesofmajorthinkers/p/bio_erikson.htm) Hockenberry, M. & Wilson, D. (2007). Wong's nursing care. St. Louis, MO: Mosby Elsevier. Horst, E. (1995) Reexamining gender issues in Erikson's stages of identity and intimacy Journal of Counseling and Development pg 271 vol 73. found April 18, 2011