**Introducing: Baby ‘Storm’ –**

**The child who was raised without a gender**

Kathy Witterick and her partner Derek Stocker have made a radical choice when it comes to their four-month-old: they are not revealing the gender of the child. Only a handful of people know baby Storm’s gender, including his/her/hir brothers, 5-year-old Jazz and 2-year-old Kio. His/her sex is not in question. The parents simply want to shield the baby from society's preoccupation with gender rules.

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| Pro’s to parenting approach | Neg’s to parenting approach |
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***Assignment:***

Apply Erik Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development theory. At what stages might baby Storm encounter conflict / difficulties in her/his/hir development (as agender)? Create (at least 3) life scenarios to illustrate some issues Storm may encounter.



**Erik Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development**

Erikson, who died in 1994, is the modern “father of Psychosocial Development”, and saw personality as developing throughout the lifetime and looked at **identity crises** as the focal point for each stage of human development.

**Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development has eight distinct stages**, each with two possible outcomes. According to the theory, successful completion of each stage results in a healthy personality and successful interactions with others.

Failure to successfully complete a stage can result in a reduced ability to complete further stages and therefore a more unhealthy personality and sense of self.  These stages, however, can be resolved successfully at a later time.

**1. Trust vs Mistrust (birth - 1 year)**Is the world a safe place or is it full of unpredictable events and accidents waiting to happen?

Erikson claimed that in this stage the child will develop a sense of basic trust in the world and in her ability to affect events around him.  The development of this depends on the consistency of the child’s major caregiver.  If the care the child receives is consistent, predictable and reliable then the child will develop a sense of trust which she will carry with him to other relationships, and is able to feel secure even when threatened.  Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of **hope**.

However, if the care has been harsh or inconsistent, unpredictable and unreliable then the child will develop a sense of mistrust and will not have confidence in the world around them or in their abilities to influence events.  This child will carry the basic sense of mistrust with him to other relationships. It may result in anxiety, heightened insecurities, and an over feeling of mistrust in the world around them.

**2. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (2 - 3 years)**

The child is developing physically and becoming more mobile. Between the ages of one and three, children begin to assert their independence, by walking away from their mother, picking which toy to play with, and making choices about what they like to wear, to eat, etc.

Erikson says that this is the point at which the child can develop a certain amount of independence/autonomy.  It is at this stage that the child needs support from parents so that repeated failures and ridicule are not the only experiences encountered.  So, the parents need to encourage the child to become more independent whilst at the same time protecting the child so that constant failure is avoided.

A delicate balance is required from the parent .... parents must try ***not*** to do everything for the child but if the child fails at a particular task they must not criticize the child for failures and accidents (particularly when toilet training).  The aim has to be “self control without a loss of self-esteem”.  Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of **will**.

If children in this stage are encouraged and supported in their increased independence, they become more confident and secure in their own ability to survive in the world.  If children are criticized, overly controlled, or not given the opportunity to assert themselves, they begin to feel inadequate in their ability to survive, and may then become overly dependent upon others, lack self-esteem, and feel a sense of shame or doubt in their own abilities.

**3. Initiative vs. Guilt (3 - 5 years)**

These are particularly lively, rapid-developing years in a child’s life. It is a “time of vigor of action and of behaviors that the parents may see as aggressive”.  The child takes initiatives which the parents will often try to stop in order to protect the child.  The child will often overstep the mark in her forcefulness and the danger is that the parents will tend to punish the child and restrict his initiatives too much.

Around age three and continuing to age six, children assert themselves more frequently.  They begin to plan activities, make up games, and initiate activities with others.  If given this opportunity, children develop a **sense of initiative**, and feel secure in their ability to lead others and make decisions.  Conversely, if this tendency is squelched, either through criticism or control, children develop a sense of guilt. They may feel like a nuisance to others and will therefore remain followers, lacking in self-initiative.

It is at this stage that the child will begin to ask many questions as her thirst for knowledge grows.  If the parents treat the child’s questions as trivial, a nuisance or embarrassing or other aspects of their behavior as threatening then the child may have feelings of guilt for “being a nuisance”.  Too much guilt can make the child slow to interact with others and may inhibit their creativity.  Some guilt is, of course, necessary otherwise the child would not know how to exercise self control or have a conscience. A healthy balance between initiative and guilt is important.  Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of **purpose**.

**4. Industry (competence) vs. Inferiority (6 - 12 years)**

Children are at the stage where they will be learning to read and write, to do sums, to make things on their own. Teachers begin to take an important role in the child’s life as they teach the child specific skills.  It is at this stage that the child’s peer group will gain greater significance and will become a major source of the child’s self esteem.  The child now feels the need to win approval by demonstrating specific competences that are valued by society, and begin to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments.

If children are encouraged and reinforced for their initiative, they begin to feel industrious and feel confident in their ability to achieve goals.  If this initiative is not encouraged, if it is restricted by parents or teacher, then the child begins to feel inferior, doubting his own abilities and therefore may not reach his potential.

If the child cannot develop the specific skill they feel society is demanding then they may develop a sense of inferiority.  Some failure may be necessary so that the child can develop some modesty. Yet again, a balance between competence and modesty is necessary.  Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of **competence**.

**5. Identity vs. Role Confusion (13 - 18 years)**

During adolescence, the transition from childhood to adulthood is most important.  Children are becoming more independent, and begin to look at the future in terms of career, relationships, families, housing, etc.

This is a major stage in development where the child has to learn the roles she/he will occupy as an adult. It is during this stage that the adolescent will re-examine their identity and try to find out exactly who they are.  Erikson suggests that two identities are involved: the sexual and the occupational.

What should happen at the end of this stage is “*a reintegrated sense of self, of what one wants to do or be, and of one’s appropriate sex role*”. During this stage the body image of the adolescent changes.

Erikson claims that the adolescent may feel uncomfortable about their body for a while until they can adapt and “grow into” the changes.  Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of **fidelity**.

During this period, they explore possibilities and begin to form their own identity based upon the outcome of their explorations.  This sense of who they are can be hindered, which results in a sense of confusion ("I don’t know what I want to be when I grow up") about themselves and their role in the world.

**6. Intimacy vs. Isolation (young adulthood)**

Occurring in Young adulthood, we begin to share ourselves more intimately with others. We explore relationships leading toward longer term commitments with someone other than a family member.  Successful completion can lead to comfortable relationships and a sense of commitment, safety, and care within a relationship.  Avoiding intimacy, fearing commitment and relationships can lead to isolation, loneliness, and sometimes depression.

**7. Generativity vs. Stagnation (middle adulthood)**

During middle adulthood, we establish our careers, settle down within a relationship, begin our own families and develop a sense of being a part of the bigger picture.  We give back to society through raising our children, being productive at work, and becoming involved in community activities and organizations.  By failing to achieve these objectives, we become stagnant and feel unproductive.

**8. Ego Integrity vs. Despair (old age)**

As we grow older and become senior citizens, we tend to slow down our productivity, and explore life as a retired person.  It is during this time that we contemplate our accomplishments and are able to develop integrity if we see ourselves as leading a successful life.

Erik Erikson believed if we see our lives as unproductive, feel guilt about our pasts, or feel that we did not accomplish our life goals, we become dissatisfied with life and develop despair, often leading to depression and hopelessness.

**Questions/ Reflection**

As stated in the reading, Erik Erikson devised his **theory of psychosocial development** whereby individuals progress through life stages, within which there is a conflict. Successful resolution of this conflict permits the person to climb to the next, more complex, developmental rung.

1. Create three scenarios - one each for three (3) of Erikson's life stages (you can make these up or draw from your own experiences).
2. Do you believe the life stages are as Erikson described them?  Why/Why not? Is a stage missing … or is one of the stages irrelevant?
3. Would you change one of the terms within the conflicts? Why, or why not?