CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework

When viewing human development across the life cycle, it is important to be able to move from a general overview of the pattern of development to an explanation of the specific processes at each life stage. Using Erikson’s perspective on psychosocial development, the following section will explain the concept of human development, and the development of the emotional and social life of the individual. This includes an explanation of Erikson’s eight stages of development. Due to the nature of this research, the developmental tasks, the psychosocial crisis and the central process for resolving the crisis that specifically relates to the early adolescent and late adolescent stages will be covered in greater detail.

2.1 Why theory?

A theory provides a useful tool for organizing ideas and information. According to Newman and Newman (1979), a theory of human development must be able to account for both stability and change in the individual. Theories that focus on changing processes generally ignore individual continuity, while those that focus on individual continuity generally ignore the process of change (Newman et al., 1979).

Erikson’s psychosocial theory has been selected as an integrating theoretical orientation in this report because it attempts to clarify the direction of development and the barriers to development through the life span. It also deals adequately with the later as well as the earlier stages of life and encourages one to consider issues of development that recur as themes from one life period to another. Erikson’s theory has a number of implications for the manner in which distressing developmental problems that arise during adolescence can be identified and understood. His understanding of the adolescent will assist the researcher in her attempt to understand stress in adolescence and aid her understanding of
why some adolescents may be more prone to employing coping styles that help maintain a sense of well-being and optimism when confronted by stressors and others do not.

2.2 Basic Themes in Erikson’s Thinking

Erikson’s work in various cultures convinced him of the need to add a psychosocial dimension to Freud’s theory of psychosexual development. Erikson expanded on Freud’s theory by developing a set of eight psychosocial stages through which individual’s progress by resolving developmental crises specific to each stage (Miller, 1993).

The age ranges of each stage are only approximations. Furthermore, the progression from one stage to the next will only come about once particular psychological events have occurred (Newman et al., 1979). While certain developmental problems may appear more clearly at specific stages, Miller (1993) suggests that such problems do appear throughout development. The basic assumption is that the psychological development that takes place at each stage will have a significant impact on all subsequent stages.

With respect to the integration of successive stages, Erikson optimistically claimed that it is never too late to resolve any of the crises (Miller, 1993). Erikson believed that, “each stage adds something specific to all later ones, and makes a new ensemble out of all the earlier ones” (cited by Miller, 1993, pg. 159).

2.2.1. The Psychosocial Crisis

The psychosocial crisis refers to the person’s psychological efforts to adjust to certain psychic demands (Newman et al., 1979). These demands derive from the social environment within which one lives and differ at each stage of development. According to Newman et al. (1979), the demands are experienced by the individual as mild but persistent guidelines and expectations for behaviour. As individuals near the end of a particular stage of development they are forced to make some type of resolution, adjusting themselves to the demands of society while simultaneously translating the
societal demands into personal terms. This process, as described by Newman et al. (1979), produces a state of tension within the individual that must be reduced in order for the person to proceed to the next stage. It is this tension state that is called “the psychosocial crisis.”

According to Erikson there are eight crises in development. These are expressed in polarities – trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt – suggesting the nature of a successful or unsuccessful resolution of the crisis at each stage. Even though, as suggested in Miller (1979), the likelihood of a completely unsuccessful resolution is quite small, some element of the negative pole is expected to be experienced by each person in an effort to confront and resolve the crisis of each stage. In fact, according to Newman et al. (1979) the negative pole of each crisis offers opportunities for understanding oneself and one’s social environment.

Indeed it can be argued that stress may be a necessary condition in order for individuals to grow as human beings. Early adolescence, for example is seen as one of the most difficult stages of development where one can become stressed when dealing with physical changes, peer group membership, early dating experiences, and the changing characteristics of the parent-child relationship.

Psychoanalytic literature (e.g. Miller, 1979) supports the idea of stress and the coping process as a transformational and developmental phenomenon.

2.2.2 Emphasis on Identity

No single theoretician has had a greater impact on our perceptions of identity development than Erikson (Bakken, Lytle and Romig, 1997). In particular, he has provided a context from which to observe the developmental process of identity formation (Miller, 1993), and has shown that a primary theme of life is the quest for identity.
Adolescence and early adulthood are times when, according to Erikson, (cited in Miller, 1993), a developing sense of personal identity is opposed by doubts about sexual and social roles in life, and when the capacity for intimate relationships alternates with feelings of isolation.

Stated differently, identity is the understanding of both the self and one’s society. Throughout life, we ask, “Who am I?” and form a different answer in each stage. If all goes well, at the end of each stage the child’s sense of identity is reconfirmed on a new level. In Miller (1993), it is suggested that identity is transformed from one stage to the next and early forms of identity influence later forms. According to the research discussed in Fitzpatrick et al. (1994) the development of an individual’s identity achievement is important in determining feelings about the self, personal beliefs, and levels of achievement.

To achieve independence the adolescents in society have to rebel against the standards and beliefs of their parents and establish separate identities for themselves (Miller, 1993). This necessary rebellion, as suggested by Freud, (cited in Miller, 1993) reawakens childhood fears of being unloved, rejected and inferior.

According to Dekovic and Meeus (1995), relational and school identities show progressive development during adolescence, although in different ways. Dekovic et al. (1995) explains that as adolescence proceeds, youngsters begin to think more about relationships and derive their self-definition from them to an increasing degree. There is a shift in orientation from parental to peer relationships which involve increased exposure to various stressors. (Aseltine and Gore, 1995). The world of parents and family remains important, but it becomes less closely intertwined with other arenas of experience.

For Erikson, (cited in Fitzpatrick et al., 1994) the individual who settles these crises will develop a sense of commitment and identity, particularly in personal life areas such as occupation, relationships, and ideology.
2.3 Overview of Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages of Development

Table 1.1  A summary table of Erikson’s eight stages of development:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Approximate age</th>
<th>Psychological crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Birth – 1 yr</td>
<td>Trust vs. mistrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 – 3 yrs</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. shame, doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 – 5yrs</td>
<td>Initiative vs. guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5 – 11 yrs</td>
<td>Industry vs. inferiority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11 – end of adolescence</td>
<td>Identity vs. identity diffusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21 – 40 yrs</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>40 – 65 yrs</td>
<td>Generativity vs. stagnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Over 65 yrs</td>
<td>Integrity vs. despair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Miller (1993), pg. 157

2.3.1 Description of the stages

Stage 1: Basic Trust versus Basic Mistrust (Birth to about 1 year)

Erikson (cited in Miller, 1993) describes basic trust, as “an essential trustfulness of others as well as a fundamental sense of one’s own trustworthiness” and the sense that “there is some correspondence between your needs and your world.” (pg.161)

In infancy, the specific nature of this crisis can be described in terms of the developing comfort and trust that infants experience in their relationship with the caregiver (Newman et al., 1979). At this early stage, according to Newman et al. (1979), few social demands are placed on the child, so the conflict can be seen in terms of the effectiveness with which the parents meet the child’s needs. These include showing warmth, consistency and stimulation and responding appropriately to the child when in need. Underlying the
resolution of the crisis of trust versus mistrust is the process whereby the child and the caregiver establish a feeling of mutuality.

Trust is an experiential phenomenon for the nonverbal infant (Newman et al., 1979) and consequently infants develop an increasing confidence that their needs will be met and the sense that they are valued. For example, infants with an attitude of trust can predict that their mother will feed them when they are hungry and comfort them when they are frightened or in pain. According to Miller (1993) they will also be able to tolerate having their mother out of sight because they are confident that she will return.

At the same time the possibility exists for the development of a sense of mistrust. According to Newman et al. (1979), if the caregiver is unable to make sense of the infant’s needs and respond appropriately to these needs, or if the caregiver is unusually harsh while meeting the infant’s needs, seeds of doubt about the trustworthiness of the environment may be instilled in the infant.

The growth of mistrust, as noted by Newman et al. (1979) stems from the child’s uncertainty about whether needs will be satisfied and from the child’s inability to gain physical as well as psychological comfort.

The establishment of trust between the infant and the caregiver has significance for both intellectual and social development. According to Newman et al. (1979), through repeated interaction with the caregiver, the infant develops a well-differentiated concept of the adult as both separate and permanent. The process of social attachment is intimately bound to the infant’s recognition of parents as separate beings and once this is established, the trusting relationship between the infant and the caregiver serves as a source of security for further explorations of the environment.

A negative resolution of the crisis of infancy, however, leads to the development of a sense of mistrust, which is characterized by lethargic, withdrawn, and grief stricken behaviours in the child (Miller, 1993).
Stage 2: Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt (approximately 1 to 3 years)

As the child becomes more independent physically and psychologically, there are new possibilities for personality development (Miller, 1993). At the same time, however, there are new vulnerabilities, namely anxiety over separation from the parents, fear that anal control may not always be possible, and loss of self-esteem when failure does arise.

The toddler’s behaviour is characterized by the phrase “I can do it myself”. According to Newman et al. (1979), toddlers become less concerned with doing things their own way and more concerned with doing them on their own. Toddlers begin to create an image of themselves as people who can manage situations competently and who can satisfy many of their own needs. As suggested in Miller (1993) when children do things by themselves and experience positive results, their sense of autonomy grows. By the end of childhood, children who have been allowed to experiment with autonomy should have a strong foundation of self-confidence and a delight in behaving independently (Newman et al., 1979).

The establishment of a sense of autonomy requires tremendous effort, energy and persistence by the child but also extreme patience and supportiveness from the parents. On the other hand, however, as suggested by Newman et al. (1979), a child can develop an overwhelming sense of shame and self-doubt if they fail repeatedly at the activities they attempt, or because of continual discouragement and criticism from parents, or most likely because of both. This results in a negative resolution of the psychosocial crisis of early childhood which means that these children will lack confidence in their ability to perform and consequently may expect to fail at what they do.

Stage 3: Initiative versus Guilt (4 to 5 years)

When toddlers resolve the crisis of autonomy versus shame and doubt in a positive way, they emerge from early childhood with a very strong sense of themselves as unique individuals. During the early school age period, they shift the focus of their attention
toward the investigation of the external environment (Miller, 1993). They attempt to discover the same kind of stability, strength, and regularity in the external world that they have discovered within themselves.

The active inquiry and investigation of the environment is what Erikson (cited in Newman et al., 1979) describes as “initiative”. As suggested in Newman et al. (1979) the child’s motivation and skill at investigation depend upon the successful development of a strong sense of autonomy. According to Newman et al. (1979), this is important because without confidence in the ability to control oneself, one is unlikely to be able to experiment with aspects of the environment. In other words, when children acquire self-control and when they are confident in themselves, they are able to perform a variety of actions and to observe the consequences. They discover, for example, the kinds of things that make parents or teachers angry and the kinds of things that please them.

The positive resolution of the psychosocial crisis of initiative versus guilt involves the development of a sense that the active cognitive investigation of the environment is an informative and pleasurable experience (Newman et al., 1979). While the child learns that certain areas are off limits, he/she also begins to realize that there are other areas available for cognitive investigation.

The negative resolution of the psychosocial crisis leads to the development of an overwhelming sense of guilt. Newman et al. (1979) explains that when adults severely limit experimentation and investigation, the child is made to feel that every question or doubt about the world is an inappropriate intrusion. This occurs most, according to Newman et al. (1979), when children’s questions are met with parental beliefs, inadequate explanations, and indifference. In effect, the child begins to feel that curiosity itself is taboo and therefore he / she feels guilty whenever his / her curiosity is aroused. The child who resolves this crisis in the direction of guilt is left to rely almost totally on parents or other authorities for directions on how to operate in the world.
The psychosocial crisis of initiative versus guilt highlights the intimate relationship between intellectual curiosity and emotional development.

Stage 4: Industry versus Inferiority (6 years to puberty)

Psychosocial theory suggests that a person’s fundamental attitude toward work is established during the middle school age period when children enter the larger world of knowledge and work (Newman et al., 1979). The great event is the entry into school, where the pre-adolescents are exposed to the technology of their society: books, multiplication tables, arts and crafts, maps, microscopes, films, tape recorders and computers. Erikson (cited in Miller, 1993) called this theme “I am what I learn” (pg. 164).

The concept of industry includes an eagerness for building skills and performing meaningful work. During middle school age, there are many aspects of work that are intrinsically motivating and the new skills bring the child closer to the capacities of adults. Each new skill gives the child some sense of independence and may even bring new responsibilities that heighten the child’s sense of worth (Newman et al., 1979). According to Miller (1993) successful experiences give the child a sense of industry, a feeling of competence and mastery, while failure brings a sense of inadequacy and inferiority, a feeling that one is a good-for-nothing. Feelings of lack of worth and inadequacy come from two sources: the self and the social environment.

Even if no chronic disability exists, the range of individual differences in aptitude, in preference, and in capability for specific skills will inevitably result in experiences of inadequacy in some domain. No one can do everything well. However, according to Newman et al. (1979), a few failed experiences can generate such strong negative feelings that the child will avoid engaging in new tasks in order to avoid failure.

Children must discover at this stage that they will not be able to master every skill that they attempt and therefore, as suggested by Newman et al. (1979), even the child who
feels quite positive toward work and who finds new challenges to be invigorating will experience some amount of inferiority with regard to a specific skill that cannot be mastered.

**Stage 5: Identity versus Role Diffusion** (early to late adolescence)

Trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry all contribute to the child’s identity. In the fifth stage, however, the development of identity takes on a new dimension. Rapid physiological changes produce a “new” body that includes a “height spurt”, the maturation of the reproductive system, the appearance of secondary sex characteristics, and the redistribution of body weight (Newman *et al.*, 1987). These changes that emerge during puberty have an impact on the adolescent’s self-image and the nature of peer relationships.

These changes along with social pressure to make occupational and educational decisions, force the youth to consider a variety of roles. Early adolescents experience a search for membership, and an internal questioning about the group of which they are most naturally a part. They ask themselves, “Who am I, and with whom do I belong?” (Miller, 1993). According to Newman *et al.* (1979), during this time pressure emanates from the family, age-mates and the school for the adolescent to ally themselves with a group of peers. Within the context of their peer group, young adolescents become engaged in a process of self-evaluation as they are extremely self-conscious of the opinions others hold of them and they become preoccupied by the need for peer acceptance.

As noted in Newman *et al.* (1987) the basic task for adolescents is to integrate the various identifications they bring from childhood into a more complete identity. Erikson, (cited in Newman *et al.*, 1979), emphasized that this whole (the identity) is greater than the sum of its parts (previous identifications). If adolescents cannot integrate their identifications, roles or selves, they face “identity diffusion” as the reassembled identity is appropriate for the new needs, skills and goals of adolescence (Newman *et al.*, 1979). The problem
may be aggravated by one’s minority group status, uncertainty about one’s sexual orientation, an overly strong identification with a parent, or too many roles from which to choose.

A positive resolution of the conflict of group identity versus alienation is one in which adolescents identify an existing group that meets their social needs and which provides them with a sense of group belonging. It is this sense of group belonging, according to Newman et al. (1979) that facilitates the psychological growth of the individual and encourages them to succeed in the developmental tasks that they have to engage during the stage of early adolescence.

A negative resolution of the conflict on the other hand, leaves the adolescent with a pervasive sense of alienation from his / her peers. The person does not experience a sense of belonging to a group but rather continually feels uneasy in the presence of peers. One way the negative outcome may be brought about is that parents may press the adolescent to restrict associations to a particular peer group, but that group may not offer the adolescent membership. Another possibility is the situation in which the individual examines the existing groups and fails to find one that would really meet his / her personal needs. A third possibility is that no peer group may offer acceptance of friendship to an individual and the person will gradually be shut out of all the existing groups in the social environment.

Erikson (cited in Newman et al., 1979) has evolved a notion of identity which involves the merging of past identifications, future aspirations, and contemporary cultural issues. This is clear in later adolescents who are preoccupied with questions about their essential character. In their efforts to define themselves they must take into account the bonds that have been built between themselves and others in the past, as well as the direction that they hope to be able to take in the future.

Erikson (cited in Newman, et al, 1979) states:
…the young individual must learn to be most himself where he means the most to others - those others, to be sure, who have come to mean most to him. The term identity expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (self-sameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others (pg. 323).

As young people move through the stage of later adolescence they find that the family, neighborhood, teachers, friends, ethnic group or nation hold certain expectations for the behaviour of a person at this age (Miller, 1993). The task of bringing together the many elements of one’s experience into a coordinated, clear self-definition is difficult and time consuming and one undoubtedly experiences temporary periods of confusion and depression (Newman et al., 1987). The adolescent is likely to experience moments of self-preoccupation, isolation and discouragement as the diverse pieces of the puzzle are shifted and reorganized into the total picture. Thus, even the eventual positive identity formation will be the result of some degree of role confusion.

Efforts to resolve questions of identity may take the adolescent down paths of overzealous commitment, emotional involvement, alienation or playful wandering. The negative outcome of role diffusion, however, as suggested by Miller (1993), is that the person is never able to formulate a satisfying identity that provides for the convergence of multiple identifications, aspirations and roles. In this case, individuals have the persistent fear that they are losing their hold on themselves and on their future.

Stage 6: Intimacy versus Isolation (early adulthood)

Only if a reasonably well-integrated identity emerges from stage 5 can psychological intimacy with other people (or even oneself) be possible (Miller, 1993). The unique task of young adulthood requires individuals to establish an intimate relationship with someone who is not a member of their own family. These relationships enhance the growth of one’s personality.

Intimacy, as described in Newman et al. (1979), “includes the ability to experience an open, supportive, tender relationship with another person, without fear of losing one’s
own identity in the process of growing close” (pg.371). The possibility for establishing intimacy however, depends on the confidence that individuals have in themselves as valuable, competent and meaningful people.

The negative pole of the crisis of young adulthood is isolation (Newman et al., 1987). For some young people, the possibility of closeness with another person seriously threatens their sense of self. They imagine intimacy to be a blurring of the boundaries of their own identity, and they cannot let themselves engage in such relationships. People who experience isolation must continually erect barriers between themselves and others in order to keep their sense of self intact.

It’s important to note that isolation may also be a result of situational factors (Newman et al., 1979). For example, a young woman who rejects marriage in order to attend medical school or people having to separate because one partner is going to live abroad may find themselves in a situation where desires for intimacy cannot be met. While we may say that the lonely person should try harder to meet new people or develop new social skills, according to Peplau, Russell and Helm (cited in Newman et al., 1979), it is possible that the sense of being isolated interferes with more active coping strategies.

Stage 7: Generativity versus Stagnation (middle adulthood)

According to Erikson (cited in Miller, 1993), generativity refers to “the interest in establishing and guiding the next generation” (pg 166) through childrearing or creative or productive endeavors.

Instead of having children, one may work to create a better world for the children of others. The skills associated with the developmental tasks of middle adulthood, including the ability to make decisions, plan for the future, anticipate the needs of others and conceptualize the developmental phases of the life span, allows the adult to make a deliberate impact on the future (Miller, 1993).
In contrast to generativity, the failure to meet the demands of middle adulthood is expressed in stagnation (Newman et al., 1979), self-absorption (self-indulgence), boredom, and a lack of psychological growth (Miller, 1993).

Stage 8: Integrity versus Despair (late adulthood)

In the last stage, people must live with what they have built over their lifetime (Miller, 1993). Ideally, they will have achieved integrity. Such integrity, according to Newman et al. (1979) involves the acceptance of the limitations of life, a sense of being a part of a larger history that includes previous generations, a sense of owning the wisdom of the ages, and a final integration of all the previous stages. In order to experience integrity, the older adult must incorporate a lifelong sequence of conflicts, failures and disappointments into their self-image.

The individual who resolves the crisis of later adulthood in the direction of despair cannot resist speculating about how things might have been or what things she/he might have done if only conditions were different (Miller, 1993). The individual might have regret for what he/she has done or not done with their life; they may have fear of approaching death and may be really disappointed with themselves (Newman et al., 1987).

2.4 Conclusion

Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development - the study of identity, autonomy, intimacy and so on has aided our understanding of how stressful the different crises are that each person has to undergo at each stage of development, how one copes with these and how these can impact on one throughout the life cycle.

Stress, therefore, can be seen as a catalyst that brings to the fore important developmental issues, which can be dealt with more or less “successfully.” If “success” can be defined, as an increasing capacity to cope with future stress and to develop characteristics important to adult development, such as the capacity for intimacy. The psychodynamic
literature (e.g. Newman et al., 1979) can therefore be interpreted as saying, that struggles with either stage-related crises or with individual stressors are ways in which the ego develops. One could argue, therefore that without stressors and crises of various sorts, ego development could not occur.

The next chapter will be devoted to the presentation of the research data that was conducted to identify the stressors in grade 10 and grade 11 girls, who attend a private high school in Johannesburg. Using Erikson’s theory as a basis for understanding the complex interaction and integration of physical, psychological and social factors that characterize adolescence as a period of development, the results presented here will assist us in determining whether a wide variety of day-to-day adolescent problems can be viewed in terms of a smaller set of five major factors, namely societal demands, self-concept, future expectations, relations and positive experience.