

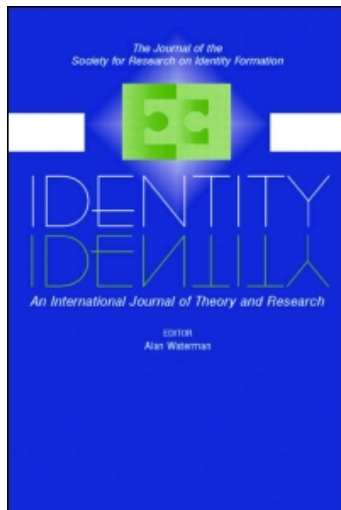
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Feminist Perspectives on Erikson's Theory: Their Relevance for Contemporary Identity Development Research

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In view of recent controversies about theory and self, identity development researchers need to examine the utility of their own theory. In an effort to begin this enterprise, we define what we see as the central concerns of Erikson's theory—a lifespan, psychosocial emphasis, and the notion of agentic identity development—and use a feminist standpoint analysis to examine the usefulness of these aspects of his theory in a rapidly changing, multicultural context. We critique the theory's emphasis on biology as a significant component of psychosocial development, including the emphasis on the biological distinctiveness of women and men as an explanatory construct. We also address the issue of an androcentric bias that many have argued is interwoven with the theory's core concepts. Finally, we offer conclusions regarding the aspects of the theory we find most useful and most in need of clarification or revision.

The grand psychological theories of the 20th century have provided conceptual grounding and analytic tools for most of the endeavors that developmental psychology has, up to this point, pursued (Gergen, 1994; Kurtines & Silverman, 1999; Lerner, 1986). In the past 30 years enough volumes to fill a small library have been written by various developmentalists about the philosophical assumptions underlying the grand theories of Freud (Strachey, 1953–1966), Piaget (1970; Inhelder &

Piaget, 1958; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969), Skinner (1938, 1953, 1974), Bandura (1977, 1986), and others who constructed broad frameworks for describing and explaining human development and behavior (cf. Ford & Lerner, 1992; Lerner, 1986; Overton, 1984, 1991; Overton & Reese, 1973; Reese & Overton, 1970). In addition, some fairly complex and esoteric revisions of grand theories have appeared, for example, Chodorow's (1978) neo-psychoanalytic theory and Fischer's (1980) neo-Piagetian theory. However, grand theories—those psychoanalytic, cognitive developmental, and behaviorist theories providing the basis for much of our modern understanding of mental life—have recently come under attack from a variety of critics.

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have argued that these grand psychological theories are founded on outdated positivist assumptions about science as the discovery of principles that govern a mind-independent reality (Gergen, 1992, 1994; Kvale, 1992; Rosenau, 1992). Postmodernists (Foucault, 1980; Lyotard, 1984; Rorty, 1989, 1990; Weedon, 1987), including feminist postmodernists (Butler, 1990b; Fraser & Nicholson, 1990; Yeatman, 1990), have further accused these theories of ethnocentric foundationalism, naive realism, presumed universalism, and rampant individualism (Martin & Sugarman, 2000), all of which have constrained our consideration of contextual and historical influences on development and have repressed recognition of the particularness of experience and knowledge within unprivileged groups. Feminist standpoint theorists (Collins, 1990; Hartsock, 1983, 1998; Maracek, 1989; New, 1998; Smith, 1987) and others explicating a critical theory approach (Gergen, 1992, 1994) similarly have claimed that the general laws and universal principles incorporated in most widely accepted theories of human development, such as those of Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg (1984), maintain and perpetuate the values and interests of powerful social groups at the expense of those who stand outside the mainstream. Feminists in general have suggested that grand theories reflect only the experiences and perspectives of those primarily White, middle-class, European and American men who until lately held the center of the intellectual power structure (cf. Miller & Scholnick, 2000). Therefore, they have argued, these theories can at best offer limited insight into the experiences and perspectives of those groups that have been excluded from the theory-building process and, in particular, cannot offer legitimate frameworks for research about women's lives or the lives of others from marginalized groups.

These criticisms about the misplaced epistemology and narrowness of grand theory sometimes lead scholars to abandon theory-derived projects and instead present "developmental stories" or "narratives" bearing greater resemblance to novels or short stories than to the conclusions and generalizations traditionally associated with social science research (Freeman, 1993; Holstein & Gubrium, 1999; Lather, 1992; McAdams, 1996; Sarbin, 1986). Even more radically, postmodern social constructionists (cf. Gergen, 1997; Harré & Gillett, 1994) have proposed alternative explanations that erase the self as an "autonomous and intentional agent" (Lovlie, 1992, p. 120) and instead "envision the elimination of psychological states and

conditions as explanations for action and the reconstitution of psychological predicates within the sphere of social process" (Gergen, 1997, p. 740). However, as Martin and Sugarman (2000) have pointed out, "without psychological agents who develop, learn, and change in ways that can be understood, at least in part, psychology and education are not only problematized, they are liquidated!" (p. 399).

In view of these recent controversies concerning theory and self, identity development researchers need to examine the utility of their own grand theory—Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1975) psychosocial theory of life-span human development. Because of its reflection of Erikson's own search for personal and social belonging; its optimistic incorporation of the ideals of American industrial and consumer capitalism inspired by the growth economy of the 1950s and 1960s (Miller, 1993; Roazen, 1976); its emphasis on the experience of White, middle class, European and American men; and its definitions of psychosocial normality, important questions arise regarding the theory's usefulness as a framework for understanding contemporary human development. Does the historical and sociocultural context of the theory's development impair its contemporary usefulness, or does this aspect of the theory sensitize us to issues involved in extending identity development research to all members of our global society? Can a theory that ties individual development to a biological ground plan, thus emphasizing a certain uniformity of experience, offer guidance for investigations of identity as it is constructed in a rapidly changing, multicultural context? Are there implicit biases of the theory that render it useless as a framework for understanding women's—or even men's—development?

This discussion offers some thoughts on these three questions, in the hope of initiating a conversation among identity development researchers about the theoretical bases for their empirical projects. We argue in support of some of the general concepts included in Erikson's theoretical formulation and the continuing utility of psychosocial theory as a guide for human development, and particularly identity development, research. In addition, we suggest that to provide useful guidance for research, the theory's developmental principles must be viewed from a perspective that acknowledges the uniqueness of life experiences associated with broad social categories of gender, class, and culture as well as the particularity of individual experience. The critique we offer in this discussion is constructed from standpoint epistemology; particularly, a feminist standpoint. We offer our perspectives from a feminist standpoint because it is one with which we, as authors, have "lived experience." Standpoint epistemology is a method of analysis based on the assumption that groups (and members of groups) differing in social position also differ in their material interests and their social understandings. Differences in position, interests, and understandings constitute standpoints from which groups and group members gain material knowledge about social relations or social structure. A standpoint is not objective, but rather consists of a subjectivity derived experientially through relationships with the social and natural world. A standpoint is a local, lived reality. Assuming a feminist standpoint permits us to share particular

perspectives that differ from those seen from other standpoints, or from those seen by a theorist who attempts to rise above a subject to describe its general laws and universal principles.

For example, using a Marxist critique of capitalism, Hartsock (1983, 1998) constructed a critical feminist standpoint by building a framework based on the claim that

women's lives differ structurally from those of men [and thus] make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point which can ground a powerful critique of the phallocratic institutions and ideology which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy. (1983, p. 107)

In other words, a critical feminist standpoint makes visible certain aspects of society, and of theories devised to explain the material relations that constitute society, that cannot be seen from other standpoints. (Similarly, standpoints of others whose lives differ structurally and materially from those from whom and for whom a theory is derived can offer other powerful critiques.)

With regard to the matters with which this discussion is concerned, a feminist standpoint argues that Eriksonian theory is constructed from a perspective that excludes the lived realities of women's lives and the lives of other marginalized groups to which Erikson and his theory-building colleagues did not belong. Thus, an analysis of Erikson's theory from a feminist standpoint (or other standpoint) makes visible certain ideas and assumptions that are invisible when the theory is critiqued from other perspectives. In addition, a feminist standpoint can provide guidance for theoretical endeavors that promote feminist values (such as inclusion and nonhierarchical relations) and open possibilities for dialogue about gendered experience. In other words, by taking a perspective from a particular standpoint, it is possible not only to critique problematic aspects of Eriksonian theory, but also to explore what is valuable.

To begin the discussion, we define what we see as the central concerns of Erikson's theory and seek an answer to our first question by considering the contemporary relevance of these concerns for human development research. We then examine a specific aspect of the theory that often is seen as problematic—its emphasis on biology as a significant component of human psychosocial development, including the theory's reliance on the biological distinctiveness of women and men as an explanatory construct. Finally, we address the androcentric bias that some have argued is interwoven with many of the theory's core concepts.

The Concept of Identity

A good way to approach a theory of human development is to identify the core questions and concerns organizing the theory, and the scope of its explanation. Extending these questions to Erikson's theory, what are its scope and its central questions and concerns? With respect to scope, Erikson's psychosocial theory touches on many aspects of development and offers an array of concepts and

propositions. Most notably, it proposes that cultural ideals, mores, and practices must be considered as significant influences on and contributors to individual psychological development. In other words, the theory conceptualizes development as transactional or systemic (Ford & Lerner, 1992) and argues that parents, peers, intimate partners, and other members of a person's social milieu are not only individual participants in developmental processes, but also are carriers of powerful societal and cultural messages. Cultural institutions, structures, and rules are transmitted to and adopted or internalized by individuals through their participation in social relationships (Côté, 1993). Furthermore, unlike the vast majority of 19th-century and 20th-century developmental theories, Erikson's (1950, 1963) theory envisions development as a lifelong project, proceeding from birth to death through the eight psychosocial stages described in *Childhood and Society*.

The importance of the psychosocial focus and the life-span developmental scope of the theory is clear. However, these are derivative concepts; they are explanations constituting answers to a central question that the theory addresses. Erikson asked, and constructed his theory to answer, this core question: How does a person compose a life centered in the self—a life recognized by self and others as having a certain uniqueness and distinctiveness? How do people go about defining themselves, unconsciously and consciously, as individuals in a social context?

This is a decidedly modern question, one unlikely to arise for most people under the circumstances in which humanity has existed throughout recorded history. Indeed, this question probably has its roots in the very historical circumstances that prompted Erikson to ask himself who he was in a pluralistic, technological, capitalist context. Erikson had opportunities to choose who he might be and become, just as he had opportunities to reflect on how he had become the person he was through his childhood, adolescent, and adult experiences. Unlike lives composed in relative isolation or under dictatorships or in circumstances where survival demands adherence to a limited range of roles, activities, and beliefs, Erikson's life offered an array of possibilities. These possibilities often arose by chance rather than through intentionality (e.g., Erikson did not intend his life-changing encounter with Anna Freud), but nevertheless, especially in adolescence and adulthood, demanded choices in response (Friedman, 1999). Indeed, the shift from prescriptive to descriptive identities that first emerged in the Western world during the Enlightenment constituted a significant historical influence on Erikson's theorizing. One reason he wrote what he did at the time he did was because the modern world in which he composed his life called for a new and different conceptualization of identity—a theory of identity development as a descriptive rather than a prescriptive process, an explanation of identity as achieved rather than as ascribed (Côté & Allahaar, 1996).

Erikson translated his personal experiences into the language of mental life that he learned from Anna Freud and her colleagues. Based on his personal history and his insights into the contextual and developmental aspects of that history, Erikson derived a psychosocial, life-span theoretical answer to this question: How do peo-

ple compose lives centered in self? Specifically, Erikson proposed that people know who they are through participation in particularized sociohistorical contexts, and the ways in which self-definitions are composed vary across the life span as bodies grow and age and social opportunities, expectations, and responsibilities evolve and change. In essence, we believe, as do many other interpreters of Erikson's theory (Côté, 1993; Josselson, 1987; Kroger, 2000), that identity development is the core concern of the theory.

The aspects of Erikson's theory that have been mentioned thus far—the socio-culturally and historically situated, life-span focus on identity development—are very much in keeping with feminist standpoint concerns regarding contextualized subjectivity. In contrast, it is not difficult to identify theories that deny the relevance of sociocultural and historical context for individual development—or deny the need for a concept of self at all. In fact, most theories of human behavior and development have historically sought to explain all behavior and development as outcomes of antecedent causes and consequently have tended to exclude the concept of the self as actor and agent from serious scientific study (Kurtines, 1998). For example, the behavioral genetics and sociobiological perspectives on development rely on evolution or reproductive success as an ultimate cause and conceptualize the immediate context as secondary, if not epiphenomenal, in explaining the development of individual human beings (Archer, 1996; Bell & Bell, 1989; Scarr, 1993; Wilson, 1975, 1978). Behaviorism, on the other hand, sees no need to presuppose either a self or ultimate causes, focusing instead on proximate causes (close-at-hand environmental events) as antecedents of all behaviors (Skinner, 1953, 1974). However, these theoretical approaches, among others, are based on assumptions that are markedly different from the one implicit in Erikson's theory. Whereas these frameworks (and others) organize nature and nurture hierarchically, Erikson's theory adopts a contextualist, dynamic interactionist, and biopsychosocial resolution in which both nature and nurture are seen as 100% contributors to development (Anastasi, 1958; Goldhaber, 2000; Lerner, 1986). Erikson's theory does encounter criticism for certain of its nature-oriented conceptualizations, a concern that will be addressed shortly. However, the overall integrative approach that links the development of an active self, that both produces and responds to the social, cultural, and historical context, locates Erikson's theory firmly in the mainstream of contemporary theorizing about human psychological and behavioral development (cf. Brandtstadter & Lerner, 1999; Freeman, 1993; Kurtines, 1998; McAdams, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986).

Likewise, the proposition that the interplay between psychological development and cultural context continues after adolescence—after reproductive and physical maturity have been achieved—fits well with contemporary theory and research concerning a number of psychological variables. For example, findings concerning cognitive development suggested that for at least some middle-aged adults, thinking processes are organized differently than they are for adolescents and young adults (Commons, Richards, & Armon, 1984; Labouvie-Vief, 1994). These adult-

hood changes in cognition are linked to experiences in the workplace and to participation in family life. Other developmental researchers have suggested that participation in marriage and parenting is not merely playing out scripts and programs developed in childhood and adolescence, but related to continuing development in self-definition and self-evaluation (Gerson, 1985, 1993; Kroger, 2000; Levinger, 1983; Newman & Newman, 1988). Still others have observed how intentionality and action relate to later-life development and successful aging (Brandtstadter & Lerner, 1999; Freund et al., 1999).

Indeed, Erikson appears to have fulfilled a social need for a theory explaining how the capacity for psychological growth and development in adults facilitates their adaptation to rapid and dramatic social change. It is notable that although a few life-span developmental theories were proposed early in the 20th century—for example, formulations by Frenkel (1936), and Jung (1933)—none met with widespread interest and acceptance in North America at that time. Most of these discussions of life-span development were published in Europe and were not translated into English until years later (e.g., Buhler, 1935; Frenkel-Brunswik, 1963). However, when the end of World War II bestowed on the United States and Canada an abundance of new technology and a need for workers and consumers who could convert the wartime legacy to peacetime uses, Erikson's 1950 book *Childhood and Society* achieved immediate success. North America needed to believe that old dogs could learn new tricks. By the late 1960s, the belief that psychological development continues into adulthood was fairly widespread, especially among the well-educated echelons of the population. Many researchers have explored adult psychosocial development in the past three decades (Gould, 1978; Josselson, 1987, 1996; Kroger, 2000; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Loevinger, 1976; Whitbourne, 1986). Almost without exception, they credit Erikson as their forefather.

Is Erikson's Concept of Identity Useful?

Although many scholars, both within and without the human development disciplines, agree that the central concern of Erikson's theory is the development of a sense of identity, there is not agreement that the concept of an individualized self is useful for understanding turn-of-the-millennium lives. Similarly, there is not agreement about the appropriate methods for the study of the self (assuming there are any). Questions also arise about the applicability of the concept of identity to the diversity of contemporary people. In the following section, we examine these issues in an effort to answer our first question: Is Erikson's concept of identity still useful?

Criticisms of the Identity Construct

The utility of the identity construct has been questioned from several different perspectives. In the social sciences, radical behaviorists continue to scoff at notions of

identity development, having never found an intentional self to be necessary as an explanatory construct. More recently, and from a completely different epistemological position, postmodernists have declared the “death of the subject” because they consider human decisions and actions to be the outcome of nonintentional (self-less) forces such as language, culture, landscape, and social practices (Kvale, 1992). In postmodern (and behavioral) conceptualizations of self, both the identity construct and the concept of development are obliterated. For example, Butler (1990b), a postmodern feminist, commented on the work of psychoanalytically oriented feminists, including Mitchell (1975), Rose (1987), Chodorow (1978), and Benjamin (1988), by arguing:

The nonliterary use of psychoanalysis, however, as a psychological explanatory model for the acquisition and consolidation of gender identification and, hence, identity generally fails to take account of itself as a narrative. Subject to the feminist aim to delimit and define a shared femininity, these narratives attempt to construct a coherent female subject. As a result, psychoanalysis as feminist metatheory reproduces that false coherence in the form of a story line about infantile development where it ought to investigate genealogically the exclusionary practices which condition that particular narrative of identity formation. (p. 332)

As noted earlier, neither feminist standpoint theorists nor human developmentalists can refute criticisms of the identity construct put forward by postmodernists (or behaviorists) on their own terms. Indeed, their analytical approach aims to deny us a voice—even topics to address.

Somewhat less radically, adherents of postmodern literary theory have challenged developmental interpretations of a coherent personal identity as the construction of an autonomous, intentional self, and have replaced it with the concept of fragmented or multiple selves existing simultaneously in an ahistorical universe (Butler, 1990a; Lyotard, 1984). Similar ideas have appeared in the social psychological literature (Dimen, 1995; Kvale, 1992; Lather, 1992). Gergen (1991), for example, has defined the problem of identity in contemporary life as the plight of “the saturated self”—a self lacking in focus and center, essentially a happenstance collage composed of superficial chance encounters. Nevertheless, a self of some sort is assumed.

Criticisms of the identity construct appearing in the human development literature are even less radical and more constructive than those of literary and social psychological postmodernists. For example, Gilligan (1982) enlarged the identity construct by offering a view of the “relational self” or “self-in-relation” as distinct from an autonomous self. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) suggested that some women develop an epistemology of “connected knowing,” in contrast to a positivist epistemology of accrued knowledge achieved via individually constructed, impartial objectivity. Another distinctly cautionary note can be heard in the book *Women's Growth in Connection* when Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey (1991) stated that they “question and are cautious about setting up a new theory of ‘Self’” (p. 2) and “do not want to repeat the error of other the-

oreticians: speaking as if there is one voice, one reality for humans, for women, when in fact we recognize the exquisite contextuality of human life" (p. 7). These writers and others (Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976; Miller, 1976) have attempted to refocus the methods or language used to conceptualize and study the self and identity development, rather than nullifying the concepts of self and identity, as do postmodernists.

In other words, although some human developmentalists are dissatisfied with particular limitations of identity development theory, they do not reject its usefulness. Rather, they suggest a need for conceptual elaboration and refinement. By directing attention to the manner in which identity has been conceptualized and specified in Erikson's theory, critics within developmental psychology have alerted theorists and researchers to the need to consider human particularity of experience in their explorations of self-construction. (Later in this discussion we address the issue of the theory's androcentrism, which appears to be the primary concern of human development critics.)

The criticisms voiced by human developmentalists have much in common with those that are raised from a feminist standpoint analysis of Erikson's conceptualization of identity development. Specifically, feminist standpoint epistemology cautions researchers to avoid imposing preconceived interpretations on the experience of study participants and to look for markers of difference as well as commonality in identity development processes. It further suggests that attention to identity content is as important as attention to process, especially when respondents differ in social status and power or represent differing cultures, subcultures, or demographic groupings (Hartsock, 1983, 1998). Thus, a feminist standpoint approach offers developmental psychology a useful vantage point from which to highlight and correct the omission of women's (and others') experience from Erikson's theory. Nonetheless, feminist developmentalists find the vocabulary of the self as active and intentional to be more useful than the vocabulary of the self as simply a passive recipient of environmental contingencies or an illusion created by the intersection of language and culture.

Criticisms of Methods of Study

Among those who assume the value of the construct of the individual, some, including feminist researchers, have recently raised questions about appropriate ways to study the development of identity. Probably the most well-known method for studying identity development involves the identity status scheme developed by Marcia (1966) to "go beyond the theoretical description of [the identity] construct and attempt to demonstrate its validity and usefulness in some empirical way" (1994, p. 72).

Marcia's (1966) identity status scheme, based on the presence or absence of both identity exploration and commitment, has been used as the basis for hundreds of identity studies (for an overview, see Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, &

Orlofsky, 1993). Measures based on Marcia's scheme have been developed and revised through the years, as scholars have attempted to make them more inclusive of domains appropriate for women (Archer, 1992; Waterman & Archer, 1993) and minorities (Phinney, 1989).

However, some scholars have argued that the traditional methods used by identity development researchers for the study of the self are still problematic. For example, Josselson (1993) and McAdams (1996), sensitive to the postmodernist emphasis on the personal and particular instead of the general and the universal, maintained that narrative approaches should replace the much-used status approach developed by Marcia and his colleagues because narrative approaches preserve individual distinctiveness rather than averaging it. Josselson (1987, 1996) and others, including the authors of this article, use content analysis of interviews in their studies of role-related identity development, and Josselson and Lieblich (1993–1999) coedited a series of books exploring the intricacies of narrative methods in the study of lives. These “grounded” methods are closely aligned with the clinical method Erikson himself preferred for data gathering.

Freeman (1993) took the concept of using narrative to study lives into the interpretive–constructionist realm by suggesting that life stories, and hence identities, are constructed (and reconstructed) retrospectively to explain subjectively selected endings, rather than prospectively, as events and experiences accumulate. According to Freeman, it is only through repeated samplings of retrospective accounts that the development of self and identity can be explored, and only for individuals.

Certainly the proliferation of methods for the study of identity development does nothing to undermine the utility of the identity construct. What can be seen in this variety of methods are reflections of scholars' organizing paradigms. The choice of paradigm (i.e., positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical, or post-structural) dictates the aims, strategy, execution, and analysis of the research project (Highlen & Finley, 1996). However, arguing for one “superior” method of studying identity (and suggesting that others are without value) implies certainty about a superior standpoint and epistemology. Such certainty is only possible if one adopts a totalizing position that is antithetical to the assumptions of standpoint epistemology. Each paradigm can be seen as having a view to contribute.

Among these paradigms, feminist standpoint theorists have values and ideas to contribute to developmental research. Along with postmodernists, these scholars have pointed out that grand theories such as Erikson's sacrifice attention to the diversity of human experience in the service of abstract, universal principles. Furthermore, they have consistently warned against the generalization of frameworks and findings derived in particular localities and based on the experiences of specific samples and populations (e.g., Harding, 1986, 1990). At the same time, we note that Erikson's theory itself can be seen as addressing this methodological concern. The focus of Erikson's theory on contextually situated identity development across the life span similarly warned against any such universalization. Attention

to these issues has yielded useful additions to the literature (e.g., Josselson, 1996) that should continue to accumulate as more researchers experiment with methods of study that seek, in a variety of ways, to authentically explore identity development.

The "Survival of the Subject": Identity as a Timely Construct

Despite both radical and revisionist criticisms of the identity construct and its study, the idea of an intentionally composed identity persists in both popular and professional venues. What can explain this persistent popularity?

As noted previously, the development of a sense of identity and the flexibility of adjustment in self-definition as social circumstances change probably represent human psychosocial adaptations to Western, industrial, and consumer capitalist culture (Côté, 2000; Côté & Levine, 1987). In cultures where selfhood is prescribed by the structural attributes of the social order, individualized ego identity deriving from choice may be less relevant to psychosocial adaptation than other factors, for example, physical strength (Côté, 2000; Côté & Allaha, 1996). Identity is problematized by the conflict that arises from choice. Choices, both conscious and unconscious, set people apart from one another, thus emphasizing individuality and promoting an individual sense of identity. Modern Western societies require that people define themselves descriptively, in contrast to the prescriptive identity definitions that are imposed on individuals in social orders where possibilities and thus choices are limited (Côté, 2000; Côté & Allaha, 1996). This broadening of possibilities and choices is likely to increase interindividual variability and thus restrict considerably the legitimacy of generalization across multiple lines of distinction.

At a practical and material level, both within the human development disciplines and within Western societies, concerns with individual identity are far from forgotten. Many of the issues we identified earlier as the foundations for Erikson's interest in identity development are even more prominent today than they were 50 or 60 years ago. The focus on individualization has intensified as familial, community, and societal bonds have weakened throughout Western societies, perhaps most dramatically in Western Europe, the United States, and Canada (Côté, 2000; Côté & Allaha, 1996). At the same time, societies have become increasingly complex, as technologies such as the Internet and World Wide Web make information instantly available around the globe, and commerce and immigration bring members of dramatically different cultures into contact with one another. Societies are increasingly pluralistic and struggle to accommodate diverse gender, racial, religious, political, linguistic, and economic groups within cooperative, if not always cohesive, functional systems. Identity politics—the gathering of people into social and political movements organized by special shared interests, such as religious fundamentalism, feminism, or national liberation—has replaced traditional social and political affiliations (Moghadam, 1994). How does one choose? How does one

find a place in the midst of competing opportunities, constraints, and demands? One may take the postmodern turn and see a sense of identity as no more than the outcome of the intersection of language and vocabulary with culture and context. Alternatively, one may assert the value of a belief in a self who intentionally composes a life (Bateson, 1989) by constructing a sense of identity—a psychosocial identity that guides contextually bound choices that are more or less satisfying of an individual's conscious goals and values and unconscious needs and desires (Côté, 2000; Côté & Allaha, 1996).

In sum, then, Erikson's theory was the first to introduce the useful concept of identity into the human development disciplines and to define clearly some parameters for identity development (Roazen, 1976). It is also important to note here that the theory has been extraordinarily generative, in that it has given rise to a number of derivative theories and hundreds, probably thousands, of empirical studies and nonempirical discussions. Derivative conceptualizations serve to refine and clarify Erikson's ideas. For example, the identity status approach derived by Marcia (1966; Marcia et al., 1993) to examine the intersections of exploration and commitment in adolescent identity formation has been the basis of many empirical investigations and theoretical discussions of identity development (see Schwartz, 2001, for a full review). Berzonsky (1988, 1990) proposed a social-cognitive model of identity formation that relies more heavily on notions of self-construction than does Marcia's formulation. Bosma (1992) suggested that repeated commitment is a key to understanding the identity formation process. Côté (1993) noted that the reciprocity between cultural institutions and ego identity has been neglected in interpretations of Erikson's theory and argued for an empirically testable psychoanalytic social psychological conceptualization of identity development. Although these conceptualizations differ somewhat from Erikson's ideas, they do not contradict or invalidate Erikson's theory. They suggest refinements and elaborations that have shown themselves to be particularly useful in empirical investigations of the identity development process.

Our answer, then, to the first question posed in the beginning of this section is evident. Does the historical and sociocultural context of the theory's development impair its contemporary usefulness? No. Although postmodern perspectives and standpoint epistemology sensitize us to individual variation, context, and authentic methods for studying lives, the theory's focus on identity development as a lifelong psychosocial process is as useful today as it was when Erikson published *Childhood and Society* in 1950—particularly for studying people who have “lost their origins in soil, ritual, and tradition” (Erikson, 1975, p. 29) and must find another way to make sense of their lives and their endeavors (Côté, 2000). The criticisms reviewed thus far are useful primarily in identifying issues that must be considered in extending identity development research to all members of our global society.

Is Biology Overemphasized in Erikson's Theory?

In addition to the general concept of lifelong psychosocial identity development, Erikson's theory includes a number of particulars. One of these, the epigenetic principle suggests that psychosocial development occurs in tandem with biological growth and development. In addition, the eight-stage life-span model suggests parameters for resolutions to developmental conflicts precipitated by individuals' emerging physical capacities, as these are interpreted and experienced within a particular social, cultural, and historical context. Specifically, Erikson's theory suggests that a person's evolving sense of self incorporates experiences associated with physically mandated possibilities. For example, infants who must summon caregivers through signals of distress and be carried from place to place are in a qualitatively different position and relationship to others than are toddlers who can crawl or walk, or even infants who can view themselves and others from a sitting position. Adolescents whose bodies are physically mature and whose social status permits them to be viewed as sexual objects define themselves from a qualitatively different psychosocial position than do children with prepubescent bodies who are generally viewed as sexually off-limits. Erikson's theory acknowledges the significance for psychosocial development of the dramatic physiological changes that occur from infancy through adolescence.

We believe this conceptualization of the relationship between embodiment—the contextually bound experiences that derive from bodily characteristics—and development is a strength of the theory. We suggest, however, that at least two aspects of this formulation are incomplete or underdeveloped.

The first problem is that the theory does not elaborate ways in which physiological change is related to psychosocial change after adolescence. Specifically, the theory does not acknowledge that the biological metric changes when individuals reach physiological and reproductive maturity. During the years of infancy, childhood, and adolescence, the physiological aspects of embodiment change dramatically. Concomitantly, intrapersonal and interpersonal interpretations of embodiment change. This biocultural process is a core component of individual psychosocial development. However, once mature physicality is achieved, social interpretations become far more significant than physical changes for embodiment. In other words, during the preadult years, changes in physical development and social interpretations of bodily characteristics appear to be in step; whereas after adolescence, the biological metric slows. Intrapersonal and interpersonal interpretations certainly are made as one slowly passes through the decades of potential reproduction or becomes physically frail and once again dependent on the physical care of others. However, Erikson's theory offers few useful guidelines as to how biological change is a helpful analytical tool for understanding psychosocial development in people between the ages of 20 and 70.

Other adult developmentalists have offered some useful insights regarding the psychosocial significance of biology after adolescence (cf. Whitbourne & Connolly, 1999). Studies by both Neugarten (1968) and Karp (1988) indicated that middle agers first recognize that they are getting older when others, responding to physical signs of aging such as gray hair and wrinkles, treat them with the respect or disdain reserved for those who no longer look youthful. Erikson's theory would be strengthened by clarification and elaboration of the role that biological aging plays in adult psychosocial development.

The second problematic aspect of Erikson's conceptualization of embodiment is the explanation of female and male gender-role identity and behavior. In 1968, Erikson addressed specifically an issue that he had mentioned many times previously: Differences in male and female psychosocial definitions of self deriving from differences in reproductive anatomy. Women, he explained, are maternal, caring, and preoccupied with relationships because they carry within them an inner space (the uterus) in which human life can be conceived and nurtured. Men, on the other hand, are agentic and instrumentally active because their bodily ground plan (the penis) orients them toward outer space and the domain of public life. In conclusion to his discussion of gender-role development he wrote

Am I saying, then, that "anatomy is destiny?" Yes, it is destiny, insofar as it determines not only the range and configuration of physiological functioning and its limitation but also, to an extent, personality configurations. The basic modalities of woman's commitment and involvement naturally also reflect the ground plan of her body. (p. 285)

We will not belabor the extent to which Erikson's "anatomy is destiny" statements have been overinterpreted or taken out of the context of other ideas included in the 1968 writing. We are in complete agreement with those who object to biological determinism as an explanation for human development (Lerner, 1986). We also are aware that biological determinism is a theoretical and political tool frequently used to justify the disempowerment of all marginalized groups, including women (Hubbard, 1990; Lewontin, Rose, & Kamin, 1984). Furthermore, the quoted statements, more so than anything written by Erikson, ensure that most feminist theorists do not accord psychosocial theory serious consideration. However, Côté and Levine (1987) pointed out that Erikson tended "to embed his major conceptions and propositions in figurative prose, making it difficult for the casual reader to fully appreciate his insights" (p. 273). In keeping with this argument, we believe that the manner in which Erikson's theory incorporates biology into its conceptualization of psychosocial development extends far beyond a simplistic anatomy is destiny interpretation.

Nevertheless, Erikson's explanation for sex differences in gender-role identity is problematic primarily because in this domain it limits its conceptualization of embodiment to biological function. Erikson's theory assumes that only the biological functions that are mutually exclusive for women and men—impregnation, menstruation, gestation, and lactation—set the parameters for their psychosocial

development, especially, but not exclusively, during adulthood, in the same way that toddlers' shortness and capacity to walk set parameters for psychosocial development. In our view, however, the analogy does not hold. Physical status (size and capability) is directly relevant to the embodied experience of toddlers. For adults, social interpretations of physical status (biological sex)—internalized and institutionalized—mediate the relevance of biology for embodied experience. The failure of Erikson's theory to adequately address the changing biological metric and the significance of embodiment for social status is a definite weakness.

In essence, then, we suggest that it is both right and reasonable to see embodiment as an integral component of psychosocial developmental processes. Clearly, the significance of embodiment changes as bodies grow and attain maturity. At the same time, we argue (and we think Erikson would agree if he were writing today) that biology is not a deterministic component of psychosocial process, but a developmental co-contributor.

How does the notion of biology as a developmental co-contributor hold up when viewed from a feminist perspective? Paradoxically, with the "anatomy is destiny" exception we note in the preceding paragraphs, Erikson's theory is actually congruent with much contemporary feminist theorizing about embodiment (Brison, 1997; Church, 1997). Feminist theorists have written extensively about the ways in which social interpretations of bodies are related to status, constructed identity, and embodied experience, especially for adolescent and adult women (Jacobus, Keller, & Shuttleworth, 1990). These discussions of embodiment focus on a diversity of topics, such as obsessive concerns about slenderness (Bordo, 1990a), the relationship between maternity and a sense of identity (Ruddick, 1989), and women's experience of their own sexuality (Barrington, 1991; Tiefer, 1995). Some of the better known formulations focus on women's bodies as playgrounds for the enactment of male sexual fantasies (Jhally, 1995) and the commercial exploitation of women's bodies as targets for marketing beauty products, exercise and diet programs, and various forms of ornamentation—from hairdos to tattoos to high-heeled shoes (Brownmiller, 1984; Kilbourne, 1995; Wolf, 1991).

Feminist scholars of diverse orientations have converged in their acknowledgment of the significance of bodily experience for self-definition. Bodies are located. They are "somewhere" (Bordo, 1990b). This embodied location in a social, cultural, and historical context generates subjectivity and meaning. Much of this meaning derives from gendered experience. Even postmodernist feminists who do not agree that bodies are located (Butler, 1990a) have argued compellingly that embodied experience derives primarily from gendered linguistic interpretation. In their words, gender is *Written on the Body* (Winterson, 1992).

However, feminist theorists, regardless of their epistemology, usually do not adopt a developmental framework or incorporate developmental concepts into their formulations. Those who do most often focus on infant identification processes during pre-Oedipal development (Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976; Gardiner, 1987). These theorists have addressed the psychological and behavioral

implications of early developmental processes for adulthood and analyzed the sociocultural origins of such processes, but have offered few specific ideas regarding individual psychosocial development. In this regard, Erikson's theory has much to offer feminist theorizing.

We now are in a position to answer the second question posed in the beginning of our discussion: Can a theory that ties individual development to a biological ground plan offer guidance for investigations of modern identity? The answer is no, as long as that ground plan is seen only from an "anatomy is destiny," or more specifically, a "reproductive anatomy is destiny" perspective. However, if the concept of ground plan incorporated in Eriksonian theory is viewed as a recognition of the relevance of embodiment for psychosocial development, the answer is certainly yes.

If all of these ideas regarding embodiment were brought into conjunction—the Eriksonian focus on development, the critical materialist standpoint feminist, focus on embodied experience as derived from social structure, and the postmodernist focus on language as an integral component of embodied experience—a thoroughly robust depiction of gendered identity development might emerge. Although Erikson's theory does not specifically incorporate and address all of these elements, the general psychosocial framework is compatible with them and could offer a useful interpretive lens for understanding how gendered identities are constructed in the context of contemporary patriarchal culture. Erikson's theory, more so than the vast majority of feminist theories, provides a framework for conceptualizing embodied genderization as a life-span psychosocial developmental process. We further suggest that an integrated conceptualization (using notions from Erikson, feminist standpoint epistemology, and postmodern approaches) could be usefully applied to understanding the psychosocial development of marginalized groups other than women, as well as the development of men (Jhally, 1999; Klein, 1993).

Is Erikson's Theory Androcentric?

We have argued thus far that the focus of Erikson's theory on the psychosocial development of an embodied sense of identity is not incompatible with, and indeed has the potential to enrich, feminist standpoint analyses of human development and behavior. Nevertheless, as we have seen in Erikson's conception of a woman's inner space as delimiting her personality, commitments, and involvements, specific concepts incorporated into the theory reflect androcentric biases that seriously challenge its relevance and utility for understanding the subjective, material aspects of developmental processes.

To discuss the issue of androcentrism in Erikson's theory, we must first establish what the term androcentrism means. Theoretical androcentrism is the practice of placing men and their interests, preferences, and characteristics—physical, psychological, and behavioral—in the center of a theoretical endeavor (Eichler, 1988).

In contemporary Western developmental theories such as Erikson's, androcentrism usually involves an assumption that stereotyped masculinity is the principle that organizes human development and behavior and the standard by which humans—meaning both women and men—are or should be evaluated.

Although there may be numerous examples of androcentrism in Erikson's theory, we discuss only the two that we believe to be most significant and relevant to an overall evaluation of the theory. The first has to do with how identity is defined in the theory, and the second with conceptualization of the relationships among identity, biology, and culture.

Definition of Identity

Erikson's theory is organized by a definition of identity development as the construction of an individuated and separated self. Three stages included in the epigenetic model pose developmental tasks that explicitly involve caring relations: Stage 1, trust and mistrust; Stage 6, intimacy and isolation; and Stage 7, generativity and stagnation. In the stage of trust and mistrust, infants develop a sense of how dependable and trustworthy the people who care for them are. Eriksonian theory argues that the quality of relational experiences of caregiving forms the basis for an individual's evolving sense of trust in others, in the social order, both proximal and distal, and in self as deserving of trust. The second, third, and fourth stages—autonomy and shame and doubt, initiative and guilt, and industry and inferiority—all involve increasing independence and separation, learning to take care of self and rely less on others, especially caregivers. Stage 5 is the period when identity formation is the foreground task and all conscious and unconscious resolutions to previous developmental tasks are integrated and consolidated into a sense of self. The theory emphasizes that a central characteristic of this stage is independence and separateness. In Stage 6, intimacy and isolation, the critical developmental task is establishing an intimate sexual relationship. However, the theory specifies that people who enter into an intimate relationship prior to resolution of the identity and role confusion conflict often will experience an unhealthy psychological merging of identities in which one or both partners lose their awareness of who they are as individuals. Stage 7, generativity and stagnation, "encompasses procreativity, productivity, and creativity, and thus the generation of new beginnings, as well as of new products and new ideas, including a kind of self-generation concerned with further identity development" (Erikson, 1982, p. 67). The virtue or strength associated with this developmental crisis is care, which emphasizes caring for others and for the well-being of future generations.

During the past three decades, a number of investigators of female identity development, including Miller (1976), Gilligan (1982), Chodorow (1978), and Belenky et al. (1986), have pointed out that in our society, girls and women often ground their sense of self and identity in caring relationships. These theorists and researchers have argued that the notion of identity as based on separation and in-

dependence from others describes a modern, Western ideal that has been integrated into contemporary male gender-role norms and becomes a defining characteristic of stereotyped masculinity (Brod, 1987). This conceptualization of identity fails to capture identity development processes often seen in women and “nonstereotypic” men—processes that Miller, Gilligan, Chodorow, Belenky et al., and other feminist theorists have argued are not grounded in essential sex-related differences, but are derived from women’s subordinate social history and the devaluation of characteristics associated with women (a subordination and devaluation that repeat themselves in Erikson’s theory).

From a feminist standpoint, the oppression of women by men appears to have existed throughout recorded human history (Tavris & Offir, 1977), although the forms of this oppression have varied with time and place depending on political and economic circumstances. According to analysts whose perspectives are congruent with Hartsock’s (1983, 1998) feminist standpoint (Costa, 1972; Janeway, 1971), contemporary Western masculinity and femininity are defined by the form of gendered division of labor that evolved during the industrial revolution. This historically specific division of labor consists of a separation of domestic and employment responsibilities in which women are socially defined as suited, by nature and moral sensibility, for private life. Men, on the other hand, are defined as naturally and morally predisposed to participation in public life, particularly through involvement in paid employment.

Prior to the industrial revolution, women’s economic contributions to family survival were essential, as they are today in developing nations where women continue to produce and provide the majority of food necessary for subsistence (James, 1985). With the emergence of industrialization and its accompanying urbanization, women’s visible contributions to the economic well-being of families declined, particularly among the middle and upper classes. The 18th-century gender-role structure has been characterized as a “cult of sensibility”—a shared social belief that women because of their higher degree of natural sensitivity are both morally superior to and more vulnerable morally than men. This naturalization of gender-role arrangements evolved during the 19th and early 20th centuries into the “cult of domesticity”—a shared social belief that women are naturally predisposed to childrearing and other domestic duties, whereas men are ill-suited by nature to engage in such activities. The result of this naturalization process is a definition of privileged White women as unsuitable for and undesirous of participation in the industrialized capitalist economic structure. Women are the unwaged “angels in the home” who provide a safe haven of support and service for men who, in contrast, spend the majority of their time in the cruel, unfeeling environment of business and industry. These angels also provide a nurturing environment in which the next generation is properly socialized to assume responsibilities in the gendered spheres of adult life (Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

Economic developments during the latter half of the 20th century, combined with effects of the feminist activism that emerged in the 1960s, have somewhat al-

tered current conceptualizations of the separate spheres philosophy. However, these social changes postdate Erikson's proposals regarding identity development. The theory is essentially insensitive to the material circumstances differentiating men's and women's lives and constituting contextual influences on the development of identity. Indeed, Erikson's ideas about women's identity development seem to be deeply influenced by and intertwined with social beliefs regarding woman's place as the "angel in the home," a theme carried through in the Eriksonian conceptualization of the relationships among identity, biology, and culture.

Identity, Biology, and Culture

According to Erikson's theory, as explicated in that portion of his 1968 writing cited previously in this discussion, women should explore identity options during adolescence. However, women resolve the identity and intimacy conflicts simultaneously, rather than sequentially, a "deviation" that has received significant attention from identity developmentalists in recent years (cf. Archer, 1992). Women delay commitment to specific ways of being in the world until "attractiveness and experience have succeeded in selecting what is to be admitted to the welcome of the inner space 'for keeps'" (Erikson, 1968, p. 283). Women give priority to the needs of their male partners in the formation of their sense of who they are, where they fit into the world, and who will become significant in providing them with knowledge of their belongingness. This pattern of identity formation does not upset the masculine-feminine organization—that is, the dominance-submission hierarchy—seen as necessary for successful sexual intimacy, reproduction, and childrearing (Erikson, 1968).

As noted previously, Erikson's theory suggests that women's relationship orientation reflects the anatomical structure of their reproductive organs. Just as their vaginas are designed to take in penises and their uteruses are designed to hold, grow, and nurture the babies conceived through penetration and incorporation, so their identities are designed to enfold, hold, and nurture others. The ultimate healthy psychosocial manifestations of this developmental mandate are marriage and motherhood.

This aspect of Erikson's theory often is interpreted as prescriptive (Lerner, 1986). Erikson's 1968 article from which prescriptive conclusions are drawn was written as commentary on 1960s feminist activism and the changes in gender-role behavior, especially women's behavior, that emerged during that decade. However, the gender-role standards and arrangements prevalent among the White middle class in the pre- and immediate post-World War II context in which Erikson formulated his theory were patriarchal and conservative. The theory is undoubtedly based to some extent on his observations of these arrangements and thus may be primarily descriptive rather than prescriptive.

Nevertheless, we argue that this conceptualization of women's identity development is androcentric. We do not take this stance simply because women are theorized to follow a separate developmental pathway from that of men. That type of theorizing is also common in feminist scholarship (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). The problem we see in Erikson's theory is the adoption of a standard, exemplified by "healthy" men, from which women are suggested to deviate. In terms of both developmental patterns and the structure of intimate relationships, masculinity is given priority over femininity. The suggestion that women resolve the identity and intimacy conflicts simultaneously implies a deviation from the eight-stage model proposed as the ideal developmental pathway. Furthermore, if women form their sense of who they are around the interests, preferences, and characteristics of their male partners, then women's sense of identity is the psychosocial subordination of individuality and agency to connectedness with and concern for others and the prioritizing of the interests of others over their own. Femininity, which is seen as the essence of womanhood, is equated with the psychosocial and behavioral subordination of individuality and agency, whereas these same characteristics are depicted as the essence of healthy masculinity and manhood. The outcome of the developmental deviation described in Erikson's theory is that male interests are given priority in heterosexual partnerships. Thus, the form of self-definition attributed to women is the antithesis of what is suggested in the theory to be the linchpin of mature intimacy: an identity enabling heterosexual intimacy without loss of individuality or agency.

Androcentrism also is embedded in the Eriksonian concept of generativity and stagnation, the critical developmental task of the seventh stage of the epigenetic model. The theory suggests that two issues are central to the achievement of generativity and its associated virtue of care: (a) overcoming self-absorption and (b) leaving a legacy for the next generation.

There is a vast body of theory and research to support the argument that caring for and about others is the primary component of female socialization (Beal, 1994; Gilligan, 1982; Lips, 1991, 2001). Lips (1991) argued that the socialization for care provided to girls from their earliest years prepares them to enter adulthood with a sense of responsibility toward others that far outweighs that of young adult men. Gilligan, speculating on the basis of moral reasoning interviews with women faced with unplanned pregnancies, suggested that women's "ethic of care" orientation involves considering the well-being of others, to the exclusion of caring for self. Indeed, the thrust of much feminist writing and practice in the past three decades, especially among feminist therapists and counselors (e.g., Jordan et al., 1991; Lerner, 1988; Leupnitz, 1988), has been to encourage women to give away less of themselves to others and recognize that caring can and should also be directed toward self.

These considerations complicate the proposition that the virtue associated with development during the seventh psychosocial stage of the epigenetic model is care.

If “the problem of adulthood is how to take care of those to whom one finds oneself committed as one emerges from the identity period, and to whom one now owes their identity” (Erikson, 1968, p. 33), women would seem to have no problem at all, other than learning the specific activities of caring appropriate for their particular sociocultural and historical context. Establishing intergenerational links of care, especially within families, is undoubtedly a complex and demanding psychosocial task, even for those whose identities already incorporate the virtue of care. The challenge would seem to be even greater for those who must simultaneously develop both a sense of caring and the skills through which care is enacted. In essence, achieving the virtue of care associated with generativity, as defined in Erikson’s theory, would seem to be a critical developmental task for men to a greater extent than for women. Once again, the needs and interests of men are placed at the center of the theoretical endeavor.

Furthermore, parenting, an adult responsibility that, despite post-World War II changes in gender-role enactment and family organization, continues to be delegated primarily to women (see Lips, 2001), is conceptualized as only the beginning point for and one component of the development of generativity. A second, equally important, if not more significant, concern during this stage is leaving a legacy for the next generation through direct involvement in “maintenance of the world [and of] those societal institutions and natural resources without which successive generations will not be able to survive” (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986, pp. 73–74). In other words, making contributions to public life that are seen, at least subjectively, as meaningful in furthering societal and institutional goals, is critical to a successful resolution of the generativity and stagnation crisis.

Although some women today are in positions to contribute through employment and other activities to a public historical legacy, the majority construct a legacy through childrearing and other relational activities that are, for the most part, unwaged. Their parenting activities and their work in maintaining the domestic domain for (mostly male) workers who exercise power in the public domain is their contribution to the future. Many women who do participate in waged work are employed in noncareer positions designed to support others (often men) whose occupational endeavors may be seen as productive and creative. Thus, Erikson’s theory implies that many women may experience barriers to the development of generativity because their biological potential for childbearing, coupled with an institutionalized division of labor along lines of sex and gender, excludes them from significant participation in those arenas where the most visible and socially valued aspects of generativity are enacted.

As we have pointed out previously, what we have labeled an androcentric bias in the theory can be conceptualized as an unavoidable outcome of patriarchal capitalism, the context in which Erikson wrote. In other words, the theory is descriptive, rather than prescriptive, in that it incorporates Erikson’s valid observations and interpretations of the gender-differentiated outcomes associated with socioe-

conomic systems that exclude women from full and equal participation in public life. Within systems of social and economic inequality, women (and other marginalized or excluded groups) have difficulty achieving generativity.

We do not entirely disagree with this argument. However, the primary focus of our suggestion of androcentrism in the conceptualization of generativity is the theoretical emphasis on the development during adulthood of an ego strength or virtue that women seem to acquire to a greater extent than do men during childhood and adolescence. Furthermore, adult women's psychosocial investment in and commitment to homemaking, childrearing, kinkeeping, and other relational endeavors such as volunteering time to assist the needy and disadvantaged is defined as only a beginning point or contributor to resolution of the generativity and stagnation crisis. Unwaged contributions to the survival of families, particularly through the provision of food—a major undertaking in prior historical periods as well as in developing nations today (James, 1985)—are not defined as maintaining the world or acknowledged as meaningful legacies to future generations. Vocational and occupational endeavors, especially those associated with the types of paid employment and public service in which men are more likely than women to make a profound psychosocial investment, are allotted primary developmental significance. Societal changes enabling more women and other marginalized people to contribute to a socially recognized legacy, thus fulfilling their potential, would not broaden the definition of generativity in Erikson's theory to include other domains of contribution and achievement. Incorporating the material realities of women's lives into the seventh stage of the epigenetic model would necessitate significant theoretical revision, an issue we address later in this article.

Erikson's epigenetic model provides a framework for understanding how part of humanity—mostly modern men of relative privilege—develops “a kind of self-generation concerned with identity development [across adulthood]” (Erikson, 1982, p. 67). Other parts of humanity, including most modern females and others without societal privilege, are either ignored or, when acknowledged, are seen as following a different developmental pathway from that specified as normal, healthy, or ideal (e.g., Erikson's discussion of “conquered tribes [and] our colored countrymen” in his 1946 essay, “Ego Development and Historical Change”).

The implication of Eriksonian theory that women's development during Stages 5, 6, and 7 is a deviation from the normal (male) developmental trajectory raises serious questions about women's psychosocial development in general. Do girls follow a developmental pathway different from that of boys in resolving the first four developmental conflicts? Are they deviant from birth, or do girls resolve childhood tasks in the same way boys do, then deviate in adolescence and adulthood when they confront identity, intimacy, and generativity issues? Given the extensive findings regarding male–female differences in gender-role development in childhood (Beal, 1994), the notion of equivalent processes and outcomes in the resolution of the first four psychosocial tasks seems questionable. Therefore, we are left

with the problem of what to make of these differences. Next, we explore several options that have been suggested.

Women's Development: Different in Degree?

One way to resolve this problem is to accept the proposition implicit in Erikson's theory—and explicit in psychoanalytic theory, from which psychosocial theory is derived—that female development is indeed deviant. In other words, it can be argued, as implied in Erikson's theory, that women's biological characteristics preclude their development of a separated and independent sense of identity. In the wake of this developmental failure at Stage 5, negative resolutions of subsequent tasks are inevitable. Furthermore, this deviant pattern of development can be attributed to biology. As is done so often, especially in nonacademic circles and not infrequently by academics who adhere to biological explanations of behavior, hormonal changes associated with puberty can be invoked as an explanation for girls' abrupt diversion from the normal or ideal developmental pathway. This interpretation assumes that the Eriksonian eight-stage model depicts ideal human psychosocial development and that women's resolutions of the psychosocial conflicts of adolescence and adulthood differ in degree, but not in kind, from those of men.

Women's Development: Different in Kind?

On the other hand, it can be argued that Erikson's epigenetic model is explanatorily sound but descriptively incomplete. The mechanisms of psychosexual and psychosocial development, including the eight-stage epigenetic model, provide valid and useful explanations for individual change across the life span. However, the model, as presented in Erikson's theory, describes modern male development only and thus is incomplete. From this perspective, it can be argued that from birth onward, women negotiate the same psychosocial conflicts as men. However, females approach and resolve these conflicts on the basis of their inherent relationality, whereas males seek resolutions that reflect and foster their dispositional agency and separateness. For example, women's identity development will be organized by relational concerns, and identity for men will involve independence and agency. Furthermore, their embeddedness in a sociohistorical environment structured to reflect, accommodate, and even intensify gender differences often will lead men and women to pursue resolutions in different life spheres or domains. Men's generativity will derive primarily from their involvement in public life, whereas women's generativity will be based on their investments in marriage, parenting, and other relationship activities. If Erikson's theory is seen as explanatorily sound, but descriptively incomplete, women's development is conceptualized as different not in degree, but in kind from that of men. Women and men are united only at the level of the most abstract processes and general outcomes described in the theory.

Women's Development: An Alternative Conceptualization

The grounding of our critique in a feminist standpoint leads us to reject both the different-in-degree and different-in-kind options in favor of a conceptualization that is both inclusive and particular. We are intrigued by certain ideas suggested by Langdale (1986) in a discussion of Gilligan's theory. Gilligan (1982) proposed that women are more likely than men to use "the voice of care" in resolving everyday, real-life moral dilemmas, whereas men are more likely to use "the voice of justice" (or reason). Langdale argued instead that all people, both men and women, develop a capacity for independence and agency and a capacity for relationality and connectedness. Both dimensions are essential for the regulation of infant/child-care-giver systems. By adolescence, however, institutionalized gendered socialization processes result in differentially constructed identities and ways of seeing and being in the world for women and men. Independence and connectednesses are balanced differently in males' and females' sense of identity, primarily because in day-to-day living, beginning at birth, they are faced with different circumstances and social expectations.

This approach, of course, is not the only alternative to explanations implicit in Erikson's theory. However, it serves to illustrate our argument that male and female development can be conceptualized as following different psychosocial trajectories without relegating either gender to a position of deviance and inferiority. Furthermore, conceptualizations of this sort do not violate the psychosocial assumption that a sense of identity is constructed largely through the transmission, adoption, and internalization of institutionalized societal and cultural values, expectations, and beliefs. Such conceptualizations do not deny the relevance of biology for identity development. They simply shift the focus from sex and its biological and anatomical constituents to the personally and socially constructed meanings of biology, including ascribed statuses and other sex-related opportunities, constraints, and responsibilities. In other words, from the perspective of Langdale (1986), women and men construct their sense of themselves as individuals through their experiences as gendered beings in a gendered society. Sex is not dismissed as an irrelevant category, but its constituents are not invoked as causal in the construction of gender-differentiated identities. This type of model can encompass wide variation in social, cultural, and historical context as well as sensitivity to the particulars of individual lives.

Having reviewed elements of androcentrism in Erikson's theory, we now move toward an answer to the third question posed in the beginning of our discussion: Do implicit biases of the theory, particularly its androcentrism, render it useless as a framework for understanding women's, or even men's, development? Our answer is an equivocal yes and no. In essence, we evaluate Erikson's theory as inadequate (and erroneous) in addressing issues of gender-related differences in the development of a sense of identity. In addition, we see the acceptance of any alternative similar to Langdale's (1986) as a serious challenge to the epigenetic model. We

do not argue with the logic of a sequence of broad developmental stages and tasks included in the model or with the impetus for development created by the dialectic between the biological and social aspects of individuals' lives. We do argue that the stage resolutions Erikson outlined describe at best only half of the developmental story, as do all androcentric (or gynocentric) models. The model is incomplete in that it excludes a conceptualization of the development of connectedness and nurturance as integral components of a sense of identity—and the generative fulfillment of potential—in both women and men.

An insightful, knowledgeable, and creative developmentalist could expand the description of development in Erikson's theory to include tasks and conflicts associated with the development of connectedness and could begin to track, through the extensive literature on childhood and adolescent gender-role development, the ways in which men and women construct a sense of themselves as simultaneously separated from and related to others. Josselson's 1992 book, *The Space Between Us*, represents one such attempt.

Would this be Erikson's theory? Does Erikson's theory remain intact in the face of such a radical revision? Do we, as readers of the theory, also have the privilege of deciding for ourselves what is essential to the theory's identity? We believe that we—those who use the theory to offer us a place to ground and interpret our work and our perspectives on contemporary lives—do have this privilege:

The critical pragmatist ... does not consider it particularly useful to ask whether her theories and metatheories (concepts and constructs, etc.) are true, preferring instead to evaluate them against existing alternatives or, if more useful, to identify or create potential new and better alternatives that test or challenge the limits of existing alternatives. (Kurtines, 1998, p. 14)

In our view, even in light of the criticisms of gender bias (or socioeconomic, political, or ethnocentric bias), the identity construct survives, as do the concepts of psychosocial construction and the ongoing reconstruction of identity across the life span—because they are useful constructs and concepts for studying people, when one assumes an active, intentional, constructive self. However, it may be that the notion of universal, sequential stages for all people everywhere and the optimal resolutions prescribed for each stage will require a radical revisioning once many standpoints are included, such that the usefulness of the model itself will be called into question.

Conclusions

The feminist standpoint analysis we offer does make visible aspects of Erikson's theory that might otherwise remain invisible, and thus enables us to offer some fairly straightforward conclusions. First, we find that the concept of identity that Erikson's theory introduced to social science, and particularly to human developmentalists, is rich and beautiful and useful to our continuing quest for understanding human lives. Likewise, the conceptualization of identity development as a life-

long psychosocial process—perhaps better, a biopsychosocial process—is very much in step with contemporary thinking in many disciplines. Many—not all, but many—postmodern and feminist standpoint theorists and researchers, especially those concerned with human development, have implicitly or explicitly adopted analytical strategies congruent with the life-span biopsychosocial framework, even as they reject other aspects of Erikson's theory. We count ourselves among them.

Second, we also see some aspects of Erikson's theory as insidiously misleading. Androcentric (or ethnocentric or sociocentric) theory does not yield useful research (Eichler, 1988), but serves primarily to obscure the many varieties of lived experience of both women and men as well as to repress an analysis of cultural and social factors contributing to identity development processes. To find out what, if any, similarities and differences occur for men and women in identity development processes, research must be guided by theory that does not define one group as normal and another as deviant. (Of course, this same guideline applies to research guided by theory that is racist, heterosexist, and classist; further standpoint analysis may reveal that Erikson's theory needs clarification and refinement along these dimensions also.) We find that Erikson's theory, in its formulation of specific developmental conflicts or tasks, does incorporate assumptions about normal development that have a particular androcentric bias. However, we believe that the developmental trajectory proposed in Erikson's theory could, and should, be revised to reduce the most obvious bias of emphasizing the triumph of independence over connectedness in the content of developmental conflicts.

Third, we argue that the biological ground plan component of Erikson's theory—the epigenetic principle—has qualified utility. The suggestion that embodiment is an aspect of psychosocial development is both insightful and useful. However, the only facet of the biological ground plan concept that is well developed in the theory links social roles and statuses to reproductive anatomy. The inner and outer space analogy confuses embodiment with biological functions. It is embodiment—life in a body with characteristics that have particular personal and social meanings—rather than biological functioning that contributes to psychosocial development, and the metric and meaning of embodiment change across the life span in ways that have not been well documented in identity development research.

Nevertheless, in our view, Erikson's theory provides a grand idea in its focus on contextually bound identity development across the life span. A blending of feminist conceptualizations of embodiment – and conceptualizations offered from other standpoints – with an inclusive and elaborated Eriksonian conceptualization of lifelong psychosocial development could offer a challenging and useful framework for future studies of adult development. Much work remains to be done by theorists who would construct open, particularized descriptions of that biopsychosocial identity development process and how this occurs in diverse cultural and relational contexts.

However, we must remember that not everyone has the opportunity to compose a personal sense of identity. Many groups and individuals, even in this new century, spend entire lifetimes in regions of extreme political chaos, severe personal restriction, or dire economic circumstances where survival demands adherence to a limited range of roles, activities, and beliefs. For these people, the story of ideal self-development that Erikson offered—of growing trust, autonomy, and a chosen personal and social identity, composed in a society that is itself trustworthy, autonomous, and generative—may be a bitter parody of their lived experience. Or it may still provide a useful framework for their developmental stories. We cannot know until new knowledge and perspectives from these other standpoints are shared.

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