

PART ONE

Identity

Theoretical Overview

The seven cases in the Identity section of this book show a pattern of a struggle for meaning and a quest for wholeness. Within the categories of values and ideology, ethnicity/race, and sexuality, the adolescent writers wrestle with important choices—who they want to be, how to relate to others, what values should guide them, and what their place is in various spheres of their lives. Though the content of the autobiographies may differ from case to case, the reader will see that the writers share common explorations and preoccupations with the self: the self in relation to others and the self in relation to the broader society. We offer here a framework for approaching the cases in this section.

Erik Erikson (1968), who has helped shape our understanding of identity, proposed a detailed and widely applied psychosocial theory of identity development. Convinced that the study of identity is as crucial to our time as the study of childhood sexuality was to Freud's, Erikson forged a radical rethinking among psychoanalytic theorists about ego structure and the role of culture and environment in personality development. As is inevitable, his writings have, over the last decades, been expanded (e.g., Marcia, 1967) and debated (e.g., Gilligan, 1982) by a succession of theorists, some of whom have significantly broadened his theory's applicability. Its general acceptance, however, remains widespread, and his ideas form the foundation of the psychological approach we take to the cases of this section.

When asked to describe his adolescence, one of our students recently wrote: "I don't know where it started and have no more idea if it's ended. Something inside of me tells me I'm in transition between something and something else, but I don't know what." In transition between two "somethings," this young man is not at all sure where he has come from and even less sure of his destination; he is Kurt Lewin's (1939) "marginal man," uncertain of his position and group belongingness. As an adolescent, he is in a stage of his life in which pressures, both internal and external, to define himself become simultaneously impossible to ignore and impossible to satisfy. He is working to establish a self-concept while at the same

time realizing that this concept is changing as rapidly as he can pinpoint it. Like Lewis Carroll's Alice, he may well reply to the question: "Who are you?" posed by the Caterpillar, by saying "I, I hardly know Sir, just at present—at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I must have changed several times since then." In Erikson's terms, the adolescent has entered a psychological moratorium—a hiatus between childhood security and adult independence.

Adolescence is a critical stage in the individual's development. Adolescents are intensely aware of how they are seen by others—aware, as V. S. Pritchett (1971) observes, that "other egos with their own court of adherents invade one's privacy with theirs." It is a time in which the values and perspectives of others become clearer to the developing mind. The adolescent must first attempt to evaluate his or her different options—different ethical positions or religious beliefs, acceptance or rejection of societal norms, attitudes toward sexuality, ideological stance in relation to family and friends—before he or she can choose among them. In this sense, the search for identity is not only the process of molding an image of oneself—it is also the attempt to understand the fundamental components of the clay that will be used.

The ego of childhood, strengthened by identifications with significant others and by growing mastery of the tasks of school and family life, will no longer hold; the challenge now for the adolescent is a creative synthesis of past identifications, current skills and abilities, and future hopes—all within the context of the opportunities the society offers. This challenge is made immeasurably harder because of the technological society we live in, in which multiple roles and careers tantalize us with choice. Mead (1958) suggests it might be easier to live in a society in which roles are inherited through birth or decided by gender! Yet the autonomous creation of identity, the redefinition of one's relationship, the crystallization in various domains of a sense of who one is, what one stands for, and how one relates to the world, is the critical task of the developing adolescent.

Erikson's theory of ego identity formation focuses on the concepts of ego identity, the identity stage, and the identity crisis. He defines identity as "the capacity to see oneself as having continuity and sameness and to act accordingly. It is the consistent organization of experience." As Côté and Levine (1987, p. 275) point out, there are two dominant characteristics defining the concept of ego identity: (1) the sense of temporal-spatial continuity of the ego, a requisite indicator of ego identity (Erikson, 1964, pp. 95–96), and (2) the self-concepts (the configuration of negative identity elements) that unify individuals' experiences of themselves during interaction with the social world. "The development and maintenance of the sense of ego identity is dependent upon the quality of recognition and support the ego receives from its social environment" (Côté & Levine, 1987, p. 275). In contrast, those who have challenged psychosocial notions of identity have suggested that we should think of defining identity in terms of the individual's connections/relationships in the world and see the individual as embedded in rather than outside the social context.

The concept of the identity stage introduces us to the notion of ego identity formation and the process by which identity is transformed throughout the life cycle. Erikson held to the epigenetic principle of development in which "anything that grows has a ground plan, and that out of this ground plan the parts arise, each

part having its time of special ascendancy until all parts have risen to form a functional whole" (Erikson, 1968, p. 92). The stages are not merely passed through but instead add cumulatively to the whole personality; Erikson saw the quest for identity and the crises that it often produces as the defining characteristics of adolescence. His psychosocial stage theory is founded on the belief that life is composed of a series of conflicts that must be partially resolved before the developing individual can move to the next stage. He proposes eight general stages of conflict: trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus identity confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair (Erikson, 1968). Following psychoanalytic theory, these stages appear in sequential order but are never completely resolved. The formation of ego identity does not then take place only in the identity stage; the degree to which one satisfactorily resolves the identity crisis is heavily dependent on the resolutions to the challenges of the first four stages in Erikson's eight-stage life cycle theory. Each item exists "in some form," Erikson tells us, before its decisive and critical time normally arrives (Erikson, 1968, pp. 93, 95). That is, there are identity elements in all preceding stages just as there are in the succeeding stages, and if the conflicts in these earlier stages are concluded satisfactorily, the healthy development of the ego is more probable. If the conflicts are resolved unsatisfactorily, negative qualities are crystallized in the personality structure and may impede further development.

The psychosocial moratorium—a time of deferred choice—is the period in an adolescent or young adult's life for resolving the identity crisis. It is a time when role experimentation is encouraged and where there is little expectation that the individual will commit to permanent responsibilities or roles. The identity crisis "is precipitated both by the individual's readiness and by society's pressure" (Erikson, 1980, p. 130). The age at which the identity crisis occurs may vary "according to such social structure factors as class, subculture, ethnic background, and gender" (Côté & Levine, 1987) or socialization factors such as child-rearing practices and identification with parents (Jordan, 1971). The moratorium must end, with the experience of role experimentation complete and the achievement of a resynthesis of positive identifications. These achievements enable the individual to find "a niche in some section of society, a niche which is firmly defined yet seems to be uniquely made for him" (Erikson, 1968, p. 156). The niche is dependent on the adolescent's feeling that commitment in the areas of values, vocation, religious beliefs, political ideology, sex, gender role, and family lifestyle are accepted, settled, and expressions of personal choice. Other more critical theorists, Jackson, McCullough, and Gurin (1981) for example, have suggested that the option of having a moratorium and being in a position to choose in the area of commitment are limited by social, political, and economic structures and dominant ideologies.

Allied with Erikson's faith in ego identity is his understanding of the difficulty involved for adolescents in creating and maintaining this identity. Identity confusion, and the resulting identity crisis, results from the individual's inability to understand the "mutual fit of himself and the environment—that is, of his capacity to relate to an ever-expanding life space of people and institutions on the one hand, and, on the other, the readiness of these people and institution to make him

a part of an ongoing cultural concern" (Erikson, 1975, p. 102). Feeling pressured by society and his or her own maturation to choose between possible roles even as personal perspectives are rapidly changing, the identity-confused adolescent experiences a confusion that challenges his or her ability to form a stable identity.

Erikson believes that the success with which the adolescent resolves these crises is extremely important for the eventual achievement of intimacy with others. It is only through the commitment to sexual direction, vocational direction, and a system of values that "intimacy of sexual and affectionate love, deep friendship and personal abandon without fear of loss of ego identity can take place" (Muuss, 1996, p. 54). Identity achievement, as opposed to identity confusion, allows the individual to move smoothly from preoccupation with the inner core of identity to exploration of the potential roles this self will play in intimate relationships with others.

Erikson's construct of identity versus identity confusion has been expanded by James Marcia (1966, 1980). Marcia, whose work on the ego and identity development began with his dissertation "Development and Validation of Ego—Identity Status" (1966), establishes two concepts already mentioned by Erikson—crisis and commitment—as the determining variables in identity achievement. "Crisis refers to times during adolescence when the individual seems to be actively involved in choosing among alternative occupations and beliefs. Commitment refers to the degree of personal investment the individual expresses in an occupation or belief" (Marcia, 1967, p. 119). Using these variables as the determining standards, Marcia breaks Erikson's fifth stage down into four substages: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement.

The identity-diffused individual is characterized by having neither an active involvement in the search for identity roles nor a commitment to any of these roles. He or she is not questioning alternatives. At this point, the adolescent is like James Joyce's Stephen Daedalus, "drifting amid life like the barren shell of the moon." Identity foreclosure is characterized by commitment without crisis; that is, the individual has chosen a set of values or ideological stance, most often that of his or her parents or valued others, without examining this value or searching out alternatives. In moratorium, on the other hand, the individual is in the midst of a crisis, actively questioning and searching among alternatives, without any commitment to one option. In achievement, the individual has experienced the crises of moratorium, and has successfully made a commitment. Identity achievement is most often attained in the college years, with moratorium and diffusion characteristic of earlier adolescence (Santrock, 1990). It should be pointed out that differences exist between societies and between groups and individuals within societies in the length of the sanctioned intermediary period, the psychosocial moratorium (Manaster, 1989). Also, those not afforded the time or opportunity to engage in identity seeking may well not undergo an identity crisis in adolescence or young adulthood.

Some theorists, among them Miller (1991) and Surrey (1984), have suggested that theories of identity development have been theories of separation and autonomy rather than connection and relationship. They believe that whereas adolescent boys seem concerned with separation and individuation, adolescent girls create identity more in connection to peers and members of their families. Carol Gilligan (1982) writes of her reservations about Erikson's theory in *In a Different*

Voice. Gilligan points out that Erikson recognized sex differences in identity development and discussed how for men identity precedes intimacy and generativity in the optimal cycle of human separation and attachment, but for women these tasks instead seem to be fused—the woman comes to know herself through relationships with others. Erikson nevertheless retained the sequence of identity preceding intimacy. The sequencing of Erikson's second, third, fourth, and fifth stages, Gilligan suggests, little prepares the individual for the intimacy of the first adult stage. "Development itself comes to be identified with separation, and attachments appear to be developmental impediments, as is repeatedly the case in the assessment of women" (Gilligan, 1982, pp. 12–13).

The process of adolescent identity formation may also vary in accordance with the ethnic and racial background of the individual. A number of theorists have presented stage theories of ethnic or racial identity development (e.g., Cross, 1991; Kim, in Ponterotto & Pederson, 1993). These frameworks of analysis suggest that nonwhite adolescents tend to begin the process in a stage in which they either identify with the white majority or are unaware of the role of race or ethnicity in their experience. They move, often as the result of a series of events or encounters in which their race or ethnicity becomes salient, into a stage of awareness. In this stage, individuals become more conscious of their position in the society and begin to question who they are in relation to their own racial or ethnic group and in relation to the dominant culture. In a third general stage, adolescents identify with their racial or ethnic group and often immerse themselves in an exploration of that group's historical, cultural, political, and social position in the society. The final stage in most of these theories is a stage of integration and internalization, in which the individual incorporates his or her identification with a racial or ethnic group into a more comprehensive identity. This more inclusive identity may allow individuals to identify with their group and interact successfully in the dominant (white) culture.

Ponterotto and Pederson (1993) provide a similar framework for examining white racial identity development. The stages they posit parallel those previously described and include preexposure, conflict, prominority/antiracism, retreat into white culture, and redefinition and integration. Other authors have explored the interactions among the multiple identities adolescents actually contend with during the process of identity formation. James Sears (1996), for example, has examined the experiences of adolescents who are both gay and African American, and Alex Wilson (1996) probes the lives of those who are gay and Native American. In Leadbeater and Way's book, *Urban Girls* (1996), researchers report on studies that investigate the experiences of male and female adolescents juggling issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and class as they figure out who they are. And Maria Root (1996) and others have begun to explore the lives of multiracial adolescents and adults and the complications involved in developing multiracial identities.

In her examination of black identity formation, Fordham (1988) considers the phenomenon of "racelessness." She explores the relationship between group (black) identity and academic success, and concludes that black adolescents follow one of two paths. Some respect an "individualistic ethos," disregarding their mandatory membership in the black group—a path that may lead to academic success.

Others consider this to be "selling out" and espouse the "collectivistic ethos" of their minority group in order to avoid becoming "nonblack," although they sacrifice academic success in the process. Ward (1989) examines identity formation in academically successful black female adolescents and discovers that racial identity formation is compatible with academic accomplishment. Considering not only the factors of beliefs, values, attitudes, and patterns of family socialization, but also "the girls' own subjective understanding of the role that race plays in their lives" (p. 217), she concludes that racial identity must be considered in order to gain a complete understanding of identity formation.

Alternative perspectives on the process of identity development in adolescence, then, focus on the examination of the individual in context. Development is seen as a process of renegotiating relationships, redefining oneself in relation to individuals and social groups (family, racial or ethnic group, class, and gender) of which one is a part. In the seven cases that make up the Identity section of this book, we include cases that address several aspects of identity development—values and ideology, ethnicity/race, and sexuality. In most cases, the writers are, themselves, engaged in exploring multiple identities. We encourage the reader to examine these autobiographies through a consideration of the following questions. What roles do issues of trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, and identity play in each person's case? Within what contexts does the author define himself or herself? What relationships and connections contribute to his or her sense of self, and how are they changing? Advisable, too, is an exploration of identity status—the evidence of crisis and/or commitment—in relation to each case, an approach similar to that followed by Ruthellen Josselson (1987) in *Finding Herself: Pathways to Identity Development in Women*.

Whatever theoretical perspective one adopts, and we suggest an eclectic approach, the essential components are a simultaneous discovery and creation of self leading to a deepening self-understanding. We believe the cases in this section capture that process in both tone and substance. In each case there is a greater sense of understanding and acceptance of oneself at the end than at the beginning. Each author makes clear that the process continues, but they seem here to have reached at last a plateau from which they can look back and survey their progress. Readers may do well to suspend somewhat their theoretical assumptions while reading a case, lest they miss the sheer spectacle of lives unfolding. Though different identity theorists provide a useful framework for interpretation of these cases, the best of them are but a scaffolding for understanding. We should try to listen first to each author in his or her own terms, to see the authors' evolution through their own eyes. In the unique and intimate details of their individual lives we can discern the outline of a universal struggle to identify our true selves. Your readings here should influence your understanding of theory at least as much as theory influences your reading.