Chapter One

Identity, Self, and Individualism in a Multicultural Perspective

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rik Erikson's (1950, 1968) multifaceted formulations of identity are among the most seminal and fruitful concepts in modern psychoanalysis, especially in interrelating the psychological makeup of individuals with their sociocultural background. A number of mental health professionals and social scientists have taken up his identity theory in their work. There is no question that Erikson's psychosocial concept of identity linking the individual's self with the community's values, norms, and social roles is central to the understanding of ethnic and racial identity in a multicultural perspective. Nevertheless, as is the case with most psychological theories, Erikson's work emerges from within a Western cultural framework and the clinical data of Western people. It is therefore essential to reexamine and reassess Erikson's identity theory for its optimal use in multicultural analyses.

I would like to paint Erikson's identity theory against the backdrop of Western individualism and, more specifically, against the northern European and North American culture of individualism. I shall demonstrate how certain aspects of his multifaceted theory are a strong critique of individualism as it has permeated psychoanalysis and other psychological theories, thereby facilitating the delineation of identity in a multicultural context. Conversely, other aspects of identity theory, particularly Erikson's epigenetic developmental stages that reach their fulfillment in adolescence and young adulthood, simultaneously delineate central psychological processes necessary for functioning in a culture of individualism. As perceptive as this part of Erikson's theory is, it needs to be seriously reexamined if we expect it to shed new light on the ethnic and racial self of different groups in the United States. Otherwise, the "other" may once again emerge as inferior or psychopathological.

Nature and Roots of Individualism

To delve into the relationship of Erikson's concepts of identity and individualism, I shall begin by briefly considering the nature and roots of individualism as the dominant culture of the United States. On a descriptive level, anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1975) has phrased this well:

> The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the other world cultures. (p. 48)

Other descriptions of individualism in current psychoanalytic and psychological theory emphasize the independent, self-contained individual who is highly separate and differentiated from others. These theories describe individuals as self-reliant, autonomous, and self-directed to freely choose their own goals, purposes, beliefs, and values. Individuals are seen as highly reflective of their own unique configuration of internal attributes, traits, and abilities. From these, individuals organize their everyday behavior, which they consider to be essentially their own business.

In Western society, the individual is considered inviolate, the supreme value in and of itself, with each person having his or her own rights and obligations, and each equal to the other. The needs of society are seen as essentially subordinate to the needs of individuals, who are governed by rationality and their own self-interest in mutually consenting contractual relationships. Considerable social privacy is granted to the individual. These cultural valuations of the autonomous individual have come to underlie all of modern European American economic, political, legal, and educational approaches (Allen, 1991; Dumont, 1986), as well as social and psychological theories, including psychoanalysis.

Since the Enlightenment, the rational, thinking person has been seen as the one who is most real and valued and as intrinsically superior to the person who is ruled by emotions. Analytic–deductive, or scientific, modes of thought that explore causal, logical relationships are seen as primary. The world and the cosmos are viewed as essentially secular—that is, knowable through science. All other ways of perceiving reality are discredited as superstition or are demystified, as in the case of religion, magic, and ritual.

What are the roots of this culture of individualism? Very briefly stated, individualism first took primacy in the religious sphere of the Reformation. It then spread to the secular sphere through the philosophers of the social contract, the Jurists, and the philosophers of the Enlightenment—and later to the liberal economic theorists and into the cultural realm of Romanticism.

The Reformation transformed an earlier Christian, otherworldly individualism to a this-worldly one where the onus of salvation is put squarely on the shoulders of individuals who are in a direct, unmediated relationship to a God from whom they are essentially separate and trying to rejoin. In the Calvinist vision, individuals—through independent, active achievement in the world—gauge the degree to which they are among the elect and therefore predestined for redemption. Protestant sects have emphasized values of individualism in taking responsibility for making correct moral decisions and in being self-reliant, self-sufficient, and independent. Rather than being rooted in a hierarchical social collective and cosmic order, as is the case in many other societies, Western individuals are on their own (Dumont, 1986; Kirschner, 1992; Nelson, 1965).

Such 17th- and 18th-century philosophers as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, each in his own way, then formulated the social contract in which essentially self-contained, atomistic individuals who interact with each other enter into a society with some kind of necessary authority. These philosophers were joined by the Jurists, who reinterpreted natural law as composed of self-sufficient individuals who are made in the image of God and are the repository of reason. This outlook was in turn adopted by various Enlightenment philosophers who laid the cultural groundwork for modern Western individualism in the social and political spheres, with the formation of the modern nation-state as a union of equal individuals with rights and obligations (Dumont, 1986).

Individualism entered the economic realm through Adam Smith and David Ricardo, who assumed a rationally ordered economy of separate, self-contained individuals governed by their rational self-interest rather than that of the community. Philosophical and literary approaches in Romanticism further developed individualism by incorporating the ideal of the highly individuated, self-expressive individual in close relationship with others similarly individuated.

Individualism, Psychoanalysis, and Identity Theory

To understand the context in which Erikson's identity theory relates to individualism, both through counterpoint and continuity, let us first briefly review the position of psychoanalysis in general to this secularized cultural model

of self-contained, self-reliant, and self-directed individuals who fulfill their individuality in work and other social relationships. Freud's model in many ways reflects the paradigm of the self-contained individual. In this model, all the motivation and psychological activity arise from within the person. The social surround receives scant attention, except for being the object of a person's sexual and aggressive drives, the source of the content of a person's conscience and of identifications with others, and the reality principle of what a person can or cannot do in the social world (Roland, 1996).

The later development of ego psychology in the United States similarly maintains the stance of the self-contained individual. Ego psychologists further delineate the early childhood developmental processes that enable the child to become a functioning, separate individual in accord with the prevalent cultural and social models of individualism in the United States.

Suzanne Kirschner (1992), a psychoanalytic anthropologist, cogently argued that Margaret Mahler's emphasis on individual autonomy, separation, and individuation (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975) reflects Protestant Pietistic and Calvinist values of self-reliance and self-directedness. Kirschner also interpreted the strong valuation that ego psychologists place on verbal communication as a reflection of the high Romantic emphasis on individualistic self-expression, as well as of Protestant values of self-reliance and separateness. Nonverbal communication, which is so important in Asian and many other cultures, is then viewed pejoratively as occurring at an earlier developmental level of merger and symbiosis with the mother.

Similarly, Freud and almost all of his followers to this day (with but rare exceptions) have adopted the rational, secular views of the Enlightenment. Religion and spiritual experiences and disciplines are demystified and relegated to the stage of infant–mother symbiotic merger states, or the "oceanic feeling," if not to some form of psychopathology. An even more disparaging attitude prevails with respect to the magic–cosmic world of personal destiny with its connection to astrology, palmistry, the spirit world, and such—all of which are so common to much of the world's population.

These attitudes were further reinforced by social evolutionism, the prevailing colonial theory of the 19th century. It held that the northern European and North American countries were at the top of the social hierarchy with their dedication to rationality, science, and technology. Southern Europeans, Slavs, and Jews were considered inferior, whereas those from Asian, African, and South American countries were deemed primitive, if not savage. It is important to note Freud's reactions to social evolutionism inasmuch as he partly bought

into it with regard to religion, spiritual practices, and personal destiny, seeing them as primitive and at times at the level of the savage (Brickman, 2003).

Erik Erikson, as much or more than any other psychoanalyst, introduced the idea that the social, cultural, and historical milieu is essential to a psychoanalytic consideration of the individual self. In his psychosocial concept of self-identity, Erikson saw the individual's identity as an integral part of this milieu rather than being self-contained. Thus, the roles, values, ideals, and norms of the community profoundly shape and are a part of a personal identity. Elaborating on the concept of self-identity in congruence with the insight of Otto Rank (Menaker, 1982) on self-creation, Erikson framed the central psychological dimension of individualism in the United States: the self-creation of one's identity.

Erikson's stages of development stressing autonomy and initiative in the childhood years—in some ways anticipating and paralleling the contributions of Mahler—lay the groundwork for concepts of the adolescent struggle to self-create an identity. Erikson's work perceptively charts the stormy seas that are more often than not encountered in this prolonged act of self-creating: the identity conflicts and diffusion, confusion and crises, the frequent need for a moratorium, the occasional syntheses around negative identities, and eventually (it is hoped) the resolution of a positive identity synthesis.

This self-creation of identity takes place within a social milieu in which contemporary culture in the United States imposes on the individual an enormous degree of autonomy in the adolescent and young adult years. Young people choose who will be their mate or love partner, what type of education and vocational training to pursue, and then what kind of work to do, what social affiliations to make, where to live, and to what kind of ideology or value system to commit. Adolescents and young adults in mainstream U.S. society thus face the enormously difficult intrapsychic task of integrating these adult commitments with the inner identifications with others and self-images developed from expectations within the family. This is the crux of Erikson's elaboration of self-identity. In this sense, self-identity is the psychological process and achievement par excellence of U.S. individualism. Although this psychological description obviously does not apply to all ethnic groups, it is the dominant mode of psychological development in youths in the contemporary United States (Roland, 1988, 1996).

The Individualized and the Familial Self

However perceptive Erikson's description of the development of self-identity in the United States, it does not reflect the experience of youths in most

traditional societies. In many African and Asian societies, the experience of childhood, youth, and young adulthood, in either traditional or contemporary urban environments, reflects an emphasis on the family, rather than on the individual, as the core concept of identity. The comments and examples that follow draw on my own experience working with clients from India and Japan.

Manoj, a young Indian psychiatric resident at an excellent residency program in New York City, once related to me that he attended a course on adolescent development given by a highly esteemed psychoanalyst. The analyst at one point proclaimed that unless a person underwent some rebellion as an adolescent, it was impossible to achieve a healthy identity. Manoj went home searching within himself for any signs of rebellion he had felt against either of his parents when he was growing up in India or against any other parental figure as an adolescent. When he could recall no such feelings of rebellion, he concluded that he must be abnormal. This is an example of how the paradigm of identity development—if it is not presented as unique to northern European and North American cultures—can make an immigrant feel inferior or even psychopathological.

Many cultures around the world do not grant individuals the degree of autonomy or the social and cultural options that U.S. culture does. In both traditional and contemporary urban Indian culture, marriages are still arranged, although among many educated urbanites, it is an arranged marriage by introduction by the two families, allowing the young man and woman to make their own decision. Educational and occupational choices are still chosen with predominating parental guidance; social affiliations or friends usually become absorbed by the extended family with no separation of age groups; and a highly integrated Hindu worldview, with certain variations and nuances, is still pervasive and operative. In essence, psychological development and functioning in India do not involve the self-creation of identity as it occurs in mainstream U.S. culture. Rather, they involve processes and organizations of what I call a "familial self" and, among many people, self-transformation toward a more spiritual self (Anandalakshmi, 2014; Roland, 2011).

Developmental stages of childhood throughout much of the world downplay Erikson's emphasis on autonomy and initiative, as well as Mahler's emphasis on separation–individuation. Other cultures typically stress dependency and interdependency, receptivity to others, and reciprocity. Most cultures outside of the northern European and North American culture belt of individualism model some type of familial self, rather than the self-creation of one's personal identity.

In fact, the very idea of a relatively integrated identity, which is so central to dominant North American psychological development, is not particularly relevant to Indians or Japanese or, I believe, to other Asians as well. These cultures experience the personal self as far more relational, varying from one relationship to another. A question may well be asked as to why psychoanalysis and other psychological theories have not until very recently tried to formulate a different and relevant psychology. The answer is again related to Freud's reaction to social evolutionism. To counter the pejorative social–psychological hierarchy of social evolutionism, he framed a new psychology based on universalism, a major Western philosophical concept, that all people are essentially alike, what he termed "the psychic unity of mankind" (Brickman, 2003). Although this was a major advance over social evolutionism, it has made it difficult for psychoanalysis to explore the cultural–psychological differences of those from cultures that are radically different from the West (Roland, 2011).

It may be useful to contrast briefly the suborganizations of the familial self with that of the more individualized self that predominates in the United States and that is so central to Erikson's developmental model of identity. This will serve to highlight many identity issues that ethnic groups who come from outside of the northern European and North American culture belt face in the United States.

The Individualized Self

The individualized self includes an experiential "I-self" as a relatively stable and integrated inner unity, regardless of inner conflicts, with a sharp separation of inner images of self and other. Relatively firm emotional boundaries surround the self, and considerable psychological space exists between self and other in "I and you" social relationships. The individualized self has a conscience that is relatively principled and constant in all situations. Although this is more true for men than for women, who are more contextually and relationally oriented, these inner structures enable both men and women in U.S. culture to function autonomously. Other characteristics of the individualized self include inner directiveness, self-agency, assertiveness, and initiative that call for one's authenticity, individuality, ambitions, and ideals to be implemented in the social world to whatever extent is possible. Cognition in the individualized self is more oriented toward the rational, logical processes of reality testing while thinking in both dualisms and universals. Communication is more verbally expressive, including feelings of anger.

The Familial Self

In contrast to this individualized self, rooted within northern European and North American individualism, is the familial self of much of the rest of the world. The familial self varies considerably from one culture area to another, just as the individualized self varies throughout the countries of northern Europe and North America. I shall delineate the Asian familial self, blurring distinctions among the self of Indians and Japanese (see Roland, 1988, 2011, for a much fuller elaboration of the Indian and Japanese familial self; and Roland, 1996, for descriptions of the Chinese and Korean familial self).

Salient suborganizations of the familial self include an experiential "we-self," with self-experience varying from one relationship to another and much closer emotional connections between inner images of self and other. The familial self also has more permeable, or less delineated, emotional boundaries between self and other, as well as less psychological space between self and other, balanced by a far more private self in emotionally enmeshed "we" relationships. The familial self is also characterized by a dual-self structure that enables an individual to meet the social etiquette of formal hierarchical relationships while maintaining a hidden, private self. In contrast to the individualized self, the familial self has a conscience that is far more contextual or situational to the relationship, situation, and natures of the persons involved. In India, this is related to the prevailing moral theory of *dharma.*

Another aspect of the familial self is that esteem is experienced much more in a "we-self" context and is related to the reputation of the family and the other in various hierarchical relationships. An inner attitude of receptiveness and openness to constant guidance from others is also characteristic, with individuality and authenticity residing much more in a private self rather than being openly manifested in social situations. Cognition is also more contextual than universal (for example, Indian *ragas* are to be played only at certain times of the day or season) and more metonymic on a monistic continuum than dualistic as in the West (for example, an idol of a god or goddess is seen as a partial manifestation rather than as a symbol). Emotion and thinking, and mind and body are on the same continuum. And finally, attributes of interpersonal sensitivity and empathic attunement to nonverbal communication are highly developed in interdependent relationships, to the point that anger is contained within the private self to preserve the harmony of the family and group.

All of these suborganizations of the self allow Asians to function in closely knit familial and group hierarchical relationships. These relationships are characterized by three psychosocial dimensions: (a) the formal hierarchy,

with its social etiquette and the expected reciprocities between loyal and deferent subordinates and nurturing and caring superiors; (b) hierarchical relationships of intimacy, with their high degree of dependence and interdependence, considerable nonverbal communication, and reciprocal gratification of one another's needs and wishes without their being voiced; and (c) a hierarchy based on the quality of the person, with deep respect and veneration given to people of superior qualities, whatever their place in the formal hierarchy.

In contrast to the essential psychological process in Western individualism of the self-creation of an identity, the fundamental process in Asians is that of self-transformation oriented to the cultivation of a spiritual self. Such self-transformation may be accomplished through any number of spiritual disciplines, including aesthetic and martial arts (in East Asian cultures), rituals, myths, pilgrimages, or being in the presence of a spiritual person (*darshan*) in South Asia. This is clearly the area of the culture where the greatest psychological individuation takes place and where Asian psychology most particularizes the nature of the person (Anandalakshmi, 2014; Roland, 2005). Moreover, in Asian cultures, the spiritual self and meditative or other disciplines are kept very private, whereas in contemporary American culture, they are openly expressed as an important aspect of one's identity (Roland, 2011).

Identity Theory: A Multicultural Perspective

Having delineated the familial and the individualized self, I will now highlight the relevance of identity theory to a multicultural perspective. Once we recognize that a person's self-identity is profoundly related to his or her community and culture, it becomes apparent that the very makeup of the self can vary significantly.

Thus, central identity issues emerge in intercultural encounters in the United States between immigrants from traditional societies who have a more familial self and those from the mainstream United States who have a more individualized self. To a certain extent, using their radar sensitivity to others and to the norms of different situations, Indians and Japanese, among others, are able to adjust quickly and appropriately to social situations they encounter in the United States.

Veena, for example, recalls her experience at a U.S. college as a 17-year-old fresh from New Delhi. The other students marveled at how quickly she had become "Americanized" in her manner and in her participation in numerous extracurricular activities. In typical Indian fashion, she quickly sensed what it was like to be a student in the United States and acted accordingly. But every

few weeks she took a couple of days off and simply stayed in bed all day. She was exhausted from taking on such an unfamiliar lifestyle and adopting a demeanor that stemmed from totally different motivation and inner psychological makeup than her own—namely, the actualization of her abilities and individuality in various activities and relationships.

For some, the contrasts and dissonances between two cultures may prove too strong. Yoshiko, a young Japanese woman happily married to a man from the United States, began working in a corporation in New York City after completing three years of graduate school in the United States. She had chosen to work in a U.S. corporation rather than a Japanese one because she had already become too "Americanized" and too individualized to feel comfortable observing the strict social etiquette and subordination of Japanese hierarchical relationships. But her work experience proved to be intensely upsetting. Her discomfort derived from her having to be verbally assertive and confrontational with clients and from the occasional direct criticism she received for the very rare mistakes she made. Her emotional makeup was much more oriented toward polite, indirect communication, in which it was expected that the other would pick up the innuendos and be cooperative, as was true among the Japanese. Moreover, direct criticism was particularly painful because she was already striving to do everything perfectly, according to her strict Japanese conscience. Thus, major aspects of her familial self around communication, conscience, and esteem were in conflict with the individualized functioning that permeated corporate life in the United States. It was only by my empathizing with the strong contrasts between the psychological functioning typical of the Japanese and American cultures that she could begin to sort out how much to internalize new ways and how much to retain Japanese ways in the formulation of a new kind of identity (for a fuller description, see Roland, 1996).

Many of the dissonances between the familial and individualized self center around issues of intimacy and hierarchy. Asians and Latinos, among others, may expect a greater emotional intimacy and interdependency, especially in insider relationships, than is common in the United States. Particular frustration may result from their expectations of nurturing from bosses, teachers, and school administrators—expectations that are not likely to be met in the contractual, hierarchical relationships typical in the United States (Bhatia, 2007; Purkayastha, 2005; Roland, 1996).

From these intercultural encounters, many Asians, Latinos, and others who are living in the United States begin developing a new identity that encompasses the dominant modes of individualized functioning in a bicultural

or expanding self. Often this bicultural self is contextualized in different situations and groups—for example, individualized functioning may be reserved for the work situation, while the familial ways may be retained for family relationships (Roland, 1988). Many immigrants initially experience their two selves as being in stark contrast with each other, coexisting uncomfortably. Gradually, they exist together more comfortably. In the second generation, among children born and raised in the United States, their identity more fully assimilates the individualized self and the culture of individualism in school and work; but the familial self is still very much in evidence in family and other relationships (Roland, 1996). There is at times conflict in this bicultural self, as evidenced by second-generation Indians sometimes referring to themselves as ABCD, American Born Confused Desei (Indian).

Identity Issues Relating to Colonialism/Racism

It is important to recognize that identity conflicts in immigrants may be present well before immigration. Problems with identity issues may be generated within their own families abroad and displaced onto the situation in the United States. Vietnamese Amerasians, for instance, have faced discrimination and marginalization in Vietnam. Immigrants whose home situations have contributed to the lack of a cohesive identity bring the accompanying problems with them to the United States.

Sunil, an immigrant to the United States from India, expressed in group therapy one day that he felt that some members of the group, including me as the therapist, wanted him to become much more independent of his family, or more Americanized. He felt that other group members were supportive of his remaining emotionally enmeshed in his extended family, most of whom had also immigrated to the United States. As his therapist, I was able to see this as an unconscious displacement from an identity conflict within his family in India. His father, an entrepreneur, had deeply identified with British culture, denigrating Indian culture and wanting his sons to become Westernized; his mother remained a traditional Indian woman and mother, representative of Indian culture and family patterns. Thus, a few of the group members had unconsciously come to represent his father in our wanting him to assimilate to the United States, while the other group members represented his mother, who stood for traditional family relationships. This suggests that counselors and therapists need to be alert to identity conflicts that may have been generated even before immigration.

The story of Sunil raises identity issues that emerge from a colonial or racist culture where there is political and economic domination by one group over another. Identity problems in a colonial/racist milieu take on a whole other coloration from those in the intercultural encounters I have delineated above. There is in the description of Veena and Yoshiko, for example, a tacit assumption that they are free to make whatever kind of identity integration they can between their familial selves and their individualized selves.

In a colonial or racist society, there is a profound denigration of the culture and self of those who have been subordinated by the dominant group. On a psychological level, there is an inevitable unconscious projection of the forbidden aspects of the self by the dominant group onto the subordinate "others." Thus, the dominant group views the subordinate group in an intensely negative way. This results not only in a poisonous image being assimilated by those in the subordinate group, but also in a highly rigid, defensive, and superior image being assumed by those in the dominant group (Roland, 2010).

A brilliant analysis of the psychology of British colonialism by Ashis Nandy (1983) demonstrates how British men in India unconsciously projected the rejected feminine aspects of themselves onto the indigenous Indians, resulting in their seeing Indians as effeminate, and therefore ineffectual. This reinforced a British identity of hypermasculinity. Until Gandhi assumed national leadership, most Indians accepted the superior attitude of the British toward them. In his analysis, Nandy depicts the British as well as the Indians as being psychologically adversely affected by colonialism. Although colonialism is by and large over, the attitudes of social evolutionism linger on. Take, for instance, underdeveloped nations compared with developed ones, or Third World countries compared with First World ones. There is clearly still a hierarchy of inferiority and superiority.

In the United States, racism involves an unconscious projection of unacceptable aspects of the self, which are the underside to the predominant ideals of independence, self-reliance, self-directedness, and achievement in work. These repressed aspects of the Protestant ethic and its secularized versions in U.S. individualism are unconsciously projected onto African Americans and others, so that they are seen in negative stereotypes. These stereotypes then serve as justification for exploitation while shoring up the prevailing norms and feelings of superiority in the dominant White group. The whole process engenders rage and self-hate in those onto whom these negativities have been projected, while greatly rigidifying the identity of Whites, again causing them to surrender a part of their own humanity. Neither group emerges with a healthy sense of identity.

Conclusion

With many ethnic groups represented in the United States, new kinds of identities are constantly evolving as persons with very different selves come in contact with each other in ongoing intercultural encounters. When options, opportunities, and choices are relatively available to everyone, these new kinds of identity integrations between different selves can gradually take place. But when racist attitudes predominate, repressed negativities are unconsciously projected onto the other, poisoning the identity of both.

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