

# I am a Person: Ego Development and Identity Issues with African Americans

Arthur Horton\*

Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois, USA

\*Corresponding author: Arthur Horton, Professor, Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois, USA, Tel: 7736337703; E-mail: [ahorton756@aol.com](mailto:ahorton756@aol.com)

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## Abstract

Present day Americans—especially the middle class—have little concern for social obligation or tradition, and so are less constrained from mingling with unrelated people. Indeed, since they move so frequently to strange neighbourhoods; they need to be able to create new support networks quickly but not to become too attached emotionally to the people in them, since no one knows when anyone will be moving on. Social media and advances in technology have accelerated these processes.

Americans we might say are approaching an historical stage with a desire to be self-defining that has produced a disintegrated or alienated consciousness. What defines this consciousness is its antagonism to the external power of society—the wish to be free of imposed social circumstances. The dangers of this position are that: 1) We may devolve into a society in which narcissistic preoccupations are pervasive; 2) Due to competition over more limited resources a social balkanization or fragmentation becomes rampant—divisions along multicultural factors become rallying forces; or 3) We do not grow into a new ethos, and remain condemned to the stagnation of the personality ethics. The above forms of human blindness stem from the same root—an inability to recognize the notion of difference as a dynamic human force, one which is enriching rather than threatening to the defined self when there are shared goals. We must be poised ready for technological, economic, social, and even political change—the one thing we can be sure of in the short-term but more so long-term fate of this country.

**Keywords:** Critical consciousness (externally directed); Self-consciousness—internal (ego development); Multiculturalism; Identity crisis

## Introduction

British historian Arnold Toynbee [1], discussing cultural evolution, stated that civilizations grow through a dynamic interplay between stability and change. This pattern of interaction results from environmental demands, which come both from within the society and from other societies that share geographical, historical, or political commonalities with the given society. Toynbee saw this fluctuation as both a challenge and a response to environmental demands. This article is written to introduce the reader to a cognitive process termed “meta-thinking” that taps into our potential as human beings to cope with the vicissitudes of contemporary life in an era that seems to be transitional and could be epochal in American history.

This transition in African American history is unquestionably a pregnant one. As a group and an individual in the larger society, as part of a more encompassing civilization, as a member of a species we have come to a moment of truth, with the future of each of us, the nation, the world community, hanging in the balance. As it was once stated, “No man is an island.” If ever boldness, depth, and clarity of vision were called for, from many, it is now.

Jung [2] comparing our age to the beginning of the Christian era two millennia ago, writes:

“[A] Mood of universal destruction and renewal ... has set its mark on our age. This mood makes itself felt everywhere, politically, socially,

and philosophically. We are living in what the Greeks called the *kairos*—the right moment—for a “metamorphosis of the gods,” of the fundamental principles and symbols. This peculiarity of our time, which is certainly not of our conscious choosing, is the expression of the unconscious man within us who is changing. Coming generations will have to take account of this momentous transformation if humanity is not to destroy itself through the might of its own technology and science ... So much is at stake and so much depends on the psychological constitution of modern man. Does the individual know that he is the makeweight that tips the scales?”

Meta-thinking is rooted in the mind, heart, and actions of modern men and women. Like all knowledge it is contextual and a matter of perspective. Von Bertalanffy [3] defined perspectives in two ways: As the many flavors of truth” and, more formally, as “a viewpoint that the validity of knowledge depends on the perspective from which that knowledge is perceived.” The first definition speaks about the many views of reality and the dangers of emphasizing one view at the expense of others. The second definition calls our attention to how perceptions are not necessarily reflections of “real” things but rather the co-creation between the observer and the observed and instantiation, the frequency of relevant events or occurrences.

In part meta-thinking represents a society and a culture undergoing dramatic change but also my own evolution and development as the very person that I am today who was nurtured by a family, community and elements of a society with its particular manifestations of cultural pluralism. Meta-thinking also represents a rigorous examination and many times a challenge to many of the beliefs and values that I embraced, most times consciously and countless times unconsciously in that development. Meta-thinking represents a synthesis or an

attempt to integrate what remains after heavy scrutiny and deliberation. What remains intact after such a process of purging oneself at the core of one's belief and values systems is not necessarily Descartes' cogito but something that has allowed me to cope, adapt, grow, and even inculcate values pertaining to a need for fulfilment, purpose and hope. It may be the breath of hope for other.

As we move through this article we will see that meta-thinking encompasses a fresh view of many aspects of what makes us human. It certainly is a shift from the traditional view of reality. The previous section in both detail and depth laid out the frontal assault on objectivism whether the naive realism version embraced by most people that assert a reality that can be grasped through direct experience or the more sophisticated view of the sciences that presumes a knowable reality, linear causality, neutral methods of investigation, and neutral theoretical formulation.

Meta-thinking entails a notion of reality that has been identified as constructivism. The nature of reality, as perceived under the umbrella of constructivism, varies however. Some writers, to whom we refer to as radical constructivists, have asserted that there is no reality except what exists in the mind [4]. Radical constructivists claim that problems exist only in the way in which they are "language"—that is, only in the frames or stories we believe and tell ourselves and one another about those problems. Another position, also called constructivism by many, is that reality does exist, but we cannot come close to knowing it objectively because of our sensory and conceptual limitations, or because of the closed nature of our sensory system, and so one map of reality is as good as another. We might call this position pessimistic realism. This position is similar to what von [5] called perspectivism—which one's view of reality depends on one's perspective, which sets the initial conditions for any observation. "The same table is to the physicist an aggregate of electrons, protons and neutrons; to the chemist, a composition of organic compounds; to the biologist, a complex of wood cells; to the art historian, a baroque object; to the economist, a utility of certain monetary value" [5].

Meta-thinking represents an appreciation of the plasticity and constant change of reality and knowledge, a stress on the priority of concrete experience over fixed abstract principles, and a conviction that no single apriori thought system should govern belief or investigation. It is recognized that human knowledge is subjectively determined by a multitude of factors; that objective essences, or things-in-themselves, are neither accessible nor totally posit able; and that the value of all truths and assumptions must be continually subjected to direct testing. The critical search for truth is constrained to be tolerant of ambiguity and conceptual pluralism, and its outcome will necessarily be knowledge that is relative and fallible rather than absolute or certain.

Hence the quest for knowledge must be endlessly self-revising. One must try the new, experiment and explore, test against subjective and objective consequences, learn from one's mistakes, take nothing for granted, treat all as provisional, assume no absolutes. Reality is not a solid, self-contained given but a fluid, unfolding process, an "open universe" continually affected and moulded by one's actions and beliefs. It is possibility rather than fact. One cannot regard reality as a removed spectator against a fixed object; rather, one is always and necessarily engaged in reality, thereby at once transforming it while being transformed oneself. Although intransigent or provoking in many respects, reality must in some sense be hewed out by means of the human mind and will, which themselves are already enmeshed in that which they seek to understand and affect. The human subject is an

embodied agent, acting and judging in a context that can never be fully grasped or controlled. The knowing subject is never disengaged from the body or from the world, which form the background and condition of every cognitive act [6].

The inherent human capacity for concept and symbol formation is recognized as a fundamental and necessary element in the human understanding, anticipation, and creation of reality. The mind is not the passive reflector of an external world and its intrinsic order, but is active and creative in the process of perception and cognition. Reality is in some sense constructed by the mind, not simply perceived by it, and many such constructions are possible, none necessarily sovereign. Although human knowledge may be bound to conform to certain innate subjective structures, there is a degree of indeterminacy in these that, combined with the human will and imagination, permit an element of freedom in cognition. Implicit here is a relativized critical empiricism and a relativized critical rationalism recognizing the indispensability both of concrete investigation and of rigorous argument, criticism, and theoretical formulation, yet also recognizing that neither procedure can claim any absolute foundation: There is no empirical "fact" that is not already theory-laden, and there is no logical argument or formal principle that is a priori certain. All human understanding is interpretation, and no interpretation is final [6].

The prevalence of the Kuhnian concept of "paradigms" in current discourse is highly characteristic of postmodern thought, reflecting a critical awareness of the mind's fundamentally interpretive nature. This awareness has not only affected the postmodern approach to past cultural world views and the history of changing scientific theories, but has also influenced the postmodern self-understanding itself, encouraging a more sympathetic attitude toward repressed or unorthodox perspectives and a more self-critical view of currently established ones. Continuing advances in anthropology, sociology, history, and linguistics have underscored the relativity of human knowledge, bringing increased recognition of the "Eurocentric" character of Western thought, and of the cognitive bias produced by factors such as class, race and ethnicity. Especially penetrating in recent years has been the analysis of gender as a crucial factor in determining, and limiting, what counts as truth. Various forms of psychological analysis, cultural as well as individual, have further unmasked the unconscious determinants of human experience and knowledge [6].

Two levels of multicultural context contribute to diversity. The first, cultural transition, has two temporal dimensions: Historical/generational sequences (cultural evolution), and immigration/acculturation. Historical/generational sequences and immigration/acculturation patterns evolve over time, as a result of changing ideologies or circumstances that influence the second level pertaining of sociocultural contexts: economics, education, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, race, minority/majority status, and regional background.

To amplify on multiculturalism in relation to material presented in prior sections I focus on multiculturalism as it pertains to economics. Economics is a sociocultural context that has a dramatic impact on everyday life. In this context, distinctions (say among the lifestyles of the poor, the middle class, and the very rich) typically have greater impacts than differences in other contexts. There are more similarities between the poor in Chicago and the poor in other parts of the world than between the poor and the rich in Chicago, New York or Los Angeles.

## Life: The Maelstrom of Problems

Everything written on problem solving is a footnote to *How We Think*, a volume written by John Dewey in 1933 in which he attempted to describe the thought processes of a human being when confronted with a problem. In doing so, Dewey was interested in clarifying reflective or rational thinking, goal-directed thinking, or problem solving. According to Dewey, problem-solving behaviour is based on reflective thought that begins with a feeling of perplexity, doubt, or confusion. The person wants to eliminate the difficulty or solve the puzzle, but in order to do this effectively he or she must follow a rational procedure. If he fails to do so he can act uncritically or impulsively, leaping to inappropriate conclusions, mistaking the nature of the problem, becoming involved in searching for the answer to the wrong problem or making a number of other errors. Anyone of these behaviours may very well compromise his capacity to cope with the situation and undoubtedly makes it likely that the problem will remain unsolved.

Dewey held that effective problem solving demands the active pursuit of a set of procedures or steps in a well-defined and orderly sequence. These steps Dewey referred to as the "five phases of reflective thinking" and they include: recognizing the difficulty; defining the difficulty, raising suggestions for possible solutions and rationally exploring the suggestions, which includes data collection, selecting an optimal solution from among many proposals, and carrying out the solution.

It has been recognized that Dewey's list of successive phases can be broken down into finer incremental steps. Below we discuss some of the complexities of problem definition. We may also add a discussion the contribution of Herbert Simon's notion of bounded rationality and the circumscribed manner in which options are identified. Furthermore, it has been recognized that Dewey's list failed to include the terminal aspects of problem solving—the evaluation of the effectiveness of the attempted solutions, and the use of feedback loops into the process by which modifications can be made in the procedures employed even as one is engaged in employing them.

When problem solving, it is wise to check your terms and assumptions. The words you use to define the problem and your perceptions of "reality" are subject to varying interpretations by others. A strategic element to defining any problem is to isolate basic assumptions by asking "What if this was not true, or not true in the way I've assumed it to be? What if I no longer assumed this and, instead, checked the evidence as though I were coming upon it for the first time, without any knowledge or preconceptions?" A solution often means a way to retrace the definition of the problem. If we enter the problem through concise definitions, we may solve it easily. The granddaddy of all unconscious assumptions is that we can understand a problem by itself, without reference to other problems. This assumption is a serious obstacle to understanding and solving a problem, since no problem exists by itself. When you focus on a particular problem, you have selected it out of what is inevitably a field or cluster of related problems, "problem system." A problem system is a group of problems that work together and often cannot exist without one another. To understand a problem well enough to solve it, you need to identify the various problems in the system and see how they relate. There is a famous Taoist story in *Chaung Chou* (around 300 B.C.) Once upon a time there was a butcher who did not understand the anatomy of a cow. He often broke his knife by cutting too deeply and striking the bones. His meat was always mixed with crushed bones

and his bared bones were always left with a good amount of meat on them.

The idea of a problem system is fairly simple. The heart of the system is the problem that has been focused on—the focus problem. The rest of the system is made up of three different kinds of problems that always exist in relation to any focus problem. Some of the related problems are underlying problems, since if they did not exist the focus problem would not exist. For example let's take violent crime which beleaguers many parts of the nation. The focus problem may be the epidemic of violent crime but the underlying problems include poverty, high dropout rates in terms of education, racial discrimination, single parent households, drug use and trafficking genetics, etc.

Finding a true underlying problem is the problem-solver's joy, since by definition, if you solve the underlying problem the focus problem automatically disappears. The trouble with most apparent underlying problems is that they are only overlapping problems'. An overlapping problem is one that, when it is solved, will reduce the focus problem in some way without completely solving it. Reducing poverty or single parent households may reduce some violent crime but it is questionable if violent crime would be totally eradicated.

At any rate the closer the focus problem comes to a total solution, the more easily we become aware of contingent problems (unanticipated consequences). These are the problems sometimes created by solution of the focus problem. This is well illustrated in the ending of the cold war and the arms race between the super-powers. The reduction of those tensions has led to massive reduction in defence spending in this country, but some of the unemployment problem alluded to early in this article.

At any rate, one may investigate the world as a scientist, or conjecture about human experience as an introspective analyst, but each is still confronted by the human world's irresolvable ambiguity and contingency. At best, we can only argue for its existential and pragmatic transformation through an act of will. Dewey, about whom we spoke, perhaps best typifies that understanding and spirit. Cognitive experience to him means a process of undergoing, the intercourse of a living being with its social and physical environment. In its fullest sense, it involves not merely an adjustment to environment but a modification of it. It is the environment-stimulating-the individual-to modify-the-environment [7]. And as we saw earlier Dewey was extremely interested in how thought functions in the experimental determinations of future consequences.

In Dewey's opinion the shift of attention from antecedent phenomena to consequent phenomena effected by pragmatism is not only the basic difference between a new and the old empiricism (of Hume, for example) but, is revolutionary in its consequences. In pragmatism's insistence upon the possibilities and not merely the antecedents of action Dewey saw the implications of a new science. The doctrine of consequences leads us to take the future into account. It leads to a conception of the universe as one whose evolution is not finished, as one still in the making. Hopefully, in what you have and will read the reader sees meta-thinking as an advance beyond where John Dewey ended.

Intellectual self-discipline is required to avoid ignoring important alternatives, uncertainties, decisions, or trade-offs. Complicated situations usually are impossible to analyse completely. To undertake a complete analysis, the decision maker would be required to:

- Specify all possible decision alternatives,

- Predict all possible consequences of every alternative,
- Estimate the probability of every consequence,
- Appraise the desirability of every consequence,
- Calculate which decision alternative yields the most desirable set of consequences.

As Herbert Simon's principle of bounded rationality makes clear, however, such an ideal rationality can never be attained because of time, information, and intellectual capacity.

Typically one must simplify. When focusing the objective is to isolate the most critical factors and describe their essential relationships. The criterion of successful focusing is not necessarily universality, far reaching explanatory power, or even predictive value. Success in this instance relates to pragmatic considerations.

This aspect of focusing works for several reasons. First, the human mind is only capable of doing simplified analysis. The limitation to our cognitive talents prevents us (no matter what we would like to believe) from performing comprehensive analysis. Second, since people can consider only a limited number of factors anyway; it only makes sense to select explicitly and carefully those few on which to concentrate. It is becoming more commonplace (beyond the intellectual world) to use models, analogues/analogies, metaphors, etc. to understand the world. As an illustration the following description of mathematical reasoning is provided: "Solving a mathematical problem is like assembling a jigsaw puzzle: It is easier and wiser to assemble from the perimeters than from the centre because we have more clues from the environment once the perimeter is established. By the same token a footnote should not be placed at the beginning of a written passage [7]."

Clearly, there is a subjective element to focusing. Intuition is employed at every point in the analysis: In determining what factors are important and breaking the problem down into components; in specifying beliefs about uncertainties and preferences for outcomes; and repeating the process as necessary. The question is not whether to focus: The only question is whether this process is unconscious or conscious, disorganized or analytical/methodical.

Finally, when one's thoughts are related to taking action, focusing entails specifying what uncertainties and what outcomes will most directly affect your circumstance. You should make explicit, to yourself if not to others, what your predictions and preferences are. Obviously, when specifying probabilities for future, uncertain events and preferences for possible consequences, there will be subjective, intuitive judgments.

A discussion of a typical condition of intellectual discovery leads to me to the observations. A repeated observation of men who have solved really important problems in science has been the following: After periods during which one has actively tried to solve a problem, but has not succeeded, the sudden right organization of the situation, and with it the solution, tend to occur at moments of extreme passivity. For example, a great chemist found the solution of a fundamental problem in organic chemistry after casually chatting with a friend, while waiting for a streetcar. He just went up the steps of the car, waving to his friend, when suddenly an entirely new possibility of arranging atoms in a molecule appeared before his mental eye. Up to that point, any attempt of his to find the structure of these molecules which would explain their behaviour had ended in failure. But now, organic chemistry began to expand in an entirely new direction—after this moment on the steps of the streetcar.

We now see that certain outstanding achievements of the mental world do not seem to be achievements of this world alone. When we considered the concept of organization in perception, we found that, for the most part, organization as an action does not occur within the mental world. Only the result of the organizing process is usually experienced. Now we find that the same holds for certain most important intellectual achievements. These achievements are often made possible by an abrupt reorganization of given materials, a revolution, the result of which suddenly appears ready-made on the mental scene. From where does it come? Where does the revolution as such take place? It can occur only in that strangest of all systems, the brain, which seems better than the active self, able to do precisely such things—but to repeat, only when the crucial material has first been thoroughly examined and made ready in active mental work. Why do such revolutions which occur in certain brains tend to be the right revolutions? At least this part of nature, the human brain, seems to operate in a most selective fashion. It is the direction of these operations which is truly remarkable.

The humanist psychologist Carl Rogers organized an important study on creativity at the University of Chicago in the 1950s. A number of psychologists, poets, therapists, and inventors spent considerable time studying the components of creativity and the psychological conditions that foster it [8].

The Rogers study revealed that people work most creatively when they are motivated from within. Conditions fostering creativity were as follows:

#### Psychological safety

- Self-valuing—the individual has a sense of unconditional worth,
- Suspension of external evaluation or judgments is a resources,
- Empathetic understanding,

#### Psychological freedom

- Openness to symbolic expression, playfulness, spontaneous juggling of concepts.

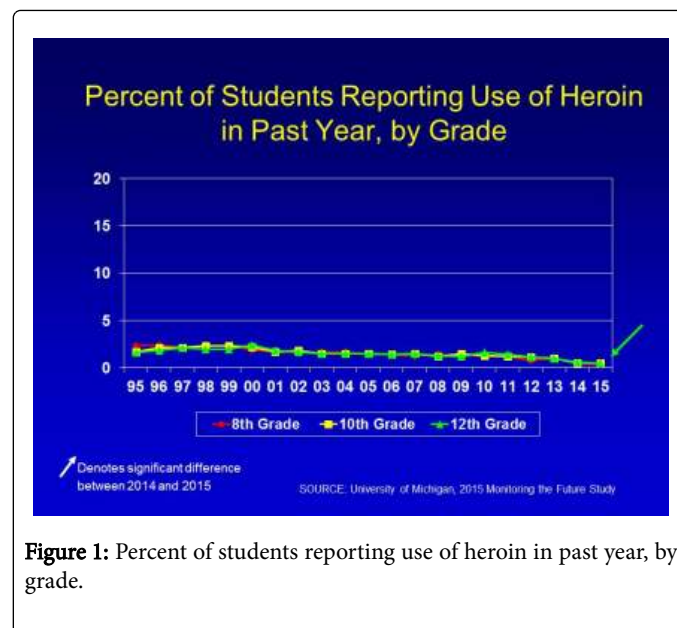


Figure 1: Percent of students reporting use of heroin in past year, by grade.



## Who am I and What is my purpose in life?

Clearly there is a problem here with the portion of the nation's youth. From my perspective this one symptom of young people undergoing identity crises. This prompted me to revisit the book by Erikson HE [9].

"Identity Youth and Crisis". He deals with a process that is located both in the core of the individual and in the core of the communal culture. As the culture changes, new kinds of identity questions arise such as social protest and changing gender roles. These days it seems to be matters pertaining to sexual orientation, generational polarization, while race at the time of his writing the book comes up in the book, it still matter today (Figure 1).

According to Erikson,

"Identity-consciousness is, of course, overcome only by a sense of identity won in action. Only he "knows where he is going and who is going with him" demonstrates an unmistakable if not always easily definable unity and radiance of appearance and being. And yet just when a person, to all appearances, seems to "find himself," he can also be said to be "losing himself" in new tasks and affiliations: he transcend identity-consciousness."

From my perspective, somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what may be called a mythical norm; which each one of us within our hearts knows "that is not me." In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that is the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing. At this juncture, we shall be concerned here rather with the process which must be undergone by an adult individual, already assimilated to contemporary American culture, who seeks to become him or herself, and to work out a way of life of their own as we enter the postmodern world [10].

1. If such an individual is to do something more than play the roles that have been assigned to her by the culture into which she has been born, she must first gain a certain distance from these roles. From this distance, she may reflect upon them, and may come to see that they are not her own. This insight will be expressed by a general dissatisfaction with the way of life that her culture has imposed upon her.
2. This dissatisfaction will enable her to glimpse certain possibilities ahead of her which she had not seen before. These possibilities will at first appear to her as abstract ways of supporting general ends, like the welfare of mankind, not demanding specific sacrifices, nor touching her directly in her concrete way of life. At this initial stage of becoming herself, they will not repel her. In this general form, they will first appeal to her, and lead her away from her accepted way of life.
3. But this revelation of abstract possibilities will die away without an active answer. If this answer occurs, it will take the form of a growing detachment from her established way of life, which will seek escape in forgetfulness and distraction. The new possibility that is drawing her away is still general and not specific. As such, it does not yet repel. It merely brings forth certain restlessness and attracts her from a majestic distance, like a gleaming star in the sky.

4. But if this restlessness is maintained, the abstract possibility will become clearer, and will be brought closer to her. As the person reflects upon it, she will see it contract into a real possibility that touches her at this moment. This is a crucial phase of the history when the issue hangs in the balance. This real possibility may be rejected, in which case the dialogue may cease, as she abandons herself. Or on the other hand, she may give an active answer.
5. This answer, if it is given, will take the form of a new sort of anxiety expressing a tension between the old way of life into which she has fallen and the new way now looming before her. As it draws closer to her existence, it will not only attract; it will also repel, as it touches the substance of her being in the world.
6. If she can sustain this tension, the real possibility will soon be revealed in a sharper and clearer form. It will become an obligation, a demand for specific action here and now, that is expressed in the stronger language of necessity—I ought and I must. The real possibility is revealed as a norm coming even nearer to an emerging self, and demanding a specific answer here and now.
7. Unless this normative appeal is refused, which may happen at any time, the answer will take the form of a specific, isolated act in the particular situation now confronting the agent. This act may bear a certain limited significance in the particular situation confronting her. But it is intended as the beginning of a personal way of life with a total significance which it does not yet possess. It is only a fragment in response to a fragmentary situation. How does this limited intention fit together with the intentions of other acts just performed and to be performed in the future? How can these isolated ideas be fitted together in a total world that makes sense? This feeling of meaninglessness pervades the whole scene, and the project may end then and there. The isolated normative act is a cry for integral meaning that calls for a revealing answer.
8. If this answer is given, the dialogue will proceed in the form of a search for projective and interpretive meaning that will make sense to the active project now under way. It is not a question of uniting ideas together into an abstract system. It is rather a question of fitting them together in a way that will be capable of guiding meaningful action in the concrete world. Even if the pattern is familiar and already established, it will be seen in a new light when it is thought through by an active agent caught up in a novel situation, and related to her life project. This revelation of global meaning calls for an answer.
9. If the agent listens, her answer will no longer take the form of an isolated response to a partial situation. It will rather be an act bearing momentous significance. It will be the beginning of a new way of life in a new world of meaning, the becoming of a self that can be called her own. This phase of the dialogue is over, and a new phase will begin.

Let us put the above into a specific context. The realities that women confront vary and sensitivity to gender and an awareness raising experience can be precipitated by many factors. They are as follows:

- Life cycle: Each life cycle transition may prompt examination of gender beliefs. For example, in 1850 women lived to be about 50 and very few outlived menopause and its consequent problems of osteoporosis, heart disease and other degenerative disorders. Now that American women live to the average age of 78, these disorders have become huge problems. Does society adequately and fairly address women's health issues?

- Ethnicity: Various ethnic groups may attribute different salience to gender beliefs at different times.
- Acculturation: Prompted by relocation from original country to host country over time.
- Economics: Upward or downward mobility may prompt examination of gender beliefs.
- Religion: Changes in religious orientation may prompt examination of gender beliefs.
- Race: Different racial groups may attribute different salience to gender beliefs at different times.
- Education: Information may prompt an examination of gender beliefs at different educational levels. For example, to many feminists the relentless search for an innate basis to complex human behaviours smacks of a quest for easy answers—handy excuses for the status quo. Feminists denounce the way in which evolutionary biology has been used against women. They criticize many of the comparisons that have been made between the behaviours of humans and other animals that confirm stereotypes about femininity and masculinity. They insist that biological predisposition does not mean biological destiny. Otherwise, what is the use of having such a sizable forebrain? Conversely, they wonder whether feminist thinking has helped or obstructed biology's efforts as a science to understand mechanisms of nature, human or otherwise. But with so many women now working in the field a new mix is added to current thought.
- Regional Moves-Relocation from urban to suburban (or vice versa), or one region of the country to another may prompt an examination of gender beliefs.
- Historical Events-Such as the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas Hearings, the Kennedy expose and/or O.J. Simpson trials may prompt an examination of gender beliefs.

Over the past twelve years, the feminist perspective on women's roles and their contribution to society has raised questions about the legitimacy of many of the theories and concepts at the core of American culture. By challenging our presuppositions the feminist critique provides an alternative perspective that more accurately addresses the socio-political and sometime economic differences that women encounter.

One concern of the feminist critique is that society changes its view of the family as a benevolent unit of socialization. We cannot assume that every individual in the family has the same options, the same opportunities and the same influence.

We cannot forget the socio-political inequalities that make women more financially and emotionally dependent than men. We will examine the impact of feminism on American culture by focusing on feminist ideology and its potential for cultural transformation. It is clear that a change in the Eurocentric beliefs of scientists must occur before we can embark on a balanced study of women and of the relationships between the sexes.

Breunlin et al. [11] argues that societies, families and individuals need to attain balance and harmony in order to grow. She regards patriarchal beliefs as oppressive for some members of the family and therefore as too costly for the growth of an individual, a family and society. Families, according to her, attain balance through collaboration.

For a family to experience balance, the mother and father need equal opportunities to influence family decisions, share family

responsibilities, and have access to familial and social resources. Today's women will find themselves somewhere on a spectrum in the evolution of gender balance.

It is regrettable that the evolution toward gender balance may be more painful than anticipated. Today's working mothers often worry about the "mommy track," fearing that they will be consigned to lower-paid, less-prestigious jobs. Nationally, women average about 72% of wages of their male counterparts. As of 2016, a woman candidate for president of the United States was defeated by NA opponent that expressed misogynist beliefs.

At any rate, there seems to be a strong proclivity or impulse in American culture for the individual to be self-defining. Achievement and success (in particular) in America seems to be a unique combination of contextual antecedents—the kinds of things that place each of us in a socio-demographic mapping—and transcendence.

I define the latter as follows:

#### **Psychological safety**

- Self-valuing—the individual has a sense of unconditional worth,
- Suspension of external evaluation or judgments is a resource,
- Empathetic understanding,

#### **Psychological freedom**

- Openness to symbolic expression, playfulness, spontaneous, juggling of concepts.

### **Race and Identity Issues**

According to Ericson,

"The individual belonging to an oppressed and exploited minority, which is aware of the dominant cultural ideals but prevented from emulating them, is apt to fuse the negative images held up to him by the dominant majority with the negative identity cultivated in his own group. Here we may think of the many nuances of the way in which one Negro may address the other as "nigger". The reason for this exploitability (and temptation to exploit) lies in man's very evolution and development as "pseudosppecies".....But there is the further fact that the oppressor has a vested interest in the negative identity of the oppressed because that negative identity is a projection of his own unconscious negative identity—a projection which, up to a point, makes him feel superior but also, in a brittle way, whole. This discussion of the "pseudo species" may have clarified some of this theoretically, but a historical emergence forces immediate application—onto oneself."

According to Wilson AN [12].

"Through projection, the White American community transfers or exports contradictions—the conflicts, self-incriminations and tensions they engender—from itself to the African American community"....

Through projection the White community seeks to transform its evil, criminal, genocidal characteristics and intentions into good, law abiding characteristics intentions." However, the introjections of the euro centrically falsified African American images into the collective African American personality can only occur when African American themselves accept those falsified images as facts. This acceptance of false images by African Americans is all the more easy and efficient by the fact that information, whether true or un true, is almost completely

controlled and manipulated by White American academic a media institutions.

## The Future: Cultural Impacts and Individual Identity Development

Returning to Ericson, he states:

"But the crisis of youth is also the crisis of a generation and of the ideological soundness of its society: There is also a complimentarily relation of identity and ideology. And if we said that the Identity crisis is least marked in that segment of youth which in a given era is able to invest its fidelity in a an ideological trend associated with a new technical and economic expansion such as mercantilism, colonialism, or industrialization, we recognize the catastrophic consequences of any systematic exclusion from such trends Youth which is eager for, yet unable to find access to the dominant techniques of society will not only feel estranged from society, but also upset in sexuality, and most of all unable to apply aggression constructively" Identity links the past and the future, both in the individual and in society.

### Paris Williams

For Paris Williams, there was never any doubt that he'd get into and attend college, he said. His parents expected that from him. He decided to attend Urban Prep specifically because its mission was to get graduates to college.

"Both of my parents emphasized education as the route to success!" said Williams, 22. "They taught me (that) not long ago, we as a people were fighting for access to education. I knew to take it seriously!"

So Williams was proud, but not surprised, when he was accepted to Georgetown University, in the bustling northwest region of Washington, D.C.

As he settled in, he began to notice what set him apart from many of his classmates.

"The other students, some were very wealthy and resourced," he said. "They came from boarding schools. It became hard for me to adjust to the workload. It was stressful. I was in a different environment where everybody was smart"

By his second year, Williams said his grades slipped, and he, too, ended up on academic probation. He was warned that he had to improve or he'd have to leave.

Then came the self-doubt But Williams said he could hear King's voice echoing in his head.

'Paris, buckle down," he could hear him say. "Paris, tighten up."

And he did.

Williams meticulously selected a circle of friends with the traits he wanted to emulate, he said. When he wanted to give up, they stepped in and offered their encouragement.

"I can talk to people who are not from my background. I found commonality that we could lean on!" Williams said. "My friend told me, 'You started here and you will finish here. We started this together and we will end this together?'"

With that support, Williams said he dug into his studies.

When he got a call from an Urban Prep counsellor asking how he was doing, Williams admitted he was having some trouble keeping up. And in order to graduate in four years, he needed to take summer courses he couldn't afford. So Urban Prep stepped in and paid for his courses.

"It felt great because I couldn't make it (alone);" Williams said. "I had them in my corner."

In May, Williams' parents travelled from their Englewood neighbourhood to the nation's capital. There they watched their boy become the first in their family to earn a four-year degree.

"They always knew I was going to do it," Williams said. "They didn't cry. They were like, 'OK, we're proud of you. But you are going to do even bigger things. Now it's time to get out there?'"

### Robert Lee Henderson III

Robert Lee Henderson III promised himself he wouldn't cry.

But as Henderson marched across the stage, wearing his black cap and gown, he felt his throat tighten. And as his class of graduates from Lake Forest College filed out of the ceremony, he spotted his sister, aunts, girlfriend and grandmother sitting in the audience. Then the tears welled up and streamed down his face.

He had done something no one in his family, long rooted in Englewood, had managed, he said.

He graduated from college.

"I thought, 'Wow, I really made it,' "said Henderson, 23, recalling that special day.

"I pointed over to my family. I wanted them to see this was for them, not for me. I started to think of all that I had been through, and it was a lot but I actually accomplished something. It was so powerful Part of his story was an identity crisis. But the more time he invested socially the more his studies suffered.

"I was lost at first," he said.

"I thought I didn't have to go to class. They sent out warning grades and I saw I was near failing. I thought, 'I've 'got to change what I'm doing?'"

From then, Henderson curtailed hanging out, he said. He focused solely on studying, spending days and nights in the library. He blocked out the old neighbourhood, the old alliances.

"I only came back to Englewood when I had to come back," he said.

"I knew if I wanted it, I had to work for it."

### Tyler Beck

For Beck, the path wasn't so smooth.

Coming from such a nurturing, supportive environment, he wasn't prepared for a campus that couldn't fully embrace him, he said. He was 17 years old and hundreds of miles from home in a region he didn't understand and an academic culture that felt foreign.

He doesn't blame Trinity, but he said they didn't have a system in place for students in need hie him.

"Not everyone comes from a boarding school where they have been exposed to those types of classes," he said.

"I'm from the South Side. We just didn't talk about books the way they did there. We didn't have the types of classes other students at Trinity had taken!"

But Beck said he didn't know how to ask for help. He had graduated at the top of his class and was a leader in his community in Chicago. In Hartford, he didn't know whom to reach out to.

<b>Traditional</b>	
Organizational	Complimentary roles are expected in the family (women as caretakers, men as bread winners). If women work, they assume most of home responsibilities.
Internal	Women may experience some oppressed and angry feelings. Men may experience guilty feelings.
External	Descriptions & explanations about problems are not given in terms of gender. Experience support from dominant norms in community & society.
<b>Gender Aware</b>	
Organizational	There is a questioning of complementarities of roles. Beginning to experience gender roles as constraining is expressed to other women. For the women there is a fluctuation between struggle to amplify roles & resignation.
Internal	Women may experience angry feelings. Men may fear loss of nurturance.
External	In women support groups there is a "beginning" to question patriarchal roles and expectations in community and society. Still the vast experience support from dominant norms in community and society.
<b>Polarized</b>	
Organizational	Openly challenging gender roles & expectations is made public. Open conflict between spouses may impact legal systems. Splits & coalitions with respect to gender may occur.
Internal	Extreme angry feelings in women (long lists of injuries); worried & fearful feelings activated. In men, extreme defensiveness is evident; guilty feelings that fluctuate with worried & angry feelings are harboured.
External	Gender oppression experienced in socialization of roles, but may be described in personal ways. Experience support from minority groups and in conflict with dominant norms in the community and society.
<b>In Transition</b>	
Organizational	Toward mutuality & supporting flexible familial roles & expectations. Moving toward egalitarian roles & mutual participation in decision making.
Internal	Angry & fearful feelings less extreme. At times, old flare-ups occur; more aware of temporary setbacks.
External	Less organized by narrow gender roles. More apt to challenge socialization of roles & expectations. Fluctuate between experiencing support from dominant norms in the community & experiencing conflict with dominant norms in the community and society.
<b>Balanced</b>	
Organizational	Egalitarian organization. Mutual participation in decision making. Vigilance about gender constraints.
Internal	Esponse has attained more balance internally, allowing collaboration and less conflict and contradiction.
External	Likely to be politically active, attempting to change narrow social roles & expectations. Experiencing minority status when contrasted with dominant norms & expectations in society.

**Table 1:** Positions on the evolution of gender relations in American society.

"It was a new realization ... people don't care about your success. How do you deal with academic probation and then asked to take some time off "I was torn up," he said. "There were tears shed, but it brought me to a place of mental maturity!"

Beck left Hartford and went to Madison to live with his brother. There he worked in a sandwich shop and saved for and attempted to figure out his next moves.



He appealed his probation at Trinity and returned for another semester, but it didn't work out, he said. So he came back to Chicago.

Back in Englewood, Beck called his Urban Prep counsellor.

"I said, 'Can you help me get back into school?'"

The counsellor did. Now at Lake Forest, Beck lives on campus and works there too. He's currently a junior and determined more than ever to graduate with a bachelor's in communications.

"I've got to finish. From here, it's nothing"

However, at the other end of the spectrum, we have behaviours as described by Wilson.

"Hence, lacking or suffering from relatively weak internal restraint the Black-on Black violent criminal feels "impelled" by his desires for stimulation, excitement and need satisfaction as well as by the attractiveness of objects and opportunity, to engage in antisocial behaviour. Feeling the need to express and demonstrate his manhood, he does so by the only means his White American conditioned short-sightedness presents to him—interpersonal violence and exploitation. Robbed of an affirming racial and personal identity and of pre-occupying positive cultural and familial goals by a greedy, criminal, White American economic establishment, he claims the full manhood and independence denied him by instrumentally utilizing violence as a means to attain those status symbols emblematic of his doubtful masculinity and autonomy. As intimidated above, much Black-on Black violence, robbery, thievery, assault, stealing, gambling and others, are motivated and sustained by Black males seeking to obtain or purchase these objects they have been conditioned to think of as important to their status and high pseudo self-regard, or to gain narcotic euphorants and analgesics in order to deal with the frustration of having attained them, or as adjuncts to their attainment."

From my perspective, I draw upon Erikson who recognizes the challenges to the African American regarding a sense of identity in the modern world (to some scholars—post-modern and others post-colonial). First, an individual must fit in American society (Table 1) due to highly respected technical skills. A person may have excluded himself by pursuits based upon genetic endowment, "talents" which afford a lively or even fancy lifestyle—record artist, athletes, theatre and movie personalities or even certain criminals. The second category is those who are involuntarily excluded, for example by literacy requirements which prevent the proof that one is mechanically gifted or advances technological knowledge, at least typing proficiency. In American society there are also prejudicial practices of employment pertaining to ethnicity, gender, race, ex-offender status, etc.

Another path in terms of identity development is the African Identity. Some notables have actually immigrated back to Africa. In this vein there are the Black Muslims who identify with Islam and call themselves members of Islam. Another path is the pervasive middle class as the provider of an identity. The middle class is preoccupied with matters of real estate education of their children, and consumption. One value of that element in America is that their offspring will have a better life than what they achieved. Another path is a religious identity path, many of those that provide leadership use

faith based upon the teaching of the bible and Ten Commandments as the basis of daily living. Another path is the antisocial path where prison life is normalized, if not glorified or in some instances regarded a political act against the economic establishment. Sexual orientation and biracial backgrounds could be added to this list. All of this will be played out against economic, political and social change the country. For example, the flight for African American from urban conclave such as Chicago to suburban localities due to gang violence and illicit, drug markets and criminal justice system perceived as hostile and oppressive.

## Conclusion

Properly speaking, there is no "postmodern world view," nor the possibility of one. The postmodern paradigm is by its nature fundamentally subversive of all paradigms, for at its core is the awareness of reality as being at once multiple, local and temporal, and without demonstrable foundation. The situation recognized by John Dewey at the start of the twentieth century, that "despair of any integrated outlook and attitude [is] the chief intellectual characteristic of the present age." has been enshrined as typifying the postmodern vision. We can further anticipate the disappearance of the old confidence of the modern mind in the superiority of its own perspective. There has been an emergence of an awareness of how little knowledge can be claimed by any mind (sheer brain power). On its own terms, the assertion of the historical relativity and cultural-linguistic bondage of all truth and knowledge must itself be regarded as reflecting but one more local and temporal perspective having no necessarily universal, extra historical value. Paradoxically the one postmodern absolute is critical consciousness, which, by deconstructing all, seems compelled by its own logic to do so to itself as well. This is the unstable paradox that permeates the postmodern mind.

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