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**Levels of Ego Development and Attitudes  
toward Women in Authoritative Positions  
among Adolescent Males:  
Inviting or Disinviting?**

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*Results from research conducted with 18-26 year-old male undergraduates in 1984 and 1995-1999 suggest that they were nonaccepting of women entering authoritative positions because they viewed women as biologically less capable than men. This pattern remained consistent across developmental levels and suggests that perceptions of biological differences between the genders continue to create an environment in which women are stereotyped.*

Over the past 35 years, women's roles in society have changed significantly. These changes are particularly evident in the area of employment, as more women have assumed full time jobs and careers. Despite the increasing numbers of women in the work force, generally, those numbers have remained disproportionately low in upper-level administrative/managerial positions. Early research on women's assumption of administrative positions reflected markedly low numbers of women in upper-level positions, especially in higher education (Clement, 1977; Irvine & Robinson, 1982). These researchers reported that male attitudes toward women in authoritative positions contributed to a negative uninviting climate for women who aspired to higher-level positions. More recent research also reinforces the assertion that gender inequity exists in higher education (Hensel, 1991) and in upper-level management positions, generally (Mills and Mills, 1996; Purkey and Novak, 1996.)

In order to examine male attitudes toward women in authoritative positions, the author conducted an initial study in 1984 with undergraduate males, aged 18-26, to examine a possible relationship between their levels of ego development, according to Erikson, and attitudes toward women in authoritative positions (Cowher, 1984). Subsequent to that research, some of the same subjects were examined 10 years later, along with another group of males from 1995-1999 who were 18-26 years of age during those years. Specific research questions addressed by the study were as follows:

1. Are the sex-role attitudes of adolescent males toward women in authoritative positions similar across the developmental levels in

terms of three stereotypes: acceptance of women into authoritative positions; female-specific barriers which traditionally have been viewed as prohibitive of permanent, full-time employment; and traits deemed necessary for success in authoritative positions?

2. To what extent are these sex-role attitudes similar to those generally viewed as stereotypical at the various developmental levels?

For the purpose of this study, subjects defined as being in the throes of “late adolescence” (Cot & Levine, 1992; Muus, 1980) were chosen because of the age relevance to “typical” college undergraduates. Additionally, the literature suggests that this age range reflects a time period of greater developmental variation than any other (Browning, 1983; Cote & Levine, 1992; Muus, 1960).

Theoretically, Erikson’s work underscored the importance of psychosocial development in the creation of attitudes. As Widick, Parker, and Kniefelkamp (1978) indicate, “Erikson’s is undoubtedly a psychosocial view; he places the developing person in a social context, emphasizing the fact that movement through life occurs in interaction with parents, family, social institutions, and a particular culture all of which are bounded by a particular historical period” (p.1). Because adolescence is a time of great change and growth, the role that educators assume in the development of adolescent attitudes is crucial. Or, as Rice (1999) states, “. . . students in college... are stimulated to rethink their ideologies” (p. 186).

In Eriksonian theory, adolescence is referred to as a “stage” during which an individual is challenged to achieve an “identity”. In describing this process, Erikson (1968) defines the ‘crisis’ of identity achievement thus, “...‘crisis’ no longer connotes impending catastrophe.... It is now being accepted as designating a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation” (p. 16). The resolution of the adolescent’s crisis occurs when an individual makes choices about his physical, mental, sexual, and occupational identities.

In order to assess the degree to which adolescents have moved toward identity achievement, James Marcia (1975) developed a model and accompanying instrument for further differentiating steps toward identity achievement. Marcia describes two extreme levels or “statuses” reflective of resolution or nonresolution during adolescence. Resolution is presumed to be the highest status and is termed, “identity achievement”; while nonresolution is presumed to reflect the lowest status and is termed, “identity diffusion”. Two middle level statuses in Marcia’s model are “identity foreclosure” and “moratorium”. Both “foreclosure” and “moratorium” may be reflective of an individual’s progress toward “identity achievement”; however, the individual in “moratorium” is probably closer to “achievement”. In theory, the foreclosed individual is committed to goals and values, an occupation, and a personal ideology; however, “the goals he works for and the values he holds were determined for him by others” (Marcia, 1975, pp. 69-84). The moratorium adolescent, on the other hand, is in the process of searching and has not embraced an identity given him by others. The moratorium individual is in “crisis”.

Initially, the author hypothesized that an identity-achieved male adolescent would be more accepting toward women assuming authoritative positions than one who was less achieved or nonresolved. The author presumed that movement toward identity achievement would correlate positively with less stereotypical attitudes toward women in authoritative positions. It was also presumed that institutions of higher learning could facilitate or enhance (invite) that attitudinal change.

### **Methodology**

For this study, the following operational definitions were utilized:

Developmental Levels. Participants’ levels of development were measured using the “Ego Identity Incomplete Sentence Blank” (EI-ISB). Marcia (1964) designed it according to behaviors which Erikson related to the achievement of an ego identity. As a result of a private conversation with Marcia (personal conversation, March 29, 1984) regarding this instrument, it was determined that although the instrument significantly

differentiated between the levels of achievement and identity diffusion, the middle levels were much more difficult to assess. Therefore, the author divided the initial sample (1984) into levels of high (identity-achieved), middle (moratorium and foreclosed), and low (identity-diffused). Using a normal distribution of subjects and according to research results reported on identity statuses, scores were divided as follows;

Identity Achieved = top 25% (total scores of 54+)

Moratorium and Foreclosed = middle 50% (total Scores of 45-53)

Identity Diffused = bottom 25% (44 and below)

The validity of the EI-ISB has been well-established throughout earlier research on ego development (Gold, 1980; Marcia, 1964, 1966, 1975, 1976, 1980) and more recent studies (Horst, 1998; Marcia, 1989, 1991, 1994). It provides an examination of ego identity in terms of commitment, crisis, and achievement.

Attitudes toward Women in Authoritative Positions. Attitudes toward women in authoritative positions were determined using the “Woman As Managers Scale” (WAMS) developed by Peters, Terborg, and Taynor (1974). This inventory was developed to examine reactions toward women in authoritative positions. It is comprised of items drawn from major content areas that include general descriptive behaviors of women in leadership and decision-making behaviors and traits, such as assertiveness and competitiveness. Validity and reliability are well-documented in the developers’ review (Peters, Terborg, & Taynor, 1974, p. 30).

Three specific levels of stereotype/nonreceptivity are determined by the WAMS. These are (1) acceptance of women into authoritative positions, (2) female-specific barriers traditionally viewed as prohibitive of permanent, full time employment, and (3) traits deemed necessary for success in managerial (authoritative) positions.

## **Procedures**

Both the EI-ISB and WAMS were selected for the concepts they address and the ease of administration. Both instruments were determined to be valid during the initial study in 1984, and reliability was enhanced by consistent use of the same materials throughout subsequent administrations in 1994 and from 1995-1999.

Selection of Participants. The initial study conducted in 1984 included students who were enrolled in six psychology classes at an urban community college campus in western Pennsylvania. Participation was voluntary, and the sample was chosen due to its accessibility. All subjects were males in late adolescence, defined as those between the ages of 18 and 26 years.

All students in these classes were tested in order to eliminate any possible bias. Although 110 males and females were tested, only 43 fulfilled the criteria for selection. Of this group, approximately one-fourth (10) were of African-American descent and three-fourths (33) were Caucasian. Follow-up with the same individuals ten years later elicited responses from only five (11.6%) of the original subject pool. All of those responding were Caucasian.

An examination of the data indicated that some of Erikson's theoretical assumptions might be questioned. More specifically, although there appeared to be some support for the notion that adolescent males become less disinviting as they progress developmentally, the results did not prove to be significant.

Students from four educational psychology classes at a rural/suburban university in western Pennsylvania participated in the 1995-1999 study of adolescent males, aged 18-26. Participation was voluntary, and this subject pool was utilized due to accessibility. Although 75 males and females were tested, only 35 met the criteria for selection. Of those late-adolescent males who participated, approximately one-eighth (N=4) were of African-American descent, while seven-eighths (N=31) were Caucasian. Instrumentation and scoring remained consistent for all subjects.

## **Data Analyses**

Correlational analyses were performed on data resulting from the two testing instruments. Developmental levels (high, middle, low), as ascertained by scores on the EI-ISB, were correlated with overall scores and three specific factors on the WAMS (acceptance of women into authoritative positions; female-specific barriers traditionally viewed as prohibitive of permanent, full time employment; and traits deemed necessary for success in authoritative positions).

Additionally, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedure was used to identify any significant differences among the means of scores between subjects at each developmental level in relation to the three factors measured by the WAMS, as well as within subjects in relation to the three factors on the WAMS, regardless of developmental level. Scheffe's post hoc comparisons were performed in order to determine which factors were significantly different.

## **Results**

Men Tested in 1984 (in 1984). In order to examine the relationship between ego development and attitudes toward women in authoritative positions, Pearson Product Moment correlations were computed between scores on the EI-ISB and those resulting from the WAMS. Three specific levels (factors) of stereotypes were examined, as well as overall sexism scores (Table 1). An Analysis of Variance procedure (ANOVA) was conducted in order to examine any significant differences among the mean scores of participants at each developmental level on the three factors measured by the WAMS. Scheffe's post hoc comparisons were performed when the analysis was significant in order to examine at which levels the factors differed. Means are reported in Table 2.

Mean scores (H=5.34, M=5.31, L=4.71) for students regarding the acceptance of gender differences as they progressed developmentally did not prove to be significant. The same trend appeared in the areas of Acceptance of Women into Authoritative Positions (Mean scores: H=5.79, M=5.72, L=5.27) and Female-Specific Barriers (Mean scores: H=4.70,

M=4.52, L=3.88). Again, none of the differences between students proved to be significant. (See Table 3.)

Although differences among the means between subjects did not prove to be significant, those among the means within subjects did prove to be significant. This would indicate that student mean scores on the three factors measured by the WAMS were significantly different. Scheffe's post hoc comparisons indicated that students, overall, were less accepting in the area of Female Specific Barriers (Factor 2) than they were in either of the other two categories, regardless of developmental level.



Table 1  
Correlations between Ego Development and Attitudes toward Women in Authoritative Positions

	(Factor 1) Acceptance of Women in Authoritative Positions	(Factor 2) Female-Specific Bar- riers	(Factor 3) Traits Necessary for Success	Composite
1984 Men (in 1984)	0.12 (N=42)	0.11 (N=43)	0.15 (N=43)	0.14 (N=42)
1984 Men (in 1984)	0.46 (N=5)	[-0.49] (N=5)	0.81 (N=5)	0.21 (N=5)
1995-1999 Men	0.27 (N=34)	0.39 (N=34)	0.09 (N=34)	0.31 (N=34)
1984 (in 1994) & 1995-1999 Men	0.28 (N=39)	0.23 (N=39)	0.24 (N=39)	0.34 (N=39)

Table 2  
Mean Scores by Developmental Level and WAMS Factors

Level of Development and Group	(Factor 1) Acceptance of Women in Authoritative Positions	(Factor 2) Female-Specific Bar- riers	(Factor 3) Traits Necessary for Success
High: 1984 Men (in 1984)	5.79 (N=12)	4.70 (N=12)	5.53 (N=12)
Middle: 1984 Men (in 1984)	5.72 (N=72)	4.52 (N=20)	5.71 (N=20)
Low: 1984 Men (in 1984)	5.27 (N=10)	3.88 (N=10)	5.00 (N=10)
High: 1995-1999 Men	5.48 (N=10)	5.22 (N=10)	5.84 (N=10)
Middle: 1995-1999 Men	4.62 (N=22)	4.26 (N=22)	5.51 (N=22)
Low: 1995-1999 Men	3.50 (N=2)	3.40 (N=2)	5.50 (N=2)

Table 3  
Analysis of Variance for 1984 Men (in 1984)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	d.f.	Mean Square	F-Ratio
Between	8.43	2	4.22	1.58
Within	33.78	2	16.89	25.20*

\*p<.05

Men from 1984 Tested in 1994. Pearson Product Moment Correlations were computed between subjects' scores on the EI-ISB, the three factors measured by the WAMS, and overall scores from the WAMS (Table 1). Although the small sample size ( $N=5$ ) should be considered, a high positive correlation (0.81) was found between all participant scores on the EI-ISB and Factor 3 (Traits Necessary for Success) on the WAMS. This would indicate that a relationship exists between participants' levels of identity achievement and perceptions of women as possessing the traits necessary for success in authoritative positions. On the other hand, the negative correlation (-0.49) found between participant scores on the EI-ISB and Factor 2 (Female-Specific Barriers) may suggest that the higher the level of development, the less accepting men become toward women in authoritative positions due to biological differences.

Two patterns emerged. First, all EI-ISB and WAMS factors were strongly correlated in a positive direction, except for one. Second, the exception to the trend among participant scores toward increasing acceptance of women into authoritative positions based on level of identity achievement was Factor 2 (Female-Specific Barriers). In this case, a strong negative correlation emerged, indicating that participants reported less acceptance of women as they (men) progressed toward identity achievement (Table 4). An Analysis of Variance using EI-ISB and WAMS factors indicated that participants scored significantly lower on Factor 2 of the WAMS (Female-Specific Barriers) than on the other two Factors (Table 5).

Subject scores from 1984 and 1994 were also compared for similarities and differences, using Pearson Product Moment Correlations conducted with their scores on the EI-ISB from 1984 and 1994 and on the WAMS from 1984 and 1994 (Table 6). Although the correlation between original participant scores from 1984 and 1994 on the EI-ISB was not significant (.03), the correlation between men's scores from 1984 and 1994 on the WAMS was significant (0.84). The positive correlation between the 1984 and 1994 WAMS scores suggests that scoring patterns did not change significantly between administrations. Although the low correlation between participants' EI-ISB scores from 1984 and 1994 might suggest that scoring patterns had changed, an Analysis of Variance procedure did not prove any significance.

Men from 1995-1999. Pearson Product Moment correlations were computed with all participant scores on the EI-ISB and WAMS. These results did not prove significantly different from zero. An Analysis of

Variance procedure was conducted on data from men in 1995-1999, with participants divided by level of ego development. Although there was a trend among subject mean scores in the direction of more acceptance of women in authoritative positions based on level of ego development (Table 2), these results did not prove significant. An Analysis of Variance procedure conducted with student means from the WAMS proved statistically significant (Table 7). Results indicated that mean scores among the groups (levels of ego development) were lower on Factor 2 (Female-Specific Barriers).

An Analysis of Variance procedure was also conducted with data from the WAMS, specifically examining the ego development levels characterized for study as “High” (Identity-Achieved) and “Middle (including Moratorium and Identity-Foreclosed). The ANOVA conducted with Middle Level students’ mean scores on the WAMS indicated that they scored lower on Female-Specific Barriers (Table 8). On the other hand, no significance was indicated by an ANOVA conducted with High Level subjects.

Finally, student scores from 1995-1999 were correlated with original subject scores in 1994. Both EI-ISB and WAMS scores were examined. Pearson Product Moment correlations of 1.0 resulted from both a comparison of the original subject EI-ISB scores in 1994 and those from the 1995-1999 group; as well as a comparison of the original subject WAMS scores in 1994 and those from the 1995-1999 group.

Table 4  
Correlations by Developmental Level and WAMS Factors

Level of Development and Group	Number of Responses	(Factor 1) Acceptance of Women	(Factor 2) Female-Specific Bar- riers	(Factor 3) Traits Necessary for Success
High: 1984 Men (in 1994)	3	1.00*	-0.72	0.87*
1995-1999 Men	10	0.28	0.44	0.06
1984 Men (in 1984) & 1995-1999 Men	13	0.29	0.20	0.37
Middle: 1984 Men (in 1994)	2	1.00*	1.00*	1.00*
1995-1999 Men	22	0.01	-0.01	-0.08
1984 Men (in 1984) & 1995-1999 Men	24	-0.04	-0.09	-0.13

\* Denotes High Correlation

Table 5  
Analysis of Variance for 1984 Men (1984)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	d.f.	Mean Square	F-Ratio
Between	2.95	2	1.47	4.87*
Within	3.63	12	0	

\*p<.05

Table 6  
Correlations Between Scores for 1984 Men (in 1984) and 1984 Men (in 1994) on WAMS and EI-ISB

1984 Men (in 1984) & 1984 (in 1994) WAMS:	0.84
1984 Men (in 1984) & 1984 (in 1994) EI-ISB:	0.03

Table 7  
Analysis of Variance for 1995-1999 Men

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	d.f.	Mean Square	F-Ratio
Between	23.3	2	11.65	6.60*
Within	174.84	99	1.77	

\*p<.05

Table 8  
Analysis of Variance for Middle Level 1995-1999 Men

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	d.f.	Mean Square	F-Ratio
Between	18.08	2	9.04	5.17*
Within	110.09	63	1.75	

\*p<.05

## Discussion

Erikson's Developmental Model. Although the author had hypothesized that adolescent males would become more accepting of women in authoritative positions as they progressed developmentally, the data did not support this hypothesis. Similar results were reported throughout the various phases of the study, including analyses with subjects from 1984 (in 1984) and with participants from 1995-1999. A negative correlation between level of ego development and Female-Specific Barriers was indicated.

Generally, it appears that all subjects reported consistently stereotypic and nonaccepting views of women in authoritative positions, scoring significantly lower on attitude surveys in the area of female-specific barriers. This trend remained consistent at all developmental levels.

Specific Attitudes toward Women in Authoritative Positions. There are many indications in Eriksonian theory that accepting attitudes toward women will increase as an adolescent progresses developmentally. Significant results were also obtained, however, in regard to scoring patterns on the WAMS across samples. Participants indicated less acceptance of women in authoritative positions, based on female-specific barriers. This pattern held true for all developmental levels.

Considerations. Authors, such as Burnett, Anderson, and Heppner (1998), suggest that factors, other than Erikson's model of identity achievement, should be considered. If higher education aspires to facilitate increasing acceptance of women into authoritative positions, it appears that Erikson's model may have limited application. Purkey (2000) also describes these limitations in his reflections on inviting/disinviting environments.

Another interesting observation in regard to data collected from subjects in 1995-1999 related to the question of Erikson's "crisis". Subjects at the middle level scored significantly lower in the area of female-specific barriers on the WAMS than subjects at either the high or low levels of identity achievement, although results from men retested in 1994 indicated more stereotypic views of women as they (participants) became identity-achieved. These results may suggest that nonacceptance is "peaking" during the "middle level" and, perhaps, solidifying at the point of identity achievement/resolution. If the middle level represents Erikson's point of "crisis"



where the individual is making psychosocial choices, these results underscore the important role that higher education plays in countering the "...stereotypical and maladaptive messages (sent) to girls in unintentional but subtle ways..." (Pajares and Zeldin, 1999, p. 62) that emerge during late adolescence.

Finally, men at the high level of ego development did evidence some higher (mean) score "trends" among all those tested, especially in the 1995-1999 group. Since these students were at the high level of development, according to Marcia's EI-ISB, (commitment) subscores on the EI-ISB could highlight factors critical for the development of more accepting attitudes. For example, analyses of data from (commitment) subscores could result in an examination of other developmental factors that are critical for acceptance. Studies, such as those conducted by Carlson and Carlson (1985) and Kroger and Haslett (1991), suggest that examining Marcia's subscores may provide insight into identity achievement. Kroger and Haslett affirm that, "Developments across identity components are not parallel..." (p. 323).

Implications for the Future. The author proposes that although Erikson's model may reflect contemporary issues in higher education, it is either incomplete or inappropriate for an organizational culture that espouses enhanced acceptance. In fact, utilizing this model with late adolescents may relay messages to both men and women that exacerbate gender stereotypes and further limit occupational opportunities for women. If Erikson's model presumes that students can be "identity-achieved/resolved" through either the maintenance of nonaccepting attitudes or exacerbation of nonaccepting, gender-biased attitudes toward women, then it should be viewed as limited or inappropriate. Certainly, it cannot be viewed as inviting.

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