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The Jingle-Jangle Jungle of Identity:
Historical Perspective and Future Directions

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Abstract

Hundreds of identity definitions used in the literature have resulted in terminological confusion: the jingle-jangle jungle of identity. The philosophical and historical origins of the identity concept are briefly reviewed, and the elaborations of identity theory by James and Erikson (which form the theoretical background for the majority of contemporary identity research) are critically examined. A multilevel person-in-context systems framework that organizes identity-related phenomena and terminology within a set of hierarchical levels of organization, specification, and integration is proposed as a way to resolve terminological problems and integrate synchronic and diachronic descriptions of identity. Systematic empirical and conceptual distinctions across levels of the person-in-context system can be used to clarify the nature of identity contents, processes, and structures.

The Jingle-Jangle Jungle of Identity: Historical Perspective and Future Directions

Questions about the nature of human “identity” extend far back into the histories of both psychology and philosophy. Insofar as these questions pertain to the human experience of a psychological self, if not to the very existence of such a self, they have probably been pondered by humans for millennia. Despite the apparent volume of thinking about the identity concept – thinking characterized by inquiries ranging from the casual conversation to the rigorous scientific investigation – it is a testament to the complexity of this concept that we are still struggling to achieve a clear understanding of human identity. Not surprisingly, this struggle to understand identity was referred to by James (1890) as the “most puzzling puzzle with which psychology has to deal” (p. 330).

Contemporary psychologists approach this struggle with the benefit of over 100 years of empirical investigation. On this basis, alone, you might expect that we – as a scientific community committed to generating cumulative knowledge – have advanced commensurately our understanding of identity. I question this expectation, particularly as it has been embodied within the recent psychological literature. In some ways, our understanding is highly detailed and empirically grounded, even if not well integrated within a coherent theoretical framework. In other ways, we seem to be as far from understanding identity as we have ever been.

Following Erikson (1968), who said “to review the concept of identity means to sketch its history” (p. 15), the main purpose of this paper is to critically examine historical developments in conceptualizations of identity, first by reference to their philosophical roots and, subsequently, by reference to the contributions of William James and Erik Erikson. Although sociological meanings of the term identity will not be ignored, there is enough confusion and complexity associated with the term identity to warrant focusing mainly how the term has been used where

referring to the subjective and objective manifestations of psychological content and processes (see Brubaker & Cooper [2000] and Gleason [1983], respectively, for recent critiques of sociological and historical usages of the term identity). For example, the concepts of identity, self, and personality have been used interchangeably in so many contexts that any attempt to clarify the meaning of the term identity must also contend with the meanings of the terms self and personality. Although I do not elaborate much on this particular source of terminological confusion, appreciating the territory that we are about to enter will ease the challenging and formidable tasks that go along with navigating the jingle-jangle jungle of identity.

The jingle-jangle jungle of identity, as described here, is a particular expression of some basic questions that humans have had about their “true” nature as they experience it within the context of wide range of “other” phenomena. The concepts of person and context are as implicit, if not explicit, within most of these questions as they are within most of the studies conducted in the humanities, arts, and sciences. We have generated vast knowledge about the physical, psychological, and social characteristics of human existence. Unfortunately, the language and images we use to describe these characteristics vary so widely across specialty areas, across individual investigators within these specialty areas, and all of this across time that it is often difficult for individuals who work in these areas to communicate easily about these basic questions. Matters become more confusing, of course, when the same word or image is used differently by different people. It is my hope that the following historical review, along with the multilevel person-in-context systems framework I use to interpret this review, will sharpen the focus on areas of agreement and disagreement about the “proper” use of the term identity as it has been, and continues to be, applied to questions about persons in context.

In taking an historical approach to understanding identity, I realize that many readers will ask “so what?” and think “who cares what people *used* to think about identity.” In response to these questions, I hope to convince you that placing the identity concept into historical perspective is a useful way to understand current misunderstandings and inconsistencies, as well as potential solutions, related to the use of the term identity. Put simply, we fail to contribute effectively to the social sciences in general, and to scientific psychological knowledge in particular, to the extent that we fail to come to terms with the historical foundations and subsequent legacy of the jingle-jangle jungle of identity.

Seminaring on Identity

Beginning in the fall of 1996, I participated in a bi-weekly postdoctoral identity seminar that focused on papers that were written from a developmental perspective and that included general theoretical reviews of some identity literature (e.g., Archer, 1993; Adams & Marshall, 1996; Berzonsky, 1988; Damon & Hart, 1982; Grotevant, 1993; Harter, 1990; Kroger, 1993; Marcia, 1993; Reid & Deaux, 1996; Waterman, 1993). During the first year, I found over 500 terms that had been used to define or describe identity. These 500 terms probably do not refer to 500 unique psychological phenomena or to a single underlying phenomenon, and in the absence of a unifying theoretical framework, it was difficult to understand how they could provide more answers than questions about the nature of identity. Even more troubling than the sheer volume of words used to refer to identity was the dearth of instances where the concept of identity was *explicitly* defined.

In order to gauge the extent to which the seminar participants were deriving some consensual meanings about the term identity from our readings and discussions, I gave each

participant a set of 500 terms, each appearing on a single slip of paper, along with a stack of blank envelopes and the following printed instructions:

- In this packet you will find a collection of cards that refer to concepts related to identity and self.
- Consider each card, one at a time, and place it into a category.
- You can form as many or as few categories as you would like.
- Use each card in one category only.
- You can add your own cards if you feel it is necessary.
- Place each group of cards into an envelope.
- Label each envelope with a category name.

After the materials were returned, we searched through each participant's envelopes¹ until we found the one containing the term "personal identity." We then created a list of all the terms contained within this particular category. After obtaining lists associated with the term personal identity for each participant, we examined the extent to which these lists contained common terms (the number of elements per list ranged from 48 to 154 and averaged 80). Surprisingly, there was no term common to every list other than the term used to select the lists to begin with, personal identity. One term, self-knowledge, was common to 4 out of the 5 lists; and 13 terms were common to 3 out of the 5 lists (i.e., ego identity, self-attributes, self-concept, self-theory, self-conception, self-definition, self-description, self-image, self-perception, self-portrait, self-representation, sense of self, theory of self).

Block (personal communication, September 2, 1998) has used the expression "jingle-jangle jungle" when referring to cases of terminological confusion like the one described here. The meaning of this phrase was partially derived from observations that were made barely 25 years after Wundt founded his psychological laboratory back in 1879, when "it was remarked by a Professor Aikins that the science of psychology frequently manifests what he called 'the jingle fallacy,' a circumstance wherein two things that are quite different may be labeled equivalently, and thus the unwary may consider them interchangeable" (Block, 1995, on Thorndike, 1904).

Shortly thereafter, the “jangle fallacy” was described as a circumstance wherein two things that are the same, or almost the same, are labeled differently (Block, 1995, on Kelley, 1927). The consequences produced by this “hasty, hazy lazy use of language” (Block, 1995, p. 209), particularly over the course of nearly a century and a half of psychological theory and research, were aptly described by Block as “severe, even crippling, terminological problems” (p. 209).

Although Block (1995) was referring specifically to the jingle-jangle jungle problem that was evident within the personality literature on “traits,” this same basic problem exists within most subdivisions of psychology (Staats, 1999) and is, at least partially, a function of authors’ overly restrictive focus on recent publications when reviewing the literature relevant to their work. Reflect on the words spoken by Gordon Allport during his 1940 presidential address at the 47th annual convention of the American Psychological Association: “Whether due to a lack of respect for past work...or the editorial guillotine...the fact remains that as research accumulates in our archives, it is cited less frequently in our current publications” (p. 54). This problem has worsened over the last 6 decades as the number of books, journals, and papers published on a monthly basis has steadily increased. In addition to this ahistorical orientation to psychological concepts, the sheer volume of papers that are published on a monthly basis makes it difficult, if not impossible, for authors to read, cite, and integrate all of the conceptual and operational contributions that are relevant to their own work, a presumable fact that is seemingly ensured, or at least practically exacerbated, by the academic “publish or perish” (PoP) subculture. The net result of these and other sociohistorical forces (cf. Benjamin, 2001; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2001) is a language of scientific psychology that is in a state of terminological confusion (cf. Griggs, Proctor, & Bujak-Johnson, 2002; Staats, 1999). This ongoing differentiation of the

language of psychology, occurring without a commensurate process of integration, can only yield increasing amounts of fragmentation and confusion.

There seems to be no easy solution to the jingle-jangle jungle problem, but recognizing and acknowledging this alarming trend, both as individuals and as a scientific field of inquiry, is a critical first step. The steps that follow this awakening will likely include placing greater value on (a) synthetic reviews that deal explicitly with both jingle and jangle fallacies within and across all areas of investigation related to a given concept as well as on (b) the development of integrative theories of persons in context. A serious re-evaluation and redefinition of our PoP subculture is also long overdue and would be a constructive step to take if we are serious about confronting these growing terminological problems. In response to these general issues, and to the jingle-jangle jungle of identity problem in particular, I initiated the historical review and theoretical analysis described below.

Philosophical Foundations for Questions about Identity

The question, “What is identity?”, is not simply a contemporary question; rather, it is a perennial question that seems to have first become an issue when humans attained personal self-consciousness, or self-reflective thought (Rychlak, 1997). Jaynes (1976) argued that “consciousness... first occurs in the history of this planet... in Mesopotamia toward the end of the second millennium B.C.” (p. 246). This occurrence reflected changes in how information was processed by the brain and, specifically, in the development of the human capacity to reflect consciously on what Jaynes referred to as the “analog-I” (i.e., the mental representation of the self in context); “the resultant subjective identity enabled the individual to frame a narrative account of his or her behavior” (Rychlak, p. 141). The precise point in time when self-reflective thought was first experienced by humans, either by a few “advanced” individuals or en masse, is not particularly

important for contemporary formulations of the identity concept. Similarly, the fact that self-reflective thought appears to emerge as an important factor in both evolutionary and personal histories is viewed better as an interesting historical fact than as the basis for an explanatory framework. Simply acknowledging the fact that self-reflective thought allows for the kind of experiences that make issues of identity noticeable, interesting, and relevant in the first place is all that is necessary to provide a basic assumptive framework that can be used to understand historical and contemporary solutions to the “identity problem.”

Skipping over several thousand years, or however much time might have elapsed since the advent of human self-reflectivity, we come to the 17th century work of Descartes. Descartes (1637/1985) was struggling to find – beyond *any* level of personal doubt – any substantive reality attributable, at all, to his personal psychological existence. His solution to this personal challenge came in the form of what became, for him, a fundamental truth: *Cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am).² This “truth” is a good starting point for modern attempts to comprehend the nature of personal identity because it focuses on what Descartes believed was a basic fact of human existence; that is, the only thing of which there can be no doubt is that “I” exist. This basic form of self-awareness can be viewed as a natural consequence of the capacity for self-reflection and as a prerequisite for the experience of, and questions about, one’s own identity. About a century later, Hume (1739/1878) argued that

The controversy concerning identity is not merely a dispute of words. For when we attribute identity, in an improper sense, to variable or interrupted objects, our mistake is not confin’d to the expression, but is commonly attended with a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable, or at least with a propensity to such fictions (p. 536).

Hume was arguing, in part, that because experience could be described best as changing constantly, it would be inaccurate to use the term “identity” when referring to this experience.³

Hume’s position was a logical consequence of applying the basic dictionary definition of identity to questions about the nature of personal identity. For example, the first definition of identity found in Webster’s dictionary (McKechnie, 1979) is “the condition or fact of being the same in all qualities under consideration; sameness; oneness” (p. 902). Since Hume readily acknowledged that the *sense* of identity was produced as a function of memory, it is clear that he was applying the criterion of “sameness” to the actual contents of experience (as opposed to the “sense” of these contents or to the memories of this content) when determining whether or not the concept of personal identity was meaningful; that is, according to Hume, assigning the term “identity” to something requires that this something remains substantively identical over time. Descartes also used the sameness criterion, but he applied this criterion to the fact of his experience, alone, as opposed to the content of this experience. The divergent foci of these two great thinkers typified centuries of philosophical debate and presaged the need for psychologists to explicitly distinguish between identity processes and identity content, a distinction that appears to be a basic prerequisite for resolving the terminological confusion relating to the concept of identity.

Identity According to James

Over a century after Hume, James (1890) exploited the distinction between psychological processes and psychological content when describing personal identity within the context of his larger theory of the “Self.” James’ writing on these topics, particularly as found in his chapter entitled “The Consciousness of Self,” represents a significant transitional event in the history of psychology by chronicling the move from a purely philosophical analysis of self and identity to

the emerging scientific analysis of these psychological concepts. He effected this transition largely by grounding his conclusions within the confines of what could be known through direct personal experience, thereby providing an “empirical” basis for his theories of self and identity. In addition, by discussing his views on identity within the context of a more extensive theory of self, James highlighted the benefits of placing conceptual definitions within an empirically derived nomological network.

James’ Self Theory

Due to the relevance that James’ theory of self had for his conceptualizations of personal identity, it is worth reviewing briefly some key features of his Self theory prior to discussing his specific views about identity. In the broadest sense, James defined the Self as “the sum total” of everything people can call their own, including not only the body and psychological characteristics but also property, family, friends, as well as “reputation and works” (p. 291). According to James (1890), “*the constituents of the Self* may be divided into two classes, those which make up respectively—(a) The material Self; (b) The social Self; (c) The spiritual Self;⁴ and (d) The pure Ego” (p. 292). The material self was described mainly in terms of the physical body and material possessions; the social self was described in terms of the “recognition” we get from other people; and the spiritual self was described as our “inner or subjective being,⁵ [our] psychic faculties or dispositions, taken concretely; not the bare principle of personal Unity, or ‘pure’ Ego” (p. 296). The material, social, and spiritual selves constitute the basic “objects” (i.e., content) of experience, or what he referred to as the “Empirical Me” (or, me selves); whereas the “pure Ego” constitutes the basic “subject” (i.e., process) of experience, or what he referred to as the “I” self.

James' (1890) description and discussion of the me selves corresponds closely to what contemporary psychologists refer to as the self-concept or the self-theory. These concepts were studied increasingly closely by psychologists during the 20th century, and aside from the tendency of 20th century psychologists to conflate the conscious process of reflecting on the self with the pre-conscious objects of this reflection, this material is relatively straightforward. James' description and discussion of the I-self, on the other hand, is more difficult to interpret – both in the terms James used and in the terms developed during the 20th century. Two basic questions were addressed: What is the actual substance of the I-self? and What is the human experience of the I-self? After lengthy reviews of various philosophical positions on the substantive nature of the I-self, James concluded that it is enough to know that “it exists; and that in everyone, at an early age, the distinction between thought as such, and what it is ‘of’ or ‘about,’ has become familiar to the mind” (pp. 296-297). He relegated any further conclusions to either metaphysical speculation or future scientific discoveries. Specifically, James maintained that “the reality of such pulses of thought, with their function of knowing...[are] the ultimate kind of fact that the psychologist must admit to exist (p. 338) and that “if *the passing thought be the directly verifiable existent which no school has hitherto doubted it to be, then that thought is itself the thinker*, and psychology need not look beyond (p. 401).

Assuming the existence of the I-self, an assumption that was nearly identical to Descartes' *Cogito, ergo sum*, James (1890) turned his attention to questions about how this I-self was experienced within the stream of consciousness. James labeled the experience of the I-self as “Thought” and described it as “the present mental state [that] binds the individual past facts with each other and with itself” (p. 338). He maintained also that Thought “does not exist until the Thought is there” (338) and that “the Thought is a perishing and not an immortal or incorruptible

thing” (345). Despite viewing Thought as a transient phenomenon within the stream of consciousness, James assigned to it some important psychological functions. For example, he argued that experiencing particular me selves was dependent on distinguishing what was me from what was not me; therefore, “there must be an agent of the appropriating and disowning.... It is the Thought to whom the various ‘constituents’ are known. That Thought is a vehicle of choice as well as of cognition” (p. 340). Summarizing his discussion of the Self, James made the following proposal: “*Hereafter let us use the words ME and I for the empirical person and the judging Thought*” (371).

James’ Identity Theory

James (1890) built his conceptualization of personal identity upon his theory of Self. We have seen that James assigned a central place within his Self theory to both the experience of Thought (process) and to the objects of this Thought (content). We have also seen that James viewed Thought as an essentially transient phenomenon. In contrast to Hume, however, James was not prepared to abandon the concept of identity on the grounds of this kind of transience. He posed the following rhetorical question to help us understand his solution to resolving this apparent contradiction in terms: “How would it be if the Thought, the present judging Thought, instead of being in any way substantially or transcendently identical with the former owner of the past self, merely inherited [its] ‘title,’ and thus stood as [its] legal representative now?” (p. 339). In other words, despite acknowledging that each successive Thought constitutes a unique experience, James argued that each successive Thought embodied in experience all that was present in each previous Thought. Specifically, James argued:

it is a patent fact of consciousness that a transmission like this actually occurs. Each pulse of cognitive consciousness, each Thought, dies away and is replaced by another. The

other, among the things it knows, knows its own predecessor.... Each later Thought, knowing and including thus the Thoughts which went before, is the final receptacle – and appropriating them is the final owner – of all that they contain and own. Each Thought is thus born an owner, and dies owned, transmitting whatever it realized as its Self to its own later proprietor. (339)

This transmission of “whatever it realized as its Self” from one experience within the stream of consciousness to each successive experience illustrates how the *sense* of personal identity corresponds to both a constantly changing stream of content and a Thought that appropriates some (or something) of this content as its own. Despite the transient nature of I-self experience that bothered Hume so much, James used a more differentiated model of the self-system to illustrate how the present judging Thought – which was not to be confused with the contents of consciousness or even the me-self contents – provides the basis for individuals’ *sense* of personal identity by bringing together, in consciousness, past and present self-related content. In this way, James staked the core of his identity theory on the somewhat tenuous grounds of the I-self component of his Self theory, thereby highlighting the most difficult questions about the phenomenological experience of having a personal identity.

According to James (1890): “each of us is animated by a *direct feeling of regard for [our] own pure principle of individual existence*” (p. 318), or “that pure principle of personal identity” (p. 330), the nature of this principle being “the most puzzling puzzle with which psychology has to deal” (p. 330). Assuming there is truth in these words, we should not be too surprised that our attempts to describe this experience of being aware of our own individuality has preoccupied and befuddled us for centuries.

James (1890) described the “pure” principle as an “abstract numerical principle of identity”⁶ (p. 318) and, contrasting it with the *objects* of experience, “as the general form or condition under which the regard and the thinking go on in me at all” (p. 321). At its core, this principle corresponds to those oft troubling concepts such as soul, pure ego, pure consciousness, transcendental ego, and to the concept James used to replace them: Thought. In other words, James maintained that it was Thought, or the I-self, that embodied this pure principle of individual existence, and it did so through its capacity for “subjective synthesis.” This so-called subjective synthesis was viewed as a basic function of the I-self and as integral to all human experiences; that is, “this sort of *bringing of things together into the object of a single judgment* is of course essential to all thinking” (331) – “the thinking them is *thinking* them together” (331).

This pure principle of identity – and the subjective synthesis in Thought that allows for it – was, for James, not enough to account completely for the sense of personal identity. The reason for this is simple: The process of subjective synthesis in Thought applies to all objects of thought and not simply to components of the self system. So, although the process of subjective synthesis might be enough to signify the *fact* of one’s existence, it can not achieve what James understood as the *sense* of personal identity without having as the objects of this synthesis the past and present me selves. When the single judging Thought brings these selves together, then selfsameness, or the sense of personal identity, can be achieved. Otherwise, the subjective experience of selfsameness was viewed by James as similar to the experiences of sameness that we have regularly with respect to any of the other facts of our experience (e.g., that’s the same house I saw yesterday). In short:

The sense of personal identity is not, then, this mere synthetic form essential to all thought. It is the sense of sameness perceived *by* thought and predicated of things

thought-about. These things are a present self and a self of yesterday. The thought not only thinks them both, but thinks that they are identical. (p. 332)

and, further:

The sense of our own personal identity, then, is exactly like any one of our other perceptions of sameness among phenomena. It is a conclusion grounded either on the resemblance in a fundamental respect, or on the continuity before the mind, of the phenomena compared. (p. 334)

According to James, then, the *sense* of personal identity was best defined in terms of the *process* of the I-self perceiving sameness across time among the me selves. James described this sense of identity in terms of the awareness of both the *fact* of one's mere existence (which was described as including the recognition of one's individuality, or uniqueness) and the perception of this existence as being continuous over time. The actual substance, or objects, of this awareness (i.e., the constituents of personal identity that were being experienced), were described mainly as me-self objects and sparingly as I-self objects, or the elusive "pure ego."

The substantive reality of personal identity was approached by James from what can be described best as a phenomenological perspective, or what he eventually referred to as a "radical empiricist" perspective (1909/1977, p. 136). From this perspective, human knowledge about the substantive reality of personal identity was located in the facts of experience as they existed within the stream of consciousness. The substantive reality of the me-self components, or the "empirical me," being reflected regularly within the stream of consciousness, were mainly derived and substantiated by James on the basis of the existence of external objects of reality. Nevertheless, James (1890) also described the substance of personal identity in terms of internal objects of reality:

Resemblance among the parts of a continuum of feelings (especially bodily feelings) experienced along with things widely different in all other regards, thus constitutes the real and verifiable “personal identity” which we feel. There is no other identity than this in the “stream” of subjective consciousness. (p. 336)

This reference to “bodily feelings” referred back to his description of the substantive constituents of the spiritual self, or our “inner, subjective being.” Specifically, in an attempt to locate empirical evidence supporting the conclusion that humans could gain indirect personal experience of their inner psychological selves, despite having no direct experience of their inner psychological self, James provided a detailed account of various sensations that he was personally able to associate with these inner aspects of his psychological being. For example, after detailing a number of bodily sensations associated with what he described as his inner subjective being, James stated:

In a sense, then, it may be truly said that, in one person at least, *the “Self of selves,” when carefully examined, is found to consist mainly of the collection of these peculiar motions in the head or between the head and throat. ...[and that] it would follow that our entire feeling of spiritual activity, or what commonly passes by that name [and what we now call “psychological activity”], is really a feeling of bodily activities whose exact nature is by most [people] overlooked.* (pp. 300-301)

To the extent that James described these “feelings” as constituents of the “empirical me,” we can see that James viewed the substantive constituents of personal identity as nothing other than this empirical me, or me selves.

The substantive reality of the I-self component was the more difficult question. James (1890) rejected the notion that either the I-self or the subjective experience of personal identity

were best understood in terms of some kind of permanent soul-like substance, or even as a “transcendental ego” (as defined by Kant). Rather, James concluded that both the I-self and the subjective fact of personal identity were best conceptualized in terms of that part of the stream of consciousness that exists in the present moment as “pure thought” – this pure thought was assigned the status of substantive reality on the basis of its ability to appropriate me-self components and past thoughts and to recognize them as belonging to the same I-self; these appropriation and recognition functions were enough to justify James’ belief that the I-self was a “real” entity.

Interestingly, while recognizing that it was the I-self that was doing the sensing of the personal identity, James (1890) was able to conceptualize the growing, substantive, personal identity, without assuming that this I-self had any directly observable characteristics in and of itself:

The present moment of consciousness is thus...the darkest in the whole series. It may feel its own immediate existence...but nothing can be known *about* it till it be dead and gone. Its appropriations are therefore less to *itself* than to the most intimately felt *part of its present Object, the body, and the central adjustments.*⁷ *These are the real nucleus of our personal identity*, and it is their actual existence, realized as a solid present fact, which makes us say “as sure *as I exist*, those past facts were part of myself.” They are the kernel to which the *represented* parts of the Self are assimilated, accreted and knit on; and even were Thought entirely unconscious of itself in the act of thinking, these “warm” parts of its present object would be a firm basis on which the consciousness of personal identity would rest. Such consciousness, then, as a psychological fact, can be fully described without supposing any other agent than a succession of perishing thoughts, endowed with

the functions of appropriation and rejection, and of which some can know and appropriate or reject objects already known, appropriated, or rejected by the rest (pp. 341-342).

Although James left the question of the substantive nature of the I-self largely unresolved, it is important to recognize that, despite lacking the benefit of over a century of empirical research on psychological content and processes, he described the substance of personal identity in terms of psychophysiological content and, further, that he did so by reference to the distinction between substantive self-system components (e.g., past and present me selves, or self-system content) and the selecting and rejecting *processes* of Thought (i.e., the I-self, or self-system processes) that were applied to the consciously represented, or phenomenological, contents of experience. As discussed in a later section of this paper, the conceptualization and operationalization of these conscious and unconscious self-system contents and processes provide guideposts for extricating ourselves from the jingle-jangle jungle of identity.

In summary, James (1890) used a relatively complex theory of Self to address questions about that which the I, as knower, is reflecting upon and, consequently, about that which has been referred to for centuries as identity, by some, and identity experiences by others. Questions about identity and identity-related experiences are implicated by some of our most basic human experiences, such as those described by terms like self-awareness, self-realization, self-consciousness, and self-reflection.⁸ According to James, personal identity and the sense of personal identity are separate aspects of the Self. Consequently, understanding the concept of personal identity, for James, presupposed a basic understanding of the complexity of Self. In light of advances in psychological theory over the past century, we can see more clearly how James construed personal identity as an objective property of the self system that corresponds

closely to what we would now refer to as a set of psychological and psychophysiological attributes. In contrast to these attributes, James construed the *sense* of personal identity in terms of the phenomenological experience of the I-self reflecting on these attributes. This distinction between personal attributes and personal experiences of these attributes reflects the crucial, yet often overlooked, distinction between objective psychological content and subjective psychological processes to which we will return in a later section.

Identity According to Erikson

About half of a century after James expressed his views on identity, Erikson (1946, 1950, 1956, 1959, 1968, 1970, 1974, 1981/1996) embarked upon the most ambitious treatment of the identity concept to date. The historical record that documents Erikson's "identity theory" is as complex and multilayered as the man himself (cf. Hoare, 2002). Here, in the core of the paper, I examine critically the development of Erikson's ideas about identity to provide a basis for evaluating the contribution of his work to our contemporary, collective understanding of human identity (particularly in light of the historical contributions that preceded him). In an effort to ease the journey through Erikson's thinking about identity, I begin by sketching briefly the layout of his version of the jungle.

Overview. Erikson was interested mainly in understanding people in context. He used the term "group identity" to represent the social context, the term "psychosocial identity" to represent the contextualized person, and the term "ego identity" to represent the person's capacity to coordinate (or balance) their sense of self within the complex, dynamic interactions among biological, psychological, and environmental forces. Given his psychoanalytic background and desire to advance our understanding of the social context, Erikson tended to address identity questions first by reference to the ego, second by reference to information

originating from the socius, and lastly to whatever other concepts appeared to be useful for linking the ego and the socius. Along the way, Erikson used a wide variety of identity-specific terms (e.g., ego-, self-, personal-, inner-, core-, sexual-, negative-, pseudo-, psychosocial-, historical-, national-, cultural-, group-, and public-identity, as well as just plain “identity”), yet focused mainly on the concepts of ego-identity (as related to integrating social information), self-identity (as related to integrating past, present, and future self-images), and psychosocial identity (as related to the fit between the person and context). In the end, Erikson broadened his (and our) view of identity to include elements from a wide range of historical and contemporary personality, social, and developmental theories, pushing researchers and practitioners to embrace quite a bit more than what we might reasonably expect from most professionals in any field of inquiry.

Erikson’s early thoughts on identity theory. In the opening chapter of “Childhood and Society,” after describing the case of a client who was suffering from what currently might be called post traumatic stress disorder, Erikson (1950) revealed some of his early thinking about the nature of identity:

What impressed me most was the loss in these men of a sense of identity. They knew who they were; they had a personal identity. But it was as if, subjectively, their lives no longer hung together—and never would again. There was a central disturbance of what I then started to call ego identity. At this point it is enough to say the this sense of identity provides the ability to experience one’s self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly. (p. 38)

At this point in Erikson’s thinking and writing about the nature of identity, when he associated the concept of ‘knowing who (or that) I am’ with the term personal identity, Erikson revealed his

implicit definition of personal identity as corresponding to both Descartes' "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (or, the "fact" of one's existence) and James' "abstract numerical principle of identity" (or, one's direct awareness of the "pure principle of individual existence"). When, at the same time, Erikson (1950) associated the ability to experience one's self as having continuity and sameness with the term ego identity, he implicitly aligned his definition of ego identity with James' (1890) concept of personal identity (i.e., "*a conclusion grounded...on the resemblance...or on the continuity before the mind, of the phenomena compared*" [p. 334]). Note, also, that Erikson did not – at *this* particular point in his career – distinguish explicitly between the *experience* of identity (as process) and the underlying substantive constituents of this identity (as content); this would change.

In addition to this equation of ego identity with the ability to experience a *sense* of continuity, there was also the equation of the sense of continuity with the sense of one's life hanging together, or not, and the emotional qualities (e.g., "confidence" or "disturbance") that characterized this sense. For example, later in this book, where discussing identity specifically within the context of adolescence, Erikson (1950) provided the following, more detailed, definition of ego identity:

The integration now taking place in the form of ego identity is, as pointed out, more than the sum of the childhood identifications. It is the accrued experience of the ego's ability to integrate all identifications with the vicissitudes of the libido, with the aptitudes developed out of endowment, and with the opportunities offered in social roles. The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued sense of confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (p. 228).

These statements reflect closely similar statements made in 1946 (cf. p. 363) and reveal that one of the main differences between Erikson's initial conception of identity and those conceptions that had preceded him was his emphasis on the nature of individuals' *emotional experience* resulting from their particular *form* of continuity and sameness. Specifically, Erikson extended discussions about human identity beyond questions of mere existence (and of the continuity and sameness of this existence) by raising questions about (a) the "quality" of emotional experience associated with the continuity of existence (i.e., the "sense" of ego identity), (b) the configuration of identity elements associated with this experience (i.e., the "form" of ego identity), and (c) the relations between these experiences and the social environment (i.e., psychosocial identity).

Erikson's identity theory in metatheoretical perspective. Several points about Erikson's approach to identity theory should be noted before proceeding to a more thorough analysis of his evolving definition of identity. First, Erikson (1950) used process-oriented terms when describing what he referred to as personal and ego identity; that is, he focused mainly on the sense or experience of identity, using references to identity content mostly as a means to the end of describing the experiential process itself. This was no accident; as conceded in the following footnote, Erikson (1968) acknowledged his preference for this process-mode of thinking:

In individuals as well as in groups I prefer to speak of a "sense of identity" rather than "character structure" or "basic character." In nations too, clinical concepts would lead me to concentrate on the conditions, experiences, and behavior patterns which heighten or endanger a national sense of identity, rather than on a static national character. (p. 324)

The clinical phenomena that he found interesting, and the focus throughout most of his published work, was clearly reflected by his emphasis on process as opposed to content.

Second, notwithstanding Erikson's many contributions to the advancement of identity theory, by applying a different term (i.e., "ego" identity instead of "personal" identity) to what appears to be the same underlying phenomenon described by James (i.e., the *sense* of personal identity, or the experience of selfsameness and continuity), Erikson contributed to one of the first major identity-related jangle fallacies (i.e., referring to one phenomena using two different terms). Moreover, to the extent that experiences of the fact of one's existence differ substantially from experiences of the continuity of this existence over time, applying the term personal identity to both of these experiences (i.e., the former by Erikson and the latter by James) can be viewed as a classic illustration of the jingle fallacy (i.e., referring to two different phenomena with the same term). Taken together, Erikson's initial framing, labeling, and definition of identity terms signaled an historic turning point in the identity literature by marking both theoretical elaborations as well as the beginning of the current jingle-jangle jungle of identity concepts.

Finally, it is useful to recognize the extent to which Erikson's identity theory was grounded in psychoanalytic, or psychodynamic, personality theory. This grounding had relevance for how he integrated – sometimes explicitly but more often implicitly – the concepts of the "unconscious" mind and the "ego" into his theory of identity. Although Erikson deviated from standard psychodynamic formulations in a variety of ways, he seemed to take the unconscious mind for granted in many places where readers might have benefited from a more explicit and detailed analysis of the implications that the various levels of consciousness might have for understanding identity content and processes. Nevertheless, Erikson did make it clear in many places that questions about the nature of identity were related to more than the conscious awareness of identity content or processes.

Clarifying the relevance of the ego concept for Erikson's identity theory is also a complicated task because, like his treatment of the unconscious mind, he appeared generally to take the meaning of this concept for granted. Further, the precise functions and meanings that he assigned to the ego concept changed over the four decades during which he elaborated various aspects of his identity theory. Nevertheless, in order to appreciate better Erikson's contributions to the evolution of identity theory, it is useful to keep in mind the basic meaning he assigned to the term ego. For example, in 1946, Erikson defined ego as "the individual center of organized experience and reasonable planning" (p. 359) and "ego space" as consisting of "an internalized pattern" (p. 375) that results from years of previous experiences. In 1950, he provided the following description:

Between the id and the superego, then, the ego dwells. Consistently balancing and warding off the extreme ways of the other two, the ego keeps tuned to the reality of the historical day, testing perceptions, selecting memories, governing action, and otherwise integrating the individual's capacities of orientation and planning. (pp. 167-168)

The important point here is that Erikson's conceptualization of the ego, despite being popularized in terms of the ways that it differed from Freud's conceptualization, nevertheless corresponded closely to the classic psychoanalytic view of the ego as a gatekeeper, or an executive function, responsible for regulating and integrating experience, behavior, and the contents of conscious awareness. It is also important to note the extent to which Erikson's description of the ego can be understood, by contemporary standards, in terms of either enduring me-self content or transitory I-self processes.

The Core of Erikson's Identity Theory

Erikson was not insensitive to the implications of terminological confusion for our collective understanding of identity, and in the years following the publication of his 1950 book, he devoted a substantial amount of effort to addressing this confusion. For example, at the beginning of his classic book, “Identity: Youth and Crisis,” Erikson (1968) stated:

In the twenty years since the term was first employed in the particular sense to be discussed in this book, its popular usage has become so varied and its conceptual context so expanded that the time may seem to have come for a better and final delimitation of what identity is and what it is not. (p. 15)

In an effort to achieve this final delimitation, Erikson (1968) attempted to refine and define his terms. At the same time, however, he readily acknowledged that he used the term identity in a variety of different ways; saying, for example:

I have tried out the term identity almost deliberately—I like to think—in many different connotations. At one time it seemed to refer to a conscious sense of individual uniqueness, at another to an unconscious striving for a continuity of experience, and at a third, as a solidarity with a group's ideals. (p. 208)

One result of this conceptual experimentation was surely progress, as documented by the impact of Erikson's work on theory and research during the past 50 years; at the same time, there remains significant amounts of ambiguity and confusion about the meaning and utility of many of the terms (e.g., identity, personal identity, ego identity, self identity, and psychosocial identity) used by Erikson and those who refer to his work. Given Erikson's extensive and enduring influence on identity theory and research – and the extent to which contemporary social

scientists draw upon Erikson's work – it seems wise to review carefully exactly what identity is and is not, according to Erikson.

Elaborating the concepts of personal and ego identity. Throughout his work, Erikson used the evolving concept of “ego identity” as a cornerstone for explaining important aspects of human development. In his 1968 book – and in his 1956/1959 article, *The Problem of Ego Identity* – Erikson's conceptualization of ego identity was far more elaborated than the conceptualizations found in his 1950 book, “Childhood and Society.” Upon close inspection, the majority of theoretical advances in identity theory found in his 1968 book appear to be based on concepts articulated in his 1956 article. There were, however, several changes in identity-related terminology, and some entirely new concepts, added to the 1968 book. For example, although Erikson barely mentioned the term personal identity in his 1956 article – and did so, there, with no accompanying definition – he provided an explicit definition of this concept in his 1968 book:

Here it is necessary to differentiate between personal identity and ego identity. The conscious feeling of having a personal identity is based on two simultaneous observations: the perception of the selfsameness and continuity of one's existence in time and space and the perception of the fact that others recognize one's sameness and continuity. (p. 50)

In view of his initial thinking about this topic, it is evident that Erikson's definition of personal identity changed over the 20 years following his 1950 book. Specifically, whereas he had initially associated the term personal identity with recognizing only the fact of one's existence and the term ego identity with recognizing continuity and selfsameness of this existence (as well as with how one's life hung together), by 1968 he was using the concept of self-perceived continuity and sameness with respect to *both* personal identity (i.e., as the fact of one's existence

over time) and ego identity (as the quality of this existence over time). In effect, Erikson was now using the term personal identity in almost exactly the same way that James used this term.

Two important exceptions to this similarity between Erikson's and James' conceptualizations of personal identity are (a) James' failure to include the concept of social recognition (of one's continuity and sameness) as an integral component of the sense of personal identity⁹ and (b) Erikson's failure to include explicitly the concept of the "abstract numerical principle of identity," or uniqueness, as an integral component of the sense of personal identity. Neither of these exceptions, however, change the core meaning these two theorists assigned to the term personal identity; that is, *the sense of one's enduring existence as a person*.

In place of an extensive self theory (along the lines provided by James) in which identity played a small role, Erikson (1968) elaborated a personality theory in which the concept of ego identity played a central role. Similar to his 1950 description of the sense of ego identity as the "accrued sense of confidence" (p. 228), Erikson began his 1968 description by noting that ego identity could be understood as an individual's growing sense of being "capable of integrating effective steps toward a collective future" (p. 49) and described this "sense" as developing from individuals' participation in meaningful mastery experiences (e.g., "through the coincidence of physical mastery and cultural meaning," p. 49). This description of ego identity sounds a lot like current descriptions of "efficacy" and reflects Erikson's tendency to think about identity in terms of the quality of one's existence (as opposed to the fact of one's existence); for example:

What I have called ego identity, however, concerns more than the mere *fact* of existence; it is, as it were, the ego *quality* of this existence. Ego identity then, in its subjective aspect, is the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego's synthesizing methods, the *style of one's individuality*, and that this style coincides with

the sameness and continuity of one's *meaning for significant others* in the immediate community. (p. 50)

In these terms, the sense of personal identity refers to the awareness of the fact of one's existence, characterized by the perception of having the same content within the self-system over time. The sense of ego identity, on the other hand, refers to the awareness of the quality of one's existence, characterized by the perception of having a similar and integrated style, or quality, of existence over time. This distinction between the fact and quality of one's existence – and the use of the terms personal identity and ego identity to differentiate between these two aspects of human experience – distinguishes Erikson's views on identity from the views of his predecessors. Prior to Erikson's contributions, as reviewed above, the identity concept was discussed only in terms of experiences associated with the fact of one's existence and never (that I know of) in terms of experiences associated with the quality of one's existence. Finally, it is important to be mindful of the distinction between “ego identity...in its subjective aspect” and ego identity in its objective aspect; Erikson *usually* referred to the former as the “sense of ego identity” (i.e., a process) and to the latter as “ego identity” (i.e., as content).

Terminological Diversity in the Eriksonian Underbrush

Understanding Erikson's view of (the sense of) ego identity as (the sense of) continuity in the “style” of one's existence requires a deeper analysis of a wider range of identity concepts used throughout his work. In particular, in the middle of both his 1956 article and 1968 book, Erikson included his most detailed discussions about the various meanings he thought ought to be assigned to the terms ego, ego-identity, self, self-identity, and psychosocial identity. Here, again, we find some changes in his thinking about these things over time, so it will be useful to consider sequentially the distinctions he made among these terms.

Identity and self-representations. Erikson (1956) began by noting that “the term identity covers much of what has been called the self by a variety of workers, be it in the form of a self-concept..., a self-system..., or in that of fluctuating self experiences” (pp. 102-103). Erikson selected Hartmann’s (1950) term, “self-representation” (as contrasted to “object-representation”) to denote that part of the personality system that could be understood as a configuration of identity elements that develops in accord with the generally successful executive functioning of the ego; that is:

In this paper, we are concerned with the *genetic continuity* of such a self-representation—a continuity which must lastly be ascribed to the work of the ego. No other inner agency could accomplish the selective accentuation of significant identifications throughout childhood and the gradual integration of self-images in anticipation of an identity. It is for this reason that I have called identity, at first, ego identity. (p. 103)

This could be the most important statement Erikson ever put in writing, at least for the purposes of clarifying exactly what he meant by the term identity, why he chose to use the term ego identity, and how these terms relate to the terms self-representation, self-concept, and self-system.

First, to the extent that the term identity, as a substantive component of the personality system, refers to what most psychologists have referred to in terms of “self-representations,” we have a direct way to map the meaning of Erikson’s identity theory on to volumes of other theoretical and empirical work conducted over the past 150 years. Second, to the extent that we understand that Erikson’s selection of the term ego identity was driven by his desire to emphasize the role of the ego in selecting, synthesizing, and organizing self-representations (and other identity elements), we are in a position to understand how Erikson’s initial

conceptualization of the sense of ego identity is related to the concept of identity as a configuration of self-representations (and other identity elements) that have been successfully selected, synthesized, and organized by the active agency of the ego. This conceptualization of a substantive identity configuration – characterized by developmental continuity – was consistent with Erikson’s original statements about ego identity reflecting the quality or style of one’s existence. Finally, although Erikson’s predilection for process thinking minimized his attention to identity as content, it is important to recognize his implicit distinction between ego identity as a substantive identity configuration (i.e., objective content) and the *sense of* ego identity as experience arising from the quality of this configuration (i.e., a subjective process).

Although the concept of ego ideal is not particularly important for the points I would like to make in this paper, there was apparently enough confusion about how this term differed from the term ego identity that Erikson (1956) used the concept of ego ideal to clarify what he meant, and did not mean, by the term ego identity. Erikson followed closely Freud’s use of the term ego ideal as referring to that part of the personality that was attuned to and embodied the morality of the specific historical period in question (as opposed to the superego proper, which embodied “a more archaic and thoroughly internalized representative of the evolutionary principle of morality” [p. 104]). Whereas the ego ideal was believed to be centrally involved with monitoring the moral quality of enduring yet evolving ethnic and cultural norms,

ego identity...would in comparison be even closer to *social reality* in that as a subsystem of the ego it would test, select, and integrate the self-representations derived from the psychosocial crises of childhood. It could be said to be characterized by the more or less *actually attained but forever-to-be-revised* sense of the reality of the self within social

reality; while the imagery of the ego ideal could be said to represent a set of *to-be-strived-for but forever-not-quite-attainable ideal* goals for the self. (pp. 104-105)

Hence, in contrast to the concept of personal identity (which Erikson used mainly to refer to the fact of one's existence and which he did not find particularly interesting, or clinically compelling, relative to the quality of this existence), Erikson elevated the concept of ego identity to the status of being a subsystem of the ego. In doing so, however, he complicated our task of differentiating among self, ego, and ego-identity; that is, in addition to identifications, aptitudes, and self-representations, Erikson claimed here that the ego and ego identity shared at least some of the same functional properties.

Ego, ego identity, and self. There are several complex theoretical issues, implicit in Erikson's 1956 identity theory formulation, that remain to be addressed. Not one of these issues is more central to understanding Erikson's contribution to identity theory than the nature of the relation between ego and ego identity. Although preferring to think mainly in process terms, Erikson referred to the substance of ego identity in terms of identity elements, in some places, and in terms of ego functions, in other places. These divergent tendencies raise some challenging questions about whether the substance and functions of ego identity, as "a subsystem of the ego," are isomorphic with the substance and functions of ego; whether the substance of ego identity might be construed adequately as a configuration of introjects, identifications, and self-representations; and whether there might be no substantive differences between the configuration of ego identity and the basis of the ego functions.

Despite equating on some occasions the functions of ego and ego identity, Erikson certainly did not appear to believe that ego identity was best understood as a completely unconscious agent. It would probably be more accurate to say that his allegiance to the ego

concept and the lack of availability of (or familiarity with) other “self” theories resulted in descriptions of ego identity that were not internally consistent. Achieving a series of internally consistent identity descriptions where including concepts ranging from the ego to the socius presupposes a conceptual framework that integrates psychodynamic concepts with “nonpsychodynamic” concepts (particularly with respect to the relation between varied types of identity elements and levels of consciousness). There was minimal or no access to such a framework in 1956.

In addition, and in contrast to James’ formulation, Erikson (1956) did not provide a systematic analysis of the four basic ways that identity appears to be manifested within the human being; that is, the subjective and objective manifestations of identity contents and processes. Nevertheless, as evidenced in the following quotation, questions about these diverse manifestations were apparently beginning to become salient for Erikson as he wrestled with the various meanings that could be assigned to the terms ego and ego identity:

In using the word self in the sense of Hartmann’s self-representation, one opens the whole controversy to a radical consideration. One could argue that it may be wise in matters of the ego’s perceptive and regulative dealings with its self to reserve the designation “ego” for the subject, and to give the designation “self” to the object. The ego, then, as a central organizing agency, is during the course of life faced with a changing self which, in turn, demands to be synthesized with abandoned and anticipated selves. (p. 105)

In these terms, the ego-as-subject appears similar to James’ “I-self,” and the self-as-object appears similar to James’ “me self.” The ego, as subject, is responsible for bringing identity elements (i.e., the “selves”) together into a coherent whole. The resulting configuration will

engender a *sense of* ego identity that is characterized by feelings of coherence and efficacy (as opposed to the kind of emotional disturbance that Erikson witnessed in the war veterans or to the role confusion he witnessed in adolescents, both of which he had associated with ego identity problems). In other words, despite the questions this position raises about the relation between self-reflective consciousness and ego functions, Erikson seemed to be arguing that (in “Jamsian” terms) the subjective I-self (ego) synthesizes and senses the objective me self (ego identity), and positive feelings follow to the extent that this me self has been well-configured.

This distinction between the ego-as-subject and the self-as-object represents a significant refinement in Erikson’s thinking about ego identity because it provided a conceptual framework that worked against the tendency to equate the concepts of ego and ego identity as unconscious, integrative functions. Whereas he had previously assigned the subjective, agentic function of integrating socially-based self-representations to ego identity and not to the ego (see his 1956, pp. 104-105 quote, on my p. 31), he was now in a position to retain the traditional view of ego as agent and define ego identity in terms of substantive identity content.

Into the terminological thicket. After distinguishing between the ego-as-subject and the self-as-object, Erikson (1956) maintained the distinction between ego (as subject) and ego identity (as object) by pointing out that the ego, in its capacity as a “central organizing agency” (p. 105), would need to integrate (in addition to the abandoned and anticipated selves) the “body self” (by which he meant “the [physical] attributes of the organism;” p. 105), the “ideal self” (by which he meant the objects of the ego ideal), and the “ego identity” (by which he appears to have meant the previously integrated identity elements). Erikson dispensed with using the term ego identity as subjective agent by explicitly identifying the ego as an agent and the ego identity as one set of elements among some other kinds of identity elements. If Erikson had continued on

this path, our journey through the jungle might have remained pleasant enough; instead, however, he took an abrupt turn directly into an area filled with thickets and quagmires.

Immediately after having successfully distinguished between ego-as-subject and self-as object – and, in the process, having helped to clarify the distinction between ego and ego identity – Erikson (1956) then proposed the following distinction between ego identity and self-identity:

What could consequently be called the *self-identity* emerges from all those experiences in which a sense of temporary self-diffusion was successfully contained by a renewed and ever more realistic self-definition and social recognition. *Identity formation thus can be said to have a self-aspect, and an ego aspect.* It is part of the ego in the sense that it represents the ego's synthesizing function on one of its frontiers, namely, the actual social structure of the environment and the image of reality as transmitted to the child during successive childhood crises. (p. 105)

In the process of distinguishing between “self-identity” and ego identity, presumably by viewing self-identity as an object and ego identity as a function, Erikson seemed to be contradicting his previous distinction between the ego as subject and ego identity as object. However, because he provided no further elaboration on these distinctions in his 1956 publication, it is practically impossible to understand the implications these distinctions have for the subject-object distinction drawn previously or for ways in which we might better understand the differences between the ego, ego identity, and self. Rather, Erikson (1956) concluded his discussion by saying only,

until the matter of ego vs. self is sufficiently defined to permit a terminological decision,

I shall use the bare term identity in order to suggest a social function of the ego which

results, in adolescence, in a relative psychosocial equilibrium essential to the tasks of young adulthood. (p. 105)

In some ways, then, it is clear where Erikson was going (i.e., toward a psychosocial theory of identity) and it is clear where he was coming from (i.e., a psychodynamic theoretical framework that was expanding to embrace more detailed representations of the self and social environment). It was also clear where he was in 1956 (i.e., in the process of building conceptual bridges between psychodynamic and social theories of being-in-the-world). Only time, and subsequent contributions to identity theory, would indicate where he (and we) would end up.

In summary, after having reflected on the possible relations among the concepts of ego, self, and identity – and the implications these terms might have for understanding the psychological dynamics associated with human development in context – Erikson (in 1956) left unresolved several theoretical issues. Whereas he seemed, at one point, to have resolved the distinction between ego and ego identity – that is, by defining the former as an active agent (i.e., process) and the latter as an identity element (i.e., content) – he subsequently reverted to the position that ego identity, as a social information synthesizing function, was a subsystem of the ego. Consequently, the viability of Erikson’s proposed distinction between ego-as-subject and self-as-object, and the implications this distinction might have for our understanding of the ego identity concept, remained at large in the jungle, so to speak. I will discuss Erikson’s progress on this bridge-building effort, as reflected in publications subsequent to 1956, after first digressing slightly into an area that I have largely neglected up to this point; that is, the so-called social side of Erikson’s identity theory.

Psychosocial identity. Having reviewed the basic components of Erikson’s identity theory, as they relate to the historical origins of the identity concept, we are in a position to

address the inclusion of the term psychosocial identity in his relatively exhaustive list of identity terms. In particular, it is useful to think about what this concept adds to identity theory that goes beyond what we have covered so far. First, it should be clear from his repeated references to “the perception of the fact that others recognize one’s sameness and continuity” (1968, p. 50) that Erikson was centrally concerned with the role that “others” played in the experience, and development, of identity. Despite the fact that the term “psychosocial identity” appeared rarely in Erikson’s 1950 book and not at all in his 1956 article, Erikson (1956) did describe the origin in his thinking of the term “psychosocial” as a reaction to what he perceived to be an overemphasis on traditional biological formulations of human development; for example:

The word “psychosocial” so far has had to serve as an emergency bridge between the so-called “biological” formulations of psychoanalysis and the newer ones which take the cultural environment into more systematic consideration. (p. 106)

From this, and many other comments, it is clear that Erikson was striving for a conceptual language that would allow him to more accurately describe human development *in context* (cf. Erikson, 1946).

In an effort to move beyond what he referred to as the “pseudo biology” typical of the traditional psychoanalytic perspective – a perspective, he claimed, that treated the environment as “an uncharted area which is said to be outside merely because it fails to be inside” (p. 106) and the person as “more or less isolated from its cultural surroundings” (p. 106) – Erikson (1956) drew upon Hartmann’s (1951) concept of the “average expectable environment” as a way of capturing the essence of what he meant by the term psychosocial. In this view, humans are born “preadapted” to an average expectable environment and are dependent upon “a whole chain of such successive environments” (p. 107) for healthy development. In what can be viewed as the

social basis for his stage theory of human development, Erikson argued that “the human environment must permit and safeguard a series of more or less discontinuous and yet culturally and psychologically consistent steps, each extending further along the radius of expanding life tasks” (p. 107). In these terms, constructing an adequate theory of identity development requires constant attention to the concept of person-environment fit, or conceptualizing the human environment “as the persistent endeavor of the older and more adult egos to join in the organizational effort of providing an integrated series of average expectable environments for the young egos” (p. 107).

The form taken by the average expectable environments, with respect to developing individuals, was described most fully by Erikson in terms of ideology. Erikson (1959) described the cultural conditions that structure the average expectable environments in terms of social values that are communicated and perpetuated through “verbal conventions and formal institutions” (p. 111). He described these cultural value systems in terms of ideology – defined as “a coherent body of shared images, ideas, and ideals which... provides for the participants a coherent, if systematically simplified, over-all orientation in space and time, in means and ends” (p. 113) – and argued that human development proceeds most successfully where there is maximal correspondence between predominant ideological systems and the stage-centered crises of “ego” development.

Although the precise form of a developmentally appropriate ideological system must vary according to the stage of an individual’s development, Erikson (1968) argued that ideological systems serve several general functions for developing youth. For example, they provide a simplified, future time-perspective, a “correspondence between the inner world of ideals and evils and the social world with its goals and dangers” (p. 187), an “introduction into the ethos of

the prevailing technology” (p. 188), a basis for “fitting in” in a way that guards against social anxiety, or “identity-consciousness,” and “a geographic-historical world image as a framework for the young individual’s budding identity” (p. 188).

Given the presence of ideologies within cultural contexts, Erikson (1968) argued that personal commitment to an ideology, whether explicit or implicit, is practically necessary for successful development. In the absence of such commitment, “youth suffers a *confusion of values*...which can be specifically dangerous to some but which on a large scale is surely dangerous to the fabric of society” (p. 188). To the extent that Erikson was correct about the dynamic relations between identity development, ideological commitment, and available ideologies, there are obviously overwhelming implications of this point of view for the study of, and institutional response to, adolescent development in our complex 21st century.

Finally, despite not having made extensive use of the term psychosocial identity, Erikson (1956) did reveal his intentions with respect to this concept when he said that “the question before us is whether the concept of identity is essentially a psychosocial one, or deserves to be considered as a legitimate part of the psychoanalytic theory of the ego” (p. 56). Perhaps this is why it can be so difficult to understand Erikson’s identity theory in terms of the prior history of identity theory. Specifically, Erikson did not appear to be particularly interested in the history of identity theories or even in the philosophical meanings that had been assigned to the term identity over the centuries. Rather, Erikson seemed to be much more interested in the relation between the person and their social environment, or the “identity of something in the individual’s core with an essential aspect of a group’s inner coherence” (p. 57).

In these terms, Erikson’s initial interest in “identity” appears to have been an interest in the identity between the person and the environment, as opposed to what had traditionally been

an interest in the psychological experience of selfsameness and continuity across time (cf. Erikson, 1946). Moreover, as evidenced in his later work, he used the term psychosocial identity in the same way that the term “social identity” is used by many contemporary psychologists, which is particularly interesting because the term social identity is one of the few identity terms that does not appear in Erikson’s work (suggesting that contemporary identity theorists commit a jangle fallacy where using the term social identity in place of what Erikson called psychosocial identity).

Summary of Erikson’s emerging identity theory. What is clear from everything he had written to this point is that Erikson was centrally concerned with three things: First, he was striving for a language and conceptual framework for describing and understanding human development *in context*. Second, he exhibited a keen sensitivity to the emotional implications of variations in the configural arrangements of identity elements, both within the personality and the social context. Third, he was convinced that there existed within the personality system some “central organizing agency” – as initially suggested by Freud’s description of the ego and as further elaborated by the “ego psychologists” of his day – that could help explain how developing individuals were able to achieve an integrated self-system in the face of what appeared to be a wide array of “disrupting” personal and social forces.

In closing this discussion of Erikson’s developing formulations of the identity concept, it seems appropriate to share, once again, some of Erikson’s own reflections on the status of his theoretical efforts thus far:

In my attempt to circumscribe the problem of identity I have been “all over the map.” I do not propose to leave the matter in this condition.... In the meantime, and in summary: identity, in outbalancing at the conclusion of childhood the potentially malignant

dominance of the infantile superego, permits the individual to forgo excessive self-repudiation and the diffused repudiation of otherness. Such freedom provides a necessary condition for the ego's power to integrate matured sexuality, ripened capacities, and adult commitments (1956, p. 119).

Advanced Eriksonian Identity Theory

Examining closely how Erikson's conceptualizations changed over the years between his 1956 and 1968 publications is instructive. Although these differences are often subtle, they are important for at least two reasons. First, using one or the other of these sources as a basis for understanding Erikson's identity theory results in perpetuating one or another of the meanings of the various terms he used. Second, discussing these different meanings will help illuminate some of the distinctions that are important for advancing our contemporary psychological vocabulary (a vocabulary that will ideally avoid jingle and jangle fallacies and thereby contribute most productively to the cumulative knowledge base of our evolving science of psychology).

Revisiting the terminological thicket. After reminding us that he had been exploring various possible meanings of the term identity (as indicated by his 1968 statements on p. 208, quoted on my page 26) – and having further commented that he was about to address “questions which it took a decade to formulate” (p. 208) – Erikson (1968) explained that he would now “come back once more to the concept of ego because when I first reported on the subject...I called what I was exploring Ego-Identity” (p. 208). The first notable change in Erikson's thinking related to the distinction between ego-as-subject and self-as-object. Whereas he had suggested the utility of, but did not so much apply, this distinction in 1956, by 1968 he had omitted explicit reference to this distinction yet had begun to incorporate it directly into his thinking and definitions. For example, whereas in 1956 he had described ego identity as a

subsystem of ego that had agentic properties, Erikson avoided this tendency in 1968 by using the phrase, “*what I once called* ego identity would...test, select, and integrate... (p. 210, italics added, to be compared with his 1956, pp. 104-105 statement, quoted on my p. 31). Where he once used the term ego identity, he now used only the term ego, thereby instantiating clearly the distinction between ego-as-subject and ego-identity-as-object.

Erikson (1968) then extended this line of thinking by incorporating the subject-object distinction into his discussion about the differences between ego-identity and self-identity. In contrast to the 1956 version of this discussion, now Erikson made it clear that he viewed both ego-identity and self-identity as identity-objects (i.e., configurations of identity elements) and as products of the ego’s synthesizing activities. This clarification provided a partial solution to that previously troubling “terminological decision” pertaining to “the matter of ego vs. self” (i.e., by treating the former as subject and the latter as object) and allowed Erikson to focus on the distinction that seemed to have driven him to use the term self-identity in the first place; that is, the distinction between synthesizing information related to “social reality” versus synthesizing information related to “self-images.” Erikson described this distinction in the following terms:

Ego-Identity, then, is the result of the synthesizing function on one of the ego’s frontiers, namely, that “environment” which is social reality as transmitted to the child during successive childhood crises. Identity, in this connection, has a claim to recognition as the adolescent ego’s most important accomplishment.... One can then speak of ego identity when one discusses the ego’s synthesizing power in the light of its central psychosocial function, and of self-identity when the integration of the individual’s self- and role-images are under consideration. (p. 211)

Erikson did not elaborate further on these descriptions in his 1968 book. Nevertheless, he had finally provided a clear description of the terms ego-identity and self-identity as objects in the personality system (i.e., configurations of identity elements) that were distinguishable from (yet related to) the functions of the ego and that, together, represent the overall configuration that he called identity.

Despite this important achievement, defining elemental components of the overall identity configuration with respect to their origins on the “self” and “social” frontiers introduced a variety of other challenging questions. For example, do the identity elements generated by these distinct ego functions differ structurally, functionally, or in some other important way(s)? If so, are we to construe self-identity elements as only “self” images and ego-identity elements as only “social” images? Given that self and social images are largely inextricable at the level of identity (i.e., most self-representational constructs can be described as ‘self-in-context’ type of configurations), perhaps Erikson intended self-identity to refer more to one’s sense of continuity across time (e.g., the “narrative me”) and ego-identity to refer more to one’s sense of fit in space (e.g., the “situated me”). Whatever the truth might be about Erikson’s thinking, and however much clarity might be gained from emphasizing one or another of these points of view, there is nothing in Erikson’s writing that precludes the possibility that identity elements of whatever origin (i.e., whether they be from the self, social, or some other frontier) exist within the overall identity configuration as parts of unified wholes that provide the basis for the sense of both continuity and fit.

Discovering lost treasure. At this point, we have arrived at what appears to be the fruition of about twenty years of Erikson’s thinking about the many difficult issues associated with the concept of identity. In what appeared in his 1968 book to be a completely new addition to his

identity theory – under the heading “I, My Self, and My Ego” (p. 216) – Erikson attempted to integrate basic theoretical formulations from psychodynamic psychology with theoretical formulations originating from a wide variety of other areas of psychological investigation. The primary conceptual unit that Erikson added here to his previous identity theory was the concept of “I” (which had been, up to this point, notably absent in his writing).

Erikson (1968) had not completely neglected the concept of “I” – having referred to it at least once as “an observing center of awareness and of volition” (p. 135) – but he certainly had not integrated this concept into his theories of personality or identity. Interestingly, Erikson began his integrative efforts with the following statement:

In order to clarify and even quantify man’s (sic) attitude toward himself, philosophers and psychologists have created such nouns as the “I” or the “Self,” making imaginary entities out of a manner of speaking. (p. 216)

If this statement had been made only with respect to the concept of “I,” and Erikson had not made any other statements about the “I,” there would probably have been little confusion about his position on this concept. However, even here, the meaning of the concept of “I” was obscured by equating it with an “attitude” toward one’s self and by associating it so closely with the term “Self” (a term that Erikson did not define but which appears to be a reference to contemporary, nonpsychodynamic self theories, such as the one described by Hartmann [1950]). The most telling aspect of this statement, however, was Erikson’s view that the “I,” the Self, and attitudes toward the self are imaginary entities (or what might now be referred to as “hypothetical constructs”). Although this metatheoretical assumption is certainly not uncommon in the social sciences, applying similar logic to concepts like ego and identity would seem to me to force the same premature conclusion; that is, that these all are imaginary entities.¹⁰

Erikson (1968) attempted to clarify his conceptualization of the “I,” and its relation to ego and identity, by way of two observations. First, he noted that autistic children find it difficult or impossible to grasp the meaning of the concepts “I” and “You” and, hence, do not enjoy the experience of a coherent “I.” Erikson then observed that

work with deeply disturbed young people confronts the worker with the awful awareness of the patients’ incapacity to *feel* the “I” and the “You” that are cognitively present.... No other affliction makes it equally clear that ego psychology alone cannot encompass certain human problems which so far have been left to poetry or metaphysics. (p. 217)

In this case, Erikson apparently contradicts his “imaginary entity” stance by suggesting that the “I” exists (i.e., is “cognitively present”) whether or not one is able to “feel” it – which implies that the “I” must have some basis in reality beyond our imagination or even our conscious perception of it (either through feeling or awareness) – and, further, that awareness is an *unnecessary* condition for the existence of the “I.”

This perspective is similar to the one Erikson initially articulated in reference to the disconnection between ego identity and personal identity; that is, the latter can exist despite the status of the former. This realization prompted the intensive examination of identity that eventually lead Erikson to the conclusion that ego identity contents exist as objects within the self-system, despite the extent to which the disconfiguration of these contents engenders disturbing experiences (or what he termed, in 1950, “the loss...of a sense of identity” [p. 38]). The point, in both cases, is that the *process* of conscious experience must be distinguished from the typically un- and pre-conscious *content* that gives rise to this experience. In short, whereas Erikson began by taking a Jamsian approach to understanding the “I” (i.e., by refusing to assign

any substantive reality to it, beyond our thought about it), he moved further from this position as he approached his discussion about how the “I” relates to ego and identity.

Taking the “I” seriously. Although not stated explicitly by Erikson, it is evident that he was motivated to address these somewhat esoteric issues in an effort to bring psychodynamic theory into the mainstream of “non-dynamic” psychological theory. Concepts like self, motive, trait, attitude, and value had been discussed increasingly frequently for years and were replacing, rather than complementing, psychodynamic concepts like id, ego, and superego. Being a clinician, and having been trained as a psychoanalyst, Erikson had a deep appreciation of the dynamics of emotion and consciousness. Consequently, notwithstanding his awareness of the similarity between the concepts of “I” and ego, and as evidenced by the following comments, Erikson (1968) was not prepared to abandon the concept of ego (which embodied most of what he seemed to think was important about both emotions and consciousness) in favor of the concept of “I” (which had remained enigmatic, at best, within all areas of psychological investigation):

Only after we have separated the “I” and the selves from the ego can we consign to the ego that domain which it has had ever since it came from neurology into psychiatry and psychology in Freud’s earliest days: the domain of an inner “agency” safeguarding our coherent existence by screening and synthesizing, in any series of moments, all the impressions, emotions, memories, and impulses which try to enter our thought and demand our action, and which would tear us apart if unsorted and unmanaged by a slowly grown and reliably watchful screening system. (p. 218)

Erikson clearly wanted to integrate the concept of “I” into his theories of personality and identity. However, he also wanted to achieve this integration without equating the ego with the “I” and while retaining the concept of ego-as-agent.

The solution he used to solve this problem, in 1968, was to divest from the ego the one aspect of the Jamesian “I” about which psychodynamic theories had contributed relatively little. Specifically, Erikson (1968) implicitly relegated the “I” concept to the domain of awareness, thus allowing him to assign the agentic functions to the ego concept (functions, not incidentally, that James had assigned to the I-self). The evidence for this can be inferred mainly from Erikson’s failure to discuss explicitly the agentic features of the “I” and from statements where he associated implicitly the “I” concept with the concept of awareness. For example, Erikson argued that “what the ‘I’ reflects on when it sees or contemplates the body, the personality, and the roles to which it is attached for life...are the various selves which make up our composite Self” (p. 217) and that “one should be really decisive and say that the ‘I’ is all-conscious, and that we are truly conscious only insofar as we can say ‘I’ and mean it” (p. 218).

Having thus differentiated between the “I” and the ego, Erikson (1968) provided minimal guidance for extending this logic to his personality and identity theories. He did, however, admonish “psychoanalysts” to

discontinue the use of the word “ego” when they mean the self as the object of the “I,” and, for example, speak of an ideal self rather than an ego-ideal as the image of what we would like our self to be like, and self-identity rather than ego identity insofar as the “I” perceives its selves as continuous in time and uniform substance. (pp. 217-218)

Abstracting clear implications from this for identity theory is no simple task. However, logical implications for identity theory do arise from these statements, particularly in light of the

distinctions between subject (i.e., ego) and objects (i.e., identity) described in the previous section. For example, by urging us not to use the term ego where referring to the self as an object, here again Erikson instantiates his ego-as-subject and self-as-object formulation. In this case, however, he also instantiates the idea of “I” as subject.

A view from the highest peak. In subsequent publications (e.g., 1974, 1981/1996), Erikson delved deeper into the nature and meaning of “I,” and, more specifically, the *sense* of “I.” Unfortunately, he did not accompany these discussions with any explicit discussion about how the “I” relates to or differs from the terms personal identity, self-identity, or ego identity. In fact, surprisingly, he did not use the terms self-identity or ego identity at all and made only passing reference to the term personal identity; instead, where he mentioned it at all, he used the basic term “identity.” Nevertheless, he did discuss the relation between the “I” and the ego; and, insofar as ego (for Erikson) was so centrally related to identity, it is worth considering further how Erikson reconciled the concept of “I” with his concept of ego.

In contrast to James’ treatment of the “I” concept, Erikson nowhere attempted an explicit definition of the term “I.” As he did with other identity-related concepts, Erikson (1981/1996) tended to think about the “I” in process terms. Nevertheless, he also tended to vary unsystematically between describing the “I” as a *conscious experience* and describing it as a substantive characteristic of the human mind. In addition to arguing that the human experience of “I” is “a vital phenomenon that lies on the borderline of psychology and of theology” (p. 293), he also described the “I” as “a center so numinous that it amounts to a sense of being alive” (p. 284); “that most obvious and most elusive endowment of creatures with consciousness—and language” (p. 293); as well as a “growing, maturing, observing” (p. 291) psychological

characteristic. The information that is most revealing about his identity theory, however, is found within the context of his discussion about Freud's treatment of the "I" concept.

According to Erikson (1981/1996), Freud focused on the way "consciousness" could be used "in the process of calling to mind what...had become denied and repressed" (p. 316); in these terms, the "I" was associated more with awareness (e.g., insight) than with agency (e.g., synthesizing). Rather than being "sidetracked" by the "age-old claim to a soul" (p. 316), Freud "emphasized what he called the human *Ich*—the right word for *I* in German, but always (and sometimes questionably) translated into English as 'ego'" (p. 316). However, this human *I*, "the *Ich* as ego" was viewed by Freud as "a primarily unconscious inner organization of experience on which human adaptation and sanity depend" (p. 316). Given the extent to which the terms ego and *I* were equivalent for Freud, and used to represent an expression of consciousness that is represented primarily as an unconscious inner organization (of something), it is not surprising that Erikson found it difficult to integrate into his identity theory the ego and the "I" as two distinct concepts. Erikson's (1968 and 1981) implicit differentiation between "I" as the seat of awareness and ego as the seat of agency was a reasonable compromise.

Summary of Erikson's identity theory.

Erikson extended the definition of "identity" beyond the bounds of prior definitions by focusing on the quality of human experience rather than the fact of this experience. In doing so, he abandoned the familiar territory of personal identity – as "I exist" – so that he could explore more freely the uncharted region of psychosocial identity – as "I exist in relation to others." Although he preferred to think in terms of identity processes (e.g., *experiencing* psychosocial equilibrium), Erikson described two basic types of identity content: ego-identity and self-identity. Despite some significant changes over time in Erikson's thinking, he ultimately

differentiated between the content of ego-identity and self-identity by reference to the two “frontiers” upon which the ego functioned in its gatekeeper capacity: the external realm of social environments and the internal realm of self-images. On both frontiers, the ego-as-agent is responsible for monitoring, selecting, and synthesizing identity elements into a coherent configuration. In the waning years of his career, Erikson went on to explore the concept of “I,” particularly as it relates to the concept of ego.

In an effort to bring the best of psychodynamic and psychological theory together into a single framework for understanding human identity, Erikson complemented his theory of ego- and self-identity as objects governed by the activities of ego-as-agent by incorporating the concept of “I” as the seat of awareness about, and reflectivity on, the ego-identity and self-identity objects. In this way, Erikson provided a sketch of human identity that included reference to the four primary quadrants described by James in terms of the subjective and objective features of psychological content and processes. Unfortunately, after completing his survey of the realm of “I,” Erikson did not apply the fruits of this exploration back to his core theory of identity and psychosocial development. Consequently, it is not entirely clear how Erikson would have us understand the combined set of subjects (i.e., “I” & ego) and objects (i.e., self-identity and ego-identity) as they move together through space and time.

Integrations and Future Directions

I began this paper by focusing on the historical origins of the jingle-jangle jungle of contemporary identity concepts. Rather than detailing the contemporary specifics of this so-called jungle, I referred only to a cursory review of a relatively small number of recent papers related to “identity” that generated over 500 terms used to define this concept. The bulk of my attention was directed toward examining the historical basis of this state of terminological

confusion, particularly as reflected in some published works of William James and Erik Erikson. A thorough analysis of the many interpretations of identity found in the theory and research that followed these works was far beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I focused on the original concepts that were used to define identity at the person level of analysis. In the following section of this paper, I review some of the key elements discussed thus far and suggest ways to integrate these elements into a general theoretical framework of the person in context that I hope will reduce, rather than exacerbate, the jingle-jangle jungle of identity.

Historical Distillates

The relation of the identity concept to human experience appears to have been formalized initially by philosophers. Questions about the fact or fiction of identity as a human quality and about the relation of self-reflective thought to these purported facts or fictions highlighted several key issues that would be addressed, in one form or another, by subsequent psychological analyses. Discussions about self-reflectivity, as the subjective process of experiencing (and interacting with) self-system content as objects of awareness, highlight the need to consider the relation of the subject-object distinction to the experience and definition of identity. Discussions about the fact or fiction of identity, as engendered by the observation of being in the midst of a perpetually changing stream of experience while otherwise experiencing significant amounts of personal continuity, highlight the need to consider the relation of the content-process distinction to the experience and definition of identity. Taken together, the early philosophical analyses of identity highlighted the need for social scientists to address clearly the subjective and objective features of identity contents and processes yet provided very little in the way of formal theories about the self or personality in context.

James' (1890) description of identity, which seems to have picked up precisely where centuries of philosophical analyses left off, was focused mainly on the subjective experience, or sense, of personal continuity or selfsameness. He referred to this as an experience of personal identity and described it, in part, as that which distinguishes us from other people and which provides the conditions for thinking and feeling in general. The experience of personal identity was clarified by reference to the I-self, or Thought, and its basic capacity for the subjective synthesis of past and present me-selves. This formulation provides the basis for distinguishing clearly between personal identity as embodied in the contents and processes of the me-self and the *sense of* personal identity as embodied in the contents and processes of the I-self. This was not a distinction emphasized explicitly by James. However, this distinction was clearly and consistently articulated in his descriptions of identity and self and provides the basis for a theoretical framework that is capable of resolving many of the jingle and jangle fallacies that plague so many of our contemporary (and historical) identity theories.

None of these benefits would have been realized had James (1890) not specified, in some detail, an overarching theory of the self system. Recall that James began by distinguishing explicitly between the objective and subjective aspects of the self-system. Specifically, he divided "*the constituents of the Self*" (p. 292) into two classes: the empirical person, or the Me (i.e., the material, social, and spiritual selves), and the experiencing mind, or the "I" (i.e., the judging Thought). At this point, James equated implicitly the objective facts of me-self objects with psychological content and the subjective experience of the I-self with psychological processes. He occasionally differentiated explicitly between content and process and, in some places, began to tease apart the subject-object dimension from the content-process dimension. In

doing so, James provided one of the first and clearest theoretical frameworks for distinguishing between the concepts of identity and the sense of identity.

James (1890) described both substantive and experiential manifestations of the me self, or empirical me. The substantive aspects of the “empirical person” were described in terms of the “central adjustments” or “nuclear self,” whereas the “the facts of experience” associated with this material aspect of the self-system were described in terms of the elements or objects that were located in the stream of consciousness or, in more purely Jamesian terminology, the objects of the judging Thought. Similarly, James attempted to distinguish between the substantive and experiential manifestations of the I-self. The substantive aspects of the “judging Thought” were considered in depth but not directly described (or, according to James, even *describable*). The existence of the “I” was inferred by reference to its functions and considered “the ultimate kind of fact that the psychologist must admit to exist.” The experiential aspects of the I self were described as “the present mental state,” or Thought: that which binds together past and present objects in the stream of consciousness.

Taken together, these descriptions help us make sense out of the distinction between identity and the sense of identity and suggest that a comprehensive understanding of identity requires differentiating content from process at both subjective and objective levels of the self-system. Although this kind of differentiation hardly seems possible when considering an individual self-system at only one point in time, moving this system through time and, as discussed below, recognizing that different “levels” of the person-in-context system are characterized by content and processes that operate according to principles that are specific to corresponding spatio-temporal scales, brings such a task well within the realm of possibility. The historical “facts” about identity compel us to look beyond the typical “one-level” perspective on

the self-system that is implicit in too many psychological theories and see that multiple levels of the self (e.g., identity and sense of identity) can and do exist. This may well have been impossible or impractical for theoreticians of the 19th and earlier centuries, but the 20th century was replete with scientific advancements that provide the conceptual and empirical tools sufficient for achieving this more differentiated (and integrated) theoretical model of the multilevel person in multilevel context.

However, before describing what such a multilevel model might look like, it is useful to review the role that Erikson's contributions to identity theory play in both the historical unfolding and contemporary manifestations of identity theory. First, it seems obvious that Erikson was not a big fan of Jamesian thinking. At the very least, Erikson did not often refer to James' self or identity theory nor use the terminology that was fundamental to James' thinking about self and identity. Instead, Erikson brought a psychodynamic background of thinking and language to bear on identity-related questions and explored a wide variety of identity related phenomena that went well beyond the classic focus on self-reflectivity and the basic "facts of existence." Foremost among these explorations was Erikson's focus on the emotional *quality* of one's experience, which he initially described in terms of ego identity, and on the role of ego and social context as prime determinants of this experience. His analysis of identity and identity-related experiences was far less circumscribed than James' analysis, yet he shared with James an affinity for process-orientated concepts (e.g., the *sense of identity*) and the subject-object distinction (e.g., ego versus identifications).

During the process of developing his theory of identity, Erikson attempted to reconcile psychodynamic thinking about personality with philosophical and more contemporary cognitive theories about self and identity. As a result, he recognized the need to describe identity by

reference to both the internal dynamics of self-representations (in terms of self-identity) and the external demands of social reality (in terms of ego identity). As objects within the self-system, Erikson's concepts of self- and ego-identity correspond closely to James' concepts of the material, social, and spiritual selves. Similarly, although their solutions differed, Erikson wrestled with the concepts of ego and I in much the same way that James had wrestled with these concepts. Together, Erikson's descriptions of identity and ego revealed a distinction between identity-related contents and processes that is very similar to James' distinction between identity as content and the sense of identity as process.

Erikson's identity theory – and the concepts of self- and ego-identity in particular – differed, in part, from James' by focusing explicitly on the inner and outer sources of identity-related information that stand in relation to the ego and the I. Putting aside, for the moment, the question of whether (or in which cases) it is the ego or I that stands in relation to either the self- or ego-identity content, by simply making such a stark distinction between these two types of information, Erikson drew our attention to the compelling idea that there is a fundamental distinction between information gathered through “direct” experience of the outer world (e.g., via basic learning processes like classic and operant conditioning) and information that is generated through higher-level cognitive processes (e.g., self-reflection). Whether considered in terms of either contents or processes, the idea that identity-related information exists at multiple levels of the self-system is consistent with a growing body of theoretical and empirical work in psychology (cf. Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Epstein, 1990; McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989). As argued in more detail, below, these ideas can be mapped directly onto Erikson's distinction between self-identity (in terms of rational information processing at “explicit” levels

of representation) and ego-identity (in terms of experiential information processing at “implicit” levels of representation).

In his final analysis, Erikson considered the ego and I as separate aspects of the personality system which, where perhaps bothersome to him, might provide us with the kind of theoretical room we need to clarify some of the more complex aspects of the person-in-context system, particularly in relation to subject-object issues. For example, where issues of consciousness, attention, activation, and action systems are of central concern (cf. Martindale, 1981), it might be useful to distinguish the observing I from the screening and synthesizing ego rather than lumping these qualities together within the I as did James. As our research and theories become more sophisticated, I suspect that we will find it useful (if not necessary) to make even further differentiations among the possible manifestations of both the I and the ego in relation to personal and social contents and processes, particularly where addressing those inner and outer sources of information that stand plausibly in relation to several manifestations of what James preferred to call I and Erikson preferred to call ego. For example, despite Erikson’s explicit objections to referring to the ego as object (see quote on my page 47), it is useful to consider the implications of construing ego and ego functions (e.g., as a screening system) less in terms of the I self and more in terms of the me selves. There is certainly a growing body of empirical evidence suggesting that the contents and processes of James’ me-self and Erikson’s ego-identity are sufficient, without regard to the kinds of conscious awareness or choices that are typically associated with the I, to account for many of the functional effects presumed by Erikson to be associated with ego-as-agent (e.g., Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2004).

Considered as a whole, Erikson’s identity theory builds upon the contributions of James, and the philosophers that came before him, by drawing focused attention to several key features

of the person-in-context system. First are the contents and processes of the self-identity and ego-identity (each of which implicates distinct “levels” within the self-system). Second are the contents (e.g., expectations and values) and processes (e.g., provision of average expectable environments) of the micro, meso, and macro levels of the environmental context (cf. Bronfenbrenner). Third are the subjective relations of the ego and I to these “objects” existing within the various social and personal levels germane to the physical and psychological worlds. Fourth are the patterns of stability and change that become evident when moving this entire complex person-in-context system through time.

Moving History Forward

Having reviewed the basic facts, as I understand them, the primary remaining task is to place these “facts” within an organizing framework that can be used as a map capable of guiding us out of the jingle-jangle jungle of identity. The ideal solution would be the development of a theoretical framework that could be applied equally well to every important question asked by any contemporary identity researcher and that could, at the same time, provide the basis for eliminating all known jingle and jangle fallacies. Together, as a field of similarly motivated individuals, I have no doubt that this ideal can be realized. In the mean time, given the scope of such a project, together with the fact that many people do not share my enthusiasm for grand theories of personality in context, I will settle here for sketching what I see as some essential ingredients of such a theoretical framework.

The problem. First, I will review the reasons why I feel it is necessary to offer yet another point of view on a topic that has no shortage of alternate points of views. We lack consensus on what identity is and what it is not (particularly in relation to concepts like personality, self, and self-concept), and we exert relatively little effort in reconciling current definitions (where they

are supplied at all) with past definitions and contemporary alternatives. As consumers of identity-related literature, we are apparently expected to accept usages of the term identity that lack specific meaning at both single points in time and, especially, across multiple points of time and contexts. I do not believe that Gleeson (1983) exaggerated when pointing out that “many who speak of identity are completely oblivious of the equivocation [e.g., between identity as something deep and intrapsychic as opposed to socially ascribed] and hence do not themselves know which of the interpretations they intend” (p. 920). Nor do I believe that Brubaker and Cooper (2000) exaggerated when arguing that the term identity “tends to mean too much..., too little..., or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)” (p. 1).

If there is any future for the identity concept, then we must confront these challenges by taking seriously the depth and extent of our collective terminological confusion about the meaning of the term identity. Without intending to stir unnecessary controversy, I feel compelled to share my observation that a variety of recent attempts to confront these challenges have largely failed to address explicitly the fundamental terminological issues that perpetuate incoherent information about identity and identity-related phenomena. Theoretical propositions appear to be too easily constructed on assumptions that have not been grounded conceptually or empirically in prior work. The extensive review of James’ and Erikson’s work on identity presented above was primarily motivated by the need to clarify exactly what these theorists did and did not say about the nature of identity. Identity theory will move forward most efficiently where consistencies and deviations from prior work are communicated clearly and explicitly (and never assumed) so that we (the researchers and consumers of research) know exactly what is and is not meant by any given term (and not simply within the context of a single paper). Until this becomes a standard operating procedure, and barring the revelation and adoption of some

unifying theoretical framework (or, at least, an integrative catalogue of identity terms and phenomena), I suspect that we will remain lost indefinitely in the jingle-jangle jungle of identity.

The outline of a solution. The organizing framework I have in mind extends the work reviewed above by placing the various types of identity terms within a multilevel person-in-context systems framework. In addition to addressing the units of analysis question, recognizing levels and the distinction among levels is essential for understanding dynamic processes (which tend to vary so strongly across levels that a lack of distinction between levels will correspond to a proportional lack of understanding of both within- and across-level dynamic processes). The multilevel person-in-context framework I propose here requires a combination of the two basic hierarchy systems that have been described in the hierarchical systems theory literature (cf. Ahl & Allen, 1996; Bertalanffy, 1968; Pattee, 1973a; Salthe, 1985; 1993); these two hierarchy systems can be used to clarify the many meanings of identity by distinguishing explicitly between persons and contexts; contents and processes; and subjects and objects (in two different but complementary ways). Different authors assign different names to these two basic hierarchy systems, but the principles they ascribe to each system are generally similar.

The overall system of hierarchical levels I describe below refers mainly to the state of the person-in-context system at a single “point” in time; that is, it focuses on structured personal and social content that exists in a temporal cross-section of psychological and physical space. Given a clear description of the person-in-context at a single point in time (synchronic), we will then be in a position to consider the more complicated implications associated with person-in-context systems moving through time (diachronic). Moving structured person-in-context content through time reveals processes that exist across a wide range of timescales both within and across hierarchy systems (cf. Lemke, 2000). Describing these dynamic processes in the simplest and

most consistent terms depends heavily on how clearly we specify the synchronic units of analysis upon which they are based. Despite this initial clarity, we should nevertheless expect the typical description of even the simplest dynamic person-in-context processes to appear fairly complicated to the untrained observer. Given this inherent complexity, and the purpose of this paper, I focus here on the synchronic part of the overall theoretical framework I have in mind.

Following Salthe (1993), I refer to the two basic types of hierarchy systems necessary for describing the entire person-in-context system as the *scalar* and *specification* hierarchies (which correspond closely to Pattee's (1973b) *structural* and *descriptive* hierarchies, respectively). Each system corresponds to a set of hierarchically arranged levels that can be used to distinguish among different units of analysis (defined in terms of either contents or processes). Beginning with the hierarchy system with the widest scope, we find the person and the context embedded in a series of synchronic scalar levels ranging from the subatomic to the astrophysical. As a scalar hierarchy, these *levels of organization* differ quantitatively along an open-ended continuum; each level contains similarly sized elements that differ substantially in size (i.e., by orders of magnitude) from the elements at both higher and lower levels (Salthe, 1993). The scalar system is characterized by part-whole relationships (such that parts at one level constitute wholes at another level that are, themselves, parts constituting larger wholes at a higher level) and is "synchronic" in the sense that the varying levels are described in relation to each other at a given "point" in time. Zooming in on the segment of this overall hierarchy of nature that is most relevant to the current person-in-context analysis, we find a series of levels that look something like this: molecules, cells, organs, organisms, groups, organizations, societies.

Given the person (as an organism that is composed of organs, cells, and molecules and that exists within groups, organizations, and society) and the context (as groups and

organizations that are composed of persons and that exist within a society), we are in a position to examine more closely the synchronic hierarchy systems that exist within persons and contexts. Beginning with the context, we can use the relatively familiar terms micro, meso, and macro to indicate the group, organization, and society levels of the person's environmental context (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1979). We could be more specific and describe these various hierarchical levels as a materially nested system of classmates, schools, and states or as a materially non-nested but functionally nested system of constraints (e.g., in terms of the expectations, rules, and laws specific to the respective levels). In the latter sense, we can think of the social context as a scalar hierarchy of social control levels (Pattee, 1973a).

Next, considering the person, I will use the terms phenomenological, symbolic, and iconic to indicate a functionally nested hierarchy of psychological control levels. An increasingly broad and compelling range of psychological research has revealed at least two distinct information storage and processing systems (cf. Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Ornstein, 1997; Paivio, 1986; Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977; Smith & DeCoster, 2000). Information on what I am calling the symbolic level has been described as linear, rational, explicit, analytic, declarative, rule-based, slow processing, fast learning, quick to change, and preconscious. Information on what I am calling the iconic level has been described as spatial, affective, implicit, imagistic, procedural, holistic, fast processing, slow learning, slow to change, and unconscious. Information at the phenomenological level – which is not to be confused with information at the symbolic level – is conscious and the quickest changing but otherwise tends to fuse seamlessly the diverse contents and processes associated with the symbolic and iconic levels. Viewed in terms of timescales (Lemke, 2000; Pattee, 1973c), cogent moments (Salthe, 1993), or the relative degree of stability over time (Conley, 1984; Helson & Stewart, 1994; Ziller, 1971), the basic

units of analysis on the phenomenological, symbolic, and iconic levels form a stability hierarchy that suggests a scalar interpretation of their relations.

Ideally, these six levels of personal and social control, taken together, would form a straightforward scalar hierarchy. However, there are several reasons why using a specification hierarchy (Salthe, 1993; cf. Pattee's, 1973b, descriptive hierarchy) to describe these levels makes sense at this point in history. In order to make sense of these reasons, we must first understand the specification hierarchy. As a hierarchy of definitions, or classes and subclasses, levels of specification differ qualitatively, refer to distinct realms of being, and can be understood as levels of descriptive generality (Salthe, 1993). Each level of specification can also implicate simultaneously parts and processes from several levels of organization. For example, if we consider iconic learning traces ("schemas") and symbolic beliefs as corresponding to distinct levels of specification, we can expect that atomic, molecular, and cellular levels of organization will exist within both the iconic and symbolic levels of specification. Most importantly, and in contrast to scalar levels (where nontransitivity across levels is the rule), there is "logical transitivity" (Salthe, 1993, p. 64) across the levels of a specification hierarchy which means synchronically, for example, that I am simultaneously a citizen of the planet (macro), a university employee (meso), a colleague (micro), happy (phenomenological), believing in science (symbolic), and motivated to contribute (iconic). In dynamic terms, logical transitivity means that contents and processes at one level can directly affect contents and processes at nonadjacent levels; for example, the State can impact directly on the individual by placing a "Stop" sign at the street corner.

We need both scalar and specification hierarchies to understand identity, and in subsequent work I will elaborate extensively on this theme. Here, though, I want to emphasize

some reasons why we cannot simply rely on the scalar hierarchy for the purposes of a synchronic description of the person-in-context. First, current theory and research related to the three personal levels of psychological control precludes a straightforward scalar interpretation; we simply do not yet know enough about how these different types of information are represented in the mind or brain. In addition, Salthe (1993) has described scalar hierarchies as open-ended at both ends (which makes sense in terms of the placement of the person and the context in the wider hierarchy of nature) but specification hierarchies as truncated at one end and open at the other (which makes sense in terms of the within-level units of analysis and their aggregations, which I describe below). This particular within-level asymmetry, which begins with a specific unit of analysis and ends with a potentially infinite array of possible higher-order configurations, also provides an analytic basis for the kind of diachronic systems framework required for a complete developmental analysis of the person-in-context-over-time system. Consequently, as labeled in Figure 1, I generally refer to the six levels of personal and social control described above – existing as they do within person and within context – in terms of levels of specification.

Finally, before considering the implications of these levels of organization and specification for resolving the jingle-jangle jungle of identity terms, the inherent complexity of the person-in-context system requires using yet another important hierarchical systems theory concept: *levels of integration*. The integrative levels concept, as used here, is really just a specification hierarchy viewed from a different (in this case, diachronic) perspective (cf. Salthe, 1993). The utility of the integrative levels concept becomes most apparent where considering the units of analysis, and their development, that are specific to each of the six levels of personal and social control. For example, beliefs are the basic unit of analysis at the symbolic level and sensory-affective-motor schemas (i.e., classical and operant learning traces) are the basic units of

analysis at the implicit level. Through the course of development, however, these basic units become integrated into higher-level aggregates such that the synchronic state of any level of the overall system can be described in terms of a wide range of aggregates of various degrees of complexity.

If we were to take the six levels of control as corresponding to distinct levels of scalar organization, the given units of analysis and their combinations within each level could be described in terms of parts at one level that constitute wholes at another level that are, themselves, parts constituting larger wholes at a higher level. For example, within the symbolic level, beliefs combine to form attitudes that combine to form goals that combine to form plans. Although this scalar interpretation might be an adequate statement about the synchronic state of the developing system, I prefer using the integrative levels concept (as labeled in Figure 1) to highlight the diachronic nature of the developmental processes that give rise to any given synchronic representation of the developing person in context. In other words, the synchronic state of each of the six levels of personal and social control result from and generate diachronic processes, but each of these person-in-context system levels can be described, at any given point in time, in terms of a specific state of integration among the relevant units of analysis.

This developmental yet “snapshot” perspective – that is, thinking about the given state of the person-in-context-over-time system in terms of diachronic integrative levels – allows us to better appreciate the “simultaneous presences” (Salthe, 1993, p. 66) of the various within-level units and their aggregates. For example, adults tend to have simultaneously present goals and beliefs, with goals being a more specific statement of generality than beliefs (i.e., people have many beliefs but form goals using only a very restricted subset of these beliefs). These simultaneous presences, in turn, allow for a diversity of conceptual approaches (e.g., biological,

psychological, sociological) to understanding objects (e.g., goals) at a given level of specification (e.g., explicit) without sacrificing the idea that the given object might actually exist at that particular level of specification and state of integration.

Further details about, and relations among, these different types of hierarchical levels, in terms of the developing person-in-context system described here, will be the focus of a subsequent paper. Here I want to show only how these levels can provide a guide for extricating ourselves from the jingle-jangle jungle of identity. First, to summarize briefly, the levels-of-organization hierarchy allows us to place the person-in-context system within the larger system of nature; it instantiates the important relation between persons and contexts as distinct but interconnected units of analysis that are themselves embedded within a much larger array of complex systems. The levels-of-specification hierarchy highlights fundamental distinctions among the diverse ways that information is represented within both persons and contexts; these distinctions allow us to map clearly and consistently our terminology onto our conceptual and operational definitions of person and context variables. The levels-of-integration hierarchy allows us to understand how particular units of analysis become integrated over time into increasingly complex configurations of level-specific content. We can now use our knowledge about these hierarchy systems to articulate more precisely the differences and commonalities among the full range of past and present identity concepts.

Applying the multilevel person-in-context systems model. As seen in Figure 1, the multilevel person-in-context systems model described above allows us to specify clearly any given meaning of the term identity by reference to the corresponding levels of organization (α , β) specification (I, II, III), and integration (a, b, c, d) within the person-in-context system. For example, if I refer to personal identity in terms of an individual's experience of selfsameness,

then I would be defining the sense of personal identity as $\alpha.I.b$ (assuming by “b” that the object of this thought was of the compound variety described by James, 1890); that is, the sense of personal identity refers to the personal (α) phenomenological ($\alpha.I$) experience of past and present selves being the same ($\alpha.I.b$). If, on the other hand, I refer to personal identity in terms of an individual’s self-reported occupational aspiration, then I would be defining personal identity as $\alpha.II.c$ (assuming by “c” that the given occupation has been selected but that a plan for obtaining it has not necessarily been formulated).

We can apply this same logic to each term used by any investigator who provides enough detail about what exactly they mean where they use the term identity. For example, as reviewed above, in many cases both James and Erikson provided enough information about the identity related terms they used for us to be able to determine where in the multilevel person-in-context model these terms should be placed. For example, James’ concept of the sense of personal identity corresponds to the personal, phenomenological, aggregate ($\alpha.I.b+$) level (e.g., where referring to the subjective synthesis, by the “present judging Thought,” of past and present me selves) whereas his concept of personal identity as an object, or me-self, corresponds to the personal, iconic, aggregate ($\alpha.III.b+$) level (e.g., where referring to the “nuclear self”) and the personal, symbolic, aggregate ($\alpha.II.b+$) level (e.g., where referring to the sameness of past and present me selves that are perceived by the “present judging Thought”).

Similarly, Erikson’s initial (i.e., 1950) statements about the sense of personal identity correspond to the personal, phenomenological, elemental ($\alpha.I.a$) level (e.g., where referring to the experience of the simple fact of one’s existence) whereas his initial statements about the sense of ego-identity correspond to the personal, phenomenological, aggregate ($\alpha.I.b$) level (e.g., where referring to the experience of continuity and sameness). Recall, however, that by 1968 Erikson

had reformulated his definition of the sense of personal identity and that his 1968 definition corresponds to the personal, phenomenological, aggregate (α .I.c) level (e.g., where referring to the experiences of both selfsameness and social recognition).

Erikson's (1968) descriptions of, and distinctions between, self-identity and ego-identity can also be framed within this multilevel person-in-context model. During the early years of his work on identity theory (i.e., 1946 to 1959), Erikson tended to describe ego-identity at the personal, phenomenological (α .I) level (e.g., where referring to the quality of emotional experience) but, by 1968, had begun describing ego-identity more in terms of the personal, iconic (α .III) level (e.g., where referring to "the result of the synthesizing function...[in relation to] that 'environment' which is social reality" [p. 211]). In almost every case, Erikson (1968) described self-identity at the personal, symbolic (α .II) level (e.g., where referring to "the integration of the individual's self- and role-images" [p. 211]).

Despite this simple analysis, placing the concepts of either self-identity or ego-identity exclusively at either the iconic or symbolic personal levels would almost certainly be an overgeneralization, particularly because we have not yet considered how symbolic and iconic information becomes integrated during the developmental process. Erikson was certainly aware that structured content at the personal level varies in accessibility to, and presence in, consciousness as a function of both personal and social factors (e.g., 1968, pp. 129-130; 157-158); and these variations correspond to what we know about iconic and symbolic representations. However, it is probably wise to reserve judgment about the extent to which self-identity, for example, might be represented at the iconic level until the science of psychology obtains a more thorough understanding interrelations between of iconic and symbolic content and processes (and their relation to consciousness).

Finally, although my focus in this paper has been on the personal levels of representation, this multilevel person-in-context model generalizes straightforwardly to the social levels. For example, a 9:00 PM curfew communicated by the parents of a 15 year old child would correspond to structured content that is represented at the social, micro (β .I) level (e.g., where referring to Erikson's use of the concept of an average expectable environment) whereas the school on the corner (and the state laws requiring attendance) would be at the social, macro (β .III) level (e.g., where referring to Erikson's use of the concepts of institutions and cultural ideologies). Using this logic, we can place Erikson's concept of cultural identity on the social, macro (β .III) level and group identity on the social, meso (β .II) level. Taken together, these designations clearly reflect where and when identity is being defined at contextual versus personal levels of scalar organization.

Unfinished Business

This detailed review of James' and Erikson's work on identity, and the brief outline of the multilevel person-in-context systems framework that can be used to place a large variety of identity concepts into a relatively few conceptual definitions and labels, leaves open many questions. In this concluding section, I will address some of the questions and issues that seem, to me, to require immediate attention. I include among these questions and issues (a) the unity and multiplicity of identity, (b) the dual nature of subject-object distinction, (c) the relation between content and process both within and across time, (d) the implications of the proposed multilevel model for theory and research related more generally to personality, the self, and the environmental context.

The unity and multiplicity of identity. Recall from my review of some of the early philosophical thinking about the nature of identity that the process and content views were often

taken in opposition to one another. I shudder when I see contemporary authors pitting against each other the unitary “versus” multiplicity views on identity. Clearly, from a multilevel perspective, we can resolve this false dichotomy by seeing that identity is simultaneously multiple and unitary; that is, the sense of identity is typically unitary in experience (as process) whereas the manifestations of identity at the iconic and symbolic levels (as structured content) constitute an unabashed multiplicity.

The dual nature of the subject-object distinction. In order to accommodate the many concepts of identity used in the social sciences, we must recognize and integrate two kinds of subject-object distinctions: the person-environment kind of subject-object distinction and the phenomenological kind of subject-object distinction. The person-environment kind of subject-object distinction is generally based on the assumption that variables associated with the person exist at a single level of analysis; these person variables are generally examined in relation to environmental variables that are also assumed to exist at a single level of analysis. In most cases, both person and environment variables are treated as if they all belong to the same level of analysis. In some cases, this kind of subject-object distinction corresponds to theoretical and empirical analyses that assume implicitly that the person and the environment exist at distinct levels of organization. These analyses seldom include further differentiations of the person and environment into sublevels yet, nevertheless, provide an implicit frame of reference for statements like “that person is subjected to more abuse than any one should have to endure” where the person is the subject and some feature of the environment (e.g., another person) is the object. This person-environment perspective is very common in the social sciences and can be used where describing a wide range of relations between personal and environmental factors

(e.g., the effects of poverty on mental health or the effects of motivation on occupational attainment).

The phenomenological kind of subject-object distinction is based on the assumption that the person's conscious experience is the unit of analysis and that this conscious experience stands in unitary relation to the social environment as well as to the self-as-object. The self-as-object, in these terms, includes contents and processes at the iconic and symbolic psychological and physical (e.g., the body) levels. For example, an individual's conscious experience (as subject) stands in relation to discrimination (as a social object), beliefs about discrimination (as a psychological object), and skin color (as a physical object). This phenomenological kind of subject-object distinction, then, is generally based on the assumption that variables associated with the environment exist at one level of analysis and variables associated with the person exist at more than one level of analysis (even though the multilevel model of these person variables is rarely specified explicitly). As James (1890) noted when describing the nature of the subject-object distinction as it manifests itself within the stream of consciousness, or at the phenomenological level:

The psychologist's attitude towards cognition will be so important in the sequel that we must not leave it until it is made perfectly clear. It is a thoroughgoing dualism. It supposes two elements, mind knowing and thing known, and treats them as irreducible.
(p. 218)

Given these two types of subject-object distinctions, bridging the psychological and social levels of analyses will be most successful where being conscientious and specific about the kind of subject-object distinction being used at every step of any given theoretical or empirical

investigation. The proposed multilevel person-in-context systems model provides the necessary framework for achieving this kind of specificity.

The within and across time relations between content and process. I think it is fair to say that process thinking and process models of persons and contexts currently dominate most areas of social science; structural approaches tend to be dismissed as overly mechanistic. My argument, here, is that we need models of persons in contexts that represent equally structural and process approaches. Unfortunately, the relation between content and process is among the most esoteric problems that arises from the study of identity and, especially, the multilevel models necessary to make sense out of this study. In this section, I will provide only the slightest introduction to this fascinating issue and leave the really hard work for a subsequent paper in which I elaborate the proposed multilevel person-in-context model.

The reason that content and process needs to be equally represented is simple (from a multilevel perspective): Structured content at higher levels is tantamount to dynamic processes at lower levels. In other words, whatever it is that we call a “thing” (content) at one level is also a large set of things in motion (process) at another level. For example, my pencil appears to be a solid object at one level and a collection of whirring atoms at another level. This relation between content and process can also be appreciated in terms of timescales (Lemke, 2000), or cogent moments (Salthe, 1993). If we consider a moment in our normally experienced time, we can see that many things happen during this moment at lower levels (e.g., atomic) and practically nothing happens during this moment at higher levels (e.g., astrophysical). Content (i.e., apparent, or temporary, stabilities) is thus process (i.e., change) that occurs outside the bounds of the level in question. Viewed in this way, and without even broaching the issue of development, it is easy to understand why persons and contexts can be, and should be, described in terms of both

process and content; which is one of the reasons we need multilevel models to study and understand the nature of identity.

Personality, self, and identity. There is nothing about my proposed multilevel model that is truly specific to questions about identity; the model is intended to apply generally to a wide range of topics germane to theory and research in the social sciences. Although I have restricted my focus to the jingle-jungle jungle of identity concepts, there are many implications of the multilevel person-in-context model for theory and research related more generally to personality, the self, and the environmental context. For example, the increasingly popular distinction between states and traits is typically used to distinguish between variables associated with the phenomenological level from variables associated with the explicit and implicit levels.

Content and processes at the state level are typically viewed as changing on a moment by moment basis whereas content and processes at the trait level are typically viewed as being relatively enduring across time. We can see, by applying the proposed multilevel model, that decisions about defining variables as state-like as opposed to trait-like will vary on a continuum as a function of the range of levels included in a given analysis. For example, although some people have argued that implicit content and processes do not change very much during adulthood, adopting a multilevel perspective suggests that implicit contents and processes are changing, however slowly, all the time.

Shifting the focus of attention from identity to something like traits should remind us about the amount of work involved with resolving, or even addressing, the various and overlapping meanings assigned to the terms identity, self, and personality. Taken together, these meanings could be construed as the most pervasive set of jangle fallacies in the history of psychological science. Recall that within their descriptions of identity, James often referred to

the concept of self and Erikson often referred to the concept of personality. In both cases, they were referring to some unspecified yet organized pattern of content and processes that was presumed to be superordinate to identity. I believe that some kind of multilevel model, like the one proposed here, will be necessary to differentiate among these concepts (or, if necessary, dispose of one or more redundancies). Given the historical precedents, however, it seems most likely that we will eventually opt for some parsing of these terms that will allow us to retain them all. For example, we might use the term identity where referring only to those contents and processes that relate specifically to experiences of selfsameness, the term self where referring to any implicit and explicit contents and processes that relate specifically to self and world theories, and the term personality where referring to any and all of the remaining collection of psychophysiological contents and processes.

Concluding comments. I have said very little about the dynamic implications of the multilevel person-in-context systems framework. Before closing, I would like to consider the concept of “social experience” as an example of the dynamic implications of such a multilevel model. Although the term social experience is often used as if it were a particular thing, close inspection of this concept reveals a complex dynamic multilevel phenomenon. We can easily say that identity development is influenced by social experience, but adequate theory and research (and absence of confusion) related to such a statement requires potentially attending to every level of the person-in-context system: that is, the person’s physical body, with its observable features, that so often elicits responses from others; the environmental stimuli that enter the intraindividual system through the body’s afferent nervous system and that might be represented at any or all of the micro, meso, and macro levels; the primary appraisal processes (that are governed mainly by contents and processes at the iconic and symbolic levels); the

phenomenological (as well as unconscious) experiences that are associated with these primary appraisals; as well as the secondary appraisal processes and experiences that follow from the primary-process related experiences (and that are governed mainly by the contents and processes at the symbolic level). The sheer range of possible experiential consequences associated with any given encounter with an array of social stimuli should give serious pause to anyone who would use the term social experience as if it referred to something in particular (unless that something is truly intended to refer to a similarly complex series of events that could mean practically anything to the person in question). In most cases, as in many other similar cases, it would probably make more sense to use more specific language, which is one of the purposes for developing a multilevel person-in-context systems framework.

Finally, I would like to mention briefly a few contemporary theoretical and methodological approaches that embody some of the multilevel principles I am advocating. First, Epstein's (1973; 1985; 1990) cognitive-experiential self-theory goes a long way toward accomplishing the kind of differentiation and integration among self-related concepts that is necessary for resolving issues like the jingle-jangle jungle of identity. The extensive theoretical and empirical work related to this approach can be used to clarify and resolve many of the known jingle and jangle fallacies found in the identity literature. Second, Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1995; see also Lerner & Castellino, 2002) person-process-context model focuses on the various levels of the social context but also represents explicitly and simultaneously structured content at multiple levels of the person and the environment, all of which changes more or less continually with the passage of time. Third, Magnusson's (2000, 2003) holistic-interactionistic perspective on the conceptualization, measurement, and analysis of development in context provides a theoretical and methodological framework that is explicitly sensitive to complex

dynamic structures and processes that occur simultaneously at multiple levels of analysis. I have drawn on all three of these approaches during my attempts to understand the nature of the jingle-jangle jungle of identity and to develop a multilevel person-in-context systems framework that I believe can be used to resolve most of the terminological confusion related to the identity concept. I would like to assume that a majority of social scientists are motivated to resolve these issues, so I close with a mantra that can be used to keep us on track: “jingle and jangle fallacies...waste scientific time.... Together, these fallacies prevent the recognition of correspondences that could help build cumulative knowledge” (Block, 1995, p. 210).

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Footnotes

1. The analyses reported here were based on the responses obtained from 5 participants (out of a possible 8; three participants did not complete the somewhat arduous sorting task). To protect participants' anonymity, each envelope was identified only with a letter. Thanks to Hank Yeh and Rhea Yap for their assistance in analyzing these data.

2. Specifically: "I observed that there is nothing at all in the proposition '*I am thinking, therefore I exist*' to assure me that I am speaking the truth, except that I see very clearly that in order to think it is necessary to exist." (Descartes, 1637/1985).

3. Hume also took the "empiricist" position to the extreme, by arguing that "when my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep, so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist" ... and that "I" am "*nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions*"

4. James' use of the term "spiritual" was, in most cases, equivalent to the contemporary term, "psychological."

5. Note that James was using the term "subjective being" here in the substantive, as opposed to the experiential sense; hence, the disclaimer: "not the... 'pure' Ego."

6. James also referred to this as the "bare numerical principle of distinction from other [people]" (p. 322), thereby highlighting the extent to which *distinctiveness* abides as an implicit, if not explicit, property of "identity." James also referred to this as "one's mere principle of conscious identity," thereby highlighting the role of conscious awareness in these identity experiences.

7. The "central adjustments" were described as part of our inner subjective being and would most closely approximate what we now refer to, generally, as psychophysiological – or, in

many cases, just plain psychological -- constructs; that is, "...the nuclear part of the Self, intermediary between ideas and overt acts, would be a collection of activities physiologically in no essential way different from the overt acts themselves. If we divide all possible physiological acts into *adjustments* and *executions*, the nuclear self would be the adjustments collectively considered; and the less intimate, more shifting self, so far as it was active, would be the executions" (p. 302).

8. This form of consciousness differs markedly from the consciousness characterizing awareness of the environment, per se, as we witness to some extent in all species; here I am referring explicitly to the human awareness of being aware of our own awareness (which can be likened to taking one's self as the object of awareness).

9. James did argue that "social recognition" was an essential component of a healthy self system. He made this argument with respect to the effects of social recognition on the "social self" and, implicitly at least, on one's self-esteem. However, James did not relate the concept of social recognition to the concept of personal identity, per se, probably because he defined identity more narrowly than Erikson. In other words, James' comments about the importance of social recognition relate more to Erikson's concept of ego identity than to Erikson's concept of personal identity.

10. Assuming that psychological constructs are necessarily imaginary, or fictitious (just as assuming that they are real, or factual), can interfere with clear understanding about the nature of personal and social realities, hence the reality of persons in context (cf. Allport, 1961). For example, applying this same logic to questions about the substantive reality of any of the objects in the material world – all being composed of those similarly abstract and apparently hypothetical constructs called, for example, atoms, gluons, quarks, etc. – forces the same

“imaginary” conclusion about any of the terms we use to describe “reality.” Consequently, this metatheoretical stance can obscure a variety of important distinctions; for example, the distinction between identity elements (as things) and identity experiences (as processes, or as the relation of conscious awareness to these things).

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Using a multidimensional hierarchical systems approach to organizing the many types of identity-related information and experiences. Note: “Phenom” = phenomenological; “P” = parent; and “Y” = youth.

Multi-Level Person-in-Context Systems

		Levels of Integration						
		a	b	c	d			
Levels of Organization	Levels of Specification	Phenom: I	I am	I am well	I like my place in society	I have come a long way as a citizen		
			Person: α	Symbolic: II	beliefs	attitudes	goals	plans
					Iconic: III	single learning trace	several learning traces	schema

		Body ~ Behavior						
Context: β		Micro: I	Parent expects Y to do homework	P expects Y to clean room, do homework	P expects Y to clean room, do homework, and wash car	P expects Y to clean room, do homework, wash car, and ..		
			Meso: II	Principle expects Y to attend class	Principle expects Y to attend class, do course work	Principle expects Y to attend class, do work, and respect others	Principle expects Y to attend class, work, respect, and graduate	
				Macro: III	State expects Y to attend school	State expects Y to attend school and obey curfew laws	State expects Y to attend school, obey curfew and traffic laws	State expects Y to attend school, obey traffic, curfew, and tax laws