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Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory on Frankie McGrath's Character in Kristin Hannah's *The Women*

Rimsha Qamar^{*1}, Aisha Farooq², Muhammad Zarar³

^{*1}*M. Phil Scholar, Qurtuba University of Sciences and Information Technology, Peshawar Campus, Pakistan*

²*M. Phil Scholar, Qurtuba University of Sciences and Information Technology, Peshawar Campus, Pakistan*

³*Lecturer, Bangladesh International School (English Section), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia*

^{*1}rimshaqamar030@gmail.com, ²aisha.farooq2022@gmail.com,
³zararkhan586@gmail.com



Abstract

*This research aims to address the character development of Frances "Frankie" McGrath in Kristin Hannah's novel *The Women* (2024) using Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development as a theoretical framework. Erikson's theory suggests that human development passes through eight psychosocial stages, with each stage having a psychosocial conflict that shapes the formation of personality and psychological health. The qualitative textual analysis and the close reading methodology of this research examines the experiences of Frankie McGrath as a military nurse in the Vietnam War and how they reflect the psychosocial crises discussed in Erikson's model. The results show how many times Frankie's development of her psychosocial functioning has been disrupted by trauma in the war, gender discrimination, social rejection and loss of loved ones. But she learns to rise above it, to reflect on her experiences, and to build supportive relationships, and she slowly rebuilds her psychological maturity and a sense of self. The study shows that Hannah's novel presents a rich picture of psychosocial growth in which development is not sequential, but recursive necessitating the return to earlier developmental struggles and dilemmas to attain emotional integrity as the individual. The study enriches literary research by providing a glimpse of the significance of developmental psychology in the process of character development and trauma narratives.*

The film tells the story of Frankie McGrath, a World War II veteran who suffered from a traumatic war and struggles to find his identity after returning home. The movie follows World War II veteran, Frankie McGrath, who suffered from a traumatic war and is having trouble finding his identity once he returns home.

Keywords: Erik Erikson, Psychosocial Development, Frankie McGrath, Kristin Hannah, *The Women*, Character Analysis, Trauma, Identity Formation

INTRODUCTION

Literature is an effective tool for depicting human experience, feelings and social realities. It captures the intricacies of the human psyche, depicting the reactions of people to personal and cultural pressures, and historical events. Literary texts can, therefore, be used to explore character development, emotional conflict and identity formation. According to Tyson (2015), psychological criticism helps to allow readers to delve into the mind and emotions of literary characters and how those characters act in the plot.

In modern literary criticism, the psychological theories have become very important, as they enable the reader to explore the characters from more than a superficial level and observe the inner motivations and conflicts. Erikson's theory of Psychosocial Development is significant among various psychological theories, because of its focus on the relationship between the person and society. According to Erikson (1950) personality is shaped by eight psychosocial stages, with each one having a developmental crisis that needs to be overcome to produce healthy psychological development. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development emphasizes social and cultural factors in identity development throughout the lifespan, in contrast to Freud's psychosexual theory.

Erikson (1968) expanded on the notion of identity, focusing on the idea that it is a dynamic process influenced by one's experiences and relationships. This is very relevant to literary analysis as fictional characters can experience identity crisis, emotional change and psychological development. Marcia (1966) later developed this work by adding identity status categories to account for the exploration and commitment to identity roles. These theories are interrelated and give a good analytical basis for the study of character development in literature.

When it comes to narratives that involve trauma, psychological development is a major factor. Trauma can alter one's sense of self and emotional stability (Herman, 1992) and traumatic events can cause fragmentation of memory and affect the ability to tell a coherent story (Caruth, 1996). This type of disruptions

can disrupt normal developmental process, compelling people to deal with the same psychological conflicts that they previously faced. This is useful when analyzing characters in situations of trauma as Erikson's theory is concerned with the impact of trauma.

The Women (2024) is a novel by writer Kristen Hannah that depicts strong female military nurses that fought in the Vietnam War. The story is about a young woman, named Frances "Frankie" McGrath, who joins the Army as a nurse and is subjected to violence, death and emotional trauma. These experiences have very much shaped her identity and worldview. Back home she is socially rejected, discriminated against on the basis of gender, and is isolated from emotional support. She comes back home and yet she is socially withdrawn, discriminated upon on the basis of gender and is emotionally isolated.

Frankie's identity, belonging, trust and self-worth issues are linked to his psychosocial conflicts, which map onto his developmental phases of Erikson's theory. Her experiences illustrate the impact of trauma and social exclusion on psychological development, not just in the childhood and adolescence years, but as an adult and through the process of reconstructing identity.

Despite abundant literature on *The Women* as a feminist work of art, past studies have not explored the work sufficiently to address the psychosocial development of Frankie as a psychologist. This study aims to fill this void by analysing Frankie McGrath's character based on Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development.

This research is focused on the impact of war, trauma, gender discrimination and social exclusion on psychosocial development and identity construction in *The Women*. In this way it helps to enrich the knowledge about literature and psychology and illustrates the connection between fictional texts and actual human developmental challenges.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

War trauma, social isolation and individual trauma have led to deep psychological change in Frankie McGrath's character in *The Women*. Though the novel was popular and scholars have paid increasing attention to trauma narratives and feminist works, little research has examined Frankie's developmental trajectory using Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development.

There is therefore a lack of knowledge regarding the relationship between Frankie's experience and the eight psychosocial stages of Eriksons and the impact of outside forces on the outcome of developmental conflicts. The aim of this study is to look at the implementation of Erikson's psychosocial theory with Frankie's character and what role her experiences play in her psychological development, identity and emotional maturity.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To discuss Frankie McGrath character using Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development.
2. To determine the social and psychological tensions that Frankie faced in the novel.
3. To explore Frankie's negotiation and problem solving of developmental crises in various life stages.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it provides a contribution to both literary criticism and psychological research. Literary-wise, the study provides an in-depth analysis of Frankie's character through the processes of her development in the experiences. It shows an example of the use of Erikson's psychosocial theory in modern historical fiction and how psychology could be used to interpret literature. The psychological point of view is demonstrated in the study with regard to the effects of trauma, social exclusion and gender discrimination on psychosocial development and identity construction. In addition, it can be used to add to the existing literature on *The Women* by filling a gap in the academic literature. The findings could have implications for literary psychologists, students, researchers, and scholars in the fields of literary psychology, trauma research, character analysis, and modern American literature.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Literature review is an important part of research as it gives a good knowledge of previous research, theories, and discussions among scholars on the topic under study. It helps researchers find out what is already known, to review the results of past research, and to find gaps that need to be filled to enable new studies. This chapter reviews scholarship relevant to the present study on psychosocial development, identity formation, trauma studies, psychological literary criticism, and existing research on Hannah's works, as Frankie McGrath's character in Kristin Hannah's *The Women* is the focus of the present study.

The chapter starts by discussing the theory of Psychosocial Development by Erikson and relevant research that has been carried out on identity formation. It then explores trauma and psychological development, followed by a discussion of literary criticism by psychological means. Finally, it reviews the current scholarship on Kristin Hannah's fiction and points out the gap in scholarship it kicks off the present study.

2.2 Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

The psychosocial development is an integral part of developmental psychology. The Theory of Psychosocial Development in Childhood and Society (1950) was introduced by Erik Erikson and he had some eight psychosocial stages ranging from infancy to old age. Erikson (1950) has suggested that every stage of development has its own crisis that, when successfully resolved, will lead to healthy personality development, while failure to resolve the crisis will create psychological problems later in life.

Erikson, unlike Freud, who was more concerned with biological instincts and psychosexual development, placed greater emphasis on the importance of social relationships, culture, and environment for personality development. He claimed that development is a lifelong process, and that people face psychosocial issues all their life (Erikson, 1950).

Erikson (1968) later developed his theory, focusing on identity formation, as one of the most significant areas of human development, in his book *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. He proposed that identities are continually recreated in a social process and as a result of experiences in life. Erikson suggested that people are able to develop a unified sense of self by combining personal values, beliefs, experiences and social roles.

Erikson's theory has been acknowledged as one of the most influential developmental theories as it provides an understanding of social and cultural influences on psychological growth. Kroger (2007) states that the relevance of Erikson's model in modern research on identity is that identity is formed in a social context, and identity is dynamic. In the same way, Newman and Newman (2020) argue that the concept of psychosocial development is suitable for analyzing individuals' coping with life transitions and psychological issues.

The significance of Erikson's theory in literary studies is expanding and has come to the fore. Literary characters often experience changes in their lives and become involved in multiple social, psychological, and emotional struggles, so the psychosocial model is useful for literary scholars to analyze identity crises, emotional issues, and personal development in fiction.

2.3 Identity Formation and Marcia's Identity Status Theory

Marcia (1966) extended Erikson's idea of identity with the creation of Identity Status Theory, which describes how people create and sustain their sense of identity. Marcia stated that the two key processes of identity development are exploration and commitment. He used these processes to list four identity statuses: identity achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity diffusion.

Marcia (1966) defines identity achievement as when a person successfully explores alternatives and makes meaningful commitments about his or her beliefs, values and goals. Identity diffusion is characterized, on the other hand, by confusion and a lack of commitment. In the case of moratorium, people seek to explore but are not committed, while in foreclosure, they are committed without exploration.

Marcia's theory builds on Erikson's psychosocial theory by adding more context to identity development when uncertainty and change occur. Schwartz (2001) has proposed that the process of identity formation is a lifelong experience, not just a period in adolescence. It is very applicable to any literary character that suffers a large life trauma that necessitates the character to redefine themselves.

Interpersonal sense-making of identity formation plays a particularly important role in understanding protagonists who experience trauma, social exclusion and personal crises. In these situations, one's sense of identity is not secure, and people have to re-negotiate their sense of themselves and their social location.

2.4 Trauma and Psychological Development

The psychological impact of violence, loss, and suffering are important lessons learned from trauma studies. Trauma scholars believe that trauma experiences can affect normal developmental processes and cause a person to question his/her identity and emotional balance. Likewise, Caruth (1996) explains that trauma is an event that is so much too much for a person to handle and/or understand as it continues to happen. Traumatic experiences often pop up in bits, making it hard for people to form a whole story from the pieces, she said. Trauma thus wreaks havoc on memory and identity.

Likewise, Herman (1992) asserts that trauma impacts on key psychological processes such as trust, autonomy, intimacy, and self-perception. She recommends people who have survived the incident may feel

emotionally isolated, anxious, depressed and may struggle with relationships. These symptoms often cause disruption in normal socio-social development.

Van der Kolk (2014) also asserts that trauma is not only a psychological trauma, but it is also a physical trauma that impacts the body and mind. He says that traumatic experiences can completely change how people regulate their emotions, interact with others and are aware of their self. The disruptions tend to bring up the past developmental conflicts, lending support to Erikson's belief that psychosocial crises can recur at any period of life.

The link between trauma and psychosocial development is especially important as it relates to war narratives as war causes individuals to undergo extreme psychosocial stress. This is why developmental theories and trauma theories have been combined to explain character reactions to traumatic experiences and the reconstruction of identities.

2.5 Psychological Literary Criticism

Psychological literary criticism is a special branch of literary criticism that studies literature related to human psychology. It aims to grasp the psychological, emotional and personality dynamics in literary texts. Similarly, a psychological criticism allows the reader to examine literary characters' unconscious motivations and emotional struggles, as Tyson (2015) explains. In this manner, literature gives itself the reflection of human behavior and psychological processes.

Likewise, Barry (2020) indicates that literary texts can be used as a source of interpretation in the field of psychology, as it offers theories that can be used as tools for interpreting what characters are doing and what the themes are in literature. Psychological criticism aids the study of how social experiences, conflicts, and emotional reactions can shape character.

Abrams and Harpham (2015) argue that literary characters can be viewed as symbols of real human experiences and thus examined from a psychological perspective. These analyses help to uncover meaning in stories and stories of human nature.

Using psychological theories in literature has been gradually popularized due to the fact that the theory could be used to connect literature to human psychology. The psychosocial theory of Erikson is especially effective because it takes into account the social and personal experiences of a person, which are both important topics of the literary narrative.

2.6 Studies on Kristin Hannah's Fiction

The Women (2024) is a historical novel by author, speaker, and educator Kristin Hannah about young Army nurse Frances "Frankie" McGrath, who is serving in Vietnam, and later who is trying to be accepted as a veteran when she comes home. The novel was published by St. Martin's Press in February 2024, and became a multi-week #1 bestseller, and one of the most talked-about works of commercial historical fiction for the year (Onion, 2024). The novel is relatively new, and there is not yet enough sustained peer-reviewed scholarship to build up. In a sense, this review is an analysis of the large body of "literature" that has developed around the text, namely the book reviews in the major newspaper journals, the author interviews, and the critical commentary. The book reviews, the interviews, and the critical commentary are all in one sense or another an analysis of how reviewers, journalists, and Hannah have assigned meaning to themes, historical project, and reception.

Hannah credits the concept for the novel to coming to her mind decades before the book's publication, stemming from her memories of Vietnam war disruption of families in her community (PBS Amanpour and Company, 2024). She took a step back from the project for years, thinking she wasn't ready for its size, until she saw how much nurses had sacrificed in Vietnam and how much Healthcare Workers have during the COVID-19 pandemic (O'Connor, 2024). Hannah based Frankie's story on the experiences of former Army nurses and interviewed medical evacuation pilots and veterans, using the experiences of real women who served as the foundation for the fiction (Orange Coast, 2025).

An idea that occurs repeatedly in the book's critiques is the lack of recognition of women's military participation in Vietnam's dominant cultural memory. Frankie is repeatedly informed, in various guises, that there were no women in Vietnam, a theme noted by the reviewers, that highlights the historical invisibility of the approximately ten thousand women, mostly nurses, who served in Vietnam (Book Reviews Online, 2026). Hannah has framed this lack of recognition as the main theme of the book, stating that she wants to return women to a war narrative that has been "garnering almost all the attention among the male combatants" (PBS Amanpour and Company, 2024).

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The novel's management of post-war trauma is closely related to its dealing with the erasure topic. Frankie's problems when he arrived home, such as his addiction to drugs and alcohol and the inability to fit back into civilian life, are typical of Vietnam vets, whose psychological wounds were largely ignored in the pre-PTSD era (Book Reviews Online, 2026). But this same theme of women somehow not serving in Vietnam was ridiculed by Rebecca Onion (2024) in Slate, where she claimed that the line of dismissal is repeated from novel to novel, to the point of losing dramatic impact.

Similarly, a number of critics point to the relationships between the nurse characters as a structural and psychological centre to the novel. Hannah has stated that she wanted to portray friendships and camaraderie among women during wartime in the same manner that is commonly done among men in war fiction—making them an integral part of her characters' lives both before and after deployment (Orange Coast, 2025).

The New York Times review by Beatriz Williams, which I had the pleasure of reading, is a coming-of-age narrative about Frankie's development from a sheltered young woman to a person who can assume responsibility at high-stakes levels for long stretches. *The Women* is part of Hannah's larger oeuvre of historical fiction, each of which tells the story of women whose lives are transformed by historical events. Similarly, the reviews of *The Women* by Mainstream have been mostly positive. Williams (2024) championed Hannah for her ability to keep the novel going despite the numerous crises and called the book a "re-centering of the Vietnam War story on women's experience. In a Washington Post review, Stephanie Merry wrote that the novel was a paean to forgotten soldiers, but that reading Hannah's emotionally costly fiction is "a popular if challenging pastime" (Merry, 2024).

There have not been entirely positive evaluations. Onion (2024) has the sharpest criticism in Slate, which holds that the novel's melodramatic plot (the return and survival of two characters that had been previously thought dead) is melodramatic, and that its secondary characters, Vietnamese characters, are underdeveloped in comparison to its protagonist. Despite the serious topic of the novel, Onion pointed out that the prose style and the use of emotional escalation make it more like a commercial romance than a literary war fiction.

3.1 Research Methodology

This study uses the qualitative research design approach. It is suitable because of the focus on interpretation, meaning, and in-depth analysis rather than on numerical measurement, which is the focus of qualitative research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that qualitative research offers the possibility of exploring complex social phenomena and human experience in a detailed manner by examining and interpreting it.

As the study aims to analyze psychological development in a literary work, it is suitable to use a qualitative approach for this study to understand the behavior of characters, the conflicts of the characters' emotions, and the representation of them, as well as to find the thematic.

3.1.1 Research Method

Textual Analysis is the method used in this study. Textual analysis is the systematic study of language, themes, characterization, symbols and structure of a narrative within a literary text. The researcher uses close reading to find passages that show psychosocial conflict and development changes. Textual analysis is used to explore Frankie's experiences in depth and how they relate to Erikson's psychosocial stages.

3.1.2 Primary Source

Hannah, K is the main reference for this study. (2024). *The Women*. St. Martin's Press. The novel is the main text that is referenced, interpreted and discussed on characters, events and themes.

3.4.2 Secondary Sources

Secondary sources: Scholarly books, journal articles, research papers, and critical studies about: Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development, identity formation and developmental psychology, trauma studies, psychological literary criticism, character analysis, and contemporary American fiction. These sources support and offer context for theory.

3.2 Data Collection

Data is gathered as a result of close reading of the novel. The researcher thoroughly analyzes the text and looks for those parts that disclose Frankie's emotional reactions, mental dilemmas, social interactions, and changes in his behavior.

Appropriate quotations are chosen that relate to Erikson's psychosocial stages. The appropriate textual support is then listed in terms of the developmental conflict that it embodies.

The data collection process includes following:

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Reading the novel more than once, highlighting important quotations and events, categorizing the evidence provided in the text to the eight stages of Erikson's development, organizing the information for detailed analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data are analyzed based on Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development as the main analysis tool. Each quotation that is chosen is explained in terms of the psychosocial conflict for each stage. The analysis focuses on the Frankie's psychological development, identity formation and transformation, the impact of war trauma, gender discrimination and social exclusion, interpersonal relationships and emotional resilience and recovery.

The study illustrates the thematic interpretation of Frankie's development and how it fits into the Erikson's developmental model and is a factor in her psychological development.

3.4 Relevance of Erikson's Theory to the Study

The psychosocial theory by Erikson offers a suitable framework for the analysis of Frankie McGrath's character because the incident she is going through can be related to a number of developmental crises that are embedded within the eight psychosocial stages. Frankie faces issues of self-worth, intimacy, autonomy, identity and trust throughout *The Women*. Her experiences in Vietnam, trauma exposure and challenges on her return home have a profound impact on her psychological makeup. The theory allows the researcher to explore the influences of social institutions, gender norms, family dynamics, and traumatic experiences on Frankie's personality and identity. Furthermore, Erikson's focus of the life long process of development is consistent with the novel's theme of psychological growth as a continuous process, and not a static accomplishment.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the theory of Psychosocial Development of Erik Erikson. This theory is first introduced by Erikson in his *Childhood and Society* (1950) and then elaborated on in *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968). The theory is based on the idea that human development is a continuous process that is influenced by social experiences and psychological needs throughout the lifespan. Erikson (1950) proposed that personality goes through eight developmental stages of psychosocial development, with each stage presenting a developmental crisis that needs to be resolved successfully for healthy psychological development.

Erikson's theory focuses on social relationships, culture, and environment throughout life compared to Freud's psychoanalytical theory which emphasized primarily the biological drives and childhood experiences. Erikson felt that every stage helped to develop a particular virtue that would help the person's personality to grow and enhance their ability to deal with future challenges.

Erikson's (1950) model of the eight psychosocial stages are: Trust versus Mistrust, Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt, Initiative versus Guilt, Industry versus Inferiority, Identity versus Role Confusion, Intimacy versus Isolation, Generativity versus Stagnation, and Ego Integrity versus Despair.

3.4.1 Trust versus Mistrust

The first phase of psychosocial development is Trust vs. Mistrust. This is the period of the person's life in which he/she becomes sure he/she can trust others and the world around him. When it is resolved successfully, it brings about the virtue of hope, when it does not, insecurity and mistrust. Literary narratives may manifest this stage in characters' capacity to rely on institutions, relationships and social systems.

3.4.2 Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt

The second stage is devoted to the development of independence and self-control. People who overcome this conflict come out with a feeling of autonomy and self-assurance. On the other hand, too much criticism or limiting can lead to feelings of shame and self-doubt. Useful for exploring characters that have difficulty with independence and self-determination.

3.4.3 Initiative versus Guilt

Initiative versus Guilt is about establishing purpose and the ability to strive for goals. Resolution will encourage people to feel confident and creative, while failure can lead to a sense of guilt and doubt. This stage offers a glimpse into characters that defy social norms and go after positive goals.

3.4.4 Industry versus Inferiority

Industry versus Inferiority: Competence, productivity, achievement. When people are successful in learning and making a contribution to society, they gain a sense of competence. Failure will lead to some sense of inferiority and inadequacy. This is a critical stage for an evaluation of professional success and recognition.

3.4.5 Identity versus Role Confusion

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The period of Identity versus Role Confusion is one of the most important periods in Erikson's theory because it is a time of developing a sense of self. Erikson (1968) stated that people have to develop a firm sense of identity by synthesizing their beliefs, experiences, values and social roles. If not, it could lead to confusion and uncertainty about one's place in society.

3.4.6 Intimacy versus Isolation

At this stage, the child's ability to develop emotional relationships is emphasized. Resolution can bring intimacy, trust, and relation to those who are successful, but failure can bring loneliness and isolation for those who fail. This conflict is often seen in literary works in their romantic, familial and social relations.

3.4.7 Generativity versus Stagnation

Generativity versus Stagnation is giving back to society and helping the next generation. People who are able to pass this stage become more caring and responsible. They might become complacent and self-pitying if they fail. This phase is frequently manifested in the forms of mentorship, service and social contribution as found in literature.

3.4.8 Ego Integrity versus Despair

The last phase is introspection on life experiences. People who succeed in solving the problem gain wisdom, acceptance, and integrity, while those who fail gain regret and despair. The above-mentioned characters who have gained self-understanding and self-acceptance are representative of this stage.

Data analysis

4.1 Trust vs. Mistrust

The psychosocial development stage is rooted in Erikson's Trust vs. Mistrust stage. It outlines that when a person is in an environment that is stable, consistent and meaningful, they build basic trust, and when they are in an unstable and traumatic environment, they develop a sense of mistrust and insecurity (Erikson, 1950).

“My generation was the last generation of believers, we trusted our parents' teachings about right and wrong, good and evil, the American myth of equality and justice and honor.” (p.7-8)

This is the expression of the collapse of the trust in the ideology which was transmitted to Frankie's generation and his psychological disillusionment. The expression “last believers” is symbolic of the culmination of a collective innocence prior to an ideological rupture. Frankie's sense of moral, just and national values are initially shaped by socially learnt views and these are psychologically stabilising. These beliefs are however found, as culturally constructed narratives, not truths in themselves. The “American myth of equality and justice” reveals the power of ideology as a symbolic system that provides emotional comfort and may not be lived reality. In times of war, it creates a ruptured meaning system and instability. Erikson's theory of trust is that it is formed when the environment is perceived to be safe and secure, but with this theory, trust becomes the belief in the institutions in place and ultimately, mistrust. It's a more existential crisis in which Frankie doubts authority, and also the nature of truth itself. Trauma theory proposes that this is a loss of symbolic coherence and that, in the past, meaningful symbols had a function and are now missing (Caruth, 1996). For this reason, the quotation is regarded as the shift of ideology trust to existential mistrust that initiates the mental fragmentation and disorientation.

“She didn't believe in the ground under her feet or the sky above her head.”(p.103)

The spatial symbolism in this quotation conveys Frankie's mental breakdown to the utmost extent. The “ground beneath her feet” is a symbol of stability, safety, and psychological grounding; the “sky above her head” symbolizes hope, future possibility, and transcendence. Frankie has lost trust in both, so that he is now in a state of complete existential insecurity, neither the present nor the future can be a source of security. This quotation extends mistrust from the relational level to ontological experience, as outlined in Erikson's (1950) theory, which sees mistrust emerging when the world is unpredictable or unsafe. Frankie does not see the world as organized or meaningful anymore but rather it is broken up and unreliable. Based on trauma theory, these experiences make people disoriented, requiring them to find their way back to reality (Caruth, 1996). The ground collapses and the sky collapses means that both the physical and the psychological orientations collapse. This makes Frankie 'in-between', in a space that lacks stability, belonging and direction. So, the quotation is a complete loss of existential trust and complete psychological destabilization.

4.2 Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt

The focus in the Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt stage is on independence, self-control, and confidence in decision-making. Erikson describes autonomy as a supportive environment, and shame and doubt as a restricting

or critical environment (Erikson, 1950). Autonomy is frequently unequal, especially for women, in gendered societies.

“Most of us too have made too many decisions based on others, we need to make what choices we need to make.” (p.41)

This quotation represents the psychological awakening of women as a whole towards autonomy and self-determination. The term “most of us” converts this into a universal state, pointing to the fact that the role that women play in decision making has been determined by external expectations, and not by their own agency. This is an expression of the internalisation of social control, in which women are socialised to make relational obligations, duty, and approval their primary concern, rather than desire. According to Erikson (1950), autonomy is achieved when people are given some freedom to make their own decisions without fear of punishment or shame. But in this social limitation of autonomy leads to an internal conflict between self-need and social expectation. Psychological urgency and the appearance of self-directed consciousness is indicated by the repetition of the phrase “we need”. It is a move away from dependence and dependency identity to agency and agency identity. Feminist psychological theory holds that women may have to build an identity in a socially constrained environment, where their voice is systematically diminished (Gilligan, 1982). Thus, the following quotation is against the internal control system. Instead of individual autonomy, there is a collective autonomy, one which focuses upon freedom from psychological limitation.

“For men the world has changed, Frances, for women: it hasn't.” (p.71)

This is a quote that represents structural gender inequality and the lack of advancement of women's psychosocial development. The difference between “changes” and “stays” emphasizes the unequal socio-historical mobility between men and women. Men are transformed and given opportunity; women remain locked into repetitive roles in society. Erikson's (1950) theory states that autonomy involves an environment that nourishes exploration and growth. This quote, however, shows that this is not the case for women. Rather, the mechanism of continuity of restriction, through patriarchal structures, restricts psychological and social development. Shame and doubt then become not a result of weaknesses in the individual, but because of the invalidation of the social group, repeated. As Butler theorises, gender roles are ‘obligations’ and ‘repetitions’ of behaviour and this makes change difficult at the structural level (Butler, 1990). So the quote is a representation of the continuity of systemic inequalities which affects female identity throughout time and results in psychological stagnation and restricts autonomy.

4.3 Initiative vs. Guilt

The Initiative vs. Guilt stage is when a child learns to act with purpose, confidence and responsibility. Erikson theorizes that when someone is allowed to take some initiative, they become purposeful; too much restriction and punishment cause the person to feel guilty and to become uncertain of his or her own capabilities (Erikson, 1950).

“Women can be heroes.” (p.10)

This quote not only redefines heroism in terms of a psychosocial and feminist approach but also challenges the traditional gendered construction of heroism. At first glance, it's just a straightforward declaration, but its message is one of ideology and resistance to the definition of “courage” and “achievement” that are entrenched in patriarchy. Heroism has traditionally been a male domain, one of strength and of war heroism. The text challenges this gender hierarchy by arguing that women are capable of being heroes as well, and that heroism is defined by emotional strength, resilience, sacrifice and moral courage. Erikson (1950) described initiative as an ability to take purposeful action without fear of punishment and guilt. This is the initiative that Frankie participates in with war, but psychological tension is created between action and validation due to the lack of social recognition. The internal conflict between agency and recognition (Gilligan, 1982) is suggested by feminist theory, which holds that women's contributions are either neglected or underestimated in patriarchal systems. Hence, the quotation serves as a sort of assertion and ideology of the mind. It places women as active protagonists of shaping history and not passive observers. It symbolically restores heroism to a universal ability and not a gendered privilege. The emergence of new possibilities of identity signifies an important change in the psychosocial development, in which the initiative is to be understood as a mechanism of empowerment in the face of structural limitation.

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At first she thought herself stupid and was finding out she was human. (p.88)

This quote reflects a profound change in the heart and mind when moving from feeling guilty to feeling accepted and integrated with one's feelings. The word stupid denotes that Frankie was judging herself based on the values of society, meaning that she is self-blameful and thinks that what she is doing is her fault and not anyone else's. Guilt is a response to when initiative is curtailed or reprimanded and relates to the person's sense of action and failure (Erikson, 1950). This leaves a person feeling reluctant, guilty and unable to express themselves emotionally. But when she comes to understand that she is "just human," it represents a pivotal moment in her self-image. Rethinks failure not as a lack in the person but as an inevitability of life. This shift is a sign of emotional growth and psychological recovery, with the surrender of self-blame for the coming of self-knowledge. The trauma perspective suggests that such a transition towards wholeness is the integration of an identity that was split into a more solidified sense of self. Frankie doesn't think of errors as sins or shortcomings, but as part of life. This enables initiative to come in again without too much guilt. Hence, the quotation represents a mental break free from judgment and in its place, acceptance, resilience and growth.

4.4 Industry vs. Inferiority

The Industry vs. Inferiority stage is concerned with acquiring skills through learning, working, and being recognized in society. If a person succeeds in this stage, he or she builds confidence and industry; if not, he or she feels inferior (Erikson, 1950).

"But few would live until then, and those who did would have wished that they could have gone to their deaths" (p.332).

This is a quotation of supreme suffering and psychological stress in the war. It embodies a scenario in which life itself becomes a traumatic experience instead of a triumph. For Erikson, industry is the process of developing competence by being engaged in productive activity (Erikson, 1950). In this context, competence is attained against the backdrop of intense emotional and physical trauma, and professional responsibility is interwoven with the experience of death and trauma. The quotation uncovers the invisibilisation of women's labour, the necessity of women's labour, and the failure to recognise the emotional pain of women in the broader social discourses. Failure on survival is not linked to failure of achievement. "wish they'd died" is really a testament to the trauma involved, as life is too painful even after surviving. This is no longer industry, but endurance, under extreme conditions, not positive accomplishment. The quote thus emphasizes the ambivalence of competence from the outside and psychological breakdown from the inside.

"We laugh so we don't cry." (p.141)

This line represents emotional coping and psychological strength in a group of people through humor. Laughter here is a way to cope with a burden of so much trauma. Erikson (1950) believed that industry is the ability to carry out tasks and responsibilities over a period of time. But this engagement can only be achieved by the use of emotional regulation strategies which prevent psychological breakdown. *The women's* use of humor is seen as an adaptive coping mechanism, helping them survive the trauma of suffering and loss. It also showcases the significance of being able to support each other collectively in order to keep stable emotions. *The women* do not suffer trauma alone, on the contrary, they have a way of sharing emotional burdens through humour which is thus their psychological language. Mechanisms are necessary for survival from a trauma standpoint and direct expression of emotions can be too challenging in high-stress environments. Therefore, laughter becomes a form of resistance and protection, allowing people to stay engaged in their activities in challenging situations and maintain their psychological integrity.

4.5 Identity vs. Role Confusion

The Identity vs. Role Confusion stage is about developing a stable and coherent sense of self through the incorporation of personal beliefs, social roles and lived experience. If this integration is not made, Erikson (1968) suggests that the person becomes confused, fragmented, and uncertain about his/her position in society.

"It was the war that tore our lives apart and exposed the lovely, if fraudulent, lies we had been fed."(p.424-425)

It's the quote that represents the collapse in the structural systems of identity and meaning that make up a collectivity. "beautiful lie" is especially important because it implies that beliefs that underlie identities are not only inaccurate but also emotionally satisfying and so deeply inculcated they become a way of life. These stories help people to have a sense of coherence, belonging and moral direction. But World War is interfering with this coherence, because it reveals the contradictions between ideology and reality. According to Erikson's model,

identity is developed when social values and personal experiences are combined (Erikson 1968). Failure of this integration results in individuals feeling fragmented and experiencing identity issues. This is the breakdown that Frankie discovers—where once stable belief systems no longer give meaning or direction. From a trauma perspective, such disruption causes a disruption of narrative, meaning someone may have trouble putting together a coherent narrative of a life. Personal disillusionment, in other words, was the only thing it represents, as well as the breakdown of collective ideological structures. The result of historical trauma is identity confusion and not a lack of strength, moving from certainty to existential uncertainty.

“ People in this country are afraid of the old white men who run it.” (p.163)

This quotation is a representation of the authority of institutions and the process of identity formation through control and exclusion. This fear is not personal, but structural, meaning that it is an instability in systems of authority. Erikson states that social recognition and validation is critical to identity formation (Erikson, 1968). But as institutions de-legitimize certain groups, identity is destabilized and fragmented. The quotation shows how power works in controlling visibility and rendering marginalized voices, such as women's voices, invisible. Power is repressive, but also productive, from a Foucauldian view, that is, it forms what can be known, said and recognized in society. Identity is not an autonomous process, but rather is shaped by institutional frameworks. Frankie's interpretation of fear in authority figures indicates that power is not without limits and is fragile, exposing fissures in the dominant hierarchies. This instability brings in the space for questioning and resistance, but it also gives rise to an uncertainty about identity and belonging. Therefore, the quotation refers to the political aspect of the process of identity formation, in which the psychological is directly influenced by the political power and exclusion.

4.6 Intimacy vs. Isolation

The Intimacy vs. Isolation stage is the development of deep emotional connections with others and a sense of identity. If the crisis is resolved successfully, the outcome is intimacy and connection, and if it is not, it's isolation, loneliness, and emotional disconnection (Erikson, 1968).

“I'll miss you.” (p.195)

This quote reflects emotionally mature intimacy that is conveyed simply and with emotional restraint. This is not an exaggerated expression of emotion but a healthy type of attachment in which there is emotional connection without dependency or loss, What is meant is not some extreme emotion but this type of attachment between two persons where they feel emotionally connected, without depending on each other, nor losing themselves. Erikson's (1968) theory of intimacy refers to the capacity to establish close relationships and develop a sense of self. Frankie's expression captures this balance: she recognizes that there is a certain emotional connection to those around her, but also that it is part of life to be separated from them. Does not refer to emotional weakness, but to emotional clarity, emotional feelings that are recognized without distortion. This indicates psychological maturity, in which they can make meaningful relationships without giving up autonomy. The simplicity in the statement accentuates authenticity; that true intimacy doesn't need to be dramatic but emotional truth has to be affirmed. So the quote is a metaphor for "emotional integration and relational stability.

“Thank God for girlfriends. In this crazy, chaotic, divided world that was run by men, you could count on the women.” (p. 202)

It is a quotation that shares the essence of female solidarity as an alternative emotional system that offers stability in a patriarchal and unstable environment. A symbolic opposition between institutional failure and interpersonal trust is created by the contrast between a “chaotic” male dominated world and reliable female friendships. The Erikson eight stages of development defines intimacy in terms of trust, sharing feelings and providing support (Erikson, 1968). In this context, the intimate will be realised in the primary sphere of female relationship. “You can always rely on *the women*” highlights the unreliability of the institution and instead the reliability comes from shared experience. This, from a feminist psychosocial point of view, is a process of the creation of alternative forms of support systems that oppose patriarchy's emotional structures. Solidarity is a kind of psychological survival for women, giving stability, recognition and belonging. So intimacy is now defined as emotional strength within a group, rather than as a romantic attachment.

4.7 Generativity vs. Stagnation

During the Generativity vs. Stagnation stage, the person is focused on contributing to the society, guiding the next generation, and leaving a legacy. Erikson states that generativity is manifested by feelings of caring,

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productivity, responsibility toward others and stagnation is manifested by emotional withdrawal and lack of purpose (Erikson, 1968).

“There were women that had a story to tell, we were there”. (p.271)

This quote is a witness to history and an illustration of how an individual's suffering becomes a shared memory. By saying "We were there," the phrase is an expression of presence, a subversion of the historical erasure of women's contributions, especially in war narratives. In Erikson's view, generativity is the production of something of value that transcends the self (Erikson, 1968). In this sense, storytelling is a generative process which enables the transmission of lived experience to future generations. By telling their stories, the women have created meaning from trauma and history out of their personal suffering. The use of an ellipsis in the quotation also reveals the significance of the experiences not openly shared, suggesting that their story is huge, with multiple layers, and perhaps emotionally charged. Narration is an important process of integration from trauma perspective: fragmented memories are reorganized into coherent identity structures. The quotation, then, is a reminder of something more than survival, it is a reminder of moral obligation. Generativity here is performed in the act of witness-bearing, and telling the truth is an act of resistance to silence and erasure.

“When I came back home to my daughter, I feel guilty about what I did to her.” (p.451)

The quotation represents failure to become emotional, failure of care giving and its impact. Erikson (1968) defines generativity as being the ability to nurture and educate the next generation. The above statement does, however, indicate a lack of emotional connection, as past trauma and emotional upset disrupt nurturing behavior. The word guilt suggests a realisation of emotional responsibility; a feeling of regret about a lack of this. Repairing relationships should happen in the return of the daughter, but it does not happen in that way. The return of the daughter should be relational repair, but it is not. This underscores the impact of unhealed emotional scars on intergenerational relationships, creating emotional barriers and confusion. The quotation is also taken in a psychosocial sense of the word, meaning that generativity isn't only about giving or taking care of physically, but also about emotional presence, empathy and communication. Try failure is the awakening of moral consciousness, but also the fragility of human relationship in psychological stress. The quotation then represents broken generativity and the feelings that come with unresolved trauma.

4.8 Ego Integrity vs. Despair

Ego Integrity vs. Despair is the last (8th) phase of Erikson's psychosocial theory. It's about remembrance with acceptance and/or regret. When it comes to integrity, it leads to wisdom and to peace, and when it comes to despair, it leads to regrets and a life inherently dissatisfied (Erikson, 1968).

“We were there.”(p.230)

The quotation is now needed to be interpreted in an existential sense. It is not "here we are" anymore, it is "here we are and here is the meaning of this. Ego integrity is the state of accepting the life as a whole, including suffering, loss and achievement (Erikson, 1968). This statement is a manifestation of this acceptance, namely by affirming the reality of experience without denying or distorting it. It represents psychological reconciliation—trauma is not broken into sections but is contained in the life-story. The simplicity of the phrase is an expression of emotional clarity and of the final recognition of the selfhood. The statement is not seeking validation from other systems, but instead it makes an internal declaration of validation of existence. It is therefore the victory of ego integrity, and the acceptance of lived truth.

Knowing her own shortcomings, she was less judgmental of others. (p.377)

This quotation reflects psychological maturity and acquiring wisdom through introspection. Erikson (1968) says that wisdom is the last virtue that develops from ego integrity. When Frankie realizes that she is not as good as she thinks, she gains a more compassionate and understanding outlook on others. Through self-discovery, there is a decrease in judgment and an increase in empathy. This is about emotional integration, meaning that things that have happened in the past, mistakes and failures are not shameful, but they are a source of insight. The quotation implies that a mature person is not one who is perfect but is one who is prepared to allow the faults and flaws of humanity. It also emphasizes the moral aspect of psychological development: the comprehension of oneself entails the comprehension of others. So it represents the fullness of the psychosocial nature of man, the wisdom, the kindness and the acceptance.

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