

Evaluate the claim  
that conflict is 'the  
motor for identity  
change'



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Firstly, Erik Erikson (Erikson, cited in Hollway, 2009, p. 252-256) can be seen to promote the claim that conflict is a motor for identity change through his theories on the subject, specifically showing how a person changes throughout life as they go through minor or major conflicts, which Hollway labels as ordinary conflict. These conflicts can result in 'identity crises', which can be seen as, whether positive or negative in outcome, as catalysts for identity change. Erikson explains that conflicts don't have to be huge or mysterious to create the right context for this.

They refer to any tensions between wishes or between events that makes the flow of life less smooth, less even, less effortless. Examples of these types of conflicts could be: someone not getting the correct change when purchasing an item at a store, or a man running for a bus and the bus driver deciding not to wait however close the man is, or veiled criticism that's disguised as a joke in what would seem a pleasant conversation. These can all be subtle motors of change in a person, even though they might be smaller bumps than what we perceive conflict to be.

Erikson takes into account that there will be differences in the extent of conflict at different times of life. Furthermore, some people will experience greater changes than others depending on what they have been through in life and what kind of lifestyle they have. According to Erikson, a person's identity is influenced by past experiences, as well as how it changes in the face of the new tasks that confront people as they live their lives. An example of this ordinary conflict can be seen in the empirical research project that the author of Chapter six, Exploring Social Lives, Wendy Hollway (Hollway, 2009, p. 8) took part in, with the aim of seeing identity changes in

first time mothers. In the instance of one of the participants called Silma, the change is evidently seen when she says that a group of people who surround her in her daily life 'recognise' her differently; because of this, she is more aware that she has changed as a person since becoming a mother. This is reinforced when she speaks about the changing relationship with her sister. She used to have more of the same preferences as her sister but now is identifying with her aunts and mother more.

Her little sister says: 'You're talking like Mum... you're not my Mum. You used to be like this. You used to be worse than me,' which portrays that there is a conflict for Silma between what she was in the past, and who she is becoming as a mother. By finding more similarities with the older women in her life, Silma shows that being a new mother has changed her identity, oscillating from who she was before she gave birth, when she is with her sister, to what she is becoming now, when she is with the older women in her family.

Therefore it is plausible to say that through becoming a mother Silma is able to identify with her 'mother's generation' more as they have been through what she is going through. She understands them more and sees them in a different light. Furthermore, the way they relate to her now as a mother, has played a part in how she sees herself too. This links to the theories of Michael Billig (Billig cited in Hollway, 2009, p274) who defines that social identification is 'the process by which any individual is bound to his social group and by which he realises his social self'.

The process in this case, of Silma becoming a mother, is so life changing that it is the strongest bind in identifying with other people that she has. Hence <https://assignbuster.com/evaluate-the-claim-that-conflict-is-the-motor-for-identity-change/>

why she is identifying less with her sister and instead sees more of her identity in her aunts and mother; this is further cemented by how she realises they now see her. Additionally, the lifestyle that Silma currently leads is different to what she did before she got pregnant. Hollway explains that when aspects of our life change it forces us to adjust our routines and habits, these adjustments impact who we are, sometimes in subtle ways and sometimes in more momentous ways.

In Silma's case of becoming a new mother, this is an enormous life change. She is doing new things like nappy changing, feeding her daughter, putting her daughter to sleep etc. These daily activities, are now a routine for Silma, and are a reminder for her that her life has changed. This change in lifestyle reminds her of the new role she has as a mother, and in essence could be seen as a motor for identity change. Something else that has changed in Silma's life is her style of dress.

She describes her style in the past as a ' jeans maniac' whereas now she prefers wearing salwaar kameez, and even goes as far to say her new dress preferences are ' normal clothes' and ' the ones I really like'. This suggests that Silma had this other identity to some degree within her before she had the baby, and this was brought to the surface through the process of becoming a mother. On the other hand, it could be argued that perhaps the body changes she had to undergo through being pregnant have affected her dress sense.

She implies that she is not comfortable with exposing her body in tight clothes and claims that her ' bum stuck out in tight jeans'. It is reasonable to assume here that her body size changing might have had a part to play in <https://assignbuster.com/evaluate-the-claim-that-conflict-is-the-motor-for-identity-change/>

her identity change. For a woman especially, her image is a significant part of who she is. When that image is altered it is easy to see how this conflict may be a motor for change in a person's identity. This idea that if our bodies change, our identities tend to change, is illustrated by Frantz Fanon (Fanon, cited in Hollway, 2009, p. 278) although on a different topic.

He was a black psychiatrist who lived in France for a time when there was still strong racial tension in many European countries. Coming from his home country where the colour of his skin did not stand out to France, he found that he had an overriding and inescapable identity as a black man. The colour of his skin affected the way people saw him, which in turn affected the way he saw himself. For Fanon however he felt a prisoner in the body he had. He comments that it was as if ' I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors (p. 79)'.

This shows how a physical aspect of a person can impact a person's perspective on your identity. Similarly, for Silma, the physical markers of being pregnant would have taken over the way people previously viewed her. When people on the street saw her, it would have been one of the first impressions they had of her, that she was going to be a mother. The people around her also changed how they viewed her, as her identity as a mother became the strongest identity that they saw. Realising how people now saw her, the old Silma started to disappear into the shadow of her new role, which became more prominent.

She, like Fanon, had an overriding and inescapable identity as a mother. In conclusion, it is clear from the discussion in this essay that conflict is a motor for identity change, whether it may be a women becoming pregnant or a <https://assignbuster.com/evaluate-the-claim-that-conflict-is-the-motor-for-identity-change/>

man having to deal with prejudice ideologies about his race. I have seen through exploring, different theories from Erikson, Billig, and Fanon that where there is conflict, ordinary conflict or major conflict as seen in Fanon's case, there is inevitably changes in identity.

However this is only a small part of what could be covered when discussing this topic, therefore my conclusion has limitation. This deduction is merely a start. Word count. : 1425. Full References: Hollway, W. (2009) ' Identity Change and Identification' in Bromley, S. , Clarke, J. , Hinchliffe, S. and Taylor, S. (eds) Exploring Social Lives, Milton Keynes, The Open University. Self reflection- I found it hard to know where to draw the line in how much content to put into the essay. I really found this topic interesting though.