

Postautonomous Ego Development: A Study of Its Nature and Measurement

Susanne R. Cook-Greuter, Ed. D.

**Based on a dissertation presented to the Faculty
Of the Harvard University Graduate School of Education**

Dissertation Committee:

Chair:
Robert Kegan, Ph. D.: Harvard University

Readers:
Terrence Tivnan, Ed. D.: Harvard University
William Torbert, Ph. D.: Boston College

Integral Publishers

Dissertation Series

All rights reserved
Copyright 1999
Susanne Regina Cook-Greuter

Integral Publishers Edition
Copyright 2010
Susanne Regina Cook-Greuter

ISBN: 978-1-4507-2515-6

Cook-Greuter@post.harvard.edu
www.Cook-Greuter.com

Environmental/Sustainable Certifications

Integral Publishers contracts with LightningSource®
for the printing of all of its publications. Lightning Source holds
the following certifications for sustainable publishing:

Forest Stewardship Council TM (FSC®)

Others are certifications tied to the timber industry:

Sustainable Forest Initiative® (SFI®)
Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification

Integral Publishers continues to strive to produce products that meet
all requirements for supporting the environment and sustainability.

Dedication

To my dear spouse, Craig,
and beloved children, Marianne and Matt

and to my
wonderful wayshowers, P. L. B. and
Skip Alexander (1950-1998)

Table of Contents

Table of contents	iii
Tables and figures	vi
Abstract	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Purpose	2
The gift of wonderful ideas	4
The Study of Human Beings	6
The centrality of language	8
Positive Lifespan Development	12
Types of lifespan theories	13
Piaget	16
Piaget's stage theory	16
Piaget's methods	17
Social construction of reality	18
Summary of Piaget	19
Postconventional Development Theory	20
Constructivist models of development	20
Overview	21
General description of adult development	22
Chapter 1: Ego Development Theory and the SCT	29
Loevinger's Theory and Manual	29
Measuring ego development	30
Characteristics of test	30
SCT as verbal behavior	32
Manuals (1970-1995)	34
Theory of ego development	36
General Problems of the manuals	38
High-end problems	39
Preliminary revisions of theory and measurement	41
Hy and Loevinger's Second Edition	43
High-End Problems Persisting in the Second Edition	45
Lack of clarity and sparse examples	45
The problem of identity	46
No new theory in spite of whole field of research	47

Chapter 2: Summary of my Revisions of Ego Development Theory	49
Ego development theory	50
Definition of terms used	50
A multidimensional psychological system	51
The linguistic foundation	51
Alternating pattern of differentiation-integration	53
Tier three: Postconventional development	54
The systems level of postconventional development	55
The Postautonomous level of postformal development	56
The autonomous, the construct-aware and the unitive stages	57
The Autonomous stage	57
The Construct-aware stage	58
The Unitive stage	63
Summary	67
Overall patterns in ego development	68
Conclusion	69
Proposed Postautonomous Scoring Categories	71
Category construction	71
Method of analysis	72
Description of scoring categories	73
Unitive stage categories	78
Chapter 3: Postautonomous Ego Development: Its Nature	89
Methods	89
Introduction	89
General proposed features of postconventional development	90
Increasing cognitive complexity	91
Stepwise deconstruction of permanent self-identity	92
Summary	93
Choosing relevant theories	93
Review of Theories with Postautonomous Elements	94
Review of theories with postautonomous elements	96
Postconventional theories	96
1) Commons et al.	96
2) Loevinger	98
3) Basseches	101
4) Kegan	104
5) Torbert	111
6) Koplowitz	114

Transpersonal four-tier models	119
7) Alexander	119
8) Wilber	123
Discussion of High-End Developmental Theories	126
Testing Content Validity of the Scoring Categories	130
Method	132
Result and discussion of text analysis	133
 Chapter 4: Postautonomous Ego Development: Its Measurement	142
General Methods	142
Outline, The sample, Data entry	142
Problems with this approach	145
Test of Interrater Agreement for Individual Completions	147
Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion	147
Test of Interrater Agreement for Sixty High-End Protocols	153
Sample, Scoring	154-155
Are the new stages really separate stages?	156
Results-Discussion-Conclusion	157-163
Determining Cut-Off Numbers for High-End Ogives	163
Bayes' theorem	166
Outcome and discussion	168
 Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion	173
Summary of Thesis and Results	173
Discussion	175
Benefits and limits of new approach	175
Scoring with the new criteria	181
Using the Second Edition	182
Unexpected results	182
Research with high-end protocols	183
Conclusion	185
Impact on education	186
Appendices A-K	191
Bibliography	211
Vita	229
Correspondence of Leadership Maturity Framework, Cook-Greuter and Hy & Loevinger's ego stages	230
Stages in Wilber, Integral Vision	233

TABLE OF FIGURES

A Full-Spectrum, 4-Tier Model Of Development	24
Alternative Stages Of Differentiation & Integration	55
The Autonomous Stage 5 (E8)	58
The Construct-Aware Stage 5/6 (C9)	59
The Unitive Stage 6 (C10)	63
The Third Tier in Kegan, Loevinger & Cook-Greuter	105
Third Tier and Transition for Fourth in Vedic Theory and Ego Development	121
Schematic Grid for Tallying Postautonomous Categories	133
Content Category Analysis	135
Sampling Procedure	143
Pearson Correlations for Experienced Raters (R1,R2)	150
Pearson Correlations Between the Compromised Rating (Rcomp.) and the Novice Raters (R3,R4) in Pairs	150
Sample (N=60) Stratified for Old TPR	154
Demographic Variables of Sample: Age and Education (N=60)	157
Pearson Correlations for TPRs by Three Raters (R1, R3, R4)	158
Percentage of Frequency Distribution by TPR (N=2160 item ratings from 60 protocols)	160
Percentage of Item Frequency Distributions for Stages 3/4 Through- 6 (E5 - C10)	161
Comparative Ogive Rules for Assigning Total Protocol Ratings (TPRs) to 36-Item Protocols	165
Distribution for Average Item Frequencies by TPR E8-C10 (S-6)121 Figurative Representation of Bayes' Theorem	167

ABSTRACT

Postautonomous Ego Development: A Study Of Its Nature And Measurement

This thesis investigates mature ego development in response to perceived high-end problems with Loevinger's Ego Development Theory (1976) and measuring instrument, The Washington University Sentence Completion Test (SCT) (1970; Hy & Loevinger, 1996). In addition to a continuing differentiation-integration at higher levels of hierarchical complexity, postconventional development is here conceived of as a conscious, stepwise deconstruction of the habits of mind, or an increasing awareness of the constructed nature of reality. Two new stages, a Construct-aware and a Unitive stage are described which replace Loevinger's Integrated stage. Nine unique, empirically derived characteristics for identifying the two postautonomous ego stages are also developed.

First, I tested my reconceptualization of high-end theory by comparing it to other theories from both postconventional constructivist developmental and transpersonal psychology (Commons et al. 1984; Kegan 1982, 1994; Basseches, 1984; Torbert, 1987; Koplowitz, 1984; Alexander, 1990; Wilber, 1986, 1997). The content validity of the stage-wide categories was assessed by investigating (a) how these theorists parse and define postconventional development, and (b) how they characterize their most advanced stages of meaning making.

Second, I subjected 147 postconventional completions and 60 SCT protocols to a multiple analysis by others. The sample was drawn from 4400 SCTs scored over 17 years. Interrater agreement among 3 trained raters using the Second Edition (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) and my postautonomous scoring categories was high with $r = .95$ ($p < .0001$) for TPR. A critique of the Second Edition, v other types of analyses, and the results from recalibrating the numbers required for assigning high-end protocol scores are also reported.

This study makes both a theoretical and a practical contribution to positive adult psychology by mapping and clarifying mature, postautonomous personality development and by providing stage distinctions and thematic categories to assess it. Moreover, these criteria may be useful in evaluating reality perspectives of mature individuals in other discourse contexts and other cultures. Finally, this thesis begins to bridge Western conceptions of psychological growth as increasing individuation and self-integration with Eastern notions of the permanent self as a transitional phenomenon that may be recognized as a guiding fiction and transcended.

QP and the thesis proposal phase and Marveta Ryan and James Lin for motivational “buck-you-uppo” during the final year. I am grateful to Varis Blaus, Karen Foster, James and Rebecca Hencke, Carolyn and Rodger Kingston, Sue Lavoie, Mel Miller, Lael Montgomery, Chuck Palus, Carol Philips, Helen Snively and Linda Terry, and many colleagues from the Society for Research in Adult Development (SRAD) for generating and debating ideas and for cheering me on. Many heartfelt thanks go to my research assistants, Janna Jilnina, Pamela Lomax, and Ariel Phillips, for having done a fabulous job on a very difficult assignment. Thanks also to Phyllis Weinberg and Craig Cook for editing parts of the many drafts, for taking care of ordinary life while I was preoccupied with this project, and for being such good sports during the “ruthless” final submission phase.

Next I wish to express my gratitude for the individual contributions of each member of my wonderful dissertation committee:

Robert Kegan, admired teacher, advisor, wellspring of ideas, learned man, and gifted wordsmith, has led me through the whole doctoral program with a firm hand and uplifting guiding images for the process. I thank Bob for believing in me, for his expert editorial and procedural advice, his powerful teachings as well as for his mentoring always delivered with wit, insight, mindfulness, and respect.

Terry Tivnan’s enthusiasm and inviting teaching style helped me to overcome my distrust of statistics. I now strive to do research myself that meaningfully integrates qualitative and quantitative methods.

Moreover, Terry has given freely of his time for data input and his upbeat style have made meeting with him and writing the quantitative parts of this thesis a pleasure. I thank him also for the careful reading of the final draft, his kind advice over the years in getting through institutional hurdles, and in giving me confidence in methodological matters.

William Torbert, professor of organizational behavior at Boston College, has been a colleague and mentor since I started scoring SCTs for him in the early 1980s. His kind and challenging influence and unfailing support have been pivotal in my pursuit of an academic career this late in life. His personal courage and his active support of my thinking have inspired and sustained me in times of doubt. I thank Bill for his “*élan vital*,” profound insights into human interaction, jousting with ideals and for his careful and substantive editorial assistance.

Although this thesis challenges some of Jane Loevinger findings, I do wish to acknowledge her as a powerful and abiding force behind my research. Though she advised me against pursuing high-stage issues, I found her ego development theory too irresistible and fascinating to stop collecting rare data and thinking about their potential for new insights into postconventional personality development. In “*Completing A Life Sentence*” Jane wonders “whether it would not have been wiser and more satisfying to have devoted a career to a more clearly useful endeavor, like curbing juvenile violence.” And reflects “that the wide interest in the SCT has acted as a confinement, constraining me to work on it. Publication of the revised SCT scoring manual (...) should signal my liberation.”