

Postautonomous Ego Development: A Study of Its Nature and Measurement

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

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Integral Publishers

Dissertation Series

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Integral Publishers Edition
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ISBN: 978-1-4507-2515-6

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

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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)

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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.”