THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EGO DEVELOPMENT AND PEER STATUS

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Psychology

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

George William Allison

May, 1974

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ABSTRACT

The relation between ego development and peer status was examined
by using the Washington University Sentence Completion Test for Mea-
suring Ego Development and a sociometric test. Eighteen high school
girls from the senior class were administered these instruments. A
composite ego development level and peer status rating was computed
for each girl. These were compared in a simple analysis of variance
design where stages of ego development represented the dependent vari-
able and peer status scores were the independent variable. Scheffe's
test was then used to isolate significant differences between the means.
Analysis of the data confirmed the first hypothesis that those girls
with the highest peer status ratings would be found at the conformist
level of ego development. The second hypothesis, that the more deviant
a person was from the conformist level, the lower would be his peer
status, received only partial confirmation. The restricted nature of
the present study was stressed and further research was urged, particu-
larly with respect to a larger sample.

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INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was designed to examine the relationship between ego development and peer status. Ego development was measured by the recently-developed Washington University Sentence Completion Test for Measuring Ego Development and peer status was measured by a sociometric test.

The Washington University test is an instrument constructed to measure ego development (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). The concept of an ego has been much discussed since it was originated by Freud. Freud viewed the ego as that part of the personality that mediates between the demands of the id, the superego, and external reality. As later theorists have elaborated on Freud's original concept, however, the ego has taken on new meanings. Sullivan (1953) referred to the ego as the self-system, emphasizing its role in interpersonal relations. Other theorists have followed who have elaborated on the ego concept from the developmental standpoint, that is, discussed the ego as a process instead of a fixed part of the personality. These theories view the ego as a unitary entity that develops according to some teleological framework. The Washington University test is derived, in part, from these ideas, principally those of Sullivan, Grant, and Grant (1957). Their work postulated most of the developmental stages used in the current instrument. The Washington University test assumes that those functions usually associated with the ego, directing interpersonal relations, self-concept, cognitive complexity, can be measured

along a single, unitary dimension. There are specific developmental stages that mark the process of ego development. However, the highest stages denote relatively few individuals and the highest stage can be considered analogous to Maslow's concept of self-actualization. Thus these stages represent ideal levels of adjustment. This does not mean, however, that well-adjusted persons are only found at the highest stages; indeed, they are found at all levels of ego development.

The first stage of ego development can be subdivided into two parts: presocial and symbiotic. This stage is characterized by very little differentiation between the self and the environment. The next stage, impulsive, sees the child as becoming separate from that environment; he is able to say "No." The world is seen as either black or white, good or bad and the person is controlled by his impulses. As the person is able to assert some control over impulsivity, he moves into the self-protective stage. Now, when his impulses are thwarted, he projects blame onto the environment, instead of himself. The self-protective person is manipulative, narcissistic.

The conformist stage is particularly prevalent among children of school age, though conformists are prevalent at any age. The person accepts the rules of his parents, other adults, then his peers. Morality is determined by social convention. The conscientious stage particularly characterizes those persons in college. Rules no longer are seen as absolutes. The person begins to perceive psychological motives in others and in himself. Most notably, he is concerned with the effects of his actions on other people. At the autonomous level, the person begins to have respect for the autonomy of himself and also

that of others. There is a recognition and awareness of internal con-
flict, along with an acceptance of this conflict. Moral questions are
seen as complex. The highest stage, integrated, almost refers to an
ideal person who does not exist. Statistically, only a tiny minority
of any population can be expected to fall in this category.

One of the most interesting facets of the Washington University
test is that it is a projective test, a sentence completion, yet with
the characteristics of a psychometric instrument. It was felt that
nothing other than a projective test would be able to capture the full
range of ego functioning. And yet, the authors have located certain
responses at specific ego development levels by noting the incidence
of such responses among the various levels in the sample population.
Theoretical considerations supplemented the data. In general, responses
are judged individually, irrespective of the other responses given.
They are also judged on the basis of stated meaning, rather than some-
thing which is only implied, making errors in scoring less likely.

Because of the care involved in constructing this test, it would
seem that it represents a major advance in measuring a trait as broad
as ego development. Other authors have developed instruments designed
to measure elements of ego functioning, yet the current test puts
these elements together in one package backed by a sound theoretical
orientation. The present study is an effort to elaborate on the work
of the authors of the Washington University test by examining the
relationship between ego development stages and an additional variable
which should logically be a function of that development, given the
theoretical background of the instrument.

As the ego mediates between the environment and the organism, it also becomes responsible for monitoring relationships between the person and other people. Interpersonal relations have frequently been considered as being under the control of the ego and, certainly, these relationships are significant in the theory of ego development behind the Washington University test. In fact, the continuum represented by these levels might be considered as representing the development of independence in the individual from those around him. In addition, though, the person must become more aware of others and of the nature of his relationships with them. He respects others as independent people, like himself, who are endowed with the same psychological strivings and conflicts that he is. Given these considerations, is the person of high ego development better liked by his peers for that reason? According to theory, there are probably more people at the conformist level than at any other level. Conformists are concerned with belonging to a group and conforming to its rules. Thus those who are conformists place a high value on social relations. Are these persons consequently more popular? What is the effect of ego development level upon popularity within a given population?

It is hypothesized that those persons who are most popular, as measured by a sociometric test, will be found at the conformist level of ego development, as measured by the Washington University test. It is further postulated that the more deviant a person is from the conformist level, the lower will be his popularity, whether the direction of deviance is toward a lower ego development level or toward a higher level.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Since the development of sociometry, the measurement of social
relationships in groups, began with J. L. Moreno and Who Shall Survive?
an extensive body of literature has arisen related to this instrument
(Lindzey & Byrne, 1968). This has largely developed through a journal
established in 1937, Sociometry: A Journal of Interpersonal Relations,
more recently titled Sociometry.

The simplest sociometric test involves a peer nomination proce-
dure where the person is asked to choose those other people with whom
he would like to participate in a given activity. In essence, those
persons chosen most often are the most popular, or highest in peer
status; those chosen least often are the least popular, or lowest in
peer status. Tests have varied in the number of criteria (activities)
specified and the number of choices permitted for each criterion.
Northway (1952) recommends three choices for each of three criteria.
Eng and French (1948) discovered that an unlimited number of choices
showed a closer correlation to their criterion than either three or
five choices. If the investigator wants to examine the status of the
isolated member, the person who is not chosen by other members, then
an unlimited number of choices is necessary. In general, though, a
small, defined number of choices and criteria makes the instrument
simpler and more efficient. Another difficulty arises when more than
one choice is allowed per criterion. Are the choices to be accorded
equal weights or should the first choice be weighted greater than the

second choice, the second greater than the third, and so forth? Even though it makes more sense logically to weight choices, most authors have viewed unweighted choices as being statistically simpler and more elegant (Northway, 1952).

The data from a sociometric test yields a representation of the relative status of individuals within the group or a "psychosocial network" (Nehnevajsa, 1956). This can be seen more easily when the results are translated into graphic form. Sociograms originated with Moreno along with his original discussion of the method. Other approaches are the target sociogram (Northway, 1952) and the matrix (Forsyth & Katz, 1946). The matrix is especially interesting, since it lends itself to further statistical analysis.

There have been many studies designed to investigate the relationship between conformity and status. With respect to the Washington University test, however, conformity cannot be viewed as a single unitary quality; rather it is one element in the process of ego development. Though one stage is labeled the conformist stage, it is only one point along a developmental scale that includes greater or lesser elements of conformity at all levels. In the present study, the assumption has been made that those persons who are more deviant from the conformist level exhibit a decreased amount of conformity. Nevertheless, an examination of studies relating conformity and status should prove helpful.

In general, previous studies demonstrate that conformity has a positive relation with peer status (Homans, 1950; Katz, Libby, & Strodtbeck, 1964). However, the relationship is sometimes not a simple one

as other factors seem to be operative. Dittes and Kelley (1956)
listed three additional variables: "(a) valuation of membership, (b)
security in membership, and (c) motivation to improve one's acceptance
[p. 106]." Their study found that those who had moderate acceptance
from group members and who foresaw the possibility of improving their
status were highly conforming. Those persons with the lowest status
also exhibited a high degree of conformity when they communicated with
other group members; however, they tended to withdraw from group acti-
vities as membership in the group became less important to them as a
consequence of their low status. In another study examining the ef-
fect of status mobility, Katz, Libby, and Strodtbeck (1964) discovered
that "sliders" (those persons who were initially deviant and then be-
came conforming) threatened high status members of the group. The
fear of being replaced as a person with high status caused them to be
less accepting of the "sliders." Even so, "sliders" were higher in
peer status than clearly deviant members.

Kelley and Shapiro (1954) hypothesized that persons with high peer
status would be less conforming because they would be more secure in
status, thus feeling freer to deviate from group norms. Their hypo-
thesis was confirmed by correlations but disconfirmed by data from
experimental treatments. A particularly interesting finding was that,
when conformity of group members was detrimental to group achievement,
the person who was highly valued as a co-worker was less likely to be
conforming. Thus there seemed to be an inverse relationship between
this kind of status and conformity.

Krieger and Wells (1969) performed a factor-analytic study to

determine those characteristics correlated with friendship. Their subjects were a group of adolescent boys at camp. They found that boys who were high in peer status were also high in perceived conformity to adult norms. Though there may be differences in the boys' conformity to adult norms as opposed to peer group norms, the study is relevant to the Washington University test since conformity is defined, in a sense, by adult norms used in the construction of that test.

Emerson (1964) found a curvilinear relation between conformity and peer status: those lowest and highest in peer status showed the greatest degree of conformity, while those with moderate peer status ratings were less conforming. This finding draws some support from the previously cited study by Dittes and Kelley in which group members with low status were highly conforming in their public behavior; yet that conclusion was tempered by the discovery that low status members were privately very deviant.

Some research has also been done on the Washington University test since its publication. With respect to the present study, the work of Hoppe (1973) is relevant. He investigated the construct validity of the Washington University test in an attempt to determine whether or not conformists scored at the conformist level. Four measures of conformity were used, one of which was a peer nomination procedure. Those with the highest peer status ratings were found at the conformist level, which was defined as including delta/3, I-3, and I-3/4 stages.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Subjects for the study were eighteen female high school students. All of the girls were white, Catholic, seniors, and either seventeen or eighteen years of age. They were also all members of the Drum and Bugle Corps of Mount Carmel High School in Houston, Texas. This is a highly disciplined, tightly knit group of girls who were used as a subject pool because they had had time to form some kind of coherent group social structure. Seniors were selected because some of them were expected to be at a higher level of ego development than would be typical of high school students, thus resulting in a wider distribution of ego development stages.

Prior to administering tests, all potential Ss were given release forms to be signed by their parents and themselves. The release forms contained brief descriptions of the instruments and assured both parents and girls that the results would be kept confidential, since some of the material might be embarrassing if known. Approval by the school administrators was necessary in advance of testing and they wanted to be certain that the Ss and their parents knew the purpose of the study. The high school was on a trimester system and a semester break delayed the start of testing. In addition, it was difficult to find a time when a group of active high school girls could get together. However, some roadblocks are expected in the completion of a research project and they can generally be overcome by persistence and dedication.

Two measurement instruments were used. One was Form AB-68 (for girls) of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test. The other was a form for specifying peer preferences. Only one criterion question was used: "If you were having a party, which girls would you invite to it?" Ss were requested to list first, second, and third choices for this question. A composite ego level and numerical peer status rating were computed for each girl. With respect to peer status scores, the number of choices for each girl was tallied with each choice, whether first, second, or third, receiving a score of one. A list of participants in the study was drawn up in advance and distributed to the girls; they were asked to make their sociometric choices from that list.

Stages of ego development were treated as the dependent variable in a simple analysis of variance where peer status scores were the independent variable. If F was found to be significant (.05 level), Scheffe's test could be used to locate the differences among the means for groups. The first hypothesis was considered confirmed if the conformist level (I-3) had a mean peer status score that was higher than those at other levels (.05 level). The second hypothesis was considered confirmed if the means for those stages that were increasingly deviant from the conformist stage decreased significantly (.05 level).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When eighteen $\underline{S}$s were tested with the Washington University Sentence Completion Test, six scored at the conformist level (I-3), eleven scored at level I-3/4, and one scored at level I-4. This was somewhat disappointing in that the distribution of scores over ego development levels was so narrow as to make statistical analysis less meaningful. However, this distribution could have been expected and, in fact, tended to support the theoretical assumption that school-age students score at the conformist level (I-3) while college students score at the conscientious level (I-4). Accordingly, high school seniors, some of whom would be expected to enter college, should score somewhere between those two levels and, in fact, most of the girls scored at the I-3/4 level.

Sociometric status scores for the girls ranged from one to five. In two instances, arbitrary decisions were made with respect to handling the data. One girl misunderstood the test question and indicated many more than three choices. The first three names were chosen from her list on the theory that those names she had recalled first were, indeed, her primary choices to the question. The problem of absentees is recurrent in sociometric testing. Girls were on the circulated list of possible choices who did not take either the Washington University test or the sociometric test. In some cases, these girls were chosen when they had not made any choices themselves. Since their scores could not be assigned to treatment groups as they had not taken

the sentence completion test, their scores were simply deleted from subsequent analysis.

The peer status scores were grouped according to ego development stage and a simple analysis of variance yielded significant between-groups differences at the .05 level:

TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance: Summary Table

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Between groups	2	14.63	7.32	5.42
Within groups	15	20.19	1.35	
Total	17	34.82		

The results of Scheffe's test showed significant differences between the means in two out of three tests. Individual means were 4.0 for level I-3, 2.3 for level I-3/4, and 1.0 for level I-4. The differences between means of.levels I-3 and I-3/4 and between the means of levels I-3 and I-4 were significant (.05 level). The remaining difference was not found to be significant.

The three treatment groups used in the analysis of variance could easily have been reduced to two, since there was only one score at level I-4. Retaining the third group was not particularly useful statistically, since there was no variance among scores for that group. However, it affords some support for the second hypothesis since the one person who scored at the I-4 level had one of the lowest peer status scores.

The first hypothesis was confirmed since the conformist level (I-3) had a mean peer status score that was significantly higher than the mean peer status scores of the other two levels. The second hypothesis was only partially confirmed as the difference between the means of stages I-3 and I-3/4 was significant but the difference between the means of stages I-3/4 and I-4 was not. Thus in simple terms, those persons who are more popular in a group tend to score at the conformist level on the Washington University test; there is also some support for the expectation that those persons who score at higher levels of ego development are less popular.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study demonstrates that conformists, those located at one stage of ego development, enjoy a higher peer status than those who are not so conforming. Though this conclusion may apply to persons who are determined to be conforming by other means, the results of this study can only be interpreted in the context of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test. The validity of the relation between conformity and peer status must be determined by other researchers; indeed, much evidence has already been presented to prove the point.

Persons found at higher levels of ego development seem to be more independent, though the concept is actually of increasing maturity and psychological understanding accompanying the development of independence; thus the word autonomy is used. These people seem to have developed a characteristic of self-sufficiency which is not appreciated by those at a lower conforming level. As a result, they are less popular. Persons at a lower level of ego development are either extremely dependent or somewhat manipulative; neither of these qualities is generally considered desirable or popular.

It was noted that there were no Ss who scored at less than the conformist stage (I-3). It is possible to score at two lower stages, though the chances of doing so are decreased. Since there were persons in the sample who scored at a level higher than the I-3, it might be that there is a stage between the delta and I-3 at which some persons

would be expected to fall, other than the transitional stage, delta/3. This prospect seems more likely since there is a rather large qualitative jump between the delta and I-3 levels. Perhaps, though, the absence of lower level persons is a function of the small sample size.

The present study is highly restricted in scope and further research is indicated to determine whether or not these findings will continue to be valid. The same study performed on a larger N would be useful. The sample might cover a range of ages or school grades to increase the possibility of finding persons who score at the lower and higher stages of ego development. However, further studies on restricted homogeneous samples might also be in order. Test theory predicts that a large majority of school-age children should be found at the conformist (I-3) level. It also predicts that persons in college should be found at a higher level. If this is true, would the most popular college students score at the conformist level, which is now, according to theory, less frequent? The study certainly should be repeated with men as subjects. To date, the Washington University test has been used primarily with women. The publication of another manual dealing with a sentence completion test for men should spur research in that direction.

One other possibility might be mentioned. Persons at higher levels of ego development seem to be less popular but they may not be less respected. The question on the sociometric test could be changed to inquire which people would be preferred as leaders. Perhaps people of high ego development are sought as leaders, even if they are not liked as well as others.

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