


**EGO DEVELOPMENT AND ITS RELATION
TO DYADIC ADJUSTMENT**


SHERRY LYNN RAGER

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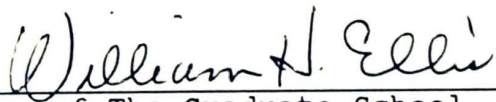
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EGO DEVELOPMENT AND ITS RELATION
TO DYADIC ADJUSTMENT

A Thesis
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Sherry Lynn Rager
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ABSTRACT

This research attempted to determine if a relationship existed between level of ego development and dyadic adjustment. Fifty undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in psychology classes participated in the study. The instruments employed to measure ego development and dyadic adjustment were the Short Forms of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development and Dyadic Adjustment Scale, respectively. A Pearson product-moment correlation was utilized for the purposes of analysis. It was concluded that no significant differences were found between level of ego development and dyadic adjustment.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Marriage has continued to be a topic of vast interest in counseling and related disciplines over the last few decades. This is quite understandable considering the high rates of marital dysfunction, separation, and divorce reported in today's society (O'Leary & Smith, 1991). However, this does not imply that all marriages are destined for dissolution. On the contrary, many marriages are productive and longlasting, bringing fulfillment and enjoyment to each partner. In fact, researchers Gove, Style, and Hughes (1990) suggested that the institution of marriage actually enhances an individual's well-being.

According to Lewis and Spanier (1979), in the majority of marriages, the main factor that determines whether a couple will remain together is the quality of the marriage. Marital quality has been used interchangeably in the literature with concepts like marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, marital happiness, and the like (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). For the purposes of this research, dyadic adjustment will be the variable examined. Dyadic adjustment is defined as "a process of movement along a continuum which can be evaluated in terms of proximity to good or poor adjustment" (Spanier, 1976; p. 17). The result of this process is determined by the level of: "(1)

troublesome dyadic differences; (2) interpersonal tensions and personal anxiety; (3) dyadic satisfaction; (4) dyadic cohesion; and (5) consensus on matters of importance to dyadic functioning" (Spanier, 1976; p. 17). Clearly, there are a wide array of forces that can act on a marriage influencing the quality and stability of the relationship (Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Indeed, in their review, Lewis and Spanier (1979) noted that such factors as homogamy with respect to social characteristics, positive parental models, access to resources, support from other parties, social and economic elements, role-fit, good communication skills, emotional fulfillment, positive regard for partner, and amount of interaction have all been found to be related to marital quality. Most of these factors are external to the individual, however, it would seem plausible that internal components would play a comparable role in an individual's marital relationship.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Swensen (1977) indicated that the kind of relationship a couple has must be a result of the types of people who are a part of the relationship. In other words, the relationship is a function of the personality traits demonstrated by the two individuals involved in the marriage. Several studies lend support to this point. Kim, Martin, and Martin (1989) found certain personality traits to be critical factors in predicting and determining marital stability. In addition, Grayson (1980) indicated that a relationship existed between personality similarity and dyadic satisfaction. Also, Barry (1970) reported that couples who had similar personalities were more inclined to have healthier marriages. Similarly, Pickford, Signori, and Rempel (1966) concluded that analogous personality traits in partners are associated with marital adjustment. Also, Burchinal, Hawkes, and Gardner (1957) determined that personality has a tremendous influence on the level of happiness reported by married persons. Further, in his review of marital studies, Bernard (1964) found that in comparison to other factors, personality was more important in determining the nature of marital adjustments.

Utilizing self-actualization as a personality

variable, Swensen (1977) conducted a study with subjects who were classified as high, medium, and low on a self-actualization measure. A test concerning intimate relationships was administered and an interview was conducted. The results showed that most of the subjects who were low in self-actualization did not have any intimate relationships or their relationships were conflictual or dissolved; those who were medium in self-actualization had idealized and stereotyped relationships, with a lack of problems; and those who were highest in self-actualization had realistic relationships, with both positive and negative aspects. Swensen (1977) subsequently compared these findings to his knowledge of Jane Loevinger's (1966) model of ego development. He concluded that the relationships which were typical of low self-actualizers seemed to fit the kinds of relationships formed by people at the earliest stages of ego development, the Impulsive and Self-Protective Stages; the relationships which were characteristic of the middle group of self-actualizers seemed to match the sort of relationships which are found at the Conformist Stage; and the high self-actualizers' descriptions of their relationships corresponded to the type of relationships which are discovered at the higher Conscientious Stage.

In a later study, Swensen (1977) found that subjects who had a low level of self-actualization had problems

revolving around role confusion, whereas those individuals who had a high level of self-actualization had difficulties in the area of promoting each other's growth and development. From the results of this particular study, he concluded that the low self-actualizers were similar to those at the Conformist Stage of ego development and the high self-actualizers were like those at the Autonomous Stage of Loevinger's model. Based on these findings, Swensen (1977) concluded that ego development appears to be a personality variable that is a critical determinant in the way individuals relate to one another.

Ego development is conceptualized by Jane Loevinger (1976) as "the 'master trait' of personality, as the frame that provides more specific traits with their meaning and around which the whole edifice of personality is constructed" (p. 41). According to Loevinger (1976), the ego develops over the life span through a succession of invariant stages. Each of the developmental stages encompasses impulse control, character development, cognitive complexity, conscious preoccupations, and interpersonal style (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). There are seven ego stages and three transitional phases which are distinguished by a descriptive term and a symbol or I-level (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970).

The earliest stage in the model is divided into the Presocial and the Symbiotic Stages (I-1) (Loevinger, 1976;

Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). In the Presocial Stage, infants must learn how to distinguish themselves from their environment (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). In the Symbiotic Stage, infants acquire the ability to distinguish their caregivers from the rest of their surroundings (Loevinger, 1966, 1976). Yet, the infants are unable to distinguish themselves from their parents or guardians (Loevinger, 1966, 1976). As language emerges, it aids the Symbiotic infants in seeing themselves as separate individuals (Loevinger, 1966, 1976).

The next stage is the Impulsive Stage (I-2) (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Children at this stage are self-centered and difficult, seeing others as a source for satisfying their wants (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). There is a tendency to view oneself and others in terms of simple dichotomies such as nice versus mean (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Feelings are expressed in physiological terms such as upset, mad, and ticked off (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). These children essentially ignore rules and externalize problems, often to a place (Loevinger, 1976, 1979; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Consequently, behavior is determined by a system of rewards and punishment (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970).

The third stage is the Self-Protective Stage (Delta) (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Rules are

recognized at this stage, however, they are followed only to advance self-interest or satisfy desires (Loevinger, 1966, 1976, 1979; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970).

Self-protective persons are characterized as being manipulative and opportunistic in their relations with others (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). For individuals at this stage, life is a zero-sum game; what one individual achieves, someone else forfeits (Loevinger, 1976).

Following the Self-Protective Stage is the first transitional phase or Delta/3 (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Individuals at this stage tend to classify people according to traditional sex role stereotypes (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Emotions are expressed in quasi-physiological terms rather than cognitively (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Cleanliness and physical appearance become major concerns for these individuals (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970).

The next stage is the Conformist Stage (I-3), which is characterized by identification with a group and acceptance of rules (Loevinger, 1976, 1979; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Conformists are primarily concerned with the sanctions which may be imposed if they do not follow the norms set forth by the group (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Due to the fact that individuals at this stage are consumed by aspects relative to a group, they tend to fail to notice individual

differences within people, instead they see everyone as being basically alike (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Individuals at this stage think in moralistic and stereotypical ways (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). However, niceness, helpfulness, and cooperation are values which typify interpersonal relating for individuals at this level (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). In addition, Conformists are especially interested in the peripheral aspects of life such as material possessions, acceptance and belonging, appearance, and character (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970).

The second transitional phase is the Self-Aware Level or the Conscientious-Conformist Level (I-3/4) (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Most of the traits typical of the previous stage hold true for individuals at this phase except there is an increase in awareness of self and the recognition of numerous possibilities in situations (Loevinger, 1976). Conscientious-Conformist individuals begin to realize that the way things should be handled or dealt with depends on various factors, such as time and place (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). There is a realization that it is alright not to consistently and constantly strive to adhere to one's reference group's prescribed norms (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Yet, while Conscientious-Conformists allow for differences and

contingencies, they are couched in somewhat global classifications, such as gender, marital status, ethnic origin, and age, rather than in terms of personal variations in characteristics and wishes (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970).

The stage following the Conscientious-Conformist transitional phase is the Conscientious Stage (I-4) (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Individuals who reach this stage have a real sense of who they are and are aware of the many unique qualities found among people (Loevinger, 1976, 1979). Out of this new found awareness develops the capacity for mutuality in interpersonal relationships (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Conscientious persons take responsibility and choose their own course of action in situations based upon what they perceive as appropriate (Loevinger, 1976, 1979; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Individuals at this stage will also tend to feel obligated to help others in their life situations (Loevinger, 1976, 1979; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Achievement is a primary focus and is measured in terms of the individual's own standards rather than through outside approval (Loevinger, 1966, 1976, 1979; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970).

The third transitional phase is the Individualistic Level (I-4/5) (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). People at this level have achieved a deeper understanding

of individual differences and an acceptance of oneself and others becomes evident (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Interpersonal relations are highly appreciated, conflicting with the value of achievement found at the previous stage (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). With this development, there is a realization that inner conflict is present (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Individualistic people have a greater ability to accept paradox and irony which leads to enhanced conceptual complexity (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970).

The sixth stage is the Autonomous Stage (I-5) (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Conceptual complexity is paramount during this stage (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Autonomous individuals realize that other people need to have the freedom to make decisions and the opportunity to learn from mistakes (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). They also have the ability to recognize and deal with conflicting needs and responsibilities (Loevinger, 1966, 1976, 1979; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Interpersonal relations are cherished (Loevinger, 1976, 1979). Yet, these individuals continue to remain cognizant of other people's need for individuality (Loevinger, 1966, 1976, 1979; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Feelings are expressed openly and honestly (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler,

1970). People at the Autonomous Stage assess life in broad terms and strive to be practical and unbiased concerning themselves and others (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970).

The final and highest stage is the Integrated Stage (I-6), which tends to be extremely rare (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Conflict is transcended and individuality is meaningful not only just accepted (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). At this stage, the unachievable is forsaken and one's identity is integrated (Loevinger, 1966, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Integrated individuals also strive for self-fulfillment (Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970).

Lickona (1974), based on the knowledge that there would be major variations in the dynamics of liking and loving between individuals who perceive relationships as a zero-sum game and individuals who perceive relationships as an opportunity to develop each other's autonomous selves, speculated that there may be some relationship between levels of ego development and levels of interpersonal relationships.

Offering support to the above contention is Crouse, Karlins, and Schroders' (1968) finding that individuals who were more cognitively complex were significantly happier in their marriages than those who were low in cognitive

complexity. The authors stated that this was a logical conclusion due to the fact that cognitively complex individuals have the resources to adjust to the flexible demands within an interpersonal relationship (Crouse et al., 1968).

In light of these findings and based on the theory that at the lower stages of ego development, there is less differentiation and cognitive complexity and at the higher stages of ego development, there is extensive differentiation and integration (Swensen, 1977), it is predicted that there is a relationship between ego development and the marital relationship. Specifically, it is hypothesized that there is a positive correlation between level of ego development and dyadic adjustment.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Subjects

Fifty married undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in psychology classes from Austin Peay State University served as subjects for this particular study. Participation was voluntary and each subject completed an Informed Consent Statement (Appendix A) and a Demographic Information Sheet (Appendix B).

Materials

The instruments utilized to measure ego level and dyadic adjustment were the Short Forms of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development (Holt, 1980) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), respectively.

Twelve-item male and female short forms of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development, abbreviated versions of Loevinger & Wessler's (1970) 36-item Washington University Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development (WUSCTED), were developed by Robert R. Holt (1980). The 36-item WUSCTED has a reported Cronbach's alpha of .91 (Holt, 1980). Using this alpha, the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula suggests that if every item is testing the same thing, a randomly chosen sample of

twelve items would have an alpha of .77 (Holt, 1980). Accordingly, adequate internal consistency has been established for both the male and female short forms with alphas of .76 and .77, respectively (Holt, 1980).

Interrater agreement for the short form was found to have a range of 67% to 88% with a median of 76% for men and 66% to 91% with a median of 81.5% for women, which is similar to the range of 60% to 80% with a median of 77% for the 36-item WUSCTED (Holt, 1980). Reported interrater reliability for the short forms, .825 for women and .78 for men, is also comparable to the median r of .75 obtained by Loevinger (Holt, 1980). In addition, in a study conducted by Picano (1987), no significant differences were found in the ego levels retrieved from the 12-item and 36-item tests.

Subjects are free to complete each sentence on the measure as they wish (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). The test is scored according to the detailed instructions and examples provided in the scoring manuals for women and men (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970; Loevinger, Wessler, & Redmore, 1970; Redmore, Loevinger, & Tamashiro, 1978). Each individual item on the test is scored independently of the others, that is, all of the subjects' responses for the first sentence stem are rated, then the second, and so on. A frequency distribution of the item ratings and a cumulative frequency distribution is made for each

subject's protocol (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Following the automatic ogive scoring rules provided by Picano (1987), an overall score or Total Protocol Rating (TPR) is then obtained and assigned to an appropriate level of ego functioning as described by Loevinger and Wessler (1970).

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), which was designed by Graham B. Spanier (1976), is a 32-item paper and pencil instrument which measures an individual's adjustment to marriage or a similar dyadic relationship (Spanier & Thompson, 1982). The DAS consists of four subscales: Dyadic Consensus, the degree to which the couple concedes on issues of significance to the marriage; Dyadic Cohesion, the degree to which the couple participates in activities together; Dyadic Satisfaction, the degree to which the couple is satisfied with the current condition of the marriage and is dedicated to its continuation; and Affectional Expression, the degree to which the couple is satisfied with the demonstration of love and intimacy in the marriage (Spanier & Filsinger, 1983).

The instrument primarily utilizes a Likert-style format with responses ranging from always agree to always disagree or all the time to never. There are two items on the test which are answered yes or no (Touliatos, Perlmutter, & Straus, 1990). Most of the items are scored from 0 to 5 and dyadic adjustment is represented by a total scale score, obtained from a theoretical range of 0-151

(Spanier & Filsinger, 1983). An individual is assumed to be well adjusted with a score of 100 or more (Spanier & Filsinger, 1983).

Utilizing Cronbach's coefficient alpha, the reported reliability for the overall DAS and the subscales, Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Cohesion, Dyadic Satisfaction, and Affectional Expression, is .96, .90, .86, .94, and .73, respectively (Spanier & Filsinger, 1983). Validity of the scale has been established in three ways. First, three judges evaluated the items based on specific criteria for content validity (Spanier, 1976). Second, each of the items in the scale have been shown to significantly discriminate between married and divorced respondents indicating criterion-related validity (Spanier, 1976). Third, the DAS was found to correlate significantly with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale suggesting construct validity (Spanier, 1976). The DAS allows for individual or group administration and requires only 5-10 minutes to complete (Kramer & Conoley, 1992).

Procedure

Participants in the study completed an Informed Consent Statement (Appendix A) and a Demographic Information Sheet (Appendix B). The students received either the Male or the Female Short Form of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. After finishing both tests,

the students were thanked for their time and participation in the study.

The Male and the Female Short Forms of The Washington University Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale were coded with a number, odd for male and even for female, so that both measures could be easily identified for each subject. For the purposes of analysis, the levels of ego development or I-levels were converted into numerical values ranging from 1 to 9. For instance, the number 1 represented the lowest ego level, Impulsive or I-2, and the number 9 represented the highest ego level, Integrated or I-6, which could be obtained on the test. The numerical value was subsequently paired with the score acquired on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale for each subject and a Pearson product-moment correlation was computed to determine if a relationship existed between level of ego development and level of dyadic adjustment. In addition, the age and number of years married for each participant were matched with both tests and examined to ascertain whether any significant differences could be discovered.

CHAPTER 4

Results

A Pearson product-moment correlation indicated that a nonsignificant relationship existed for level of ego development ($M = 5.480$) and dyadic adjustment ($M = 116.480$), $r(48) = -.027$, $p = .8515$. In addition, no significant differences were found for level of ego development and age, $r(48) = .004$, $p = .9806$; level of dyadic adjustment and age, $r(48) = .145$, $p = .3143$; level of ego development and number of years married, $r(48) = -.037$, $p = .7997$; and level of dyadic adjustment and number of years married, $r(48) = -.107$, $p = .4580$. The mean age was 30.320 and the mean number of years married was 7.760.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The present data are incongruent with the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between level of ego development and dyadic adjustment. Although Lickona (1974) pointed out that there may be a relationship between ego development and interpersonal relationships and Crouse et al. (1968) found that cognitive complexity, which is characteristic of the higher stages of ego development, was a factor in marital happiness, this study failed to show any evidence of such a relationship.

Although it is only speculation, several possibilities could account for the negative findings. First, there was a lack of variation among the subjects scores on the Short Forms of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development. Most of the subjects tended to cluster around the Conscientious-Conformist Level (I-3/4), which is typical of many adults in college and noncollege settings alike according to Holt (1980). However, without a representative number of subjects falling into the other categories of ego development, it would seem difficult to determine exactly to what extent the level of ego development would influence the level of dyadic adjustment. Second, due to the subjective nature of the Short Form of

the Washington University Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development, it could be quite plausible that the test itself may have had an impact on the results. Although the test has been widely used and shown to be effective in numerous studies, this does not mean that all subjects will respond seriously to the items. In fact, several subjects failed to complete the sentences or replied with a response which was too fragmentary to be meaningful. Whether these things influenced the results in any way is unclear, however, it does seem to negate the serious nature of the study itself.

Despite the insignificant findings, it may be interesting to examine ego development and dyadic adjustment in a different context. For instance, a study could be conducted to determine if similar or contrasting ego levels produce higher or lower levels of dyadic adjustment by testing both partners instead of only one of them. Also, a study could be conducted comparing cohabitating and married couples based on their level of ego development and dyadic adjustment to ascertain if any differences are present. Numerous hypotheses could be formulated based on the concepts of ego development and dyadic adjustment and pertinent information could be gained. Therefore, ego development and dyadic adjustment should continue to be researched to determine what if any relationship exists between the two.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

The purpose of this investigation is to test ego development and its relation to dyadic adjustment. Your responses are confidential. At no time will you be identified nor will anyone other than the investigators have access to your responses. The demographic information collected will be used only for purposes of analysis. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to terminate your participation at any time without penalty.

The scope of the project will be explained fully upon your completing the questionnaires.

Thank you for your cooperation.

I agree to participate in the present study being conducted under the supervision of a faculty member of the Department of Psychology at Austin Peay State University. I have been informed, either orally or in writing or both, about the procedures to be followed and about any discomforts or risks which may be involved. The investigator has offered to answer any further inquiries I have regarding the procedure. I understand that I am free to terminate my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice and to have all data obtained from me withdrawn from the study and destroyed. I have also been told of any benefits that may result from my participation.

Name (Please Print)

Signature

Date

Appendix B

Demographic Information Sheet

Number of years married _____

Age _____

Sherry Lynn Rager was born in Hopkinsville, Kentucky on December 28, 1969. She attended Elkton Elementary School and graduated from Todd County Central High School in May, 1987. The following August she enrolled in Hopkinsville Community College where she received an Associate in Arts in May, 1989. She entered Western Kentucky University in August, 1989 and transferred to Austin Peay State University the following semester in January, 1990. She received the degree Bachelor of Science in Psychology in August, 1991 and completed her graduate work in May, 1994, earning a Master of Science degree in Guidance and Counseling.