

Introduction

Exceptional Maturity of Personality

An Emerging Field

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In the third stage, the super-logical, the mind seeks to return to immediacy, to solve the dualism and oppositions inherent in the practical life of thought and action. One or another of the great ideals arises and becomes the place of retreat; and the universal categories of thought, the absolute forms of value, and the various panaceas of feeling erect their claims to final authority. [And so in the grand scheme] the leading motives of development [are seen passing] from perception and memory, through the various phases of the reasoning processes, and finding their consummation in the highest and most subtle of the super-logical, rational, and mystic states of mind.

—Baldwin (1930, p. 13)

This volume, although rooted in Jane Loevinger's work, goes beyond it in significant ways and presents a comprehensive examination of optimal adult development coming out of positive, developmental, and humanistic psychology. The introduction supplies the background and structure for a theory of the maturation of consciousness and introduces the reader to a rudimentary understanding of Loevinger's (1976) model for ego development. It represents the path that most chapters in this text are either explicitly based on or the underpinning from which their work is derived. Additionally, this chapter presents a background into what

is known and theorized about how consciousness changes as it expands from one stage to another, and how this expansion appears as lived experience. It ends with an overview of the studies that appear in this volume and the book's overall significance for future research.

Developmental views in philosophy are at least as old as Friedrich Hegel's 1807 publication of *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*. James Mark Baldwin (1861–1934), one of American psychology's founding fathers was keenly aware of the importance of development for the human mind, but did not articulate a systematic theory of it. Since the mid-20th century, however, there has been a growing interest in individual maturation, or what many of the present authors term personal evolution. Especially in the second half of the 20th century, such developmental theorists such as Jean Piaget (1952), Laurence Kohlberg (1969), and Ken Wilber (1986, 1995, 2006) have catalyzed both academic and popular interest in developmental studies. Although Maslow (1954/1970) introduced the concept of *self-actualization and optimal development* into American psychology half a century ago, systematic, empirical research did not begin to emerge until recently under the term *postconventional personality development* (Hewlett, 2004; Miller & Cook-Greuter, 1994; Torbert, 2004). Only in recent years, however, has serious academic attention been turned toward the examination of the most advanced stages of personality growth and development. Contemporary developmental theorists for the first time are chronicling growth paths from birth to advanced stages of maturation (Hy & Loevinger, 1996; Kegan, 1982; Loevinger, 1976; Wade, 1996; Wilber, 1986).

Until a few decades ago it was common to conceive of personal development as beginning at birth and proceeding in an orderly fashion through a sequence of developmental stages culminating in conventional adult functioning. The pioneering work of Jean Piaget (e.g., 1952, 1977b) had led to a model of epigenetic, or structural, levels of growth, a stage theory, according to which cognitive development progresses through an invariant sequence of hierarchically arranged stages that form qualitatively distinct units of development. Conceiving of development in this fashion puts an emphasis on the dynamic aspects of state transitions and allows us as well to conceptualize stages of growth that are empirically rarely seen. Work by Lawrence Kohlberg (1969) and Loevinger (1976) offered the most innovative and influential of the early neo-Piagetian theories, applying stage theory to the domains of moral reasoning and ego development, respectively.

Loevinger (1976) defined an ego stage as a frame of reference or a filter that the individual uses to interpret life experiences. It implies a level of character development, cognitive complexity, an interpersonal

style, and a set of conscious preoccupations. Loevinger developed a projective assessment instrument for measuring the level of ego development titled the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (SCT). The SCT translates qualitative observations about personality into quantitative data. Using this test, Loevinger laid the empirical foundation for hundreds of later investigations of adult development.

Loevinger conceptualized nine stages of personality development. The way the stages are named and numbered has changed over time, so the reader is cautioned that the same number may describe different stages in various research reports, and different names may describe the same stage. In this introduction we follow the latest version of the scoring manual (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). The reader is referred to Table I.1, showing names and numbering systems used by different authors in this volume. We can describe the first three, *Symbiotic*, Stage 1; *Impulsive*, Stage 2; and *Self-protective*, Stage 3, as *preconventional*. These stages represent normal developmental stages in childhood, but also are maladaptive strategies in adulthood that can be associated with psychopathologies such as borderline disorders. Individuals at this level fail to understand another's point of view, thus they are devoid of compassion and tend to lead lives narrowly focused on their own personal gain and advantage. Miller and Cook-Greuter (1994) estimate that about 10% of the adult population function at this level.

The following three stages are termed *conventional*. They describe about 80% of all adults in our culture. The fourth stage, *Conformist*, describes individuals who are identified with the values and norms of the social group to which they belong. They strive to express this through appearance and behavior, and are concerned about their reputation and possible disapproval from the group. In the eyes of the Conformist,

Table I.1. Correspondence of Ego Development Models

Stage	Hy and Loevinger 1996		Cook-Greuter 1999	Torbert 2004	Joiner 2007
2	Impulsive	E 2	Impulsive	Impulsive	Enthusiast
3	Self-protective	E 3	Self-protective	Opportunist	Operator
4	Conformist	E 4	Conformist	Diplomat	Conformer
5	Self-aware	E 5	Self-aware	Expert	Expert
6	Conscientious	E 6	Conscientious	Achiever	Achiever
7	Individualist	E 7	Individualist	Individualist	Catalyst
8	Autonomous	E 8	Autonomous	Strategist	Co-Creator
9	Integrated	E 9	Construct Aware	Alchemist	Synergist
10			Unitive	Ironist	

good is what the group approves of. There is strong emphasis on outer, material aspects of life. A rigid black-and-white worldview in regard to what is acceptable in terms of gender roles and opinions predominates. Loevinger emphasized that members of nonconforming groups within the general culture, such as “hippies” or “punks,” often show and expect conforming behavior within their own groups.

The fifth level, *Self-aware*, is the modal stage of the majority of adults in the contemporary Western culture (Cohn, 1998). Moving to this stage, adults gain more independence in terms of their ability to reflect on group norms, and there is a growing awareness of an inner life. A person can consider different possibilities and alternatives as well as exceptions to the rules. Cognition and affect, however, remain within established categories and are rather undifferentiated. The *Conscientious* stage, Stage 6, presents a significant step toward further internalization and differentiation. Individuals have established personal standards and values. Moral considerations and responsibilities toward others are now important, as are long-term goals. The Conscientious person strives to understand motivation and individual differences. Situations as well as problems can be seen within specific contexts, and the perspectives of other people are appreciated. In short, the outer direction of the Conformist, Stage 4, has now been fully replaced by an internal orientation that encompasses self-chosen values and standards to which the person strives to achieve.

Stage 7, the *Individualistic* stage, represents the first of several *postconventional* stages. To grow beyond Conscientious, Stage 6, a person must become more inner-directed and more tolerant of themselves and others. The self-established standards of the previous stage must become more contextualized and flexible. Persons at the Individualistic stage become aware of contradictions, such as the conflict between their need for autonomy and their need for emotional connection. They are willing to live with emotional and cognitive complexities that may not be resolvable, and they become more psychologically minded.

The *Autonomous* Stage, Stage 8, and the subsequent Stage 9, *Integrated*, describe about 10% of the U.S. adult population. Autonomous individuals are able to accept conflict as part of the human condition. They tolerate contradictions and ambiguities well and demonstrate cognitive sophistication. The Autonomous person respects the autonomy of others and values close personal relationships. Self-fulfillment and self-expression gain increasing importance in this person’s life. High social ideals of justice are also typical of this stage. Unfortunately, Loevinger found it difficult to arrive at a definitive description of Stage 9 because the sample pool of observable subjects at this stage was so small.

Significant work in regard to the higher stages has been completed by Cook-Greuter (1999), who evaluated more than 14,000 SCTs in an effort to understand the complexities of advanced development. She emphasized a cognitive shift that takes place at the Autonomous level, Stage 8, describing it as the embracing of systemic and dialectical modes of reasoning. Such individuals can hold multiple viewpoints and are interested in how knowledge is arrived at. In the language of the post-Piagetians such as Richards and Commons (1990) this constitutes a postformal way of reasoning. Individuals are aware of subjectivity in the construction of reality, accepting interpretation as the basis for the creation of meaning. Cook-Greuter constructed two *postautonomous* stages to replace Loevinger's final Stage 9, and suggested that about 1% of the population reach this level of development. The ninth stage in her system is called *Construct-aware*. At this level, individuals become conscious of how language shapes the perception of reality. Language is experienced as a form of cultural conditioning that people usually remain unaware of throughout their lives.

According to Cook-Greuter (1999) individuals can subsequently progress to an understanding that their egos are actually constructed from memory and maintained through an ongoing internal dialogue. As their self-awareness increases, they become interested in alternative ways of knowing. Transpersonal episodes, such as peak experiences, become increasingly common and people become drawn to meditation, alternate ways of knowing, and the witnessing of the internal process. At this stage, the individual experiences conflict between ordinary consensual reality and transpersonal awareness. This may be evident in the ego's ownership and evaluation of transpersonal episodes, or in seeming paradoxes such as attachment to nonattachment. Only at Stage 10, the *Unitive* stage, can individuals sustain an ongoing openness to experience that is fluid and without struggle. They are now able to make use of transpersonal experiences free from ego clinging. Individuals have been tested who are found to be functioning at the Unitive stage, ranging upward from 26 years of age (S. Cook-Greuter, personal communication, December 3, 2003).

It is important to note that ego development, as conceptualized by Loevinger, is but one conceptualization of maturity; one that places emphasis on cognitive complexity and a mature conceptualization of the individual's position in the social environment. Hy and Loevinger (1996) point out that ego development cannot be seen as an indicator of social adjustment, nor does it suggest mental health and subjective well-being (see also Helson & Srivastava, 2001; Pfaffenberger, 2007).

According to structural developmental theory, all stages must be negotiated in consecutive order. And the level currently experienced sets the stage for the dilemmas that must be resolved before progressing to the next higher stage. Individuals who occupy the higher stages of development must, at some point during their lives, have experienced the earlier stages of development. Virtually all models of higher development maintain that each individual begins at the lowest possible stage and progresses onward through the developmental levels in sequence. Thus, people understand the thinking and worldviews of lower developmental stages, but their comprehension of or empathy toward worldviews at higher levels is limited. When they encounter worldviews that do not fit their existing paradigm, they tend to see them with selective attention, screening out perceptions they do not understand or agree with. This phenomenon can lead to awkwardness between a person who has recently moved to a higher stage of growth and his or her previous cohort members. Movement from one stage of development to another creates moral, philosophical, and behavioral changes. If development proceeds into the highest range it can cause a psychological dissonance with the ambient society that exists in the midrange. Consequently, we can assume that individuals who function at high levels of development have experienced, perhaps on several occasions, alienation from those around them due to changes in worldview. These events may have occurred periodically throughout life and perhaps even began in childhood.

Why rapid development occurs for some and not at all for others remains a mystery. If, as is true in most cases, postconventional individuals were exposed to the same rigors of ordinary life as their cohorts, and subjected to the same growth limiting norms, what has provided the impetus for their extraordinary growth? The following pages address this and other enigmas of postformal personality development as they have begun to be illuminated by contemporary psychological research.