

**Female Adolescent Ego Development
and How it is Related to Attachment and Depression
A Longitudinal Study**

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**A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology at Pace University**

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PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

ABSTRACT

Research suggest that adolescents' developmental level accounts for their sources of strengths and psychopathology and that ego development rather than age predicts the nature and degree of adolescent turmoil. This study investigated how changes in ego development are associated with changes in depression and attachment in the same female adolescents over time. Specifically, it examined whether shifts in developmental level correspond to changes in depression and attachment. Time of testing by shifts in developmental level and interaction effects were examined. Participants were female high school students attending a public high school and were part of a longitudinal study of adolescent depression and development conducted by Pace University from 1988 through 1993. This study looked at their scores on the Washington University Sentence Completion test (WUSCT), the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children (CES-DC), and the Inventory of Parental Representations (IPR) a minimum of two consecutive years in a row.

In the larger study, cross sectional samples suggest that the relationship between ego development and depression, as well as ego development and attachment, does not always follow a linear pattern. Rather, adolescents at the Pre-Conformist and Self-Aware levels were more depressed than those at the Conformist and Post-Conformist levels. Furthermore, Pre-Conformist adolescents perceived their mothers more negatively than other developmental groups while self-aware adolescents perceived their mothers the most positively. As a result, it was hypothesized that female adolescents who progressed from Pre-Conformist to higher developmental levels from one year to the next would report less depression and more positive attachment patterns. Because Conformist female adolescents were least depressed, it was hypothesized that those who

shifted to a higher or lower developmental level would report greater depression and that the Self-Aware who shifted one level of ego development from one year to the next would report less depression.

In order to determine whether significant changes occur in depression level from one year to another as an effect of shifts in ego development, one-way ANOVAs were employed. Furthermore, to determine effect sizes and differences over time, general linear models were utilized. In order to determine whether significant changes occur in attachment to mother over time, as an effect of shifts in ego development level from one year to the next, general linear models were utilized. Effect sizes (ES_r) were calculated in terms of correlations and interpreted according to Cohen's (1988) recommendations; effect sizes 0.1 or less are considered small, those from 0.1 to 0.3 are considered moderate, and those greater than 0.3 are considered moderate to large. No significant interaction effects were found. A shift in ego development level from one year to the next was not associated with significant shifts in depression scores. Furthermore, there were no significant interaction effects on attachment to mothers between the time of testing and shifts in ego development level. Exploratory analyses were conducted to determine the effect overall shift in ego development level would have on depression and attachment. While several of the analyses neared significance, only two of them yielded significant result. For one of the two-year waves, females who decreased in ego development level reported their fathers as being more burdened by them and demanding more perfection than those who increased in ego development level. Furthermore, for one of the two-year waves, females who shifted to another ego level reported their fathers as being less burdened by them and demanding less perfection than those who remained at the same level.

The outcome of this study suggests that as there are both positive and negative aspects associated with each developmental level, a shift in ego level from one year to the next does not

always correspond to shifts in depression and attachment. Furthermore, the study did not consider moderating factors, such as environmental demands and supports, non-normative stressors, and traumatic experiences, and normative stressors, such as onset of menarche and this could affect adolescents' responses to shifts in ego development level.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence has been described as a time of turmoil and rapid change. Notably it is marked by physical change (Marcia, 1980), separation-individuation, and identity formation (Erikson, 1968). Evans, Brody, and Noam (2001) noting dissatisfaction with chronological age as an index of maturity suggested that more psychological indices, particularly ego development, which organizes an individual's construction of oneself and of the environment, would be more meaningful. Hart (1995) found that adolescents' developmental level accounts for their sources of strengths and psychopathology and that level of ego development rather than age predicts the nature and degree of adolescent turmoil, including personality style and symptoms such as anxiety and depression. Ego development as measured by Loevinger is a way of tracing developmental sequences of the self as an individual "navigates through life" (Loevinger, 1984). Each successive developmental stage represents a higher level of maturity, cognitive and emotional complexity, differentiation, and personality integration (Loevinger, 1976). Moral and cognitive development, as well as the capacity for interpersonal relationships, also reflects one's level of ego development. Early childhood experiences of attachment and security have been found to be cornerstones of personality development (Bowlby, 1969) and ego development (Reich & Siegel, 2002).

Although the importance of early attachment has been stressed in the formation of identity and personality, it is important to consider how emerging awareness and capacities for self-criticism are related to perception of parental attachment and depression during different developmental stages. Clearly, an optimum time to study ego development is during adolescence

as this is a time when there is significant turmoil and rapid change. This study built upon previous studies of ego development in adolescence by exploring how shifts in developmental level over time are associated with shifts in psychopathology and perception of parental attachment.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Conceiving of adolescence as a farewell to childhood that involves the “passage from one realm of existence into another,” Kaplan (1984) described adolescent upheaval as arising from social, physical, and psychological changes. The biological changes that take place give rise to new mental organizations in a dynamic interplay with psychological processes adapting to the condition of pubescence (Blos, 1962). Adolescence not only differs in scope and processes from other times in life, but there are significant differences in how it is conceptualized. Not only is it marked by physiological changes in puberty (Marcia, 1980), but healthy development depends on the capacity for individuation and identity formation (Erikson, 1968). Marcia (1980) defined identity as a self-structure consisting of an “internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history.” Adolescence is a crucial time in the formation of identity, a time of transition when cognition moves from concrete to formal operations, enabling rapid shifts in moral development, psychosocial concerns, and an opportunity to secure and consolidate the sense of self (Marcia, 1980).

While Anna Freud centered her discussions of the adolescent ego around the adequacy of defense mechanisms to cope with impulses propelled by puberty (Freud, 1967), Hartmann, stressing adaptation, was interested in the ego’s organizational function as it connects the internal and external experience (Josselson, 1980). Looking at ego development throughout the life cycle, Erikson saw adolescents critical task as achieving ego identity, a complex synthesized organization of experience that is more than the sum of its parts.