Introduction: Contributions and Controversies.

Personality theories often lack an appreciation of development, and developmental theories often lack an appreciation of individual differences. Jane Loevinger’s work on ego development bridges the gap between these two domains. “Individual differences in character,” she noted (1976), “have interested men for centuries. Interest in how character is formed in childhood and youth is also ancient. But to see those two phenomena as manifestations of a single developmental continuum is a modern twist. That insight is the origin of ego development as a formal discipline” (p. 3). Loevinger regards ego development as the central dimension of personality, second only to intelligence in its pervasiveness and influence. Her empirically based descriptions of the stages of ego development must be counted amongst the most important achievements of personality and developmental psychology (see Appendix for an overview of the stages of ego development).

Until recently, personality and developmental psychology pursued seemingly incompatible goals. Personality research sought to identify individual differences in polar variables, a goal that could not meaningfully incorporate evidence of qualitative changes in personality growth. In contrast, developmental psychology sought to identify age related qualitative changes, a goal that could not meaningfully incorporate evidence of individual differences within age cohorts. The theory and measurement of ego development addresses both goals simultaneously.

Loevinger’s measurement strategy provides investigators with a method for converting qualitative data into psychometrically sound quantitative data. More importantly, it permits a continual exchange between data and theory, leading to progressive refinements of theory.
development is too encompassing and too fluctuating in its manifestations to pin down its abstract nature. Instead of providing a formal definition, Loewinger offers a pointing definition, providing empirically based descriptions of each developmental level. Yet a more formal definition of ego development may be necessary for resolving a number of theoretical issues, including (a) deciding what determines the constitutive elements of each stage, (b) identifying principles that explain the coherence of each stage, and (c) proposing a mechanism that drives development.

Two misconceptions frequently arise over Loewinger’s work. First, her stage sequence is often located within a Piagetian framework, leading many investigators to regard ego development as an index of cognitive growth or, more generally, an index of intelligence. Attempts to link Loewinger’s developmental model to early psychoanalytic theory reflects a second misconception. Blasi (chap. 1) argues that Loewinger’s conception of ego development cannot be understood within the context either of cognitive-developmentalism or of psychoanalysis. He details how the cognitive component within ego development is qualitatively different from the cognitive component within Piagetian theory and its offshoots. Westen (chap. 4) also argues that Loewinger’s theory of ego development is not an outgrowth of psychoanalysis and has little overlap with the four classical psychoanalytic models. Despite the conceptual independence of ego development and psychoanalytic theory, Westen notes that Loewinger’s work anticipated many contemporary currents in psychoanalysis, particularly psychoanalysis’ current emphasis on interpersonal relationships (see also Josselson in this volume).

What are the central features of ego development if they are neither cognitive nor psychosexual in nature? Stated more concretely: What changes during the course of ego development, and why? Blasi (chap. 1) suggests that ego development reflects the evolution of a motivation for mastery. McAdams (chap. 2), using James’ distinction between “I” and “Me,” argues that ego development would be the I that progressively constructs the Me, eventually by constructing one’s life story. Kegan, Lahey, and Souvaine (chap. 3) define the central organizing tendency of ego development as the progressive differentiation between “subject” and “object”—the aspects of self one controls and those one is controlled by. All of these authors share the view that ego development, however defined, reflects an underlying unity in personality (see Westen’s chap. 4 for a contrary opinion).

All stage models face the problem of explaining why growth occurs. Holt (chap. 5) proposes that General Systems Theory provides important insights into this issue. In so doing, he demonstrates that the central principles of ego development theory are found in other domains of science, ranging from
PART II: CONSTRUCT VALIDITY

Chapters in Part II present empirical findings that, directly or indirectly, address issues of construct validity. Are stage descriptions generally valid, regardless of age and gender? What is the course of development during adolescence and adulthood? Two comprehensive reviews of early research with the WUSCT have been published (Hauser, 1976; Loewinger, 1979a), but an overview of more recent findings is not available. The present volume attempts to fill that gap, partially, by presenting chapters that include elaborate reviews of research in a particular area. Pals and John (chap. 7), for example, review evidence in support of the premise that developmental maturity is related to individual differences in personality. Chapters throughout the book present novel findings pertaining to the validity of the ego development construct and measure.

Westenberg, Jonckheer, Treffers, and Drewes (chap. 6) examine the extent to which Loewinger’s stage descriptions and scoring categories are applicable to children and adolescents. Their study of more than 2,500 Dutch respondents support the cross-national and cross-age validity of Loewinger’s developmental model. Their findings also suggest a need for revising descriptions of the earliest developmental stages, at least when applied to children and adolescents. Such findings rekindle a question Loewinger considered answered: Does age-contingent scoring permit more precise assessments of ego development?

Pals and John (chap. 7) examine the link between ego development and personality traits and typologies. Their findings suggest that developmental maturity is related to individual differences in personality types. However, they found that subtle distinctions among ego development stages could not be captured by objective personality measures.

Employing a meta-analysis of findings obtained from cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, Cohn (chap. 8) examines the course of ego development across adulthood. His analysis supports Loewinger’s expectation that development tapers off by early adulthood. Knowing the trajectory of development may provide some insight into the factors that promote or inhibit growth. Rogers (chap. 9) examines whether gender-related experiences differentially affect ego development. She proposes that certain types of experiences, such as conflict over social conventions, may inhibit or even reverse the course of ego development in girls.

PART III: RELATED DEVELOPMENTAL MODELS

Chapters in Part III examine the empirical relations between ego development and several related constructs, including moral development, the development of interpersonal understanding, and attachment classifications. Contrary to Loewinger’s assumption that the edge of growth may occur in any domain (Loewinger, 1983), some authors in this section suggest that growth in one domain is necessary but not sufficient condition for growth in another domain. Snarey (chap. 10) examines the link between moral and ego development, investigating whether ego development is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for moral development. Despite the strong correlation between ego and moral development, Snarey argues that the two constructs are far from interchangeable, and their relationship depends on one’s age and gender.

Schultz and Selman (chap. 11) link ego development to an increasing capacity for coordinating perspectives of oneself and other people. Such coordination involves understanding of relationships, affective meaning, and interpersonal action. The authors argue that ego development is most closely aligned with the cognitive component in this process (i.e., understanding relationships), and it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for mature real-life relationships. Related theme is raised by Hauser, Gerber, and Allen (chap. 12), who examine the association between ego level and attachment status. Their research suggests that adolescent ego level predicts security of attachment in young adulthood. The authors argue that ego development may function as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for secure attachment in adolescence and adulthood. Labovitz-Vief and Diehl (chap. 13), in contrast, propose that ego development is more closely aligned with cognitive rather than affective aspects of personality growth, and would thus be unrelated to attachment styles.

Many authors throughout the volume (e.g., Blasi; McAdams, Noam, Westen) raise a central question about the nature of ego development: Does Loewinger’s conception of ego development only capture the cognitive component of personality and personality growth? The evidence thus far does not support this interpretation. Indeed, Loewinger’s scoring manual and stage descriptions emphasize the affective and motivational aspects of personality growth, such as impulse control, conscious preoccupations, interpersonal orientation, and character development. Loewinger (e.g., 1976) considers cognitive style (sometimes referred to as cognitive complexity) as one of several strands of ego development. However, it is not clear that Loewinger and some of the authors in this volume attach the same meaning
to these terms. Should cognitive complexity, however it is defined, be regarded as a central component of ego development or should it be seen as only an important correlate? Can the affective-motivational components of ego development be split, theoretically or practically, from the cognitive components of personality, implying the existence of two separate developmental strands? Such questions can be explored empirically. The ideas proposed by several authors in this volume provide a useful context for pursuing this investigation.

PART IV: CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Chapters in Part IV examine the clinical implications of Loewinger's developmental model. Several issues are addressed, including the link between ego development and psychopathology, the necessity of tailoring psychotherapy to the developmental level of the patient, the link between ego development and clients' representations of psychotherapy, and the relations between ego level and counseling skills. Loewinger (1968) maintained that "...every stage has its weaknesses, its problems, and its paradoxes, which provide both a potential for maladjustment and a potential for growth" (p. 169). She suggested that some psychopathologies are probably more common at certain developmental stages, but she also emphasizes that the relation between ego level and mental health can only be accurately assessed when the two constructs are defined independently of each other (Loewinger, 1968).

Rierdan (chap. 15) accepts Loewinger's conceptual distinction between ego level and mental health, while Noam (chap. 16) explicitly rejects it, arguing that mental health indicators are woven into Loewinger's developmental model. Rierdan approaches this general issue by examining the link between ego level, depression, and pubertal timing in girls. Noam examines the issue of ego level and mental health within the context of his research program with clinical populations, linking ego level and adolescent psychopathology. Taken together, both chapters provide an extensive review of the empirical relations between ego level and symptomatology, a topic the authors locate within their more general discussion of developmental psychopathology. Both authors conclude that ego level influences the presence, severity, and specific form of psychopathology. However, the extent to which ego development and mental health are conceptually distinct remains unresolved. Findings obtained by Westenberg et al. (chap. 6) touch on the latter issue. Much of the malignancy that is typically associated with Impulsive and Self-protective adults was missing from the SCT responses of Impulsive and

Self-protective children and adolescents. Such findings must be incorporated into models linking ego level and mental health.

Horowitz (chap. 17) discusses development from the standpoint of an individual's increasing capacity for supradordinate organization of self and other schemas. He suggests that healthy adjustment accompanies the capacity for supradordinate organization, and he illustrates how therapeutic strategies could be tailored for different developmental levels. His discussion is not specifically tied to Loewinger's model of ego development and thus provides readers with an alternative framework for conceptualizing the link between mental health and development. Young-Eisendrath and Foltz (chap. 18) return to Loewinger's model and examine how ego level influences patients' understanding and expectations of psychotherapy. Their findings suggest that clients at low ego levels perceive psychotherapy as a concrete service provided by therapists who are responsible for the outcome; at higher developmental levels psychotherapy is conceived of as a personal process of internal discovery for which the patient is primarily responsible.

Borders (chap. 19) shifts the focus of discussion and examines how counselors' ego level influences the perception of patients, in-session cognitions, and counseling ability. She hypothesizes that one's ego level restricts the attainable level of counseling skills, although counseling training itself may promote ego development.

POSTSCRIPT

Loewinger recounts the history of the WUSCT and the empirical basis of her developmental model. It was data analysis, not psychoanalysis, that shaped the evolution of her stage theory. Several additional issues are addressed in her chapter, including the relationship between ego development and intelligence, and the limits of computerized scoring of WUSCT protocols. Although seemingly disparate in focus, both topics are concerned with predicting ego development scores. Loewinger cautions, however, that the WUSCT was not developed for the sole purpose of calculating a total protocol rating. Rather, the WUSCT was designed to reveal insights into the nature of personality growth, a goal that could be eclipsed by focusing solely on the prediction.

The contributions to this volume attest to the pervasive influence of Loewinger's theory and the lively state of work in the field of ego development. Important questions remain unanswered and there is disagreement over some central issues. But such debate reflects the normal
SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF LEVEL OF EGO DEVELOPMENT

APPENDIX