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The development of psychological androgyny and its relationship with self-esteem in adolescence

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CHAPTER 7

LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1 Subjects

The subjects addressed in the present research constitute a narrow strata in a multi-cultural society such as South Africa's. They were restricted to white subjects with the understanding that subjects drawn from other cultural groups may have scored differently. They were also English-speaking. While this has the advantage of being commensurate with the language of the tests employed and enables some generalization from American results, it does not imply that these results are necessarily generalizable to other language groups. Furthermore, the groups selected were specifically middle-class and subjects from other socio-economic groups may produce different distributions of results.

If further research is conducted with similar groups of adolescents from different language, cultural, and socio-economic groups and very different results are obtained, this future research would serve to undermine the intrapsychic perspective recommended in the present research and would strengthen the claim that sex-role identity research needs to be located in social theory. The theoretical context of sex-role identity research remains problematical and the further application of gender schema theory and other theoretical perspectives may serve to

strengthen and clarify this essential area.

The size of the sample of undergraduates used in the present research yielded an unequal cell size in comparision with the other age groups sampled . This unequal distribution not only made comparision with the other age groups difficult, but it probably played a major part in the lack of significance in the results for undergraduates. This lack of constancy means that, at best, only tentative links can be made with the other groups and interpretations regarding the late adolescents can only be made with great caution.

Other dimensions of the subjects sampled also limit the results and interpretations. For instance, some of the evidence presented in this dissertation suggests that the androgynous and undifferentiated subjects are polarized by levels of intelligence, ego development, moral development, and that family constellations and relationships may play an important part in the development of sex-role identity and self-esteem. Furthermore, aspects of self-esteem in the present research were limited to experienced self-esteem. Measures that yield ratings of presented self-esteem and social self-esteem are available and data gleaned from peers and teachers could have been used in the present research to supplement and confirm results relating to the experienced self-esteem as individually reported in this study. It is therefore strongly recommended that further research consider these variables which may, to some extent, be confounding and

limiting the present results.

7.2 Measuring Instruments

Two measuring instruments were employed in this study: the Bem Sex-Role Inventory as modified for adolescents and the Tennessee Self Concept Scale. A real difficulty was the quantitative assessment of complex aspects of the personality, a problem common to all social and psychological research. Previous researchers have noted the desirability of using several measures concurrently to try to obviate inherent weaknesses of any individual measure particularly when measuring aspects of the personality. It is suggested for future research that similar studies heed the admonition of Kelly, Furman, and Young (1978) and employ several sex-role identity measures with the same sample. Their research comparing the BSRI, PRF ANDRO, and the PAQ showed that the same sample can be classified in different categories depending on the measure used. They also point out that one of the difficulties of relying on broad typological quadrants is that predictive utility is lost.

As noted in Chapter 1, there is some disagreement regarding scoring procedures for the BSRI. The median-split was the statistical procedure of choice in the present study, a choice which has precedent and was substantiated. Nevertheless, this is the procedure which is responsible for producing the quadrants seen in the presented results. While this procedure has many strengths, it is also recognised as

crude because it results in the loss of more detailed information. Although the controversy is still unresolved, it is recognised that the application of multiple regression techniques also has strengths and, if employed in future research, would be capable of measuring the strength of the contribution of femininity in the two younger age groups and the contribution of masculininity in the undergraduate results and the weights of these two variables in the construct of androgyny.

A major limitation of the present research which mirrors previous research is that no conceptual definition of the constructs under consideration was given. That is to say, while androgyny is operationally defined, it is not yet conceptually defined. This problem also exists for the constructs masculinity and femininity. Therefore, the present research has not been able to clarify what exactly is being measured. Clearly, this research and other preceding studies are measuring something which is quite likely a universal and fundamental aspect of personality. Replicated empirical studies seem to confirm this. However, there is as yet no conceptual understanding of the constructs under examination. In the opinion of the present researcher this anomaly is explained by the lack of a substantial theoretical background and compounded by current neglect of this field. Since 1974 there have been hundreds of empirical studies and much replication of data. Although methodological problems still exist and need investigation, energy might now be more

fruitfully directed to theoretical considerations with a view to conceptually substantiating what is being measured, its etiology, and its role in the functioning personality.

To this extent, the construct validity of the BRSI is still under question.The study by Kelly et al (1977)indicating the *differential endorsement of negative sex-role stereotypes* is an important contribution to a more holisitic understanding of the subjects who score in the various quadrants. A suggestion for future research is that their measure be incorporated into the present BSRI in order to provide a more substantial measure of sex-role identity.

Although the TSCS provides an adequate measure of self-esteem, it also has the capacity to provide information relating to other aspects of the personality referred to as the self concept. Future research could capitalize on these dimensions of the test and investigate the relationship between these variables and sex-role identity. For instance, it provides a measure of the physical self which may *illuminate some aspects* of the difficulties the undifferentiated are reported to have with physical boundaries; the moral-ethical scale may provide data which correlates with Kohlberg's scale of moral development; the family self could provide a correlate with other family data; the social self, if linked with the femininity scale of the BSRI, may confirm the findings of others that femininity is a measure of sociability; and the Self Criticism Score, a

measure of defensiveness, if linked with the masculinity scale of the BSRI, may confirm the findings of others that masculinity is associated with defensiveness.

Clearly, future research in the area needs to draw on other measures in order to further our understanding of human development at adolescence and to capitalize on the abilities of measures currently available. To this end, it is recommended that future research employ a battery of tests to extapolate maximum data from presenting subjects. This battery could consist of several sex-role identity measures and several self-esteem measures supplimented by data gleaned from some selected subjects after projective testing and interviews and incorporating data from peers, teachers, and families.

7.3 Research Design

Finally, this study was constructed as a cross-sectional one. While developmental links were made cautiously between developmental stages, it is not possible to trace developmental fluctuations using this method. The present research has shown that it is no longer acceptable to view adolescence as a unitary stage of development and cognisance should be taken of the psychoanalytic conception of specific and discrete stages of development. The present research also shows that if developmental trends are to be accurately tapped, males and females should be testad separately. Future research could add considerably to our understanding of the

complexities of adolescent development if longitudinal studies addressed the intricacies of development at specific stages in an holistic a way as possible.

7.4 General Directives for Future Research

The findings of the present research indicate that *adolescence should no longer be addressed as a unitary stage* of development but as a series of discrete developmental stages. This suggests that those studies which select subjects of arbitrary ages within adolescence and generalize from them to other adolescents or the population at large, should be interpreted with caution. The significant differences between sexes, particularly at adolescence proper and later, indicate that findings regarding mixed sex adolescent samples are confounding important differences. These differences need to be extrapolated particularly as results for females are often outside the parameters of explanation employed and seem to indicate a different developmental path worthy of further theoretical investigation.

Investigations along the above lines should also be extended to different social and culutural groups to examine the extent to which findings obtained in this and other studies can be generalized.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is possible that this study could have an application beyond empirical investigation and the raising of theoretical problems. In clinical work the clinician could expect to find representatives of all sex-role identities in an average case load and each may have a particular profile suggesting particular therapeutic perspectives. Part of the value of the present study may be in its clinical application. Integration of the the present results, particular emergent profiles, and suggested therapeutic approaches derived from theoretical bases will be outlined below.

When taken together the findings of the present study indicate that at any of the three stages of adolescence one could expect to find that one quarter of the population are androgynous and therefore at a more psychologically developed stage than others. In a clinical setting and without the benefit of empirical measures this assessment could be roughly determined by information given which indicates a flexible response to situations such that the person is able to draw on what have been discussed as masculine and feminine qualities. Confirmation of this status would be determined by the further assessment of an internal cohesion indicating that ego integration is in progress. Ireland (1981) has indicated that androgynous clients will present themselves for therapeutic treatment and, while their difficulties are as real as anybody's, they could be expected to have a better

prognosis. It is likely that the developmental path preceding the status of androgyny has produced an internal ecology capable of introjecting appropriate therapeutic intervention which is likely to be of benefit to that person. Therefore androgynous clients are likely to be available for a more psychodynamically oriented therapeutic treatment. However, interpretation of the present results, supported by previous empirical findings, suggest that androgyny may be qualitatively different for females than for males. This is an area which needs further investigation and clinical observations may have a further contribution to make in the exploration of this phenomenon.

The prognosis for the undifferentiated does not seem so favourable given the earlier picture presented of their levels of internal and external functioning. If the alternative theoretical perspective outlined by the present researcher is instituted, the treatment of choice would entail the exploration of those unintegrated aspects of the ego which have an historical root. Quite likely the focus of attention will devolve to earlier relationships and experiences located at the oedipal and/or latency period of development. Exploration of these aspects may enable the person to integrate and develop the masculine and feminine parts of the personality in such a way that they no longer threaten the ego and defenses that previously were used to contain the internal conflict can be freed for more adaptive uses.

The other treatment of choice emerges from gender schema theory. This would entail a reeducational approach tailored towards a cognitive reappraisal of the structure of society such that the person would be less inclined to divide the world into two sexual equivalence classes and instead gain a more unitary view where sexual divisions are less important and human qualities assume greater value.

The present results indicate that this undifferentiated psychological profile is more likely to be found amongst adolescent boys particularly at the stage of adolescence proper. However, given the fluctuations of adolescence, the results of the present research, and the finding of flexibility of ego status presented by Marcia (1976), it is likely that this is not a permanent functional state and the child will negotiate these turmoils without professional intervention. However, if the internal and external environment is not favourable in this regard, the clinician may expect a significant number of undifferentiated adolescents to present for therapeutic treatment.

Given the diagnostic lack of introspection noted earlier among the undifferentiated as well as the possibility that anxiety levels are low because maladaptive functioning is ego-syntonic, coupled with the perceived threat of exposure of internal chaos, it is likely that they will not be self-referred. It is more likely that they will present because of the concerns of others and resistance can be

expected to be high. Taken together with the possibility of lower levels of intellectual functioning, a more cognitive or social learning therapeutic approach may be more accessible for undifferentiated subjects.

Adolescents who present with a more masculine profile can be expected to be more assertive but also more defensive in a clinical setting. The previous theoretical discussion indicates that these defenses may serve to encapsulate passive feminine dependency needs which may also become apparent as needs for abasement. The therapeutic procedure with these adolescents might take the form of allowing and encouraging these dependency needs in order to allow the person to explore and integrate these parts of the personality. The prognosis of the masculine adolescent is better than that of the undifferentiated because presumably some aspect of the parents has been identified with and internalized such that self-esteem is higher and therefore a more psychodynamic therapeutic approach could be used to reach deeper levels of conflict.

The status of feminine at early adolescence and adolescence proper, according to the present results, seems to be favourable to the adolescent. However, at late adolescence this profile is no longer advantageous. It is likely that these clients expend a lot of internal energy in interpersonal relationships to meet ego-building needs. Presumably, this becomes a difficulty for the person if the

more active and assertive aspects of the personality are unavailable and preclude optimal functioning. It is likely that these clients need some of the defensiveness that the masculine adolescents overvalue. Building ego defenses therapeutically may reduced some of the sociable, gregarious behaviour of the feminine-typed, but by promoting the development of internal defenses enabling the enactment of more assertive behaviour, a more integrated balance may be achieved to the benefit of the feminine person.

This dissertation has traced the development of sex-role identity where an androgynous orientation was found to be to the advantage of adolescents at each stage of development. Discussing this development, the distributions of sex-role identity statuses, and theoretical considerations in a therapeutic context may be of benefit to clinicians in the treatment of adolescents. Being alerted to the sex-role identity of a client may enable the clinician to more readily diagnose internal and external difficulties with a view to more accurate and economical treatment plans. Thus the investigation of androgyny and other sex-role identities and the relationship with self-esteem at the various stages of adolescence can be seen to have clinical as well as theoretical relevance.

APPENDIX A

You have been selected by Wits University to take part in a project to find out the current thinking of teenagers in Johannesburg.

Here are 2 questionnaires which I would like you to fill in as HONESTLY as you can.

As you notice, I have not asked you to write your name on the answer sheet. I will be the only person who sees the answers and they will be confidential.

It is very important that you should feel free to write what you really think about yourself.

You have about an hour to complete both tests.

THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. Just answer each question as honestly and accurately as you can.

Thankyou for your time and effort.
Yours sincerely,

R.L. Hornibrook

(Robin Hornibrook)

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS SECTION BEFORE TURNING OVER THE PAGE

SEX (MALE OR FEMALE): .....

DATE OF BIRTH (DAY: MONTH: YEAR): .....

FATHER'S OCCUPATION: .....

MOTHER'S OCCUPATION: .....

WHAT LANGUAGE OR LANGUAGES DO YOU SPEAK AT HOME: .....

.....

.....

DIRECTIONS

On this page you will find listed a number of personality characteristics. I would like you to use those characteristics to describe yourself, that is, I would like you to indicate, on a scale from 1 to 5, how true of you each of these characteristics is. Please do not leave any characteristic unmarked.

EXAMPLE:
Write a 1 if it is never or almost never true that you are sly
Write a 2 if it is sometimes but infrequently true that you are sly
Write a 3 if it is occasionally true that you are sly
Write a 4 if it is often true that you are sly
Write a 5 if it is always or almost always true that you are sly

So, if you feel that it is sometimes but infrequently true that you are sly, never or almost never true that you are "malicious", always or almost always true that you are "irresponsible", and often true that you are "carefree", then you would rate these characteristics as follows:

Sly	2	Irresponsible	5
Malicious	1	Carefree	4

1	2	3	4	5
Never or almost never true	Sometimes but infrequently true	Occasionally true	Often true	Always or almost always true

*

Defend my own beliefs		Forceful	
Affectionate		Compassionate	
Act as a leader		Have leadership abilities	
Individualistic		Eager to soothe hurt feelings	
Sympathetic		Warm	
Cheerful		Dominant	
Assertive		Tender	
Sensitive to needs of others		Willing to take a stand	
Friendly		Aggressive	
Strong personality		Gentle	

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Tennessee Self-Concept Scale

Answer Sheet

Form C

ITEM	RESPONSE	ITEM	RESPONSE	ITEM	RESPONSE
13	1 2 3 4 5	7	1 2 3 4 5	1	1 2 3 4 5
14	1 2 3 4 5	8	1 2 3 4 5	2	1 2 3 4 5
15	1 2 3 4 5	9	1 2 3 4 5	3	1 2 3 4 5
16	1 2 3 4 5	10	1 2 3 4 5	4	1 2 3 4 5
17	1 2 3 4 5	11	1 2 3 4 5	5	1 2 3 4 5
18	1 2 3 4 5	12	1 2 3 4 5	6	1 2 3 4 5
31	1 2 3 4 5	25	1 2 3 4 5	19	1 2 3 4 5
32	1 2 3 4 5	26	1 2 3 4 5	20	1 2 3 4 5
33	1 2 3 4 5	27	1 2 3 4 5	21	1 2 3 4 5
34	1 2 3 4 5	28	1 2 3 4 5	22	1 2 3 4 5
35	1 2 3 4 5	29	1 2 3 4 5	23	1 2 3 4 5
36	1 2 3 4 5	30	1 2 3 4 5	24	1 2 3 4 5
49	1 2 3 4 5	43	1 2 3 4 5	37	1 2 3 4 5
50	1 2 3 4 5	44	1 2 3 4 5	38	1 2 3 4 5
51	1 2 3 4 5	45	1 2 3 4 5	39	1 2 3 4 5
52	1 2 3 4 5	46	1 2 3 4 5	40	1 2 3 4 5
53	1 2 3 4 5	47	1 2 3 4 5	41	1 2 3 4 5
54	1 2 3 4 5	48	1 2 3 4 5	42	1 2 3 4 5
67	1 2 3 4 5	61	1 2 3 4 5	55	1 2 3 4 5
68	1 2 3 4 5	62	1 2 3 4 5	56	1 2 3 4 5
69	1 2 3 4 5	63	1 2 3 4 5	57	1 2 3 4 5
70	1 2 3 4 5	64	1 2 3 4 5	58	1 2 3 4 5
71	1 2 3 4 5	65	1 2 3 4 5	59	1 2 3 4 5
72	1 2 3 4 5	66	1 2 3 4 5	60	1 2 3 4 5
85	1 2 3 4 5	79	1 2 3 4 5	73	1 2 3 4 5
86	1 2 3 4 5	80	1 2 3 4 5	74	1 2 3 4 5
87	1 2 3 4 5	81	1 2 3 4 5	75	1 2 3 4 5
88	1 2 3 4 5	82	1 2 3 4 5	76	1 2 3 4 5
89	1 2 3 4 5	83	1 2 3 4 5	77	1 2 3 4 5
90	1 2 3 4 5	84	1 2 3 4 5	78	1 2 3 4 5
99	1 2 3 4 5	95	1 2 3 4 5	91	1 2 3 4 5
100	1 2 3 4 5	96	1 2 3 4 5	92	1 2 3 4 5
		97	1 2 3 4 5	93	1 2 3 4 5
		98	1 2 3 4 5	94	1 2 3 4 5

	RAW SCORE
IDENTITY	
SELF-SATISFACTION	
BEHAVIOR	
PHYSICAL SELF	
MORAL-ETHICAL SELF	
PERSONAL SELF	
FAMILY SELF	
SOCIAL SELF	
TOTAL POSITIVE	
VARIABILITY	
CONFLICT	
FINAL NOT-SELF	
TOTAL	

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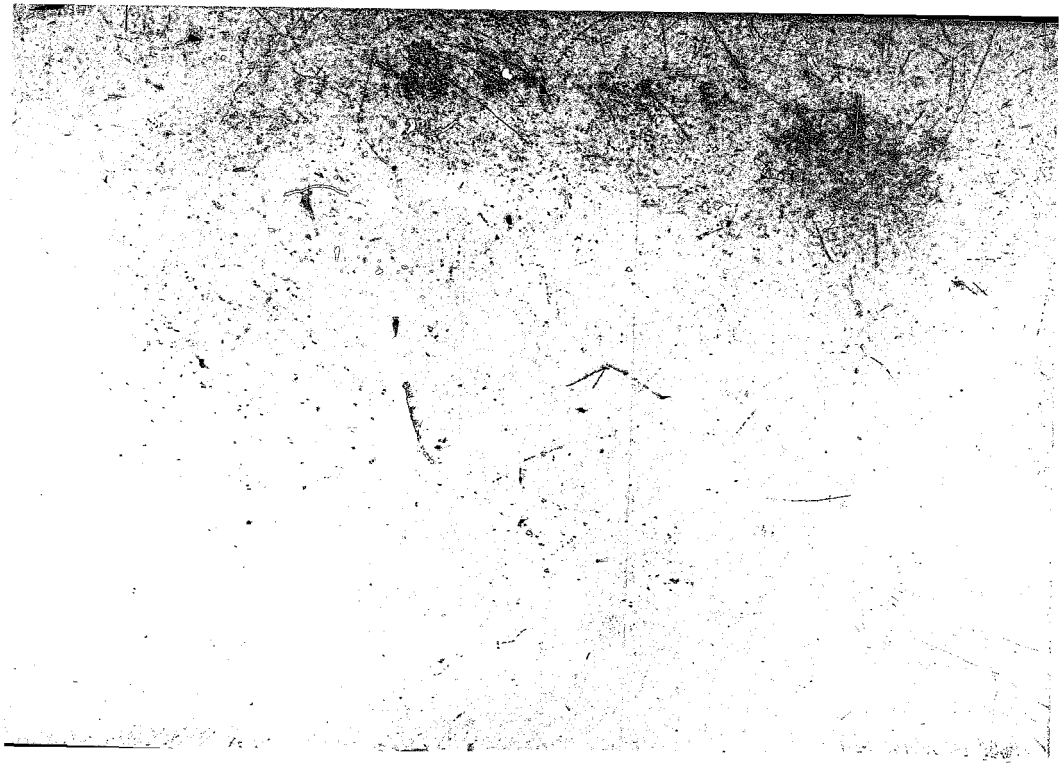

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