

TODAY'S THEORY AND TOMORROW'S PRACTICE*

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A speaker with this topic has wide license to promote his pet theories and practices, and to do so whether or not his theories and practices are related. I am not confident, in fact, beyond what is implied by such catch phrases as "occupational choice is a continuous process" and "guidance must be developmental", that vocational development theory is yet directly applicable to guidance practice. But more about this later.

According to the APGA Convention Program, this is the fourth in a series of panels devoted to presentations and critiques of recent work by the Career Pattern Study. On the previous three panels, Professor Super and his associates reported follow-up studies conducted with the 132 young men who now constitute the main sample of the Career Pattern Study. These subjects were ninth-grade boys in 1951-52 in Middletown (N.Y.) High School. They were studied again at the twelfth-grade level, at age 21 and at age 25. The 132 subjects remaining constitute 94% of the original sample, an impressive statistic in itself. That the same percentage of the second sample, those subjects who in 1951-52 were eighth graders, was reached is gratifying.

It is not possible here even to highlight the enormous data reported in the earlier three sessions. The statistics include about 80 vocational maturity measures and perhaps 50 correlate measures such as intelligence, parental occupational level, etc. This makes quite a matrix. Factor analysis still left 24 and 25 factors to examine at each age period. The attempt to assimilate these statistics in a few gulps has produced painful

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indigestion and an admiration for the intestinal fortitude of the current CPS staff.

I speak as an alumnus of the Career Pattern Study, impressed with its current accomplishments, somewhat out of touch with them, yet still ready with advice. The present CPS staff may understandably treat my comments as those of an old alumnus, that is, receive them kindly before shelving them.

It is useful to remember that there is not one, but several vocational development theories. Ginsburg, Roe, Holland, and Tiedeman, for example, each have advanced special versions of how individuals identify and come to pursue with purpose a definable occupational field. What such investigators have proposed concerning occupational choice or vocational development or career development are not technically theories, but conceptual schemes. Professor Super's theory, for example, is a tentative and generalized outline of the human-life history as it pertains to work. He depicts the life history in terms of five stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline. Within each stage an individual is seen to cope with certain developmental tasks, which he needs to resolve in appropriate sequence and timing if he is to maintain himself across his adult life span in some productive and satisfying relation to work. Only the first three stages in Super's scheme, namely, growth, exploration, and establishment, are relevant at this stage to the subjects in the Career Pattern Study.

Professor Super's scheme also includes such terms as vocational maturity and vocational self-concept. We lack time to explore the meaning of these terms; yet to interpret meaningfully the data reported during the

past few days, they need to be understood. The term vocational maturity suggests that as individuals move through each life stage, they will be seen to differ in their readiness to cope with and to resolve vocational developmental tasks. The term vocational self-concept suggests that an important phenomenon in the vocational development and decision-making process is the image one has of his personal qualities and potentials and of what kind of person he would like to become. Super has suggested that much of vocational decision-making involves implementing in real life one's concepts of self and ideal self.

In these comments I shall consider briefly two theoretical questions which may have implications both for research in vocational development and practice in vocational guidance. The first question has to do with the conceptual adequacy of the term vocational development; the second concerns the use of the term self-concept.

Vocational Development and Ego Development

Let us consider the relation between vocational development and ego development. I use the term ego as do modern revisionists of the psychoanalytic tradition such as Eric Erikson, Robert White, and Jane Loevinger. The term ego has been defined variously within and without the literature of psychoanalysis. To illustrate its meaning here I shall quote briefly from a recent paper (Hummel and Sprinthall).

As an individual confronts the flow of demands and opportunities in daily living--for example, the tasks imposed by the school--he perceives and acts under the guidance of a system of psychic dispositions. This "guidance system", which comprises the mainly conscious, the rational and reality-oriented aspects of personality, is called the ego....

The ego structure, the network of personal dispositions

within the ego, changes and develops as an individual matures and learns from experience. At any given moment, however, it influences significantly the manner in which a person governs his needs and impulses and guides his instrumental behavior in response to the tasks and opportunities in his external world. It is in this sense that the ego can be construed as an agency, an "establishment" through which an individual adapts to his environment. Some of the indicators of an adaptive ego include: a rational orientation to problem situations; a readiness to deal with a set of prescribed tasks with minimal delay, distraction, or supervision; a planful orientation toward the future; and a willingness to postpone enjoyable activities in pursuit of a distant goal.

I propose that what Professor Super and his colleagues are attempting to measure under vocational maturity may be represented more powerfully by separating out and classifying their observations under generic concepts of ego, ego development, and ego strength. This is not entirely a strange proposal. The Career Pattern Study has derived its indices of vocational maturity from such common principles of developmental psychology as differentiation, realism, and independence, principles which are central in a theory of ego development. Also relevant is the attraction which Eric Erikson's (1959) scheme of ego development has had in guidance and in vocational research. Many in this audience could recite his eight stages from memory, although Erikson is unlikely to value such a literal recollection of his "stage names". Erikson purports to explain the processes through which each of us, in our encounters with environmental demands and opportunities, realize, in loose sequence, and with varying success, a sense of trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, intimacy, generativity, and integrity. His concepts of identity and identity formation have been recognized widely in the literature on the psychology and sociology of work. Tiedeman and

O'Hara (1963), for example, have attempted to transfer each of Erikson's eight stages into their scheme of career development.

No investigator with whom I am familiar, however, has systematically applied a theory of ego development to the vocational problem. Tiedeman and O'Hara employed Erikson's stages mainly to suggest how the processes of differentiation and integration operate in personality development; they did not use ego as an organizing or primary concept. Crites (1965) recognizes that the "choice competences" underlying some of the CPS vocational maturity indices can be conceived of as ego functions; he intends to construct a Competence Test for a Vocational Development Inventory which will assess such ego-relevant variables as ability to resolve choice conflicts and ability to select goals. Crites seems content, however, to equate ego loosely with cognitive processes.

The concept of an ego which has a central, organizing role in personality formation is, as Erikson indicates, consistent with its earlier usage in philosophy. This idea of ego, however, is not likely to be congenial to investigators in vocational research, most of whom are still strongly influenced by the positivist and empirical dicta of the psychometric tradition. Yet, so knowledgeable a psychometrician as Jane Loevinger (1966), who well knows the difference between a reified construct and a hard salami, asserts almost dogmatically the "organic unity" of the ego. The ego is not merely the sum of the mechanisms that control impulse, resolve conflicts, and achieve cognitive mastery; the mechanisms are themselves part of the ego structure; adaptive and problem-solving behavior are merely manifestations of this (relatively) unified structure. Loevinger construes ego to be psychologically analogous to a biological

organ. She belittles the continuing attention of researchers to "arbitrary and artificial", subsidiary variables such as response set in personality inventories. She regards ego development to be a basic psychological process, separable from--even though necessarily related to--physical, psychosexual, and intellectual development.

The gist of my proposal earlier in this paper is that vocational development be construed as a psychosocial variant of ego development. Vocational maturity would be, in this sense, those aspects of ego strength which pertain to readiness for vocational decision-making. In effect, the vocational maturity measures reported to date by the Career Pattern Study are a (delimited) estimate of ego strength. For example, the four seemingly adequate indices of vocational maturity at the ninth-grade level were all subsumed under a factor entitled "Planning Orientation to Life"; the findings at the twelfth-grade and at age 25 are less distinct but do not contradict this point. Although it is probably infeasible to re-interpret, in terms of ego variables, data which were gathered and analyzed with a specific focus on the topics of education and work; my proposal may be useful, at least, in identifying possible sources of contradiction in the vocational maturity data. The CPS emphasis to date on normative concepts and data limits the implications of its findings. It is disappointing, as Super observes, that parental socioeconomic level still plays so important a part in these measures of vocational development; almost all the significant predictors at grades nine and twelve of vocational development at age 25, can be interpreted in terms of differences in family background. Ego strength, too, is surely a function of family conditions. A concept such as ego, however, permits an investigator to

explain differences among subjects within the same socioeconomic status and even within the same family. It also suggests guidelines that schools might use in setting up educational programs to stimulate such ego qualities as personal responsibility and planfulness which play an important part in vocational development. Merely exposing students to more comprehensive information about education and work, or attempting to substitute for the home in influencing their aspirational level, is likely to be insufficient.

In measuring vocational maturity, too early and too narrow a focus has been made, I believe, on what the CPS researchers presume to be work-related attitudes, information, and behaviors. It may be ultimately both a more parsimonious and more powerful procedure to attempt first to identify and assess basic ego strengths in each person; then, in a second step, to estimate how appropriately and effectively these strengths are being employed in vocational planning and decision-making. In developing a Vocational Development Inventory which will measure both choice competences and choice attitudes as general variables, Crites promises to deal effectively with this problem. The strategy for measuring vocational maturity employed to date by the Career Pattern Study, however, is confined by its normative and empirical approach. (Here the CPS staff might protest that their self-concept research involves quite elaborate theory-building; one might reply that the CPS self-concept theorizing and measurements have been related only minimally to the vocational maturity data; but more about this in a moment.)

At this stage in this pioneering study there is much to recommend a normative and empirical approach; and in view of the enormous ground-

breaking that had to be done, there surely is no occasion for fault-finding. The Career Pattern Study has proposed a quite elaborate framework in which to develop vocational development theory and it has been prolific in defining new vocational maturity variables and procedures for measuring them. However, to explain differences in vocational behavior in terms of psychological functioning, in terms of processes which are amenable to deliberate instruction and guidance, it will be necessary to employ more dynamic constructs than those represented in the current CPS indices of vocational maturity. The concepts of ego and ego development seem to fill this need.

The variables suggested by a model of ego development are elusive to define and to measure systematically; to date, they have lent themselves mainly to clinical assessment. But the measurement problem is solvable. As part of a twenty-year follow-up study of adolescents, Kroeber (1963) reports a promising method for assessing such qualities as ego strength and autonomy. Efforts to assess ego development in themselves may help to identify anomalies in our current methods for studying vocational development. For example, in considering the problem of assessing level of ego development, Loevinger distinguishes between polar variables and milestone sequences. Polar variables are typified by ability traits, a person's score on such a trait can be expected to increase monotonically as a function of age experience; individuals can be described as having more or less of a certain tendency or capacity. Milestone sequences, however, tend to rise and then fall off in prominence with age or experience; they do not lend themselves to monotonic scaling across a span of development. For example, conformity to social standards may

characteristically increase as an oppositional young child becomes a cooperative older child; at adolescence, however, he may become oppositional once again; as an adult he may conform selectively in certain social contexts but remain oppositional and critical in others.

Loevinger insists that significant aspects of ego development cannot be described and assessed along polar dimensions. Individuals change qualitatively in terms of certain variables at different stages of development. Furthermore, factor analysis obscures such qualitative differences. Loevinger's argument is especially relevant to the vocational maturity measures. Such indices as differentiation of interests and amount of information about education and occupations seems scalable monotonically; but other vocational maturity criteria such as acceptance of responsibility may, like conformity, change qualitatively with age. In treating such variables as if they increase monotonically with age, and in combining them in a factor analysis, the Career Pattern Study may be aggravating the great variance already present in developmental data of this kind. This may account in part for Jordaan's finding that the ninth-grade scores on vocationally relevant variables gave essentially no clue to the twelfth-grade scores.

Self Concept

I have dwelt overly long on the relation between ego development and vocational development. An adequate consideration of the efficacy of the self-concept as it is being employed in the Career Pattern Study data would require an even longer statement. I thus will merely repeat an objection I have made at other times to the enthusiastic attention

which has been given to self concept in vocational research during the past decade. Professor Super and his colleagues have done some elegant theorizing about self-concept in their College Board Monograph and have reported some unique empirical studies of self concept at this Convention. I still doubt seriously, however, whether the payoff is going to justify their effort.

We cannot attempt to deal here with the methodological issues underlying self-concept theory, and with phenomenological theory in general. These issues have for a long time challenged and frustrated more astute philosophers and psychologists. Let us grant the usefulness of self-concept as a term to convey that an individual construes meanings not only for objects (people, things, ideas) in his environment but also for "himself" as an object. His concept of self is built on his own direct experience and on "reflected appraisals" from others. The self-concept is a hypothetical unity of countless simpler percepts and concepts. Each simpler concept varies in the way in which it is descriptive versus evaluative.

In choosing and planning for future education and work, individuals are influenced by both descriptive and evaluative concepts of self. They are less likely, for example, to elect occupations for which they assess themselves to lack the qualifications or the personal dispositions. Self-reference is an integral part of all personal, and thus vocational, decision-making. The concept has been stretched too far, however, to include concepts of the world, of opportunity, which may include elements of self-reference, but include reference to other things as well. The plans of an adolescent to become a physician emerge from a complex process

of evaluating the world of not-self as well as self.

I am concerned that both the idea of self-concept and the kinds of data used to measure it have been stretched to cover too much of the process of vocational decision-making. I do not believe that the term "vocational self-concept" is felicitous or especially useful. The notion of a self-concept, of a complex of constructs about one's own qualities which will influence thought and action with reference to vocation, can be useful. I am pleading here for parsimony in concept.

The scoring procedure employed by Bothwell is an instance of stretching the notion of self-concept beyond efficient usage. After finding that the Career Pattern Study interviews contained relatively few self-descriptive statements by the subjects, he decided to include as indicators of self-concept all statements of like and dislike, of aspirations, and of plans. Bothwell scored under self-concept statements the following kind of statement: "I am going to go to medical school and hope to become a doctor?." One can understand Bothwell's logic without agreeing with it.

The statements by an individual of his aspirations and plans are likely to vary in important but unfathomable ways in the degree to which they are based on self-appraisal. Even similar statements of aspirations and plans made by two different persons are likely to differ significantly in the degree to which they are derived from self-analysis. A more parsimonious methodology would regard statements of interest, of like and dislike, of hope, of plans, to be simply what they are. I do not see how our understanding of an individual, of his vocational development, will be improved by categorizing all such statements within categories of

self-reference.

At some future time, I should like to make a case for incorporating self-concept theory within a theory of ego and of ego development. Within such a scheme, the ego, besides governing the largely unconscious demands of the id and the primitive aspects of the superego, would be required to synthesize concepts of self and of ideal self with concepts of an objective and a social reality. Included in the objective and social reality for each individual would be the opportunities and demands related to education and work. The concept of ego would engage researchers not only to make linear estimates of an individual's abilities, interests, and values, and of his self-appraisals with reference to such variables, but also to estimate such (higher-order) qualities as capacity to tolerate ambiguity, to control or divert impulse, and to perceive means-end relationships. (By higher-order, I mean not more desirable, but more abstract and comprehensive.)

In this short presentation I have perhaps added too much new complexity to the already overwhelming complexity of the CPS methods and data. I have done so because I am not content that, despite their complexity, the CPS researchers are employing a sufficiently powerful theory to account for the elusive process of vocational development. The vocational maturity concept is still too descriptive and normative to detect the subtle ways in which individuals change and differ from each other as they assume roles in definable adult occupations. The self-concept theory reflects too pallidly the great struggle and uncertainty which may often accompany the efforts of a person to establish an identity in the adult world. The theories employed by the CPS staff hardly seem to

account for their own great struggle and persistence to make sense out of the enormous problem they have chosen to study. I can infer little about their self-concepts, except that they deserve to evaluate themselves favorably. I am impressed greatly with the ego strength which they brought to bear in ordering and analyzing the data reported at this Convention.

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