A TEST OF THE PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY OF IDENTIFICATION

MARGERY H. KRIEGER   AND   PHILIP WORCHEL

V. A. Hospital, Seattle, Washington   *University of Texas*

Although the concept of identification occupies a central position in a number of personality theories, considerable confusion exists as to its nature and numerous attempts have been made to categorize the various meanings assigned to it (10, 13). Little systematic research has been conducted on validating the significance attributed to identification in personality development.

Identification has been viewed as cause, effect, process, and outcome. Freud (1927) distinguished between primary and secondary identification and mentioned at least three different types of identification. In the sense that it is used in the present paper, identification is defined by Freud as a *process* or mechanism by which one individual becomes like another, patterning some or all of his attitudes, feelings, and behaviors after some chosen model (5, 6, 7, 8). Thus, in describing "the change from the parental function to the super-ego," Freud states, "The basis of the process is what we call an identification, that is to say, that one ego becomes like another, one which results in the first ego behaving itself in certain respects in the same way as the second; it imitates it, and as it were takes it into itself" (8, p. 90).

The clearest *effect* of identification is, according to Freud (6, p. 68), seen in the formation of the *superego*, which is reflected in those moral and behavioral standards to which an individual holds and which are provided by cultural tradition. The second major effect of identification is in *ego* formation which Freud saw as developing out of the compromise between the organism's drives and impulses and the demands of external reality. The family situation is usually the child's first example of external reality, and he is likely to model his own adjustive techniques upon those of his parents, particularly the parent with whom he identifies. *Character* is a third effect. According to Freud, it belongs entirely to the province of the ego. The creation of character is due to "the incorporation of the early parental function in the shape of the superego," which is "no doubt the most important and decisive element; next come identifications with the parents of a later date and with other persons in authority, and the same identifications

as precipitates of abandoned object-relations" (8, p. 126). Freud also wrote about character in a very general sense as being along a continuum from very active and dominant to very passive and submissive behavior. He related these two behavioral poles to masculinity and femininity, and felt that they were, to a great extent, determined by identification with the male or female parent respectively, or with the person playing the typical "masculine" or "feminine" parent-role in the child's life.

Thus, inasmuch as a person should "become like" the parent with whom he identifies, there should be a significant degree of similarity between the kind of person he perceives himself to be and the kind of person he perceives that parent to be. As to the cause of the direction of parental identification, Freud (6) attributed it to the relative strength of the masculine and the feminine sexual components, among other things. He recognized three major directions of identification, and postulated that each was associated with a distinct form of psychosexual development.

In the *"normal"* person, the Oedipus complex is resolved when the child gives up its tender attachment to the parent of the opposite sex and identifies with the parent of the same sex (6, p. 41; 8, pp. 174-175). Thus, the boy becomes like his father, the girl like her mother, paving the way to normal heterosexual adjustment.

In the *neurotic* individual, there has been no real resolution of the Oedipus complex. Thus, no clear identification can be made with either parent, and the result is an ambivalent identification with both (6, pp. 43-44; 8, p. 183).

In the *homosexual* individual, an inverted situation has occurred. After the Oedipus complex has been resolved, the child identifies with the parent of the opposite sex (6, p. 42; 8, pp. 177-178).

The present study is designed to test the following hypotheses derived from the reasoning we have just presented from Freudian theory.

1. The normal individual identifies with his parent of the *same* sex and, as a result, sees himself and his ideal-self as more similar to this parent than to the parent of the opposite sex.

2. The neurotic individual is unable to choose between his parents in the formation of his ideal and sees himself and his ideal-self as equally *similar to both* parents.

3. The homosexual individual identifies with his parent of the *opposite* sex and, as a result, sees himself and his ideal-self as more similar to this parent than to the parent of the same sex.

METHOD

Subjects. Three groups of 10 *S*s. each consisting of six men and four women, were matched for age, education, and socio-economic level: Group I, overt and admitted *homosexuals* who had consulted the psychiatric section of the university health center; Group II, *neurotic* patients without history of homosexuality or psychosis; Group III, the *normal* group who were not homosexual and not in psychiatric treatment.

The age range for all *S*s was 18 to 29 years, and the mean age for the total sample was 23.9 years. The ages of all matched subjects fell within one or two years of each other. All *S*s had attained college level and all but two had completed at least two years of college.

Instrument. The instrument was a form of Q-technique. In developing the Q-sample, the aim was to reflect as fully as posible the psychoanalytic concept of personality structure as related to the products of identification. These, as noted above, are: superego, character or orientation, and ego, each of which has certain aspects, directions, or forms. To provide an accurate representation of these products of identification, a large number of replications of each category was considered desirable. Accordingly, a sample of 180 items was set, providing 60 statements in each of the 3 categories: superego (lenient and strict), character (passive and active), and ego (denial, reaction formation, projection, somatization, isolation, sublimation).

In order to assemble statements that would reflect the above categories, a number of major psychoanalytic books and journals were consulted with the hope of finding concrete statements of these attitudes and mechanisms. Psychoanalysts, however, seldom report statements of the patient's actual feelings, attitudes or behaviors so that our search proved fruitless. Therefore, it became necessary to formulate specific statements that could be expected to reflect some aspect or manifestation of each category. This was done on the basis of the definition of the category.

A total of 360 statements were formulated, double the number of items required. To determine the accuracy of the items, four judges were asked to sort them in the above categories, after these had been defined for them entirely by quotations from Freud (5, 6, 7, 8) and Fenichel (4). To avoid theoretical bias, judges who varied considerably in psychological and psychoanalytic sophistication were selected. Only 60 items were rejected for not meeting a criterion of 75% agreement among the judges. The final 180 statements were selected randomly from the remaining items, and were typed each on a 3″ x 5″ card. Some of the items were: 12. "I don't mind being a little dishonest if I need to get ahead" (lenient superego).—6. "I feel that prostitution is sinful and should be abolished" (strict superego).—23. "I often ask for help or advice" (passive independent).— 24. "I don't care if I am liked or not" (denial).—25. "I am bothered by allergies" (somatization).—

Procedure. Each *S* was asked to sort the statements on a nine-step scale in a prescribed distribution under four conditions: (*a*) to give the most accurate possible description of himself (self-sort), (*b*) to depict the way he would like to be—his ideal (ideal-sort), (*c*) to give his best estimate of the way his father would sort the statements, and (*d*) the way his mother would sort the statements.

The sorting procedure elicited a measure of the *S*'s perception of his parents, as in the studies of Sopchak (11) and Beier and Ratzeburg (2), rather than of the parents' perceptions of themselves, as in the Cass study (3). This was because it was felt that identification can only occur on the basis of the child's perception of his parents, regardless of what the parents may actually be. Although it might be more in line with psychoanalytic theory to deal with the way subjects perceived their parents at the time the Oedipal conflict was resolved, this is clearly not possible.

For three "normal" subjects the reliability coefficients for the self-sorts, using the test-retest method, were .76, .75, and .72, with retest intervals of two to six months. These coefficients compare favorably with a reliability of about .80 reported by Stephenson (12) for most Q-sorts.

Results and Discussion

To test the hypotheses concerning identification in homosexuals, neurotics, and normals with the same- and opposite-sex parent, product-moment correlations were computed between the self-sorts and sorts on each of the parents, and between the ideal-sorts and sorts on each of the parents. Table 1 shows these four correlations for each S in the three groups.

Homosexuals. The direction of the identification as predicted from the hypothesis should result in a significantly greater correlation of the self-sort of the S with that of the opposite-sex parent. The results on both individual and group analysis do not confirm this prediction. The mean z' score of .32 between self and same-sex parent, is actually greater than the mean z' score of .24 between the self and opposite-sex parent. The mean difference of .08 in the direction opposite to that predicted is, however, not significant. Only for three Ss are the pairs of correlations significantly different (M4, M5, and F10), two showing greater correlations between the self and same-sex parent than with the opposite-sex parent. Three of the coefficients in the self-same column and six coefficients in the self-opposite column are not significant.

The deviation from prediction is even greater in the correlations between ideal-sort and sort on parents. The mean difference in z' scores is .14 in the direction opposite to that predicted, and of the six significant differences in the paired correlations, five show greater relationships with the same-sex parent. Also, four of the ideal-opposite coefficients are negative.

Neurotics. For neurotics no significant difference in correlation coefficients between the self-sorts and sorts on the parents was predicted. Our data again contradict theoretical expectation. In both the self- and ideal-sorts, neurotics tend to identify more closely with the parent of the opposite sex. The mean difference in z' scores between the self-same and self-opposite columns is .15, which is significant beyond the .02 level. Also, the three pairs of correlations which are significantly different are in the direction of the opposite-sex parent. These results are what we expected in the homosexual sample. The difference is even more striking in ideal-parent correlations. Here the mean difference in z' scores is .29, which is significant far beyond the .01 level. Also, all seven pairs of correlations which are significantly different are in the direction of the opposite-sex parent.

TABLE 1. SELF AND IDEAL Q-SORT CORRELATIONS WITH PARENT OF THE SAME AND OF THE OPPOSITE SEX

	Homosexuals				Neurotics				Normals			
	Self-Same	Self-Opp.	Ideal-Same	Ideal-Opp.	Self-Same	Self-Opp.	Ideal-Same	Ideal-Opp.	Self-Same	Self-Opp.	Ideal-Same	Ideal-Opp.
M1	.62	.59	.65	.66	.15	.41*	.09	.33*	.28	.35	.18	.42*
M2	−.02	−.14	−.19	−.13	.06	.18	.03	.01	.58	.74*	.58	.73*
M3	.47	.37	.68*	.51	.13	.13	.14	.17	.52	.56	.67	.74
M4	.32*	.16	.46*	−.17	.24	.54*	−.24	.58*	.40*	−.01	.36*	.08
M5	.24*	.04	.10*	−.38	.37	.51	.21	.41*	.24*	.02	.18*	−.11
M6	.52	.19	.65*	.01	.75	.81	.82	.92*	.55*	.27	.31	.31
F7	.17	.14	−.09	.10	.06	.45*	.14	.50*	.68	.72	.60	.64
F8	.24	.26	.27	.28	.02	−.06	−.22	−.01*	−.10	−.23	−.28	−.22
F9	.14	.05	.06*	−.31	.21	.23	−.01	.31*	.29	.17	.34	.33
F10	.26	.56*	.36	.84*	.40	.42	.18	.34	.03	.24*	−.39	−.15*
Mean z^1	.32	.24	.34	.20	.27	.42	.15	.44	.39	.33	.29	.34
Corresp. Mean r	.31	.24	.33	.20	.27	.40	.15	.42	.38	.32	.29	.33
$\overline{D}z^1$		.08		.14		.15**		.29***		.06		.05
t		1.33		0.99		2.94		3.64		0.77		0.73

*Difference between the pair of z^1 scores significant beyond the .05 level in direction indicated.
**Significant beyond the .02 level.
***Significant beyond the .01 level.

Since there might be some question as to whether the data meet the assumptions necessary for using the t-test for paired differences, the signed-rank test for paired observations was applied. On the self-sorts, the sum of the smaller rank sum is -1, which is significant at the .01 level for an N of 10; and for the ideal-sorts, the smaller rank sum is 6, significant between the .02 and .05 levels, thus confirming the findings from the t-test.

Normals. From the hypothesis, we expected that the correlations between the subject and the same-sex parent would be significantly greater than those between the subject and his opposite-sex parent. The results do not confirm our expectation. The mean z' scores are practically identical for both the self and ideal sorts, with mean z' differences of .06 and .05. Neither t-ratio is significant. For the self-sorts, five pairs of correlations are significantly different at the .05 level, three in the direction of the same-sex parent, and two in the direction of the opposite-sex parent. For the ideal-sorts, two pairs of correlations are significantly different at the .05 level in the direction of the same-sex parent, and three in the direction of the opposite-sex parent. Thus there is no distinct trends. Contrary to hypothesis we find then that normals identify less with same-sex parents than homosexuals.

These results do not mean that Freud's views concerning the development of neurosis and homosexuality are, in the light of our results, rejected altogether, since he proposed many factors other than identification. Rather, it is the role of identification as an influential factor which the results make questionable. Furthermore, it is evident that our results depend entirely on the method of evaluating the degree of identification. Objections may arise as to the validity of such an approach—but we have attempted to derive our instrument by adhering as closely as possible to an operational interpretation of the underlying process. There is also no measure of the dominant roles or the masculinity and femininity of the parents of the subjects in the present study which may influence the direction of identification.

Aside from their bearing on our initial hypotheses, our data lead to additional findings when presented for men and women separately (Table 2). According to self-sort and ideal-sort, men identify more than women with either father or mother, the mean correlation for all men with both parents being .315, compared to .185 for women. The difference of .13 is significant at the .05 level. Normal men versus normal women show this tendency even more strongly, .373 versus .165. The difference of .208 is significant at less than the .05 level.

TABLE 2. MEAN Q-SORT CORRELATIONS FOR MEN AND WOMEN SEPARATELY

| | | | Men | | | | Women | |
		Father	Mother	F - M	Father	Mother	F - M
Homosexuals:	self	.36	.20	+.16	.25	.20	+.05
	ideal	.39	.08	+.31**	.23	.15	+.08
Neurotics:	self	.28	.43	−.15	.26	.17	+.09
	ideal	.17	.40	−.23**	.29	.02	+.27**
Normals:	self	.43	.32	+.11	.22	.22	0
	ideal	.38	.36	+.02	.15	.07	+.08
Mean r: all subjects		.33	.30		.23	.14	
normals only		.405	.34		.18	.14	
Mean r both parents:							
all subjects			.315			.185*	
normals only			.373			.165*	

*Difference men - women significant at the .05 level.
**Difference significant at the .01 level.

We also see that in the case of homosexual men the mean correlation of ideal-sort with sort for father is significantly greater than with sort for mother, .39 compared to .08. While homosexual women also identify more with the father than with the mother, this difference is not significant. These findings might be explained in Adlerian terms as the homosexual seeking distance from the opposite sex (1, p. 424), a tendency which in the case of homosexual women might be overshadowed by their masculine protest.

In the case of neurotics, the findings from Table 1 are confirmed. For men, the mean correlation of ideal-sort with sort for mother, .40, is significantly greater than with sort for father, .17; while for women, the correlation is significantly greater for father-sort, .29, than for mother-sort, .02. Here there is also a suggestion from Adler's writings. In an early paper he noted "especially in neurosis . . . feminine behavior in men . . . and masculine roles in women" (1, p. 47). But this statement is not unambiguous, in that Adler also mentions homosexuality in this connection, and, furthermore, accepts "an apparently random coexistence of masculine and feminine character traits" (1, p. 47) as a second possibility in neurosis.

SUMMARY

Three hypotheses based on Freudian theory were tested, (*a*) that the normal individual identifies more with the parent of the same sex than with the parent of the opposite sex, (*b*) that the neurotic identi-

fies equally with both parents, and (*c*) that the homosexual identifies more with the parent of the opposite sex. Ten subjects (6 men, 4 women) from each of these three categories (30 *S*s in all) made Q-sorts describing themselves, their ideal selves, their fathers, and their mothers. Degree of identification was derived from correlating self- and ideal-sorts with sorts for father and for mother.

The results supported none of the three hypotheses. On the contrary, it was found: (*a*) normals identify with both parents equally, and (*b*) neurotics identify significantly more with the parent of the opposite sex. When the data were examined for men and women separately, they showed additionally: (*c*) men identify significantly more with either parent than do women, the normal subjects showing this tendency even more than the total group, and (*d*) while homosexual men identify significantly more with their fathers, homosexual women do not identify more with their mothers. The findings with neurotics and homosexuals suggest certain conceptions of Adler.

REFERENCES

1. ADLER, A. *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*. New York: Basic Books, 1956.
2. BEIER, E. G., & RATZEBURG, F. The parental identifications of male and female college students. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, 1953, 48, 569-572.
3. CASS, L. K. An investigation of parent-child relationships in terms of awareness, identification, projection and control. *Amer. J. Orthopsychiat.*, 1952, 22, 305-313.
4. FENICHEL, O. *The psychoanalytic theory of neurosis*. New York: Norton, 1945.
5. FREUD, S. *Collected papers*. Vol. 2. London: Hogarth Press, 1924.
6. FREUD, S. *The ego and the id*. London: Hogarth Press, 1927.
7. FREUD, S. *The interpretation of dreams*. (8th ed.) New York: Macmillan, 1932.
8. FREUD, S. *New introductory lectures on psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton, 1933.
9. KRIEGER, MARGERY H., & WORCHEL, P. A quantitative study of the psychoanalytic hypotheses of identification. *Psychol. Rep.*, 1959, 5, 448.
10. LAZOWICK, L. M. On the nature of identification. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, 1955, 51, 175-183.
11. SOPCHAK, A. L. Parental "identification" and "tendency toward disorders" as measured by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, 1952, 47, 159-165.
12. STEPHENSON, W. *The study of behavior: Q-technique and its methodology*. Chicago: Univer. Chicago Press, 1953.
13. SYMONDS, P. M. *The dynamics of human adjustment*. New York: Appleton-Century, 1946.