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A Study of the Relationship between Liberalism-Conservatism and Maturity

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A Study of the Relationship between
Liberalism-Conservatism and Maturity

by

Mary Jo Kupst

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
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Abstract

152 Ss, students at Loyola University, responded to the Florida Scale of Civic Beliefs, Barron's Ego Strength Scale, and the Intellectual Conviction Scale in a study to test the hypothesis that liberals are more mature than conservatives. Results showed that (a) there were no significant correlations between Conservatism and Ego Identity, Conservatism and Autonomy, or Ego Identity and Autonomy, (b) there were no significant differences in Conservatism, Ego Identity or Autonomy when Ss were broken down into male and female, sophomore and junior, and (c) there were no significant interactions between these variables. It was concluded that the hypothesis that liberals are more mature than conservatives was not supported when these variables are more tightly defined.

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The primary aim of the authors of The Authoritarian Personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) was to determine the personality variables related to liberalism and conservatism. Liberalism and conservatism were viewed as measurable patterns of different politico-economic thinking. Whichever pattern of politico-economic thought an individual possessed was considered a reflection of his personality, not merely opinions gleaned from his environment. According to Levinson (Adorno et al., 1950), what distinguishes liberal thinking from conservative thinking is the desire for change in the balance of power. To measure this dimension, the Politico-Economic Conservatism Scale, an attempt to measure a general right-left factor, was constructed. With regard to overall patterns of personality adjustment or maturity, data were mainly collected in interviews, and the authors concluded that liberals were high in adjustment or maturity, while conservatives were low. As Frenkel-Brunswik (Adorno et al., 1950) found in her interviews, conservatives were lacking in emotional and rational maturity, while liberals were high in these qualities. Gunnison (1967) in a later assessment of liberalism and conservatism using the PEC Scale, took the position that liberals were more psychologically healthy than conservatives, and that liberalism can be seen as social growth in the same way that self-actualization can be seen as personality

growth. McClosky (1958) using a 9-point scale measuring liberalism and conservatism as polar positions around which individuals of certain personalities can come to rest, tried to find the differences in personality and adjustment that are related to these positions. He found that conservatives scored consistently at the "undesirable" end on social-psychological attributes, and that this was also true of clinical-personality variables. Similarly, Winborn and Jansen (1967) found significant differences between leaders of liberal groups and leaders of conservative groups on the basis of responses to the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire. Liberal leaders tended to score significantly higher in the positive direction, e. g. in being more adjusted in social relationships, more emotionally sensitive, and more confident and secure.

These studies suggest that liberalism seems to be positively related to overall adjustment or maturity. However, there are certain problems involved in a study of this type, and they are largely concerned with the variables themselves. Liberalism, defined merely as desire for change in the balance of power, does not distinguish between classical liberalism, which opts for removal of governmental restraints, and the new liberalism, which opts for government as a necessary implement to effect opportunity and freedom for those who cannot do so themselves. Furthermore, the PEC Scale, which has been used as a measure of the liberalism-conservatism dimension, only consists of five items in its last revision, and would hardly seem to be an accurate measure. The scale chosen for the present study, the Florida Scale of Civic Beliefs (Kimbrough and Hines, 1963) not only defines liberalism in its current sense, but also includes liberal items as well as conservative items, which has not been the case in previous scales (Adorno et al., 1950; McClosky, 1958). Thus, the Florida Scale would seem to provide a better operational tool for the measure-

ment of the independent variable, liberalism-conservatism.

There is a difficulty in understanding what is meant by the dependent variable, maturity, which seems to be multidimensional. Thus, in working with this concept, care should be taken to operationally define just what is meant by maturity. Keefe (1968), in a study comparing seminarians and nonseminarians, took the position that maturity, a multidimensional concept, can be seen as comparative development of Jahoda's (1958) criteria of maturity. One of these, Ego Identity (Jahoda's "attitudes of the individual towards the self"), was considered by Erikson (1959) to be comparable to the layman's view of a mature outlook. Keefe measured this criterion by using the Ego Identity Scale (Rasmussen, 1961). This scale is more appropriate for use with younger adolescents while the Ego Strength Scale (Barron, 1953) is more applicable to a college population. The two scales correlate $r = +.60$. Barron (1953) found that the scale correlated $-.47$ with the Ethnocentrism scale of the University of California Public Opinion Study Questionnaire. On the basis of clinical studies, he inferred that such things as rigidity and stereotyped thinking (which are also characteristic of conservative thought) are negatively related to scores on the Ego Strength Scale.

Another criterion, Autonomy (Jahoda's "individual's degree of independence"), was measured by the Intellectual Conviction Scale (Rokeach and Eglash, 1956). According to Keefe, this would be illustrated operationally by freedom from intellectual rigidity (internal autonomy). With regard to its relationship with conservatism, Rokeach and Eglash (1956) found correlations of $r = -.38$ and $r = -.26$ between intellectual conviction and conservatism as measured by the PEC Scale. Although both were considered pointer readings of maturity by Jahoda, the correlation between them ($r = +.15$) which was found by

Keefe was quite low. It would seem that they should be more highly correlated than these findings if they are both components of the same dimension.

The purpose of the present study was to discover whether the hypothesis generated by previous research that liberals are more mature than conservatives is supported when these concepts are more tightly defined. Since the Florida Scale of Civic Beliefs seems to provide a tighter definition of liberalism-conservatism, it would be of value to find out if these same relationships held. Thus, the hypotheses to be tested were: that liberals are higher in maturity than conservatives, and, more specifically, the liberals are high in ego identity and autonomy, while conservatives are low in these qualities.

Method

Subjects

Ss were 152 male and female students enrolled during the Spring, 1969 semester in the three developmental psychology courses at Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois. Ss were predominantly sophomores and juniors. Since no significant differences were found among the three classes, the data were combined.

Materials

Three scales were used. The Florida Scale of Civic Beliefs, a measure of liberalism-conservatism, consisted of 60 items in such areas as foreign affairs, economics, public finance, the functions of government, and the nature of man and society. The authors report a split-half reliability correlation of .934. Content validity of the items was obtained by using 15 judges from the faculties of the Universities of Tennessee and Florida. An item analysis together with a factor analysis resulted in the 60 items. All items in the scale showed a first factor loading of .46 or above (with the first factor reflecting liberalism-conservatism). None were loaded above .50 on any of the other 14 factors. This may be taken as evidence of validity to the extent that the first factor reflects liberalism-conservatism (Shaw and Wright, 1968, p. 308).

The Ego Strength Scale, a 68-item device for assessment of adaptability and personal resourcefulness, consisted of selections from the MMPI to measure such areas as physical functioning, spontaneity, contact with reality, feelings of personal adequacy and vitality, physical courage and lack of fear, conventional church membership, and undogmatic, permissive morality. Odd-even reliability was found to be .76 for a clinic population of 126 patients. Test-

retest reliability was found to be .72. The scale was cross-validated to determine its effectiveness as a prediction instrument for the outcome of therapy, and correlations of .42, .54, and .38 were, as Barron suggested, sizable enough for a valid measure of patient variables that are related to outcome of psychotherapy, the significant determinant here being ego-strength before the therapy began. (Barron, 1968). Silverman (1963) investigated whether the Ego Strength Scale by itself would be as reliable and valid as when it was used in the context of the full MMPI. He found similarly high test-retest reliability between the full and single forms. Construct validity was supported on both forms, concluding that the scale can be used individually, since this does not significantly affect reliability or validity.

The Intellectual Conviction Scale, consisting of 20 items, was designed to discriminate intellectual conviction (rational beliefs) from dogmatic conviction (rationalized beliefs). Intellectual Conviction was defined as rejection of statements when such statements are supported by irrelevant considerations. In two follow-up studies, the corrected reliabilities were found to be .76 and .73. The scale has both content and construct validity, however, the construct validity was largely obtained on the basis of correlations with other Likert-type scales (PEC Scale, F Scale) which presents a kind of limitation. On the other hand, when an independent cognitive task (Luchins Einstellung problems) was employed, a low, but significant correlation was found, reaffirming, to some extent, the validity of the scale.

The order of presentation of the three scales was counterbalanced so that Ss received the scales in random order (to avoid time effects, such as adaptation and fatigue). The scales were combined in a booklet entitled "The 1969 College Student Opinion Study." Also on the cover were a code number, a space

for indicating S's sex, and a space for indicating S's year in school.

Procedure

All Ss were given the scales on the same day in the same room. Instructions given by E were: "This is a study of opinions and attitudes of college students. You will be identified by code number only. Please indicate in the spaces provided on the cover your sex and year in school. Please answer honestly and seriously. You may leave when you are finished."

Results

Overall Pearson product-moment correlations were obtained between Conservatism and Ego Identity ($\underline{r} = -.00054$), Conservatism and Autonomy ($\underline{r} = -.08513$), and Ego Identity and Autonomy ($\underline{r} = +.00292$). Partial correlations were also computed. Between Conservatism and Ego Identity with Autonomy held constant, $\underline{r} = -.0003$. Between Conservatism and Autonomy with Ego Identity held constant, $\underline{r} = -.09$. Between Ego Identity and Autonomy with Conservatism held constant, $\underline{r} = +.003$.

Ss were also divided on the basis of sex and year in school. There were no significant differences between males and females in Conservatism ($\underline{f} = 1.004$, $p = .05$), in Ego Identity ($\underline{f} = .1521$, $p = .05$) or in Autonomy ($\underline{f} = .2025$, $p = .05$). There were similarly no significant differences between sophomores and juniors in Conservatism ($\underline{f} = .9801$, $p = .05$), Ego Identity ($\underline{f} = .0576$, $p = .05$), or in Autonomy ($\underline{f} = .1089$, $p = .05$).

Table 1 shows the correlations computed on the basis of sex and year in school. None of these correlations was found to be significant.

The variables were not curvilinearly related, as can be seen by inspection of Figures 1-3.

An Analysis of variance was computed to determine significant interactions, if any, between these variables. Table 2 shows the three types of interactions involved. None of the interactions was significant at any level of significance. Figure 4 shows the lack of interactions between the variables.

Table 1
Correlations based on Sex and Year in School

Variables Correlated	Females	Males	Sophomores	Juniors
Conservatism and Ego Identity	+ .120	- .163	- .217	+ .108
Conservatism and Autonomy	- .199	- .150	- .186	- .097
Ego Identity and Autonomy	+ .110	+ .269	+ .025	+ .139

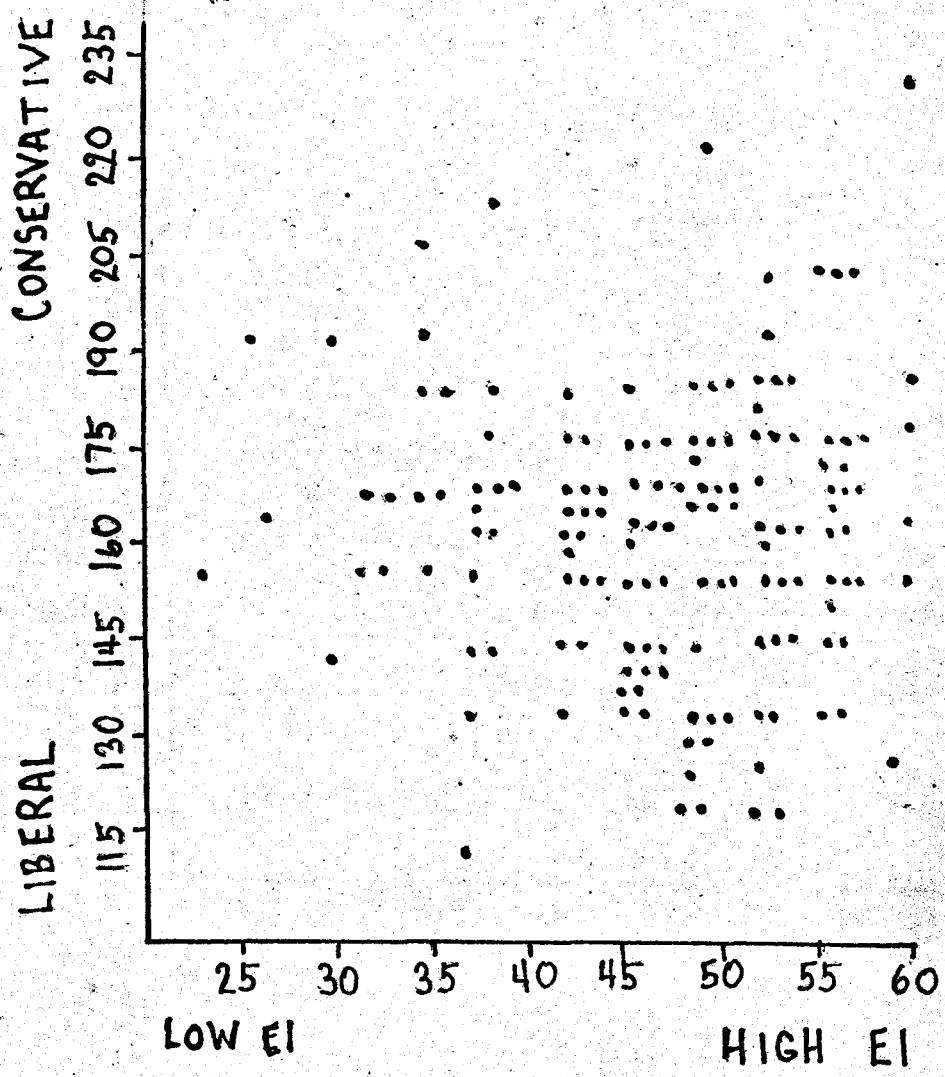


Fig. 1.--Scattergram of Liberalism-Conservatism and Ego Identity

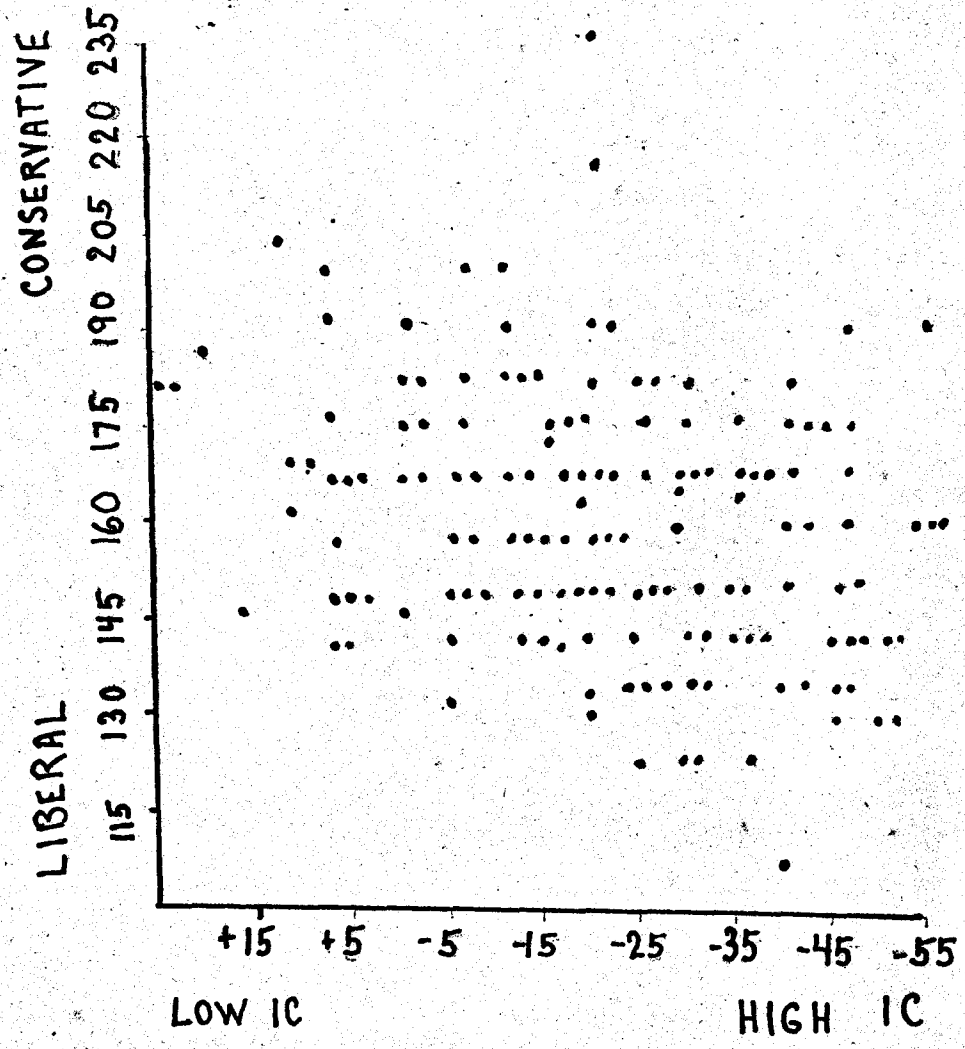


Fig. 2.--Scattergram of Liberalism-Conservatism and Intellectual Conviction

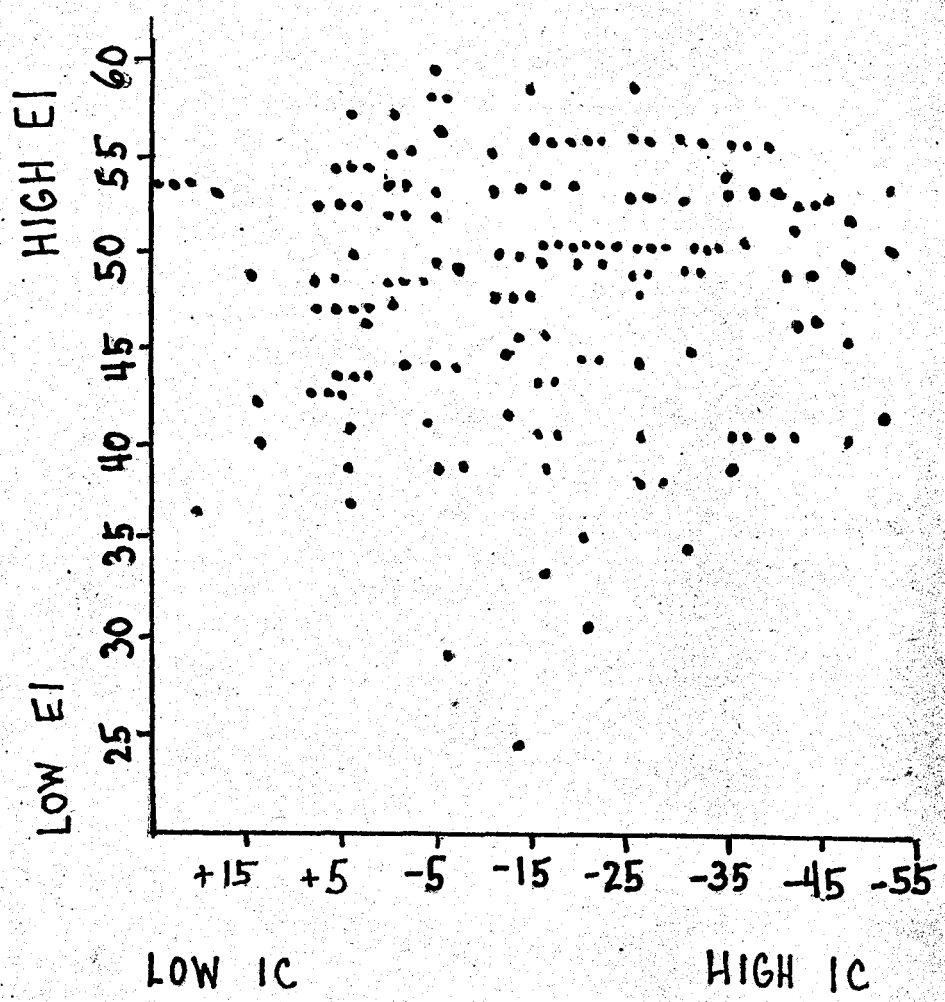


Fig. 3.--Scattergram of Ego Identity and Intellectual Conviction

Table 2
 Interactions among Variables
 Means for Each Group

	High Cons.	Low Cons.	High E.S.	Low E.S.	High I.C.	Low I.C.
High Cons.	..	..	-20.3	-18.94	50.43	47.3
Low Cons.	..	..	-27.0	-25.20	47.48	45.8
High E.S.	-20.3	-27.0	..	..	151.80	161.8
Low E.S.	-18.94	-25.2	..	..	155.00	162.3
High I.C.	50.43	47.48	151.8	155.0	..	..
Low I.C.	47.30	45.8	161.8	162.3	..	..

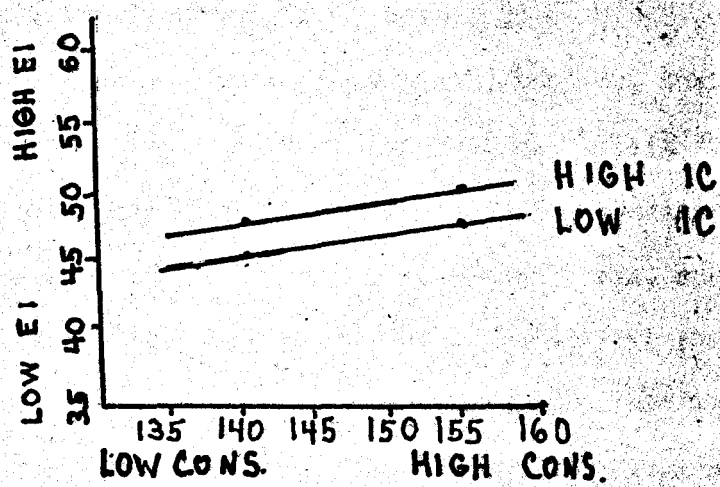
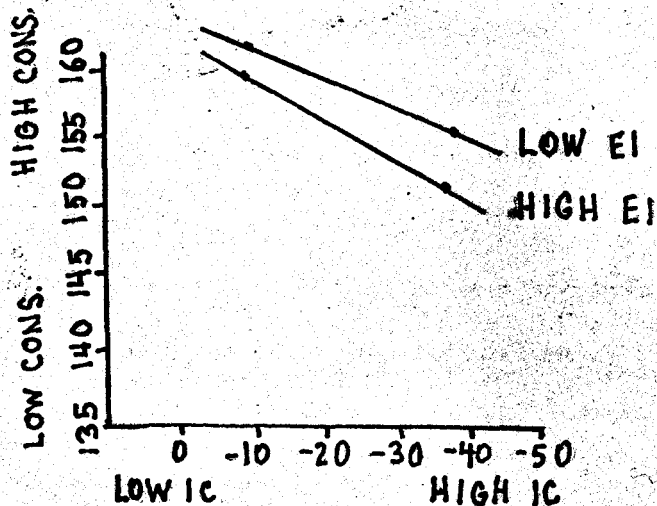
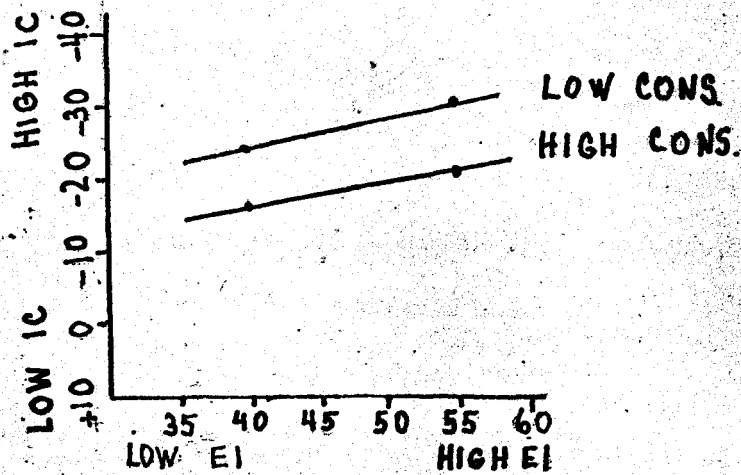


Fig. 4.---Relationships Between Variables

Discussion

As the results clearly indicate, the present study does not support the hypothesis that liberals are more mature than conservatives. Even though the direction of the correlations between Conservatism and Ego Identity, Conservatism and Autonomy (both negative) and Ego Identity and Autonomy (positive) were in accord with the hypothesis, the correlations were so small that one could not draw significant conclusions from them. Furthermore, as would follow from these findings, there were no significant interactions among the variables. These results seem to be contrary to what has been fairly well accepted in light of previous research. However, there are a few possible reasons for the lack of relationships.

Perhaps the most plausible explanation is what was referred to earlier as the difficulty in defining the variables. When liberalism and conservatism were thought to be relatively global patterns of thought, and when maturity was considered to be a unidimensional concept, results gained in such frameworks as those of Adorno et al (1950) and Gunnison (1967) seemed to be clear cut in favor of the liberals. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that the measurement of these variables must tap more than a general right-left direction or a general maturity factor. When liberalism-conservatism was measured in such a way as to assess the individual's thinking in varied areas, such as foreign affairs, economics, functions of government, etc., (realizing that the individual may be conservative in some areas, liberal in others), differing results occurred. An individual who may have been a clear cut liberal according to the California PEC Scale may now be considered more conservative on the Florida Scale because he is only liberal in one area. As we have seen from this study, whether he would automatically be considered more mature than one

who had scored still more conservatively, is more a matter of conjecture than it was before.

When the views concerning the dependent variables, maturity, are compared, a further explanation of the results obtained can be made. Today, it would be difficult for one to argue against a position such as that of Jahoda (1958), that maturity is multidimensional. It is generally accepted that an individual can be higher in some areas of maturity than in others. However, when earlier authors talked about maturity, it seemed that they were referring to a unidimensional concept consisting of various healthy signs which were usually untestable. Besides being global regarding their independent variable, they were equally unclear about their dependent variable. It would be interesting to see whether those individuals that Frenkel-Brunswik (Adorno et al., 1950) considered mature and adjusted as a result of her interviews, would be considered as such if the multiple criteria for the same were spelled out and measured. Thus, more precise definition of those concepts may have narrowed the gap between liberals and conservatives in the degree of maturity that is usually ascribed to them.

Another point must be brought in, and that is the validity of autonomy and ego identity as criteria for maturity. More specifically, the question concerns the low correlation between the two. If they are both part of the same thing, shouldn't there be more of a relationship between them? Perhaps a study using others of Jahoda's criteria and Keefe's (1968) operational tools would shed some light on this problem. Moreover, a study could be done using other instruments measuring ego identity and autonomy to discover whether the relationship was the same or similar between them.

A second explanation for the low relationship between liberalism-conser-

vatism and maturity might be the absence of an activity dimension. Perhaps the individual is not considered high in maturity unless he is actively liberal as opposed to merely having this point of view and doing nothing about it. The activity dimension is becoming a popular topic for research, especially on college campuses, where leaders and active participants are compared (Haan, Smith, & Block, 1968; Winborn and Jansen, 1967; Watts, Lynch & Whittaker, 1969). Distinctions are made on the basis of amount of commitment and involvement, and differences--moral, emotional, rational, and political--have been found between activists and nonactivists, as well as between active conservatives, active liberals, and active radicals. For example, Winborn and Jansen (1967) found that liberals differed significantly from conservatives in having less concern for conventionalities and in being more confident and secure in meeting life demands. This was a study of leaders of campus social-political action, and these liberals and conservatives were active members of their respective organizations. The absence of these considerations may partially explain the lack of differences found in the present study. A student might "think" as a liberal is expected to think and score high in liberalism, but unless he does something with his liberal ideas, he may be considered, as regards maturity, in the same light as the individual who "thinks" as a conservative is expected to think, but doesn't act. A study of this type would seem quite valuable for further research.

Finally, another factor which could account for the lack of differences between liberals and conservatives in maturity is the fact that the Ss were enrolled in a Catholic university. It can be said that they were probably not all Catholic, but a great majority of those attending Loyola University are of that religion. Perhaps the religious factor is another partial explanation of

the lack of differences. Perhaps maturity in or adjustment to a Catholic university environment is different from that in a nonsectarian university environment. Also, the atmosphere, not just of being a religious school, but being an urban university with a large commuter population, where the student leaves the academic structure every night and goes home, may make him less accessible, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, to any sort of political commitment.

Again, we have returned to the activity dimension, but with it, should be included the type of institution where the data were compiled. Looking to future research, one could contrast this sample with one from another urban nondenominational school, and with other schools with different environments to see if these affect the results. Thus, after a consideration of various factors, such as the problem of definition, the activity dimension, and the influence of the institution, the results contradicting the hypothesis that liberals are more mature than conservatives does not seem so surprising.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mary Jo Kupst has been read and approved by the director of the thesis.

Furthermore, the final copies have been examined by the director and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Aug. 28, 1969
Date

Michael J. Birnbaum, S.V.
Signature of Advisor