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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHILDREN'S IDEALS

By DAVID SPENCE HILL

The ideals of children so far as they are revealed in writing the name of the person or character whom the child "would like to resemble" were the subject of the present investigation. The accompanying analyses, tables and curves comprise the various types of ideals. "Acquaintances," "Historic" or "Public Persons," "Characters from Fiction," "Religious Personages," "Ideals from Opposite Sex," are the general rubrics, with the accompanying subdivisions. (See Table I.) A total of 1,431 white children was included, pupils of two public schools of the City of Nashville, Tennessee. The schools are designated respectively as Groups T and H. The different analyses are:

1. Ideals at various ages, 7 to 15, of the 1,431 children, boys and girls of both groups combined. (Fig. I.)

2. (a) Ideals of 857 children (boys and girls combined) of Group I.

(b) Ideals of 574 children (boys and girls combined) of Group II. (Fig II.)

The analysis does not include consideration of motives. The answers to "Why," often argumentative or explicit, indicated the earnest nature of the responses in many instances.

PRELIMINARIES

Preliminary to the work described in this paper, data were got through teachers from some 400 children in three small schools. A child-study class of six members was divided into three couples, each of which analyzed the data. Enough help was given in class to insure uniformity in methods of tabulation. It was found convenient for each student to record the analysis in a composition-book, upon one page of which the rubrics for classification were written upon the left margin in vertical order. The corresponding margin of the remaining pages was cut away, so that two pages were available for each year or age recorded. This method was found much more practical than to use one large sheet of paper, and it has been followed throughout. The purpose

TABLE I.

Ages		7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Totals
Number of Papers	Boys	54	67	92	95	98	96	79	71	37	689
	Girls	65	79	97	87	92	104	80	91	47	742
	Both	119	146	189	182	190	200	159	162	84	1431
Acquaintances	Boys	68.5	57.	47.	23.	20.	12.5	11.	10.	.0	27. %
	Girls	86.	75.	62.	56.	46.	32.	37.5	34.	36.	51. %
	Both	78.	66.5	54.5	39.	33.	22.5	24.5	23.	20.	39.5%
Father or Mother	Boys	33.	19.	20.	7.	11.	6.	4.	.0	.0	11. %
	Girls	28.	14.	15.5	10.	6.5	8.	6.	8.	.0	11. %
	Both	30.	16.	17.	9.	9.	7.	5.	4.	.0	11. %
Other Relative	Boys	15.	13.	6.5	3.	2.	.0	6.	.0	.0	5. %
	Girls	9.	4.	4.	5.	1.	.0	4.	6.	.0	3.5%
	Both	12.	8.	5.	4.	2.	.0	5.	3.	.0	4. %
Other Acquaintance	Boys	21.	24.	21.	13.	7.	6.	1.	10.	.0	11. %
	Girls	49.	57.	42.	41.	38.	24.	27.5	21.	36.	37. %
	Both	36.	42.	32.	26.	22.	15.5	14.5	16.	20.	24. %
Public and Historic Persons	Boys	15.	36.	40.	63.	66.	79.	85.	79.	95.	62. %
	Girls	3.	14.	24.	31.	38.	42.	41.	41.	42.5	31. %
	Both	8.	24.	32.	48.	53.	60.	63.	57.	65.	46. %
President	Boys	.0	.0	.0	3.	.0	1.	5.	1.	3.	1. %
	Girls	1.5	.0	.0	.0	1.	1.	.0	1.	.0	.5%
	Both	1.	.0	.0	2.	.5	1.	2.5	1.	1.	1. %
Historic American	Boys	11.	31.	33.	50.5	60.	71.	73.	72.	78.	54. %
	Girls	1.5	14.	22.	26.	22.	33.	27.5	30.	32.	24. %
	Both	6.	22.	27.	39.	41.5	51.	50.	48.	52.	38. %
Historic Foreigner	Boys	.0	.0	4.	6.	5.	2.	4.	3.	13.5	4. %
	Girls	.0	.0	2.	3.	11.	5.	10.	4.	8.5	5. %
	Both	.0	.0	3.	4.	8.	3.5	7.	3.	11.	4. %
Misc. Public	Boys	4.	4.5	3.	3.	1.	5.	2.5	3.	.0	3. %
	Girls	.0	.0	.0	1.	4.	4.	4.	5.5	2.	2. %
	Both	2.	2.	2.	2.	3.	4.5	3.	5.	1.	3. %
Character from Fiction	Boys	7.5	3.	9.	6.	5.	2.	1.	7.	3.	5. %
	Girls	9.	10.	12.	3.	10.	13.	11.	20.	13.	11. %
	Both	8.	7.	11.	5.	7.	8.	6.	14.	8.	8. %
Religious Persons	Boys	9.	4.5	4.	7.	8.	6.	2.5	4.	3.	6. %
	Girls	1.5	1.	2.	9.	6.5	12.5	10.	5.5	8.5	6.5%
	Both	5.	3.	3.	8.	7.	9.5	6.	5.	6.	6. %
God	Boys	5.5	.0	1.	5.	.0	1.	1.	.0	.0	2. %
	Girls	1.5	1.	1.	.0	1.	2.	4.	.0	.0	1. %
	Both	3.	1.	1.	3.	.5	1.5	2.5	.0	.0	1.4%
Jesus	Boys	.0	3.	1.	2.	3.	4.	.0	3.	3.	2. %
	Girls	.0	.0	1.	8.	4.	10.	5.	5.5	6.	5. %
	Both	.0	1.	1.	5.	4.	7.	2.5	4.	5.	3.4%
Persons from Bible	Boys	4.	1.5	2.	.0	5.	1.	1.	1.	.0	2. %
	Girls	.0	.0	.0	1.	1.	1.	1.	.0	2.	1. %
	Both	2.	1.	1.	.5	3.	1.	1.	1.	1.	1. %
Opposite Sex Chosen	Boys	17.	21.	15.	11.5	6.	7.	1.	1.	.0	9. %
	Girls	11.	15.	32.	34.	39.	43.	42.5	34.	36.	32. %
	Both	13.	18.	31.	22.	22.	26.	22.	20.	20.	21. %

of the writer in utilizing the unsatisfactory data of the preliminary text was not for any expected value of content, but rather to enable him to develop expeditious methods of handling such data through the medium of class work. It also

was in response to the suggestion that the element of subjectivity of opinion in the observer played a too large part in some of the earlier child-study researches, and that some of these had not even been submitted to the precaution of having analysis and calculations made by a second person. Space

does not warrant the publication of the results of this preliminary test as related to the subjectivity and to the inaccuracies of the three pairs of workers. Suffice it to note that, although encouraged to care and accuracy by the instructor,

the graphic representations made by the students revealed several points of difference ranging from one to eight per cent, differences attributed to varying classifications, and to mechanical inaccuracies. Each member of this class had

done at least minimum college work in the sciences—physics, chemistry, biology, psychology.

The present larger study is based upon papers secured from white children in schools in opposite localities of the city. One school is situated in a somewhat new and popular residential section; the other in an old but, perhaps on the whole, less prosperous locality. Printed blanks were used upon each of which was printed the question: Which person (among those you have seen, or thought of, or heard of, or read about), would you most like to resemble? Why?

The writer instructed the teachers who gathered the data how best to avoid in the children suggestion, imitation, frivolity; and he explained the necessity of obtaining serious, spontaneous replies. Confusion or irregularity in distributing and in collecting the papers were to be guarded against. In the case of the youngest children with whom handwriting was difficult, the teacher was to question each child individually and herself record the answer. To this end a conference was held with the principal and teachers, after school upon the day preceding the test (Spring of 1910). At the conclusion of the explanations a typewritten circular repeating the careful instructions already made orally, was given to each teacher, and along with it the package of question-blanks for her pupils. The replies were gathered promptly, and after division into bundles according to sex, by the teacher, were returned to the writer. The precautions taken and the interest and carefulness of the teachers led to the opinion that the papers are as reliable as can be expected in such endeavors with children.

COMPARISON OF METHODS

The assumption (as by Barnes and Goddard) that "100 papers of each age of each sex is the most satisfactory number" could not be tested exactly by means of our material, owing to the fact that using this method we were able to muster only 100 papers for each age, 50 of each sex, for practice work by a college class. However, the material was worked over and classified, and the calculations of the two methods were made separately by different persons.

In the first instance the writer alone analyzed the data for both groups combined and also separately for each school. He found the percentage for each item in each age by using the actual number of answers received. An inconsiderable number of blanks (one to four) at each age, "(no answer)" papers, were returned according to instructions, except in the case of children seven and eight years of age. It was reported that practically all of the children replied except in

case of these youngest children, the answers of whom the teachers recorded after individual questioning. It was difficult to obtain the full quota therefore in the lowest grades. Our calculations are based upon the actual number of replies as principals rather than upon the whole number of children in a room since it was believed that the error of selection within the school was confined almost entirely to the two lower grades; and this was due to limitation of time rather than to choice. Goddard—(*Ped. Sem.*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, p. 209) includes those "not answering" in his principals.

In the second instance 50 papers of each sex and age were used—making a total of 100 for each age. Here the group of college students were put into service, they utilizing the work for class room use. The aim was to furnish a comparison with the "actual number" method of calculation used in the first instance, as well as again to modify the factor of the subjective opinion of the writer who made the analysis above. In this second analysis the replies were read carefully before four students by the instructor or a pupil, and each student kept her own record; debatable points of classification were decided by vote after discussion. There is of course an advantage in time and speed where 100 papers of each are taken. The first method involved tedious copying, checking and calculating of hundreds of percentages all of which had to be gone over more than twice to insure accuracy. The actual results in our case got by the two methods do not differ considerably.

We shall use in what follows the percentages used for Fig. I. This shows in detail the percentages after combining the two groups—a total of 1,431 children from 7 to 15 years of age. The number of papers from 16 to 17 years was not large enough to be used—(They are indirectly *prima facie* evidence of cases of retardation). (See Table I.)

THE CONTENT

1. *Father and Mother.* The presence in consciousness of father or mother as an ideal is represented at the different ages for each sex as follows:

TABLE II

Tennessee		7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	years
Father	Boys	33.	19.	20.	7.	11.	6.	4.	0.	0.	
	Girls	28.	14.	15.5	10.	6.5	8.	6.	8.		
	Both	30.	16.	17.	9.	9.	7.	5.	4.	0.	
California (Barnes)											
Mother	Boys	14.	10.	10.	8.	2.	1.	1.			
	Girls	23.	17.	11.	11.	6.	6.	8.			
	Both	18.5	13.5	10.5	9.5	4.	3.5	4.5			
German (Goddard)											
Ideals	Boys	58.	34.	36.	22.	12.	10.	4.	14.		
	Girls	29.	33.	17.	16.	12.	15.	17.	10.		
	Both	43.5	33.5	26.5	19.	12.	12.5	10.5	12.		

Our results tally with other investigations in that (1) parental influence seems to diminish with age (2) with other American investigations in that father and mother are mentioned less frequently than in the German group of Goddard. Our figures do not show age for age, that either boys or girls largely predominate in this choice. It has been lamented that the large choice of parent or acquaintance as ideals is symptomatic of "narrowest sort of life," although it is also averred that we do not know "the best rate of expansion of the child's personality." To the contrary, where home life is wholesome—a large choice of such ideals seems to us ethically desirable. A large and earlier choice of public characters might be evidence of anything but normal "development of soul"—but rather of disillusionment, precocity or where the influencing personalities are unworthy, the exchanging of one's birthright for a mess of pottage. It depends upon the home and the kind of parent. The enumeration of historic and public characters about to follow indicates for our children a wide and rich range of ideals, with exceptions; nevertheless in a country whose people notably cherish home life, I should have preferred to see our percentages of preference for father or mother higher than they are.

2. *Other Acquaintances, playmate, teacher, etc.* The sex differences in regard to choice of "other acquaintances" as ideals are as follows:

Girls obviously predominate in this choice (37% as compared with 11%). The results agree in general with other American studies.

3. *Historical or Contemporaneous Public Persons.* Not including Bible characters, under this division the boys lead throughout, age for age; or as totals, boys, 62% compared with girls, 31%. This is similarly true in both groups. In this list are included some (about 12) miscellaneous public characters, vaguely defined as "actor," "fireman," "great soldier," etc. Historic or public Americans predominate.

The actual characters mentioned by both boys and girls are as follows. The figures are numbers of papers.

	Boys	Girls
Geo. Washington	213	102
Robert E. Lee	37	5
Andrew Jackson	15	4
Sam Davis	15	3
Roosevelt	14	1
President	12	4
Rockefeller	11	2
James Robertson	8	13

Columbus	6	6	
Lincoln	6	3	
Longfellow	5	17	
Edison	3	1	
Stonewall Jackson	3	1	
Rosa Bonheur	3	4	
Shakespeare	2	1	
Senator Carmack	2	1	
Robert Fulton	2	1	
Bonaparte	1	1	
Charles Kingsley	1	1	
	<hr/>	<hr/>	
	359	171	Total 530.

CHARACTERS MENTIONED BY BOYS ONLY

John Sevier	4	Marion Francis	2
Daniel Boone	3	Cabot	2
Eli Whitney	3	Dr. Cook	2
U. S. Grant	2		

Mentioned once each: Socrates, Michael Angelo, Bruce, Farragut, General Forrest, Patrick Henry, W. J. Bryan, Eugene Field, R. L. Stevenson, E. A. Poe, Dickens, Prince Albert, John Stuart, President Elliot, Lewis Carroll, George Wright, and O. Wright, Andrew Carnegie, Marshall Field, Magellan, Capt. Lawrence, Dave Warfield, Tom Thumb, Kermit Roosevelt, Mrs. Alice Hegan Rice, Flanders (Auto man) Ellis (writer) Miscellaneous 15. Total 61.

CHARACTERS MENTIONED BY GIRLS ONLY.

Martha Washington	3	Peary	2
Walter Scott	3	Missionary	2
Clara Barton	2	Mozart	2

Mentioned once each: Mrs. John Sevier, Mrs. James Robertson, Pocahontas, Joan of Arc, Queen Wilhelmina, Queen Isabella, Alice Cary, Cecil Chaminade, Whittier, Bulwer Lytton, Augusta E. Wilson, John Trotwood Moore, Alex. Campbell, Peter, Prescott, Helen Keller, W. A. Dromgoole, General Greene, Queen of Serbia, Bertha Clay, Helen Taft, Halley, Patti, Calvé, Beethoven, Hans Andersen, Prince Henry, Annie Fellows Johnson, Marvin Evans, Rev. Jones, Miscellaneous 8. Total 54.

The above lists are an array in which it is difficult to find more than two or three ignoble characters—such as Cook and Jeffries—trivial exceptions. The variety of heroes, pioneers, statesmen, writers, artists, soldiers, musicians, sailors, invent-

ors, men of business, represents the content of some of the world's best biography—and we have not included in the above lists distinctly Bible characters. This wide range, while attesting individuality of choice and considerable culturistc environment, nevertheless is surprisingly short or scattered, when the writer recalls that Nashville and Tennessee are rich in historic interests and celebrated characters, whose memory there is perpetuated upon the printed page, by tradition, in story and by monuments. It would seem natural that strong and historic characters of the South such as the following would appear more active in the consciousness of these Southern children: Robert E. Lee, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, Sam Davis, James Robertson, Stonewall Jackson, John Sevier, Daniel Boone, Farragut, Henry Clay, David Crockett, not to mention scores of contemporaneous characters from Tennessee, eminent in other states.

The opportunity exists in Tennessee as elsewhere to build more upon the circle of interests nearest home a discriminating sentiment and inspiration for the strong and heroic in human life.

4. *Characters from Fiction, Myth and Story.* There is evident, as in other studies, the comparatively slight influence of fiction-ideals. (See Figs. I and II.)

As glaring exceptions the influence of the cheap novel appears. These heroes of the novel are relatively unimportant and many more excellent characters are mentioned; there is evident, as in other studies, an obvious lack of the rich material of myth, legend and folklore, with which the creative imagination of particularly younger children might be fed, if the material available amongst our people could be edited, selected and utilized for the good of the children. Fiction seems to influence the girls more than the boys in each group. Combining the groups, 11% of the girls and 5% of the boys chose deals from fiction.

Named by the boys there appear: William Tell 5, Crusoe 5, Fairy 5, Robin Hood 4, Miller of Dee 2; once each—Gabriel, Hiawatha, Rip Van Winkle, Alice in Wonderland, Rebecca of Sunny Brook, Capt. Kidd, Santa, Bear Hunter, Red Men, L. Grant, Herbert Carter, "Henry," R. Whitney—*Total* 34.

A more varied list is made by the girls: Little Colonel 16, Elsie Densmore 6, William Tell 3, Evangeline 5, Cinderella 3, Red Riding Hood 3, Santa 3, Snow White 2, Silver Locks 2, Queen 2; once each, Aladdin, Crusoe, Rose Red, Rose Campbell, Elizabeth, Hiawatha, Benn Starr, Dora Dene, Genevia, Grace Darling, Fairy, King, Queen, Jewel, Elaine, Girl in S. S. Story, Carroll Bird, Dorothy in Wizard of Oz, Dorothy, Dorothy Dainty (adv). Barefoot Boy, Fairy, Lady in Fairy

Book, Princess, Mrs. Wiggs, St. Valentine, Minnehaha, Tar Baby, Clara in Mammon, Contented John, Mrs. Wentwood in Burglar's Daughter, Fanny in Tempest and Sunshine, Indian Princess, Betsy Lewis and Missy in Little Colonel books, "Girl," Grace Darby, Jack in the Bean Stalk, Alice Longfellow. Total 85.

5. *Religious Characters.* The convenient tabulation of Goddard (*Ped. Sem.*, *loc. cit.*) shows the relative position of the distinctly religious characters including God, Jesus, and Bible characters as observed in similar investigations in different parts of the world. Our percentages are likewise small. The general agreement of all these studies is that religious characters are named with the least frequency as compared with ideals chosen from acquaintances, public persons or fiction. This consensus demands the attention of the forces of organized religion whose vocation is to keep alive the spirit of religion. Several hypotheses may be offered to explain this paucity of ideals. (1) The low percentages for religious characters is about proportionate to the relative time and effort spent upon Bible and religious study by the average child, as compared with the work of the day school. Once a week at Sunday school as compared with every day at the public school can hardly yield much greater results. One cannot assert, at least upon the basis of these figures, that the actual teaching method of the Sunday school is totally ineffective, when the amount of time available is considered. (2) The home evidently is not successful to-day in arousing permanent admiration for Bible and religious characters. (3) Perhaps these characters are felt by the child as being remote, intangible, inapplicable to present day conditions. Orthodoxy does not emphasize enough the human side of Christ and therefore the child may not place Jesus in the category of "persons." If all this be true, we have here a new emphasis upon the need for a social application, for a modernization of the gospel interpreted to cope with present conditions. (4) A reticence in mentioning "religious characters" doubtless is one factor. If the data were got within the walls of a Sunday school room, perhaps results might appear very different.

For making more vital the influence of the religious and moral heroes, the present writer ventures to suggest to sincere religionists the following practical expedients. For adults let there be organized classes or societies in our churches for the purpose of studying and investigating the actual social conditions in local communities, as regards the problems of poverty, sanitation, public and benevolent institutions, as jails, hospitals, asylums and the problems of civic improvement. This will bring to light the demands for applied

religion. Then for children let there be tried more fully a revival of the ancient art of story telling to make more vivid and permanent the character—ideals through which as personalities it is desired to convey the chosen principles of applied religion. The method of the story was the method of the great Teacher

OPPOSITE SEX CHOSEN

The often remarked fact brought out by the results of Barnes and Goddard that girls choose male ideals to an undesirable extent appears again in our returns. Of the girls, 32%, and of the boys, 9% chose as ideals characters from the opposite sex. It is surmise to state whether this is due to growing dissatisfaction with the limitations traditionally as well as naturally restricting women, or due to there being more male ideals to choose from. Perhaps both factors are operative. It appears to the present writer that we do not stress enough in story, reading, picture, and song the noble qualities of available female characters contemporaneous and in history.

That the male ideal is commonly made more conspicuous in history and in current events, and that the imitateness of the child is affected through the examples most vividly presented—rather than by some peculiar dissatisfaction with her sex, seem adequate hypotheses to explain this choice of male ideals by the average girl. In order to point to these factors, however, one need not deny that a sense of ill-adaptation to cope with the demands of life is too common in some young girls because of our artificial modern environment.

GROUPS T AND H CONTRASTED

At every age the children of Group H lead in the choice of Acquaintance-Ideals. Totals: Group H, 47%, Group T, 34%. At every age Group T leads in the choice of Historic or Public Persons; Group T, 52%, Group H, 37%. In each group Religious or Bible ideals total about 6%. The earlier years of childhood in Group H and the later years of Group T seem the more influenced by such characters.

In regard to the use of data of this kind for minute comparisons of groups, races, etc., the present writer is not enthusiastic. It seems questionable whether any but the largest and most obvious differences in these curves should be given weight in contrasting the characteristics of national or racial groups, particularly when slightly different methods may have been used. The summarizing curves exhibited by Goddard therefore, of German, New Jersey, California, and Minneapolis studies must be used with caution. Such curves of group

data are extremely sensitive to the element of imitation or suggestion and therefore minor variations at any age must be checked by more studies before we indulge in dogmatizing. Upon the face of our returns it may be seen that there is about as much difference between our two groups in the same city and of same race as there is between results got in different states or countries. Waiving fine points of difference in these crude studies, we may find some facts of general agreement or of comparison. (See Fig. II.)

CONCLUSIONS

1. *Practical value to students of pedagogy.* Whether one catalogues studies such as the above as of "human nature," "ethics," or "psychology" it appears that considerable value may be gained by the moderate expenditure of time upon similar studies by classes in education. A statistical study of ideals of school children appeals to the writer as belonging properly to the sphere of experimental pedagogy, since it acts as a test to reveal a crude portrayal of some of the actual results of educative procedure. The material of such a group study is more illustrative, suggestive and stimulating than conclusive and is doubtless unusually sensitive to the influences of suggestion and imitation. A variation at a given age, especially in moderately large groups, might be due more to the contagion of a whispered suggestion influencing a dozen or more children than to the designated factors. Furthermore, the age error makes only approximate, within six months, the years named. Other questions may be raised, *e. g.*, the psychological nature of the complex mental fact we are attempting to measure; and it might be interesting to contrast the results of several repetitions of this test of ideals made at intervals upon the same group of children in order to observe the reliability of a single performance of the children, or upon similar groups in dissimilar surroundings. It would be unwarranted to generalize upon fine points of difference. The large general differences and tendencies in childhood verified in the case of large groups, however, seem well established, *e. g.*, the diminution of acquaintance ideals, the multiplication of ideals from public characters, and the paucity of religious characters cited. Without overestimating the value of this one example of the class of work, we would suggest its revival and repetition.

As practice work, where the easier method of calculation is used, a repetition of this early child-study investigation seems worth while, because one can utilize within a few days' time the data for class work. Aside from the consideration of the

specific topic, some indirect benefits have accrued in the experience of the writer with small groups of students, in that the work naturally gave rise to discussion of statistical methods, to an attempt to devise standard procedure, to the sifting of generalizations, and the developmental process was illustrated by the resulting curves.

2. *Ethical value of study of ideals.* A simple study of the ideals of a group of children offers some other values to students of education. Educational psychology and experimental pedagogy are concerned chiefly in learning *how* to make changes in human beings. What kind of changes to make or the what and the why are equally important problems lying within the domain of ethics, although metaphysical inquiries regarding morality do not seem to produce much good fruit. We catalogue in our histories of education the characteristic aims of races or peoples, such as the "passivity" of the East, the "activity" of the West, the "culture," of the Greeks, the "efficiency" of the Romans, the "discipline" of the Middle Ages, or the ideals of knowledge, development or character as we follow Comenius, Rousseau or Herbart. Perhaps we formulate as the modern aim of education the resultant or synthesis of such of the above elements as are desired for social life, the emphasis upon each to depend upon the exigencies of time or place. But this is not enough for students of education, for they should realize that the individual boy or girl must with more or less distinctness formulate those mental complexes known as our ideals, patterns or standards. These are the products of habit, and ideals focalized may in turn start new habits. They are an essential part of the developmental process as the child and his environment change. It seems, therefore, that such simple studies as the above present some added points of value, because with moderate effort upon the part of the student they forcibly bring to his attention typical data fresh from the minds of children; and concrete data are what force to recognition many of the questions of the *what* and the *why* in education in addition to the mere *how* of the experimentalist.