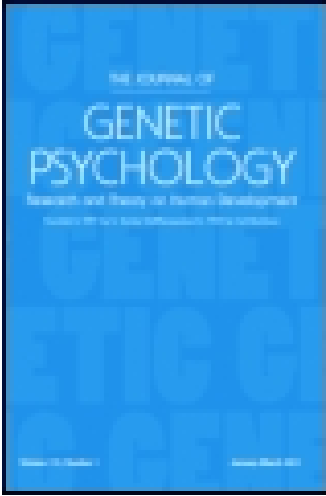


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A SWEDISH STUDY IN CHILDREN'S IDEALS

By ALBERT N. GILBERTSON

A new study of children's ideals appears in the current issue of the *Svenskt Archiv för Pedagogik*, from the pen of Georg Brandell, of the University of Upsala. It is based on an investigation which the author of the article made in the common schools of Gothenburg in September, 1911. His conclusions are founded on returns from 889 children, 474 boys and 425 girls, ranging in age from eight to fifteen years. Throughout his study he makes comparisons between his own results and those of the similar studies in London by Earl Barnes, in Newcastle, Pennsylvania, by W. G. Chambers, and in Göttingen, Germany, by H. H. Goddard. He expresses his indebtedness also to the writings of G. Stanley Hall, John Dewey, Irving King, Alfred Binet and William Stern.

In the investigation the following question was given to the children: "What person (man or woman) whom you have seen, about whom you have heard spoken, or about whom you have read, would you most like to resemble? Why?" The questions were printed on slips of paper and were distributed among the children. The teachers in whose classes the inquiry was made were furnished with strict instructions concerning the conduct of the investigation. I shall here present the most important conclusions of the author.

Of the younger children the great majority chose persons in their own surroundings, but these ideals were rapidly displaced by characters more remote in time and space. Girls chose local ideals to a greater extent than did the boys at all the various ages covered by the study, the percentages being 35.3 and 28.2 respectively. About the tenth year a rapid development takes place in the transition from acquaintances to other ideals.

Parents were chosen most frequently by children of both sexes at the age of nine, receiving the votes of 40 per cent. of those of that age. From that time their popularity steadily decreases. The father is chosen most frequently by the boys, the mother by the girls. Relatives other than the parents are chosen most frequently at the age of eight, other acquaintances are most popular at nine. The teachers are not popular as ideals among the children. They enjoy their greatest popularity with children of ten and eleven years. Chambers expressed his surprise that children to such a small extent choose their teachers as ideals. "One would expect that teachers, coming in constant and close contact with their pupils for a number of years and specially engaged in the development of their minds and characters, would stand high in the series of ideals. For some reason this is not true." Of the American girls 4.5 per cent. name a teacher, while only 1.5 per cent. of the boys make such a choice. The Gothenburg children were somewhat more favorable to their teachers, 2.3 per cent. of the boys and 6.3 per cent. of the girls voting for their teacher. Not a single boy over the age of twelve chose his teacher. The author does not state what proportion of the teachers in the classes studied are men, but in Scandinavia men still form a large proportion of the teachers in the elementary schools.

The Swedish children choose historical and public personages to a

greater extent than do the English and German. In this respect they are more like the American children. The percentage of the total number voting for persons in this class is 61.6, 69 per cent. of the boys and 53.4 per cent. of the girls. The Swedish children are more tardy in their transition to historical and public ideals than are those of any of the other three nationalities. This transition occurs in the case of the Swedish children chiefly at the age of ten. Historical persons form the most popular class of ideals. Their popularity increases steadily with the increasing age of the children. The boys choose their ideals from history more frequently than do girls. The historical characters chosen are almost exclusively Swedish. The very few foreign persons chosen were nearly all chosen by boys, who are disposed to go further afield for their ideals. Luther is the only historic character chosen by members of both sexes, namely by 0.4 per cent. of the boys and 0.7 per cent. of the girls. Six-tenths per cent. of the boys chose Caesar, 0.4 per cent. Columbus and Alexander the Great. Five-tenths per cent. of the girls chose Melanchthon. One of the Gothenburg boys chose Washington as his ideal. This boy, who was eleven years of age, seems to have lived in America as he wrote his answer in English. It read as follows: "George Washington. I like him best because he speaks the truth, and he has won the English war."

Gustavus Adolphus, the Protestant hero of the Thirty Years' War, is the great national hero, receiving the votes of 22.4 per cent. of the boys and 11.1 per cent. of the girls. His position is comparable to that of Washington among American children. The latter received 34 per cent. of the votes of the boys and 24.5 per cent. of the girls in New Castle. Gustavus Vasa, the liberator of Sweden, the next in order of preference was chosen by 7.6 and 4.5 per cent. of the boys and girls respectively. Both of these kings are most admired by children at the age of eleven; their relative popularity gradually decreases in the later years. John Ericson, the Swedish-American inventor, of "Monitor" fame, is very popular with the boys, being the ideal of 5.7 per cent. of the latter. He received the greatest number of votes from boys of thirteen, namely, 14 per cent. of those of that age. He does not receive a single female vote. This may be due to the much greater interest in inventions among boys. The fourth most popular character is Charles XII, the famous warrior-king.

People in contemporary public life are chosen more frequently in the later years than in the earlier. Selma Lagerlöf, the Swedish authoress and Nobel prize winner, is the greatest favorite among girls (14.8 per cent.). She is not named by any child younger than ten years. Edison received 1 per cent. of the votes of the boys. Mark Twain and President Taft each received the compliment of one vote. Sven Hedin, the Swedish explorer, is the most popular contemporary character with the boys (3.6 per cent.).

Kings and statesmen are more popular with boys than with girls. The latter show greater admiration than do boys for people distinguished in the arts of peace, who have not been kings. The votes for rulers are more than twice as numerous among the boys as among the girls (38.6 and 17.4 per cent. respectively). Twenty-six and eight-tenths per cent. of the boys and 34.8 per cent. of the girls voted for persons in exclusively peaceful pursuits. Warriors, who have not been kings, were not the choice of many of either sex, though they were chosen to a somewhat greater extent by boys than by girls. Rulers are most popular with children of eleven. Girls esteem, more than do boys, authors and artists. Even men of science are more popular with girls than with boys.

Characters from fiction are named to only a very small extent by the children, 3.2 per cent. of the total number. They occur three times as often with the boys as with the girls, 4.9 and 1.4 per cent. respectively. Americans will be interested to find that the author has placed our own Buffalo Bill under this head. He leads the list of favorites of this class. Col. Cody will be surprised to learn that he is a fictitious character. His nearest competitor is Robinson Crusoe. Texas Jack comes third. The writer of this review must admit that he is not sufficiently familiar with American literature to know whether or not the last-named worthy is correctly classified.

Girls choose Biblical characters more than twice as often as do boys, 9.4 and 4.2 per cent. respectively. The percentage for the total number of children was 6 per cent. Two and two-tenths per cent. of the boys and 4.9 per cent. of the girls said they would like to be like God or Jesus. Chambers found that $2\frac{2}{3}$ per cent. of each sex expressed such a desire. Other American investigations show a somewhat larger number; but none indicate a pronounced interest in characters with religious associations. In Scotland, England, and Germany a higher percentage was found. In Edinburgh 7 per cent. of the boys and 13 per cent. of the girls named God or Jesus. Of the London children, studied by Barnes, the corresponding figures were 7 per cent. for the boys and 14 per cent. for the girls, while 4 per cent., chiefly girls, chose Biblical characters other than the Godhead. In a New Jersey investigation, also by Barnes, 4 per cent. of each sex chose the Godhead, but no one named other Biblical characters. In Göttingen 5 per cent. of the boys and 8 per cent. of the girls named God or Jesus, while Biblical characters were chosen by 2 per cent. and 7 per cent. respectively. In the present Gothenburg study no boys older than ten years named Biblical characters, human or divine; no girls older than thirteen. The curves for both sexes go downward, but that for the boys, which at first exceeds that for the girls, sinks much more rapidly.

Girls choose men as ideals several times more frequently than do boys women. While only 7.4 per cent. of the boys have named women, 44.7 per cent. of the girls choose men, a ratio of approximately 1:6. Similar results were obtained in other investigations, especially in America. Miss Dodds, for example, found that 34 per cent. of the girls stated expressly that they would rather be men than women. In England and Germany, the tendency for girls to choose men was less pronounced. In this respect the Swedish children more nearly resemble the American. Among the boys the disposition to choose persons of the opposite sex decreases in the later years, not a single boy over twelve years naming a woman as his ideal. On the other hand, among the girls this tendency increases with age, being more than twice as great at fifteen as at eight. Outside of female acquaintances, the only woman named by boys of any age is Selma Lagerlöf.

Uniformity in the children's choices is greatest from ten to thirteen years. At both earlier and later ages greater variation is shown. As an explanation of this phenomenon the author says, "It would surely be too bold, on the basis of the available material, to attempt to present an hypothesis concerning the cause or causes of the variability in the uniformity. The increasing uniformity might possibly be conceived as depending on the levelling influence of the instruction, and the diminishing uniformity after the age of twelve on the gradually progressing individualization of the child, which at the above-named age may have advanced far enough to make itself felt side by side with the levelling forces of the instruction. The low degree of uniformity among children of eight and nine may thus de-

pend on a certain planlessness in the choice of ideals, the decrease in uniformity after twelve, on the other hand, may be caused by the possible fact of the child's individuality now being sufficiently developed to exercise an influence on its choice. The leveling tendencies of the instruction may make itself most strongly felt between these two stages. It is clear, however, that the correctness of this interpretation may be strongly questioned. Further researches on this point are necessary."

Girls employ, more often than do boys, "the undifferentiated goodness" as motivation for their choice of ideals, 34.4 and 15.7 per cent. respectively. The disposition to use this kind of motivation decreases, however, with both sexes with increasing age, although it decreases somewhat slower with girls than with boys. The use of this so-called "undifferentiated goodness" has been interpreted as an indication of small development in the power of analysis; the different aspects of a personality are conceived as an indefinite whole. But the author does not regard this explanation and its application to the difference between boys and girls in this respect, as conclusive. The fact that clearly girls prize the goodness of people more than do boys, is a factor which has contributed to the difference of the sexes on this point. Not in all instances has mere goodness been given as the only motivation. In many cases, especially among the girls, one or more qualities have been named in addition to goodness in general, showing that the children may be able to differentiate, even when goodness is the chief cause of admiration. On the average about 11 per cent. of each sex uses this "undifferentiated goodness" as the *only* motivation.

Material considerations play a subordinate rôle in the choices of Swedish children. Less than one per cent. have motivated their choices with material advantages of one sort or another enjoyed by their ideals. This motivation is more frequent among boys than among girls. The English, Prussian, and American children valued material things much more highly than do the Swedish. In New Castle the percentage was 6, 7 for the boys and 5 for the girls. Our author comments on these figures as follows: "When we consider that these figures were obtained in investigations in the dollar-land, America, they must be regarded as extremely low." The English and Prussian investigations show larger figures. In London material advantages were named by 10 per cent. of the boys and 14 per cent. of the girls, and in Göttingen 14 per cent. and 5 per cent. respectively, came in this group.

Even social position, honor and fame are matters of small importance in the minds of Swedish children, 2 per cent. of the boys and one per cent. of the girls. A comparison with the results of other investigations are of great interest on this point. It shows that American and English children value "position, honor, greatness" to a much greater degree than do the Swedish. Of the last, only 2 per cent. of the boys and 1 per cent. of the girls come in this class. While in New Castle this motive appeared in 16 per cent. of the children, 18 per cent. of the boys and 13 per cent. of the girls. In London this was the motive of not less than 20 per cent. of the children. This type of motivation occurs to a greater extent among the boys than among the girls in all the different studies.

On the other hand, the Swedish children place intellectual and artistic qualities very high, higher than do English, Prussian, and American children. In Gothenburg 27 per cent. of the boys and 33.9 per cent. of the girls named these as their motivation. Only 3.5 per cent. of the boys and 6 per cent. of the girls in New Castle indicated this as the reason for their choice. In London this group comprised 6 per cent. of the children, in Göttingen 20 per cent. of each sex. All studies show

that girls have greater appreciation of qualities and activities in this field than have boys. Other investigators have found that this appreciation develops with increasing age. The same is true of Swedish children in a very pronounced way, the percentages for the age of eight being 2.8 for boys and 4.4 for girls, for the age of fourteen 43.4 and 62 respectively.

References to physical characteristics, such as an attractive appearance, etc., occur very sparsely, and then mostly at the earlier ages. The percentages for the total number of children are 2 for the boys and 1.4 for the girls. For New Castle, the figures are 2 per cent. for the girls and 1 per cent. for the boys. Greater importance did these qualities have for the English children, namely, 4 per cent. of the total.

Moral qualities were named by 12.4 per cent. of the boys and 22 per cent. of the girls. In Chambers' investigation in New Castle 22 per cent. of the answers were put in this group, a relatively larger number than is the case in the Gothenburg investigation. Other investigators did not place these in a separate class. Closely akin to this type of motivation is that expressed by a desire to help others. Motivation of this kind is most frequent among girls, 4.1 per cent., to 0.9 per cent. among boys. In New Castle the corresponding figures were 5 per cent. and 2 per cent. The results of other investigations point in the same direction. Our author therefore concludes that altruistic tendencies are stronger in girls than in boys. The figures do not indicate a development of altruistic sentiments with age. On the contrary, there is a rather steady decline in the case of the girls. The figures for the boys are so small that no conclusion can be based on them; only at the ages of nine, eleven and thirteen are there any in this class. It has been believed that the altruistic tendencies decrease about the age of twelve or thirteen. The results of the Swedish investigation do not contradict this view. Indeed, the percentages, for girls, are less at twelve and thirteen than at eleven and again at fourteen. They are twice as high for eight and nine as for fourteen. More light, however, is shed on the problem by adding all the motivation in which moral qualities are mentioned, namely, those dealt with under "undifferentiated goodness," "moral qualities" (specific) and "desire to help others." These combined curves show the moral standpoint employed more often by girls than by boys at all ages. "Equally clear does it appear," says our author, "that these purely moral standpoints steadily lose their power over the minds, the older the children become. It does not seem, however, that this fact should give cause for any pessimistic conclusions, for the moral standpoints are clearly displaced by others, which might be placed almost as high, such as intellectual and artistic, social and political." The curves for both sexes show an increase after twelve years, when they are at their lowest point. This fact seems in some measure to confirm the theory referred to above.

Social and political qualities and activities are more esteemed by boys than by girls, 13.5 per cent. and 7.7 per cent. respectively, and this at all ages, except the first, when they are equal. These figures are higher than those which Chambers obtained in New Castle, 4 per cent. for the boys and 3 per cent. for the girls. For Swedish children these standpoints seem to play a greater rôle than for the American. The curves indicate that the social consciousness is in a state of progressive development during school age.

Boys have greater admiration for military qualities and achievements than do girls, 31.7 per cent. and 10.6 per cent. respectively. This admiration increases with both sexes until the age of eleven or twelve, when

it begins to decline. In this group are included those answers which emphasize the devotion to the fatherland manifested by their military favorites. They depend, therefore, also on a social consciousness. Such could be considered as falling under social and political type. The Swedish figures are large, compared with the percentages Chambers obtained in New Castle, 18.5 and 2, for boys and girls respectively. The author adds this comment, "That the Swedish school boys to such a high degree admire military deeds and qualities, has its primary cause in inherent instincts. But these instincts are awakened and developed especially through the instruction in the history of Sweden, which to a large extent is a narrative of glorious victories, won by the Swedish arms."

Our author lastly calculates the number of points of view found in the answers. He finds that girls are richer in points of view than boys. a conclusion, he states, which he has arrived at also in other studies in child psychology. The superiority of the girls in this respect prevails at all ages. After twelve the curves for both sexes show a decided direction upward.

The author concludes his study with a consideration of the pedagogical significance of his results.

Referring to the fact that school children in the early grades choose their ideals from among people with whom they are personally acquainted, and later more and more choose from among people in contemporary public life and characters in history and fiction, "This is an expression of the growth of the personality together with a steadily progressing expansion of the circle of experience. That such a development is desirable, is beyond all doubt. If the children persistently chose their ideal from their immediate surroundings, it would indicate that their development was arrested, and that they possessed a direction of thought and volition answering to narrow provincial conditions and therefore would be without value for more highly developed culture. But," he goes on to say, "this is only one side of the matter. It is clear that this development should not take place with the greatest possible haste. It cannot be desirable that children should regard as ideals persons whom they are not in position to understand. The admiration they give them, thus comes to depend on the fact that they misunderstand them. It is certainly necessary to give the children personal ideals, but it should not take place before the children have reached the age in which they can conceive their real merits. Admiration for the great personalities must not be awakened in a mechanical way or exclusively by the aid of faith in authority. Such an admiration is external and artificial and leaves the child's volitional life untouched."

The author states as a general pedagogical principle, that "children at the earliest ages should look up to and have devotion for their parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, and others with whom they come in personal contact." This seems to be the presupposition for their being able really to raise up as ideals the greater personalities, whom they later meet in history and literature.

Speaking of the age when the transition should be made, the author states that we have not yet a pedagogical thermometer for the exact determination of this and most other problems of the science, depending as it does on so many factors of which we have as yet no definite knowledge. He refers to the fact that the studies in America showed that children of six, seven, and eight to a pronounced extent chose historical and public characters as ideals, must naturally be regarded as depending on the children's being led altogether too early into a

world, which only at a later age they are in condition to understand." He questions whether even Swedish children do not make this transition too hastily, especially about the tenth year. Even children of ten years may find it difficult to get any high degree of understanding of historical and public characters, and "it can be assumed that their indicated choice is in many cases not an expression of a definite volitional direction."

In this connection the author presents four curves showing the frequency of choice, by the New Castle children, of Washington and Lincoln, and, by the Gothenburg children, of Gustavus Adolphus and Gustavus Vasa. We get two types of curves. One type is represented by the curves for Washington and the two Swedish kings, which are very much alike, the second type by the curve for Lincoln. The first three curves all reach their culmination at the age of eleven, after which they decline, the Lincoln curve, on the other hand, rises pretty steadily and reaches its highest point at the last age studied. Concerning the first type the author thinks it necessary to inquire whether its rapid rise and fall are not causally connected. Barnes and Chambers have considered this question in the case of Washington. Our Swedish investigator agrees with their conclusion that Washington is impressed upon the children at an age when they ought to seek their ideals in their immediate environment, for when "the sugar coating" is worn off through later reading and experience, children turn away from their former idol. The same he holds to be true of the two Swedish heroes. The Lincoln curve he considers an indication of the more normal, truly idealistic development.