

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ATTITUDES
ON THE MENTAL CURVE OF ADOLESCENTS

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Under the influence of G. Stanley Hall and his disciples, students of secondary education assumed that at adolescence there is an abrupt physical development followed by a marvellous mental and emotional unfolding, an intense critical activity, a new love of nature, and an amazing assimilation of wisdom; that is, "the mind at times grows in leaps and bounds," defying all analysis and explanation. But during the past fifteen years, all writers on adolescence have begun by asserting their disbelief in the abandoned saltatory theory, then they proceeded to prove by tables and graphs the untenability of the theory, especially as relates to a sudden change in the rate of growth of the *specific* mental powers. Why this anxiety over an abandoned theory?

Do the statistical tables and graphs tell the whole truth when the attitudes characteristic of adolescence are not called into action? When only paper-and-pencil tests are applied, we are not dealing with pupils as going concerns. Tests were given to the same group of children over a period of years by Baldwin and Stecher¹, Wolley², Thorndike³, and Brooks⁴. Then Brooks brought together the results of many studies with a view to securing greater reliability. By putting these laboratory data together, all we get in defense of the discredited belief is that there is a slight increase in the mental growth rate between thirteen and fourteen.

But what of it? The results are not impressive for any one who has lived face to face in social relations with preadolescent and adolescent groups. Any one who has had this privilege knows that the mental reactions of a face-to-face adolescent group are quantitatively and qualitatively different from those of the preadolescent group. He knows this with the same certainty as he knows any other social phenomenon that occurs under immediate observation. Since the advent of our much objective testing and measuring, the traits and developments most characteristic of adolescence have received little attention, for the reason that there seem to be inherent obstacles that block the measuring of these traits and developments. Youth cannot be defined in terms of any isolated entity but only in terms that include the interaction between the individual and his group. We are interested in the responses of the whole situation, which is a complex stimulus-pattern. The responses are configurational and do not readily yield to objective measuring. Hence this study suffers because objective variable facts are not available to any large extent.

P. F. Furfey⁵ made an effort to measure the changing volitional life of 982 boys from eight to eighteen. He named the element under consideration "developmental age." The results, as tabulated and charted, portray "the progressively increasing and non-intellectual maturity of general behavior." The change in personality is due to "some combination of extrinsic and intrinsic causes." The extrinsic causes of course include the social heritage, which begins to be appreciated during adolescence. Furfey found

that the scores increase regularly during preadolescence, that the curve turns upward more sharply from twelve to sixteen, and that after sixteen there is no tendency to increase. The significance of these findings lies in the increase during early adolescence and in the fact that the developmental age does not correlate closely with the physiological age. The full report of Furfey's study indicates that it is in social situations that the adolescent comes nearest to unifying and integrating all his responses.

One of the assumptions in the use of the various tests has been that any kind of ability is directly proportional to the performance resulting from the use of that ability; whereas in the interest of scientific accuracy, we should add that any form of active psychic energy is always conditioned by other concurrent physical and psychical forces, forces that in this case defy definite measurement. That is, mental energy, the results of which we think we can measure, is definitely conditioned by causally related social and emotional impulses.

In this discussion we seem to be justified in reasoning from physical causes to psychical effects. The maturation of the endocrine glands furnishes the physical basis for many of the psychic changes that are characteristic of adolescent development. What then are the social and emotional attitudes and responses that have their origin in glandular maturation? They are well known to observers of boys and girls in their teens; they are gregariousness, a new interest of boys and girls in each other, independence and self-assertion, a desire to cooperate and do team-work (group loyalty), a desire for social approval, and other alter-centric proclivities. Thus we must not leave out of our reckoning the new functioning of the endocrine glands, which supplies the internal stimulus and increases the emotional and social tension. Mental tests do not provide the conditions which stimulate unified emotionally toned responses; the attitudes and drives involved are shunted out of the circuit; in other words, they are not part of the configuration.

Our conclusion is that any test which tests a single function fails to recognize the principle that the whole determines the functioning of any of its parts, that the functioning of the whole cannot be determined by any of its parts, that the functioning of the whole cannot be determined by even the most accurate knowledge concerning the functioning of all the parts, and that consequently there emerges from the functioning of the whole new results, new entities. However, none of the foregoing leads to the conclusion that there arises any new mental powers during adolescence; but we must conclude that there comes a new mode of functioning which appears as more critical judgments and greater ability to deal with abstract situations and think in a broader way. Moreover, when the group is confronted day after day with the same kind of social stimulus, there is a constant and progressive *growth* in the direction of ability to respond to social interstimulation; that is, there is a gradual *building up* of social response habits which no purely mental test can reach. Thus the final conclusion is that it is arbitrary and unscientific to *separate* the purely mental aspects of the adolescent, proceed to measure and chart our findings, then conclude that we have obtained practical results that will aid us in better understanding and sympathetically dealing with classroom situations.

¹ Baldwin, B. T., and Stecher, L. I., "Mental Growth Curve of Normal and Superior Children." University of Iowa Studies in Child Welfare, Vol. II, No. 1.

² Data collected at Cincinnati, Ohio, not published in full.

³ Thorndike, E. L., "On the Improvement of Intelligence Scores from Fourteen to Eighteen", Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. XIV.

⁴ Brooks, F. D., The Psychology of Adolescence, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929.

⁵ Furfey, Paul H., "Child Development", June, 1931.