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THE PROBLEMS AND INTERESTS OF HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS¹

OWEN HAFFNER AND DONALD SCHILD

PROBLEM AND PROCEDURE

The purpose of this study was to determine the concerns of interest and the personal problems of high school and college students. The problem was conducted in connection with a course in the psychology of motivation, at Iowa State College. The functional approach in education is receiving much emphasis at the present. If the work of the school can relate itself to the needs and interests of the students, its effectiveness can be greatly increased. Studies such as the present one are thought to be of value in considering curricular offerings of high schools and colleges.

The procedure for the study was adopted from a similar investigation by Symonds². To find out the phases of current living which adolescents consider the most serious and the most interesting, Symonds submitted a questionnaire covering fifteen areas of living, to some nine hundred high school students of Tulsa, and to a similar number in New York City. Our data will be compared to those obtained by Symonds.

The form used in collecting our data is shown in table I. The

Table I—Questionnaire Form Used

Factor	Personal Problems	Concerns of Interest
Health	_____	_____
Sex adjustments	_____	_____
Safety	_____	_____
Money	_____	_____
Mental hygiene	_____	_____
Study habits	_____	_____
Recreation	_____	_____
Personal and moral qualities	_____	_____
Home and family relations	_____	_____
Manners and courtesy	_____	_____
Personal attractiveness	_____	_____
Daily Schedule	_____	_____
Civic interests	_____	_____
Getting along with people	_____	_____
Philosophy of life	_____	_____

¹ The writers acknowledge the assistance of Dr. L. K. Henry of Iowa State College and Principal Verne Young of the Ames High School in obtaining the data and preparing the report.

² Symonds, P. M., "Life Problems and Interests of Adolescents," *School Review*, Vol. 44, September, 1936, pp. 508-518.

instructions which accompanied the questionnaire are as follows: "Put a number from 1 to 15 in the column to the right of each item, indicating its rank according to importance as: Personal Problems and as Concerns of Interest."

The questionnaire was administered to a sampling of 161 high school students, consisting of 88 boys and 73 girls and also to 123 college students who were enrolled in elementary psychology. The latter group contained 76 men and 47 women. Final ranking of the fifteen areas was obtained by adding the individual ratings of students.

RESULTS

Table II shows how the high school students ranked the fifteen areas as regards personal problems. Significant sex differences are to be noted in the case of health, safety, mental hygiene, manners and personal attractiveness. For the combined rating, getting

Table II — Personal Problems — 161 H. S.

Factor	Boys	Girls	Total
Health	1	6	2
Sex adjustments	11	14	14
Safety	8	13	12
Money	3	3	3
Mental hygiene	7	12	11
Study habits	6	8	8
Recreation	10	11	10
Personal and moral problems	5	5	5
Home and family relations	4	4	4
Manners and courtesy	15	7	7
Personal attractiveness	9	2	6
Daily Schedule	13.5	10	13
Civic interests	13.5	15	15
Getting along with people	2	1	1
Philosophy of life	12	9	9

Table III — Interests of High School Students

Factor	Boys	Girls	Total
Health	1	1	1
Sex adjustments	12	11	12
Safety	11	12	11
Money	4	4	4
Mental hygiene	9	10	9
Study habits	10	13	10
Recreation	5	8	7
Personal and moral problems	8	6	8
Home and family relations	6	7	6
Manners and courtesy	3	5	5
Personal attractiveness	7	2	3
Daily Schedule	14	14	14
Civic interests	13	15	15
Getting along with people	2	3	2
Philosophy of life	15	9	13

along with people, health, money family relations and personal problems rank in the order named.

The concerns of interest of high school students are indicated in Table III. Sex differences in interest are not noticeable in many instances. Philosophy of life is ranked ninth by girls and fifteenth by boys. The general pattern of interests is similar to the pattern of problems. It is significant to note that sex adjustments, civic interests and daily schedule rank very low in both tables.

The personal problems reported by college students are reported in Table IV. Some rather significant sex differences are to be noted. Women rate study habits first while the men rate the same factor fifteenth. Other sex differences are similar to those noted in the high school group, with the exception of sex adjustments. In the total ranking of problems, money now ranks first place, with health second and getting along with people third. Civic interests and safety stay well toward the bottom of the list.

Table IV—Problems of College Students

Factor	Men	Women	Total
Health	2	6	2
Sex adjustments	5	11	6
Safety	13	15	15
Money	1	4	1
Mental hygiene	7	14	10
Study habits	15	1	13
Recreation	6	8	12
Personal and moral problems	3	10	4
Home and family relations	8	12	8
Manners and courtesy	9	9	7
Personal attractiveness	11	5	9
Daily Schedule	12	7	11
Civic interests	14	13	14
Getting along with people	4	3	13
Philosophy of life	10	2	5

Table V—Interests of College Students

Factor	Men	Women	Total
Health	1	2	1
Sex adjustments	6	13	8
Safety	11	15	14
Money	5	10	6
Mental hygiene	10	14	12
Study habits	13	6	11
Recreation	8	7	7
Personal and moral problems	3	5	4
Home and family relations	9	9	9
Manners and courtesy	7	8	5
Personal attractiveness	12	4	10
Daily Schedule	15	12	15
Civic interests	14	11	3
Getting along with people	2	1	2
Philosophy of life	4	3	3

What are the interests of college students? Table V shows that health and getting along with people are still at the top. Philosophy of life ranks third in interest as compared to ninth with the younger group. Civic interests and safety are relatively uninteresting.

How do our data compare with those of Symonds? How do high school and college students compare? Table VI presents this comparison for the matter of personal problems. It will be noted

Table VI—Problems of the Three Populations

Factor	Tulsa & N. Y.	A. H. S.	I. S. C.
Health	2	2	2
Sex adjustments	15	14	6
Safety	12	12	15
Money	1	3	1
Mental hygiene	11	11	10
Study habits	4	8	13
Recreation	10	10	12
Personal and moral problems	5	5	4
Home and family relations	8	4	8
Manners and courtesy	7	7	7
Personal attractiveness	3	6	9
Daily Schedule	14	13	11
Civic interests	13	15	14
Getting along with people	9	1	3
Philosophy of life	6	9	5

that health and manners are the only factors given the same rating by all groups. The following differences should be noted:

1. Sex adjustments present a greater problem to the college students studied than to the high school students.
2. Money is an important problem with all groups.
3. Study habits were an important problem in Symonds group, of average importance with our high school students and, surprisingly enough, relatively unimportant with the college students.
4. It is difficult to explain why Ames high school students rank

Table VII—Interests of the Three Populations

Factor	Tulsa & N. Y.	A. H. S.	I. S. C.
Health	2	1	1
Sex adjustments	13	12	8
Safety	10	11	14
Money	7	4	6
Mental hygiene	12	9	12
Study habits	11	10	11
Recreation	1	7	7
Personal and moral problems	8	8	4
Home and family relations	9	6	9
Manners and courtesy	4	5	5
Personal attractiveness	3	3	10
Daily Schedule	15	14	15
Civic interests	14	15	13

"getting along with people" first, while the other city high school students rank the same factor ninth.

5. Safety, mental hygiene, recreation, daily schedule and civic interests are relatively unimportant problems with all groups.

A comparison of the concerns of interest of the three groups is made in Table VII. No factor is given the same rating by all groups. The Tulsa and New York high school students are much more interested in recreation than are our two groups. The college students and the large city youngsters are more interested in a philosophy of life than the local high school students. Personal attractiveness ranks third with high school students and tenth with college students.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Health, money and getting along with people seem to be the three most important problems to high school and college students. These items and personal attractiveness rank high as concerns of interest.

Civic interests, study habits and safety rank low, both as personal problems and as concerns of interest. The fact that civic affairs rank low with all groups as far as interest is concerned may imply that an important aspect of our training for citizenship is being overlooked. Certainly our activity in this area is mild when compared to that of other countries.

We would agree with Symonds that the schools might well give more training in the wise handling of money, and in worthy ways of increasing personal attractiveness. Certainly the schools "have a mandate" to supply formal instruction in health and supply health service. There exists the challenge to make the worthy areas of activity more interesting.

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