

Youth: Ego Ideals and the Impact of Culture

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Current manifestations of youth unrest challenge behavioral scientists in many disciplines to supply a framework for understanding the psychological reorganization occurring at the time of adolescence and young adulthood (the epoch of youth). It is becoming increasingly clear that intergenerational communication presupposes such genuine understanding between participants in a dialogue or confrontation. What light can we shed on the intrapsychic reorganization by in-depth individual study of young people undergoing psychoanalysis? What theoretical constructs can we derive from such studies that would suggest working hypotheses for validation by related disciplines? Clinical examples will be given during this symposium in the two main papers to illustrate theoretical concepts, especially those concerned with grouped mental functions which we designate as the structures, ego, id, and superego, or ego-ideal as well as other representations designated as Reality. As our knowledge has grown and with it an increasing capacity for generalization, both intrasystemic and intersystemic relations between them have become both clearer and more easily applied to specified clinical problems. At the same time the context of normal human development has had to be elucidated.

The panel will direct its focus primarily on the changes occurring in the Ego-Ideal system in its relationships with the Ego, and Reality during the epoch, Youth. Ego-ideal may be defined as the image of the self to which the individual aspires both consciously and unconsciously. In the process of development it begins as a substitute formation taking the place of the lost narcissism of childhood. At a later phase ego-ideal appears to be made up of identifications with the parents (and others) not only idealized, but, in actuality, as infantile drive strivings toward them have simultaneously been given up. When the actual self does not measure up to the ego-ideal, disorders of self-esteem occur, and some of these will be touched upon. Being closely related to moral values and ethical standards, the ego-ideal is very much related to the superego function, commonly regarded as the one which is

prohibitive, enforcing, and critical in childhood and becoming ultimately the conscience of the mature adult.

Data have been accumulating to show that the capacity for the formation of the ego-ideal is probably a constitutional given. However ego-ideal contents are quite specifically the identifications with parents, and in turn bear the environmental stamp of particular experiences undergone by the individual in the course of his development, and further colored and elaborated by other mental contexts which would distort it. (In-depth study of pathological states often reveals that the parents were not all that punitive or demanding, for example.) From a broader viewpoint the ego-ideal has a social interface for it must necessarily contain the common ideal of the family and even larger group-ideal formations. It represents "the voice of the past in the present," that is, the transmission of culture by training and education of the moral and intellectual nature of man, again giving the ego-ideal highly specific contents.

Since this meeting is to be a half-day panel, discussion will be adumbrated, passing over the learning of drive controls at earlier age levels to the final rearrangements which occur between adolescence and young adulthood. The ego is now faced with multiple intrapsychic demands, not only from the maturing sexual drives, but with the demands of represented Reality, ego-ideal, and superego. Ritvo will show how the maturing ego must translate the ego-

ideal into possible achievable goals (resonant with opportunities in reality) as well as cope with obstacles. In adolescence, regressive mobilization of old wish fulfilling self-images, grandiose notions of the self, and glorified and heroic fantasies serve only to set the individual up for intolerable anxieties in anticipation of failure, if realistic commitment to the world is undertaken. "Drop-out" psychology will be considered by the panel in this connection, and Esman's paper will also consider the effect of drugs in manipulating such mental states artificially.

Simultaneous rejection and devaluation of former ego-ideal states and incorporation of new ones is a very complex process, and while they may appear to be replications, epigenetic processes also occur. These are related to cultural experience in part, and the symbolization of culture as "social ideals" also renders the latter subject to ego-integration and synthesis in keeping with reality. Ritvo will present data to show some of the courses followed by youths caught up in the complexities posed by gaps between reality and ideals, and between rationalization and fact. The sorely beset ego must mediate between values of the past, traditional institutions such as church, politics, and the military and the massive contemporary informational input from levels of higher education, intellectual training, and multivariate factors related to instantaneous worldwide communications media. Exploration, integration, and self-directing ego-ideal go hand in hand in the ego-synthesis which brings to a close the epoch, youth.

The panel members, all psychoanalysts, will then detail special problems which they have encountered in some of the social groupings with which they have worked. The study of ego-ideals as found during the period of greatest rearrangement, in youth, considered in the social matrix of several different groups, should prove of great interest to research workers in many disciplines.

The symposium is under the sponsorship of the American Psychoanalytic Association. Herman M. Serota (University of Chicago) is the arranger.

HERMAN M. SEROTA
University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

Speakers

Samuel Ritvo (Yale University Study Center).

Aaron Esman (Jewish Board of Guardians, New York).

Charlotte Babcock (University of Pittsburgh Medical School).

Seymour Lustman (Yale University Child Study Center).

Jeanne Spurlock (Meaharry Medical School).

Gabriel Casuso (University of Miami).