

Trends in Preadolescent and Adolescent "Fears and Worries": A Comparison of Boys and Girls from Ages 9 through 18

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ABSTRACT

The things which people are afraid of, or worry about, make up an area of importance in the study and practice of mental health, education, and various fields of psychology. An earlier study (1) compared the fears and worries of Oklahoma children of two socio-economic levels. The present study seeks answers to these questions: (a) How do boys differ from girls in their types of fears and worries, and (b) what age-trends exist for the sexes in content of fears and worries?

The following stimulus question was given to 343 pupils (159 boys and 184 girls) of the Hollis, Oklahoma schools: "List the fears and worries you think persons of your own age group have." This unstructured stimulus question elicited a total of 3715 items (1589 from boys and 2126 from girls). These were later classified into twelve categories and graphs were drawn showing the per cents of expressed fears and worries which fell into each of the twelve categories at each age. These graphs showed shifts in the relative importance of types of fears and worries rather than the absolute number expressed by the subjects. Tests of significance were carried out between sexes for each age group by computing a series of 2x2 chi square analyses.

Of the six categories showing fairly constant sex differences, girls tended to be concerned with health, personal appearance, and social relations, while boys seemed more concerned about school, domestic animals, and, after age 13, economic matters. Statistically significant differences between the number of worries expressed by boys and girls were found in all areas studied except school, political, and personal appearance.

Concern with natural phenomena and animals decreased in relative importance with age, while economic, political, personal appearance, and personal conduct worries tended to increase. Safety and health worries rose to a peak in preadolescence and early adolescence respectively, then declined. The other three categories—social relations, supernatural, and school—remained more constant in proportion. School fears showed two peaks corresponding to age of entry into junior and senior high school, with a gradual decline after each.

The boys' one-to-two-year maturational lag behind the girls showed up clearly in the areas of health, social relations, and personal conduct.

REFERENCES

1. Angelino, H., Dollins, J., and Mech, E. V. Trends in the fears and worries of school children as related to socio-economic status and age." *J. Genet. Psychol.* (In press).