The Self Ideal versus the Model Ideal

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ABSTRACT: A list of 50 ways of perceiving one's personal ideal was constructed and administered to 74 women about to make a lifelong commitment. The mean number of items endorsed was 28. An item analysis yielded discrimination indices for 28 items at better than the .05 level of significance. These attitudes were discussed as less motivativing, and opposite attitudes from the same point of view were grouped under six principles of motivation: dominant relationship, closeness, growth, valuational center, similarity, realism. From these two diametrically opposite perceptual structures of attitudes emerged the self ideal and the model ideal.

People are motivated by the ideal they are trying to realize. But in counseling sessions it has been noticed that what people have proposed to themselves as an ideal frequently is not really an ideal at all but simply a model. Instead of their motivation being in terms of final causality, it is in terms of exemplary causality. In psychoanalytic terminology, their ideal seems to be a function of the superego instead of a function of the ego ideal. The content of their ideal is, however, only one source of motivation. The attitudes underlying that ideal are another source of motivation.

When consideration moves from the ideal and its content to the attitudes toward the personal ideal, attention is directed away from the referent of the attitude to the attitude itself. In an attitude there is observed the special way of perceiving the ideal, the elicited emotions arising from perceiving the ideal as a value, and the consequent tendencies to behave in certain ways relative to the referent of that attitude. Focus in this investigation is on the perceptual components of the attitudes underlying the ideal. The investigation has disclosed that people have a variety of ways of perceiving their personal ideal.

The source of motivation considered in this study is in the perceptual component of the attitudes toward the personal ideal. As soon as a client in counseling perceives the situation in a new way, often he is observed to be activated to think, feel, and act in a more purposeful manner. In this instance a change in motivation is observed that is identical with or at least concomitant with a change in perception. Motivation is seen as "...the process of arousing action, sustaining the activity in progress, and regulating the pattern of activity." It is precisely here in perception that a determinant of motivated...
behavior is found, behavior that is aroused, directed, energized, regulated, and sustained. This cognitive character of motivation was brought out by the retiring president of the Division of General Psychology in 1960:

Off and on for a number of years, I have been identified with a controversial point of view that perception is not governed by motivation. Today I shall introduce a new element of controversy by turning the topic upside down and asking you to consider the possibility that what we call motives are really a particular kind of perceptual or cognitive event. To some of you that may sound like nonsense or worse, but let me see if I cannot make some kind of sense out of it for you. Certainly motivational theory is in the doldrums, and if I can suggest a new slant on old problems, some good may result so long as you reject them on empirical grounds—which will mean doing new research and adding to our pathetically small store of facts in the field of human motivation.  

The variety of attitudes toward a personal ideal were derived chiefly from sessions in spiritual direction and counseling, especially from the goal-setting stage of the counseling session, but also from research on level of aspiration, ego ideal and superego, creation of ideals, development of the ideal self, congruence of self and ideal self, and motivation in perception.  

From a population of nearly 200 perceptions of a personal ideal, 100 perceptions were retained after eliminating similar, unclear, and merely verbally different perceptions. An intensive analysis of these perceptions showed that two perceptions could be paired, since they were from the same point of view. As an example, the point of view of distance could embrace two perceptions: perceiving the personal ideal in terms of being far from a person; perceiving the personal ideal in terms of being near to a person. Thus there were two perceptions from each of 50 points of view. An estimate was then made of which of the two perceptions from each point of view was more frequent. These perceptions estimated to be more frequent composed the list of 50 perceptions that were presented to the subjects of the study. Each perception was phrased in the form of a question, and the point of view was included in each question.  

The purpose of the investigation is to discover all the attitudes toward the personal ideal people have by asking them whether or not they have any or all of the 50 ways of perceiving a personal ideal. The sum total of perceptions an individual has toward his personal ideal is his perceptual structure or his constellation of attitudes. The 50 perceptions used in the interview compose the model perceptual structure or the model constellation of attitudes, and are associated with the model ideal, their referent. It is assumed that a person's constellation of attitudes toward a personal ideal contains a mixture of attitudes from both constellations. Thus, those endorsing a large number of attitudes of the model constellation are presumed to have few of the self constellation; those endorsing a small number of attitudes of the model constellation are presumed to have many of the self constellation. The basis of these assumptions is the fact that each and every attitude in the model constellation has its corresponding opposite in the self constellation.