

YOUTH AND THE CONTINUITY OF GENERATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE *

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Change in Society

It is altogether fitting that Dr. Kenneth Keniston should have keynoted this conference. Choice of a social scientist is in keeping with the growing importance of this field as seen on the one hand by the recent creation of a new division of social sciences in the National Science Foundation in Washington, and, on the other hand, by the *New Yorker Magazine* carrying in a recent issue the profile of Robert K. Merton, a distinguished sociologist.

Dr. Keniston approaches his subject with a comprehensive summary of the general characteristics of the changes that are influencing our society today, changes that he describes as pervasive, independently valued, institutionalized, accelerating and open-ended. He regards these changes as historically unique. When Dr. Keniston refers to culture-contact change, i.e., change when members of two previously separated cultures come into contact for the first time, it reminds me of an experience a few years ago with a French teen-age girl who lived in my home as a foreign exchange student. The day eventually came when the young lady was called upon to speak before a P.T.A. group.

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Boston, May 28, 1961.

She chose to talk about how she happened to come to America, explaining that she saw an American Field Service poster on the bulletin board at school, then dashed home to tell her parents she wanted to go to the United States for a year's study. Her mother said absolutely no—she was too young—a year was too long—and America was too far away. Just at that moment her father came home. Our young lady appealed to him, and he approved. Luckily for her, she told the P.T.A. audience, in France the father, and not the mother, is the boss in the family, and she thought it was the same all over the world, until she came to Baltimore to live with the Goldmans.

In Dr. Keniston's analysis of change he notes how much we have come to accept change in our society, and points out that many of our words of highest praise stress innovation and transformation, e.g., dynamic, modern, growing, and so on. That this is an accurate observation is borne out by a recent article of the American historian, Henry Steele Commager. Commager writes with enthusiasm of the positive aspects of change, with no reference whatsoever to the many serious problems resulting from change. He writes of change as fascinating, exciting, and irresistibly interesting, and credits Americans as being most resourceful, most ready to chal-

lenge the traditional and embark on new enterprises. "To cling to the past," says Dr. Commager, is to go backward."¹

Dr. Keniston, however, directs our attention to the serious social consequences of these fast moving changes: the discontinuity between generations and the difficulty in preparing youth for an unknown and uncertain future. His analysis of the dilemma of youth, characterized by alienation, a feeling of helplessness in the face of overpowering social forces, and an unwillingness to take on adult responsibilities, is at once suggestive of Peter Pan in the Broadway musical singing, "I won't grow up, I will never even try, I'm never gonna be a man," and T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," where we find the theme of the younger generation disillusioned with their elders and despairing of society and its future.

Nevertheless, in spite of the disturbing picture he paints of modern youth, Dr. Keniston finds hope for a brighter future in our ability to shape society, if we are willing to try, and in mankind's enduring values and ethical principles which can provide the continuity for a changing society.

The phenomenon of change in our society, and its responsibility for many of our social ills, has long been a familiar theme of sociologists and novelists. Kingsley Davis, more than 20 years ago, and before the atom bomb, earth satellites, and man in space, asked why contemporary Western civilization showed so much parent-adolescent conflict. His investigation of this question led him to believe that the extremely rapid rate of social change tends to increase conflict and create a hiatus between one generation and the next.² Similarly, Tur-

¹ Henry Steel Commager, "We Have Changed—and Must," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 30, 1961. p. 10.

² Kingsley Davis, "The Sociology of Parent-Child Youth Conflict," Stein and Cloward, Eds.,

genev, in his novel "Fathers and Sons," written more than a hundred years ago, at a time of great social change resulting from the freeing of the serfs, wrote of the ancient conflict between the younger and older generation. Turgenev related this conflict to the emergence of new forces in Russia, with the younger generation negating all of the traditional elements in Russian society, held so dearly by their elders.

Seymour Lipset, a contemporary American sociologist, pointed out that a century ago British travellers in the United States were struck with the "lack of discipline in the home, the loss of parental control, children doing as they pleased, arguing with their parents, etc."³

Relation of Social Work to Change

The continuing process of change that Dr. Keniston describes as a basic and all pervasive part of our society, is also well known to social work. In the span of my own 25 years and more in social work I can remember delivering food baskets to hungry families, escorting clients to the agency clothing room, ending cases with the notation in the record "case closed, client uncooperative," and can even recall with a nostalgic feeling when there was a caseworker for every job, and the executive's problem was not a shortage but a surplus of job applicants. Casework theory and practice, the kinds of clients coming for help, the nature of their problems, the use made of agencies by the community, and the degree of responsibility the community was willing to take for its troubled members, have all undergone profound changes.

Social Perspectives on Behavior, The Free Press, Glencoe, Ill. 1958, pp. 35-44.

³ Seymour M. Lipset, "Constant Values in American Society," *Children*, Nov.-Dec., 1959, pp. 219-224.

Social work also has another interest in change, a professional interest that has to do with our belief in man's capacity to change and to make things different for himself. Most, if not all, of the individuals and families who come to a social agency want some change in their lives, either to alter a present condition, or to remove the dangers that threaten personal stability and family continuity. This belief in man's capacity for change, even if only a limited change, in man's ability to influence in some measure his own destiny, is a deep-seated principle in social work, a principle that has been tested in the life experience of every one of us. While I agree with Dr. Keniston that "no man has ever been able to completely predict or control the precise events that will befall him," every man has at least some limited mastery over his fate. Moreover, within the "increasing and unpredictable changeability of the life situations in which we live," so well delineated by Dr. Keniston, there is still room for personal striving and struggle toward goals, without which life would be meaningless.

Youth in a Changing Society

Dr. Keniston's analysis of the problems of modern youth is most penetrating, yet I cannot help but feel that his portrayal is somewhat one-sided and out of balance. His comments about the lack of rebelliousness in youth against the older generation bring to mind the recent incident at Harvard when several hundred students marched in protest against President Pusey's decision to issue diplomas in English instead of the traditional Latin, voicing the battle-cry, "Latin, si; Pusey, no!"

Dr. Keniston's concern is that most young people are gripped with a widespread feeling of powerlessness, social, political, and personal, and no longer

feel that they can make an impact upon society. This is not the conclusion reached by other observers of the social scene, although I do not doubt that Dr. Keniston can find many who share his belief.

For example, Dr. Harold Taylor, former president of Sarah Lawrence College and now a lecturer before university groups, views youth in a somewhat different perspective. He sees them as ahead of their government and their country in matters of principle and desire for positive action. Writing in a recent issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, Dr. Taylor argues that this is a generation with idealism, highly developed critical faculties, and capability for moral leadership. He cites the Negro students in the South and the sit-in strikes, the student protests against the loyalty oaths and the nuclear arms policy, as evidence of their active, and even aggressive interest in working against social injustice and political wrongs. Some of these students, says Dr. Taylor, are even planning to enter politics after graduation. Many have already worked in election campaigns, have had their taste of politics, and have found excitement and challenge in the political life. Dr. Taylor concludes that there is indeed a new movement, a new spirit in a new generation, willing to tackle world problems on their own, looking for new alternatives, ready to show the world what they can do.⁴

Similar to Dr. Taylor's findings is the report of Milton Mayer, journalist and lecturer, who tells us that the American university student is becoming a political animal. His article pictures youth in revolt against their elders, rejecting the older generation, and ardently working towards changing the social and political

⁴ Harold Taylor, "The New Young Are Now Head," *The New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 29, 1961, p. 5.

conditions that they find unacceptable to their sense of justice.⁵

The latest annual report of Margaret Clapp, President of Wellesley College, is also representative of those who see youth in a less worrisome light. Quoting President Clapp, "A third area of transition at Wellesley and, therefore, probably elsewhere, seems to exist in renewed individualism. There is somewhat less concern among undergraduates for approbation than there was a decade ago, more insistence on the importance of the self than of the group, more interest in how the self can thrive in the after-college world of organization. Surely this is the main stream of Western civilization." This analysis of student character is in contrast with the other-directed, the uncommitted and alienated, and the so-called "beat."

Searching for a solution to the problems of youth in contemporary society, Dr. Keniston suggests two possibilities which he believes offer some hope toward providing the essential continuity between generations: shaping and directing social change toward socially desirable goals; and the rediscovery of the enduring human values and life principles with a willingness to create new ideals appropriate to our time. I thoroughly agree with Dr. Keniston's thoughts on shaping the future course of society through social planning. I would also agree that there is a middle ground between totalitarian planning, and open, uncontrolled change, which allows forces and pressures other than the public interest to influence the course of change.

Planning Change in Social Work

Planning towards socially desirable goals is a basic part of casework practice and communal service, even though

⁵ Milton Mayer, "The Found Generation," *The Progressive*, March, 1961, pp. 9-12.

our best laid plans may not always achieve our goals. It sometimes seems that a bandwagon psychology takes over in social work, and agencies hasten to offer services more in response to what is professionally fashionable than in response to client need. Planning in social work should be geared to changing community needs rather than professional interests, although this may mean, in some instances, giving up well entrenched programs and established ways of offering services. Changing services to meet the changes in social problems and clientele created by the depression, World War II, the wave of refugee immigration, and the increasing number and needs of the aged are all part of a story, too well known to bear repetition here, but these are major instances of agencies planning their programs to meet changing social needs, and developing new skills to meet these needs responsibly.

Social Work's Role in Strengthening Family Life

But what of the enduring human values and life principles that, despite the very rapid social change, can still provide a conduit between the generations, and how does social work relate to these values? For me, the answer is a clear one. Despite the changes it has undergone in response to changes in the wider society, the family continues as the instrument for transmitting our culture, our ethical values, and for stabilizing our society. The family is both the carrier of the moral principles that men live by, and is, in itself, an enduring human value, an essential and vital part of our life and society. When family stability has been weakened by domestic conflict, or when a child is made homeless because of parental inability to provide care, it is social work's task to strengthen family solidarity or to provide a substitute family.

Social work has had a long acquaintance with family conflict associated with cultural differences, as seen in our work with refugee families, and is not unfamiliar with problems resulting from conflict between the generations. We have seen how frequently these conflicts express themselves in problems of closed communication between parent and child, between the older and the younger generation, the European and the American born. Sensitive to these cultural differences and conflicts between parents and youth, social work acts to open up and restore channels of communication as a means of improving family harmony and stability.

Social work's role in strengthening family life in the midst of deep and continuing social changes is a challenging one and, in the effort to keep abreast of new problems and to keep related to new needs, the profession must strive to strengthen its own knowledge and skills. In this regard there is a growing recognition of the importance of the influence of society and its stresses and strains upon individual and family life. With this increased awareness comes the need to achieve eventually an integrated understanding of the individual, his family, and society, and their inter-relatedness in order to treat adequately problems of personal and family adjustment. In the historical development of casework theory and practice, the profession has moved from an emphasis on individual psychology to a concern with family and group dynamics. Professional literature is now showing a growing interest in family diagnosis and family-centered treatment. More and more articles are beginning to appear on the relationship between social and cultural factors and individual problems, and the contribution that the social sciences can make as a new dimension to casework diagnosis and treatment. For example, Dr. Maurice R. Friend,

a psychoanalyst on the faculty of the New York School of Social Work, clearly favors the inclusion of social science concepts in teaching casework.⁶ However, much of the literature, after initially conceding that the social sciences have something of value for casework understanding and treatment, warns against too heavy reliance upon the social sciences for easy answers to hard questions. While agreeing that the social sciences can make a contribution to casework, Florence Hollis is lukewarm about the Curriculum Study's recommendations on increasing social science content, and cautions us against devaluing psychological material.⁷

Social Science in Social Work

Even though some writers have found it necessary to warn the profession against going overboard in relying on the social sciences, it is my impression that while the schools of social work are giving increasing attention to the relationship of social science concepts to casework, group work, and community organization, only a handful of agencies have had any actual experience in working with sociologists. More experience is needed from the field to balance and enrich the theory taught in the classrooms. Rather than sounding the alarm, I would urge agencies to learn through doing what the social sciences have to offer that would promote agency purpose, be it in the casework, group work, or community organization fields. Family Service Association of America reports no great evidence of this type of collaboration in member agencies.

⁶ Maurice R. Friend, "Proceedings of the Conference on Family Diagnosis," *Social Service Review*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, March, 1960, pp. 2-16.

⁷ Florence Hollis, "The Implications of the Curriculum Study for Social Casework," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. No. XXXVII, No. 2, Dec., 1960, pp. 134-142.

Establishing closer relations with the social sciences is not to mean in any way a downgrading of the importance of psychological factors, but rather an effort to bring in new knowledge and insights, and learn what other disciplines have to offer. When the head of the Department of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University reached retirement age a few months ago, and a successor was to be chosen, a noted physiologist was appointed because of the University's interest in the research values from collaborating with another field. The value of collaboration has already been tested in a few social agencies, the most noteworthy example of collaboration resulting in the discovery of the father in child guidance work. This achievement came about as a result of the Jewish Board of Guardians' project some years ago with Dr. Otto Pollak, an eminent social scientist. A few other agencies have been similarly engaged in research projects, discovering for themselves the contribution of social scientists to agency practice. Most agencies, however, are not at the stage where they can employ research staff. Collaboration between social work and the social sciences should, of course, be a two-way street, with both sides gaining from a sharing of experience and a closer working together.

In our own agency we developed a project on multi-problem families involving the psychiatric consultants from our Family Service and Child Care Divisions, and a professor of sociology at Goucher College. We have a substantial number of multi-problem families in our caseload, many of whom have been known to the agency for a period of years. These are families with the familiar story of chronic need, inadequate parents, maladjusted children, physical and emotional illness, little motivation for change, and limited response to agency efforts to help.

It seemed to us that in addition to the

usual casework method of looking at these families individually, it might be profitable to have a sociologist examine the group as a whole in order to identify major patterns and significant material that would add to our understanding of these families and enhance our ability to help. Along with taking part in case conferences, our sociologist has been assembling and analyzing data on our multi-problem families for the purpose of determining whether any important correlations exist that would be useful in our diagnostic and prognostic efforts.

The project is still very much in the beginning stages, but the participation and stimulating contribution made by the sociologist has been such as to lead us to believe that important gains can come from our experiment. One of our psychiatric consultants, who happens to be Commissioner of Mental Hygiene in Maryland, was sufficiently impressed with the collaborative experience to comment that he thought he might employ a sociologist for the mental hospitals in Maryland.

Social Action by Social Work

One aspect of a changing society not yet mentioned is the possibility of influencing or modifying the whole social structure. Wilensky and Lebeaux raise this question in their study of "Industrial Society and Social Welfare," and conclude that changing the total society is not a problem that citizens or social workers can deal with successfully. They suggest as more appropriate fields of endeavor the groups that mediate the relations of individuals to society, i.e., the family, neighborhood organizations, gangs, and so on. Indeed, they point out that "to face the hard truth, the whole social structure, short of revolution, can be moved only slowly, only

slightly."⁸ This, however, does not lessen the responsibility of social workers as informed citizens to lend their weight and the weight of their agencies in supporting social legislation. However, Wilensky and Lebeaux believe that the social sciences can make a contribution precisely in this area of large scale social change. They suggest that cultivating closer ties with the social sciences can help towards providing a scientific base for those social reformers whose interest lies, not in individual or family service, but in the larger society and its potential for change through social planning. Contrary, however, to the position held by Wilensky and Lebeaux that social change is not the area in which social workers can most effectively function, a recent article in *Social Work* proposes that this is indeed the area in which social workers should develop technical skill and know-how.⁹

Social Work Values

Earlier I referred to the ethical principles that Dr. Keniston envisages as a continuity between youth and the elders. What are some of the principles that social work would pass on to tomorrow's generations of caseworkers, group workers, and other workers in the communal services, in order to provide the continuity for our own future generations? How will these principles stand the test of time and social change? Will they survive as our enduring val-

⁸ Harold L. Wilensky and Charles N. Lebeaux, *Industrial Society and Social Welfare*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1958, pp. 217-218.

⁹ Hyman J. Weiner, "Toward Techniques for Social Change," *Social Work*, Vol. VI, No. 2, April, 1961, pp. 26-35.

ues, or will they be modified or even discarded under the pressure of a changing society?

Will the worker of tomorrow accept the principle of man's right of self-determination, of his freedom to make his own choice, including the right to make the wrong choice?

Will social work still believe that a child grows best in a family, and that family life should be kept strong, not only for the sake of its younger and older members, but for the stability of our society as well?

Will the practitioners of the future still have faith in man's capacity for growth and change, and for taking responsibility for his behavior?

Will tomorrow's agencies support the principle that social work is for all who need it, and not only for special classes of our society?

Will the community of tomorrow agree that there is a place in social work for both public and private agencies?

And will tomorrow's generation of professionals still come to National Jewish Conferences because of the values found in these meetings by past and present conferees? Will this Conference provide a continuity between the generations?

Just as Dr. Keniston warns that it is not enough simply to present young people with a ready-made set of values, so must future generations of social workers test out for themselves the truths that we now hold to be self-evident. Only through such self-examination and readiness to modify creatively its practice and programs as community needs change, can social work continue as an enduring and sustaining force in a changing society.

THE DISCONTINUITY OF GENERATIONS; CONSENSUS OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS *

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THIS is the fourth consecutive year that we have been looking at the general social scene at our conferences, trying to understand it better and seeking to translate that understanding into practice as we serve people. In these past few years, we have not hesitated to concern ourselves with large, philosophical issues, and this year has been no exception.

In 1960 the conference's over-all theme was the changing world and its effect on the American Jewish community with particular reference to Jewish values. This year our concentration has been upon the process of change itself. We have tried to examine how our values are transmitted. We have asked ourselves whether the acceleration of change has interrupted the continuity of the generations and thus presented some blocks in the transmission of values. We have wanted to see what implications the "how of change" has for us as Jewish communal workers.

Dr. Keniston's dissection of the anatomy of change led him to some specific conclusions about youth today to whom,

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Boston, Mass., May 30, 1961. Mr. Gold summarizes in this paper the proceedings of the discussion groups which met after hearing Dr. Keniston's, Mr. Goldman's and Mr. Rosenberg's papers. Pp. 5-36.

as he put it, "... the present in our society assumes a new importance as the one point of apparent stability between an increasingly irrelevant past and an ever more inscrutable future." Mr. Rosenberg's and Mr. Goldman's presentations looked at the implications of this from the viewpoints of social planning and agency practice.

My task is not to summarize the three major presentations, but rather to present the consensus of conference participants about these matters as revealed in discussion groups. I have not used the word "summary" in referring to the discussion groups. I have instead deliberately used the word "consensus," for while the differences we have among us should not be glossed over, those things on which we all agree are much more important. I therefore, propose to dwell upon those matters about which most of us seemed to agree and which emerged as a common professional frame of reference.

I have chosen to divide the material I gleaned from the discussion groups into three categories. First I should like to make some general observations on the impressions I gathered as I listened to all of the groups. Then I would like to present the general thinking as it related to social-agency structure and practice. Finally, I plan to discuss general conclusions as they related to our profes-