

1977

Problem adolescents: adolescent growth in the context of an urban junior high school/

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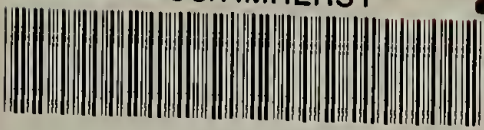
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PROBLEM ADOLESCENTS: ADOLESCENT GROWTH IN THE
CONTEXT OF AN URBAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

A Thesis Presented

By

L. FRANKLIN HARRELL JR.

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

May 1976

Psychology

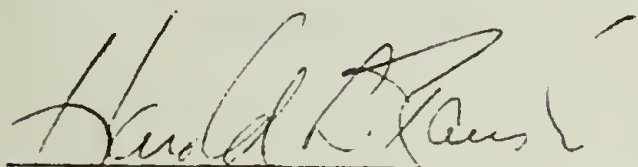
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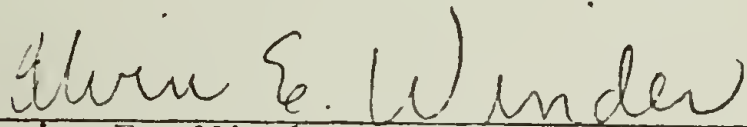
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Harold Raush for his thoughtful guidance in the writing of this study. I am also indebted to Al Winder for his advice and expertise in the area of adolescent development.

Extra thanks to Cass Turner. Without his active interest, encouragement and involvement this project would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Joe Shay who helped us get started as group leaders at the school by making several initial contacts for us.

Special thanks to Patty Owens for being in the world.

PREFACE

During the winter of my first year of graduate study in Clinical Psychology, I began to seek opportunities for getting involved in some type of clinical work (either as an observer or as a therapist apprentice). I wanted to work in a setting which afforded exposure to a fairly diverse set of individuals with varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. I also felt a need and desire to work with young people who have serious problems in adjustment to social institutions, particularly black and working-class individuals situated in an urban setting. In the course of my search through the Psychology Department for the opportunity for such an experience, Patty Owens--a fellow graduate student in the clinical area--expressed similar interest and motivations. We both felt that youth in general and adolescence in particular, is an extremely delicate and difficult period in the life of any individual, and that too little attention has been devoted to work with adolescents in clinical training and in psychological literature.

With the aid of a more advanced graduate student who was experienced in the area, we entertained the idea of doing co-therapy with a group of "problem" adolescents in the public school system of Green City, Massachusetts, though I am sure none of us really expected much of anything to come out of this idea. We were told that in order to work in this capa-

city we would need to find someone who would supervise our work. This was somewhat discouraging since all of the clinical supervisors in the Psychology Department are generally quite overloaded with teaching, research and supervision responsibilities by the middle of the academic year. We were politely advised by fellow graduate students not to even ask, and thus set ourselves up for a big disappointment after spending time and energy generating exciting plans and ideas. When my colleague and I approached Dr. Turner, a respected teacher and friend in the department, we were certain he would offer us encouragement coupled with an apology for his inability to supervise us due to a very heavy schedule. How surprised we were when he not only responded positively to our ideas, but became quite enthusiastic and excited about what we planned to do. He agreed to supervise our clinical work in spite of having begun the conversation by telling us not to even ask, because he did not have a spare moment for himself in his weekly schedule!

Early Planning

My colleague and I feel that the schools are an important target for therapeutic intervention with adolescents who are having difficulties. This is so because it is in the schools that children often have their earliest and most sustained extra-familial contacts (Davidson, 1965). One is immediately struck by the enormous scope and impact of the so-

cializing process which is taking place around and within each individual child. The school becomes one of the focal points in the child's experience of this socialization process. When the child reaches early adolescence he has already formed much of the value system and view of the world which he will take with him into adulthood and maturity. Current social institutions, values and definitions of reality are in a constant state of flux and revision in our society (Toffler, 1971). It should not be surprising that there will be a number of casualties--individuals who cannot or will not adapt to this socialization process. It is not difficult to understand how bewildering, inconsistent and unstable the world can seem to a young person growing up in this period of history. My colleague and I operated under the theory that adolescence is one of the latest stages at which children who appear to be headed for a life of difficulty and stress may be helped. If there is no such intervention for a child in this position, there is a risk that his troubles, behaviors and views of how people are with each other will soon become most difficult to reverse.

We chose group therapy as a mode of intervention because 1) it would enable us to reach a greater number of children who have difficulties, 2) a group might provide the adolescent with the rare opportunity to discuss problems with and receive support from peers in an atmosphere which is different from the confines of the assistant principal's office or

the school restrooms and hallways, 3) such a group experience may leave each of the members with some seed of insight which he or she may be able to use one day in the resolution of difficulties.

As the reader has no doubt inferred by now, neither my colleague nor I had any experience in leading psychotherapy groups, much less a group of rambunctious "problem" adolescents. We realized that we were under a particular time-pressure to select a group which could make significant enough movement and progress to be of value to the group members by the end of the school term in June. Thus, in the midst of our other activities and responsibilities in the Psychology Department we scurried to prepare our work, at the same time reading whatever we were able to get our hands on concerning adolescence and group psychotherapy (which I might add, often appeared to be two mutually exclusive categories).

It is difficult to define "group therapy" even for one who is quite experienced with groups. Yalom (1975) believes that the term "group therapy" is an oversimplification and prefers to think instead of group therapies, which are classified in terms of the goals and curative factors of a particular group therapy approach. We planned to run our group with what Yalom would call the ambitious goal of characterological change, hoping to rely heavily on the cohesiveness which the group would achieve to promote interpersonal learning through the interaction and human experience of the mem-

bers. We would later learn just how ambitious this goal was for a group of "problem" teenagers. We would also come to learn a great deal from week to week about how to run a group of adolescents.

For a child who is continually "in trouble", intervention at this stage of his life could mean the difference between a successful adjustment of his personal goals and motives to what life has to offer him and self-destruction whether it be through a life of crime where he finds himself in and out of jail, or a life characterized by loneliness and depression due to the inability to initiate and maintain relationships with other people. We felt that a junior high school would be a good place to start our work and that ninth graders would probably benefit most from a group experience. Fifteen and sixteen-year-olds who have been labelled "problem" adolescents are likely to have a significant number of experiences of experiments in autonomy and being rejected or punished for it. A group would provide a setting in which these adolescents could discuss their motivations and rationales for doing the types of things which get them into trouble without an expectation of being punished or rejected for such disclosures.

My colleague and I decided on co-therapy for a number of reasons. Most significant, we felt a co-therapy team consisting of a black male and a white female would offer a diverse set of role-models and role-expectations for the group

members. Such a situation could provide sex-role and racial material which could be worked on in the group, again in a manner quite different from the ways in which these adolescents might be accustomed to dealing with such issues. Furthermore, some therapists have found that teenagers can profit from observing substitute parental figures in the person of the male and female co-therapists as they disagree with one another and yet present themselves as adults who are able to communicate with one another (Rosebaum, 1971). Naturally, compatibility of co-therapists is a necessity. Patty and I had shared ideas and ideals about clinical practice and research as well as certain values concerning political and economic realities in society. In the brief period that we had known each other since coming to the University we felt confident that a degree of trust and compatibility necessary for an undertaking of this nature existed between us.

As we became more involved with the task of planning for our group, ideas and research possibilities began to surface. We began our project with no specific hypotheses in mind. We nevertheless agreed that some type of naturalistic approach to the group process and whatever data might be generated was the best method of inquiry. It occurred to us that the same qualities which worked in our favor as a therapeutic team might also facilitate a joint or collaborative analysis of the data. My colleague and I could each check our observations and inferences against one another. It was felt that

this would strengthen the validity of any such study which we might decide upon and reduce observer bias. Disagreement or different perceptions of the same human events and their effects might turn out to be more valuable than disastrous to this kind of study--particularly in situations which might lend themselves to multiple interpretation.

The task before us as therapists in training seemed formidable, yet also intriguing and exciting. There would be so much interpersonal, developmental and social material to be cognizant of that it was evident that whatever the outcome of our work at Rigby, we would be gaining valuable clinical and research experience which perhaps would not be easily obtainable in other settings or using other intervention strategies.

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SECTION I

C H A P T E R I

INTRODUCTION

The setting. We had our first meeting with school officials at Rigby Junior High School in late February of 1975. My colleague and I, and our clinical supervisor, Dr. Turner, met with the school principal, the ninth grade guidance counselor and a third-year clinical graduate student who had worked with adolescents in Rigby JHS for the past three years and was instrumental in helping us get started. The guidance counselor had compiled a list of seventeen ninth graders who were described by the school as "disturbed" or "problem" adolescents who might benefit from a group experience. We had asked for as diverse a selection of children as possible from which we would choose approximately ten individuals to participate in the group. Thus we were given males and females, blacks and whites, children with acting-out problems and children who were withdrawn, all characterized by the fact that they repeatedly got into trouble in school. At that point we did not know the specific nature of the kinds of trouble to which these adolescents were prone. Naturally, there is much ambiguity in the term "disturbed" adolescent. One soon begins to ponder what the difference is between "disturbed" adolescents and "normal" adolescents. What qualifies a teenager to be categorized in school as a "disturbed" or "problem" adolescent? This was a question which would

be asked repeatedly as we became more and more deeply involved in our work at Rigby JHS.

Some background and description of the setting is called for at this point. Rigby JHS is located in a predominantly white-middle-class neighborhood on the northeast fringe of a moderately-sized city in Massachusetts. It is exceptionally well-equipped and well-maintained. In many ways it seems a typical American junior high school. The principal informed us that the enrollment at Rigby totalled approximately 1300 children. About one third of the enrollment is black. Most of the children (about 1100 of them) including almost all of the black children, are bussed to school.

After spending an entire school day at Rigby it was evident that in many respects it is also characteristic of an urban junior high school. It was only in recent years that black children were bussed to Rigby. The effects of the culture shock which resulted when black youngsters were bussed into Rigby while not readily apparent are easily observed as one spends some time in the hallways and lunchrooms. Most of the black children came from what had formally been an inner-city JHS district which was recently disbanded. From the accounts of the black students whom we interviewed, many of whom had recently transferred to Rigby we deduced that Rigby was more rigid and regimented than the schools which these children had been attending. On the other hand there was an equally great culture shock for the teachers and school offi-

cial. There are very few black teachers in the school. Thus the educational staff of Rigby JHS suddenly were faced with the task of having to educate a significant number of black students with a previous school experience which was somewhat different from that to which these educators were accustomed.

The atmosphere at Rigby caused me to recollect my own junior high school experiences of approximately 15 years ago. I was, and still am struck by the impersonal, non-supportive, anxiety-provoking atmosphere which characterizes a child's education, particularly at the early adolescent stage of development. The effect seems to be that of extinguishing much of what could be called the inquisitive-exploratory component of human nature, as well as the suppression of what may be considered to be the supportive, pro-social component of human nature. This is unfortunate because adolescence is a stage of human growth and development where much of the delicate balancing and structuring of an individual's personality takes place.

The social environment of the urban junior high school is worthy of study as it has a significant impact on the psycho-social development of our youth and ultimately upon the kinds of persons who will populate our society. It has been observed that while adolescent values tend to differ from the tradition of formal academic scholarship, those students who conform to the dominant values of the adult culture

are most likely to be formally rewarded (Coleman, 1970; Fish, 1970; Trickett & Todd, 1972). But what of those youths who cannot or will not, due to any of a variety of causes, conform to adult cultural values as put forth in the schools and as a result are not formally rewarded but rejected, punished and/or ignored? This is obviously becoming a concern for educators, legislators and the general public and is evidenced by the recent passage and implementation of Chapter 766 in the state of Massachusetts and similar laws in other states. Additional research which investigates the social environment of the schools from the point of view of the children who are having emotional difficulties of the type covered by Chapter 766, is necessary and would be a welcome input into plans for change or additional social services to youth in the schools.

Another observation which we made in our initial visit to Rigby JHS was the varying rates of growth in youngsters at the junior high school level. The children range in age from 11 to 16 years. The differences in physical size among students at Rigby was often quite significant. It was not uncommon to observe small groups of very youngish-appearing boys and girls, less than five feet in stature, appearing as if they would not look out of place in an elementary school. On the other hand, there are other groups of girls who appear as if they might pass for mature young adults, and boys of huge build and stature, at times as tall as 6'4" whom many

policemen--not to mention teachers and guidance counselors--would hesitate to confront. Upon observation, one can only speculate as to the effects of such varying rates of physical and emotional growth on psychological adjustment among junior high school age children.

In a stage in his life which is characterized by upset, inconsistency, internal and external conflict (A. Freud, 1958), the adolescent in the schools is under a variety of pressures. Again the question arose--why are some (if not most) adolescents able to survive such pressures while others have serious difficulties? Adolescents often implicitly demand help through anti-social acts, and it is essential for anyone who would seek to understand adolescents to ascertain what lies behind such behaviors (Miller, 1974). The ultimate maturation of the adolescent is in danger when he cannot express the need for both dependence and independence and gain gratification in each (Kraft, 1971).

Screening procedure and formation of the group. As stated earlier, we were given a list by Mrs. B, the ninth grade guidance counselor, of 17 "disturbed" adolescents--all ninth graders--whom she felt might benefit from a group experience. We knew little of her criteria for selecting the children for her list other than that they each were individuals who repeatedly got into trouble in school. We decided to interview each candidate jointly for approximately half an hour and then select a group of about ten adolescents. We

liked each person with whom we talked. We sorely regretted having to exclude anyone. Our most important criterion in selecting group members was therapeutic need. We then strove for a balance of male and female, black and white, and aggressive and withdrawn individuals. The group was run until the end of the school year--approximately five months. The following individuals were selected to be in the group:

- 1) Danny--white male, small frame, described by school authorities as probably emotionally disturbed. We were also told that he hates "shrinks" and probably would not cooperate with us. Danny was also repeating the ninth grade, and had numerous difficulties in school--behaviorally and academically. He expressed some defensive and fearful feelings about the black students in the school.
- 2) Beth--white, female, large frame, described as non-conforming, "into drugs", ran away from home last year with boyfriend, has problems in the home.
- 3) Charlie--black, male, average frame, described as "a spoiled baby" by the school officials, also described as unrealistic and doing poorly academically.
- 4) Duke--black, male, average frame, athletic appearance, cocky, described as underachieving academically, a "loudmouth", bright, a school kingpin, etc.
- 5) Bernadette--black, female, large frame, friend neighbor of Duke, a school queenpin, yet appeared in the interview as rather shy, withdrawn.
- 6) Amy--white, female, appears and speaks in a manner which gives an impression of a person who is more developmentally advanced than average, described herself as getting into much trouble at home as well as in school for offenses such as skipping classes, came from

a parochial school, described by school officials as having the ability to do well, but very sly, surreptitious.

- 7) Mary--black, female, physically mature, gets into trouble for lateness to class, failure to do homework, failure to come to school; problems in the home, withdrawn, browbeaten appearance, lack of energy, looks very sad.
- 8) Sammy--white, male, smaller than average in size, appear shy, withdrawn, described as non-conforming and on the verge of failing ninth grade.
- 9) Lawrence--black, male, appeared very guarded in the interview, a history of suspension for offenses such as smoking, skipping detention, etc.
- 10) Charlotte--white, female, we were unable to interview her before the group got underway because she was absent all that week due to illness; repeating ninth grade, has much difficulty staying out of trouble in school.
- 11) Dolores--black, female, average size frame, described as a "militant" last year, absent from school a great deal and we were unable to interview her before the start of the group. We decided to include her in the group when Mary's parent refused to allow her to be a group member.
- 12) Helen--white, female, large frame, physically mature, at the time when we were interviewing the kids she was on suspension from school for a fight with her boyfriend; we happened to encounter her while she was in the office inquiring as to when she would be allowed to return to school; school officials would only describe her as something of a handful for any counselor, ". . . will be a real revelation . . .", etc.

It was decided that the group would meet once a week for one class period (approximately 45 to 50 minutes). After the first two meetings the group demanded to meet for two class

periods because one period was not enough time for each member to express himself or make a contribution to the group process.

Research. Not knowing exactly what we would find nor what would take place from week to week, it was difficult to generate specific hypotheses. We felt that a qualitative approach to the data would be most fruitful because it would enable us to proceed in a manner which would allow us to become intimate with the realm of the data and would allow hypotheses to develop. There were also problems of collaboration--since the raw data are the same for each of us. As we became more intensely involved with the group and the setting, my colleague and I found that our areas of concern and emphasis tended to diverge. The result is separate studies which we hope will nevertheless complement one another. In fact, each would seem incomplete without the other.

In my study I look at the junior high school as an institution. I examine the relationship between the developmental stage of adolescence and the social environment of the urban junior high school from a humanistic-psychodynamic-developmental viewpoint. The study focuses on the demand characteristics and norms of the social environment of the junior high school and explores to what extent these norms enhance or inhibit the growth needs of the adolescent. In such an approach, a theory of adolescent growth is necessary in order to define the growth needs of adolescents and the

responses from society (in the form of the school system) which support and inhibit adolescent growth. We know that adolescence is characterized by recurrent alternation of periods of disturbed behavior (often taking the form of rebellion or experimentation) with periods of relative calm. Generally, such disturbances represent attempts on the part of the adolescent to express and consolidate new controls and methods of coping; the periods of relative quiet which follow enable the adolescent to assimilate his experiences and ponder the consequences of his behaviors. We know that this is a necessary stage of growth through which each individual must pass enroute to maturity, and that if parents, community and school are understanding enough to support the adolescent through this stage of his life, that he will eventually discard unsuccessful behaviors, thus gaining the additional ego strength necessary for mastery and control of his life at an adult level (Winder, 1974). The study attempts to ascertain to what extent the climate and atmosphere provided by the school enables smooth and successful growth to take place in the individual adolescent. It also focuses on the maturational levels of individual group members and the effects of the structure and environment of the junior high school on the growth of each member. Specific examples and accounts of these children's school-related experiences are used to facilitate understanding of the school environment, many aspects of which are not directly accessible to the adult.

It is from this theoretical perspective and viewpoint regarding the nature and function of public education that my research will examine the social environment of Rigby Junior High School. Naturalistic observation in the school I hope has yielded some fascinating insights into the world in which the adolescent spends a good deal of his waking hours, which may have some impact on contemporary social issues.

Summary. The research thus consists of an in-depth analysis of a variety of data. The focal point for the generation of this data was the process of the group, and the interactions among members of the group, which inevitably raised issues of concern in the school about which these adolescents felt most strongly. In my study, I have focused on: 1) how the social environment of the junior high school affects the psychological growth and maturation of adolescents who are labelled troublemakers, and 2) the specific effects of the social environment of the school on the psychological growth and maturation of each member of this sample.

The research was a process of ongoing hypothesis generation, selection, specification and verification which increased in intensity as the process itself developed. This appears to be one of the best methods for investigating the types of questions and concerns specified above. Emphasis is on presenting and analyzing the data in a manner which lends itself to the understanding of a social setting. It is my hope that the study which is presented here will at the very

least generate interest among psychologists and in undertaking this kind of research in the schools.

C H A P T E R I I

SELECTION OF A RESEARCH METHOD

Chapter I reflected some of the general areas of inquiry toward which this study is directed. Participant-observation was ideally suited to our approach, our theoretical and therapeutic concerns for the respondents, and our own roles in the setting. It is a naturalistic method distinguished by the actual participation of the researcher(s) in the activities of the social system which is being studied. It is also an ideal method for the clinical psychologist as it allows him to become and remain intimate with his data, much of which is often not quantifiable and not subject to rigorous control. The clinician-investigator, or participant-conceptualizer (Raush, 1974) includes his own thoughts, feelings, reactions, etc., in the realm of data. He thus has the opportunity to ". . . secure his data within the mediums, symbols, and experiential worlds which have meaning to the respondents. . ." (Vidich, 1955). This approach is most suited to the study of complex, ongoing social systems such as a junior high school, and interactional processes such as group psychotherapy, which cannot be investigated in the traditional laboratory setting. Three other considerations contributed significantly to the decision to use participant-observation for the study. The method would allow:

- 1) proximity to, familiarity with, and a subjective "feel"

for the data; 2) flexibility in the collection and analysis of the data; and 3) dissemination of findings in a form of presentation which could be understood by a lay reader.

Closeness to the data. Proximity to and familiarity with the realm of the data is essential to accuracy of reporting. Lofland (1971) suggests that for the trained observers, proximity can yield significant insights and enable discoveries, particularly in areas of inquiry in which occurrences, activities and interactions (if noticed at all) tend to be dismissed as commonplace or unimportant. In the research presented here proximity permitted the reporters to examine a junior high-school setting from three perspectives -- that of various students, that of school officials, and that of a neutral observer. Achieving these perspectives required: 1) a physical, face-to-face proximity to the persons involved in the setting; 2) a significant period of time (five months) under a variety of circumstances (group therapy, consultations with school officials, the researchers' roles as co-leaders of a group in the school, interviewing of students); 3) achievement of a certain degree of intimacy with respondents (group members) to facilitate communication and disclosure of information which adolescents at 15 and 16 years of age ordinarily do not reveal to adults in a school context; and 4) the opportunity to devote attention to what Lofland calls the "minutiae of daily life" through naturalistic observation of participants in the setting. These four

aspects parallel Lofland's (1971) four types of proximity--physical, temporal, social and macrocosmic.

Flexibility in the collection and analysis of data. An important characteristic of participant and naturalistic observation research is the flexibility inherent in this approach. The researcher can enter a setting and proceed with no preconceived formal hypotheses. The subsequent generation of hypotheses occurs as the data unfold. Among behavioral scientists such a qualitative approach is often considered to be unscientific. Kaplan (1964), however, points out that observation in science is an active and rigorous phase of inquiry which has a vital role in the generation and validation of hypotheses. He notes that scientific observation is distinguished by careful search, attention and forethought, and is to be contrasted with our largely casual, passive observations in everyday life. Thus observation is an integral phase of scientific investigation in its purest sense--that of ". . .making accessible what otherwise could not be seen, or if seen would not be noticed" (Kaplan, p. 127).

Qualitative methods also yield an opportunity to reject hypotheses which become inappropriate during the course of the investigation, if the data warrant and as new hypotheses are generated. One can make adjustments, investigate unforeseen sources of data, even completely overhaul and change his whole approach in the middle of a study if it becomes evident that by doing so the researcher can shed more light on the

problem or situation under scrutiny. Similarly, once the data have been gathered the same type of flexibility exists in terms of data analysis. One may find that his data can be analyzed in a variety of ways to provide the basis for several investigations.

A weakness of such a flexible approach is the ease with which one can become lost amidst the almost inevitably massive amount of data of qualitative studies. Knowing what to discard and what to retain must surely be one of the most difficult tasks for a participant observer. In classical research designs one tends not to be faced with this dilemma. Research activities relate directly to the experiment, and analysis of the data often consists of specific predetermined steps. Conclusions and inferences are drawn with a level of confidence pre-established by convention. No such convention nor comfortable structure and precision of operation exists for the qualitative researcher. However, what he sacrifices in terms of precision and certainty he gains in other areas, the most significant of which have to do with communication, impact and social relevance.

Dissemination of findings and communication with the lay reader. For me, one of the most important considerations in choosing a research method is that the findings and final analysis be accessible to the "lay reader." Included in the category "lay reader" are individuals--professional or non-professionals--outside of the community of social scientists

and outside of the academic community. The hope is that those directly involved will be able to relate to and act on the material. An advantage afforded by participant and naturalistic observation and by qualitative analysis is the accessibility of the report to people.

Research Technique

Our entry into the setting was simplified greatly because we came into the school with specific roles--that of counselors and group leaders from what was termed the "U. Mass. Counseling Program", already established at the school. Our major task as researchers consisted of observation of the setting and what occurred there. Our roles as co-therapists served to facilitate our research tasks. Activities performed in the interest of therapeutic intervention such as interviews with students, parents, teachers, and other school officials more often than not tended to serve the interests of our research as well. Our highest priorities were the emotional, psychological and physical welfare of our clients--the group members, and of other students with whom we came in contact. Research issues were pursued within this context of priorities.

As the school term proceeded and as our group progressed, meeting once each week for two consecutive class periods (90 minutes), we were better able to organize our inquiry and share the direction of our research. A large part of the

data came from our group meetings, nearly all of which were audio-taped. Our roles as group leaders granted us access to many other aspects of school life and allowed us to make varied observations over the period of our work (February through June). The ability to check our observations against one another proved invaluable since there were times when it was difficult to believe what one heard or saw.

By the latter stages of the school term my colleague and I were able to distinguish certain areas of specific concern to each of us and concentrate on those. I became more concerned with the nature of the social environment of the school and its effects on the growth and maturation of the adolescents in our group and in the school. My colleague became more interested in family interaction patterns of the group members and role values transmitted in the homes of these children. Thus, at the end of the school term, after the final formal group meeting, we met with each individual group member for an informal but structured interview where data more specific to each of our interests were sought.

The final data sources were: approximately sixty hours of tapes of group sessions, structured and open-ended interviews with school officials and students; observations over a period of five months. The task was to extract coherent reports from these data. The strength of the participant-observation method lies in its capacity to lend understanding to a particular organization, process or substantive problem

(Becker, 1958), rather than in demonstrating relationships between abstract variables--for which certain quantitative methods are better suited. On the other hand, a major hazard of the participant-observation approach is the possibility of the researcher becoming enmeshed in the real-life concerns of the respondents and the setting to such a degree that his objective observer's viewpoint becomes jeopardized. This could of course threaten the validity of the study. Moreover, the choice of a research problem often relates to issues which have particular meaning for the researcher. Such issues may be emotionally-charged. And although it is probably impossible for any investigator to take on a completely value-free stance, the participant-observer, especially, walks a very thin line between his own feelings and that which he observes in the field. Furthermore, the method requires of the researcher considerable tolerance for uncertainty.

Quality control of participant-observation data. McCall lists some common threats to the quality of participant observation data, as well as certain means of controlling these. The most significant of these in terms of our research are: 1) to what extent does the reporters' presence affect the observed phenomenon?; 2) the possibility of misinterpretation of what is observed or reported by the respondents on the part of the researcher; and 3) the possibility of overidentification with the respondents or particular factions among the respondents in the setting.

Effect of Reporter's Presence

McCall feels that the best check for this, when available, is the comparison of data with respondent interview accounts of similar incidents at which the observer was not present. In our case, this consisted of verifying behavior, attitudes, incidents, etc. involving individual group members through other sources such as teachers, guidance counselors, principals, other students. We tried to do this whenever possible though we did not of course have sufficient time or energy to verify each item or incident. Therefore we did so only with those occurrences which seemed to us to be significant in terms of the emotional health of the respondent and in terms of our research.

McCall also gives another check for the participant observer who is attempting to control for reactive effects in his data. That is to directly ask respondents in what ways, if any, the presence of actions of the reporters seem to affect the phenomenon in question. We strove to do this repeatedly throughout the course of the group, and again at the post-group interview at the end of the school term. For example, we observed the group increase in cohesiveness and the intensity of its interactions about halfway between the start and close of the group when we were able to convince the members that the tape recordings of each session were not being replayed in the vice principal's office, nor was there any possibility of this in the future. Furthermore, asking the

group members about the effects of our being in the room and in the school did prove a helpful indicator of how much the respondents were willing to tell us and how accurate their accounts were. The situation was somewhat more complex regarding interviews with school officials who obviously had become quite adept at editing their statements. Yet, it soon became possible to read between the lines of their explicit statements and gain reliable data through use of simple non-directive clinical interviewing skills.

Possibility of Misinterpretation of Data

Again, this is a very real threat to data reliability and validity in any qualitative study in a public school. Youth culture exists as a realistic phenomenon with a vernacular particular to its sub-culture--words and expressions which may mean one thing in adult society often take on quite a different meaning for the adolescent. The only way to circumvent this limitation is for the researcher to swallow his pride and relentlessly ask questions which cause him to appear stupid and ignorant, in order to insure that he has a grasp on the meaning behind the adolescents' statements.

Another problem involving the personal characteristics of the researcher is his recall ability. Undoubtedly a criticism of this method of research must concern its reliance on a good deal of observational data which is (by necessity) retrieved from memory, since constant note jotting in the

midst of observation can be destructive to the study in terms of distraction to the observer and reactive effects upon the setting. Nothing appears more "unscientific" to the experimental researcher than having to recall large amounts of material, perhaps hours after its occurrence. Yet, Strauss (1964) indicates that with some practice, it is possible to recall ". . . in quite literal detail an astounding proportion of what (one) has witnessed" (McCall-Simmons, p. 74). Certainly any psychologist who has done psychotherapy without the benefit of a recording apparatus will attest to this capability of the human mind. We also found this to be the case in our research, and soon became adept at recall of events and conversations, many of which we were able to verify without the benefit of our audio-tapes of the sessions.

Overidentification with the Respondents or "Going Native"

This was quite a real danger for my colleague and me, since we did grow to identify with our clients (the group) to some extent and liked each of them. As kids who were constantly in trouble, their plight drew sympathy from us as it became obvious that we were possibly the only adults (in school or at home) who were willing to listen to their side of things. Eventually they grew to respect us for this. However, in terms of data analysis, it was quite difficult for me to remain completely objective at all times. McCall (1969) points out how very important it is for the researcher

to reflect on the direction and degree of his sympathies and antipathies toward the respondents and the setting, looking for sources of these in his own role relations, personal characteristics and intellectual frame of reference (McCall-Simmons, p. 133). Though I have sought to remain as objective as possible throughout the research process, it will not take the reader long to learn that in the core of my being I certainly do feel close to the people in the group. Rather than viewing it as a contaminating influence on the research, I prefer to think that it says something positive about their personal qualities as human beings.

Summary

Selection of participant-observation as a research method required my co-therapist and research colleague and myself to continually re-evaluate our goals and objectives throughout the course of the data collection. We chose this method because we believed that the data and the setting would dictate to us what to study and how to study it. We embarked on the project with the full knowledge that it may not yield sufficient data for a formal study. As we proceeded, in the process tapping our own interests within psychology and our own individual priorities in relation to the setting, definite directions began to crystalize. The junior high school proved to be an excellent setting for viewing the adolescent and the effects of the social environment of the

junior high school on the growth and maturation of the adolescent. Emphasis of the study is placed on understanding this process.

SECTION II

C H A P T E R I I I
THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Hawthorne J. Rigby Junior High School is located in a typical middle-class American community near the Green City city line. As you drive down Maple Street, you cannot help but notice hamburger joints, donut shops, drive-in theaters, new and used car dealerships, furniture and appliance outlets, etc., all of which make the neighborhood seem typical of the sort of buffer zone which tends to be situated between the inner city and the suburbs of most American cities. You turn right onto Rigby Road and drive about four hundred yards up a small hill through a small grove of green trees which flank a well-kept lawn, and you park your car in the visitor's parking lot. Before you stands a single-level red brick building. It is a prototypical school structure. As you walk toward the entrance large metallic letters loom above the doorway, spelling out the words: HAWTHORNE J. RIGBY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL.

After you walk through the doorway you find yourself in a hallway. The hallways and corridors are painted bright orange, red and yellow hues in some places; in other places the walls are lined with identical gray footlockers. As you walk around the school you begin to find that it is very well-equipped. If you are from New York City as I am, your old junior high school seems like a barn compared to Rigby.

For example, there is a new library and communications center which is equipped with cheerful red wall-to-wall carpeting, new furniture, a generous variety of reading material, conference rooms (our group meetings were held here). There is also an audio-visual component to the communications center which boasts video-tape consoles, cameras, recording equipment, a darkroom, etc. The center is well lit by natural sunlight which falls through the skylight and the plate-glass windows which flank the communications center and the library on two sides. A high ceiling adds to the feeling of spaciousness as you stand in the center of the library and look around you. The library-communications center is situated on a sunken level from the hallways which lead to the various classrooms so that the entire library is visible from the corridors which run adjacent to it. As you gaze through the plate glass windows which exist in place of walls on the north and east side of the library, you notice a similarly well-equipped greenhouse. The lush greenhouse faces the library--there is a small courtyard in between. On the other side of the building there is also a new swimming pool and a fine gymnasium. You get the impression that Rigby JHS is the showplace among Green City's junior high schools, and the envy of principals and teachers throughout the city.

If you walk through the hallways when classes are in session, you see classrooms in which neatly-dressed children are seated. There is every appearance of a placid, and or-

derly environment. Something, however, is missing. Where is the restless energy, spontaneity and vivacity which is typical of the junior high school-aged teenager?

If you wait you will find it in the hallways and corridors of Rigby, just as you would in any other junior high school. When classes are changing (between class periods) or just before school begins or after school is out the hallways take on quite a different appearance and climate. During these periods there is a "free-for-all" quality in the hallways. It is as if someone has lowered the threshold of a dam, and a huge wave of energy in the form of thirteen hundred adolescents has been unleashed. It is a high-powered youth experience which is replayed after each class period, before and after each schoolday, day after day. If you are a visitor and you are accidentally caught in the halls during one of these periods you may be pushed around, jossled, squished. My colleague, who is barely taller than many of the students was nearly knocked to the floor of the corridors during our first visit to the school.

If you happen to be standing in the hallways during one of these times of the day, you may notice brief scuffles and fights, often a playful type of jesting and testing, sometimes a serious conflict and at other times a mischievous and malicious ganging up on a vulnerable individual by two or more bigger and stronger persons. Corridors are narrow and children bump into each other frequently.

If you walk down the hall and into the central office as a visitor, you notice that the control center and principals' offices are located here. There is a climate of order, efficiency and officialdom. A huge switchboard occupies the rear of the office. It is from here that announcements are made to the entire school, to individual teachers in their classrooms, and it is from here that students are called down to the office when necessary. Most of the school records are also kept here. Several clerical employees work from behind their desks in the large front office and a long counter separates them from a smaller space where you stand and wait to conduct your business. In each corner of the large office there are chairs for those awaiting an audience with one of principals. If you are a visitor you are likely to be treated cordially and your business is taken care of promptly. You may even find yourself remarking about how well-run this school is.

If, on the other hand, you are a student, you probably have a different impression of this office. When you are called down to the office you know that the chances are that it is not because of something you did right. As you enter the office the room appears very similar to the court rooms on T.V. The place is sterile and hostile. The long counter which separates the staff from the accused is a formidable "barrier" to personal contact. An adult directs you to sit outside the assistant principal's office until you hear your

name called.

The Public School as Prison

Haney and Zimbardo (1975a) have collaborated on a research project in which they examined the effects of a simulated prison environment on volunteer guards and inmates. As a result of an educational psychology seminar which he taught, Haney came to see various similarities between prison environments and public school environments. Subsequently, Haney and Zimbardo (1975b) collaborated in the writing of an article entitled "The Blackboard Penitentiary" which analogizes the prison environment and the high school environment. In this article the authors state that they have visited and interviewed respondents in both environments. While they do not claim that public schools are actually prisons, they do feel that the relationships among participants in each of these settings are similar to a degree which is distressing. Haney and Zimbardo use the prison analogy to indicate similarities in the functions of the prison and the school--institutions whose manifest purposes seemingly differ.

I found that our data complement many of Haney and Zimbardo's (1975b) descriptions of the school environment. What follows is a more vivid picture of Rigby Junior High School, using the Haney/Zimbardo article to focus on various aspects of the school setting.

The Blackboard Penitentiary

When students do not conform to a teacher's standards no matter how arbitrary they may be, the teacher generally has the authority to punish them . . . (the) teacher has an arsenal of available options: reprimanding the student privately, embarrassing him in front of his classmates, keeping him after class or after school, sending him to the school disciplinarian, assigning him to a number of afternoons detention, grading him a failing grade, recommending his suspension from school (Haney & Zimbardo, 1975b, p. 29).

Leader (Frank): Does anyone know where Helen is today?

Amy: She's not here today.

Charlotte: She got thrown out of school.

Leader (Patty): Really? Do you know when--within the last couple of days?

Charlotte: This week.

Leader (Patty): You don't know what for?

(Charlotte shakes her head no.)

Charlie: Mr. G. is kicking people out right now!

Beth: He kicked 18 kids out yesterday.

Leader (Frank): What for?

Amy & Beth: Smoking and throwing firecrackers.

Bernadette: They threw Q. out for hitting R.

Beth: And that girl hit her first!

Leader (Patty): It seems like they really ought to do something about that smoking rule.

Beth: They don't care. They love it.

Amy: At the end of the year they go crazy kicking kids out.

Leader (Patty): Why?

Charlotte: Because they want you to come back here again.

Leader (Patty): (speaking facetiously) Who'd want to put up with you lousy kids again? Come on. (laughter)

Bernadette: (seriously) They do! They like to kick you out!

Leader (Patty): I know, but not because they want to keep you here.

Charlotte: Oh, that's different.

Beth: Every year you know, they get down on the kids at the end of the (school) year.

* * *

Leader (Patty): (to Dolores) I hear you were kicked out.

Dolores: A teacher you know, I had got a pass from Mr. V. and I came down here and she (the librarian) forgot to tell us to put the time down and he said I was skipping a class.

Beth: They throw you out for skipping class!

Bernadette: Yes!

* * *

Amy: You know little K.? She got kicked out of class. She's a little angel (disgustedly); kicked out of class!

Bernadette: That girl don't hardly do nothing.

Charlotte: I know. She's as quiet as a mouse.

Beth: Why'd they throw her out?

Amy: Because K. raised her hand.

Beth: (with an expression of utter amazement) Oh god!

Dolores: (chuckles) And then J. was going to ask a question. And she (the teacher) said, "Has Helen been here?" and he raised his hand and she said, "Get out of here! I know you're not Helen." (laughter)

Leader (Frank): It sounds like the teachers and principals are getting a bit edgy toward the end of the year.

Leader (Patty): It sounds like they're pretty short-tempered too. I'm putting that as a joke. It sounds like they are incredibly short tempered!

Bernadette: Then there was M., she didn't understand nothing on that paper. She said "I don't understand it." She (the teacher) said, "Get out!"

* * *

Students of course have no similar means of retaliation when they are abused or unfairly treated by teachers. Those who do follow the circuitous bureaucratic paths of redress open to them quickly discover their powerlessness in direct confrontation. As in prison, the teacher's word always counts more than the word of the students, most school officials recognize their natural allies Nearly all (students) agree they would never take a serious grievance directly to the offending teacher for fear of retaliation (Haney & Zimbardo, 1975b, p. 29).

Leader (Patty): Dolores, when they kicked you out last week for what you just explained it seems like everybody here thought it was a real cruel, hard thing to take.

Dolores: I was mad.

Charlie: You got kicked out for nothing.

Dolores: Mr. V., like if I had him now, I had him right now I wouldn't be able to get out of my class.

Leader (Patty): When you say that made you mad, what happened to the madness? Where did it go?

Dolores: I told Mr. G. that he ain't proving nothing by throwing people out and bring 'em back in just to throw them out again! He got mad.

Leader (Patty): And he got mad at that?

Dolores: He said, "Either you calm down or get out!" That's after he had told me that I was kicked out for five days.

Leader (Patty): I could see a difference between people getting mad and cussing the teacher out and stuff like that. But for you to just stand there and tell him that you were angry about what he was doing. . .

Dolores: It's like, he said that I should not have got mad or anything.

* * *

Leader (Patty): (to Sammy) What got you suspended?

Sammy: I just got in a fight.

Leader (Frank): You seem like the last guy anyone would expect to get in a fight. You're so quiet.

Amy: I'm glad he did.

Leader (Frank): You're glad?

Amy: That guy is a real wise guy.

Leader (Frank): They just kick you out, no matter who started the fight?

Group: Yeah.

Sammy: I bumped into him and he called me a swear (word). I pushed him and he hit me. Then we started fighting. . . . Mr. S. broke it up. He's the assistant principal.

Leader: (Patty): What did he say?

Sammy: I don't know. He didn't talk to me.

Leader (Frank): Did you get your differences resolved?

Beth: Yeah, you get to write it down.

Leader (Patty): You said Mr. S. didn't talk to you?

Sammy: No, he just gave it to Mr. G., he's my assistant principal, and he told me to go home.

* * *

Leader (Patty): Beth was just saying that this girl just came up to her out of the clear blue sky and started to hit her.

Leader (Frank): Did you know her?

Beth: Well, I'd talked to her but I didn't really know her.

Leader (Frank): You fought for how long?

Beth: I punched her a couple of times, I guess, and then he (Mr. G.) broke it up. Then he sent me down to the office, and he sent her afterwards.

Leader (Frank): And what did he tell you in the office?

Beth: He just told me to write down what happened, and then she had to write down what happened. And he read 'em, and he said we were both going home.

Dolores: Was her's different than yours?

Beth: Yeah, she said I hit her first.

Charlotte: Like, if I'm a troublemaker they're not going to believe me, they're going to believe that the other kid's good.

Bernadette recounts an incident where she felt that she had been wrongly accused of smoking but was subsequently suspended from school for this offense. She returned to school with her father, and they had a conference with assistant principal, Mr. G. Bernadette said that in the conference,

every time she would start to say something in defense of herself, Mr. G. would cut her off. Mr. G. also talked as if he had actually been there and had himself seen Bernadette smoking, which was not the case. It was one of the school matrons who had reported her. At this point Bernadette's father became really angry and grabbed Mr. G. by the lapels of his jacket, telling him in no uncertain terms never to mistreat his daughter this way again. This incident evidently shook the assistant principal and Bernadette describes him becoming so vindictive toward her family that her younger brother, J., of whom she emphatically says, "He won't even look at a cigarette!" (Charlie immediately confirmed this) was suspended for smoking. Bernadette said that she and her brother had to be very careful around the school, and that her parents have decided not to send her younger siblings to Rigby for fear of further harrassment. Amy and Charlie said that they too had younger brothers and sisters who were attending Rigby and that those kids were labelled and harrassed because they (Amy and Charlie) had gotten into trouble in school in the past.

Leader (Patty): But I don't understand why they would throw out your little brother when he was not smoking. You know?

Charlie: (excitedly and emphatically) You know what they do? They get back at her! (points to Bernadette) They try to get them because they couldn't get her kicked out 'cause her father jacked up Mr. G.

* * *

. . . (Students are subjected) to regimentation and regulation which produces a comparable docility. The schools regulate the daily activities of their inmates by a prison-like system of bells and roll calls. Classes generally run mechanically for a fixed length of time and change at regular intervals, regardless of the natural educational process (Haney & Zimbardo, 1975b, p. 30).

The end of a period at Rigby is marked by the sound of a loud siren-like buzzer which is more than loud enough for everyone in the building to hear. The buzzer has a sound quality reminiscent of an air-raid siren and the air-raid tests of the 1950s. It seems calculated to produce the same type of apprehension in the students who must gauge their activities by it. This buzzer seems to add to the tension in the atmosphere of Rigby JHS. This became especially obvious to my colleague and myself when the intense emotional interactions and experiences of the group were interrupted by the buzzer.

Activities like eating or going to the bathroom, whose pace is taken for granted in the outside world, are strictly limited by the schools (Haney & Zimbardo, 1975b, p. 30).

* * *

Charlie: Everytime you go to the bathroom you gotta take a pass home and show your mother the pass, everytime you went to the bathroom.
(laughter)

Dolores: He's not kidding.

Amy & Bernadette: It has to be signed by the parent.

Leader (Frank): What?

Charlie, Amy & Bernadette: You got to get it signed by the parent!

Charlie: So every time you go to the bathroom your mother or your father gotta know about it!

Amy: And if you don't bring it back you get an hour (detention).

* * *

Leader (Patty): What if your mother sends a note and says that she doesn't want to participate in that?

Charlie: Then you won't get no more passes.

Leader (Patty): To go to the bathroom?

Charlie: To go to the bathroom!

Dolores: Yeah.

* * *

Prisons and high schools maintain their authority in part through the use of symbols of power. In prisons, these include not only the obvious walls, bars, and towering gun posts, but also the special "GUARDS ONLY" rooms and areas off-limits to inmates. . . . Like prison guards, teachers also have the use of special lunchrooms, lounges and washrooms more comfortable, if not luxurious, than those reserved for students (Haney & Zimbardo, 1975b, p. 30).

* * *

Dolores: You should hear those teachers! They get in that Teachers Room and they talk about the kids.

Bernadette: I heard them myself once.

Dolores: Mr. R. tells us some of the things they say! Like they were planning how they were going to get rid of M. and I overheard them myself, the door to the teacher's room was open.

* * *

Today (6/12/75) Patty and I ate lunch in the school cafeteria. We had been invited by some of the group members to each lunch with them and we were both flattered by the invitation. When we arrived we were greeted by Bernadette and Dolores. We got on line with the students to buy lunch and to our surprise, two of the food service workers asked us why in the world we wanted to eat here in the student cafeteria when we could eat a "good meal" in the faculty lunch room. They seemed amazed and even somewhat insulted that we would willingly demean ourselves by eating in the student cafeteria. However, we insisted on eating with the kids. The cafeteria workers clearly thought we were quite strange for doing this. We had obviously violated an unwritten taboo. Bernadette bought our lunches for us so that we paid at the student rate which is slightly less than the visitor's luncheon rate. It was really pleasant to eat and talk with the kids informally, almost as peers. We met some of their friends, all of whom we liked. Their spontaneous interaction with their peers in this informal setting seemed to bring out qualities of sensitivity and intelligence which were seen only very rarely in other school areas and activities.

* * *

Another unwritten taboo centers around the restrooms. It is strictly enforced that a student cannot enter the faculty restrooms. However, an unofficial rule which is evidently followed just as strictly is that teachers and other adults do not enter the student restrooms, except in emergency situations. I tried on more than one occasion to gain entry to the boy's room in order to learn what this was about--unsuccessfully. Usually a student would quickly stop me and (politely) direct me to the faculty men's room. My colleague noted a similar situation with the girl's room. One time I was walking with Charlie in the hallway and asked him to point out the infamous boy's room to me. He took me to the door but would not allow me to enter, stepping between me and the door saying, "You don't want to go in there. It's really nasty. There's another bathroom around the corner (the faculty restroom). You don't want to see what's in there." I did not press the point. After all, Charlie may have been right, Maybe I really didn't want to see what was happening in there.

CHAPTER IV

THE ADOLESCENT IN THE SCHOOL

It is Thursday afternoon. In the new library-communications center it is business as usual. A few students are seated at desks or tables scattered throughout the library, quietly reading or studying. In the far corner of the library is a conference room. Inside of this room the group sits with the chairs forming a circle. The atmosphere is intense. There is a pause in the discussion. The group members' facial expressions are tense. Everyone's attention is focused on Duke (age 15).

"Everyone knows I'm immature, so you don't have to keep repeating it!" he blurts out loudly.

"Well, why don't you grow up while you're here?" asks Beth, obviously annoyed.

"No, I don't want to grow up!" retorts Duke.

"Why?"

"Because I don't feel like it!"

"Are you afraid to grow up?"

"I'm not afraid to grow up! I just don't want to!" shouts Duke.

"Why is that?" one of the group leaders asks.

"Me is me! I'm a clown! I'm a clown, I admit I'm a clown. I like to laugh, I don't like to be sad!" yells Duke with the excitement and emphasis of someone who is making a gut-level disclosure about himself.

The stage of human development which has been labelled adolescence is at best a difficult period of transition for any youth. He is rapidly approaching adult physical stature. There is the painful longing and anticipation for adult sta-

tus with all of its privileges and responsibilities. At the same time there is the fear and uncertainty regarding the leaving behind of the security and relatively care-free days of childhood. Adolescence is a kind of eight to ten-year limbo between childhood and adulthood. As such it may be more than a transition period for many. It may be coming to signify a way of life which the individual is reluctant to leave behind in favor of entering adult society.

Winder (1974) asserts that the nature of modern industrial society has necessitated the ten year transition period (from approximately age 12 to 22 years) from childhood to adulthood. In pre-literate tribal societies there is nothing which corresponds to adolescence as we know it. What there often is instead is an initiation ceremony or rite de passage which consists of some test or task such as the killing of a wild animal, which a youth must perform in order to attain maturity. Modern industrial society, on the other hand, dictates that somehow youth will emerge from the ten-year transition period with fully differentiated and integrated identities. Perhaps the greatest difference is that in tribal society youth is assured from birth of a place in the community, while in our society the adolescent must make a place for himself through his individual efforts. His success is largely dependent on his ability to build a highly differentiated personal identity for himself. It is a game, a competition in which it is at times uncertain to the participant

as to whether the prize is worth the effort.

Impulse Control

Charlie slowly walks down the corridor toward the library, a jacket and book slung over his shoulder. He is alone. An average-sized black youngster of 15 years, he walks with a slight limp --the result of a hip operation the year before. He is dressed in a simple red checkered shirt with grey khaki pants and white sneakers. Along the way two black girls approach from the other direction. They know Charlie and stop to talk with him. The girls are giggling with each other. They are somewhat better dressed than Charlie--their clothes appear fairly neat and in the latest styles. Suddenly Charlie is wildly swinging his jacket at the two girls, striking them.

"Cut it out, Charlie!"

"Come on, Charlie, leave us alone, huh?"

"Hey, Charlie, you better get outa here before you get in trouble again." The girls continue to giggle playfully as they proceed through the corridor.

"I'm a get you next time!" Charlie shouts as he turns and walks away, looking frustrated.

For Charlie, a mature identity is not and has never been easy to negotiate. His hip operation caused him to miss a great deal of school last year. Furthermore, Rigby was a new school for Charlie who had transferred from Van Allen JHS about a year ago. Thus Charlie found himself faltering academically and socially and seriously in need of support in the school. When this support was not forthcoming, Charlie's behavior would often vary between two extremes. At times, he

would display a preadolescent type of childishness sometimes clowning around. Sometimes teasing and hitting the girls seemed to be the closest he could come to showing affection. At other times he would be more sensitive to the needs of other people than most of the other group members:

Helen lay on the floor, face down, weeping, having just told the group of her impending arraignment and court hearing on charges of assault and battery. Some of the group members had not been very sympathetic to her, evidently feeling that she was at least partly to blame. Helen's account of the incident was inconsistent and Amy, Charlotte and Beth had mercilessly exposed these inconsistencies until Helen broke out in tears. Charlie was the only group member to kneel beside the anguished Helen, laying his hand on her shoulder, and speaking with a soothing quality in his voice which was in contrast to his usual rasping, abrasive speech:

"It's gonna be alright, baby. I know it will. You've had a rough time, but it's gonna be alright."

Charlie's behavior would often anger the other group members as well as my colleague and me. He seemed impervious to feedback of any sort from anyone. However neither my colleague nor I found that we could remain angry at Charlie for long. This is because almost without fail he would stop one of us in the hall or remain with us after the session had ended to help us tidy up the conference room and apologize: "I'm sorry about today. I guess sometimes I can be a real knucklehead."

One of the characteristics of human growth at age fifteen, Charlie's age, is an increase in physical energy due to

the strong erotic and aggressive impulses which have begun to surface. Usually, the teenager at this stage of life has made no effort to call forth such impulses. Yet, the impulses emerge and often to the dismay of the adolescent they demand an outlet and are expressed through his behavior. This brings about periods of seemingly disturbed behavior, frequently distinguished by various forms of acting out. Such episodes are generally balanced by periods of relative calm and low energy discharge. It appears that during these periods adolescents can take some time and reflect upon their behavior and the consequences of their actions. Such reflection is important for Charlie if he is to establish a sense of personal identity for himself.

The group is seated in a circle. The members are processing a role-playing exercise which was just completed. The exercise had centered around Amy and her inability to refrain from striking someone when she becomes angry at home or at school. All of a sudden Charlie begins to strike Dolores whom he is seated next to. Dolores strikes back at Charlie and soon they are exchanging blows. No one can figure where this conflict came from or how it arose.

Bernadette: They're in love.

Dolores: (to Charlie) What's wrong with you?

Leader (Patty): Charlie, what's that about?

Leader (Frank): Charlie, what are you doing?

Leader (Patty): Why do you think he was doing that, Bernadette?

Bernadette: Starting trouble. I mean, I'm not saying that he was, but that's how a fight always starts if you ask me.

Leader (Patty): Didn't it seem strange for Charlie to start hitting Dolores right in the middle of this?

Bernadette, Amy & Beth: Yeah.

Leader (Patty): Then talk to him about that.

(Charlie begins to tap his chair loudly with his hands, as if his chair were a conga drum. He is obviously actively seeking to ignore the discussion which has not centered on him.)

Group: (Trying to get Charlie's attention) Charlie, hey, Charlie!

(Charlie gets up and walks away.)

Bernadette: Why you gonna hit someone for no reason?

Amy: It was just an attention getter,

(Charlie returns.)

Charlie: (like a child who has just been scolded) You don't have to talk about me behind my back!

Leader (Patty): We want to talk to you, come here. Don't walk away.

Beth: (joking) We won't commit you to an institution yet.

(Meanwhile, Duke and Charlie begin to sing a recent popular soul tune in unison. It has a disruptive and distancing effect on what the group is trying to do. It is like the child who covered his ears in order to avoid hearing himself criticized by a parent or older sibling.)

It can be enormously difficult to distinguish between normal and pathological adolescent behavior. By definition, adolescence is a period of human development which is itself a disruption of peaceful growth (A. Freud, 1958). The psy-

chological changes experienced in adolescence closely resemble neurotic and borderline psychotic symptoms, Charlie would certainly have received some sort of disciplinary action from a teacher if such an outburst had occurred in a class or in the hallway. It is likely that it was behavior of this nature which had contributed to Charlie's becoming labeled as a "problem child" in the school. Other group members, particularly Helen, Amy, Sammy, Lawrence, Beth and Danny, would repeatedly run afoul of school authorities due to a lack of impulse control similar to that experienced by Charlie in the segment transcribed above. Another example lies in something which happened to Danny earlier in the year.

The Adolescent's Precarious Position: Adult or Child Status?

Mrs. B., the ninth-grade guidance counselor, recalled a recent incident where school officials had opened Danny's locker (without Danny's knowledge or permission) and found a carton of cigarettes there. This caused Danny's suspension from school once again in accordance with school regulations. According to Mrs. B., Danny took great offense to this, feeling that his rights had been violated. Subsequently, Danny became quite angry and agitated. The school officials had already "diagnosed" Danny as "probably emotionally disturbed." A more formal and accurate diagnosis was evidently not forthcoming since Danny was diagnosed as "hating shrinks", and since he refused to be tested by the school psychologists. Mrs. B. regarded Danny's reaction to the discovered cigarettes and suspension as further evidence of Danny's disturbed emotional condition, rather than as a spontaneous release of anger and frustration on Danny's part. She seemed totally oblivious to any notion of an invasion of Danny's rights to privacy, or the fact that Danny had not been caught smoking these

cigarettes. Mrs. B. was totally unsympathetic and non-cognizant of Danny's point of view, or his reasons for reacting the way he did.

I found no obvious evidence of pathology in our initial interview with Danny, nor in the group sessions which he attended. This is in spite of Mrs. B.'s warning that Danny would probably not even speak to us once he found out that my colleague and I were psychology graduate students because of his dislike for "shrinks." He talked with us quite openly and candidly in the initial interview, and seemed like an average youngster.

Danny was the victim of a labeling process which is insensitive and all but irreversable. Once a child has been labeled "emotionally disturbed", this label tends to follow him throughout his career in public school. This is so regardless of the accuracy of such a label or the small likelihood that the school officials can objectively arrive at a diagnosis. The result was that Danny's behavior came to be viewed by school officials as a manifestation of his pathology. This substantiated Danny's "disturbed" label in their minds.

Furthermore, the incident described above reflects a process which ignores Danny's sensitivity to the issue of being treated as a child. Danny was 16 years old and was repeating the ninth grade. As he was older than most of the other students at Rigby, the actions of the school officials who opened his locker and suspended him from school in effect disconfirmed Danny in his identity seeking. The process also indicates that the school too is uncertain about the

adolescent's status.

Distrust of Adults

"This school changed me," muses Beth.

"When I first came here I never got into trouble. It really got me to hate adults--'cause you get hassled a lot. Adults know it all, they think kids are all wrong!" she says.

A large part of the task of adolescence is the differentiation of the individual from his parents, to whom he has been attached since infancy. In fact, the entire adult world may come to be seen as "enemy territory", a threat to the individual's fragile personal identity. At school, many of the adolescent's conflicted feelings toward his parents are often placed onto other authority figures as well, such as teachers, counselors, and principals. He seeks refuge in his peer group. Therefore, it becomes increasingly difficult for any adult to approach and build a relationship with a youth thirteen to sixteen years of age. For the counselor or therapist seeking one-to-one intervention with an adolescent, the obstacles to a successful relationship are formidable, particularly if the teenager's behavior has caused him to be sent to the adult for "treatment" or counseling. Anna Freud (1958) sees such a situation as allowing little opportunity for the necessary therapeutic alliance to become established. Without it, however, effective intervention cannot take place.

When my colleague and I interviewed Lawrence during our first week at Rigby, his attitude toward us at that time exemplifies the difficulty which an adult faces in attempting to form a relationship with an adolescent in such a context:

Lawrence entered the guidance office slowly and suspiciously. His facial expression betrayed an expectation of having been called down from his class for some breach of school regulations. We greeted Lawrence and introduced ourselves as graduate students at the University who were working at Rigby on a volunteer basis. One of us asked Lawrence if he knew why he had been called to the office. He shook his head. There was a rigid, guarded, untrusting feeling about Lawrence. He seemed to regard us impersonally (i.e., as extensions of the school system or extensions of the guidance office), in spite of the fact that we were not directly connected with the school. He was not very talkative, and it was all but impossible to make any human contact with him. I assured him that he was not in any trouble but that Mrs. B. had given his name to us as someone who might benefit from a group experience, and I informed him that we would be leading a group of which he could become a member if he wished. Nevertheless, Lawrence remained tense and suspicious, though he did say that he wanted to be in the group.

Adolescent Ego Defenses

In the adolescent's withdrawal of his emotional ties to his parents, his instinctual energy must become redirected toward new objects outside of the family. If, for some reason, the adolescent cannot find expression for this energy outside the family, the energy stays bound within the self. This is often manifested in an adolescent's fantasies of omnipotence and notions of grandeur and power over others (A.

Freud, 1958; p. 21 in Winder/Angus). Note Charlie's reaction in the following sequence:

Bernadette: You know how in English class we always be talking about Nixon and Rockefeller, about people and our presidents and stuff? We got down that Rockefeller's a cheapskate. (laughter)

Dolores: He's blackmailing the people.

Duke: Aw, he can't blackmail, 'cause somebody'll kill him.

Charlie: I'll kill him. All Rockefeller need to do is will that money to me. If he puts my name down on the will, I'll finish him off. I'll finish him off. I'll take his money and finish him off. I'll take all that money and things he owns and give it to the poor.

Leader (Patty): Charlie, if you finished him off, even if your name was on his will, they wouldn't give you any of it. (laughter)
That's the way it is.

Another possibility in instances where an adolescent's instinctual energy cannot find a suitable object for expression outside of the family, is that this energy can be directed toward the individual's own body. The adolescent then manifests hypochondriacal and somatic symptoms similar to some borderline forms of psychosis. Consider Mary, whom we selected to be a group member, but whose mother refused to allow her to participate in the group.

Mary was recommended for our group by Mrs. B. because of her frequent absences and latenesses to school, and because of undone and incomplete homework and school work. Mary appeared physically mature and older than her true age of fifteen years.

She had a brow-beaten manner and her face seemed to carry a perpetual sad expression. Mary seemed to lack energy and enthusiasm for life. She had no friends and she spoke of being bored in school and consequently not paying attention to her classes. Mary described herself as ". . .having heart trouble, but no one will believe me." It seemed to us that Mary's home situation was so oppressive that it was interfering with her functioning in school. She spoke of being physically and emotionally abused at home by her mother and older brother-- being given responsibility for excessive amounts of housework while her mother worked, being left at the mercy of her callous older brother who beat her often. Because of her home situation, Mary said that she was always tired and missed the school bus not infrequently, resulting in absences, latenesses and disciplinary action. Patty and I were moved by Mary's story and were greatly saddened by her parent's refusal to allow her to participate in the group, probably due to the mother's fear of disclosure concerning Mary's home situation.

Peer Relations and Identity Formation

The fact that Mary had no peer group and thus no relationships outside of her family in which she could seek refuge and support contributed to her sad state of being. More important, she had little or no opportunity to seek out and "try on" new identities, which is so important to the teenager's growth and development of a unique and individual personal identity (Winder, 1974). Membership in the group might have provided considerable benefit for Mary, even if she were too withdrawn and reticent to actively contribute much to the group.

In a sense, the group served as a sort of legitimated peer group within the school for our group members. In terms

of age and grade level, each individual in the group was fairly close to the other group members. Each of them had been in some type of difficulty with school authorities to the extent that they had become labeled as "disturbed" adolescents. Some of the group members were neighbors (e.g., Duke and Bernadette lived next door to one another, as did Dolores and Charlie). Amy, Beth and Charlotte spent a good deal of time together outside of school, Sammy and Helen had dated at one time, etc.

The peer group is vitally important to the adolescent because it is here that he gains a sense of belonging and personal strength. He has the opportunity to test trial identities for himself within the framework of the youth culture.

Developmental Differences

The fact that the group was largely a peer group does not mean that each member was exactly like all the other members, or that all the group members were at the same level of maturity. There were vast differences in development and maturation among these youngsters. This became evident in one of the early sessions where Helen disclosed several of her recent experiences including heroin addiction, suspension from school for fights with boys and girls, chasing a teacher down the hall with a knife, an attempted suicide, sexual experiences and various assorted domestic problems. The girls

in the group were able to relate to these types of issues and empathize with Helen far more readily than the boys. The boys were obviously frightened by the subject matter of the discussion, particularly the sexual content.

At one point Helen turned to Danny and asked persistently, "Danny, would you hold it against someone, would you go out with a girl if she had gotten pregnant and had an abortion?"

"I don't know," said Danny, obviously surprised by the direct question.

"Suppose it wasn't her fault? Suppose she had been held down? Would you?" Helen asked repeatedly.

At another point in the discussion Helen and Amy both mentioned having been encouraged to prostitute themselves by their own fathers.

"I don't think I should be here," remarked Danny nervously.

Helen was talking about things which most of the boys had never experienced and possibly had never discussed outside of the type of "bathroom conversation" about sexual matters in which most adolescents at this stage of development engage. Thus, the boys were feeling threatened by the content of the discussion. They (particularly Duke) expressed these feelings by joking and acting in an inappropriately light-hearted manner while Helen and the other girls discussed experiences and situations which were quite serious and real to them. The differences in maturation in girls and boys of like chronological age was never more obvious.

Helen had developed early (physically), and experienced

things which many women twice her age have not. Yet, it seemed that her life had not waited for her emotional development to catch up with her physical development. She was confused and conflicted. At times it was difficult to know which of her accounts were accurate enough to be taken literally.

Helen's search for personal identity had been, and would continue to be a difficult one, although it seemed at times that she was working hard to straighten out her life and build a future for herself--only to have repeated setbacks such as her current court hearing and subsequent probation on assault and battery charges.

SECTION III

The minority group is a special American institution, created by the introduction between a history and an ideology which are not to be duplicated elsewhere. Minority status has little to do with size or proportion. In a democracy, a dominant social group is called a majority and a part of its dominance consists in the power to arrange appropriate manifestations of public support; while a subordinate group is, by the logic of political morality, a minority. . . . What is surprising is that the sons and daughters of the dominant adult group should be treated as a minority group merely because of their age. . . . In any society to be sure, the young occupy a subordinate or probationary status while under tutelage for adult life. But a minority group is not merely subordinate; it is not under tutelage. It is in the process of being denatured; of becoming, under social stress, something more acceptable to the dominant society, but essentially different from what its own growth and experience would lead to. Most beasts recognize their own kind. Primitive people may initiate their youth; we insist that ours be naturalized, though it is what is most natural about them that disturbs adults most. The court of naturalization is the public school.

From Friedenbergr, Edgar Z.;
1965; The Dignity of Mouth
and Other Atavisms. Beacon
Press, Boston. Pp. 66-67.

C H A P T E R V

FACTORS WHICH INHIBIT ADOLESCENT GROWTH IN THE SCHOOL

The material presented in the previous section would indicate that the so-called adolescent upset is an inevitable and necessary component of normal human development. The onset of puberty marks the beginning of adolescence. At this point in his life the individual begins to experience a significant increase in erotic and aggressive impulses which he seeks to defend against, often unsuccessfully.

The developmental tasks of adolescence are: 1) giving up the role of child (age 12-15 years), 2) achieving a sexual identity (age 15 to 17 years), and 3) achieving a personal and occupational identity (age 17 to 19 years). All of these tasks constitute the adolescent's identity seeking, and require that he find ways of coping with sexual and aggressive urges. This identity-seeking process requires considerable trial behavior and testing of one's autonomy, and this may take the form of acting out or other types of behavioral manifestations which can bear a striking resemblance to symptoms of borderline psychosis. Such behavior in adolescents is usually regarded by parents and school authorities with distress and alarm, and steps are taken to reprimand or punish the guilty youth. Unfortunately these measures fail to take into account the fact that the adolescent is still in the process of learning to master his sexual and aggressive

drives, in a manner similar to the way in which an infant learns to control and effectively employ his own limbs. Most of us feel that it would be cruel and ignorant to punish an infant for spilling his milk on the table. Is it not equally harsh to punish an adolescent for acts such as smoking, fighting, or expressing his dissatisfaction by exiling him from class or from school?

A. Freud (1958) and Winder (1974) suggest that greater concern should be directed toward those individuals who do not undergo adolescent upset. Adolescents who pass through their teenage years with little or no stress are generally regarded as "ideal teenagers" or models of correct behavior by parents, teachers and other adults. Yet, these persons may not have worked through the conflicts and constructive changes of adolescence. They may never have experienced the mastery of aggressive and erotic drives (libidinal impulses), and thus they may remain emotionally immature in their adulthood. Some experience adolescence later in life, or over an extended period of time, as a way of life. Even when adolescence is experienced in adulthood the childhood identity must become grown up. If the individual is unable to move into adolescence, then he has no identity. Identity diffusion occurs and chronic depressive and schizophrenic symptoms are incurred.

When viewed in this perspective, normal adolescence is characterized by disharmony. It is an interruption of peace-

ful growth and development. Adolescent behavior takes on a function--establishing control of one's instincts and actions. This requires quite a perceptual shift by adults--particularly parents and school officials (who are in effect, surrogate parents). Anna Freud advises us to direct efforts toward informing and assisting the adult community toward a better understanding of adolescence.

While an adolescent remains inconsistent and unpredictable in his behavior, he may suffer, but he does not seem to me to be in need of treatment. I think that he should be given time and scope to work out his own solution. Rather, it may be his parents who need help and guidance so as to be able to bear with him. There are few situations in life which are more difficult to cope with than an adolescent son or daughter during an attempt to liberate themselves (Winder & Angus, 1968, p. 23).

The Prospects for Adolescent Growth within the Climate of the School

Goodman (1964) has said that outside the family, most children have little interaction with adults with the exception of school teachers. The highly structured public school schedules, however, permit little time for contact on a personal level. For example, in Rigby's systems of class periods school begins at 8:20 a.m. and dismissal is at 2:20 p.m. Classes run for forty-five minutes with a four-minute interval between classes during which students are expected to proceed to their next class or study hall. There is literally no time for informal interaction in which teachers and

students might relate to one another on a more human level. On the contrary, guidance and confiding with adults in the school tends to occur only in extreme situations, the results being that one must be "deviant" in order to receive any individual attention. Even then, the nature of such attention is usually impersonal and hostile (see Chapter III), so that most adolescents prefer to avoid or minimize contacts with school personnel by unquestioning obedience to school regulations.

Erikson (1968) asserts that fidelity is of vital importance to the adolescent's identity seeking. The teenager's search for someone and something to be true to is the tool by which he eventually works through the developmental tasks of adolescence. It is a process whereby youth comes to identify with significant persons and social forces which relate the individual's life to a living community and ongoing history. Adolescents thus tend to relate to adults on the basis of what they stand for.

At Rigby there was a lack of available adults who stood for things which the adolescents in our group could give fidelity to. For most, it was non-existent in this environment. For example, Mr. N., the school principal, represented one adult to whom many students could give fidelity, but his presence did not change the nature of the school. His administrative duties limited his availability to students, who were otherwise subject to the authority of other school offi-

cial. Mr. R., a social studies teacher, was another adult to whom our group members and their peers could give fidelity. The students admired his teaching style--students were free to express their opinions, discuss issues of current importance to them, and even attempt to teach their peers. However, he worked at Rigby for only a half year, after which he resigned because of the pressure exerted upon him by his superiors who demanded that he teach and conduct his classes in a "professional" manner.

The group members' willingness to give fidelity to my colleague and myself indicates that given the proper climate and the availability of such persons, the process of fidelity can be brought into operation. Erikson (1968) refers to this as the strength inherent in the adolescent. Thus if one is confirmed as a troublemaker or as a child then he must accept this role. If, however, the teenager is confirmed in his identity seeking, his capacity for growth is great and he is likely to move through adolescence successfully.

Adolescent Insecurity in a Competitive Environment

Many adolescents also seem to prefer to maintain anonymity while in school. "Getting lost in the crowd" or withdrawing into himself and daydreaming in order to get through the day allows the student to remain within his protective shell, not risking exposure before his teachers or fellow classmates. This minimization of one's personal identity is

a characteristic of human behavior in hostile environments (Haney & Zimbardo, 1975b). Such a climate is anything but growth enhancing for the adolescent, who needs the opportunity to test new behaviors and responses.

Furthermore, in the classroom, the student becomes socialized in accordance with the competitive nature of this culture. He learns what material he can, more out of the fear of failing than through the appeal of succeeding--one student succeeds at the expense of another's failure (Laing, 1967). Beth spoke of having been penalized for having spoken up frankly to a teacher when she had difficulty with an assignment which required her speaking before the entire class.

Charlotte: Tell them about Mr. T.

Beth: Yesterday he threw me out of class. He asked me if I thought the class was dumb and I said "yeah" so he threw me out of class.

Leader (Patty): How did he happen to ask you that?

Beth: Because we were doing our oral reports, right? And nobody was getting a good mark, 'cause it's stupid--you didn't know what you were saying!

Charlotte: It was embarrassing. Everybody laughed at you.

Leader (Frank): They didn't tell you what to do?

Beth: You were supposed to get your own information. You get embarrassed and stuff! You know? He says, "Do you think this crap is dumb?" And I says, "Yeah!" He says, "Well then, get out!" (laughter)

The teacher seemed insensitive to the feelings of inse-

curity concerning standing up before her class and speaking, which Beth or any normal adolescent of age 15 or 16 might have. There is an exploitative quality about such an approach.

Lack of Communication between Adults and Adolescents in the Schools

The school system sets up a barrier between the adults and adolescents in the schools. Adolescents are clearly a captive audience with second-class status. The social environment of the school dehumanizes interactions between the adolescent and adults so that in situations where an adolescent might be expected to seek assistance from an adult, he refrains from initiating such contact. Even when such contacts are structured into the school's program (e.g., regular meetings with the guidance counselor), an adolescent will rarely open up and express his true feelings to an adult. Rather he will ". . . maintain sullen silence and not give the adult the time of day. His presumption is that the adult is setting a trap, could not understand, does not care anyway" (Goodman, 1964). An example is Lawrence's blatant mistrust of my colleague and myself in our first interview with him which is described in Chapter IV. Though it was more obvious with Lawrence, each of the adolescents whom we interviewed assumed that he or she was in some kind of trouble and had been called from class for that reason.

The lack of open communication between adolescents and adults at Rigby can have a severely inhibiting effect upon the healthy maturation of the adolescent. If he does have difficulties for which he needs assistance or guidance and he cannot find it in a parent or school official, he must work out his difficulties on his own with his limited experience and understanding. There appeared to be almost no open channels through which the adolescent who was undergoing difficulty individually in the home, in the community, or in the school might seek aid and relief. For example, there was nowhere in the school for Mary to seek counseling and support concerning her difficulties at home outside of our group. When her parent refused to allow Mary to enter the group it left no avenues open to her. She came to be repeatedly penalized for absences and latenesses to school, undone homework, etc. She came to be labeled as a "problem" without any attention being directed toward the child's personal difficulties which were related to the latenesses and absences.

School Regulations

The school's rules and regulations are another barrier to personal contact between adults and adolescents at Rigby. School regulations have the effect of relieving school officials of the need to be accountable for their actions. "The Rules" become the rationale for nearly all that is done by adults in the school environment. Adults, then, are not re-

quired to take personal responsibility for their actions since they are merely carrying out and enforcing "The Rules." These rules often appear unjust and arbitrary to the students. The group members spoke bitterly about the rules at Rigby. Some had attended other junior high schools in the city and found Rigby JHS to have a far more rigid and exacting set of rules than the schools which they had previously attended. The group all agreed about the rigidity of the rules:

Leader (Patty): You say that Rigby is the worst school in Green City.

Group: It is! It is!

Leader (Patty): I wanted to know if you think so and also why is Rigby the worst school?

Beth: The rules.

Amy: Rigby comes down too hard on everybody. Much too hard!

Charlie: Too many rules.

Leader (Frank): Well, why do you think Rigby has all those rules?

Bernadette: You want to know how come? 'Cause Rigby the best built school in Green City. That's why. It's the best built junior high. They got the pool, carpet. It's the only school that got these except for private schools.

Dolores: And they say "Hey! If you come to our school you better act cute" and stuff.

Bernadette: That's right.

Charlotte: They try to scare you.

Each of the group members interviewed after the final

session complained about the rules. "They're too hard to follow, and they're not fair. All the kids I know have trouble following them," said Beth.

When I asked Mrs. B., the ninth grade guidance counselor for a copy of the school regulations which are issued to every student at Rigby, she maintained that no such thing existed. All of the students whom I knew had discarded their copy, left it at home or were unable to locate their copy, but they insisted that they had been issued such a booklet. In the central office, the staff also were unable to locate a copy for me to examine. Finally, Mr. G., the assistant principal, was able to dredge up a copy. It is a thirty-one page document, written in the language and style of a college or university catalogue. It would certainly be difficult for a fifteen-year-old and even his parents (particularly if they are from a black or working class background) to make much sense of it. As regards disciplinary action such as suspensions, the language is vague in some places and legalistic in others. It becomes obvious from the document that the student is in a powerless position. The section on suspensions begins as follows:

- A) Students have a right to an education and to the equality of educational opportunity.
- B) Disciplinary measures (suspensions) which deprive him of this right should be utilized only in extreme cases such as the following where a student shows his inability to recognize the rights of others.

The manual begins with offenses such as "possession of dangerous weapons", and "deliberately causing hazards to endanger safety," which almost no one would object to as punishable by suspension. However, at the bottom of the list are such questionable offenses as "any serious violation of school regulations" and "unsatisfactory school behavior," the arbitrary nature of which is obvious. Who decides where to draw the line between serious and non-serious violations, and satisfactory and unsatisfactory school behavior? Certainly the students have no input into these matters. And teachers and principals must often make on-the-spot interpretations of school regulations.

One wonders how an adolescent is supposed to know where to draw the line when this is in no way clearly specified. Furthermore, as was discussed above, adolescents in the schools are a captive audience. How cynical it must appear to the adolescent to read of his "rights to an education" and suspensions for the student who is unable "to respect the rights of others involved in the educational process." The student may wonder what smoking, or expressing an opinion or emotions has to do with respecting the rights of his classmates. It must seem every more cynical to the student who reads:

It is assumed that actions which separate the student from the school (suspensions) should be fair and consistent. . . .

The True Business of the Schools

Together with the school regulations, the school's curriculum comprises the bulk of the business of the public school. It is misleading to assume that academic education is the only process taking place here. What appears to be of even higher priority is what Friedenbergr (1963) has referred to as a dual social function of the educational system: 1) to build a common pattern of values and responses among adolescents from diverse class and ethnic backgrounds; and 2) to provide a social mobility ladder for the youth of our society. The atmosphere of the schools is value-laden with this dual social function. The demands for socialization have caused the school system to gear most of its resources and rewards toward those adolescents who are solidly middle-class to the relative neglect of lower-status youngsters, whom it often treats with hostility (Friedenbergr, 1963, p. 315).

Most of the group members felt that Rigby had not served their needs as growing adolescents. They seemed to feel more as if it had been they who had served the needs of the school by having been required to attend Rigby. The following are excerpts from our final interviews with individual group members shortly prior to their graduation from junior high school. Of course most of them said they hated school and were glad to be leaving. Yet, it was not (as an adult might think) an opposition to learning and scholarship. When asked, each of them had definite ideas of things they felt they

should be learning and had not been able to get at Rigby. The practical sense and social consciousness which they displayed in these interviews indicated that these boys and girls, in spite of having been labeled "deviant", were no less intelligent, no less sensitive to the needs of others than the average adolescent:

Sammy: Rigby was hard. The teachers hassle you too much. I learned a little stuff but they teach you everything over and over again, the same stuff. . . (they should teach you) how to work on jobs, how to get along with other people--you ain't gotta know what a verb or a noun is! They should also teach you about politics and junk. They just teach you about the past.

* * *

Bernadette: I didn't like it. Rigby was too strict, too many rules for people to follow--nobody can do it. . . . You should be learning about what's happening now, not the past! Like inflation and the people coming from Korea, Viet Nam, why are they wasting money, no jobs.

* * *

Charlie: Rigby is the best school in Green City. It's a nice place if it wasn't for the rules. Too many rules--if someone is caught smoking in the boys room they get suspended. I don't want to learn none of that social studies shit, about the old days. They should have what's going on today, more about the president and the government. No, Rigby didn't help me plan for my future! I wanted auto-body mechanics--they wouldn't give it to me. They gave me what they want. I wanted to go to Barnam Vocational last year. Mrs. B. didn't send my folder to Barnam so I couldn't get in.

* * *

Helen: Kids should learn things like ecology and things they are going to be doing in life, not things like history--kids get bored of the past. For the most part they teach things kids already know. A lot of kids want to know about what's going to happen in the future, how to plan for their own future.

I'm going to be a truck driver--tractor-trailer. No, Rigby didn't help me prepare. I'm going to Vocational High. I'll take auto mechanics (like my father). I find girls hard to get along with. At Vocational I won't have to deal with girls. . . some of them are so petite! I was brought up to act like a guy (doing things like working on cars). They taught me how to fight, taught me my responsibilities, my enemies. I don't like things like sewing, female sex-role type of things. . . . Mrs. B. and Mr. G. don't want me to go to Vocational High. They want me to go to Commercial High were I can learn things like typing.

* * *

Dolores: They should pay attention to kids. (I want to) learn about the world, really. Like Mr. R, he teaches: "How would kids feel if they were president? How would they feel if they were working and their tax money was being wasted?" We want to learn what's really going on in the world, like Rockefeller, the Mayaguez.

The Racial Climate of the School

Here again, the surface appearance is one of harmony among black and white students. Black students comprise roughly one-third of the student population at Rigby. Though there were only two black teachers working in the school, Mr. N., the school principal, was proud of the racial balance at Rigby. He confidently attested to the relative absence of racial strife in his school. Still he was obviously not com-

fortable with the topic and soon changed the subject to athletics at Rigby, of which he was even prouder. During our first few weeks at Rigby we heard nothing from any of the school officials with whom we had contact that would indicate that the racial issues, which are characteristic of the social environment outside of the school, had penetrated the seemingly serene atmosphere found inside the school. I was somewhat suspicious of this, due to a couple of incidents which I had observed in the hallways and a couple of fleeting comments by various group members. Yet, there was really no reason to believe that racial problems of any sort existed at Rigby until our group session of May 14, 1975. The group was involved in discussing the unfairness of the suspension rules and in formulating some ways in which they might change such rules, were they in charge of the school. In the process of this discussion group members repeatedly spoke of friends and acquaintances who had been suspended for reasons which appeared very arbitrary. In many of these incidents it appeared to the group members and to us that teachers were at times prone to using their nearly absolute power over students as a release for their own inner frustrations and conflicts.

Bernadette: Well, that ain't nothing! You know my girlfriend A. and Mr. H.? They had an argument. Mr. H. called A. a 'nigger' and she called him a 'fat bastard.'

Leaders: (surprised) What? Say that again, more slowly?

Bernadette: A. is one of my best friends. Mr. H.,
he's a big fat man.

Charlie: Square biz!

Amy: Yeah.

Bernadette: He's a social studies teacher. Well
one day A. was running in the halls, right?
Mr. H. told her to stop. A. said, "I know you
ain't talking to me!" He says, "Yes I am."
Then A. said "No, you're not!" And Mr. H.
said, "I'm talking to you, nigger!" just like
that.

Leader (Frank): Is he white?

Group: Yes.

Leader (Patty): Is he still here?

Bernadette: Yeah! Then A. called him a 'fat bast-
ard' and then she got suspended.

Leaders: Did she tell anyone?

Bernadette: Yeah, she told Mr. C.--that's her
counselor--and he couldn't do nothing about it.

Leader (Patty): (slowly, in amazement) Mr. C.
couldn't do anything about it, even though she
told him that he called her a nigger?

Beth: It's your word against theirs. What can you
do?

Bernadette: He tried to get Mr. H. kicked out of
school but he couldn't because you know they
said she shouldn't have got mad at him and
said that. She said he shouldn't have called
her a nigger in the first place.

Leader (Patty): That's what I was talking about.
I wasn't talking about keeping her in school.
I was talking about keeping him in school.

Bernadette: Mr. C. couldn't say anything 'cause he
was downstairs when it happened. They finally
ended up giving her one week (suspension) in-
stead of two weeks.

Throughout the remainder of our involvement similar incidents came to the surface. It became evident that a good deal of racial tension did exist in this environment. This was true among the students, as well as between student and school officials. These tensions were very much present and bear some relation to the subtle racism inherent in the educational system. Charlie was disclosing his feelings about being black at Rigby:

As we sat on the lawn in front of the school building Charlie speaks gravely, a change from his usual loose, joking manner:

"It's like you in jail! If you get in a fight with a white kid the black kid gets kicked out." Charlie calmly puffs on a cigarette, fully aware that it is an infraction punishable by short-term suspension.

"Like the time Tommy James was hit by a white kid. He pushed Tommy out the way and Tommy punched him. His nose bled and Tommy got five days and the white kid got nothing. . . . Seems like nobody likes colored kids. I don't know why but that's the way it be," he says as he flicks his cigarette butt into the gutter.

Dolores too had strong feelings about being black at Rigby:

"My mother said that if you're black they'll put everything against you. It seems to be true." There is a strong tone of bitterness in her voice as she speaks.

"It's like when this white guy and me got into a fight, started by the white guy. The white guy didn't get suspended and I did. I didn't want to come back to school!"

Beth's opinions concerning the black students at Rigby were given to us honestly and spontaneously in our final interview with her. Her viewpoint appears representative of many of the white students and again should be interpreted in the context of the white middle-class bias of the school environment:

"They think they're dynamite. They're trying to take over the school (not all of them, some of them are O.K.). Their actions, the way they talk, if you walk down the hall you'll get your ass kicked. Most white kids back off. It's not organized, it's just the way they are in school. I think it's really stupid! I think everyone's equal, it doesn't matter what color you are, but when you start acting like that it doesn't look it.

"They should act like normal people, like everyone else does. They should be more pleasant. They don't always have to be jumping on you. All kids do it. Everyone ranks on everyone else, but I can't see fighting for nothing, 'cause you bump into somebody."

Beth is reacting to some of the behaviors of the black students. She seems not to understand however the dissonance and difficulties which black adolescents are subject to in the school environment. It is enough of a task for the white adolescent to carve out his own individual identity in the context of the junior high school. The black adolescent must not only differentiate himself from his parents; he must also differentiate himself from the white culture in order to resolve his adolescent identity crisis and achieve a fully differentiated personal identity. Adolescents then become a

particularly crucial stage for the black adolescent. Helen was more sensitive toward the black students' dilemma since she socialized with more of the blacks than did Beth and was more familiar with issues and situations which confronted blacks at Rigby. Perhaps her own personal experiences also enabled her to empathize with blacks more readily.

"They (the black students) get ranked out a lot. My sister's married to a black Puerto Rican, and I have a lot of black friends. I hang out a lot with them. The white kids go around: 'Oh you nigger!', and then there's fights. I don't think it's right. They're just like everyone else. A lot of kids, like Charlotte, Beth and Amy, think that black kids are trying to take over the school, but they're not--Mr. G. and Mr. K. (assistant principals) already have it in their hands!

"Black kids don't like some white kids because they're sarcastic. . . . Black kids feel that they're badder and bigger and can take care of themselves. If anyone jumps on their case they'll jump on them. The blacks feel that they shouldn't take anything. They sit together, stick together, stick up for each other--big ones will take up for the little ones. . . . If they got Mr. G. or Mr. K. to leave, then Rigby would be O.K. They are always trying to kick kids out of school--especially black kids."

Fear of racial, cultural or class differences which is one of the bases of racism, appears to be primarily an adult problem. Youth appears to be far more receptive to these kinds of differences, although some adolescents seem to have had a significant amount of the fears and prejudices of their elders transmitted to them. Danny, for example, felt very much intimidated by the blacks in the school, and talked of

an imminent gang-war type of confrontation between black and white students. However, I heard no mention of this possibility elsewhere. Sammy had some insight into Danny's situation and perspective:

"I wouldn't want to be black in this school. Probably you'd be treated bad by whites. Black and whites usually get along pretty well though, I guess. Danny was small and a lot of black kids hassled him. I'm small too and they hassle me, like today a guy bumped into me in the hall and wanted to fight."

The tensions that were present in the school are definitely in the context of the fear and denial of cultural differences among the races. The white-middle-class bias of the school system is often baffling and stifling for the black youth.

The primary function which Friedenberg (1963) attributes to the schools is that of establishing common responses to certain key stimuli, regardless of how different the respondents are. The ideology which underlies the educational system dictates that it is the function of the schools to render it unnecessary to acknowledge and explore natural human differences. The result is that if the student does not fit the white middle-class mold which has been designated as "normal", he is likely to be penalized in the form of a label of "emotionally disturbed" in his student folder.

Weems (1974) similarly notes that because of the assumed norm of the white middle-class child, differences from this norm have been assumed to imply deviance, and such differences to be regarded as inferior and even pathological.

He states:

Insufficient consideration has been given to the possibility that despite a shared cultural geography, blacks and whites may conceivably occupy different cultural psychologies. Because of the overriding assumption of cultural homogeneity encompassed in the cultural heterogeneity. We have been loath to approach the reality of the compelling differences which do exist among the races (Weems, 1974, p. 1).

Weems (1974) details the real and valid cultural differences between blacks and whites. Educators, however, have sought to extinguish these differences to the detriment of black youth. This, in effect, constitutes a form of psychological and cultural genocide. Racial and cultural differences are in accord with natural human variation. They could be a powerful source of stimulation and knowledge to those who would earnestly explore such differences.

The School Officials

Most of the school officials were held in contempt by the group members. However, they were not always the "ogres" who were described to us by the group. Mrs. B., the ninth-grade guidance counselor, for example, appeared warm and personable. Sometimes she seemed to bend over backwards to assist us. She could be quite charming with some students. However, when displeased with a student, the tone of her voice would shift and take on a penetrating and hostile quality which made me feel fortunate that I was not one of her

students. Toward the end of the term, my colleague and I began to detect a change in Mrs. B.'s attitude toward us. She became colder and more distant, almost in direct proportion to our growing attachment to the group members, and she seemed impervious to our complimentary remarks about them.

I spoke with Mrs. B. informally and at length on the final day of school. I expressed to her the group's feelings that Rigby's rules are too strict, too numerous, and too difficult to follow. She felt that it was her duty as well as the task of the school to discipline students in preparation for their responsibilities in high school and eventually in adult life. Her opinions reflected traditional notions of how adolescents should be handled. This was what she had been taught, and she believed it to be the only proper way to run a junior high school. She had worked as a guidance counselor for several years. It seemed that no amount of argument or logic would change her views.

Although some of the things she did had adversely affected some of the members of our group, her removal from Rigby, or even a change in her perspective on adolescents would not change the nature of the system or cause the school to abandon the white middle-class norm from which it operates. Nor would the removal of Mr. G. or Mr. M. (assistant principals), whose major task it was to discipline students who had violated school regulations. They were all helpful and cordial to us. Mr. G., for example, was pleasant to talk with and he

seemed to feel that we were providing a necessary and worthwhile service to the students in our group. Yet, when he would assume the role of disciplinarian-assistant principal, his tone of voice and facial expression would change and he would seem remote from any sort of personal contact. He became caught in his role as the symbol of arbitrary adult authority.

Mr. N., the school principal, was in a somewhat different position. Since the assistant principals handled most of the disciplinary matters, he was able to devote most of his time to the business of running his school. Surprisingly, Mr. N. seemed to be loved by all at Rigby. I never heard anyone say a negative thing about him; as passionately as the group hated the school and other school officials, so did they love Mr. N. "There goes the nicest person in the school," said Charlie one day as Mr. N. passed us in the hallway.

Mr. N. seemed to possess a sensitivity for adolescents and their difficulties which few of the other staff could boast, partially a result of his long experience in working with adolescents and largely due to his personality which can be characterized as warm, gentle, sensitive and dedicated. Many of those who found themselves in some kind of difficulty in school would find someone who was willing to listen to them and offer them encouragement and advice in Mr. N. Nevertheless, even his presence in the school as its top administrator did not make the environment much less repressive

and alienating than it was.

Most of the teachers we met were also cordial and helpful. They generally encouraged us in which we were doing. What it was about the environment which causes the alienation between adults and students did not become evident to me until late in the term as I was organizing and compiling my data. I remembered how we had been given a list of seventeen students as possible group members by Mrs. B. We had originally planned on a group of six to eight adolescents. During our first week at Rigby, as we screened students for the group, we found that we did not really want to eliminate anyone and we had considerable difficulty in deciding whom to eliminate. Soon we were committing ourselves to eleven. We felt guilty about not being able to include everyone whom we had interviewed, and personal notices were sent to those whom we were not able to take into the group. In spite of our having clearly explained to each person that we would not be able to take everyone, we later learned in the pandemonium of the early group sessions that those who were excluded were very angry. Some of them came to the sessions anyhow, without passes and at some risk of disciplinary action from the school. It was in these instances that I believe I could empathize most with the role confusion which plagued some of the younger and more sensitive teachers in the school, such as Mr. R. (whom nearly everyone in our group spoke of favorably). When these students would come to the group, some-

times refusing to leave, my immediate thought and reaction was to have these persons leave the room. I then realized that I was apprehensive lest we lose control of the group who were eyeing us carefully to see how we would handle ourselves in these situations. Something about sending these adolescents away felt very wrong. The need to maintain control and the fear of losing it forces one to act in an authoritarian manner, neglecting the needs and sensitivities of the students whom one is supposed to serve.

Louise was one of those whom we had to exclude from the group. She was furious with us and never let us forget it. She received a long-term suspension shortly after the group began to meet and we did not see her again until she was reinstated when the term was nearly over. In the intervening period, we had come to learn that there had been a move on the part of certain school officials to force Louise out of the school, though the reasons were never entirely clear. We pondered whether this would have happened had we included her in the group. As we passed her in the hallway she turned and approached us. I braced myself for the usual tirade. Instead, she just looked at us and said in a soft, almost meek voice--certainly out of character for her, "I'm still mad at you guys for not letting me in the group. I really had a lot of things to say."

Summary

Despite its excellent facilities, the social environment at Rigby impedes the personal growth of the adolescent in several ways. There is little opportunity for meaningful personal contact between adults and adolescents, and thus communication between school officials and students tends to be limited to a narrow sphere of experience and activity. There is no indication that decisions are made democratically. The rules are designed and enforced by adults. The students must obey them blindly and faithfully. Nor do students have any control over what they are taught. The white middle-class norm of the school system tends to serve the interests of those children who fall into that category. Those who do not--the blacks, Puerto Ricans, and working-class whites--may find their opportunities blocked because preference is given to those who operate within this framework. The school officials have been trained to accept the white middle-class norm as their central frame of reference, and any behavior or ambitions which fall outside of the norm tends to be regarded as pathological or inferior. The result of the school system's efforts to build a common pattern of values and responses among a diverse student population has been the extinguishing of a variety of potentially growth-enhancing characteristics which students bring to this setting.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The thrust of this study is an inquiry into the relationship between the psychological growth needs of the adolescent and the social norms of an urban junior high school in Massachusetts. As co-therapists and leaders of a group of ninth graders my colleague and I were able to act as participant observers in the setting over a period of five months. As such, we were able to interact with the setting and observe how the environment and those involved in its function. The names of the respondents and other individuals in the school have been changed, and the name of the city disguised.

It was felt that there is little understanding of how the junior high school really affects those who are involved in it. This is particularly so since we are all so familiar with it that we tend not to devote much thought or attention to it, in spite of its crucial role in the socialization of youth at an important stage in their development.

Implications

The school as it is presently organized and functioning is not meeting the growth needs of its students. The climate of the school does not allow or encourage normal adolescent growth. The absence of meaningful interaction between ado-

lescents and adults in this environment does not enhance adolescents' growth. The ideology which underlies the functions of the school does not lend itself to normal adolescent growth. The messages which adolescents receive from adults concerning acceptable modes of conduct tend to be unclear, ambiguous and contradictory. It is no surprise then that a student's behavior may appear chaotic. Spontaneous behavior and testing of one's autonomy becomes at best, very risky. The presence of overt and covert racism in the schools render the reality testing which is already risky for the white youth, all but impossible for the minority youth. The school curriculum also appears to smother rather than stimulate adolescent growth. Outdated curricula are sorely in need of revision in order to keep pace with the everchanging realities of our society and our world.

The children blame the adults and the adults blame the children. Yet the blame does not lie entirely with those who are directly participating in the setting. It is the educational process which is malfunctioning, in that somehow the most basic notions of education have been lost. Such notions involve growth toward a mature, productive and satisfying existence as the right of every individual. Instead, what we have is a crudely efficient socializing machine which does not allow for normal human variation in the form of individual, racial, and cultural differences. Those who cannot or will not be 'processed' are singled out, rejected and event-

ually discarded.

These adolescents do need more attention and support from the adults in the school. The adults too require more time, more education and new tools in order to provide the students with a social environment which will enhance rather than inhibit students' growth as human beings. Adolescents possess a great capacity to grow if given the opportunity to do so in the form of a proper social climate. The focus of such a social climate must be personal growth and support, not social control.

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