An Assessment of the Perceptions of Institutionalized Filipino Youth

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Special Reports

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It may well be that what we observe as delinquency and crime is more often than not recognized as a normal reaction of normal people to an abnormal condition. The juvenile delinquent is always a person whose spiritual, educational and/or social needs are not being met.

D ELINQUENCY, like any syndrome, has multiple implications and ramifications. To be more deeply understood, it must consequently be viewed in the context of the delinquent's inability or failure to perceive what society expects of him and he of society. Apropos the juvenile delinquent's attitudes toward society, one must, therefore, ask such questions as the following: what personality type does he possess? How well integrated is his personality? How well has he been prepared by his family, school, church and community to meet the challenge of life? For consistency, interwoven with realistic goals, warmth and understanding, abets growth, fosters continuous personality development, and generates a balanced self-concept. The youth unsure of his identity, possessed of distorted perspectives and poorly conceived goals, shies away from interpersonal intimacy. Groping for a place in society, he often shows a readiness to repudiate and, if necessary, to destroy the institutions and the people who seem

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to threaten him. He is consequently alienated from society. Peer groups usully provide him then with a psychological refuge amidst what he feels is hostile environment. The gang is merely the peer group at odds with society; it constitutes the vehicle for delinquency.

Since the Manila Youth Reception Center (MYRC) has a transient population, the subjects for this study are randomly selected from all inmates confined there on October 14, October 22, and November 5, 1968. Information was gathered through a Tagalog-English questionnaire, twelve sentence completion items, interviews,and observations.

Twenty-two boys or 23% of all inmates were included. They ranged, in age from 11 to 16, with a mean age of 13.3 years. Eighteen girls or 62% of all female inmates were included. Again, their ages ranged from 11 to 16, with a mean age of 13.3 years. The forty subjects represented 32% of all population of the MYRC for the designated study dates. Their terms of confinement varied from less than a week to nearly a year. Some were first offenders, and others repeaters for the third time. Charges ran the gamut from simple disobedience to more frequent indictments of robbery to less frequent but still prevalent charges of homicide.

The questionnaire, in the format of a rating scale (Table 1), showed that the inmates of the MYRC considered the center staff, court staff, volunteers and other as "friendly" and "very helpful". Literature on rating scales, however, invariably questions the reliability and validity of the technique. In this particular setting, the rating technique revealed much jockeying for prestige within the institution; everyone wanted to look good in the final results to be tabulated. The results, therefore, are coarse estimates and not precise indicators because (1) at least 50% of the subjects were illiterate so that information was elicited by interview, (2) respondents showed evidence of mental set, (3) subjects were often influenced by peers toward checking certain categories, (4) the social workers who assisted during the study often coached subjects toward favorable categories, and (5) even in cases where subjects

possessed some reading and writing skills, limited academic preparation as well as an almost sterile comprehension of terms was evidenced. Subjects often inquired: "what is a physician?" "What is a janitor?" "What do you mean by peer group?"

Responses to the completion statements were rich and varied, pragmatic yet revealing as follows:

1) Both boys and girls tended to complete the statement "I am" with a positive trait. In no instance did the boys list a negative trait; one girl answered "I am bad." Do these subjects have maladjusted self-concepts or has society been too hasty in branding them as delinquents? Are girls more sensitive to labels or more psychologically crippled by legal confinement?

2) Fourteen boys and twevle girls felt that their problem was "how to free myself and go home," indicating a dichotomy between this projective approach and the questionnaire ratings. Two boys and two girls listed their parents as the problem; three boys and one girl listed no particular problem; one boy sought the reason behind his confinement and two girls provided such perceptive answers as: "my problem is being solved little by little," and "how will my parents know I am here".

3) The statement "I enjoy doing" was completed as follows: eight boys, playing;five, working; four, studying; two, drawing; one, being good; one, dancing; and one, being free. Among the girls, nine preferred to work, while two enjoyed each of the following: playing, dancing, and being good. Reading, studying, and collecting card views each received one endorsement.

4) Boys and girls chose goals in life which centered either on a specific career or on study. Two boys and two girls had no goals; one boy's goal was "to protect myself from danger". Is the danger real or imagined? Within the home or institutional setting? Does it emanate from age peers or authority figures?

5) All boys disliked doing "bad things" and ten out of twenty-two specified they disliked stealing. The girls' responses showed variety, and, in some cases, need of immediate therapy; for example, one disliked eating; two, sitting; one, everything in life; and one, to get married.

6) The general consensus among both boys and girls was that the future looked good.

7) The pre-eminence of the here and now is reflected in the answers of boys as well as girls to the question about the person whom they liked best. The majority listed a staff member of the MYRC. Six boys listed specific traits they sought in the person they liked. Three boys nominated their mothers as the person they liked best. In only one case did a boy list both his parents. Four girls, however, designated both their parents. Do the results imply that girls have better relationships within the family circle?

8) Eighteen boys and nine girls indicated a favorable reply for the MYRC. A difference, however, existed in their descriptive responses. The boys described tthe MYRC as "a dormitory building," "a house," "a beautiful house for those who do not know where to go." Seven girls, on the other hand, saw the MYRC as "a jail," "a cage," "a jail for children who sinned and are lost." Are the girls' perceptions aligned with the views of society? Are they mature? Credulous? Or maladjusted?

9) The statement "My father. . ." was completed with a positive trait by eleven boys and eleven girls, and with a negative trait by one boy and three girls. A descriptive phrase was inserted by one boy and three girls. The boy indicated his father's nationality and added, "he is already dead."

10) The completion statement "When I have a problem I go to. . ." elicited replies that dovetailed with previous findings about preoccupation with present needs. The MYRC staff was again endorsed by 12 boys and 9 girls. Two boys and two girls approached their mother, while only one boy and no girl turned to their father. Four boys and four girls

sought assistance from relatives; two boys preferred to seek solace in a place like the Luneta and three girls sought the confidence of friends.

11) The majority of both boys and girls felt their mother was good and kind; two boys gave negative responses and one girl replied, "she is not with me."

12) Most subjects perceived people in general as being good; three boys and four girls tended to make the statement, "some are good, some are bad." Three girls indicated that people are "different."

An analysis of the data shows many positive trends in the adjustment abilities of these youthful offenders. Is their problem then basically cultural? Kvaraceus acknowledges that the pertinence of cultural forces that affect the growing boy and girl tends to be more amorphous than factors in personality or in the home-family-neighborhood environment.

The data and personal observations raise questions concerning the validity of the in-take procedure, professional rehabilitative services, and the total institutional environment. How can a penal institution attempt rehabilitation when an inmate has not even been appraised and/or has no clear notion of his offense? Ambiguity is a strongly negative factor in a youngster's search for his or her freedom. To an already battered personality, it can be disastrous. A researcher working in the Bacolod Boys Protectory tersely stated: The detention of minors in a hostile jail environment, which reenforces existing emotional problems and creates new ones more often than not leads to future acts of crime. A therapeutic or rehabilitative environment better serves the coping process because it identifies the source of resistiveness and supplants it it with an ameliorative cooperativeness.

Do authorities complicate the problems of delinquents? They may. An American seminar on juvenile delinquency prevention and control concluded that the ways by which authority figures deal with a child's anti-social acts may markedly influence the adjustment patterns with which the child may face up to similar situations in the future. Whether

dealing with transitory acts of disobedience or serious crimes, the process of normal adjustment and maturing must be realized under the guidance of committed and competent professionals from many disciplines. Studies have repeatedly shown the magic of suggestion, role identification, credibility, and persuasiveness toward shaping the personality, temperament and forte of an individual. Moral standards are inculcated through psychological discipline, which is an index of both the parents' manner of restraining aggressiveness and of indicating approval. The inmates of the MYRC tended to categorize adults under either positive or negative groupings, gravitating toward the group or individual sympathetic to them. These young men and women are pleading for understanding and desperately searching for love.

A study made by Aldaba-Lim, Bellosillo and Alano revealed that only 86% of delinquents were able to explain their delinquent behavior. Predatory gang delinquents have defined themselves as persons without personality problems. They think of themselves as lacking in adjustment difficulties ...and research data seem to demonstrate that these individuals are no more or less pathological than their non-delinquent peers. If individual gang members are to be changed, the group must be changed.

At a University of Kansas seminar on delinquency, a guideline for grasping the roots of delinquent behavior included:

1) The *real* problem, i.e., our action is directed toward correcting what undesirable factors?

2) The *real* cause, i.e., what aggravates the problem and what permitted its development?

3) The *real* self which must be dealt with, i.e., what emotions, limitations, or conflicts within our own selves must we deal with when we are coping with the problem?

4) The *real* message in the delinquent's behavior, and in our response.

Rehabilitation programs should, therefore, encompass the expectations of society even as they generate interaction bet-

ween the offender and all the personnel associated with the re-
habilitative process so that catharsis may deepen understand-
ing in the involved parties. The official designation of "delin-
quent" should be applied only after all factors have been
carefully scrutinized. Why mar or stigmatize an individual's
name for a simple act of disobedience? The in-take procedure
as well as professional and non-professional personnel are in-
cipient clues to youthful adjustment. Integrated and balanced
activities during confinement could demonstrate the proper
use of time, and hasten the development of the inmates'
potential. Thus, only by meeting the delinquents' spirit-
ual, emotional, educational and social needs can any re-
habilitative process hope to produce mature and respon-
sible citizens. The ultimate appraisal of institutionalization
should take into account whether confinement has been merely
a stop-gap for repeated acts of disobedience, a prelude per-
haps to more severe behavior problems, or has led to the learn-
ing of the lesson, i.e., has resulted in the satisfactory adjust-
ment of the individual, and if so, by what means. In conclusion,
Rogers' comment is appropriate: our work cannot be measured
or evaluated save in the degree to which it aids the individual
fit normally into society.

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TABLE I*

Center Staff	Hostile	Friendly	Very Helpful	Do-Gooder	Only a Job	No Contact
Superintendent		15	24	1		
Security Officers	3	19	13		4	1
House Parents	2	15	18		5	
Social Workers		8	32			
Physician	2	12	19		3	4
Dentist	1	8	28		1	2
Dietitian-Cook	3	12	15	2	4	4
Playground Instructor	5	15	9		1	10
Janitor	1	5	10	1	5	18

Court Staff						
Arraignment Officer	2	12	18	2	3	3
Fiscal Officer	1	10	21	1		7
Judge		6	29		2	3

Volunteers						
Priests	2	17	16	2	1	2
Sisters	1	19	15		1	4
Big Brothers or Big Sisters	1	11	19			9
Vocational Instructors		12	14	2	5	7

Others						
Parents	4½	5½	25			5
Relatives	3	9	15	1	3	9
Peer Group	4	13	12	3	2	6

Activities	Good Mahusay naman	Fair Kainaman	Unsatisfactory Walang Kuwenta
Meals	25	9	6
Sleeping Quarters	26	7	7
Cleaning Assignments	23	14	3
Vocation Projects	24	11	5
Religious Services	28	9	3
Recreation	23	13	4

* Hostile — *Dinadaan ang lahat sa lakas; nananakit*
* Friendly — *Palabati at mapagkaibigan*
* Very Helpful — *Napakamatulungin at maaasahan*
* Do-Gooder — *Nagbait-baitan lamang*
* Only a job — *Tungkulin lamang ang hinaharap*
* No contact — *Hindi napagkikita o napagkakausap*