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ADMINISTRATIVE THINKING ON YOUTH
AND YOUTH PROGRAMS*

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ABSTRACT

Administrators have a lot of influence over the nature of youth programs. Because of this, their thinking on the causes of delinquency, the nature of ideal youth programs, and the role of youth workers were tapped. In the past, people in the field of delinquency have been accused of assuming an individual, personal problem or deficiency point of view. This study of administrators in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area suggests that, while some evidence for a more social structural understanding exists, in general the individual problem perspective prevails. An explanation for the persistence of a personal problem perspective is advanced focusing on a critical examination of the interplay among the social status of youth, the function of the juvenile justice system, and the role of administrators in bureaucracies.

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency is a social problem and attempts at solving it can best be understood as a social movement.\(^1\) The reality of the present juvenile justice system, including the courts and the public and private agencies providing services to youth, is a subjective, socially-constructed reality having its roots in a history of interaction among powerful and not-so-powerful interests. As social realities are constructed they become institutionalized, imbued with authority, and reified by those who control their organizational components. In this way, the juvenile system has emerged as a natural, self-evident order.

The juvenile justice system evolved out of the changing definition of family, parenthood, and childhood ushered in with the growth of

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capitalism and industrialization. In the U.S., the power behind the invention was a collectivity of social reformers and social workers, including Jane Addams. Their power was converted into authority with the institution of the various juvenile and family courts toward the end of the 19th century. Final legitimacy was lent by the very influential theorizing of G. Stanley Hall, a relatively minor psychologist whose developmental theory of adolescence still is prototypical.

The paradigm normalized by these "child savers" may be summed up as rehabilitation. Adolescents, although physically mature, were emotionally children engulfed in a period of "storm and stress" and therefore easily led astray by evil, adult and non-adult influences in transient, immigrant-filled, and therefore disorganized, American cities. Thus, situational, personal and interpersonal factors (not larger social structural conditions associated with capitalism and industrialization) were the ultimate causes of delinquent behavior. To fight delinquency, the courts accepted responsibility for defining the best interests of children by acting in parens patriae; guilt and innocence were not at issue so much as psychological and social well being. Services provided for delinquent children were to be therapeutic, assuring safe passage into working class, adult roles.

The rehabilitation paradigm survives to the present, albeit legitimated by a more sophisticated psychology and sociology. Writing in 1943, C. Wright Mills demonstrated that leading textbooks, owing to the class bias of their authors, continued to focus on the interpersonal, situational determinants rather than the social structural, normative determinants of social problems. By this means, Mills believed, students educated through these books were being socialized to maintain an "ideology of social pathologists." More recent writings evidence the sustained strength of the rehabilitative paradigm. The muckraking of William Ryan indicates that social services continue to "blame the victim." The cooler theorizing of Edwin Schurr suggests that an "individual treatment" model pervades programs for delinquents. Knight, and later, Ruby, indicate that not a great deal of theoretical difference exists among the various types of youth programs, including the newer diversion programs. Delinquency may be a social problem, but in keeping with the rehabilitative ideal, the social structural aspects of it appear to be continually overlooked in favor of the individual and interpersonal aspects of it.

In spite of the dominance of the rehabilitative paradigm, there is considerable indication that a paradigm shift, in the Kuhnian sense, is underway. The youth culture of the 1960's stemmed somewhat the childhoodization of young adults, and the 1970's saw the growth of an active movement advocating rights for children. Three major supreme court
decisions weakened the parens patriae authority of the court and strengthened due process procedures. Sociologists and psychologists, confronted by the overwhelming inability of youth programs to demonstrate their effectiveness, have begun to challenge traditional theories of adolescent delinquent behavior. Contemporary thinking is now likely to debunk developmental theories, lay stress on social structural issues, and seek changes in the legal status of youth. How swiftly the paradigm shift will take place depends on a number of political and social contingencies. Of considerable importance is the receptability of the new paradigm to those who control the juvenile justice system.

Among the more powerful people in the juvenile justice system are administrators of youth programs. Granted that their power is hardly absolute, the authority of administrators, and therefore their potential influence over youth programs, should be obvious. It is within their authority to shape, maintain or alter the nature of the services being delivered. It is within their authority to affect the parameters of behaviors of youth workers regardless of the professional identification of youth workers. If youth programs are to lose their rehabilitative, victim-blaming framework, administrative thinking must eventually deligitimate it.

For these reasons, the present study is based on interviews with administrators of youth and delinquency programs. The assumption was made that policy develops in keeping with the way in which the causes of youth problems are conceptualized. If they are conceptualized along a personal or interpersonal problem framework, programs can be expected to reflect therapeutic, rehabilitative ideals; if they are conceptualized around social structural concerns, programs can be expected to incorporate social reform and change ideals. Therefore, in interviewing administrators, the intent was to describe the way administrators think about the causes of delinquency, about ideal programs to ameliorate or prevent delinquency, and about the role of youth workers -- be they social workers, counselors, probation officers or the like. In this way we hoped to understand the persistence of the rehabilitative paradigm and suggest what might be expected of youth programs in the future.

SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

In all, thirty-one administrators were interviewed. They were all those heads of programs in the Portland metropolitan area registered with the Oregon Council on Crime and Delinquency. The administrator of a large and important statewide agency located out of the metropolitan area was also included. A wide range of agencies is represented by the
administrators; public and private, new and old, traditional and non-

The administrators themselves were a homogeneous group. They
ranged in age from mid-twenties to over sixty. Although most were male
and white, there were five female and three black administrators. Con-

siderable variation in education was apparent: five had not received
a B.A., sixteen had masters degrees in counseling or social work, and
two were clinical psychologists. Collectively, they represented a
wealth of experience: twenty-four had been involved in youth programs
at least six years, with two of these years in administrative capaci-
ties.

Each of the administrators participated in an open-ended, in-depth
interview approximately one hour and a half long. The interview sched-
ule was simple, consisting of essentially three questions: one explor-
ing thinking about the "causes of delinquency," the others exploring
thinking on "ideal programs" and "effective youth workers."

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prior to the interviews, the differences between a rehabilitative,
personal problem orientation and a social-structural, social change
orientation were conceptualized.

The Rehabilitative, Personal Problem Orientation

A personal problem orientation sees the roots of delinquency in
some failure within the individual or within the immediate social envi-
nronment. Usually, the failure is thought to be in the personality of
the delinquent or in his/her internalized self, self image or iden-
tity. Hereditary factors might also be the failure. Or, the
failure might be in deficient knowledge and abilities. Regardless,
the failure sets the delinquent apart from non-delinquents and, thus,
is said to cause delinquent behavior.

Social events are not excluded from the orientation. Indeed, they
play a central role. But the social events which are highlighted are
situational or micro-sociological. Significant others in the form of
parents and peers become the social environment through which internal-
ization takes place. Subcultural factors may also be important, but as
a deficient significant other. Larger social conditions are seen as
irrelevant, a constant, or too far from the substance of daily life to
play an important part in the lives of individuals.
In general, programs created around a personal problems framework seek to help individuals and their families overcome personal shortcomings. Each client is individualized so that the particular failure may be accurately diagnosed and treated. The services provided may range from therapy, to counseling, to recreation, to skill development, to vocational training.

The role of youth workers varies considerably but is essentially designed to assure that the particular problem of the delinquent and his/her family is uncovered and treated. Most typically, the worker is understood as a counselor who, by forming a special kind of relationship, helps the delinquent cope with, adjust to or overcome social realities.

**Structural Problem, Social Change Orientation**

The structural problem orientation relates delinquency to normative arrangements within a society. It is in the structure and function of societal institutions that the roots of delinquency are to be found. All social institutions, but especially economic institutions, are seen to affect daily the lives of individuals. Sometimes structural problems are understood as a failure or dysfunction in existing institutions. Other times, delinquency is understood as a likely, or at least unintended, consequence of the proper functioning of institutional arrangements. Social psychological conditions -- race, class, personality -- make certain people more vulnerable to delinquent behavior, or, if not, to being caught, processed, labelled and treated as a delinquent.

A structural problem orientation would not deny nor ignore the existence of personal problems. However, in developing programs and working with clients, primary attention is given to changing organizations and institutions rather than changing individual and families. In fact, personal problems are assumed to be assuaged by involving individuals in social change. Thus, programs would stress community development, developing economic opportunities, advocating for bureaucratic and legal changes. The role of youth worker would be broker, advocate or change agent, although while performing these tasks counseling and therapeutic functions might also be fulfilled.

**FINDINGS**

The ideal type sketched so neatly could hardly be expected to exist in pure form. The thinking of administrators, whether about causes, programs, or worker roles, represents a mixed type, neither completely
rehabilitative nor completely social change in point of view. Yet, this said, it is fair to generalize that the administrators overwhelmingly represented and defended the traditional rehabilitative, personal problem paradigm.

**Causes**

A great deal has been said and written about the causes of delinquency. Based on your experience and study, what do you personally think are the causes of delinquency?

In response to this question, almost every administrator disclaimed the existence of a single cause, listing instead a number of personal as well as structural conditions contributing to delinquency.

The single most frequently listed cause of delinquency was family problems: bad parenting; disorganized, dysfunctional homes; poor family environments; and poor family communication patterns being the most frequently mentioned. Other interpersonal, situational variables, especially peer group pressure, were cited but generally not given great importance.

Slightly less often mentioned, but obviously of great significance to the administrators, were individual, psychological problems of youth, such as a lack of inner controls or other personality or emotional characteristics. A few noted cognitive problems such as a lack of knowledge, abilities or skills for obtaining employment. Hereditary factors were alluded to in a very few instances, and even in these instances were not seen to be important.

Social structural conditions were cited with as much frequency as personal and interpersonal conditions. All but two of the administrators noted such mezzo-sociological conditions as dysfunctional youth services; problematic schools; and community, neighborhood or sub-cultural difficulties. Additionally, fully two-thirds cited such macrosociological conditions as poverty, lack of social responsibility, materialistic values, violent values in society, racism, social mobility, social change and normlessness.

Although almost all administrators listed both personal and structural conditions causing delinquency, it was nevertheless clear that a personal problem orientation dominated their thinking.

For example, only four administrators could be said to have expressed a point of view essentially social-structural in nature. Interestingly, two of these represent clearly conservative points of
view. One of these condemned changing social values toward family life and sexuality, while the other summed it up this way:

There is so much questioning of every institution. It makes it so difficult to trust anything. It was easier before when you thought your country was best and your church was right.

Barely a radical comment was made by these or any other administrator. More often comments about social conditions were liberal in nature pointing to "dysfunctions" but not challenging basic institutional arrangements.

The bulk of the administrators were clearly within a personal problem framework. They demonstrated this in a number of ways. Indirectly, it was demonstrated in the sheer time given to discussion of personal and interpersonal problems. Likewise, the vagueness with which most discussed structural conditions was in marked contrast with the clarity of analysis about individual and family problems. Directly, it came out over and over again in specific comments: "The family is not the only factor, I guess, though far and away the most predominant influence..."; "Early parenting is the factor of highest importance"; "Totally disorganized families...this is the key thing"; "Dysfunctional families are probably the principle cause"; "The causes of delinquency are directly related to poor parenting...Other explanations are only symptoms"; "The problem is right there with mother and father."

**Programs**

There has also been a lot said and written about the need for more effective programs for dealing with delinquent youth or even potentially delinquent youth. Let's suppose that you have been asked to write a grant proposal for the development of an ideal youth program or service. What kind of program would you develop?

In response to this question, about a third of the administrators expressed assurance that existing programs -- or at least their program -- was effective. However, none of them presented evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of their or any other program. Typical was the reply: "Can we document the good we've done? I get a gut feeling that we are doing good. This can't be captured in evaluations."

When the failure of existing programs was conceded, service delivery issues were cited as having direct bearing. Only three administrators suggested that perhaps the underlying rehabilitative paradigm
guiding most programs was related to program failure. In spite of such remarks all but two of the administrators could think of improvements for youth programs or talk abstractly about an "ideal" program.

Thirteen of the administrators noted that an ideal program would be a preventive program, that most were presently "bandaid" programs. Nevertheless, the difference between preventive and bandaid program was not one of a kind. For most administrators, prevention means doing the same thing only sooner. For instance, the most commonly expressed idea was early detection of potentially delinquent children -- with the help of school officials -- and administering to them individual or family counseling. Only two of those desiring preventive programs saw prevention essentially as a shift from a personal problem to a social problem orientation.

The ideal programs tended to be multi-faceted, including activities designed to rehabilitate individuals and their families as well as to change social conditions. However, when the relative weights of program components is taken into account, the dominance of a rehabilitative perspective is clear.

Fully 28 of the 31 administrators saw the need to include family or individual counseling in their ideal program. For twelve of the administrators, counseling, or rather better counseling, was the only concern. For an additional seven, it was the major concern. Interestingly the great importance given to family in the etiology and ideal rehabilitation of youth is not reflected in actual programs. Time and again administrators bemoaned the difficulties encountered in trying to incorporate family counseling.

The dominance of the rehabilitative model comes out in other ways as well. Several of the administrators indicated the need to work with schools, that is, help in the search for delinquent youth who could then be placed in counseling. Similarly, several stressed the need for employment services, that is, preparing youth for the process of looking for employment so that, as three administrators emphasized, "they can compete in the labor market." Recreation, as a potentially therapeutic experience and as a means for "keeping them busy and out of trouble," fills out the range of rehabilitative services described as "ideal" for youth programs.

Although the predominant orientation to program planning was rehabilitation, a fair number of administrators did include services best understood as social change oriented.

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The social change services most likely to be mentioned were reforming schools, developing communities, and developing employment opportunities. Eleven administrators saw the need to work toward changing the educational system and developing alternative education programs. However, it is important to stress that most administrators believed that present school conditions were adequate.

Nine of the administrators believed that community development should be an integral part of youth programs. Typical was this comment: "The model for youth services should be community based. Community education would be the backbone of the program with community workshops, for instance, youth law forums, where the community is educated to the dynamics of the juvenile court system."

Job development was important for only seven administrators. Job development may be distinguished from the slightly more frequently cited need to train youth for employment. The two would seem to go hand in hand but it was not unusual for administrators to stress one or the other. At least one administrator believed that it was not the responsibility of her agency to "get jobs for kids; they had to learn to compete for themselves."

It might also be noted that three administrators acknowledged the need for legal services, including the need to work toward changes in the law. And, three administrators suggested the need for advocacy in youth programs.

The Role of Youth Workers

Not only have many maintained that programs were ineffective or need improvement, but they have also believed that in handling individual cases probation officers, caseworkers, youth workers and the like have not been particularly effective. Why do you think the work of these workers has proven inadequate? Or said another way, what do you personally feel should be the role of the worker to ensure a more effective handling of cases?

Although seven of the administrators challenged the premise of this question, the remainder accepted it. Regardless, almost all of the administrators defended the work of youth workers, pointing, quite logically, to a number of hindrances which limit effectiveness. The chief hindrances mentioned were bureaucratic and other service delivery problems such as "burn out," high case loads, service fragmentation, legal obstacles, financial limitations, poor community resources, poor community involvement, poor program planning, and even poor administration.
In at least seven instances, criticism was made of youth workers. Youth workers were criticized for their "poor use of casework skills," for not being "research oriented," for being on an "ego-trip," for not being "mentally healthy." One administrator had them "too protective of agencies," while another had them "too down on agencies."

These comments aside, twenty-three of the administrators did make suggestions on the role of the worker to ensure a more effective handling of cases.

Although the question was intended to elicit thinking about functions and skills, the administrators commonly directed themselves toward the personal qualities of effective workers. The list of qualities noted was vast: innovative, imaginative, realistic, motivated, mature, genuine, honest, sincere, humanistic and caring to name only a few. For a significant number of administrators, these personal qualities were more important than skills or education. Typical is this comment: "High calibre equals whole people...non-defensive and well adjusted. Training is a factor but not an overriding one. Personal attributes are basic."

To some extent the personal qualities of youth workers fall beyond the research concerns; such qualities are as important in rehabilitation as it is in social change. Yet the context within which most administrators discussed qualities indicated a clear bias: most assumed that the basic function of youth workers is counseling. The qualities they were listing were qualities of a good counselor. This becomes especially clear in the kinds of skills believed to be necessary for effective handling of cases.

Only fifteen of the administrators addressed themselves to skills and functions. Of these the skill given primary consideration was the ability to relate to youth. For most, relating to youth meant empathic, supportive, non-judgmental behavior. For at least five, it also meant "the ability to use authority." In addition to the ability to relate to youth, other counseling skills cited include diagnostic skills ("knowing your client thoroughly") and case planning and goal assessment skills. Finally, seven administrators emphasized explicitly the need for individual and family therapy skills.

Very few administrators mentioned skills not in some direct way related to rehabilitating individuals or families; none could be said to have seen the function of youth workers essentially in social change terms. Four administrators alluded to the need for community skills, another stressed the need for knowledge about community resources, still another discussed the need for youth workers to "minimize conflict
between community and child and assure that the system does the least amount of damage." Finally, only one administrator called attention to such skills as "advocate, coordinate, facilitate."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The juvenile justice system is institutionalized around a rehabilitative paradigm. Recently that paradigm has come under attack by academic and legal experts, indicating that a new, social change paradigm may be replacing it. The findings reported here, however, suggest that, at least among the thirty-one administrators interviewed, the rehabilitative paradigm continues to be the social reality around which services are offered.

It is not that administrators ignore or reject social structural/social change issues; the data clearly indicate that a social change paradigm is making inroads. There is ample recognition of social structural conditions in the causation of delinquent behavior, and there is some willingness to incorporate such social change activities as school reform and community development into youth programs. Nevertheless, social structural/social change issues are definitely secondary, not integral, to the thinking of administrators.

For the overwhelming majority of administrators, delinquent and non-delinquent youth are different types of people. The difference is conceptualized as emotional, cognitive, or behavioral deficiencies having their roots largely in the particular family environment of the particular delinquent. Programs dealing with youth, whether preventive or ameliorative, are expected to help individuals and their families overcome their personal deficiencies. The chief component of ideal delinquency programs is some form of individual or family counseling and the primary function of youth workers is to counsel youth. Services which support the paradigm are necessary; those which strike out in new directions are merely for thinking about.

The findings represent the thinking of a relatively small number of administrators in a particular geographic region. We cannot pretend to make generalizations about the thinking of other administrators and the status of other programs for youth. Yet the findings do suggest that administrators are not in the vanguard, exploring new ideas and devising new programs; rather, they are locked into old schemes, maintaining older social visions. Why is this?

Observations made during the interviews enable us to negate a number of possible explanations. No evidence was found to suggest that
personal and social attributes of administrators determined allegiance to the rehabilitative paradigm. Sex, race, and education appeared unrelated to administrative thinking. While it was true that younger administrators were more likely to acknowledge social structural/social change concerns, no clear pattern emerged. Likewise, type of agency appeared to make no significant difference. Public or private, new or old, seemed to make little difference. Among the more disheartening observations was that administrators of self-proclaimed "alternative programs" differed from their more traditional counterparts largely in their dress styles and rhetoric, not in fundamental ideas.

A more fruitful explanation may be found in a critical examination of the interplay among the social status of youth, the function of the juvenile justice system, and the role of administrators in bureaucracies.

Children are a collectivity of people subjected to the authority of adults. The extensiveness of the authority, expectations about the proper use of authority, and the exact age distinguishing child from adult is culturally and historically relative. The growth of a child-centered, nuclear family has moved western civilization away from reliance on abandonment and physical abuse as a means of expressing authority. At the same time, we have also subjugated increasingly larger numbers of people by extending legal and social definitions of childhood. In most parts of the United States today, a child is legally someone under the age of eighteen. Full rights of citizenship, however, are commonly withheld until the age of twenty-one. Furthermore, social definitions of childhood not uncommonly include all those enrolled in degree granting educational programs regardless of age.

To justify the incorporation of such large numbers of people under the category of child, we have institutionalized theories of psychological development. Thus, we argue that there is a special child, adolescent and young adult psychology which necessitates their subjugation. Most people today earnestly believe that young people must be constantly supervised by adults because of intrinsic bio-psychological incapacities.

While not necessarily intended, the subordinate status of such large numbers of socially defined children has some functional consequences for industrial capitalism. It limits the role of great numbers of young people in the economic market. Young people do not have the right to compete with adults in the labor market. The positions in the work force open to the young are most often secondary, dead ended positions, similar to those offered to racial minorities, and operating primarily to instill the value of work as an end in itself. It assures
the continued creation of professions of and for adults in the service of training, socializing, counseling and rehabilitating children. It assures that adult workers, who marry and have children, will have a legitimated area in which to exercise the authority from which they are alienated in the work place.

Because of their subordinate status, there is always the danger that children — especially post-pubescent children — might organize to alter the authority of adults over them. To avoid collective attempts to overcome adult authority, some means must be found for cooling out youth and for mystifying the reasons for their subordinate status. This is a primary function of the juvenile justice system. Where education helps to legitimately define and reward conforming youth, the juvenile justice system helps to legitimately discredit non-conforming youth. Both have effects on future adults; the credited, conforming young person is accorded full economic opportunities, while the discredited, non-conforming young person is channeled out of the mainstream of economic opportunities.

Administrators of youth programs are in positions whereby the publics with which they must negotiate for funding and other, more general kinds of support, are not only those credited, conforming adults, but those adults whose investment in the economic status quo is most pronounced. These include boards of directors, community leaders and government officials, all top heavy with representatives of the business community. These publics also include parents in general who are seeking support in exercising authority over their own children. In short, it would be very difficult for a reform-oriented administrator to be appointed, let alone institute a program dedicated to social reform.

This is also true for administrators of newer, alternative youth programs. Although the rhetoric of social change is an asset to being appointed, it does not assure the development of a social change oriented program. In part the difficulty arises from an inability to convert rhetoric into programs, but it also arises because ultimately even these administrators must negotiate with the same publics as more traditional administrative personnel.

Changes are taking place in services for youth albeit very slowly. The status of youth in contemporary society, the functions that status has for maintaining existing institutions, the historical role of the juvenile justice system in legitimating that status and controlling entry into the economic market, and the normative pressures placed on administrators all mitigate against the acceptance of a social change paradigm. However, as the rehabilitative paradigm continues to prove inadequate and as more and more youth workers are exposed to literature
delineating a social change orientation, a critical mass might evolve among administrative personnel, eventually helping to reshape the juvenile justice system.

Footnotes

1. This theme has been explicated in Armand L. Mauss, Social Problems as Social Movements (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1975).


11. In Kent (1966) the Supreme Court ruled that a waiver of juvenile court jurisdiction (to an adult criminal court) must satisfy "essentials of due process and fair treatment." In Gault (1967)


the court asserted that the accused minor had a right to notice to appear at an official hearing for specific charges, advice of counsel, confrontation and cross examination of witnesses, and the right against self-discrimination. In *Winship* (1970) the court stated that juvenile courts must require proof beyond reasonable doubt when disposing of cases of minors charged with an act that is a crime if done by an adult.

12. Program effectiveness is extremely difficult to measure, yet it is fair to say that the more exacting the study the more likely ineffectiveness will be found. For an interesting review of effectiveness studies see Edmund V. Mech, *Delinquency Prevention: A Program Review of Intervention Approaches* (Portland, Oregon: Regional Research Institute for Human Services, Portland State University, 1975).


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