

College Students

The Process of Psycho-Social Growth

America is a nation of affluence. Likewise, many American colleges and their students are affluent. Herein lies the main cause of the social and academic ills currently besetting many of the nation's colleges.

In analyzing the affluence of most college students, it is necessary to look at their family backgrounds. Two frequently-occurring characteristics of American families are the "unnatural" expressions of emotion and the overly demanding discipline systems.

The affluent family found security and comfort in material things. Often these were substituted for "normal" means of communicating emotions and beliefs. Given such security, affluent children found no need to establish individual attitudes and values with which to guide their behavior.

This hindrance to psycho-social development was complicated by the great demands of family discipline. Discipline can be viewed as either "liberal/overly-liberal" or "strict/overly-strict," for the middle ground is often impossible to find.

The "liberal/overly-liberal" type of discipline placed (and places) excessive psychological demands upon a child — demands to produce values, beliefs, and emotions by which to guide behavior. For the most part the immature child/adolescent was unprepared to establish these guidelines.

At the other extreme, "strict/overly-strict" discipline also included great demands — demands to adhere closely to a well-defined behavioral pattern. Generally, this type of discipline did not prepare the individual for the inevitably necessary personal values, beliefs, and emotions.

Thus there is expected either too much growth too soon or not much growth at all. With either type of discipline, individuals tended to cultivate guilt complexes because they could not achieve the expected patterns of behavior; the "liberally" disciplined individual found himself unable to cope with the freedom granted him; the "strictly" disciplined youth found himself unable to comply to the rigid expectations — there was a yearning for greater emotional-psychological growth.

Also resulting is doubt — doubt that any type of individual behavioral guidelines could ever be established as well as a doubting or suspicious of life and of others.

Upon entering college — suddenly released from the family situation and its discipline function and its security — most persons find themselves emotionally unprepared for the life ahead. In such a predicament, the college students do not know how to cope with the newly found freedoms and responsibilities of college life. Not knowing what to do, the students relapse into alienation, into apathy and withdrawal — they drop out.

Forever confronting them, though, are the unavoidable questions of self-identity and societal role — the problems of individual values, beliefs, and emotions. However, in dropping out, all attempts to solve these problems are avoided. Commitment is avoided — commitment to the self and to the future. The world is now; the future, the corrupt adult society, is hopeless. Co-existing with this distaste for adult society is a general distrust of others. "Paranoia" is a term often associated, rightly or wrongly, with the problems of alienation, distrust, and doubt.

It is within this context that alienated college students propagate the social and academic ailments afflicting many colleges.

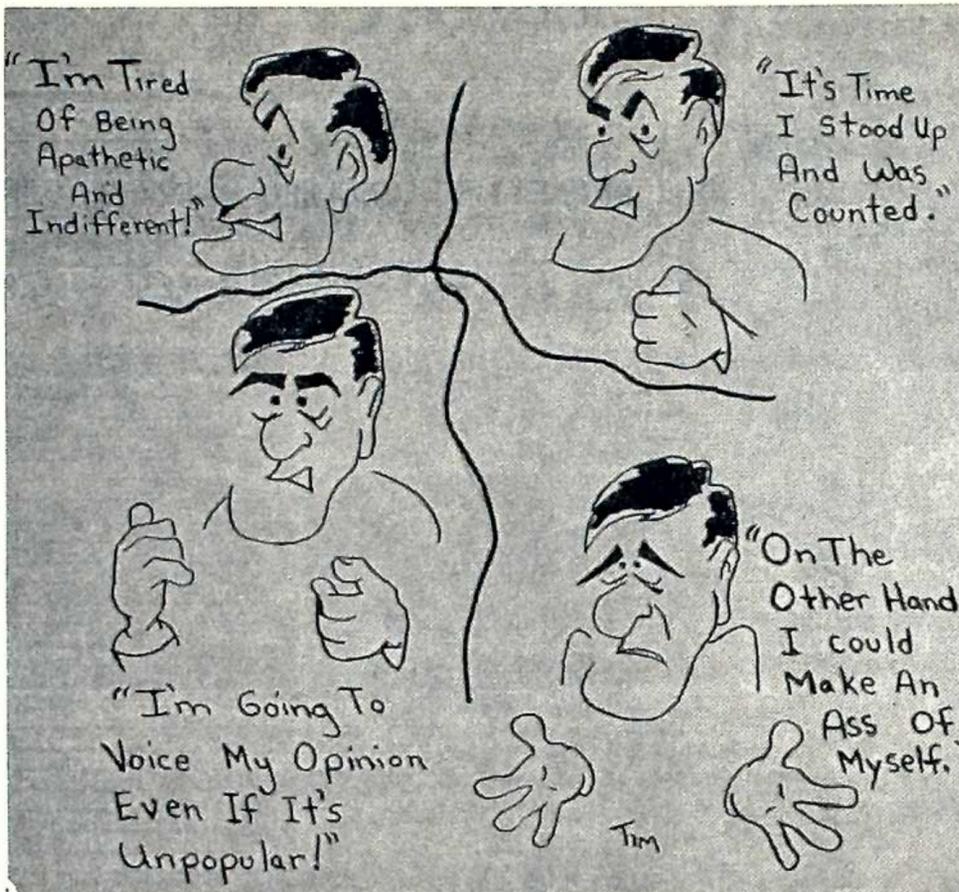
At the social level, students, lacking any clear concept of the self, are unable to relate to their peers — to their roommates and classmates. "Normal, open, healthy" human relationships are impossible, for the students are always on the defensive, not knowing whom they can trust.

This "paranoia" is most notably manifested in the fear that if attempts are made to establish close relationships, the students might find out "who they really are." Thus typical students continue their self-defensive patterns of behavior, not wishing to discover themselves, not wishing to expose their innermost thoughts and feelings — for these emotions may threaten the security to which they have become accustomed.

The fear, then, is that the "real" selves may not be highly socially valued by others. Students are afraid to be subjected to social scrutiny, for they may be rejected. The result for a college is often a dull social life — an ever-present lack of heterosexual relationships, the simple boy-meets-girl, boy-speaks-to-girl, boy-dates-girl . . .

The personal aberrations, however, also affect the academic lives of the students. In the absence of a distinct self-identity, most students do not know what to expect from their studies; students are unable to relate their studies to any delineated life plans or life-style. Consequently there is no commitment to the academic processes because there is no personal relevance.

This is most often manifested in the frequent complaint that class discussions are pitiful; here again we can turn to "paranoia," for students are unwilling to venture forth with their opinions, comments, and questions, fearful that they might find their "real" selves, fearful that whatever social images they have will be wounded by any



display of ignorance of intellectual/scholarly weakness.

These academic problems are compounded at liberal arts colleges which lack the definitive goals characteristic of teachers' colleges or business schools. The liberal arts colleges offer only the vague goal of "graduate school or nothing." This goal is certainly a liability to students trying to overcome the identity crisis.

What are some of the solutions to this problem of distrust, identity crisis, cynicism, and general social and academic maladjustment? We believe that it is necessary to improve first the human situation before the social and academic problems can be treated. Furthermore, we assert that it is necessary to improve the social situation before the academic situation can be enhanced. In essence, we value most the individual; society is of secondary importance, and studying of least importance (not to imply that studies are not important).

The key to solving the human situation, it seems to us, is communication. Because there has been a long period of time devoted to refining the "generation gap," the enmity and consequent lack of communication between adults and youth (caused by a mutual distrust and dubiousness — more a case of youth reflecting adults' attitudes), we can only conclude that the main thrust of attempts to resume communication between the two groups should be within the college communities, for the gap between college students and parents seems beyond solution (an admission we are hesitant to make).

We have seen that material things alone cannot communicate human emotions, beliefs, and values. Thus the current rejection of materialism by today's youth as emphasized by the hippies — with whom most, if not all, of the college students identify to some extent.

Needed are more favorable attitudes — sincere symbolic expressions of human wants, ideas, and feelings. "Love" is being tossed around as one answer. We find many

methods of expressing this love — verbal as well as non-verbal.

What is needed within college communities today, then, are more sincere attempts at serious communication. One remedy we suggest is that the colleges grant students complete freedom to regulate their own lives. Such action would communicate a genuine trust and faith in the college generation — something which is not often expressed by anyone.

This call for complete freedom may seem incompatible with what has been said already. We believe otherwise. We maintain that only with complete freedom to behave as desired (within "normal" societal codes of behavior) can students come to solve the much greater problem of self-identity. Compared to the identity crisis, therefore, complete removal of artificial social regulations imposed by colleges is only a minor issue, but one which will improve the chances of winning the identity of crisis struggle.

It is time for colleges to eliminate women's hours, remove restrictions on open house "privileges," do away with liquor controls which go beyond social custom.

What we have been talking about is the general process of youth growing up. What we are asking for is the removal of artificial social regulations which serve no useful purpose. Our request is for the right of college students to experience life as it is meant to be experienced — with its joys as well as frustrations.

In the process of growing up with complete freedom, students will certainly make mistakes, but they have the right to be wrong, because they will learn just as well from failure as from success. The freedom will have to be faced eventually, and the sooner the better, for only within the context of total freedom can the identity crisis be won. As soon as that battle is over, but not until then, it will be possible to start working with the social and academic problems of the colleges. In the long run, the colleges come out ahead.

Independent Study Offers An Academic Alternative

Are you feeling restricted by the traditional classroom method of lecture-discussion-exam? If so, why not try to arrange for an independent course or two during the coming terms?

The college's academic administrators and professors seem to be encouraging independent study. Therefore we can assume that it should not be very difficult to obtain permission to study independently various subject matter. In many departments it is possible to arrange for an independent study of material covered by a specific course.

Although independents are more prevalent during Interim, they could also abound during the regular terms. If you have a special interest, we encourage you to discuss it with a professor in the department under which your interests are subsumed.

There appear to be several advantages to independents. Foremost is that the individual, in proposing an independent, is allowed to delineate his private area of interest and is also allowed to structure the study to fit

his own interests and needs. Because the topic is limited, greater depth of study is possible. Another favorable aspect is that more frequent individual discussions with professors may ensue. Not to be overlooked are the additional hours of freedom from class periods that often can be overly boring.

We do not intend to slight the possibilities for interdisciplinary independent study. Fusions of the subject matter of two or more departments is possible. Biochemistry, physiological psychology, and the physical properties of sound and music are just several examples.

Whatever your individual interests, we are sure your proposal for an independent study will be welcomed by most professors. We suggest serious consideration of this alternative to classroom work. Perhaps this suggestion is offered too late to be acted upon for next term. However, it is not too soon to start thinking about next year. We think it is worth a try.

Helping Others Help Themselves

One of the more frequent arguments in behalf of American military efforts in Vietnam is that we are offering that nation time to become a politically, socially, and economically stable society.

Given this view, we have nothing but admiration for our goal. However, assuming that this is the long-range goal of most American foreign policy with regard to the many "underdeveloped" nations, we wonder how many of these countries will be asking eventually for American military assistance once "communist-inspired" or "subversive" groups or ideologues become powerful enough to threaten the existing power structures.

At the present time, the United States, aside from being militarily involved in Vietnam, is also active in Laos, Thailand, and Bolivia, where CIA agents reportedly were training the Bolivian troops which killed Che Guevara. Token military aid was given to the Congo government last summer when three American military transport planes were sent to be used as necessary.

Looking at these examples of American foreign policy and military assistance, we find it not inconceivable that in the future the United States will be engaging simultaneously in a dozen or more internal political struggles — struggles between the existing governments and various bands of "nationalists," "communists," and "exploited masses." These could easily happen in most of the "underdeveloped" nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

We doubt that the American public will ever tolerate simultaneous military involvement in many countries. In short, the American people will become weary of war; this is what the communists are saying and to a large degree this is what is happening. Many Americans, however, use this as an argument in favor of American efforts in Vietnam — "the communists say we will tire of war; let's show them we'll never quit." This argument completely overlooks the more important goal of establishing a stable society.

The essence of this article is that we foresee many future internal wars (Vietnam-like wars) occurring in the so-called "underdeveloped" nations. Inevitably, most of these will require some amount of American involvement. This is what we protest — the inevitability that the United States will have to meddle militarily in the internal politics of the many African, Asian, and Latin American nations.

Realizing these inevitabilities, we maintain that the only possible way to avoid future military engagements is to provide immediately for self-help programs which will educate and prepare the "underdeveloped" nations for self-government, programs which will raise the social, political, and economic standards of the "common people" so that they will have no desire to overthrow militarily their governments.

What we are calling for are massive pacification programs — such as that in Vietnam — which assist the "common people" in self-help activities — building schools and hospitals and playgrounds and marketplaces. Such pursuits provide people with a pride in what they are doing — improving their villages. This pride in the tangibles of pacification programs provides a basis for other advances — education, economic reform, etc.

Our assumption in making the above statements on self-help programs is that the people of other nations have no reason to be proud of American foreign aid handouts. What is needed in such aid is the development, in the minds of the citizens of underdeveloped nations, of a feeling of personal involvement — emotional attachment — to the social, political, and economic improvements being instituted to eliminate the "underdeveloped" status. This personal involvement should result in pride and a desire for further self-improvement.

On a world-wide scale we see the Peace Corps as the only major American program allowing others to help themselves.

Thus, if American foreign policy requires that we, as a nation, provide the "underdeveloped" nations "time" — time to self-create politically, socially, and economically stable societies — then that "time" is now.

Self-help breeds self-pride, a pride which should preclude the violent destruction and overthrow of the self-made society. In essence, peaceful American foreign policy programs instituted now should obviate the need for American military assistance and involvement in the future.

Collusion Ahead? "No Comment."

Several times during the past months we have walked past the football stadium and noticed the civil defense siren atop the stadium's pressbox. We wonder if this manifestation of college cooperation with the government portends future intimate relationships and contracts between the college administration and various governmental units. College officials are remaining tight-lipped about this situation.