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The Youth Movement, Rochedale, and the Counsellor

Sociologists, psychiatrists, psychologists and academics in many disciplines related to the study of human relations are having a field day commenting upon the condition and direction toward which our society is presently moving.

One social phenomenon that is of particular interest to us as counsellors and educators is the movement afoot among our youth. This movement is characterized by feelings of uncertainty, instability, and a lack of comfort when considering the past and the present as a reference for future action. It is a surging whirlpool into which many of our young people have plunged in an attempt at self-discovery. Some are reaching calmer waters. Some are caught in the center. Some have drowned.

This movement and the attitudes that it generates and nurtures have profound implications for the theory and practice of counselling. We are surrounded by young people who are looking to us for direction. How we help them is indeed crucial.

For the past two years, the writer has given considerable thought to deciphering and unweaving "what it is all about." At times the search has resulted in information or experiences which have led to a better understanding of our young people. At other times I have had no recourse but to retreat into the uncertainty of my thoughts endeavouring to retrieve a missing link.

Initially, I would like to share some of the thoughts I have had as a result of a particular experience which was shared with two other counsellors. I will then consider its implications for counselling.

rochedale

Late last spring counsellors from many parts of Canada convened in Toronto for the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association Convention. The program had been quite meticulously planned by the organizing committee and there was such a wealth of events occurring at the same time in different places that it became a difficult task to choose one session in preference to another.

Presentations took place at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and in Varsity Stadium. Our residences at the University of Toronto were situated a few blocks away. Geographically located in the convention area was Rochedale College. The location of our residences in relation to OISE and Varsity Stadium made it necessary to pass by Rochedale sometimes two or three times a day.

After walking by the College a couple of times, the writer asked the counsellors with whom he was in company at the time, if they would be interested in trying to gain entrance to Rochedale. After a momentary pause in front of the building, reactions to the question were generally negative. This occurred several times before two friends agreed to accompany me inside the institution. One looked like a presently-in-vogue, groovy, young narc informer. The other was as "straight" as an officer in the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force. In appearance, I, too, was more like the officer type.

We headed for Rochedale — dressed in shirt and tie, and very establishment-like. As we entered the doors of Rochedale, we were confronted by a long-haired Rochedale Security Guard. He was dressed in well-greased, paint-covered blue denims and wore a label on his blue denim jacket inscribed 'Rochedale Security Guard.' Having tried to assure him that we were just delegates to a counsellors' convention, we asked if we could look around. He decided to limit our area of travel to the foyer. We stood around observing posters, bulletin boards, and the young people who, in turn, were observing us. The curiosity of one young lad got the best of him and he stepped forward and asked us what we were doing there. We were out of place and we felt it! After "rapping" for a couple of minutes, we explained to what was by then a fairly large audience that we were interested in getting an inside look at Rochedale — like maybe getting on the elevator and going up a couple of floors to talk with people there. No sooner was the suggestion made than we were whisked off into the elevator —

after an exchange of a few words, of course, between the Security Guard and one of our self-appointed hosts.

The elevator ride was an interesting experience in itself. As the doors closed, we looked at each other in troubled silence. One wondered whether the youngsters thought we were somebody we actually were not. At each elevator stop, youngsters seemed to scatter in every direction. Our "tour guides" were quite amused. They were so amused, in fact, that later on they suggested that it might be fun to take us on a tour of different floors of Rochedale and "freak-out" people by our presence!

Finally, we were escorted off at one of the floors into a room. It turned out to be the bootlegger's center of operations. There were several young people in the room and after introductions we proceeded to have a rap session and a drink. The "liquor outlet" was one of the many informal services available in Rochedale. There were grocery stores, leather shops, restaurants, etc. The young man who sold the beer was an entrepreneur at heart and was quite proud of his business. Certain rules had to be observed in the establishment. One knocked before entering. Credit was extended to good customers on a short-term basis. The operator suggested that by saving enough money from his enterprise he hoped to build a cottage on a piece of land he had on the West Coast.

As people made their way in and out of the rooms we carried on conversations with anyone who cared to talk with us. There was no question of their willingness to talk with us particularly since we were from the outside and provided them with an attentive audience. Some wished to perform for us. Many had had their share of hard times. They had been up and down on drugs and at times had been without money and lodgings. Loneliness had brought some of them to Rochedale. It is difficult to realize that the reason some of those kids go barefoot in the street is that they have no shoes to wear.

In relating experiences, one young fellow stated that he had been with the Canadian Armed Services NATO Peace Keeping Forces, in the Middle East. He related how disturbed he was by shooting incidents when he had to kill or be killed. Another teenager in the room was so "spaced" that the only intelligible statement he could make was: "Ya gotta boogie-woogie, man — ya gotta boogie-woogie — that's all there is, man." Another young man was on the road to alcoholism. His girl friend was a petite sixteen or seventeen year old whose facial expressions indicated total confusion.

We discussed the people "out there" — the straights, the establishment, the counterculture. Feelings of suspicion, hostility, anger and aggression were voiced. There was talk about a recent raid by the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force Riot Squad — a raid which, they said, accomplished nothing. The Riot Squad had left the premises empty-handed.

It was interesting to note that not all the residents of Rochedale were members of the youth culture. There were labourers, business people, pensioners, teachers, architects and others. It may be that they were attracted to the type of community atmosphere found in Rochedale.

In general, the youngsters we met responded with considerable acceptance and understanding to our questions. At no point were we made to feel uncomfortable or unwanted. In fact, the contrary was true. One wonders what kind of reception these youngsters would have received if they decided to crash a gathering of service club members or some other establishment-like organization.

It appeared to be a rewarding experience for all concerned. This was a group of kids who accepted us into their world and helped us to try to understand it. We were a couple of straights who took time out to come off the street and explore this place. We left Rochedale in the early hours of the following morning with mutual good feelings.

the counsellor

At this point, one may ask, "What are the implications of Rochedale for counselling?" or, more globally, "What impact has the youth movement on the current theory and practice of counselling?" Such a question merits serious enquiry.

There were many lessons for us in this experience. Rochedale was near the center of convention activity physically and it represented many of the problems which we as counsellors encountered. We meet these youngsters in our establishments: elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities; why could we not have met them in one of theirs?

Let us endeavour to make this issue a personal one. How many of us as counsellors have taken the time to drop in at a local youth clinic, drop-in center, or self-help center to find out what is being done at such places? How many of us are familiar with the establishments our youngsters frequent, the local 'Y', restaurants, recreation halls and communes? Do we ever take the time to stop and drop in? How many of us

are familiar with the local street people? How many of us know who street people are? How many of us know counsellors, psychologists, social workers, physicians, etc. who, when confronted with a student who is "freaking out," require the assistance of his fellow students or friends to talk him down? Do we ever wonder why the referrals are not going the other way? Do we ever ask ourselves who is supposed to be helping whom? As we interact with some of these youngsters in the comfort and security of our offices, have we ever thought of their value systems in relationship to ours?

Granted the majority of us function in public educational institutions, and that we are trained to help "normal kids with normal problems," but what is today's normal kid doing and thinking? Is being adjusted to an acceptance of the society in which we live, sufficient criteria for being considered normal? We no longer talk about being "well-adjusted," but rather "well-adjusting" and it is a fact that many of our youngsters are just not adjusting well at all! I am not referring to the youngster who comes to see a counsellor for one or two interviews and is given a little comfort, assurance and support which enable him to follow through on his plans. Rather, I am referring to the youngsters who were discussed on the previous pages. If some of these adolescents use drugs, for example, do we take the position that we are not qualified to help them because they are too divorced from reality? Do we rush them off to a hospital where they are asked their names, addresses, telephone numbers, and many irrelevant questions only to be asked to sit in the waiting area for an hour or two. Could we not offer them something more?

Let us look at the means available for alleviating some of these difficulties. Let us consider the efforts we as counsellors could make and the changes in counsellor training programs and research which could be effected.

As counsellors, we may have thought of the possibility of spending a little less time in the office and a little more time on the streets. I am not suggesting that we become pseudo-social workers, but it seems to be quite important for us to meet youngsters in their own surroundings. Perhaps we could consider volunteering some of our time to serving in a youth clinic or in a drop-in center. As we drive by one of the restaurants where our youngsters hang out, why not stop in and have a coffee with them? It would not take long — half an hour or so — and it would not have to be done every day. Let them know that we are available and that we care. We would

not have to go to these establishments alone. We could go in the company of a teacher, a friend, or a counsellor. If we wish to witness something interesting, why not drop in at a local 'teen dance. We may ask ourselves why everyone is hanging around and not dancing. We might ask what the lightshow is all about. We might challenge ourselves to see how effective we are at interacting with these kids on their home grounds for a change.

It seems to me that our counsellor education programs will have to change. We might take cognizance of the fact that many young people do not want to follow occupational careers and that they may be looking to our universities to offer them wider depths of experience in different areas rather than specialization in various disciplines.

We may think about some counsellors being trained for street work and others for educational institutions. The former would do their practicum and internship work in the community — at drop-in centers, recreation halls, the local "Y", and other youth centers. It may be an enriching experience to have a counsellor exposed to both environments.

The writer is also under the impression that much of the research into counselling theory is limited to the dynamics of counsellor-client interaction. Research should continue in this area but we might begin considering environmental influences and the effect they have on attitudes as they relate to counsellor-client interaction. The social environment of the counsellor and that of his client may be quite different yet interaction may be effective. Could interaction be rendered more effective if counsellors had a greater understanding of the sub-cultures which surround them?

Guidance and counselling has come a long way in the last forty or fifty years and we may be on the threshold of an entirely new era of counsellor exploration. As always, it is we who must seize the initiative and up-date our current methods and practices or face the possibility of obsolescence. Hopefully, we will be able to rise to the challenge set before us.