

## Student Unrest: The "P-Factor" Theory

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In the fall of 1964, the writer had a discussion with a Pakistani graduate student who stated, "You Americans talk about student demonstrations, but you've never really had one". The writer agreed that this was true probably of most contemporary educators, but such occurrences were not unusual in the early days of American higher education, the "great butter riots" at Harvard being a case in point. However, within a few months, the situation at Berkeley exploded, and for the past five years demonstrations and student unrest have expanded and multiplied almost by geometric progression throughout the institutions of higher education in the United States until today they threaten the very existence of higher education as we have come to know and recognize it.

The writer is of the opinion that a series of factors can be identified as either direct or indirect causes of student unrest. Perhaps the most conclusive article concerning reasons for student unrest was presented by Halleck(1) in which he advanced thirteen separate and distinct hypotheses to explain what could be causing unrest and alienation in our younger generation. It is the intent of this article to present the "P-Factor" Theory of student unrest. An attempt will be made to identify and define the indirect factors as opposed to the direct factors, but often these categories could be interchanged with one another with respect to any given situation of student unrest.

### *Indirect "P-Factors"*

*The "Pill":* The advent of the oral contraceptive has had a profound effect on community mores as well in the releasing of sexual frustrations and inhibitions of youth. It has brought to the female a perception of new freedom which has literally smashed family relationships and what had been thought to be acceptable moral behavior in the eyes of the parent generation. It has allowed young men and women to participate in free love, love-ins, etc., without fear of conception. One only has to peruse the Berkeley Barb or the Los Angeles Free Press to see when and where the next meeting of the Sexual Freedom League will take place in order to relieve his sexual drive. As an indirect "P-

Factor", the "pill" is an indicator of a dynamic change in moral ethics. At the same time it cannot help but be a guilt-producing factor in the psyche of youth, thus giving rise to feelings of frustration and unrest.

*The Pope:* The last few years have brought about an attack upon the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church, the likes of which were probably not seen even during the Reformation. The attacks upon the Pope from within his own church are indicative of a tremendous change with respect to the religious beliefs and concepts that had been held to be irrefutable, dogmatic truths, the questioning of which in the most recent past would have brought the transgressor back into line quickly by a mere threat of excommunication. The mutiny within the ranks of nuns and priests relative to clerical garb, celibacy, and papal infallibility is almost incomprehensible to an older generation who were brought up in the christian faith and followed the Puritan ethic. This point was brought home forcibly to the writer, when he visited his sister last summer shortly after the papal proclamation on birth control. His sister, a Roman Catholic, was heard to remark, "To hell with the Pope, let him take care of my soul and I'll take care of my sex!" We now find youth deserting the organized church, claiming that it is irrelevant and hypocritical, and yet religion often served as a shelter, sanctuary, and mode of confession to relieve guilt and grief for their parents in time of stress and anguish. It holds little or no meaning to today's activist youth, who profess to have substituted the teachings of Herbert Marcuse for the teachings of Jesus Christ. However, Christ preached peace and Marcuse preaches revolution, thus it would appear that the alienated youth are only doing what comes naturally.

*Pot:* The rise of a "drug culture" among the youth of today is a phenomenon reaching proportions that tend to stagger the imagination. The writer attended a meeting recently in Palo Alto, where it was authoritatively stated that approximately twenty-five percent of the junior high students and fifty percent of the high school students in Palo Alto, experiment with drugs. Another participant at the meeting, an M.D. from Wyo-



ming, cited almost identical figures for the urban areas of his state. The youthful statistic-makers of the aforementioned areas are not in most cases ghetto dwellers, not products of lower socio-economic cultural or racial deprivation, but sons and daughters of Stanford professors and Wyoming cattlemen. The use of drugs by youth has been classified by some as a byproduct of the "instant gratification" generation, but the writer sees the widespread use of "pot", for example, which is a felony in most legal jurisdictions, as an indicator of a massive breakdown of adherence to the established laws of the community. Secondly, drug abuse seems to indicate a wanton disrespect for the longevity of one's own life, as if life must be lived instantaneously for if you don't, you will miss "something".

#### Direct "P-Factors"

*The Press:* This "P-Factor" can be applied to television newsmen as well as the members of the fourth estate who profess loudly to be defenders of the public truth, but the reader must never forget that such profit-making organizations must, as the first order of business, sell newspapers and promote ratings. Those who lead student uprisings have utilized the news media to their advantage that would put a publicity-prone politician to shame! There is some evidence that the news media tend to promote confrontation in order to manufacture news. The writer had the opportunity to personally observe a television newsman produce his own "show" at a discussion confrontation between activist students and the Regents of the University of Hawaii in September, 1968. This individual decided which were the most significant scenes to televise, and was utilizing a complex array of hand signals, winks, and grimaces to signal to various activist students. A specific nod of the head was an indication for a student to rise and depart from the room where he could "caucus" with the "producer". The reporting of this "production" on the six p.m. television news that evening in no way resembled an honest picture one would have drawn after viewing the proceedings in person. Another example worthy of note was reported recently to the writer by the president of a western university, who stated that the SDS called the news media in the capitol city and announced they were going to have a protest sit-in at the university at nine a.m. the next day. When informed that due to an important Governor's press conference scheduled for nine a.m. the next day, the media could not supply

newsmen or cameramen, the SDS spokesman replied, "That's OK, we'll hold the sit-in at eleven a.m. instead, so you guys can be sure to make it."

The news media play an indirect but important part in student unrest through the publicity they generate for the activist youth's cause. At the first sign of any campus disturbance, the news media rush to the scene to record their version of the proceedings in glowing sight, word, and sound. Often the population of those representing the news media outnumbers those participating in the disturbance!

*The Parent:* The post-World War II generation of parents unwittingly opened a Pandora's (another P-Factor?) Box by initiating an era of permissiveness with respect to their children that is now being utilized by youth in a manner never intended by their parents. The "Now" generation either gets what it wants or proceeds to throw an adolescent tantrum to achieve its perceived needs. We live in an age of "extended" adolescence between 13 and 30. The writer is of the opinion that we have ample examples of this extended adolescence as evidenced by the behavior patterns of activist students on college campuses with the shell-shocked university administration in the role of the aggrieved parent. After all, if God is dead, why should "en loco parentis" live on? Or, as one wise man has put it, "Children mature so fast nowadays that by eighteen they won't even accept their own parents 'en loco parentis', let alone the college dean."

*Political Power:* Eric Hoffer recently stated, "As you watch the activist students you know beyond doubt that they are first and last not students but men of action — potential organizers and managers. Many of them are intelligent, articulate, even brilliant, but their hunger is not for knowledge and for the mastery of skills, but for action and a taste of power." The activist student realizes that in order to produce a desired shift in the balance of power in his direction, he must have real power and not be satisfied by a condescending pat on the head by administrators and professors. To achieve this, he has gone straight for the academic jugular vein and succeeded in an admirable manner. His cause is pure and he is absolutely convinced that he is morally in the right, regardless of what action he must take to achieve this power. This reaction is a source of great concern to those who are currently held accountable for the process of higher education. Kennan(2) states, "What strikes me first about angry militancy is the extraordinary degree of certainty by which it is inspired: certainty of one's



own rectitude, certainty of the correctness of one's answers, certainty as to the inequity of those who disagree. Such convictions seem particularly out of place at this time. Never has there been an era when problems of public policy even approached in their complexity those by which our society is confronted today."

Kramer(3) is of the opinion that if students are to have real power, they must take it forcibly, or at least use force to focus public attention to their claims. Fischer(4) believes that students have a considerable talent for leadership — a talent which they are all-too-likely to use, in their frustration and disgust, to disrupt the university which failed them.

Students are demanding participating either by threat or implied threat of force, in the operation of higher education in areas formerly staked out by administration and faculty as their own private preserves. To a large extent they will succeed, because faculty and administrators, when faced with an unmanageable situation, have "suddenly seen the validity of student power demands, and have magnanimously allowed students to join them in the decision-making process." This capitulation is usually couched in terms of "allowing the student to participate in a democratic learning process", when in fact it is usually an attempt to get a monkey off their back, a monkey which unknown to them has already grown into a gorilla. In short, the name of the game is power, and the advent of student unrest is a whole new ball game, although some of the more ancient participants are unaware of it.

The *Professoriat*: Grantsmanship, research contracts, and consulting fees have been key words of the post-sputnik vocabulary of the jet-age professor. The student and his concerns have a very low priority in some professors' scheme of life. Government, industry, and college administrators have done a magnificent job in conditioning the professor to take the carrot dangled in front of him, and to paraphrase Admiral Farragut, "Damn the students, full speed ahead!"

Cousins(5) reports that presidents of colleges and universities have stated that they were alarmed by the increasing tendency of faculty members to regard themselves primarily as research specialists rather than teachers. The kind of recognition valued by too many faculty members leaned more toward academic distinctions or other professional rewards than to satisfaction for having made a direct contribution to

the education of students. Irving Kristol, writing in the May, 1968, issue of *Fortune* states, "The university is very good at training scholars and specialists, but is very bad at educating young men and women." Thus, it appears we have created a situation where there is less and less teaching done by those who are primarily hired to teach and counsel students. Mute evidence of student reaction to this situation is reported by Evans(6) relative to "barbs" directed toward professors at the University of Washington following a student evaluation of faculty. Some of the comments were as follows:

"This course, I am led to believe, was quite interesting at one time."

"The professor was hindered by a miserable text. However, since he wrote it himself, I have little sympathy for him."

"The professor, although undoubtedly intelligent, did his best to indicate otherwise."

"This class operated on the principle of diminishing returns: fewer and fewer people came back on successive class sessions."

How many of us who make higher education our profession have ever said, "If I didn't have to bother with students, I could get some significant work completed." Finally, as a parting thought, who has seen a professor working on a research problem because year after year students in his classes showed an interest in it?

The writer, in an effort to keep this article brief, has reported only the more important "P-Factors" in his theory, which is, as many theories tend to be, almost endless in scope. Other "P-Factors" would include programming (computerization), punishment (the lack of), peer relationships, patience (the lack of), participatory democracy, prosecution (the lack of), pride, privilege, prestige, prejudice, and last but not least, the Playboy philosophy.

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