

**T**HE high school underground press has not yet been studied in depth. Complete files of these ephemeral periodicals are rare. Moreover, the significance of these organs as both predictive and supportive of school disorders has been slow to receive recognition. There now exists a national network of high school underground communication paralleling that of adult publications.

This press can be viewed as an important part of the dialogue among faculty members, administrators, and students, as well as between the community in general and American youth. Through the medium of the underground press, certain students who are outspoken critics of adult society, who are innovative, who are committed to major social change, and who believe they are denied expression in authorized school publications are articulating on-campus and societal problems but also proposing solutions.

Content analysis of a complete file of a high school underground paper, *The Loudmouth*, extending over a period of 18 months, indicates a radically critical attitude toward many long established high school policies and practices. It portrays the commitment of high school youth to the ideals of a more fully democratic and creative society. It also reveals a deep involvement with significant political and social movements in the culture as a whole.

## Content Analysis

Seventeen issues of *The Loudmouth*, originating in a middle-class urban Southern California high school, were secured for content analysis. It was hypothesized that the papers would become: (a) more conservative or institutionalized during the 18 months of publication; (b) increasingly focused on issues outside the school parameters; (c) responsive to discrepancies in the regularly published school paper; and (d) dominated by affective expression when compared with the regular paper, to compensate for the absence of affect in the authorized school publication.

*The Loudmouth*, a parody on the regular school paper *The Loudspeaker*, proved to be so provocative that by the end of its second phase of publication, a competing right-wing underground publication *The Truth* was being distributed to ensure that "all sides of every issue" were being heard. This incident, in microcosm, is symbolic of the developing polarizing reaction to young radicals throughout the country.

The three major categories of articles derived from study of *The Loudmouth* were: (a) off-campus societal concerns; (b) on-campus issues; and (c) miscellaneous, which includes self-promotion, humor, creative writing, and advertising.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were quickly dis-

proved. The item of primary importance to staffers was their personal documentation of the Century Plaza Peace Demonstrations, which occurred during the Los Angeles visit of President Johnson. Detailed stories, including maps, filled 18 percent of all space during the initial period of publication. No mention of these violent confrontations, which received worldwide attention, appeared in the regular school paper. Combined with reportage of experiences at "love-ins," "be-ins," and other communal activities in which the staff participated, almost one-fourth of the first publication phase, approximately six months, evolved from first-person experience.

The editors' perception of hypocrisy in American life, specifically that existing in the relationships between blacks and whites, and between youths and adults, received student writers' attention, as did the problems of abortion (they were in favor of liberalized laws); capital punishment (they were opposed to it); loyalty oaths (they despised them); economic inequity (they felt guilty about it); and drug use (they ridiculed drug dependency while simultaneously seeking alterations in the law which mandated felony penalties for marijuana possession). They vigorously opposed the draft, favored an immediate end to the Vietnam war, and predicted the development of a movement which has become known as "the resistance." These

controversial issues occupied slightly less than half of the first series of papers, which began in March 1967 and continued through the summer.

### On-Campus Issues

The on-campus issues which concerned the staff were the regulation and control of student behavior, campus politics, dress codes, the students' serious involvement with problems of education in general, and friction on the campus between rival groups. The high school dress regulations were considered a symbolic issue. Writers pointed up the irrationality of arbitrary, adult-imposed grooming standards by examining the changes in fashions which occurred from one school year to the next. That which was regarded as immodest or slovenly last year, styles or practices for which students were suspended then, were this year considered acceptable.

Originally, educators' objections to long hair on males were based on their fears of possible effeminacy or even homosexuality. Others had previously had negative experiences with what they termed "shags"—pre-delinquent, long-haired youth. Because the wearing of longer hair was used by some

\* F. K. Heussenstamm, Associate Professor, California State College, Los Angeles

Southern California male adolescents to identify participants in the marijuana sub-culture, the concern of adults was understandable. All long-haired males are not drug users, however, and the suppressive tactic of forced haircuts has done little to control drug use and abuse and, in many instances, has contributed to the advancement of the counter-culture.

About 14 percent of the first year's column inches was dedicated to these problems. The promotion of the paper itself occupied 17 percent of the total; humor and cartoons, all of which were editorializing or issue-related, took slightly less than 10 percent of all editions; poetry and personal essays about 8 percent. Advertisers included local book-stores, record stores, and eateries. Paid advertisements amounted to 6 percent of column inches. In general, during the first year, off-campus controversies absorbed the staff's attention by better than a three-to-one ratio in terms of space allotment. In summary, 43 percent of the publication was initially devoted to off-campus issues, 14 percent to on-campus issues, and the rest to the miscellaneous items previously listed.

## Changes Over Time

During the second phase of publication, approximately one year, some distinct changes were noted. Paid advertising doubled, and the amount of space devoted to promotion diminished as the paper established itself in the school community. At one point, the editors apologized for not printing all submitted material, although during the preceding period they had made repeated appeals for written contributions. Their ardor to espouse causes manifested itself in their dedication to the Eugene McCarthy campaign for the Presidential nomination, and by their vigorous work in the community to support their political commitments. Politics per se thus occupied 10 percent of the writing, but coupled with discussions of American morality and "hypocrisy," the treatment of political topics amounted to 25 percent of the total output.

Writers continued to attack school dress regulations, censorship of textbooks, and student body elections. They also printed an exposé of faculty involvement and alleged coercion during the campus elections. They sarcastically raked the curriculum as "irrelevant" in many instances, particularly on controversial issues in the larger society. They scored other traditional school practices. During the second phase of the paper's existence, 30 percent of editorial efforts went to off-campus issues, 33 percent to on-campus problems, and the balance was divided among promotion, humor, advertising, and creative writing.

Writers employed various tactics in criticizing traditional school practices as in the following example of irony:

Homework assignments are becoming more and more stimulating. "Read the chapter and answer the questions at the end. Be ready for a test tomorrow. Current events are due next Monday" is a typical modern homework assignment. This displays great progress over what homework assignments were once like. Why forty years ago, a typical assignment might have been, "Read the chapter and answer the questions at the end. Be ready for a test tomorrow. Current events are due next Monday." It's wonderful to see how far we've come!<sup>1</sup>

In general, the quality of the writing improved steadily after the initial publication, while a more esthetically designed paper emerged. Positions on issues were still dogmatically stated by Editor Mike Lukas, although there was an apparent feeling of confidence based on a minimum of conflict with the administration, which was certainly evidence of adult sensitivity at this particular school.

The importance of the high school underground press as an indicator of present convictions and aspirations and especially of future political action, some of it violent, should not be underestimated. □

<sup>1</sup> R. Garry Shirts. "Underground High School News Paper Editors Conference." *Pilot Policy Research Center Progress Report 3*. La Jolla, California: Western Behavioral Science Institute, November 15, 1967.

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