

THE ALIENATED GENERATION AND THE LAW

*Detective Sgt I/C. D.R. Jefferies, Juvenile Aid Bureau,
Queensland Police Department*

THE ALIENATED GENERATION — WHO OR WHAT ARE THEY?

The concept of alienation has been variously described but there is widespread agreement that it incorporates powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation and self-estrangement. To quote Lipke, "The common thread linking all of these variants is a mismatch between one set of values and another and when such an irreconcilable mismatch occurs then alienation is the result".

All of us have had some contact with alienated individuals, but as police officers, particularly we in the Juvenile Aid Bureau, are in daily encounter with youngsters and adults who form part of this 'alienated generation'.

The most obvious group are young recidivists — those who at an early age have for a variety of reasons received much greater prominence within the Criminal Justice system than in the Education system. They appear to have no profound affinity with parents, family, school or community group and a limited peer group appears to be their **only** tenuous source of social acceptance.

A second group are those involved in the area of child abuse. Not only the victims (who either by this abuse or by intervention are alienated from their family) but also the offenders who usually have at some stage been victims of alienation themselves.

A third group are the so-called 'street-kids', the runaways who for a variety of reasons are living on their wits and whose estrangement from general social norms increases daily.

Then there are the various minority groups, the ethnic and other groups who because of cultural language or other difficulties are often isolated from large segments of society and in particular, the law.

I venture to suggest that many police are themselves alienated because of their reaction to negative community attitudes towards law enforcement; and their own lack of personal involvement in positive contexts. One could well argue that police are both victims of and contributors to alienation.

Because of increasing demands on police manpower, an upsurge in crime and a shortage of personnel, Police Departments opt to shift away from the local station with the neighbourhood sergeant (a fountain of local knowledge of both the ordinary citizen and the criminal) to a system of mobile patrols. The police officer becomes encased in a thin cocoon, the opportunity for personal interaction between the police officer and members of the local community has been drastically curtailed to either an enforcement encounter or a reactive response following a complaint. The pro-active element in policing seems to be in a steady decline.

To my mind one of the biggest problems which has contributed to this alienation in all areas is the breakdown in interpersonal communication. I believe that this has affected us all. Obviously the young with the emphasis on T.V., video, computers, computer games etc. have an increasing temptation to decrease interpersonal communication even more. But unless we open up channels of communication the alienation we are experiencing in this generation will certainly increase in the next.

Many children I have encountered in the Children's Court

seem to see a court appearance as the 'price for getting caught'. Their understanding of the procedure or its effects can best be summed up in the words of one youngster who stated to a companion on leaving the court complex that he had been 'abolished and discharged'.

Too many children are like pieces of meat going into the sausage machine. In too many respects the sheer volume of cases and the limited resources of the court and its officers greatly contribute to this feeling of alienation in young persons.

Unemployment contributes its share to alienation. I have had personal contact with many youngsters who have ceased looking for work because of the frustrations associated with innumerable unsuccessful attempts.

Labelling either of schools or suburbs contributes to alienation, impressionable youngsters have a tendency to conform to unsatisfactory levels of behaviour if there is general consensus amongst significant others in the area (teachers, police, etc.) that you can expect no more.

Obviously in dealing with any of these groups police officers are most likely to be involved when some law is infringed or some behaviour transgresses the accepted level. Often police, when dealing with any of the members of these groups are accustomed to dealing with the present problem, the complaint, the offending behaviour, and as a result the focus is on dealing with the offence rather than the offender.

The training and role expectation all encourage the officer to respond this way. However my experience has shown that in many respects this is a short-sighted view. If we fail to look to causes, fail to understand the needs of the individual, fail to offer some assistance, we will succeed in doing no more than plugging another offender into an already overloaded criminal justice system.

To illustrate this point, I would like to use a study of a number of children dealt with by police who were the subject of care and control proceedings in the Children's Court. This small survey undertaken by Barbara Flynn of the Queensland Department of Children's Services throws some light on the reasons for these children's alienation and resultant offending.

She studied some 40 case histories between 1978 and 1981.

After applications were presented to the Court for the Care and Control, underneath were discovered these stories of rejection and abuse. (Psychological, emotional and physical abuse of adolescents.)

Some the factors found were: 35% of the boys and girls appearing on applications for care and control were born out of wedlock and the mothers between 13 and 17 years of age at the time of having the child.

27% of the children were born to parents living in de-facto relationships. Often the misbehaviour was related to the time of the entry of the de-facto into the home.

65% of the children were living where there was extreme marital disharmony.

35% — one of the parents had a chronic alcohol problem.

75% — one or either parent had themselves come from unstable early family lives.

42% reported patterns of physical violence within the family.

100% had chronic school problems (history of transferring

from various schools).

Obviously this information would have been available to the police officer who was the applicant had he seen his role to be to probe the causes of this behaviour rather than react to it. Often the reaction taken in many instances serves only to reinforce the behaviour rather than help solve it.

I daily encounter cases in the area of child abuse where parents who had come to the notice of police as children for behaviour-related offences were often the victims of similar abusive behaviour as has brought them to our notice now. Because their cry for help was expressed in the language of behaviour, a language that was misunderstood by those involved in dealing with their case, their tone plight was never recognised and as a result a second generation of children fell victim to this alienation. Thus it is only through a broadening of my understanding of the family dynamics and the many different causes of behaviour that I have seen the importance of listening and asking questions.

Too often our training as police has been law enforcement-oriented rather than in preparation for the 70% of our work that is service and peace keeping-oriented. Wouldn't he be better called a Peace Officer?

Research being undertaken by the Queensland Police Academy is enlightening.

The fact that respondents in that survey called for an increase in police involvement in community youth groups a greater involvement with the young in the schools, more police with special training to handle adolescents and a greater emphasis on the prevention and detection of juvenile crime, is evidence of the community's expectations.

The fact that people in the community feel sufficiently concerned to voice views such as this must be answered by a greater allocation of the scarce police resources to this area. It will also alert the educators of police to an awareness of where the community feels improvements must be made.

The views of many respondents could best be summarised in two responses:

- "We don't need resourceful, confident, articulate, intelligent police who are dishonest or unsympathetic."
- "Police need to be competent in their work, sensitive to community needs, honest and courteous. Law enforcement and public relations go hand in hand." Don't be alienated, get involved is what they are telling us.

Obviously, obtaining the views of the community is the easier part; translating them into the product that will hopefully fulfil their expectations is the more difficult task now to be undertaken.

What then can be done to reduce or prevent alienation? In many respects I believe that what is needed is a sensitizing of people to the needs of young people and the possible causes of disruptive/anti-social behaviour. Too often, police officers (and in many respects other agencies) are only involved when the child has transgressed some rule of law and the police involvement is then seen only as 'enforcement'-oriented. Too often we are involved in the processing of the results of behaviour and have too little time to be involved in an examination of the causes of the behaviour and even an involvement in taking action that may prevent, or minimise further offending. This not only holds true for police but also for social workers, teachers, and other professionals.

I believe that Queensland has certainly done much to demonstrate that a co-ordinated and multi-disciplinary team approach to the problem of child-abuse is both possible and effective.

I also believe that it is perhaps time that a similar team response to behaviour problems could be tried. For example, police are concerned at the attitude that many young people have to police in general. Youth on the other hand also have concerns. This was evidenced in the study of police/student

relationships in the A.C.T. in 1980 when 61% of students surveyed felt that there should be more contact with police in High Schools and more emphasis on community relations/awareness through increased displays/campaigns held for example in shopping centres.

The community also has expectations and these were evidenced in the responses in the recent public survey undertaken by the Queensland Police Academy on Policing in Queensland. Comments such as:

- "Policing is 99% dealing with people and should have a bigger emphasis on human relations in the training period."
- "Younger members of the Police Force take on an 'us versus them' attitude instead of realising that they are part of the community."
- "Police should think of themselves not simply as enforcers of the law but rather as being helpers and servants of the community."

Obviously then, there is a problem. What can be done about it? I believe that the involvement of the general community in this survey of the training needs of its future police officers is an important step. But this is only one.

I believe a further step is to involve police officers more closely with the community they serve. This view has been given recognition by the Report of the Royal Commission on the Police in London in 1962 which stated "It is no exaggeration to say that the police cannot successfully carry out their task of maintaining law and order without the support and confidence of the people. The police and the people are one."

If I can illustrate this by way of an example. When the Juvenile Aid Bureau was first founded by Commissioner in 1963 its founding members got to know most of the high school principals and deputies by name. They were involved not only in investigating offences but they were also involved in meeting with parents groups, community groups and others in an effort to 'educate' parents etc. in what the police response to delinquent behaviour was. They also involved community groups, professionals and organizations on a personal basis to offer a greater service to those youngsters with whom they came in contact.

Now with the alarming increase in juvenile crime, and the increased responsibility for the protection of schools and school property the opportunity for such personal interaction has decreased with the effect that J.A.B.'s service to the community they serve has been curtailed. Yet one may well ask whether this increase in crime among juveniles could be decreased if we were to really collectively examine the causes rather than applying 'band-aids' to the problems by way of arrest and court appearances.

Some efforts have already been made. The Victorian police involvement in the establishment of trailbike centres via the co-operative response of council, service groups, concerned parents and police etc. demonstrates what can be done through community co-operation.

I see a further area for involvement which is within the school structure itself. Several overseas forces have actually 'bitten the bullet' and attached police officers to schools to act as lecturers etc. In the Metropolitan Police in the U.K. it is calculated that some 40,000 policemen hours per year is spent in some 4500 London schools, catering for approximately 1¼ million pupils. This figure does not include the work of the Career Section and Crime Prevention Officers.

Several other forces have been involved in innovative programmes such as the School-child liaison scheme conducted by the Leicestershire Constabulary where 'police fortnights' are conducted in all primary schools once every three years. By this programme the children are shown that the policeman is neither a superman nor a bogeyman; he's human

like everyone else. This friendly approach also extends to parents and families and the force hopes that by improving relations with children the local police may also get to know the rest of the population on more friendly terms.

While these options are desirable the opportunity for implementation depends on administrative decision which in turn hangs on resources, availability of time within an already overloaded curriculum etc. but there are still opportunities for individual efforts on the part of teachers, principals, police officers etc. to take advantage of every opportunity that presents to create an awareness in young people of the police officer as an individual and also promote some understanding of his role on behalf of the community.

Often police have too easily accepted the 'enforcement' role and have failed to give at least equal time to the pro-active 'preventive' policing. In my view it is the neglect of this area of police work, particularly in our police forces, public image that has contributed to our alienation from society in general and young people in particular. My experience has been that the more opportunity a young person has to see a police officer as a person who cares, is firm but reasonable and who knows he also has responsibilities, the more likely that young person will accept advice, co-operate and improve his own self image and his image of police and policing.

At present a certain degree of conflict exists between police and various social service agencies. In many respects this has been brought about by circumstances over which these organizations have little control. It is recognised that social workers are not providing the kind of service that they themselves would wish. This is caused by a myriad of reasons not the least of which is the case loading and resources available to them.

Nevertheless, it is difficult for a police officer who is constantly arresting persistent juvenile offenders not to attach the blame for his apparently non-effective actions on "social workers". Similarly social workers often see the relationship that they try to build damaged by "short-sighted police action" and a polarization of attitudes can develop which results in stereotyping.

Let's grasp the stinging nettle, pool the resources and adopt a team response. Second a number of social workers to work with the Police Juvenile Aid Bureau thus providing a more "complete" service and allow both workers to fully appreciate each others roles and difficulties. This has been done overseas with excellent results. Perhaps now is the time for each of our professions to move away from the safety of our own "patches" and seek new ways of overcoming our own alienation.

A further area of improvement that is possible with little cost is the more effective use of existing resources. For example we have already here in Queensland a Police & Citizens Youth Club network that serves the general community and provides a valuable service by training and preparing youngsters in a wide variety of sporting and other social activities.

Yet these facilities are only used by a small percentage of the youth of an area. Too often either the programme offered by the club or its presentation does little to attract the young people most in need of the services that could be offered by the club.

As a result of discussions with various bodies some clubs have now commenced providing after-school care for younger children and vacation programmes to cater for an increasing number of children of working parents. Yet I believe we have done little to tap the potential of this valued resource in our community. Its acceptance and support by the community is evidenced by the public financial support yet often the contact between the "on line" police officer and the youth club clientele is minimal if not non-existent.

I believe that we as a force as well as other agencies in the community need to examine what resources we have, what are

community needs and what can be done collectively to act on some of them. A further example of this is the use of school facilities after hours.

In my opinion one of the most important ways in which we can overcome our own alienation and thus help others to overcome theirs is to begin at grass roots level to see what we can do at "our level" to assist in changing some of these situations.

Inspector Avery in his book 'Police Force or Service' proposes the establishment of a Social Safety Council under the aegis of the local council. He suggests that they could function similarly to the Road Safety Councils of some years ago. His suggestion is that a social safety council would be established in each police division or district. Representations on the Council could come from the local government authority, business people, sporting organizations, service clubs, ratepayers organizations, child groups and the like, together with the Inspector, his senior uniformed Superintendent, Detective Superintendent, Traffic Superintendent and Licensing Superintendent. If the council met quarterly and the meeting was publicised and open to the public it would provide an opportunity for citizens to put ideas and propositions in the area of social control and discuss local social issues which might benefit from police assistance and involvement. This proposal I believe warrants careful consideration as it may provide a valuable tool in helping to overcome alienation in the community.

To summarise, I believe that the law has been alienated from this generation.

To overcome this we need to adopt:

- A team approach to behaviour problems.
- Greater utilization of community resources.
- A change in police training.
- Developing mechanisms that will allow greater community involvement in policing.
- ⑥ More important than any of these, an emphasis on sensitising of all individuals working with the alienated generation to both the needs and causes of alienation.

What then can a conference such as this achieve? If our deliberations are to achieve anything we need to take the insights and knowledge gained here and share it with others. To quote Professor Betty Watts, the man in the street is not here today. He doesn't go to conferences or meetings. But the man in the street, the boy or girl in the street, the woman in the street, these are the people with whom alienated children have their intimate daily interactions. These are the people who can receive or rebuff. These are the people who can understand and accept or look on people as oddities. It is these people who can be involved in working together to overcome this feeling of isolation and powerlessness etc.

It is for each of us to step in and ask ourselves what we as individuals can do either individually or collectively.

Obviously, none of us has all the answers but together we can work together to try and overcome this problem. The future welfare of the following generation rests, not with the government, not with the child care organization but with you and me.

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