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High school students and heads of households in rural areas of Illinois were studied with respect to their attitudes toward Negroes. The hypothesis used was that a youth subculture or "contra-culture" did serve as an important socializing agent in forming the attitudes of students toward Negroes. Results indicated that there was only slight evidence of "contra-culture" tendencies and that student attitudes toward Negroes were in general the same as those held by the adults. It was concluded that strong family influence on children's attitudes toward minority groups still existed in these 2 rural areas. (JAM)

PARENTAL INFLUENCE, YOUTH CONTRA-CULTURE AND RURAL ADOLESCENT ATTITUDES TOWARD NEGROES

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Social change in rural communities and its effects on family life has been a matter of concern for sociologists specializing in a number of different kinds of studies for some site. Rural sociologists have tended to emphasize the breakdown of the traditional, closely knit rural family and the tendency for rural families to resemble more and more closely those found in urban areas. Family sociologists and those dealing with the phenomenon of adolescent subcultural tendencies in modern American life have tended to assume the increasing urbanization of rural life has lead to rising importance of peers as important reference groups in the development of rural adolescent attitudes. This paper attempts to assess the relative importance of parental and peer group influence on the attitudes of a group of rural adolescents toward negroes in the effort to determine some of the extent of the breakdown of the rural family and the development of youth subculture in rural areas.

Some theoretical background material from the fields of sociological specialization mentioned above will provide a useful context for the presentation of the data in the present study.

Among family sociologists, Burgess particularly has concerned himself with the rural family. He and Wallin suggest a delineation of the ideal typical nature of marriage in rural and urban contexts. In the rural context the definition of obligations within the family is well understodd and formally defined. Rights and duties are inetricably bound up with certain status positions in the family as opposed to the urban situation where obligations are defined on a more individual basis. In the latter situation young people are portrayed as free to choose their mates and even to choose the social relationships in which they engage before marriage. Under rural conditions such choices are largely controlled

by the family. The changes in rural life in the twentieth century are said to have caused a shift from the fural toward the urban marriage type. (Burgess and Wallin, 1953)

Later, Burgess, Locke and Thomas characterized the rural family as "institutional" in the sense that it performed all the traditional family functions and was kept in force by external, community pressures. "Familism" is the form taken by the institutional family in American society. By "familism" they sought to characterize the family in which the members feel they belong first and foremost to the family group, that the individual's activities and goals are subjugated to family objectives, that the material resources of individuals are to be used for the assistance of kin whenever needed and that the perpetuation of the family is of upmost importance. Such "familistic" attitudes they associated with farming as a common cooperative occupation tieing together the members of the family across generational lines and with the persistance of primary relationships and social control by the family. (Burgess, Locke and Thomas, 1963, pp. 60-65)

In their estimation this "institutional" rural family is declining and changing. The rural family is no longer a self-sustaining unit, performing all traditional family functions. It is breaking up as a work unit as the children are dispersed to cities for education and employment. Commitment to a rural way of life is declining with the transition from agriculture to agri-business and the application of advanced technological innovation to agricultural tasks. Further, rural farm life is becoming urbanized with the introduction of modern conveniences and improved transportation and communication. Thus, the farm family is seen as changing into a "companionship" focused system. Such a characterization would undergird the often heard cry that the old family ways are breaking down.

Rural sociologists seem to be in general agreement that the farm family has lost many of its "old time" functions and that its members are not as closely kit as they once were. Rogers cites one study indicating that farm families spend even less time together than urban families, and argues that farm families have generally lost the "productive, protective, educational, recreational, and religious functions," which were their responsibility at one time. He also points to more independent mate selection, a decrease in the authority of husbands and fathers, a decline in respect for the opinions of oldsters in the family and the decreased importance of family goals in the life of farm families as indicators of the replacement of familism by individualism. (Rogers, 1960, pp. 170ff)

Taylor and Jones describe the same process indicating that the rural family which was once the place of "childbirth, rearing, training, health care, protection, recreation, religion and food and fiber production," has been radically reduced in terms of the "social space" it occupies. (Taylor and Jones, 1964, pp. 344ff.)

However, while the literature on the rural family among family and rural sociologists strongly supports the general observation that the rural family has been subject to many pressures toward change and that in general change has been toward a more modern, urban type family, there has not been much exploration of the question of just what such changes mean in terms of socialization and attitude formation.

There are practical and theoretical reasons to suppose that rural adolescents are increasingly exposed to potential attitude determining interaction with peers outside the family context. On the common sense observation level there is the fact that they are increasingly going to school and to work in relatively urbanized, consolidated centers where they spend a good part of their waking hours in interaction with individuals from other locales than their own. On the theoretical level there is the suggestion by Eisenstadt (1956, p. 54) that age-homogeneous groups tend to "arise in those societies in which family or kinship unit cannot ensure, or even impedes, the attainment of full social status by its members." American society, even in rural areas, increasingly approximates the condition he specifies as leading to this development in which the important institutionalized roles of the system have become independent from the family. Under such conditions individuals of the same age group are thrown together because of the need for learning the kinds of role performances which will satisfy the new universalistic standards determining reward allocation in the system.

A rather large sociological literature has grown to describe just such a development in American society as a whole; the sociology of adolescence and adolescent subcultures. The importance of this literature for the present paper lies in the suggestion that insofar as "familism" is declining in rural areas and young people are exposed to an "age homogeneous", subcultural kind of experience, one would expect to find a increased divergence between youth and adults on a variety of value, normative and behavioral dimensions. Thus, one could profitably ask to what extent attitudes of rural adolescents are derived from their family as opposed to their peer group memberships. Before data is presented on the question, a brief review of the literature on the sociology of adolescence will help to establish the context.

That literature seems to center on the question of the presence of a youth subculture which differs in values and behavior from adult society. There appears to be some consensus that such a subculture does exist in modern American society due to the impact of technological change and the kind of protracted specialized educational experience it has made necessary. (Gottlieb and Ramsey, 1964, p. 29)

Some writers trace the beginning of concern with the problems to Reuter (1937) and some to Parsons (1942). Both Reuter and Parsons give early statements of the theme that an adolescent subculture has developed as a result of our cultural complex which defines a particular area of human existence that lies between childhood and adulthood in which young persons are set apart physically by educational pursuits and during which they must seek common solutions to the problem of moving from particularlistically oriented nuclear family life to universalistically oriented educational and economic pursuits. Since then the theme has been exemplified and amplified by, among others, Eisenstadt (1956), Coleman (1961), and Smith (1962). Eisenstadt's emphasis on the need for the development of age-homogenous groups has already been mentioned; Coleman pushed the concept of subculture to the point of arguing that a full "adolescent society" develops in which most important interactions are carried out in isolation from adults; and Smith centered on youth-adult conflict. All three, however, insist on the reality of the existence of such a subculture, and all three agree on the relative lack of family determination of behavior and values.

A contrasting view has been expressed by Elkin and Westley (1955) who, in a study of forty middle class young people in a suburb of Montreal, concluded that youth do not reject adult values. However, theirs would seem to be a minority view.

A number of other investigators have criticized the radical definition given to youth subculture and have sought to soften the kind of absolute dichotomus distinction frequently drawn between youth and adult culture. Schwartz and Merton (1967) investigated the language of adolexcence and came to the conclusion that

youth subculture need not be characterized primarily as a"contra" culture and that

> ...the members of a subculture can be integrated into basic societal institutions even though their definitions of ordinary social situations are predicated upon a specail set of cultural meanings. Consequently, the crucial criterion for the identification of a youth subculture is whether its norms provide its members with a distinctive world view, a style of life, and the standards against which they can measure their own worth.

Finally, Snyder (1966) has suggested that the adolescent culture in the high school he studied was not "characterized by internal solidarity and conformity." A heterogeneity existed in which there was variation according to socioeconomic status values, social participation and sex. However, even in this toned down version of the theory of adolescent subcultrues, a definite set of distinctive styles of life were found which set adolescents off from the world of adults. Even here the correlation of the growth of youth culture with a decline in family solidarity is obvious.

There have been few attempts to apply the youth subculture concept to the condition of rural youth in America. However, if the suggestions being consistently made about the decline of family solidarity and increasing urbanism in rural areas are to be taken seriously, the emergence of a youth culture is a distinct possibility. The trend would not be toward "individualism" as suggested by Rogers, but toward the replacement of the family as the most significant reference group for adolescents by some other group, most likely the adolescent's peers. Consolidation of rural schools, particularly at the high school level, increased mobility and interaction among rural youth, a common set of problems of adaptation to an increasingly urbanized society and the likelihood that the majority will never find their livelihood or residence in a strictly rural setting would seem to provide adequate conditions for the development of a viable subculture among rural adolescents.

However, Bealer and Willits (1961) found no evidence for the emergence of a youth subculture in rural areas. They are conducting a long-term study of nearly 8,000 Pennsylvania youth which "shows that the rural adolescent is outspokenly traditional" in regard to drinking, smoking, loafing, and failing in school. Only in regard to dancing and dating does there appear to be significant non-traditional behavior. Further, they do not find the significant differentiation that might be expected between urban and rural youth's acceptance of family as the most important point of reference in determining attitudes. Rural and urban youth both regarded family as the most important reference point, not peer groups. Urban and rural youth attitudes toward behavioral norms, then, may reflect the attitudes of their parents more accurately than might have been predicted, with rural youth expressing quite traditional attitudes. The points of disagreement which do develop between parents and youth may reflect differences over the question of when recognition of the maturity of individuals should occur, and may reflect as much acceptance of eagerness to participate in adult society as rejection of it.

To summarize, we find on the one hand family and rural sociologists taking a position that there is a decline in the institutional family and familism among rural families. On the other hand, we recognize sociologists of adolescence proposing that there is a developing youth culture or "contra-culture" in American society though the limits in the kinds of norms and behavior it affects are not well established. The proponents of both positions indicate that aspects of urbanization and industrialization such as rising levels of technology, mobility, and physical isolation of youth from adults are the social forces generating these changes. If this assessment of the changing rural family is accurate, one would expect that rural youth will deviate from adults, including their own parents, in their values, normative expectations, attitudes and behaviors. Following this suggestion we have examined the degree of correspondence between a group of rural high school students and the head of their households with respect to their

attitudes toward Negroes.

This approach to the subject of parental versus peer-group influence differs somewhat from previous methodologies. The relative importance of family and peer groups in the development of adolescent attitudes and behavior has usually been determined by asking adolescents who affects their decisions on certain matters with little or no independent testing of the reference groups for actual similarity of attitudes. Under the auspices of a research group analyzing rural industrialization in Illinois,[1] two independent sets of data were collected concerning student and adult attitudes toward minority groups.

The adult data were collected as part of a household survey based on an area probability sample of two rural areas, one undergoing industrialization and one a relatively stable and prosperous rural area centered around a county-seat service city. In all, 1096 households were included in the sample. The youth data consists of questionnaire responses by students in colsolidated high schools in the two counties. Seven hundred and thirty-eight students completed schedules.

There was overlap in the two surveys in terms of the families serving as respondents. That is, parallel data were available for some heads of household,[2] and high school students of the same family. Seventy-seven such instances of overlap were identified. Of these, five had to be dropped from the analysis because more than five percent of the relevant data was incomplete.[3] Thus, for seventy-two families we have independent responses of heads of household and children on the same questionnaire items.

The two survey instruments overlapped in attitude items; a Bogardus Social Distance Scale.[4] The respondents were asked to indicate whether they would admit Latin Americans, Germans, Negroes, Jews, Southern Whites, and Applachian Hillbillies to employment in their occupation, to citizenship in their country, to close kinship by marriage, to their street as neighbors, as visitors to their country, to their club as personal chums and whether they would exclude them from their country.

In an effort to isolate the kind of attitudes that would accurately reflect significant socialization by parents or peers, attention was confined in this investigation to attitudes toward Negroes. Formation of attitudes toward this particular minority group would seem to be particularly significant to American concerns at the moment and individual adolescents presumably are under pressure to formulate certain sets of attitudes toward this group in both their peer group and family contexts. This situation represents a possibility for contradictory socialization between the peer group and the family.

In focusing on this attitude the investigation differs from most studies of adolescent subculture. Typically studies have directed attention to attitudes regarding distinctly adolescent behaviors such as: dress, music, dating patterns, and use of automobiles. These kinds of concerns would seem the likely points of conflict between parents and their children. Little is known about competing peer groups or parental influence on more socially relevant attitudes.

The analysis of the data was guided by the general hypothesis that a youth subculture or contra-culture did serve as an important socializing agent on the attitudes of the students toward Negroes. Three indicators of the existance of such a contra-culture were proposed. First, a significant difference between the mean social distance score of the students and the head of their household and between the students and a random sample of adults would indicate that the students hold a different view of the desirable social distance between themselves and Negroes than their parents or adults in the communities. Second, a distribution of scores with a smaller variance among the students than among the heads of household or among the sample of adults would indicate strong subcultural or peer group pressures for conformity of attitudes toward Negroes. Finally, low correlation of student head of household attitudes and student-adult attitudes would indicate the relative uninfluential role of the family in the formation of adolescent attitudes toward Negroes in this population. Failure of the data to manifest these characteristics would strongly suggest the absence of a youth subculture which affects

attitudes of rural youth toward Negroes in a manner contradictory to the views of the students' parents and the adult population of the community represented in the study. The data compiled are found in Table 1.

Table 1 - Mean Scores, Variance and Selected Correlations of Parents, Students and an Adult Sample on Negro Social Distance Scale.

	$\bar{X}$		r	Probability of r
Head of Household	10.3	2.25	.42	<.01
Student	10.0	1.96	.04	N.S.
Adult Sample	10.1	2.56		

Brief examination of the data peveals that none of the indicators give evidence of a youth contra-c:lture. The absence of a significant difference between the means of the head of household and student scores or the sample adult and student scores would indicate that the respondents in all three categories desire much the same level of social distance between themselves and Negroes. However, one should note that the students do have the lowest mean score which may indicate some slight contra-cultural tendencies.

The absence of significant differences in variance of scores in the three groups indicates that adolescent peers are no more in agreement regarding Negro-White social distance preferrence than are their parents and other adults of the community. The students reflect fairly accurately the Negro attitudes of their parents and other local adults. Again, it should be noted that the students do have the lowest variance of scores thereby indicating the possibility of some slight subcultural pressures.

Finally, the correlation of student head of household attitudes is considerably higher than the correlation of student-adult attitudes. Thus, adolescent attitudes can be predicted much more accurately from those of the head of household than they can from those of adults in the community in general.

The evidence seems to indicate, then, that relatively strong family influence is still to be found in these two rural areas and that the emergence of an adolescent subculture which serves as an important and divisive determinant of the attitudes of these high school students has not taken place.

Thus, these data suggest that generalizations about the decline of familism and the loss of former functions by the rural family may not easily be extended to loss of influence by family over certain attitudinal characteristics of rural adolescents. Rural high school students may spend less time with their parents than formerly. They may be exposed to potentially attitude changing, urban type experiences and influences through education and occupational endeavors. But the evidence here is for the continued importance of rural parents as influential in determining their children's attitudes toward minority groups. As Bealer and Willits (1961) indicate, the concept of youth subculture or contra-culture cannot easily be extended to rural society. For rural youth, basic attitudes may remain "traditional" and much like that of their parents.

FOOTNOTES

1. The research project referred to is the "Hennepin Project" which is an interdisciplinary analysis of the impact of rapid industrialization of a rural-agricultural area being carried out at the University of Illinois under grants from the National Institute of Mental Health and the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station.

2. "Head of household" here refers to the adult interviewed in the household survey. In sixty-six cases this was the father of the high school student concerned. One widower was included among the fathers. There were six female heads of household with five of them being widows.

3. In the case of several others with less than five percent missing data in the social distance scale items, responses could be edited to coincide with the general direction of responses on a Guttman Scale.

4. The method used for scaling the data was the computation of a simple summated score for each individual respondent, granting a score of one for admittance and two for rejection on each item. Thus, the scale ranged from possible values of seven to fourteen with the high score reflecting high social distance.

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