Granada Hills High School Rap Room:  
Three Case Studies

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Counseling and Guidance

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Introduction

The rap room at Granada Hills High School was conceived by Ron Bosoniff, a counselor and teacher there. It is now in its second year, with students from California State University, Northridge, participating in the rap room. Most of my counseling experience has been with adolescents and I had always wanted to counsel in a school setting to see what it was like. I had this opportunity plus the advantage of not being accountable to other teachers or administrators. In other words, I had complete (and still have) freedom to counsel. While Ron has the support of the administration in his endeavors, he does have problems with teachers who feel their students should not be allowed to leave the classroom to go to the rap room when the student felt inclined to do so. Ron's idea of education includes emotional growth as being as important as academic and social growth. His outlook, along with his sincere and open personality made me feel I would like to work with him.

The rap room is open until about 1 p.m. every day. It is crisis-oriented, meaning a student may come to discuss a pressing problem and hopefully expect to be helped by whoever is in the rap room.
at the time. The room also serves a social purpose; students come just to relax and be with their friends. (This, however, is going to be discouraged since it detracts from the purpose of the room.)

My involvement in the rap room was (is) limited to Thursday afternoons when I had the room for my client and myself. My preference was for long-term individual counseling and this is what I am currently engaged in.

In writing these case studies it should be clear that the counseling is still going on: thus, if anything seems unclear that is probably because I am unclear as to exactly what is happening.

The following three female students were referred to me by Ron because he felt they needed a long-term relationship which he could not give them.
Carol is my easiest client to write about since I have not seen much of her. Ron knew she was having problems and gave her my telephone number. She did not call for about four weeks until she was feeling somewhat desperate.

The first thing that struck me about Carol was her beauty. She has blond hair, large brown eyes, and beautiful skin. She is of average height and has a slim figure. On our first meeting she was quite friendly to me. She started talking immediately and poured out lots of family problems and lots of tears in the hour. It was important to her that her mother did not know she was talking to a counselor, and therefore I promised not to call her at home because her mother is always there. The second meeting one week later was similar to the first except Carol was more reserved, less tearful, and I was more verbal. Basically, Carol was engaged to a boy her age (17) without her mother's (and family's) knowledge because her mother did not approve of the boy's culture and background. Besides the guilt Carol felt about this, she was also confused by her mother's behavior toward her. Carol spent more time with her mother at home than any of her three brothers and sisters. Her mother was clinging onto Carol for companionship,
yet also using her as a scapegoat when something went wrong. Carol was in conflict because of her desire to be close to her mother and her need to escape her mother's clutches.

Our third meeting was quite different from the others. Carol seemed to have come against her will and sat as if she were ready to get up and go any minute. She was not depressed when she came in; she said she was resigned to the present and was living for this coming summer when she was moving out of her home. Thoughts of her boyfriend were what kept her going. My hunch was that Carol had gotten as close to me as she would permit herself and was now trying to withdraw gracefully. I had become interested in Carol and wanted to work with her. Carol had no friends at the school; her social life revolved around her boyfriend and his friends. Carol revealed she felt guilty that she was talking negatively about her mother behind her mother's back. Actually, Carol never felt comfortable talking about her feelings unless she was at the point of being unable to hold them in. This week she was feeling better and did not want to get into the feelings that made her depressed. For the time being, she'd leave well enough alone.
I have not seen Carol since. The fifth week she called to say she could not make it. The week after she did not call at all. I wrote her a note via Ron but have not received an answer.
When Ron first told me about Liz, a fifteen year old tenth grader, I was enthusiastic to work with her because it seemed to me she would be quite a challenge. Liz has been sent to counselors several times since junior high school but she did not continue. Liz does not speak, except in her home with her family. Her parents feel nothing is wrong with her except that she is shy. She does well academically. She has no friends at school. She is usually alone, except if she is with her older sister, an attractive senior who is usually with several boys around her.

Liz is a tiny girl - about 4'10" and about eighty pounds. She has long wavy hair which covers her face when she looks down. She is in my opinion potentially quite attractive.

On our first meeting we sat in the rap room. I asked her questions about anything and everything. Occasionally she would nod something. Most of the time she sat very rigid and trembling. Thirty minutes was enough for both of us. The second session was similar to the first. I expected Liz to see what a trustworthy and empathetic individual I was and open up to me. I do not know what she saw; she rarely looked at me. Her eyes were mostly downcast.
After that I decided to stop playing counselor and try to become her friend on her level. This was not easy since the brunt of the relationship was up to me (and still is). We began doing things - looking at ceramics exhibits, shopping for clothes (for me), taking walks around school with me doing most of the talking. On these occasions Liz was relaxed, smiled a lot, nodded a lot, and occasionally murmured a few words. Liz is taking a class in handicrafts, and what she is learning coincides with what I've been trying to teach myself. Several weeks we spent doing some needlepoint, and more recently crocheting. I am sure Liz is glad to be in the position of teaching me, and this is also giving us something in common.

About two weeks before Christmas vacation I began to feel very dissatisfied. I could tell Liz felt comfortable with me, but I had no idea what else was going on in her head. I was not sure if she liked me or really wanted to see me, although she was never late and never missed a week. That week I decided we would have a talk, meaning I would do the talking, ask questions and hope for a response. I explained how I was feeling and she nodded understanding. She looked at me most of the time and was not as nervous as she had been the first weeks. I learned that she
accomplishing, and she liked me. It also came out that she wanted to change — to be able to relate to people. I strongly felt that I did not want her to come unless it was her decision — this was important for me. Liz never would make a decision, but I forced this one upon her and gave her one week to decide. The next week (the last one before Christmas vacation) I asked her again. She smiled and nodded yes. We spent the rest of the time doing a new crochet stitch.

Needless to say, I was quite happy about her decision. However, Liz is more of a challenge than I had anticipated. I discussed her quite a bit with Ron and Ezra Wyeth, who both gave me helpful suggestions and plenty of encouragement. Often I feel frustrated by the lack of verbal communication. For the time being I have given up making this the goal of the relationship. At the moment I have no defined goals, except that we may become closer, and she may become more comfortable with me, and eventually this man transfer to other people.
Quite in contrast to Liz, Linda is a very talkative girl, so much so I often find myself getting sleepy. I feel I have been the least effective with Linda, partly because I see her right after Liz when I am usually somewhat drained. In contrast to Carol, Linda cannot wait to come. She is always early and never misses a week.

Ron referred Linda to me because she was having behavioral problems in school, was generally depressed, and thinking of dropping out. She is in the eleventh grade and her grades are average. She has found herself growing apart from her old friends, and except for her boyfriend who goes to another school, she is quite lonely when not with him. At home she sleeps a lot.

The first two weeks we discussed "the problem" - a personality conflict with a male teacher. She was not very very turned on to school anyway, so this made her want to drop out. Ron arranged a meeting with the teacher, Linda and himself. I strongly encouraged this confrontation although Linda did not want it. She went through with it, compromises were made, and now all is well in school.

Linda wants a friend in me, as well as a counselor. She is lonely and has found a way to occupy Thursday
afternoons. (Her boyfriend sees his psychiatrist on Thursday afternoon also). Sometimes Linda comes in lively and jolly, and will talk away about anything to fill the time. Trying to get into something deeper was frustrating because Linda would then jump onto something else. When I pointed this out to her she would look dumbfounded.

Other weeks she comes in not quite so jolly and wanting to discuss things bothering her. These times she would be quite open and more willing to get into herself, but not too deeply. Basically, Linda is quite resistant to exploring herself, but does want to maintain some kind of relationship—a relationship that does not get too deep or become too close. Perhaps because of my ambivalent feelings towards her I am not sure I want to become very close to her myself.

The last week before Christmas vacation Linda brought her sewing and was sewing buttons while she was chatting away. I felt distracted and annoyed by the sewing, plus bored with the chit-chat. I was actually quite angry; I felt used and my time being wasted. I told her how I felt and she became upset and began sewing faster. I asked her why she came and she said that I was able to help her when she needed it. However, Linda took my question as a
rejection and soon became defensive, telling me that maybe she did not need to come anymore since she could talk to others if she needed to. I told her that I was not telling her good-bye, but that I was being honest in telling her that she often bored me. It was hard for her to see how being honest was different from being rejected. I had no plans to discontinue seeing her. I feel that the relationship is finally moving. Linda feels confused.
SUMMARY

Outwardly, my three clients at Granada Hills High School are completely different. However, they have the following in common: they are lonely, they are often depressed, they want guidance, but they are resistant to getting too deeply into their feelings.

I feel I have made some progress with Liz. She is comfortable with me and seems to look forward to our meetings. She looks at me when I talk and responds more often.

As of today, I do not know if I will ever be seeing Carol again. For a short time, counseling served a cathartic release for her. However, she did not want to go beyond that.

Linda puzzles me. I am struggling along with her as she is with me. Linda sees me because she is lonely and wants someone to listen to her. Sometimes this gets boring for me and my struggle is to move the relationship to a deeper level.

The experience has been an invaluable one for me. I hope my clients feel the same.
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