

REPORT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

CLIENT: OTIS RODGERS, 1993 Marwell Blvd., Hudson, Ohio, Age 16, Grade 10

REFERRED BY: COUNSELOR AT CHAMBERLIN HIGH SCHOOL, TWINSBURG, OHIO

DATES SEEN: March 2nd and March 6, 1965 DATE OF REPORT: March 10, 1965

METHOD OF EXAMINATION: CLINICAL INTERVIEW

The following report is based upon my study of Otis Rodgers during two interviews of one and one-half hours each on March 2nd and March 6th. During the March 6th interview, his father, by my request, was present and participated in the interview.

Psychological testing was not done. After the initial interview, I did not feel that psychological testing would contribute significantly to our understanding of the boy at this time. Then, too, the attitude of Otis toward testing was not favorable, for he felt that the pronouncements of the psychologists who had examined him before led to his being out of school.

Prior to seeing Otis, I was given the following information: his name, age, grade, and school. I was also told that he was out of school and that he had been seen by two psychologists. No case history material was provided. No test results, test interpretations, opinions, or even real indications of the client's problem were provided.

Thus, I began with behavior in a clinical setting. The basic problem was to find out what was wrong and why.

In spite of the limited behavioral patterns observed during the interviews and the lack of background information, I was able to formulate certain hypotheses regarding Otis in connection with the present situation.

General Observations

During the first half hour of the initial interview, I had some difficulty establishing a working relationship with Otis. He appeared apprehensive, indicated that he had come to see me because he had been required to come, and gave short answers. As the time passed, however, he became less apprehensive and more verbal. Initially, he rambled about some situations that had occurred. When I began to probe, he seemed somewhat relieved, reduced his rambling, and began to talk about his experiences with greater concern. Little probing was needed, for simple reflection and clarification were sufficient for maintaining his fluency. Stuttering was manifest throughout the interviews but was not related to any particular area(s) of content.

The content of the interviews was rather broad. He talked of his experiences at school - both the pleasant and the unpleasant. He described a fair number of experiences which indicated that he has problems in adjusting to authority figures and to various kinds of restrictions. He talked about areas of concern to most adolescents, including interests in girls, the striving for independence, the developing of skills for future vocational choice, the acquiring of values and ethical systems for behavioral guides, and the need for understanding oneself. We also talked about the civil rights movement, his family and community life, his interests and his aspirations, and, of course, of the incidents which underlie or caused the present situation.

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He had no difficulty in talking about situations which have made him experience fear, anger, depression, hostility, or love. In both interviews, his responses to situations that would ordinarily elicit a mild emotional response were entirely appropriate.

His appearance was characterized by neatness and reflected favorable self-regard. His hair style, shoes, and gait suggested that he enjoys and seeks attention.

In describing Otis, I would say that he is tense and restless, stubborn and worrisome, aggressive yet sociable. He is sensitive and frank. Underlying the facade of self-confidence are feelings of inferiority.

I feel that Otis sees himself as a person who has experienced a number of incidents which could have been avoided. He recognizes that he has difficulty in conforming, in avoiding altercations, in accepting stringent limitations. He sees himself as trying to adjust to the problems he encounters, as one engaging in a period of vigorous reality testing, and as a student who can do average work in school. He recognizes that his interest in girls, his strong interest in civil rights, and his pride in being a negro may be misinterpreted by other persons. He does not see himself as being overtly aggressive. He sees himself as trying to bluff his way through situations, as being able to deny the expression of fear when he is really scared of being hurt, and as being ready to run when he is not successful with his bluffing attempts. He knows that he is verbally aggressive and at times hostile but he wonders why he has been looked upon as being dangerous, violent, a threat to the safety and security of students and faculty.

Specific Questions

In view of the material uncovered during the interviews, it seems worthwhile to focus upon a number of critical questions. I shall state these questions, indicate the kind of data or information needed to answer them, and then try to answer them in terms of what I learned about Otis during my interviews with him. In some instances, I shall provide more questions than hypotheses.

Here are the questions:

1. Is the behavior manifest by Otis of a chronic or situational nature?
2. Is this young man dangerous, a threat to persons in the school?
3. What is there about Otis that elicits a strong negative reaction from others?
4. What does his problem seem to be?
5. What kind of resources does he have for adjusting to the demands which are placed upon him?

① Is the Behavior Manifest by Otis of a Chronic or Situational Nature?

The "behavior" being referred to consists of his reactions to authority figures, his interests in girls, his difficulty in adjusting to the restrictions placed upon him, and his altercations with teachers.

In order to deal effectively with this question, we need to know whether Otis manifested this type of behavior in the Cleveland Public Schools. Is there anything in the records which would indicate that he was predisposed to behave in the manner described above?

In my interviews with Otis, I found nothing that would permit me to conclude that his problems are of a longstanding, chronic nature. I feel that his problems are of a transient, situational nature.

The records from Cleveland should be obtained and examined. If the records provide evidence for chronicity, then I will modify my opinion. In the absence of such information, however, and on the basis of my observations of the client, I feel that the problems manifest are exaggerated aspects of his difficulty in mastering some of the developmental tasks associated with adolescence.

② Is this Young Man Dangerous, a Threat to Persons in the School?

When we speak of "violence", we are concerned with overt, destructive behavior, such behavior being primarily but not necessarily directed toward humans.

The kinds of information needed to answer this question would be obtained from the answers given to the following subordinate questions: Has Otis ever lost control of his aggressive tendencies and attacked a person? Does Otis have a juvenile delinquency record for any kind of violence, no matter how slight? Has he been observed to carry a weapon? If so, has he wielded the weapon or used it as a threat to the security of others? Is there any history of property destruction associated with his past behavior? Is he known to have physically manhandled persons in such a way that their person was violated in a medically determinable way? Has he been subjected to situations of severe restraint or punishment where the natural reaction was to fight back?

Again, we are concerned with behavior from the past which would indicate any experience in which he has lost control or indicate any persistent, sadistic plotting or indicate the destruction of something in the nonhuman environment.

Projective test data may be useful in determining that the client has aggressive tendencies. But projective test data cannot conclusively indicate that the person is violent or destructive when placed in behavioral situations requiring such overt responses. The critical issue is this: Is there any evidence from his past behavioral history that he is predisposed to vent his hostilities in acts of overt aggression or hostility?

Nothing in my interviews with Otis indicated that he had ever lost control of his anger. Nothing was uncovered that would indicate that he is dangerous, violent, or a threat to the security of his peers and instructors.

I can say that he does experience hostility. I can also say that if he is pushed too far, he, like most people, will fight back, first, in thinking, then, in speaking, and finally, in overt expression.

Hostile, yes. Aggressive, yes. Violent, no. This is my position until relevant evidence to the contrary is produced.

③ What is There About Otis that Elicits A Strong Negative Reaction from Others?

The "others" referred to here are basically the individuals who believe that he is incorrigible, violent, and a sick person who needs psychotherapy.

Perhaps, we should ask another question, perhaps, a more basic question: What is there about the psychological makeup of these individuals that make them perceive and react toward Otis as they do?

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Could it be, for example, that this tall, proud negro youth has by his association with a white girl violated behavioral codes and that this behavior when considered in the light of his previous affection toward another girl has brought to the surface or generated fears, anxieties, prejudices, and/or pressures which have become extremely difficult for the guardians of the school to cope or deal with?

Could it be that since Otis has in a number of ways ignored the conception of what is proper negro behavior at Chamberlin that the feeling prevails that he should be put in his place or that he must be sick?

Could it be that Otis elicits the hostility in some staff members which may be converted into overt acts of aggression toward Otis?

Could it be that any of the foregoing, singly or in combination, are operating to account for the behavior of others toward Otis?

One cannot deny that Otis is aggressive. In view of many of the things that have happened, something would be wrong with him if he was not aggressive, even hostile.

Neither can one deny that there are some aggressive and hostile individuals who are concerned about him.

In either case, where there is aggression, there is also frustration. And our task is to find out where the frustration is.

In the case of Otis, is his frustration simply the result of intrapsychic conflict? Are there no barriers in the external environment?

In thinking about aggressions, we must remember that aggressions may be rational or irrational, the former most often being responses to actual situations in the life of a person that are most often justifiable, while the latter results from some inner mental attitudes that compels the individual to act aggressively.

I cannot conclude that all of his aggressions are irrational.

Neither can I answer the question, the major question, posed in this section. I think that I could answer it if I had an opportunity to clinically examine the persons I identified in the first paragraph under this question as the "others".

If a decision regarding this young man's educational future is at stake, this factor must not be glossed over.

What Does His Problem Seem to Be?

He is not psychotic. Intellectually and emotionally, he is in contact with reality.

He is not psychopathic or sociopathic. Although some of his traits may suggest this, I believe that Otis experiences sorrow, has a conscience, and does profit from experience.

I do not consider him to be what we generally call a neurotic. The core experience of the person with neuroses, the so-called free-floating anxiety, does not seem to be present.

I consider his problem to be adolescent situational maladjustment. I believe that he is experiencing a transient situation of severe stress related to the pronounced stresses and strains which he is encountering in his vigorous testing of reality. His interest in girls, his rebelliousness in the form

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of altercations with authority figures, his heightened racial consciousness, and his difficulty in adjusting acceptably to the restraints and punishments placed upon him are traits which are symptomatic of his problem. *

Unless this is recognized and dealt with adequately, these problems can be increased and the situation may be acute.

What Kind of Resources Does He Have for Adjusting to The Demands which Are Placed upon Him?

Intellectually, he is capable of doing at least average work. His past academic performance should bear this out.

His self-regard, appearance, and physical ability are assets which can be used in vocational settings.

His failure to strike back when he had been punished suggests emotional controls.

* His interest in civil rights, English, business, and track indicates areas in which he could attain achievement.

His reluctance to withdraw from the stresses which he has recently experienced suggests that he can cope with the kinds of stresses which bring out cowardice in many men.

The interest of his parents in him is another resource.

The demands which are placed upon him are: he must learn to accept many things which are not right but which exist; he must learn to keep his mouth shut when he is tempted to say something which is quite likely to be misunderstood or to elicit aggression from others; he must learn to "smile when he's feeling blue"; he must learn what behaviors he is supposed to manifest in order to stay out of trouble and then display them; he must learn "to see and yet not see" and "to hear and yet not hear"; he must learn that it may be both wise and safe to accept a subordinate role and to accept excessive restrictions; he must learn the foregoing while he is learning the new rules and actions which are being sanctioned and encouraged by increasing numbers of negroes; he must learn how to utilize his pent-up energies for constructive purposes.

I believe that he has the intellectual and emotional resources to acquire those behaviors and to assume a role acceptable to those persons who are concerned about him.

Implications of Findings

I believe that Otis should be permitted to return to school and to complete his course of study for this grade.

He has problems; and these problems must be dealt with in a firm and fair administrative manner. I do not believe that dismissal from school is the answer. I do not believe that a transfer to another school is the answer. While getting rid of Otis might reduce some of the anxiety and apprehension being experienced by the staff, such action will not contribute to his growth and development. Indeed, I feel that it would serve to undermine some of his resources and complicate his adjustment efforts.

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Otis needs and must have limits. And he must learn to adjust to them. However, rigid disciplinary measures -- either strict or permissive -- whether in the home or at Chamberlin that do not take into account his needs, his resources for adjusting and the kinds of tasks he must learn to adjust to, can lead to more trouble.

With a little effort, I believe that Mr. and Mrs. Rodgers and the school officials can work together to provide Otis with the kinds of experiences which will enable him to gain a greater understanding of his behavioral patterns in the light of social requirements and also in terms of his inner strivings and frustrations. Furthermore, I believe that professional counseling could help him in his growth toward maturity.

Quite frankly, I believe that Otis is seeking to be "understood" and to be "controlled."

This report has been long. It has been about a human being in an unfortunate situation. Because of this, I have labored to make explicit the rationale for my opinions.

As I said before, "In spite of the limited behavioral patterns observed during the interviews and the lack of background information, I was able to formulate certain hypotheses regarding Otis in connection with the present situation." I am willing to modify my position on any or all of the questions if the kinds of information which I called for can be produced.

The situation is unfortunate because Otis has been made to feel that he is not wanted because he is supposedly dangerous, violent, and a threat to the safety and security of others. He has been told by our actions that we think something is wrong "upstairs" and by our demands that he is "sick" and needs some treatment.

I may be wrong in the inferences I have made, but the data that I have and the clinical feeling which I have certainly do not lead me to support the validity of any of these ideas.

THESE IDEAS, EVEN IF THEY WERE NOT THERE BEFORE, AND EVEN IF THE DATA WHICH I AND PERHAPS OTHERS HAVE DO NOT PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR THEM, ARE THERE NOW.

If I am wrong -- if the evidence which I asked for is available -- then I must reverse my position and press hard for him to receive specialized treatment.

But, if I am not wrong -- if the facts which I asked for bring forth negative data -- then this case has very strong ethical implications, especially if the experiences which Otis has gone through and the thoughts which have been placed in his mind are instrumental in the development of unhealthy behavior. As a psychologist, I am very much concerned with the outcomes associated with this unfortunate situation.

Distribution:

Wm. S. Mercer, Superintendent, Twinsburg Public Schools
Mr. Roosevelt Rodgers, father of Otis
Case File

Milton E. Wilson, Jr.
Milton E. Wilson, Jr., Ph.D.
Consulting Psychologist

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUMMARY

To: Mr. William S. Mercer, Exec. Head
Twinsburg School District
Mr. Donald Welever, Principal,
Chamberlin High School

From: Ralph Gillman, County Supt. of Schools
By: Edgar M. Ansell
Date: February 24, 1965

Subject: Results of individual psychological study of:

Name:	OTIS RODGERS	Address:	1993 Marwell, Twinsburg
Birthdate:	9-27-48	Telephone:	OL 3-8746
Parents' Names:	Roosevelt - Helen	School:	Chamberlin High
Date Tested:	2-11-65	Grade:	10
C.A.:	10-4	Counselor:	Mrs. Nell Mengel

Reason for Interest: Deviant behavior.

General Observations: Otis was not in school when the examiner arrived, so Mrs. Mengel, the counselor, made arrangements for him to come to school that day for testing. His absence from school was due to a pending decision concerning his most recent act of insubordination.

This tall Negro boy greeted the examiner in a warm, friendly tone. Being somewhat guarded initially, Otis soon became acclimated to the testing situation.

History: Otis was tested by an examiner from this office in January 1962. Since that date, he has engaged in behavior which resulted in five school suspensions. Terms of suspension have ranged from one to ten days. Defiant behavior included not honoring detention and accosting a white girl in the hall. The act of kissing the girl traumatized her and she was absent from school for a few days. Otis saw nothing wrong with this behavior and felt persecuted, since the girl did not receive similar disciplinary action. After all, Otis felt that she did nothing to discourage his approach.

Tests Administered: Bender Visual Motor Gestalt
Wide Range Achievement Test
House-Tree-Person
Hand Test
Rorschach

Test Results: Wide Range Hand Test
Reading Grade Level 8.3 Acting Out Ratio 0:8

Discussion of Test Results:

Since a Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children was administered in January 1962, and the question of intelligence did not seem to be an issue, the examiner elected to accept the intelligence scores reported, and proceeded to administer projective techniques.

Personality testing indicated that Otis is having difficulty in establishing good interpersonal relationships. He is an expansive individual who is basically unconcerned about the feelings and values of others. He is harboring strong feelings of anxiety with pronounced aggressive tendencies which have a hostile flavor. Otis has the propensity to act out in an anti-social manner unless he is under careful supervision, and perhaps in spite of it or as a reaction to it. Further analysis indicated a lack of good planning and judgment. Therefore, since Otis does lack the ability to plan appropriately and is impulsive in nature accompanied with few and/or weak controls, the potential of his acting out in a destructive manner is highly probable.

February 24, 1965Summary and Recommendations:

Otis is a young man with strong hostile feelings and unfortunately lacks the controls to cope with these aggressive tendencies. The following are recommendations for what appears to be within the best interests of this young man:

1. An immediate referral to a clinical psychologist for a differential diagnosis and possible counseling, which may, of necessity, be of long term.
2. If Otis is readmitted to school, it is this examiner's recommendation that admission be contingent upon compliance with recommendation number 1.


If Otis is readmitted to school without professional help, then the following recommendations should prevail.

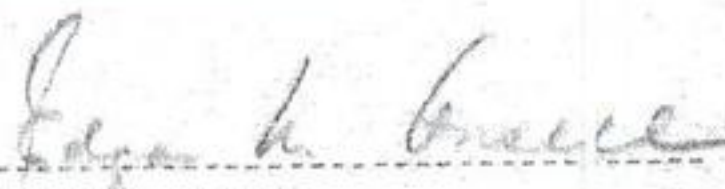
1. The counselor, Mrs. Mengel, staff this case with Otis' teachers on a one-to-one basis, and stress the seriousness involved.
2. Teachers be aware that Otis could act out in the classroom with a minimum of provocation; therefore, try to avoid any situation with Otis that would require a direct frontal, verbal attack or submission on his part. Firmness, of course, but containment appears to be the best policy.

Parent Conference (2-16-65):

A conference was held and attended by Mr. and Mrs. Rodgers, Mrs. Mengel, Mr. Storage, Mr. Parks and this examiner. An interpretation of the data was presented, and it appeared that the Rodgers were reluctant to accept the interpretation.

After the conference, Mr. Storage requested that the teachers be informed of Otis' behavior and an interpretation be made of the term "acting out." Mr. Parks met with the faculty that day and presented his views on this topic.


Ralph Gillman, Superintendent,
Summit County Schools


Edgar M. Ansell,
Intern Psychologist

EMA:lh