

**STUDENTS', COUNSELORS', AND TEACHERS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT CONCERNS:  
ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE OF A PERSISTENT PROBLEM**

**BY**

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STUDENTS', COUNSELORS', AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF STUDENT CONCERNS:  
ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE OF A PERSISTENT PROBLEM

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A Research Paper  
Presented to  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in Psychology

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by  
Jean Pate Maxey

March, 1979



To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Jean Pate Maxey entitled "Students', Counselors', and Teachers' Perceptions of Student Concerns: Additional Evidence of a Persistent Problem." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

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Major Professor

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Gestalt psychologists suggest that a person responds to a "situation-as-perceived." Therefore, the way a student sees a situation or perceives the world determines learning and behavior. Thus, suggestions made by an adult are most effective when they take into account the point of view of the students (Strang, 1954). Some studies (Gage and Suci, 1951, Morris, 1954) have shown that teachers' effectiveness with students is positively related to their ability to judge the students' behavior accurately. It seems that in order to effectively relate to youngsters and understand their perceived problems and concerns, school personnel must be able to view the students' world as do the students themselves.

Other research has concerned itself with the students' perception of their outstanding problems and areas of concern (e.g., Bailey & Robertson, 1964; Carlson & Sullenger, 1958; Lowry & Reilly, 1970; Morris, 1954). These studies have indicated that students tend to view their problems in a somewhat different way than do teachers and counselors. This evidence indicates that a gap in understanding may exist between adolescent students and their educators

or helpers. This gap, in turn, may hinder understanding and effectiveness in helping the student deal with these problems.

Shertzer and Stone (1971) surveyed questionnaire response of samples of adolescents over several years and found recurrent concerns about physical development (e.g., breast size, body size, and skin conditions), interpersonal relationships (e.g., friendships and study habits), family situations, and relationships with the opposite sex (e.g., dating, petting, and other sexual behaviors). Although the same types of problems reappear over the years, the immediacy of these problems seems to change from generation to generation.

Using an original list of problems devised by Symonds (1935), Lowry and Reilly (1970) replicated earlier studies by Percival Symonds (1935) and Dale Harris (1957). Lowry and Reilly (1970) found that high school students ranked money as being their major problem, followed respectively by study habits, mental hygiene, personal and moral qualities, philosophy of life, home and family problems, personal attractiveness, sexual adjustments, health, safety, getting along with others, civic interests, daily schedules, manners and courtesy, and recreation. In comparing their results to the earlier studies of



Symonds (1935) and Harris (1957), Lowry and Reilly found that major changes in the ranking of problems by students had occurred over the years. For example, personal attractiveness had declined in importance from third (Symonds, 1935) to fourth (Harris, 1957) to seventh ranking. Health declined in rank from second (Symonds, 1935) to twelfth (Harris, 1957) and then increased to ninth in the Lowry and Reilly (1970) study. Mental hygiene gained as an area of concern over the years, moving from a rank of eleventh (Symonds, 1935) to fifth (Harris, 1957) and then to third in the Lowry and Reilly (1970) study. Sexual adjustment also became a more important concern to students over the years, moving in rank from fifteenth (Symonds, 1935) to twelfth (Harris, 1957) to eighth (Lowry & Reilly, 1970). Manners and courtesy were seen as less important, declining in rank from seventh (Symonds, 1935) to eighth (Harris, 1957), and then to fourteenth (Lowry & Reilly, 1970). All three studies found money and study habits to rank very high as an area of concern.

In an attempt to obtain information about counseling effectiveness in four secondary schools in Omaha, Carlson and Sullenger (1958) asked junior and senior high school students to express areas in which they desired counseling.

They found that a high percentage (over 50%) of students expressed interest in "how to be more charming, how to get along with others, how to work and study effectively, how to choose a vocation, and how to protect physical and mental health" (p. 179). The data suggested that not enough emphasis was being placed on counseling in the area of boy-girl relationships. Counseling most often centered around the areas of school and career-related problems; that is, study habits, vocational choice, class scheduling. The researchers concluded that "the high schools are not meeting the needs of adolescents as long as boys and girls are not counseled in how to develop a normal and healthy interest in and relationship with the other sex" (p. 182).

Several studies have been directed toward actually determining if a discrepancy does exist between student and teacher-counselor perceptions of student problems. Anonsen (1961), using senior-level high school students as the sample population, investigated this question. Anonsen (1961) found that differences did exist between teachers' and students' perceptions of student problems. Of eight problem areas, students ranked vocational-educational planning as being their second most important problem, whereas teachers ranked this area as eighth in

importance to students. Students ranked boy-girl relationships as seventh in importance; teachers ranked this fourth. Students ranked physical health and appearance as fifth; teachers ranked it third. Other areas were ranked similarly by both teachers and students. No large discrepancies existed in the remaining five problem areas: home and family relations, personality, relationships with teachers, school work, and value concerns and issues.

Bailey and Robertson (1964) replicated Anonsen's (1961) study with a sample of junior high school students. These students indicated school work to be their number one problem area, whereas teachers perceived this problem to be of much less importance (rank of 5) to the students. Again, vocational-educational planning appeared to be an outstanding problem with students (rank of 3); teachers ranked this problem as eighth. Teachers perceived home-family relationships to be a more important concern than students, ranking it second, whereas students ranked home-family concerns as fifth. Teachers also viewed boy-girl relationships to be of more concern to the students than the students themselves. Teachers ranked this problem as third; students ranked boy-girl relationships as eighth. The studies of both Anonsen (1961) and Bailey and Robertson



(1964) indicate some gap between teachers and students concerning the perceived importance of adolescent problems.

A replication of the Bailey and Robertson (1964) study was reported by Newman (1965). This research included both high school and junior high school students, and substituted the term "interest area" for "problem area." Newman felt that the word "problem" evoked undesirable emotions which might not be associated with the word "interest." The results indicated fewer discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions of areas of concern. In the junior high school sample, there were discrepancies in the areas of vocational-educational planning (students ranked this area as seventh in interest, while teachers ranked it third); physical health (students ranked the concern as third, while teachers ranked it sixth); and boy-girl relationships (students ranked the area eighth, whereas teachers ranked it fifth). In the senior high sample, only the areas of home-family and boy-girl relationships were perceived differently by students and teachers. Students ranked boy-girl relationships as eighth in importance, whereas the teachers ranked this area fifth. Interest in home-family relationships was ranked as seventh by students and fourth by teachers. Although the Newman (1965) study revealed important differences in the perceptions



of students and teachers regarding students' problematic areas, the study did find higher correlations between perceptions of students and teachers than did either of the studies by Anonsen (1961), or by Bailey and Robertson (1964).

Another investigation comparing pupils' and teachers' perceptions of student problems was conducted with junior high school students in 1960 by Amos and Washington. These researchers asked teachers to evaluate, using the Mooney Problem Check List, those students considered to be "problem students." The students also rated their problem areas by using the same instrument. Analyses yielded significant differences. By ranking it sixth out of seven categories, teachers underestimated the problem area of "Money, Work, and the Future." Students, on the other hand, rated this area as being their second greatest concern. Teachers also failed to recognize the importance the students placed on health and physical development. Teachers assigned this area a rank of seven, while pupils ranked it fourth. Boy-girl relationships were found to be a somewhat greater student problem than teachers realized. The authors concluded that "in the main, the teachers' observations tended to be confined to those problems which disrupt classroom order and

procedure and threaten the position of the teacher" (p.257). The researchers further concluded that teachers should either: (a) give extra effort to making more adequate judgments of the kinds of problems their students experience, or (b) rely more on testing devices, such as the Mooney Problem Check List, to help them understand their students.

Redfering and Anderson (1975) provided evidence that perhaps counselors also do not perceive students' problems accurately. Their survey indicates that "areas considered as most important by counselors and counselor educators tended more toward psychological well-being such as self-concept and social adjustment. Students' greatest concerns were more basic and utilitarian, identifying areas such as personal appearance, money-job, boy-girl relationships, and 'my future'" (p. 199). Students and counselors differed significantly in their perceptions in eight of fifteen areas of concern. Students considered drugs to be less of a problem than did counselors, and the areas of future, personal appearance, money-job, health, home life and family relationships, war and world problems, physical safety, and religion to be of greater concern than their counselors perceived. The results of the Redfering and Anderson (1975) study indicated that counselors in today's high schools may be limited in effectiveness

because of inaccurate perceptions of student problems.

The authors suggest that "counselors must have an accurate awareness of the client's fears, fads, and the like . . . and be aware of new concerns as well as of traditional problems" (p. 200).

Although the research comparing adult perceptions of students problems with the students' perceptions of their areas of concern is limited, the literature reviewed does indicate that (1) although some changes in intensity and importance have been noted, the problems of junior high and senior high students have remained relatively consistent through the years, and (2) teachers seem to view students' problems as those which stem from the classroom and curriculum, counselors tend to view students' problems as stemming from a psychological or emotional base, and students tend to view their problems as resulting from the more basic utilitarian areas of life. Since one of the objectives of formalized education is to help guide students toward a more emotionally healthy and profitable way of life, a major step toward the achievement of this objective might be to more effectively understand students and their perceived concerns about themselves. Ruth Strang (1957) states, "We can best understand adolescents as individuals if we observe and study them directly

and listen to them, without being biased by preconceptions about the 'typical adolescent'" (p. 3). It is therefore the purpose of the present study to further investigate the perceived concerns of students as seen by teachers, counselors, and by the students themselves. Hopefully, the present study will help shed additional light upon the nature and causes of the lack of correspondence of perceptions that has been reported in the above-mentioned research.



## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

#### Subjects

Student subjects for the present study were 87 male and 102 female students enrolled in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades in three high schools in an urban/suburban area of Tennessee. Each grade was equally represented. The students sampled were solicited from both required courses and study halls.

The 48 teachers who served as subjects were employed in the same three high schools from which the student sample was drawn. Of the 48 responding teachers, 20 were males and 28 were females. Teachers were asked to respond to the questionnaire at the same time their class was completing the student survey. Teachers chosen in this manner totaled approximately 20% of the teacher sample. Other teachers were solicited from teachers' lounges or the surveys were circulated to them with the aid of the guidance counselors.

Because the counselor-student ratio in the schools surveyed is approximately 1:500, only seven guidance counselors served the three schools. All seven counselors (three male and four female) responded to the survey.

### Instrumentation

The questionnaire used in the present study was adapted from a list of problems included in the Redfering and Anderson (1975) study. This survey contains 15 of the most frequently listed problems of high school students (see Appendix A and B). All subjects were asked to indicate the importance of the problem on a Likert scale with 1 indicating the area of highest concern and 7 indicating the area of lowest concern.

### Procedure

The present researcher visited individual classrooms chosen by an assisting guidance counselor and explained the survey to the class. Any questions that students asked were answered after the instructions were given. The classes were allowed adequate time to complete the questionnaires, with most subjects completing the form in approximately 15 minutes.

The teachers and counselors were given the appropriate survey form and asked to complete the questionnaire without further instructions. Any questions concerning the procedure for filling out the survey were answered.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

The Friedman two-way analysis of variance with a .05 level of significance was used to analyze the data. No significant differences were found between the teachers', counselors', and students' rankings of the 15 problem areas ( $\underline{s} = 42$ ,  $H_0$  accepted). See Appendix C for rankings and means of each group. Further investigation of individual problem areas with the Brown-Mood Multi-Sample Median test indicated that 10 of the 15 problems were rated significantly different by the three groups (see Table 1). One problem area, military service, could not be analyzed with the Brown-Mood test because of an extreme median.

Table 1

Results of the Brown-Mood Multi-Sample Median

Analysis of Individual Problem Areas

Problem Areas	$\chi^2$
Personal appearance	6.842*
Religion	14.514*
Self-concept	5.147
War and world problems	14.63*
Health	30.051*
Future	38.419*
Social injustices	2.51
Drugs	39.942*
Boy-girl relationships	17.234*
Money-job	3.211
Home life and family relationships	11.58*
School	17.178*
Social adjustment and responsibility	4.49
Physical safety	12.553*

\*H<sub>0</sub> rejected (critical value = 5.991)



## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

A comparison of overall rankings of the problems suggested that there were no significant discrepancies in the way the students, teachers and counselors rated their perceptions of students' problems. However, a more thorough investigation was needed because the Friedman analysis of variance test only sought to indicate a difference among the three groups, but was not an investigation of the differences among the groups according to each problem area. When the Brown-Mood test was performed, significant differences in the perceptions of student problems by students, teachers, and counselors were found in 10 of the 15 areas of concern. Further study could explain the differences between each of the groups, but the present study did not undertake these analyses. A review of the table of rankings and means (Appendix C) indicates similarities and differences in the means of the groups for each problem area.

The findings of the present study are somewhat similar to the results Redfering and Anderson reported in their 1975 study. The main areas of difference in student ratings between the 1975 study and the present

study were war and world problems, boy-girl relationships, and social adjustment and responsibility. These seemed to be areas of more concern to students in 1975. The 1975 ratings, respectively, are eighth, second, and sixth; the 1978 ratings decreased to fourteenth, sixth, and ninth. The mean of the students' ratings of war and world problems in 1975 is 2.73; in the present study, the mean is 5.17. The mean student rating of boy-girl relationships in 1975 is 2.17; whereas, in the present study, the mean is 3.24. Finally, the 1975 mean for social adjustment and responsibility is 2.60; whereas, the mean in the present study is 3.49. These differences were not analyzed statistically because of insufficient information from the 1975 study. All other areas appeared to be rated essentially the same by the students in the two studies.

In comparing the counselor ratings of the 1975 study and the present study, three discrepant areas were noted. The perceptions of the two samples of counselors differed in the areas of personal appearance, social injustices, and drugs. In 1975, the counselors ranked personal appearance as ninth, with a mean of 3.36; in the present study, it was ranked third, with a mean of 2.57. The area of social injustices was rated fifth in 1975, with a mean of 2.84; in 1978 it decreased to tenth, with a

mean of 3.71. Finally, the area designated as drugs was given a rank of 3 in 1975, with a mean of 2.78; and decreased in rank to ninth in the present study, with a mean of 3.57. These differences, likewise, were not statistically compared, but appeared to be worthy of attention. Ratings and means comparing teachers' responses were not possible because the 1975 study did not include teachers in the sample.

A comparison of the two studies reveals some interesting considerations. The apparent decrease in concern about the areas of war and world problems, boy-girl relationships, and social adjustment and responsibility, as judged by the students, is perhaps indicative of the change of the times. War was a more definite possibility in 1975 than it is at present, probably because of the country's involvement in Viet Nam just prior to 1975. The change in rating of the problem areas, drugs, was interesting. Although students in both studies did not view drugs as a significant problem (ranks of 13 and 14), counselors in 1975 ranked it third as a perceived problem of students; but this rank decreased to ninth in the present study. This change could be indicative of the changing attitudes toward drugs; that is, perhaps adults understand drugs and adolescent attitudes about drugs today better than



they did in 1975. The reason for the change in ratings of both boy-girl relationships and social adjustment cannot be explained at the present time.

One limitation of the present study is the small number of counselors sampled. The researcher felt that there would be a fewer number of confounding variables if only those counselors from the schools in which the students and teachers responded were surveyed. Unfortunately, those three schools only employed a total of seven counselors.

A second problem with the present study is the manner in which the respondents were asked to rate the problems. A better method would have been to list each possible choice of ratings, 1-7, and have the respondents to circle their choice instead of having them list the rating.

There were also a number of questions from students about the proper rating procedure on the questionnaire. These questions were mainly requesting further clarification of the rating scale; for example, "Does 1 mean that it's a small or large problem?" Since there is the possibility of a reverse of the rating scale by some respondents, each survey was reviewed, and five surveys from the student sample which were obviously reversed were not included in the statistical analyses.

The information provided by this research parallels



in many ways that already indicated by prior studies of this kind--that teachers and counselors might not be attuned to the real problems of adolescents. Although the Friedman analysis of variance indicated that there was no difference in the perceptions of the three groups sampled, an investigation of individual problem areas revealed that there were differences in 10 of the 15 problem areas. If, in fact, the perceptions of educators are incorrect concerning the problems of their students, then the educators' abilities to help students is limited. One school in New York sought to attack this problem by surveying the students by means of the Mooney Problem Check List (Morris, 1954). Problems were then evaluated and decisions to change the school program were made based upon the indicated problems. The resulting effects were very positive in that the teachers became more responsive to student needs and more enthusiastic in their teaching practices. This method seems to be a good possibility for discovering the real concerns of students, and the time and effort involved might bring rewarding effects. A suggestion made by Redfering and Anderson (1975) is worthy of consideration: "A reasonable starting point (in understanding adolescents) could be to ask and to listen" (p. 201). Educators need to be able

to communicate with their students, and they can do so only by understanding the students and their real concerns.

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APPENDIX A: TEACHER/COUNSELOR SURVEY

## TEACHER/COUNSELOR SURVEY

I am a graduate student at Austin Peay State University working on my Master's degree in counseling and guidance. In order to complete my thesis study, I am conducting a survey of the problems of today's high school students, and how those problems are perceived by students and educators. Please rank each of the areas of concern listed below on a scale from 1 to 7 (1=highest concern; 7=least concern) indicating your perception of the importance of each problem in students' lives. Thank you for your complete honesty and cooperation with this project.

Highest concern---Moderate concern---Least concern  
Rating scale: 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

Areas of concern:	Rating
Personal appearance-----	_____
Religion-----	_____
Self-concept-----	_____
Military service-----	_____
War, world problems-----	_____
Health-----	_____
My future-----	_____
Social injustices-----	_____
Drugs-----	_____
Boy-girl relationships-----	_____
Money-job-----	_____
Home life and family relationships-----	_____
School-----	_____
Social adjustment and responsibility-----	_____
Physical safety-----	_____

Please check one for each category:

Teacher\_\_\_\_\_Counselor\_\_\_\_\_

Sex: M\_\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_\_

Race: White\_\_\_\_\_Non-white\_\_\_\_\_

Thanks!  
Jean Maxey

## APPENDIX B: STUDENT SURVEY

## STUDENT SURVEY

I am a graduate student at Austin Peay State University working on my Master's degree in guidance and counseling. In order to complete my thesis study, I am conducting a survey of the problems of today's high school students. For each of the areas of concern listed below, please indicate by giving a value from 1 to 7 (1=highest concern; 7= least concern) just how much of a problem you consider this factor to be in your life. Thank you for your complete honesty and cooperation with this project.

Highest concern---Moderate concern---Least concern  
Rating scale: 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

Areas of Concern:

Rating

Personal Appearance-----	_____
Religion-----	_____
Self-concept-----	_____
Military service-----	_____
War, world problems-----	_____
Health-----	_____
My future-----	_____
Social injustices-----	_____
Drugs-----	_____
Boy-girl relationships-----	_____
Money-job-----	_____
Home life and family relationships-----	_____
School-----	_____
Social adjustment and responsibility-----	_____
Physical safety-----	_____

Please check one for each category:

Grade: 10\_\_\_\_ 11\_\_\_\_ 12\_\_\_\_

Sex: M\_\_\_\_ F\_\_\_\_

Race: White\_\_\_\_ Non-white\_\_\_\_

Thanks!

Jean Maxey



APPENDIX C: RANKS AND MEANS OF INDIVIDUAL PROBLEM AREAS  
BY STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND COUNSELORS

## RANKS AND MEANS OF INDIVIDUAL PROBLEM AREAS

BY STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS

Problem Areas	Students		Teachers		Counselors	
	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean
Personal appearance	3	2.92	6	3.13	3	2.57
Religion	11	3.77	13	4.75	12	4.29
Self-concept	8	3.31	4	2.93	1	2.29
Military service	15	5.81	15	5.98	15	6.14
War and world problems	14	5.17	14	5.77	13.5	4.43
Health	4	2.96	12	4.55	11	4.14
Future	1	2.29	8	3.85	4.5	2.71
Social injustices	12	3.87	9	4.17	10	3.71
Drugs	13	5.02	5	3.04	9	3.57
Boy-girl relationships	6	3.24	1	2.0	2	2.43
Money-job	2	2.65	2	2.15	6	2.86
Home life and family relationships	5	2.98	3	2.89	4.5	2.71
School	10	3.71	10	4.3	7	3.0
Social adjustment and responsibility	9	3.49	7	3.7	8	3.14
Physical safety	7	3.26	11	4.38	13.5	4.43

APPENDIX D: CHANGES IN THE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT PROBLEMS  
OVER A THREE-YEAR PERIOD

# CHANGES IN THE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT PROBLEMS OVER A THREE-YEAR PERIOD

Problem Areas	Students				Counselors			
	1975		1978		1975		1978	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Personal appearance	2.24	3	2.92	3	3.36	9	2.57	3
Religion	3.01	11	3.77	11	4.61	13	4.29	12
Self-concept	2.76	10	3.31	8	2.39	2	2.29	1
Military service	4.66	15	5.81	15	4.45	12	6.14	15
War and world problems	2.73	8	5.17	14	4.0	11	4.43	13.5
Health	2.46	5	2.96	4	4.77	14	4.14	11
Future	1.82	1	2.29	1	2.87	6	2.71	4.5
Social injustices	3.03	12	3.87	12	2.84	5	3.71	10
Drugs	4.65	14	5.02	13	2.68	3	3.57	9
Boy-girl relationships	2.17	2	3.24	6	2.03	1	2.43	2
Money-job	2.28	4	2.65	2	3.23	8	2.86	6
Home life and family relationships	2.61	7	2.98	5	2.74	4	2.71	4.5
School	3.45	13	3.71	10	3.71	10	3.0	7
Social adjustment and responsibility	2.6	6	3.49	9	3.03	7	3.14	8
Physical safety	2.75	9	3.26	7	5.32	15	4.43	13.5