

RELATING TO RECOMMENDATIONS ON WAYS OF BEING

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The unique situation at the University of the South Pacific calls for the integration of many people who have varied and dissimilar backgrounds. The University population is composed of two large and disparate groups.

The two major classifications are, firstly, south sea island peoples, and secondly, peoples whose backgrounds are based in the Indian sub-continent. These latter were brought to Fiji in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as indentured labourers, and have remained. Each of these groups comprises approximately half of the total University population. The islands group originates in areas which, in the main, are concerned with subsistence in natural surroundings. The Indian population has brought with it a long tradition of cognitive philosophy, and very intricate and divergent belief systems. The latter group has a written tradition of knowledge, and the former a rich oral tradition.

The task of education is to teach this population how to solve problems in an objective, scientific, logical and scholarly way, using the academic skills, including a large measure of reading and writing. This western oriented approach is different, if not foreign to the backgrounds of many people within the subgroups. While the University is attempting to convey skills which will enable people to live in a complex, modern world, the values of industrialized nations are being questioned deeply, even by some of their own members. I have a quote from Paul Ricoeur (1977), who wrote the introduction to UNESCO's publication, **Time and Philosophies**. He says:

Western man tends to measure all other societies by their degree of variation from his own period. In describing them as archaic, he simply thereby naively passes judgment on his own culture which hankers after the past in protest against certain unbearable features of modern life.

Some social science researchers indicate that they believe that modern life is much more difficult to handle than life in archaic cultures (Aguessy, 1977; Carroll, 1980; Jeanniere, 1977). Some are promoting the doctrine of primitivism, which is the belief that qualities of chronologically earlier cultures are superior to contemporary ones. Of course this doctrine is not new. The so called "simple" life has frequently been glamorized and glorified, a la Rousseau's "noble savage", who seems to hold a place very dear to the hearts of modern western people.

What does the University population think about the proliferation of pronouncements from social science researchers regarding the **merits** of life in "underdeveloped" locations? What do they think the effects of glorification of primitivity will be on education and on life in general?

A group of second year University students taking a course in Educational Psychology were asked to poll in order to collect opinions from the University Community regarding the glorification of primitivity as a way of life, and whether those polled thought this would have a positive or negative effect on education and life in general. The purpose of gathering these opinions was to generate a pool of items to develop a questionnaire. The students collected a large number of opinions from about 500 interviewees. When these were corrected for duplications, fifty statements emerged. In addition to the opinions on positive and negative effects, some people believed that the glorification of primitivity was a patronizing attitude, and some saw it as a reasonable protection.

These fifty items were presented to a representative sample of the University community, a class of 180 students taking a class in Evaluation and Measurement. There were approximately half and half Islanders and people of India descent, and the subgroups were matched for sex and age. This representative group was asked to check whether the glorification of primitivity would have a positive or negative effect, and whether it would be patronizing or a reasonable protection in education and society in general. They were also asked to state for each of the 50 items whether they agreed or disagreed.*

The entire group was in agreement in general in direction. The two major subgroups were in general agreement as to their perceptions of facts that pertained to primitivity and its glorification. They were also in general agreement about the value judgments pertaining to the same issues. Out of the fifty items there were only three in which the two major subgroups differed markedly. Thus we can say that there was no great polarization found between the major subgroups. There was only one item on which the subgroups split over a value judgment, and two items which indicated a difference in perception of facts. We shall return to these later.

Some of the representative items that demonstrate surprising agreement are number 44, which states that it is important to preserve communication and understanding between groups of people rather than preserving them in isolation showed 94 percent agreement, with 91% of

*See Appendix II for these 50 items.

one subgroup and 97% of the other subgroup indicating that they agreed. Number 22, even if people live in underdeveloped areas they want to know what is going on in the rest of the world. There was 92% of agreement on this by the entire group, with each of the subgroups agreeing at the level of 91%. On number 18, if given the choice, most people would choose the primitive way of life, 75% of the total group and 75% of the Island subgroup disagreed with the item, saying **most people would not** so choose, and 79% of the Indian group disagreed. On number 13, underdeveloped people are really aspiring to experience a more complex way of life, 61% of the total group thought this was so, and 61% of each subgroup agreed.

To return to the three items on which the subgroups took opposite points of view. The items of **fact** were item 2, and 49. Item 2 says primitive life has more hardships than well developed societies. The islands group disagreed. 79% of that group thought that was not so. But the Indian group agreed with the item in that 73% of them thought that there were more hardships. On item 49, primitive people tell the researchers what the researchers want to hear. 73% of the island people agreed. On the other hand 82% of the Indian people disagreed. This difference in perspective can be explained through an inside versus outside point of view. Members of the two subgroups have different sources of information, one from the inside and one looking on from the outside.

The item of value judgment is a puzzle. Number 45 says, in practice it is better to keep people with their own kind. They don't need outsiders. 82% of the islanders disagreed. In other words, they felt that it was better to accept "outsiders" and not reject them. 75% of the Indian group, however, agreed with the item. This is interesting when compared with item 44, just previous. That item says that it is important to preserve understanding and communication between groups of people rather than trying to preserve them in isolation. This was held in extremely high agreement — 94% of all of the sample agreed with this, with both subgroups agreeing highly, of course. The reversal on item 45 by one of the subgroups would indicate some idiosyncratic meaning. One might hypothesize that the phrase "don't need outsiders" could have triggered a special affective meaning.

An item of special interest which taps the population's value judgment of the researchers motives is item 36. It says, the researchers want to set up "special preserves," like animal preserves, where they can go and watch the natives in "their natural habitat." 82% of the islanders marked that they agreed with that statement, but only 55% of the Indians impugn such

motives. Again in item 27, even though seeming to give praise for primitivity, the researchers are really looking at primitive people as inferiors, 73% of islanders agreed that this is so, but only 58% of Indians agreed. It seems that Islanders are taking a more jaundiced view of researchers' motives!

As is indicated by the accompanying table of results, the glorification of primitivity has not demonstrated much in the way of demonstrable polarization among the enlightened University population, and does not pose any specific educational problems at the University. In addition, we may say that all the population appears to be addressing the issues in a thoughtful manner, and in general the "commercial" for solving the world's problems by returning to the primitive life are being looked at with a rather enlightened view.

REFERENCES

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APPENDIX I

SUMMARY OF DATA

There were 19 items on which the Islanders agreed in direction among themselves at 75%

Items	Direction
1; 5; 6; 9; 11; 16; 22; 25	Agree
28; 34; 36; 41; 44; 47; 48	Agree
2; 14; 45	Disagree

There were 14 items on which Indians agreed in direction among themselves at 75%:

Items	Direction
1; 9; 10; 16; 22; 28; 30; 41; 44	Agree
14; 18; 31; 37; 49	Disagree

There were 14 items where combined groups agree at 75%:

Items	Direction
1; 5; 6; 9; 16; 22; 25; 28	Agree
41; 44; 46	Agree
14; 18; 31	Disagree

There were 8 items that all held in common for direction at 75%:

Items	Direction
1; 9; 16; 22; 28; 41; 44	Agree
14	Disagree

There were 9 items on which Islanders agreed at 75% but on which Indians were ambiguous:

Item	Direction
5; 6; 11; 34; 36; 46; 47; 48	Agree
12	Disagree

There were 6 items in which Indians agreed at 75% but on which the Islanders were ambiguous:

Item	Direction
10; 26; 30; 42	Agree
31; 37	Disagree

APPENDIX II

A JUDGMENT RELATIVITY EXERCISE

THE QUANTIFICATION OF QUALITATIVE DATA

In 1981 a class in educational psychology conducted an opinion poll of the general population at the University of the South Pacific. This population contained students, faculty, and other staff. Each of the 180 students was to try to poll at least 10 persons.

The students were given a statement which indicated that some social science researchers from so called "developed" societies may tend to "glorify" primitivity as a reaction to the negativities of modern life. The people were asked to judge whether this glorification would have a positive effective or a negative effect, and whether it was a patronizing attitude or a reasonable protection. A number of items were generated when people were asked to give their reasons.

We are now asking you to participate in the quantification of these consolidated responses.

Please circle: I am Female Male

Please circle: I am Indian; Melanesian; Polynesian; Oriental; European.

1. Will this glorification of primitivity have a positive or a negative effect on education and society in general in countries in transition?

Positive..... Negative

2. Do you believe that this glorification of primitivity is
(Please check)

A. Patronizing B. Reasonable Protection
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Following are a number of statements secured in a polling process. We want to quantify these qualitative statements in order to achieve some degree of generalized information.

Please read the following statements and if you agree, circle the A and if you disagree, circle the D.

1. The glorification will influence indigenous people to take pride in their current identities. A D
2. Primitive life has more hardships than well developed societies. A D

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| 3. The researchers are speaking from a position of mockery because they have the chance to choose which life they will live. | A | D |
| 4. Slowing down modernization will discourage taking too hasty steps into what might be too hard to bear. | A | D |
| 5. It is the duty of more advanced societies to reveal both positive and negative effects of both kinds of life. | A | D |
| 6. The glorification will preserve tribal security. | A | D |
| 7. Glorifying primitivity will promote parochialism in which choice of another way of life will be denied. | A | D |
| 8. Asking people to choose the "simple life" is the same as telling them to remain children. | A | D |
| 9. There should be some "pockets" of simple existence left in the world. | A | D |
| 10. Glorification of the primitive will lead to promotion of harmony within the group. | A | D |
| 11. Glorification will keep the primitive group from feeling inferior. | A | D |
| 12. If primitivity is glorified, students could not advance to another kind of life because cross fertilization with other cultures would be denied. | A | D |
| 13. Underdeveloped people are really aspiring to experience a more complex way of life. | A | D |
| 14. Keeping people in underdeveloped conditions is a good thing because it prevents them from having material possessions. | A | D |
| 15. It is best to stay in one's own unique situation even if it is primitive. | A | D |
| 16. People should be encouraged to think they have an interesting way of life even if it lacks benefits of civilization. | A | D |
| 17. Glorification of primitivity helps prevent evils of urbanization such as exploitation by leaders. | A | D |
| 18. If given the choice, most people would choose the primitive way of life. | A | D |
| 19. In the primitive world, individual creativity is minimized because everyone is kept on the same level. | A | D |

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| 20. To try to keep people uncivilized is an act of master minding by those who think they are superior. | A D |
| 21. Dependence on technological devices should be prevented. | A D |
| 22. Even if people live in an undeveloped area, they want to know what is going on in the rest of the world. | A D |
| 23. Underdeveloped people have superior minds, and should be allowed to become whatever they want to be. | A D |
| 24. The researchers are trying to "fixate" people and stop their progress in any direction. | A D |
| 25. Subsistence living is a better way of existence because it is more economically free. | A D |
| 26. Glorification of primitivity promotes discriminating against women. | A D |
| 27. Even though seeming to give praise for a primitive way of life, the researchers are really looking at the primitive people as inferiors. | A D |
| 28. Primitive life has the advantage of giving the young people a sense of being protected and belonging. | A D |
| 29. These researchers try to minimise the benefits they enjoy such as electricity; stereo-sound; fridges; transport; power tools and so on. | A D |
| 30. Glorification of primitivity would prevent "urban drift". | A D |
| 31. Primitive education is better than modern education. | A D |
| 32. These researchers want to prevent analysis and experimentation in order to keep people simple. | A D |
| 33. Glorification of primitivity would prohibit study of advanced sciences and fossilization would set in. | A D |
| 34. Living in primitivity would be good because it would eliminate the need for foreign experts. | A D |
| 35. Glorification of primitivity would set up an education system where boys would have the advantages because girls would be kept at "womens' work". | A D |

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| 36. The researchers want to set up "special preserves" like animal preserves where they can go and watch the natives in their "natural habitat". | A D |
| 37. In primitive societies criminals do not develop. | A D |
| 38. To try to lead people to think that the primitive life is ideal is to get them to cooperate in a thought making experiment. | A D |
| 39. The researchers are living out their fantasy lives. | A D |
| 40. Researchers should live for a long time just as the primitives do before making recommendations. | A D |
| 41. Making primitive people aware of their origins, rituals, and artifacts is an important contribution to their situation. | A D |
| 42. Glorification of primitivity would promote more affectionate relationships between parents and children. | A D |
| 43. It is important to preserve everything from the past so that nothing is lost. | A D |
| 44. It is important to preserve understanding and communication between groups of people rather than trying to make them preserve their isolation. | A D |
| 45. In practice it is better to keep people with their own kind. They don't need outsiders. | A D |
| 46. It is an asset to have primitive societies appreciated by civilized societies. | A D |
| 47. It is good for people to live simply and avoid complex ways of life. | A D |
| 48. If people are kept backward and illiterate they will fall prey to exploitation. | A D |
| 49. Primitive people tell the researchers what the researchers want to hear. | A D |
| 50. Primitive societies ignore young peoples' points of view more than technological societies do. | A D |