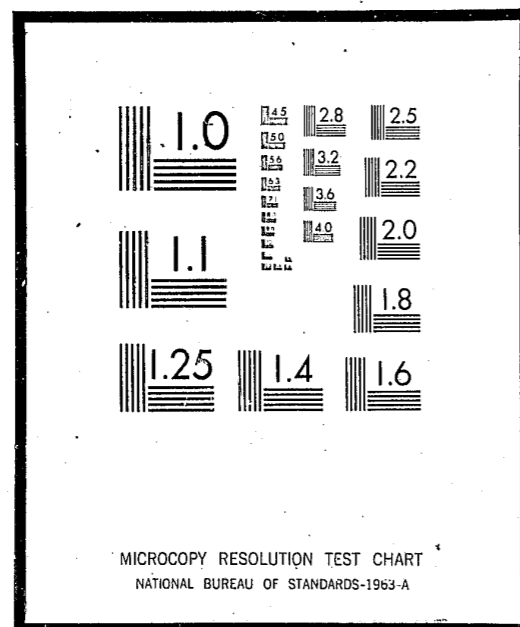


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ABSTRACT: Synanon, an alternative lifestyle which has been successful in the rehabilitation of drug addicts, alcoholics, and other character-disordered people, is described by Col. Edward L. Maillet, U.S. Army, who visited Synanon to explore the potential relevance Synanon might hold for the Army in its attempt to deal effectively with personnel who have drug and alcohol-related problems. The report explores Synanon's demography, socio-structural features, the Synanon Game, Synanon norms, values and themes, and the impact of the Synanon experience on those who live it for short and long periods of time. The report also profiles the significant portion of Synanon's population who came to the program without drug or crime-related problems, but who, instead, have decided to live in this drug-free, tobacco-free, violence-free community and to contribute their income or their professional or trade skills to the growth of the community. The report also explores the potential relevance of the Synanon process to the Army and its problems with drugs and alcohol. The author concluded that it is evident that Synanon successfully assists many persons to abandon long-standing drug-addictive, alcoholic, criminal and other self-defeating and anti-social behaviors. More impressive yet are Synanon's more positive accomplishments with such persons who have histories which demonstrate severe character and behavior disorders. It appears to have developed a system within which many such persons are transformed into remarkably responsible, productive, contributing members of society.

#### PREFACE

This is a report of a research visit to Synanon Foundation, Inc. conducted at the request of the Director of Discipline and Drug Policies, ODOSPER. The purpose of the visit was to explore, in preliminary fashion, the potential relevance Synanon may hold for the Army in its attempt to deal more effectively with personnel who have drug and alcohol-related problems.

Whenever a complex sociocultural phenomenon is observed from a particular point of view, selectivity is necessarily involved, and some distortion inevitably enters the description. The reader should keep this in mind, because other perspectives presumably might lead to somewhat different descriptive outcomes. The observations reported here, together with the associated analysis and discussion, must be regarded as tentative. The exposure to Synanon was very intensive; but it was brief, lasting only ten days. In that period, a total of only five hours was spent away from the Synanon environment, and most of that five hours was spent discussing impressions about Synanon with behavioral scientist friends.

It should be noted that Synanon made itself completely open to observation. It is a measure of Synanon's confidence in what it is doing that it placed no constraints whatsoever upon the investigator's access. The author met and conversed at some length with over one hundred freely-selected members of Synanon who had been residents for as little as one day and as much as fourteen years. These interviews were largely unstructured, and often

went well into the night. Approximately six hours were spent with Mr. Charles Dederich, Synanon's founder and overall Director, in opening and closing interviews. Since The Game occupies such a central position in the Synanon life-style, the investigator spent about thirty hours observing ten separate Games involving directors, newcomers, oldtimer Synanon residents, six and seven year old dependent children, and square life-stylers. Mr. Dederich, the inventor of the Game, participated in one.

Mr. Dederich, individually, and the whole of Synanon are owed a debt of gratitude for their readiness to be of assistance in every way possible, for their apparently very candid interest in the Army Community and its problems, and for many courtesies and kindnesses.

## INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1958 by Mr. Charles Dederich with a small group of ex-drug addicts and alcoholics, Synanon is now a large, very vital association of persons who share a communal life-style within a network of eight settlements located chiefly in California.<sup>1</sup>

It is extremely difficult to find satisfactory analogies to characterize Synanon, even in general terms. It is inevitably reminiscent of Skinner's Walden Two.<sup>2</sup> There are important differences, however; not the least of which is the fact that Synanon is not fictional. Some aspects of the Synanon reality are approximated if one invokes such modern phenomena as the kibbutz and commune, or the older utopian communities which appeared throughout the United States especially during the 19th Century. There are even some similarities to the traditional monastic orders. These analogies break down upon closer examination. They are potentially useful, nevertheless, if only to the extent that they may steer the reader from other more misleading models which are likely to spring to mind because of Synanon's original and continued involvement with drug addicts, alcoholics, and criminals. Synanon will surely be misunderstood, if it is assumed to be similar to the hospital, the rehabilitation agency,

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<sup>1</sup> The word "Synanon" derived from a garbled mispronunciation of the word "Seminar" by a resident in the early days.

<sup>2</sup> Skinner, B.F., Walden Two: The Macmillan Company, New York, 1948.

the educational institution, or the prison. It clearly is none of these, --although it is very extensively engaged in behavioral correction, education and rehabilitation,--and it does provide for such health care needs as may arise with its members. Those familiar with the therapeutic community as a tool for psychiatric intervention will find that comparison appealing. But this also misleads in very significant ways. All such institutions are ideally conceived of as providing some kind of remedial experience through which participants will be enabled to function in some more satisfactory fashion elsewhere,--typically in their home communities. Synanon does not present itself as a temporary way-stop, however much some persons may use it as such. Rather, it presents itself as an alternative community in which persons may pursue an alternative life-style in an environment which is explicitly anti-drug, anti-alcohol, anti-tobacco, and anti-crime.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

The population of Synanon, which changes from day to day, has grown rapidly during its short history. At one very recent count it had about 1800 members. During its fourteen years of existence about ten times that number of persons have resided in Synanon for periods of several days to years. About sixty-eight percent (68%) of its present membership came to Synanon because they were manifestly in trouble,--most with histories of drug addiction and many less in recent years as alcoholics. As might be expected, many in this group tell a story of crime, vagrancy, and prostitution.

They have an impressive cumulative experience with juvenile correctional institutions, jails, prisons and mental hospitals. Many report unsuccessful participation in various drug treatment programs, including several of the now popular methadone regimes. Typically their experience with schools and jobs has been sketchy and marked by failure. Irresponsible behavior was reflected in turbulent family life. Many had been rejected for military service; and, for those accepted, it appears that the experience was almost universally unsuccessful. One former commissioned officer and several former NCO's described quite satisfactory service in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps, only to be later followed by involvement in the addict life-style as civilians. In short, then, sixty-eight percent (68%) of the Synanon population consists largely of persons who would ordinarily be described as having severe character and behavior disorders. They come chiefly from urban environments, usually referred quite informally by individuals who have either heard about Synanon or have had some direct experience with it. Some are referred more formally by agencies, especially courts and probation departments. In this latter instance, they come as a condition of probation or as a court imposed alternative to incarceration.

About seventeen percent (17%) of the members are adult squares, i.e., persons who joined Synanon because they were attracted to it as an alternative life-style, and not manifestly because of drug-addiction, alcoholism or other severe behavior disorders. The squares appear to be predominantly white and middle-class, probably with well above average exposure to schooling. They appear to be generally "successful", by usual popular standards.

This group includes representation from the range of the professions, to include four physicians, one dentist and a number of lawyers. Advanced academic degrees in a variety of disciplines are not especially uncommon. There are businessmen and businesswomen. At least several millionaires are numbered in this square group of residents. Interviewed squares almost universally reported a generalized dissatisfaction with the social and cultural ambience they left behind. Several reported special concern about the negative environmental influences to which their children had been previously subjected, as well as displeasure about the poor quality of schools. Several square parents seemed to have been drawn toward Synanon partly because of their children's pre-delinquent behavior. A number of the married women seem especially attracted by Synanon's child-rearing arrangements and by relief from more traditional housekeeping and mothering roles. Many expressed pleasure at being involved in what they regard as a revolutionary social experiment. These, of course, were the kinds of motivations verbalized to a virtual stranger, and may or may not be the really compelling reasons behind their decisions. Presumably, they are socially approved motivations in the Synanon context. Interestingly, not one square indicated that he had come to Synanon out of a desire to help drug addicts or because he felt a need for help with his own troubled behavior.

Some squares came to know Synanon through friends and relatives who were former-addict members. It seems, however that most of the squares were introduced through membership in Synanon Game-clubs. These are groups of

non-residents who meet regularly at each of the Synanon facilities to play the Game,--a Synanon encounter-type group activity which will be discussed later. As is true with all Synanists, the squares reside within Synanon and share in the community life. Some work on the outside and are referred to as life-stylers.<sup>1</sup> Others are in the employ of Synanon, Inc. in any of a wide variety of occupations. Those who hold extra-mural jobs contribute at least enough money to cover the cost of their upkeep. Many donate more,-- some very much more.

Approximately fifteen percent (15%) of the Synanon population consists of dependent children below the age of eighteen years, who were either born into the Synanon community or entered it with their square or addict parents. These youngsters, then, are involved in Synanon because of parental decisions to join, and not manifestly because of their own behavior disorders. In several instances teen-age dependent children have stayed on as Synanon members, by their own choice, even though their parents have split.<sup>2</sup> The dependent children are involved in Synanon's rather extensive educational process and live communally in peer groups from the age of six months on. Responsibility for rearing the child beyond the first six months resides with, and is met by, the wider Synanon community. For this

<sup>1</sup> The term "life-styler" is used ambiguously in the Synanon patois. In its more authentic meaning it is used to identify a member, square or not, who lives in Synanon but is employed outside. It is, somewhat confusingly, also used to mean any square member employed outside or within Synanon.

<sup>2</sup> Leaving Synanon is known as "splitting." A person who has left Synanon is clumsily known as a splittee. The term carries some opprobrium, something akin to "quitter" in an airborne unit.

purpose there is an extensive system of nurseries, schools and special dormitories for peer-group living. The parents' day-to-day involvement in the life of the child is, then, very much less than would ordinarily be the case in the nuclear family.

The larger Synanon establishments appear somewhat similar to many Army posts in demographic characteristics. The population appears quite heterogenous in terms of racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and regional backgrounds. Seventeen percent (17%) of Synanon membership is Black and seven percent (7%) comes from Latin-American backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> Few Orientals are in evidence. Synanon appears to be disproportionately young, masculine and physically healthy.<sup>2</sup> Sixty-four percent (64%) of the adult community is male, and sixty-nine percent (69%) of the total community is between eighteen and thirty-nine years of age.<sup>3</sup> No very old people are in evidence; and there appear to be few, if any, members who have serious physical disabilities. There are no unemployed. The Synanon demography is similar to that of the Army in some dynamics as well as in structure. Most population growth derives from recruitment in the late adolescent-early adult age range, rather than from births. In both cases, only a

<sup>1</sup> Synanon is attempting to determine why it is relatively unsuccessful in retaining long term Puerto Rican and Chicano membership.

<sup>2</sup> Synanon is presently attempting to correct the male-female imbalance by favoring female admissions.

<sup>3</sup> The adult community is here intended to mean members other than dependent children. Actually some of the adult members, so defined, are as young as some of the older dependent children.

relatively small proportion of the population remains much beyond two or three years to become lifers, although that opportunity is generally available to those who are attracted to the life-style and are able to conform to its requirements.

Population turnover is even more extensive and rapid in Synanon than it is in the Army. Members have no service obligation to fulfill to delay leaving; and Synanon is under no outside pressure to maintain manpower strength levels. A Synanon survey found that, of a group admitted during a recent four month period, fifty percent (50%) had left within one month. One third were still with Synanon at the end of six months. Past experience suggests that a considerably smaller portion will remain much beyond a year or two. Eleven percent (11%) of the present total Synanon population has been in residence for more than five years; forty-four percent (44%) over two years; and sixty-one percent (61%) for over one year. There is a small element which has been with Synanon since its earliest days. There is, therefore, a cumulative core in the population which provides a measure of stability and continuity to the community in spite of rapid turnover.

The Synanon Community, like the Army Community, is not locality-based. That is, members retain their identification with the larger community as they periodically move about within the Synanon system of facilities, in much the same way that Army members retain their sense of community as they move about from post to post. In both cases this is probably more true as members become increasingly committed to a career in the system.

## SOCIO-STRUCTURAL FEATURES

Prescinding from the important issue of the desirability of such a condition, it is virtually impossible for any modern American institution to exist as an enclosed, truly total society. Synanon does, however, approximate a total community in that it has already developed and is consciously continuing to develop structures and processes for most of the major social functions found in relatively complete and relatively self-sufficient communities. For example, it has provision for community government and administration, an economic system for the acquisition and internal distribution of needed goods and services, and a system for control and correction of deviant behavior. There are systems for child-care, education and health services. There is remarkably well-developed provision for housing its members and for transportation.<sup>1</sup> The thrust clearly seems to be in the direction of developing a total community to the extent possible.<sup>2</sup>

The Synanon Sub-Communities: As previously mentioned, The Synanon Foundation operates multiple facilities, most of which are located in California. There are Synanon facilities at Tomales Bay, San Francisco, Oakland, Badger, Santa Monica and San Diego,--all in California. It also has one facility in New York City and another in Detroit. Synanon communities, especially those in California, seem to be very strongly integrated within an interdependent

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Synanon has developed a well-trained rescue squad and fire department (complete with fire engine) at its Tomales Bay facility.

<sup>2</sup> Plans for a Synanon university at San Francisco are in early stages of development.

system with continuous and extensive interchange of information and personnel. Some specialization of function is already present in these communities, and more seems to be developing. Santa Monica, the largest community with over 800 members, now serves in part as the reception station for all new members (apparently other than "squares"). Badger, which is an especially lovely ranch, serves principally as a kind of R & R vacation site for Synanists, and as an education center for high school age dependent youngsters. Extensive business office functions, presently performed at San Francisco, are being moved to Tomales Bay, which also performs a kind of R & D mission. There are plans to locate a university at the San Francisco site. New York, Detroit, and San Diego appear to serve largely as recruitment centers. Each of the communities visited (Tomales Bay, San Francisco, Oakland, Badger and Santa Monica) have noticeably distinguishing characteristics which seem to derive in large part from size and environment. The San Francisco facility is a converted paint factory; Oakland, a converted athletic club-hotel; and Santa Monica, a converted beach resort hotel. The life-style at each of these is influenced by its more idiosyncratic features, as well as the metropolitan character shared by all three. Tomales Bay and Badger are rural in fact, and very much so in life-style. Badger, much the smallest facility with only forty-five members, has a more primary-group type intimacy, less possible in the larger communities. Synanon has its own modern, very comfortable "scenicruiser" bus which links the California centers with daily runs. Synanon has very impressive property holdings. Equally impressive is the care with which it develops and maintains those properties. In Oakland and Santa Monica it owns rather large and attractive apartment

complexes in which only Synanon members live in close association with the main centers in those cities, and apparently without excessive loss of communal involvement.

The Synanon Economy: Synanon functions without benefit of government grants. It is a non-profit, tax-exempt enterprise. It acknowledges this status as an important reason for its fiscal viability, and frequently reminds its membership of certain social responsibilities which derive from that status. Synanon's principal sources of income appear to be:

--Financial donations--donations especially from some square Synanists and from prosperous friends, are probably the most important source of revenue.

--Hustling--Synanon has a highly developed system, termed hustling, through which they systematically solicit, receive, warehouse, and distribute donations of enormous amounts of food-stuffs (to include beef cattle), clothing, equipment, furniture, and supplies. A year ago, while attempting to hustle some paint, they received, an abandoned paint factory as a donation. This large run-down complex of buildings in central San Francisco has already undergone a remarkable transformation into an attractive facility for Synanon purposes. This was accomplished with Synanon labor.

--Synanon business enterprises--At present these consist chiefly of a business which nets over a million dollars a year selling imprinted advertising novelties such as pens, key holders, cigarette lighters and the like to businesses. A team of young ex-drug addicts, travel about

the country as salesmen. Synanon now operates only one of what used to be a string of gasoline service stations in the Santa Monica-Los Angeles area.

As was mentioned previously, there is no unemployment at Synanon. New members are quickly integrated into the Synanon work-force. They typically arrive inexperienced, unskilled, and totally devoid of good work habits. The work ethic receives very heavy and repeated emphasis at Synanon. New members usually start out at low-skill but meaningful and necessary work. If and when they demonstrate (on their own free time) an interest in learning some new skill, the Synanist with that skill has an explicit responsibility to teach it. Members are actively encouraged to learn new skills and to seek larger responsibility. Training in leadership and supervision is stressed. Because of rapid development of facilities there is an ever increasing need for productive skills. Since Synanon is a relatively total community, virtually all skills are required. The dependence of the entire community on the contribution of each member's work sets an expectational climate in which the work ethic can flourish. Some non-square members are life-stylers; that is, they are employed by business firms outside of Synanon. The experience with this program has, thus far, been very successful, although not extensive. It seems that employers, have been extremely pleased with their performance, noting that they are remarkably industrious, dedicated and honest. Interestingly they report that these ex-addicts exert a very positive influence upon their other employees.

All employees of Synanon receive the same salary, \$50. per month. The highest executives receive no more. Not all members are employees of Synanon. A new member (other than square) must typically wait five years

before his application for salaried employment will be honored. In the meanwhile he receives a small allowance known as WAM ("Walking around money") of about \$1.50 per week. Members also receive a certain number of credit points at the Synanon store against which he can purchase clothing, toilet articles and the like.

It should not be assumed from all of this that Synanists live in poverty. On the contrary, the standard of living is very comfortable. The food is excellent and abundant. The quarters, while not opulent, are very attractive and comfortable. Some of the previously more affluent members may experience a decreased standard of living at Synanon; but they are probably quite few. The typical non-square newcomer probably finds at Synanon a level of material comfort he never experienced before. It is quite possible that this serves as an important tie for many, especially during the earlier months of association. It seems that the standard of living improves appreciably as members move away from newcomer status. Nicer quarters, more privacy and freer access to the range of recreational facilities are thereby gained. Newcomers must first demonstrate responsibility. Most of the amenities and desirable recreation facilities seem to be available communally in Synanon. Very few members are likely to own sailboats or horses; but sailing and riding in exquisite circumstances are available activities. Members do own private property. Several more prosperous Synanists, for example, own personal airplanes. But with an expectation for \$50. maximum monthly income, the more typical ex-junkie member, who comes to Synanon broke, must realistically have more modest personal ownership aspirations. A number

seem to save for trail-bikes which they use at the several rural facilities.

There is some interesting experimentation in processing involving various rearrangements of work and leisure time scheduling. The intent is to discover some alternative rearrangements which would permit people to engage their required work more productively and also to pursue their leisure-time activities and interests more fully. Under one such arrangement, for example, some residents enjoy frequent ten-day vacations by working longer hours each day for rather extended "work-weeks." Some residents find that under such an arrangement they can pursue studies and hobbies with greater satisfaction.

Synanon Government and Administration: The Synanon Foundation is governed by a Board of Regents under the very strong leadership of Mr. Charles Dederich, the Director. Board membership is composed of the Regent of each of the Synanon communities and several other personnel who hold key positions in the overall structure. These are appointed positions, as are all the management positions within each facility. Although Mr. Dederich, at less than sixty years of age, continues to be a very vigorous leader of Synanon, question about future leadership inevitably arises. There appears to be no formal provision for transfer of his leadership role yet established. While there is ample provision for staying in close touch with the preferences and discontents of the membership, the government appears to be highly authoritarian in character. There appears to be no provision for democratic elections to any positions of power in the system.

Education: An elaborate system of education exists for all Synanon members. Much of the education for the adults is rather free in form. Many members

are learning the crafts of the electrician, the carpenter, the plumber and the like. Some of these same members are also studying liberal and fine arts as well as professional disciplines. For example, one youth learning to be an electrician is also studying poetry under the tutelage of a Synanist who is a former professor of literature. Several other adult members are learning to play such instruments as the flute, violin and piano, as they also learn more urgently required practical crafts. Members sometimes attend courses in the outside community to learn a skill not yet available in Synanon. The dependent children attend classes in a system of highly experimental Synanon schools. In addition to many of the more traditional subjects, these students learn a range of rural-oriented skills such as animal husbandry and how to care for themselves in wilderness circumstances.

Health Care: Some of Synanon's needed health services are provided by resident health professionals and subprofessional medics. Most professional health services are voluntarily donated by non-members who are friends of Synanon. Each facility has an attractive, comfortable clinic which appears to be adequate for ordinary care requirements. Inpatient care is obtained at local hospitals. Withdrawal from drugs is done cold-turkey with no fuss in a non-medical atmosphere. Extreme caution is exercised to avoid unnecessary dependence upon medication in Synanon members. Several young square physicians have joined Synanon. The plan is for them to function as community health officers at each of the facilities in broad preventively-oriented roles not unlike that of an Army unit or post surgeon.

## THE SYNANON GAME

The Synanon Game is a group activity in which all members usually engage at least twice a week. Players meet at a specified time and place,--sometimes a place which is reserved exclusively for that purpose. The Game is played in relatively small groups,--twelve persons more or less. Players sit in comfortable chairs arrange in a circle. An atmosphere of informality is encouraged. A "grazing table" is set with coffee, tea, soft drinks and snacks.

In the Game all players are theoretically peers, in the sense that there is no appointed leader. A person who holds a leadership position in the Synanon community is not, for that reason, necessarily expected to emerge as an informal leader in the Game. In reality, however, that seems to happen quite often, perhaps because persons skilled at playing the game also emerge into positions of leadership at Synanon.

The Game group membership may be deliberately structured for one or several sessions; or it may be a group which plays the Game together regularly. Regular Game groups usually consist of persons who have reason to be in on-going interaction on the floor, as life outside the Game is termed. It may be, for example, a work group, a peer-group of newcomers, a management group, or a group which simply happens to live in close proximity. Quite commonly, a person who does not regularly play with that particular group is invited to participate in a session for some special reason.

Only two formal rules constrain Game behavior. Players must neither threaten

physical violence nor engage in it. Beyond that anything goes. Players may say whatever they desire, however they choose to express it. That is not to say, however, that the group must approve of all game behavior as long as it is non-violent. Quite the contrary. But the canons of decorum which govern Synanon behavior in the non-Game situation are neither required nor necessarily expected during the Game.

The game usually begins with an indictment. One member turns to another and confronts him with some aspect of his behavior which he finds objectionable. The person upon whom the indictment is targeted is expected to defend himself. Skill in Game-playing is measured largely in terms of the quality and vigor of indictments and defenses. Ridicule and exaggeration, however outrageous, are permitted to establish a point. The skillful indictment is documented in detail, and may take some time to present. The other players ask questions to clarify the issues, and contribute examples to confirm the accuracy of the indictment. Thus, once an indictment is placed upon a player, he is likely to become the target of the entire group's sarcastic appraisal or angry denunciation. Or the person making the indictment may himself become such a target, if the group finds fault with his accusations. Some players are especially adept at mimicry and facetious characterization, and such Game behavior is commonly reenforced by general approval and laughter. Sometimes the criticism is more restrained and quiet. But that seems to be less often the case.

Indictments may target on misdemeanors ranging in significance from recurrent but relatively minor dyspeptic behavior, to perceived incompetence in doing one's work, or some serious violation of ethical standards. Neurotic or

crazy behavior is subjected to special ridicule. The group is especially on the alert to uncover an implicit contract any member may have made to exempt a good friend, a boss, a spouse or anyone else from indictment. When detected, such contracts are vigorously attacked by the rest of the group. There are supposed to be no secrets at Synanon; and no person or behavior is exempt from scrutiny. Effectively pulling the covers from somebody for some hitherto unnoticed misbehavior is one of the higher skills in playing the Game. A subordinate may attack his supervisor for perceived inequities, abuse of authority, laziness, discourtesy, double-standards or incompetence. He is expected to back up his indictment with behavioral evidence. A husband may attack his wife for what he regards as unacceptable bedroom behavior about which the group is presumably otherwise unaware. Privacy, even in such matters, is not valued. A player in a management position may be attacked for planning or carrying out a project ineptly. In the Game played by six and seven year olds, one youngster was attacked vigorously by his peers for persistently taunting another smaller and younger member. A teacher may be attacked for poor classroom preparation or unfair treatment of a student. The cook may be attacked for preparing poor meals or wasting food. The manager of the clothing store for giving favors to a preferred customer. A member may be attacked for a pattern of withdrawal from community activities or lack of commitment to established goals. A player may be attacked for conducting a courtship irresponsibly. An older member for being a poor role-model to newcomers. A plumber may be attacked for bungling a job and causing a flood. A carpenter for doing a shoddy job.

A square life-styler may be attacked for demonstrating lack of commitment to Synanon by making much smaller donations from his earnings than he might. Slovenliness in dress and manner may be subjected to criticism. This process usually continues for hours, sometimes well into the night. There are some tender expressions of compassion and concern. But these are only intermittent. Even if reduced to tears, the indicted person is expected to explain and defend his behavior. If he cannot do so convincingly, there are demands to know what he plans to do to correct it. He may perhaps answer constructively. Not uncommonly, he replies with some four-letter expletive. The group may then move on to another in apparent despair. Anger and frustration are the prevalent moods. The language of the street,--rarely heard at Synanon outside the Game,--is used abundantly and sometimes creatively. There is considerable laughter, but it is almost always at somebody's expense. The Games of more experienced Synanists are noticeably different from those of newcomers. Members with more years of experience tend to employ more subtle use of rhetoric, humor and reason; but even they often resort to the shouting, cursing, and naked rage which characterize the Games of newcomers.

With astonishing consistency newcomers and older Synanists alike identify the Game as the sine qua non of the system. It is generally regarded as Synanon's most original innovation,<sup>1</sup> and the single ingredient most responsible

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Dederich contends that the general movement toward development of attack therapy groups, encounter groups, sensitivity groups and the like had its origin in the Synanon Game.

for keeping the system intact. When difficult potential problems were discussed with Synanon executives, they expressed confidence that, should they arise, solutions would be found, in part, by playing the Game. Personal success was attributed to the Game by every ex-addict who was asked what in the Synanon Experience was helping most to keep him clean. One youth, not asked that question, volunteered that his already accomplished and his anticipated success were attributable to playing the Game. He had been at Synanon less than ten days. The assurance that nobody can get hurt playing the game is given frequently and unreservedly.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the existence of some personal or system problem was commonly attributed to failure to bring an issue to the Game. This enormous faith in the power of the Game appears in part to be a matter of cultural definition, and item of Synanon faith. From the time of the newcomer's arrival he seems to be systematically taught to expect it to work wonders, if he plays it well. This attitude is repetitively reinforced throughout his stay.

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<sup>1</sup> It may be that the vigor of attack and other aspects of the Game may be threatening to some participants and influence them to leave Synanon. There is an attempt to provide support when there are indications that such might be happening. It might also be wondered if the experience might be otherwise traumatizing to psychologically more fragile participants. There seems to be common agreement among Synanists that this is not the case. It should be recalled that the game is very much focused upon behavior in the here and now. It is explicitly defined as inappropriate to delve into the past or to interpret behavior in terms of any of the systems of depth-psychology. The long-term impact of the Game,--good or bad,--on those who leave Synanon is simply not known.

Given this pervasive and apparently quite genuine faith in its power, the frequency and vigor with which it is played, and the fact that no persons or topics are exempt, the Game unsurprisingly occupies a very central position in Synanon life. In light of this, it is interesting that, when the nature and purpose of the Game were explored with Mr. Dederich and other Synanon executives, they tended to characterize it in curiously enigmatic terms. Asked why the Game is played at Synanon, Mr. Dederich replied in something like the following manner: "We play the Game chiefly so we can get better at it. We play it for the same reason people anywhere play games. We enjoy it. We play to have fun at it, and for the exercise we get from it. We play for the sheer enjoyment that comes from developing certain required skills. Why do you play tennis?" On another occasion, when asked to identify the attributes of an effective Game player, he replied in terms that were again relevant to a sport or a game like chess. Synanists constantly speak in terms of having fun playing the Game.

This persistent adherence to the metaphor of the GAME is an interesting phenomenon in itself. For sure, deep symbolic and quasi-sacred meanings are attached to game activities in some cultures. But modern, technologically advanced societies,--and Synanon is anything but a technologically retarded society,--do not usually and explicitly ascribe quite such central importance to games. Nobody seriously thinks that the Spanish society, for example, would really collapse without its bull-fight. But there is general agreement within Synanon that it would collapse without its game. The Game is literally defined as a matter of life or death. Because of the very limited life

expectancy of the heroin addict on the street, success in Synanon is often defined as a matter of life or death. And success in Synanon is perceived to be, in large measure, a consequence of playing the Game. The seriousness of the Game is demonstrated in other ways. Certain rituals are associated with the Game when little children are introduced to it. As they sit in a circle, they prepare for playing the Game by listening quietly to rather solemn music. Incense and candles are burned. The Synanon prayer is read aloud. The manifest purpose of this approach is to teach the little ones to regard the Game as a uniquely different activity, necessarily distinct from non-Game life in Synanon. However, this cultic approach presumably communicates that the Game is more than a different kind of activity,--it is also a profoundly important one, even a quasi-sacred activity.<sup>1</sup>

In light of this, other observers must also have been struck by the insistent use of the game metaphor as a curious kind of put-on. And, in a sense, it may be. But if it is, it should be understood that it is not a put-on reserved for visitors. We might reasonably assume that it is very functional to regard the Game as, at once, an activity engaged in basically for fun and as a quasi-sacred activity of crucial and even life-or-death importance. It may be useful to define the Game as a fun activity, which happens to have some otherwise beneficial effects upon the system and upon its individual members. This enigmatic aspect of the Synanon Game

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<sup>1</sup> In reality it is difficult to speculate about the meaning of such rituals to young Synanon children. It seems that few attend church services, and they may not have had much exposure to sacred ritual to which they might analogize Synanon rituals. These rituals are not presented in explicitly "religious" terms.

deserves more systematic consideration than was possible during a brief visit.

Certain assumptions about how the Game affects the community and especially its individual ex-addict members seem plausible:

--The Game appears to be an extremely powerful instrument of behavioral modification and social control. It is difficult to imagine how any member could for long persist in a behavior defined as importantly unacceptable by his group. To achieve respite from enormously forceful criticism and ridicule, he would have to either change his behavior, change the group's pejorative definition of that behavior, or leave Synanon. The member is virtually stripped of all outside social contacts which might exercise a contrary influence. For all the talk about having fun playing the game, it might reasonably be speculated that it is approached with dread by the member who knows he has transgressed in some serious way.

--The Game appears to be a potent device to keep the members of the system, and the system itself,--honest. There is an explicit attempt to make all life at Synanon public. The unacceptability of maintaining protective contracts, together with reenforcing approval given to pulling the covers one from another keep things very much in the open. The street ethic which values covering for oneself and for others is constantly undermined. Squealing is not only approved, it is required.

--Since everything tends to be open to observation and criticism, the typically cynical and distrustful street attitudes toward authority are less

tenable at Synanon. Since persons in authority are themselves subject to constant scrutiny and criticism, arbitrary exercise of power is discouraged, and paranoid suspicions about authority are probably less readily maintained.

--The enormous and frequent discharge of anger in the Game probably serves to decrease the likelihood of angry outbursts on the floor. The Game is presumably an important support to the maintenance of non-violence at Synanon.

--Members are probably given the feeling that, through the Game, they can influence the course of the system and eliminate many irritants in their immediate situation. There is less reason for the elsewhere prevalent feelings of passive impotence, resignation to fate, or need for rebelliousness.

--The faith in the power of the game to effect good for the entire system and its individual members probably operates in part as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

--The rigid distinction between the Game and the non-Game situations in Synanon life, together with employment of game-playing metaphors, probably permit an openness in play which might not otherwise be possible.

--The playing of the Game within a community in which the participants typically spend their entire daily lives probably assures that significant real-life issues are examined. The players are provided frequent mirror-images of themselves as others see them. They cannot bring in interesting but possibly irrelevant material, as often happens in psychotherapy in its several forms.

--Players are probably under strong pressure to be able to approach the Game from a position of moral ascendancy. Nothing is as likely to draw fire in the game than the situation of "the pot calling the kettle black."

--The experience of a group not permitting its members to get into serious trouble may be enormously reassuring to persons who, with reason, are uncertain about their own controls. It represents a strong manifestation of genuine concern about the individual and what he is doing, not always familiar in the ex-addict's past experience.

#### SYNANON NORMS, VALUES AND THEMES

There is little ambiguity about behavioral expectations at Synanon and this, in itself, is an important aspect of the environment. Certain norms, values and themes are heard about over and over again. Selected out for consideration here, are several which appear to be especially important in Synanon's approach to the ex-addict newcomer:

"Good behavior is hip at Synanon." Newcomers are quickly, persistently and forcefully taught that the hipster style, the tough-guy style, the hippie style, and any of the variety of styles commonly associated with drug-addict and delinquent behavior are not acceptable at Synanon. Such behavioral styles, even in their more superficial aspects, are met with derision and ridicule. In the words of one senior ex-addict member, the newcomer is taught that "good behavior is hip at Synanon." The newcomer is made to feel the fool if he persists in the behavioral styles he found appropriate on the street. He is expected to actively renounce anything suggestive of his drug-addict, alcoholic, or delinquent past. There is, consequently, a

remarkable absence of long-hair styles on men, love-beads, talk about big drug-habits, tough-guy mannerisms, hipster slang or general finger-snapping behavior one might expect to find with a group of newcomers.<sup>1</sup>

Demonstration and Role Modeling: At Synanon it is not a case of dusting-off and bringing in an occasional reformed ex-addict to give testimonial. Newcomers are surrounded by role-models who have abandoned the drug-addict and criminal life-styles, and who are publically and unambiguously committed to a socially responsible, ethical and competent way of living. These role models are readily available; they are twenty-four hour a day members of community. All members, including newcomers, are told that they must conduct themselves in a way such that they can be used by others as role-models. Emphasis is constantly placed upon demonstration rather than mere verbalization in teaching.

"Good boys get good things": This homely theme is stressed by Mr. Dederich. Good behavior is positively reenforced with clearly visible, desirable rewards. The newcomer can quickly observe that ex-addicts, ex-alcoholics, ex-criminals, ex-prostitutes prosper at Synanon. They run the place. They prosper precisely because they are committed to good behavior and to becoming

<sup>1</sup> On the first day of his visit, this observer expressed surprise about this, and remarked that one would find more long haircuts, love-beads and hipster mannerisms on an Army post. An ex-addict Synanon executive, who had himself been expelled from the Army years before, replied wryly:

"Quite simply, we at Synanon don't stand for that shit."

competent, constructive members of the community. Good boys get good things in their own direct experience as well. For most newcomers, life at Synanon is a lot more comfortable than it had been on the street. All needs are met; and there are many of the amenities. The surroundings are attractive, and approval abounds. There are many visibly attainable opportunities to learn, to do and to become. The opportunity structure is an available one; but it requires good behavior.

The Carrot and the Stick: Bad behavior is not likely to go either unnoticed or unpunished. Punishment is chiefly verbal in nature, but it is severe. The manner in which it is meted-out in the Game has already been discussed. It is also administered through the haircut, a device in which the offender is called in to receive a soul-shaking scolding by several more senior members. This misbehavior is scrutinized, belabored and ridiculed. He is clearly told precisely how he must change. The haircut is not always a figure of speech. An offending male member is sometimes given the option of having his head shaved in lieu of having to leave Synanon. The choice to do so is taken as a public acknowledgement of misbehavior and as a public commitment to amend his ways. Behavioral principles generally hold that such punitive approaches tend to influence people to seek ways to avoid punishment rather than to change their behavior for the better. Avoidance is, however, very difficult within Synanon,--if possible at all. Most newcomers, in fact do leave Synanon before very long, whatever the reason.

Voluntary association: Synanon encourages its members to stay; but it does

not bribe them to do so with lowered behavioral expectations. Synanon reminds its members that the door is always open, and they mean it. Members are free to leave at any time. They are not, however, free to come and go. In this regard, Synanon enjoys an enormous advantage over many public institutions engaged in efforts to modify behavior. Even those members who are at Synanon as a condition of parole or as an explicit alternative to a jail sentence are free to leave. And Synanon is free to tell them to do so. Prisons, military stockades and public mental hospitals enjoy such freedom to a much lesser degree, when they enjoy it at all. Synanon uses this advantage. Its assumption is that the really successful member will remain at Synanon, although it is recognized that most will leave sooner or later. This is an interesting reversal of the situation which obtains at most programs which deal with deviants. Unlike Synanon, they hold out return to something else as a goal. Implicitly that something else must therefore be defined as something better. In its approach, Synanon says: "If you behave well you may stay at Synanon and enjoy its rich, full and enjoyable life. If you revert to your old behavior patterns, you will have to leave."

Identification with the system: The newcomer is very quickly given a sense of identification with Synanon. This observer was well impressed by this when he was given a tour of a facility by several young newcomers who had been with Synanon less than two months. They did not refer to things as "Synanon's" property. They repeatedly spoke in terms of "we have," not "they have." There seemed to be a very genuine sense of pride of ownership

as they pointed out beautiful property, buildings, equipment and the like. In such an attitudinal climate the ex-addict is less likely to think of himself for very long as a transient in a system which is trying to do things to him. The we-they mentality, with all of its potential for resistance and conflict, is much less tenable. The separation between staff and inmate, which characterizes institutions of all sorts, is not much in evidence.

Participation: Because Synanon is a vital, growing community, there is a constant need for productive work from all members. Buildings and roads are under construction. Maintenance is required. Vehicles need to be driven and repaired. Children must be cared for. Grounds must be kept. Businesses must be operated. Food must be prepared and served. Much must be learned. There is no occupational-therapy make-work. The newcomer is quickly given a sense of the worth that comes from really being needed in a community,--a sense he may never have really had before. He is given a contributing role and not the passive role of patient or inmate. His work may be menial at first: but it is never meaningless. And he can see that he has opportunities to learn new skills and be employed in them. One young ex-addict proudly told of how he is now serving as an apprentice to a lawyer and will become a lawyer himself at Synanon. Apparently, Synanon really means to give him that opportunity. In such ways the newcomer is encouraged toward involvement in the community. It is for many a new experience not to be associated with a marginal group looking-in at a community, seeking excuses for why they are not really productively involved.

Self-reliance and group responsibility: There is an interesting and somewhat

paradoxical emphasis at Synanon upon both self-reliance and shared responsibility for what happens to each member. Members are constantly encouraged to build the attitudes and competence which make self-reliance possible. On the other hand, there is a simultaneous emphasis upon each member's real responsibility for the other. It is probably very difficult to remain a loner at Synanon; the process does not permit that for long.

Self-Control: Self-control is highly valued at Synanon. The free-will orientation to responsibility is implicit in all of its approaches. In a Game, one member denied any recall for a misbehavior observed by several others. He was forcefully told something like: "See here, you are losing control. Crazy people don't know what they are doing and they don't have control over what they do; and we don't allow crazy people at Synanon. So cut it out." Such terms as "sick" or "crazy" are sometimes used to characterize behavior, but it is in the metaphor of the street. The medical model is not in vogue. Nor are unfavorable social circumstances accepted as an excuse for deviant behavior. Members are expected to behave well, apart from how they might feel at the time. One Game-player was asked: "Are you ever going to learn that at Synanon you smile at the next guy even when you don't feel like smiling?" In another Game, an ex-addict newcomer was indicted for doing a lot of day-dreaming when he should have been working. He was told: "We all know that you were a space-cadet out on the street. We don't space-out at Synanon. Get in control of yourself and shape-up."

Drug use is stupid: At Synanon the ex-addict is constantly confronted with

how stupid he was. Drug-abusers are almost always distainfully referred to as "dope fiends." Drug and alcohol abuse are unambiguously defined as stupid, corrupt behavior. Such behavior is laughed at and ridiculed. The anti-addiction posture of Synanon was extended several years ago to include tobacco. Synanon had been spending almost \$180,000 per year on cigarettes for its members. The decision was made to proscribe tobacco. It stuck. Several hundred members left Synanon because of that decision, but well over a thousand formerly heavy-smokers remained.<sup>1</sup> Synanists tend to have a moralistic righteousness about such matters. Even visitors may not smoke or drink at Synanon.

The Work Ethic: Members are constantly reminded that they are expected to put in a full day's work, each day. Hard work and competence in one's work is demanded. Laziness, shamming, not pulling one's weight, and shoddy performance are not likely to go unnoticed for long. Members given to such behavior know that they will be confronted. Work of all varieties, if it is well-done, is valued. One senses considerable pride taken in work; and there is a remarkable seriousness about the work that is done. Buildings and vehicles are extremely clean and well maintained. It would be difficult to find a more safety-conscious community. Food is always well-prepared and attractively served. Dining halls and kitchens are spotless.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly many ex-heroin addicts reported that they experienced more difficulty giving up tobacco. Many had been smoking two or three packs of cigarettes a day. Synanon's extraordinary success in this regard is a very powerful demonstration of its ability to control community behavior.

Synanon as a social looking-glass: From the time of his arrival, the Synanist is constantly confronted with a looking-glass image of himself, as provided by those about him. Distorted perceptions of self, especially with respect to interactive behavior, are constantly subject to correction especially through the mechanism of the Game. Members are persistently forced to see themselves as others see them. Posturing and self-deception are thereby strongly discouraged.

Containment: Synanists are encouraged to invest their energies and resources in Synanon. The assumption seems to be that, if all members do so, Synanon will develop more fully and more quickly into a complete community. Members are, for example, discouraged from seeking recreation outside of Synanon. Relationships with outsiders probably thereby become quite diluted. Outside interests are not generally encouraged. Members who contain their energies, activities, and associations within Synanon are presumably more likely to reinforce and support each other's commitment.

Synanon as a religion: At one time, some Synanon leaders gave serious consideration to seeking formal, legal status as a religious body, chiefly so it might thereby perform its own marriage ceremonies. While that plan was not pursued, the idea is not so far-fetched; and members are not discouraged from thinking about Synanon in such terms. There are quasi-religious elements of creed, code, and cult very much in evidence in the Synanon life-style. Further, there is very much a sense of seeking to work out ones salvation through living in the Synanon life, in something akin to the

monastic commitment. There is a strong sense of prophetic mission about Synanon,--feeling that it may as a community be showing the way to a troubled world.

The Synanon creed is eclectic and quite non-theological. References to God in the Synanon prayer and philosophy are vague and might be comfortably accepted as purely metaphorical even by an atheist. Some members do continue to identify themselves as adherents to one of the traditional confessions, but it seems that few are actively involved with any church.

The Synanon Code is largely humanist in orientation and consistent with a natural morality. But it is strict. As mentioned before, drugs, alcohol and tobacco are proscribed. Sexual morality is demanded of all members; and there is no evidence of the looseness in the standards of sexual conduct. Honesty, kindness, concern for one's neighbor and courtesy in human relationships are emphasized. There is a great attention paid to preserving the natural environment; and sound ecological practices are taught and followed. The non-violent posture is reinforced by verbal behavior. Outside of the Game one seldom hears provocatively hostile talk. Synanon takes no formal position in the matter of military service. As a matter of fact, however, there is a tendency for its young male members to seek conscientious-objector status.

Members begin their day in quasi-liturgical group-meetings which include a reading of the Synanon philosophy and the Synanon prayer. In recent years a weekend group experience known as the Synanon-Trip has been developed for

selected members. It seems to serve a number of purposes not totally unlike the religious retreat, the religious revival, or the Catholic cursillo. It is intended to provide the member with a fuller, and deeper understanding of himself and his relationship with others. Techniques are employed to help the Synanist temporarily surrender his usual defenses and bare his true self in an atmosphere of complete trust and support. It is reported that members experience the Trip at varying levels of intensity. Several members reported to this observer a response of quasi-mystical release, not altogether unlike the conversion or other religious experiences described by some religious persons. As it was described, it does not seem that the Trip is manifestly religious in content or approach, however. There are other quasi-cultic aspects to Synanon life. Even the hoop-la,--a Synanon dance,--has something of the character of a joyful quasi-religious celebration, in that it is deliberately invested with symbolism. The hoop-la is a simple dance-step performed by very large groups of dancers in a relatively small area. Each dancer occupies a small space. If he performs the steps correctly, he can do so with surprisingly individuated style without interfering with those about him. It is done with considerable and obvious enjoyment, and with a distinct sense of celebration.

It is easy to see how legend developed around the saints who founded the great religious orders. Although always addressed and referred to informally as Chuck, Mr. Dederich, the Synanon founder, is already surrounded by legend. Tape recordings of his talks are listened to, studied, analyzed and discussed at all Synanon centers. Members who have been closest to him since the early days of Synanon enjoy an especially high status in the minds of Synanists.

In short, there is much about Synanon which is quasi-religious in character. It is not surprising, therefore, if it might serve as a religious-substitute especially by those members who have been only tenuously associated with formal religion in the past.

#### IMPACT OF THE SYNANON EXPERIENCE

Drug addiction treatment programs--like most other programs intended to alter deviant behavior of any kind,--ordinarily present themselves as temporary way-stops at which the participant engages himself in some kind of remedial experience on an either residential or non-residential basis. The express purpose of such programs is to return participants to the outside community better able to cope with their problems and less inclined to deviant conduct. This model roughly describes most programs designed to correct deviant behavior, quite apart from whether their orientations are social, medical, psychiatric, educational or frankly punitive. Their manifest goal is to prepare participants to function better elsewhere and under other circumstances. For such programs, therefore, the most relevant evaluative questions refer to the performance of participants after they have left the program and have returned to their normal environments. Of course, it may be that such programs usually have notoriously poor results because they do return deviants to environments which reinforce deviant behavior more than for any other reason.

The above model does not describe the Synanon approach. Synanon offers deviants and squares alike a new community in which they can pursue an

alternative life-style, not as a temporary rehabilitative experience but rather as a permanent arrangement. Given this rationale, a different set of evaluative questions are most relevant. Presumably, it is for this reason that Synanon makes no attempt to follow-up on the many persons who leave. Whatever Synanon's reasons, however, the net result is a most unfortunate loss of potentially very valuable data. Synanon touches the lives of many more people than the relatively few who remain. Thousands of drug addicts have resided with Synanon for periods ranging from days to years,--and then left. Presumably that pattern will continue. Synanon recognizes and accepts this reality; but it is inclined to define departure as prima facie evidence of failure. It may be that Synanon works very beneficial effects on persons who use it as a temporary way-stop. Perhaps not. The best that can be said is that there is now no reasonable way to know. It is probably functional for Synanon to assume that splitting results in return to drug-addiction. This serves as a device to encourage retention, and to reinforce the commitment of those who do remain.

It does seem evident, however, that Synanists usually demonstrate rather dramatic behavioral changes for at least as long as they do remain. Probably with considerable accuracy, Mr. Dederich claims that Synanon has the largest collection of clean addicts in the world. The only exceptions may be certain very large facilities which operate with locked doors;--and even at many of these, it is notoriously easy to get access to drugs.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Synanon does not regard a person on methadone as a clean addict. Synanon appears to regard methadone as a poor solution to the heroin addict's problem. They seem to stop short of condemning the approach, however; presumably because they recognize that it may at least keep the addict away from crime.

To really understand Synanon's accomplishments, the reader should be reminded of the character of the greater portion of its non-square population. These are persons who have typically failed in school and dropped-out; who have had only intermittent work experience, and that at marginal jobs; who, if they tried marriage, have usually failed at that; who have been unable to get along with parents and siblings. These are typically the persons who occupy the marginal fringes of society, looking in at what to them seems to be an unavailable opportunity structure. They are the persons who tend to stay in trouble of one kind or another. They are ordinarily not very competent even at their criminal activities. They usually come to Synanon with minimal skills and less self-esteem. With fairly good reasons they are themselves convinced that they are losers.

Unsurprisingly, Synanon's success rate with such material is, by any definition, not very high. Most leave Synanon, and leave quickly. But Synanon's expectations,--its standards of success,--are extraordinarily high; and it appears that Synanists demonstrate rather dramatic behavioral changes for at least as long as they do remain. Most of the persons who run Synanon, and run it very competently, are men and women who themselves once matched the description just given.<sup>1</sup> But one need not refer to Synanon's more outstanding successes

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Dederich is an exception in this regard. He was a chronic alcoholic; but never a "falling-down drunk" (to use his phrase). Furthermore, it appears that he did demonstrate considerable competence in the business world.

to make the point. Perhaps just as impressive are the behavioral and attitudinal changes already evident in younger more recent members who have been with Synanon only a matter of months. In interview after interview such young newcomers confessed to considerable surprise at their own changed behavior. Whether they could sustain such changes without Synanon supports remains unknown. Synanon leaders seem to doubt that they could. But the behavioral changes evident within Synanon are remarkably constructive, and not only a matter of having surrendered drug habits. These young members quickly learn to talk and behave in socially responsible ways. They develop competence in many areas. They are learning marketable skills and apparently learning them very well. They speak hopefully about their futures. They verbalize rejection of their pasts in totally derisive terms. They appear to relate one to another with courtesy, kindness and concern. They look cheerful, enthusiastic, energetic, and healthy. The list of changes could go on. To the extent that one is familiar with the former life-styles, attitudes, manner, and condition of such youths, he would inevitably be impressed with such changes. To the extent that he is familiar with the typically poor results of most institutional approaches, he would necessarily be well impressed with Synanon's more positive accomplishments, even granting that relatively few stay on.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The intended meaning is that the number who remain at Synanon are few relative to the number who enter. There is no intent to suggest that Synanon, compared to other programs, helps few addicts. If anything, in the absence of accurate data, I would suspect the contrary.

The factors which operate to determine who will remain at Synanon and who will leave are not clear. Almost certainly it is a highly complex set of factors. Those who have been at Synanon for extended periods appear to be remarkably adept verbally, especially in contrast to the general newcomer population. If this observation is accurate, it may suggest a hypothesis to partially explain the selection process. Perhaps success in Synanon, to some important extent, involves a process of survival of the verbal fittest. Verbal skills do seem to pay off at Synanon, especially in playing the Game. Considerable emphasis is placed on learning to substitute verbal management of problems for acting out approaches. Intentionally or not, Synanon involves its newcomers in many activities which have the effect of training verbal skills. The Game is the most obvious example; but others abound. Each morning, newcomers take turns speaking and reading before their peer group. Waitresses are taught to do a very professional job describing selections at each meal. The hostesses on the sceni-cruiser bus do a remarkably professional job making their required announcements. Discussion groups are omni-present, and members are expected to participate very actively. It may be that, ceteris paribus, the newcomer with greater potential to profit from such training is more likely to succeed in a system which places such emphasis on verbal skill. Under this hypothesis, for example, one might predict that newcomers from environments in which English is a second language (i.e., many Puerto Rican and Chicano youths) may tend to do less well at Synanon. Other cultural issues may, of course, also be operative; and, indeed, probably are.

## POTENTIAL RELEVANCE TO THE ARMY

The intent of the Synanon visit reported here was to gather data in an exploratory fashion to begin to answer the following questions: Would some kind of relationship with Synanon be potentially useful to the Army? What purposes might it serve? What are the factors which might serve to support or impede such a relationship? What forms might such a relationship take? These issues were discussed at great length with Mr. Dederich and other Synanon members, but in necessarily general and tentative terms. The visit, only ten days in duration, was too brief to permit very definitive answers to those questions. Certain tentative answers, however, seem justifiable:

Would some kind of relationship with Synanon be potentially useful to the Army? What purposes might such a relationship serve?

It appears that Synanon is often able to accomplish rather impressive results with the very group of people with whom the Army has some of its most trouble-some problems: i.e., persons with severe character and behavior disorders. The Army has not been remarkably successful in its efforts with such persons. Some form of relationship with Synanon might be potentially useful in at least two ways: Synanon could be used as a practical alternative resource for dealing with some selected personnel who have significant character and behavior disorders; and Synanon, further, might be used as a research and training resource from which the Army might learn some alternative approaches to its problems in this area. In brief, it does appear that the Army might derive significant benefit from such a relationship.

## What are the factors which might support or impede such a useful relationship?

There are several potentially supportive factors:

--There appears to be considerable and enthusiastic interest at every level of Synanon,--but most especially at the executive leadership level,--in finding ways to enter into some form of helpful relationship with the Army. There is general confidence that ways can be found to work out potential problem areas.

--From the foregoing description of Synanon, it can be immediately recognized that there are several features in the Synanon approach which are alien to Army life. More remarkable, however, are those features which are surprisingly similar, at least on the conceptual level. The basic Synanon approach of using the sociocultural system itself, group process, and effective leadership to prevent, manage and correct deviant behavior is very consistent with Army theory in such matters. The behavioral objectives of the Synanon approach also appear to be very compatible with those of the Army.

--Synanon has developed a body of experience with personnel who are quite similar to the personnel who get into difficulties in the Army; mostly young and from a range of ethnic, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. It is apparently not a highly selective group.

There are also certain potential problem areas which might raise difficulties in a Synanon-Army relationship, and which require further study and clarification:

--Synanon encourages a kind of total and long-term commitment in its members, not unlike the commitment ideally expected of Army personnel, especially those who are career-oriented. It is not inconceivable that these dual commitments could in some yet unidentified way, constitute a source of role conflict for an Army Synanist. Admittedly this concern is vague; but it deserves further exploration.

--Synanon's requirement that members be non-violent in their dealings one with another is totally compatible with the Army's ordinary proscription against assaultive behavior. It does, however, appear to develop into a broader and more fundamental position of non-violence in many Synanists, leading some of the younger men to request conscientious objector status. This is not a formal Synanon doctrine, and many of the older Synanists do not adopt a position of conscientious objection in the matter of military service. It would be unsurprising, however, if some Army personnel might come to such a position as a consequence of involvement with Synanon.

--Voluntariness is central to the Synanon approach. Army candidates would of necessity be volunteers for Synanon involvement. Furthermore, Synanon would probably have to retain the right to promptly dismiss Army members who do not meet behavioral expectations. This would require establishment of a system to permit very short-notice transfers.

--The extent to which the ex-addict, ex-alcoholic or ex-criminal requires the support of continuous and total involvement in the Synanon Community to sustain

his changed behavior is not yet established. It is not yet clear, for example, how many Synanists will be able to work outside as life-stylers, or how long it will take for them to be enabled to do so. Presumably, experience in this matter could be readily monitored in a research project.

--Synanon is in many ways pragmatic and experimental in its approach, and appears quite receptive to suggestions. Its leaders do, however, have rather definite convictions about certain things which they believe to be essential. It is, for example, highly improbable that they would agree to permit urine testing or other similar checks on members who happen to be in the Army. Further, there is considerable conviction that bits and pieces of the Synanon approach, used apart from the whole system, are not likely to work. It seems that in several instances negotiations between governmental agencies and Synanon have broken down precisely because there was a desire to modify the Synanon approach in ways thought to be essential. It seems likely that in any relationship with the Army, Synanon would require very extensive independence.

#### What forms might a Synanon-Army relationship take?

At minimum the following steps seem feasible and advisable:

--Devices could be developed to refer to Synanon those active duty personnel who are approaching ETS and who have significant behavioral problems, drug-related or not. This would in the case of drug-addicts require the involvement of the Veterans Administration in planning. But such referrals might also involve personnel receiving separations under the provisions of AR 635-212 for other than drug-related problems, retired or dependent personnel with

alcoholism, and others. It would be well to think of Synanon as a potential resource for more than drug-related problems. Arrangements could be made to involve Synanon in a program of orientation involving films, reading material and speaking engagements at Army posts.

--Army personnel who are to be involved in the control, management and correction of drug addiction and other deviant behavior could be sent to Synanon for periods of extended training. Synanon has developed a body of experience operating a unit within a Nevada penitentiary and in providing, within its own facilities, extended training for police officers. It has also had experience operating a ward in a Navy hospital. Army military police, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and other personnel are likely to profit from such experience at Synanon.

Certain more extensive involvements also seem worthy of further exploration:

--On a demonstration project basis, selected volunteers from the Army Community who have identified serious behavioral problems,--whether related to drugs and alcohol or not,--could be sent to an existing Synanon facility on a contract basis. Active duty personnel selected should probably have relatively long-term obligations to the Army and/or career aspirations. Such a program would attempt to serve several purposes. It would hopefully provide selected personnel with an opportunity for rehabilitation. A certain number who persevere in their desire to remain in the Army could form a very valuable nucleus for assisting the Army with its drug-addiction, alcoholism and other

deviance problems. It is interesting that ex-military Synanists, almost universally, look back upon their unsuccessful experiences in the armed services with a willingness to realistically appraise their own involvement in those difficulties. Further, many expressed an enthusiastic interest in attempting to help the Army in its efforts to deal with drug-addicts and other problem soldiers. It might be that active duty soldiers who become involved with Synanon might also undergo similar attitudinal changes and thereby become a very valuable Army resource. It should be noted that the State of Michigan has entered into an arrangement with Synanon in which it refers delinquent youths as an alternative to sentences in correctional institutions. Michigan pays a modest per diem rate for each youth in this program. Several California probation and parole jurisdictions have somewhat similar arrangements with Synanon.

--A contractual arrangement could be made with Synanon to operate a facility as an alternative to the Stockade or Disciplinary Barracks for some active duty military personnel under sentence for UCMJ violations,--drug-related or not. Commanding Generals might, under this concept, be authorized to offer certain selected sentenced personnel the alternative of involvement in such a program,--perhaps on some basis like one year at Synanon in lieu of six months in a stockade or Disciplinary Barracks. Any soldier leaving Synanon prematurely would have to complete his confinement sentence. It has been Synanon's experience that residents tend to do better if they have such unpleasant alternatives hanging over their heads. It might be well to select prisoners who are convicted of charges which are not peculiarly military in character, such as assault, larceny, drug-related charges and the like. Synanon might

be given facilities to operate such a program either at an active military base or, perhaps preferably, at some inactive base such as an abandoned NIKE-site. The Synanon facility might profitably be staffed in part with ex-military Synanists with a preference for such work, and with such Army personnel who had successfully involved themselves in one of the other programs suggested above.

--Devices could be developed to encourage and support the establishment of a Synanon facility in a civilian community proximate to a large Army base or a complex of military bases (e.g. San Antonio, Texas). In return for such support, members of the military community might be given preferential consideration for admission. Such a facility could then be used by active duty, retired and dependent personnel with drug, alcohol or other behavioral problems.

--As a final alternative an attempt might be made to form a Synanon-type facility at an Army installation with maximum use of Synanon consultation, but otherwise without its direct involvement. I suspect this to be the weakest alternative, if for no other reason than the likelihood that it would not interest Synanon. It should probably be pursued only if it would prove to be impossible to develop a plan which would make more direct use of Synanon's structure and reservoir of experience and skill. Before such an approach would be attempted, it would be well to expose a number of Army personnel to a rather extensive Synanon experience.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident that Synanon successfully assists many persons to abandon long-standing drug-addictive, alcoholic, criminal and other self-defeating and anti-social behaviors. More impressive yet,--at least to this observer, --are Synanon's more positive accomplishments with such persons who have histories which demonstrate severe character and behavior disorders. It appears to have developed a system within which many such persons are transformed into remarkably responsible, productive, contributing members of society. Of special interest, perhaps, is the fact that it has within its membership a number of young men who were extruded from military service because of serious behavioral problems and who were totally unresponsive to all previous remedial efforts.

The Army is searching for more effective ways to deal with delinquent personnel, who may or may not have drug or alcohol related problems. It is this observer's impression that, in this effort, the Army may profit from some form of association with Synanon. It is recognized that there are several features in the Synanon system which are potentially problematic for Army personnel. It is not clear, however, that these are necessarily unresolvable. Several possible models for such an association with Synanon are suggested above in admittedly undetailed outline. It is recommended that these be explored more fully. From such exploration some more feasible model may emerge. It is further recommended that any association which may develop with Synanon should be research-based to assure that opportunities for learning and for evaluation be fully utilized.

**END**