

JUVENILE MISFITS

'Rebel Without a Cause' Depicts Another Set

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

THE recognized increase in the number of youngsters in our society who are emotionally disturbed and who manifest their disturbance in various manners, including delinquency and crime, offers a strong temptation to film makers to move in on that theme. Goodness knows, it is infinitely dramatic and full of possibilities. But it is also exceedingly delicate and subject to easy abuse by those who, either willfully or blindly, might misrepresent or sensationalize.

Certainly there was no intention on the part of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to make its "Blackboard Jungle" an exaggeration of the general nature of the boys and the conditions that prevail in a typical big-city vocational high school in a low-class area. But some of the critical reactions to that picture were almost as strong as the resentments and violences in it. The feeling was that it had gone overboard.

So, we suspect, many people will feel that Warner Brothers' "Rebel Without a Cause" is a desperate and dangerous distortion of another aspect of modern disturbed youth. For there is a tendency in this picture to toss every bit of the blame for the insecurity and rebelliousness of its three key youngsters upon their parents and the police—the former for not "understanding" and the latter for being dull and dumb.

No "Chicken"

The main character in this item at the Astor is a handsome teen-age lad who has a phobia about being tagged a "chicken" (a coward) by his unstable friends. This is because his well-off father, whom he apparently once loved, has lacked the "guts" to stand up to his nagging mother in the forcible manner the boy thinks he should. And so our restless, mumbling misfit, played intensely by the late James Dean, is indecisive himself and is groping for security and an understanding love.

The person from whom he gets it, all in the course of one mad day, is a girl his own age of good background who is also emotionally disturbed. Her trouble is that her father stopped kissing her when she was 16 and this has filled her with such a sense of not belonging in her family that she has taken up with high school "cowboys" and "goons."

In the course of proving he isn't "chicken," by fighting a switch-blade knife duel with one of these lads and then by vying with him in a desperate and suicidal game with automobiles, Mr. Dean wins the admiration of the young lady, played prettily by Natalie Wood. Together they seek a lonely exile, from which they are soon returned home when a young friend, also a misfit, tragically is killed by the police. Fortunately, at this point, dawn breaks in the parents' minds.

There is a great deal in this picture that does reflect the attitudes of certain teen-age elements, particularly in their bullying braggadocio and their mania for pointless violence. But the insistence with which the scriptwriter and director address sympathy to the youngsters at the expense of their parents and others who represent authority (even an innocent schoolteacher also comes in for a passing knock) renders this picture's likely influence upon real youngsters with emotional disturbance questionable. There is a deception in its pretense of "understanding" that can gravely mislead.

Little Egos

We certainly would not want to argue for the prohibition of such films, but we continue to insist that producers be more careful and responsible in what they say. To paraphrase an old axiom, little egos have big eyes.

Speaking of prohibition, we hope everyone took careful note that the United States Supreme Court has swung another wallop at the pre-release censorship of films. In giving a decision last Monday on an appeal of the distributors of "The Moon Is Blue" against the banning of that film in Kansas, the court repeated what it has said—that it is a violation of the guarantees of free speech for a state to condemn a film for being "obscene." In four decisions, now, the Supreme Court has invalidated censorship laws. How long will it take state legislators to get this through their heads?

Reviews in Brief

Lucy Gallant—Jane Wyman as a smart store-owner casts pearls, mink coats, etc., before the ladies of an oil-rich Texas town. At the Victoria.

Frisky—Gina Lollabrigida and Vittorio De Sica in a strained sequel to their "Bread, Love and Dreams." At the Trans-Lux Fifty-second Street.