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THE PAROLE SUPERVISOR IN THE ROLE OF STRANGER

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Parole is a link in a chain of experiences the parolee has undergone involuntarily, with his own self-interest and personal wishes subordinated to the interests and needs of the total society. As such a link, parole represents a transitional period between the regimentation of a correctional institution and the freedom of the normal community life. This transition requires that the supervisor govern his interaction with the parolee to be consistent with the objectives of the earlier incarceration and the ultimate purpose of developing in the parolee self-reliance and identification with the community norms.

This function complicates the definition of the proper role for the supervisor. Authoritarian elements exist in the role because: First, to be consistent with the objectives of imprisonment, the supervisor supports the use of force by the state in a positive way as a means for treating criminals; Secondly, the effectiveness of parole lies in its restrictions on the parolee's freedom. Although he is outside prison walls, the parolee still is under sentence and subject to certain conditions in his use of his limited freedom. Parole is a period of guidance and supervision which continues the correctional treatment begun in prison. The supervisor's responsibility is to protect society by assuring that the parolee is fulfilling his obligations.

DIFFERENCES FROM OTHER SIMILAR ROLES

The authoritarian qualities cause some to confuse this role with that of a policeman or prison custodial officer. In contrast to the policeman, who is charged with the duty of apprehending criminals, the supervisor uses his authority to create a favorable attitude in the parolee and a favorable situation in the parolee's environment for the assuming of self-control by the parolee. The objective is to bridge the gap between purely externalized authority over the parolee and the achievement by the parolee of a capacity for self-direction. This bridging requires the parolee's par-

ticipation in the process of change in his own behavior. This difficult task can be accomplished only if the supervisor uses his authority with firmness and consistency, but without rigidity, by limiting restrictions to those which are essential and can be understood by the parolee, and through avoidance of unnecessary humiliation or irritation.

The supervisor's role also resembles that of a social caseworker. Both roles involve concern with environmental effects upon personality and with ways of erasing personality defects. To change behavior patterns, individualized treatment is sought through insights into the unique qualities of the parolee and of his environment. Insights require rapport between parolee and his supervisor. However, his role differs from that of the social worker to the extent that the attempts to establish and maintain rapport jeopardize the supervisor's responsibilities stemming from authoritarian elements of his role. This does not imply that the case worker does not represent and apply authority¹ but his authority differs in degree and, to some extent, in the type of client to which it is applied. The social caseworker and the parole supervisor often deal with the same kinds of personalities among their respective clients, but personality factors in crime causation and the offender's response to the stimuli of conviction and imprisonment can produce personalities and situations not to be found in social casework.

PATTERN FOR REHABILITATION STRATEGY

The two major elements of the supervisor's role are united by the common objective of instilling self-discipline in the parolee. This gives the supervisor's role the aforementioned transitional quality. Contacts with the parolee are to be used

¹ For a discussion of case work in an authoritarian setting, see RICHARD A. CHAPPELL, *Probation: Case Work and Current Status*, in PAUL W. TAPPAN (editor), *CONTEMPORARY CORRECTION*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951, pp. 386-88.

to create a relatively stable relationship for him within his community which will encourage him to internalize the norms supporting the social order. The strategy is to use the contacts as units for creating new patterns of association. It is helpful to conceive of these patterns to be differentiated along a continuum beginning with the parolee's isolation from the social order and culminating in his amalgamation within law-abiding society. The stages along this continuum can be described as follows: *Advance*, tentative admission of the officer by the parolee to the parolee's private and personal world of thoughts and aspirations; *Adjustment*, recognition by the parolee that differences exist between his value system and that of the total social order; *Accordance*, mutual participation by the parolee and the supervisor becomes possible because of common experiences, emotions, and attitudes created during the adjustment period, but full identification of the parolee with the values of the total social order is not attained; and *Amalgamation*, the deviation of the parolee from the social norms of total society is eliminated through his internalization of those norms.²

This paper is concerned primarily with the first of these stages. However, effective supervision requires that the contacts which contribute to the attainment of this first stage must not jeopardize the attainment of later stages. Of course, the essence of advance is the creation of rapport between officer and parolee by minimizing social distance through establishment of free communication. Rapport is a prerequisite for later stages, but it is of little value as an end in itself, insofar as the objectives of supervision are concerned. It is possible that close rapport could be established easily if the supervisor accepts the parolee's values, but the costs would be loss of a professional relationship and of the possibility of rehabilitation. The supervisor would find himself enmeshed in a social situation pushing him toward amalgamation with the parolee's norms. Then, who would be "rehabilitating" whom?

The officer enters into social interaction with the parolee within a community environment made up of third parties who can influence the quality of the parolee-supervisor relationship. Such third parties include social workers, law enforcement officers, court officials, ministers, and members of service

clubs. Other third parties will be in more direct contact with the parolee; these include his employer, members of his family, his neighbors, and members of his work and recreational groups. The supervisor must establish and maintain rapport with these third parties so that they may be his allies in amalgamating the parolee within the community. Therefore, the officer, assuming his responsibility in a community new to him, will find that he must proceed through the stages from advance to amalgamation with these third parties. Even when the supervisor has had previous experiences in the community, each new case will bring contacts with new third parties.

In his efforts to attain the stage of advance, the officer can be defined as a sociological stranger. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to assessing the limitations and advantages given the supervisor by his role as stranger in initial contacts.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STRANGER

What is this role of stranger? It exists because the individual is in an alien land, away from his own people, and consequently not subject completely to the subtle controls exerted by the culture of the people among whom he now lives. Simmel pointed out that this mobility of the stranger makes him physically near but socially remote in his relationships within the community.³ Because his mobility has made him an exception to the personality-conditioning processes experienced by the orthodox members of the community, the stranger is objective in his attitude toward the values of the people among whom he lives. His objectivity, if coupled with personal ties with the individual concerned, fits the stranger for the role of confidante to an orthodox member of the community. Unlike the wanderer, the stranger has a place in the social structure of the community because of his economic, political, or social functions. In history, we find the stranger often served as a trader, a middleman between peoples who stand in a producer-consumer relationship. Although his differences may bar him from full acceptance into the community, the stranger must be recognized as a participant in the community life to the extent that his function contributes to community life.

The height of the social barriers erected against the stranger will vary with the intensity of the in-group ties uniting the members of the community.

² Adapted from HOWARD BECKER, *SYSTEMATIC SOCIOLOGY ON THE BASIS OF THE BEZIEHUNGSLEHRE AND BEGILDELEHRE OF LEOPOLD VON WIESE*, New York: Wiley, 1932.

³ See GEORGE SIMMEL, *SOZIOLOGIE*, Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1908, pp. 685-691.

We are bound in personal relations to other members of our in-group through common characteristics and common possession of culture and cultural equipment. The greater the similarity, the greater is the warmth of the social bonds of the individual to his group. The less the similarity, the weaker are the social bonds. If the group defines such similarities as unique to itself, a greater barrier is erected against the stranger because his freedom from the group's conventions makes him dissimilar. However, if the group defines the similarities as peculiar to the individual as individual rather than to the group, the stranger exhibiting such similarities has a greater chance of gaining social acceptance. This possibility is enhanced if the group is so large numerically in membership that the warmth of the emotional ties with fellow group members is reduced. The stranger could be similar to other members of the community in nationality, religion, social position, racial criteria, educational attainment, or personality.

Because of his freedom from local conventions, the stranger is more likely to exhibit "sanctioned rationality", rather than the "affective rationality" characteristic of natives of the community. "Sanctioned rationality" is the pursuit of ends by means regarded as conforming to the principles of economy of effort, efficiency, and absence of undesirable effects, but limited by the character of the ends sought. In "affective rationality", the means and ends are fused emotionally on the basis of unquestioned acceptance of the traditions of one's people.⁴

HOW THE SUPERVISOR QUALIFIES AS STRANGER

The supervisor qualifies as a stranger in these ways:

1. He is a functionary within the state-wide parole system, with his jurisdiction usually extending beyond the bounds of the local community. As a middleman, he implements the policies and expresses the authority of an extra-community agency. Ethnocentric attitudes against extra-community agencies are barriers to rapport.

2. The combination of authoritarian and rehabilitation-oriented elements in his role makes him the ally of both law enforcement and social workers in the community, but his dissimilarity from each in objectives and functions requires that

⁴ See HOWARD BECKER, *Interpretive Sociology and Constructive Typology*, in GEORGE GURVITCH and WILBERT E. MOORE, *TWENTIETH CENTURY SOCIOLOGY*, New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945, pp. 78-81.

he resist stereotyping of his role in terms of either element. Therefore, he may appear at times to these allies to be representing a program disruptive, or at least contrary, to the objectives of the community agencies whose support and services are essential to effective parole supervision.

3. To achieve rehabilitation, the supervisor must implement moral norms which, presumably, differ from those expressed by the parolee in the anti-social act which occasioned imprisonment. The supervisor applies sanctioned rationality toward the end that contacts of the parolee with the supervisor and with members of the community will contribute to the parolee's amalgamation within the community. Those agencies and individuals in the community who oppose the techniques and/or objectives of parole would consider his rationality to oppose their affective rationality. Thus, the officer may be cast as a stranger by some members of the very community within which the parolee should be integrated.

4. Similarly, the supervisor may be cast as a stranger to the parolee. If the anti-social norms of the offender stem from a sub-culture, he may be motivated by an affective rationality not shared by the total community. Then the officer is a stranger to the group sharing that sub-culture.

5. The supervisor may be cast as a stranger because he differs from the residents in characteristics he has attained through previous membership in ethnic, religious, social class, racial, educational attainment, or rural-urban residence groupings.

SUPERVISOR'S CHARACTERISTICS AND COMMUNITY'S REACTION

The quality of the initial reaction to the officer can be a barrier to, or can be a factor favorable for, rapport. The result depends in part upon his awareness of his place in the social situation and his skill in turning the sociological factors operating to the advantage of his objectives. He should be aware of his own contribution to the "chemistry" of the situation. His introspective analysis is aided if he realizes that the conception of the supervisor's role held by the parolee and the various third parties is at least as important as his own view of that role. Their conceptions are reactions to three interdependent sets of characteristics exhibited by the supervisor. The first set is related to his status as an institutional functionary within the parole system. The second set stems from his membership in

various groupings based on criteria such as social class, religion, race, educational attainment, or rural-urban residence. His behavior, mental make-up, and dress will reflect values and attitudes he has internalized through socialization while he has participated in such groupings. His uniqueness as an individual will be reflected in the third set of characteristics.

It has been noted that newcomers frequently evoke no perceivable preference or distaste on their first appearance.

"Reaction is more objective: rational criteria or accepted social standards inhibit emotions linked with sympathy or antipathy. The stranger is promptly labeled or assigned a niche in a familiar plurality pattern. His social affiliations with a class, a cultural or racial group, etc., are matters of primary interest for the observer. In Shaler's terminology, this is categoric contact; it is markedly in contrast to the emotional attraction and repulsion sometimes called forth in the observer as a result of the newcomer's relation to his own tastes, inclinations, desires, and experiences—in brief, to positive or negative sympathetic contacts. . . ."⁵

As a newcomer, the supervisor appears to be making contacts of a categoric nature in many instances. This would be most true for initial contacts based on his status as institutional functionary. The validity of this statement for the second set of characteristics would depend upon the degree of his similarity in group affiliations with natives of the community and the relative importance placed upon such similarities by the natives. The contribution of the third set of characteristics to the rehabilitative process depends on the sympathetic contacts it makes possible.

SUPERVISOR AS INSTITUTIONAL FUNCTIONARY

The status of institutional functionary is likely to be a dominant factor in the initial contacts of the officer with the parolee and the third parties. The initial response is to the supervisor's office, rather than to him as an individual personality. The quality of the response to the office varies with the respondent's conception of the parole program and its effect upon his own activities.

One possibility is that the response to the office will place the case automatically beyond the stage of advance. Local agencies may accept the supervisor as an ally with a similar occupation. Some

parolees will welcome him as a guide along the route toward successful termination of parole. The parolee and the third parties accept the supervisor's conception of parole.

Another possibility is that the supervisor is welcomed but on the basis of an erroneous conception of role and of parole itself. The office permits easy establishment of rapport, but the attainment of later stages of adjustment and accordance is blocked because the rapport is based on a stereotyped conception of the supervisor's role. Such stereotyping can create false expectations of parole which later brings disenchantment to the parolee and third parties.

A third possibility is that the categoric nature of initial contact is obscured by antipathies aroused by the supervisor's office. Because the emotional response is to the office rather than to the supervisor as an individual, the initial contact appears to be categoric. However, the antipathies make this a negative sympathetic contact, impeding progress toward advance and subsequent stages of association.

SOCIAL CLASS AND EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Social class attributes are included in the second set of characteristics of the officer which affect the initial response given him. This probably is the most important of the characteristics included in this set. The difference in socio-economic status can be a real obstacle to the communication essential to the establishment of rapport. This point has been established by Johnston.⁶ He noted that the professional in the correctional institution finds it difficult to project himself into the social situations common to his lower class inmate and much of the clinical literature deals with middle-class patients who are more amenable to treatment than those from the lower class. Johnston wrote:

" . . . Social scientists have discovered that, due to values, childrearing patterns, and circumstances in lower class homes, these children tend to grow up with lower levels of aspiration, a lessened ability to defer gratification for future gains, and generally a lower level of 'push' to succeed in a given task, than persons raised in middle class homes. . . . The professional man in the prison setting may find himself unable, then, to understand a prisoner's preference for a job in the officers' kitchen to an opportunity to learn the

⁶ NORMAN JOHNSTON: *Sources of Distortion and Deception in Prison Interviewing*, FEDERAL PROBATION, March 1956, pp. 46-47.

⁵ WIESE-BECKER, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

machinists' trade—a choice which is hedonistic and opportunistic but which in no way deviates from what seems to be typical reactions found in the social strata from which most of our prisoners are recruited. In other areas such as early sexual experiences, the amount of physically aggressive behavior manifested by the prisoner in previous life, etc., it is imperative that the evaluator shun his own middle class value system and appraise the behavior of the inmate in light of what we know about standards of behavior and customs in other segments of society. . . .”

Although social class differences may be a barrier to rapport with the parolee, the similar difference between parolee and various third parties can expedite establishment of communication between the supervisor and these third parties. If the rapport is consistent with the objectives of parole, the officer finds advance easily established with these third parties. However, the opposite result is to be expected if rapport is based on faulty premises held by the third parties or if the third parties place the parolee outside their in-group as unacceptable for integration into the community as a law-abiding citizen.

Because of his presumably advanced education, the supervisor can gain acceptance by community residents with similar educational attainments. However, the supervisor has attained an educational level higher than that of most of his parolees and some of the third parties. An important function of formal education is socialization, including development of such elements of personality as philosophy, recreational interests, vocabulary, accent, and taste in dress. Differences of this sort can be the basis of ethnocentric reaction against the supervisor.

As one criterion of social status, high educational attainment sometimes stimulates antipathy in persons with an inferior education because the difference symbolizes the inferiority they feel. On the other hand, superior educational attainment is regarded automatically by some with less schooling as proof of great ability. Therefore, formal educational status, in and of itself, can stimulate either a negative or a positive sympathetic contact.

Thirdly, the curriculum of formal education is an abstraction from the past experience of man presented in a “hot house” environment in order to increase the quality and quantity of facts and insights learned in a given time over that available through unplanned and uncoordinated individual

experience. Presumably, the supervisor has been found qualified as an institutional functionary because his formal education has given him a reservoir of facts and insights for carrying out his responsibilities. Therefore, he can win support for parole objectives from the parolee and the third parties because he has such a reservoir to draw upon as he applies his “sanctioned rationality.” His educational attainment is a means for achieving rapport because it enables him to demonstrate greater skills and knowledge, not just because it is a “calling card” for the impersonal granting of superior status in a world of hasty and transitional contacts between persons.

Racial, religious, and ethnic qualities of the officer may be the basis for categoric contacts if these qualities are criteria for social stratification within the community. It is likely that these qualities were taken into consideration in his selection as an institutional functionary so that they would not be serious barriers to establishment of rapport in the community as a whole. However, varying with the heterogeneity of the community in terms of these qualities, achievement of rapport through conformity of the supervisor's characteristics with those of one segment of the community could mean creation of barriers to rapport with other segments.

The stereotypes of the “city slicker” and the “country hick” are exaggerations of dissimilarities in personal traits between urban and rural people derived from difference in such sociological factors as degree of cultural homogeneity, pecuniary nexus, division of labor, population density, and pace of life. The supervisor conditioned to urban life is likely to find his personal traits a barrier to free communication with individuals conditioned to rural life. The supervisor with a rural heritage may find the same situation in dealing with urban people. He must acculturate himself consciously and deliberately to folkways, mores, vocabulary, and traditions others have learned unconsciously and informally as a part of daily life since childhood.

SUPERVISOR AS AN INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY

The third set of characteristics are those unique to each supervisor as an individual. The personality of the officer is the key to effective parole because individualized treatment requires a personal relationship between parolee and officer based on mutual confidence, trust, and respect. Burbank

and Goldsborough have pointed out that the probation officer must have these abilities: To form and sustain wholesome interpersonal relationships, to accept responsibility for the authority he carries, to work with aggressive persons, to work with other agencies and people, and to improve in performance through self-analysis.⁷ Of course, the same can be said for the parole officer. Flexibility, objectivity, patience, persistence, and a sophisticated grasp of the crucial factors in each case are essential qualities in the officer. His professional competency should include the understanding of the sociological potentialities of his role as stranger and capacity to exploit them.

ADVANTAGES GIVEN BY ROLE OF STRANGER

Although his office gives him a place and function in the community, the parole officer is free comparatively from the affective rationality of the native residents. He does not share community attitudes derived from previous behavior of the parolee which would conflict with objective application of techniques appropriate for the case. Because amalgamation with the community is a prerequisite to lasting rehabilitation, the supervisor must give heed to the affective rationality of the community in his contacts. However, in his professional role, he must be sufficiently detached from his "patient" and the community to be able to diagnose, prescribe, and administer the proper treatment. The objectivity inherent in the role of stranger contributes to this end.

In attempting rehabilitation, the supervisor is seeking to construct a social environment most conducive to behavior changes in the specific parolee with his own unique personality and his own special constellation of environmental factors. The parolee and the third parties have certain attitudes which affect the possibility of amalgamating the parolee into the community in a new role consistent with society's interests. As a newcomer, the officer represents a new element in the "social chemistry" of the group encompassing the parolee and the third parties. In the process of readjustment of interpersonal relationships within the group to this new element, the attitudes and behavior of the group members may be modified. If the supervisor has the necessary insights and leadership skills, the role of stranger gives him an

opportunity to inject the seed of change into this group environment to the end that rehabilitation becomes possible.

To carry out his responsibilities effectively, the supervisor must elicit the support of various third parties and of the parolee for both authoritarian and rehabilitation-oriented elements of his office. He must achieve rapport with the individuals concerned, but it must be rapport which contributes to modification of the parolee's behavior and his environment consistent with rehabilitation. As a newcomer, the supervisor has the opportunity to build a foundation of attitudes towards himself and his objectives consistent with this type of rapport. As an established member of the community, he would face the added burden of revising prior definitions of himself and his role before creating more appropriate attitudes.

Earlier we noted that objectivity fits the stranger for the role of confidant. This role is appropriate for the task of reducing the deviation of the parolee from the community norms. As an outsider, the supervisor can be a more acceptable confidant to the parolee than members of the community. He is a passerby in the sociological sense; the members of the community have a more permanent place in the parolee's social world. The officer does not share the affective rationality of the community. His professional attitude and his objectivity as stranger can encourage the parolee to express doubts about the validity of this affective rationality, thereby opening the way to adjustment and accordance. Such confidences with more permanent members of his group invite retaliation or future embarrassment for the parolee.

SUMMARY

In summary, the parole supervisor faces the problem of integrating authoritarian and rehabilitation-oriented elements of his role. To achieve rehabilitation, he must elicit the participation of the parolee and of other members of the community in creating new interpersonal relationships which integrate the parolee into community life. The supervisor will find his role of stranger both a handicap and a resource in attaining rapport as an essential prerequisite. If it is to be a resource, he must understand the nature of his role and the sociological implications of his personal and professional characteristics within the social context of community life.

⁷ EDMUND G. BURBANK and ERNEST W. GOLDSBOROUGH, *The Probation Officer's Personality: A Key Factor in Rehabilitation*, FEDERAL PROBATION, June 1954, pp. 11-13.