

Winter 1960

Role Training as Preparation for Release From a Correctional Institution

Martin R. Haskell

H. Ashley Weeks

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Martin R. Haskell, H. Ashley Weeks, Role Training as Preparation for Release From a Correctional Institution, 50 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 441 (1959-1960)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

ROLE TRAINING AS PREPARATION FOR RELEASE FROM A CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION

MARTIN R. HASKELL AND H. ASHLEY WEEKS

Dr. Haskell is Placement Director in New York for boys discharged from Berkshire Industrial Farm, and is conducting role training sessions. He is teaching Criminology in City College, New York and is President of the New York State Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama.

Dr. Weeks is Adjunct Professor of Sociology and Research Director of the Department in New York University. He designed and directed the Highfields Project in New Jersey. At present he is directing a research project in the University of Michigan under the program in Hospital Administration. He has made many contributions to the literature of juvenile delinquency—EDDOR.

There is general agreement among criminologists that the inmate of a prison, during his period of incarceration, develops a vocabulary that reflects attitudes, beliefs, opinions and orientations different from and often opposing those of the conventional person. Many inmates, prior to their incarceration, were members of delinquent groups with subcultures deviating materially from that of the dominant culture in our society. Other inmates are subjected to a continuous acculturation and assimilation of the criminal value system and the consequent inability to make a satisfactory adjustment to the world he enters upon release.¹

The roles played by the inmate of a prison and the roles he is required to play upon his release are dissimilar in many important respects.² This is true of most of the important family, occupational, and community roles. In spite of the fact that most inmates work while in prison, the attitudes attached to the role of worker differ materially from the attitudes required for a satisfactory adjustment to a work situation outside the prison. It has been pointed out that workers in the prison labor system are encouraged to be non-productive, dilatory and contentious. Prison developed attitudes affect the individual's concepts of the role of job seeker. In prison it is considered to be the duty of the officials to provide a job for the inmate and he comes to feel that he has a right to a job.³ Foremen and employers outside the prison demand greater productivity

and more cooperation than the inmate is accustomed to give.

In order adequately to enact a role the individual must know the rights he acquires as the occupant of a status, the rights of all the others involved in the situation, his obligations, and the obligations of all of the others. This knowledge is usually acquired through experience. Role playing may serve to help individuals adjust to future roles.⁴ Cottrell, in listing twelve propositions related to adjustment to any social role, includes two that point to role playing as an aid to adjustment. He writes:⁵

The degree of adjustment to a future role varies directly with the degree of clarity with which the future role is defined. The degree of adjustment to a future role varies directly with the amount of opportunity for:

1. Emotionally intimate contact which allows identification with persons functioning in the role.
2. Imaginal or incipient rehearsal in the future role, and
3. Practice in the role through play or other similar activity.

To prepare the individual to respond in the socially approved manner in the social situations in which he ordinarily functions, Moreno suggests Role Training, a form of role playing in which emphasis is placed on the reenactment of past performances.⁶ This is a technique for differentiating in action those patterns of behavior

¹ LLOYD E. OHLIN, *SOCIOLOGY AND THE FIELD OF CORRECTIONS*, pp. 27-40.

² Role is defined as the socially prescribed way of behaving in particular situations for any person occupying a given social position or status. The ability of the individual to perform in a role refers to the relation which his behavior bears to a modal pattern in a given cultural group.

³ LLOYD W. McCORKLE AND RICHARD KORN, *Resocialization Within Walls*, ANNALS, 293 (May 1954).

⁴ Role playing is defined as a temporary stepping out of one's own present role to assume the role of another individual or of one's self at another time, in an experimental situation.

⁵ LEONARD S. COTTRELL, JR., *The Adjustment of the Individual to His Age and Sex Roles*, AMER. SOCIOLOGICAL REV., VII (October, 1942).

⁶ J. L. MORENO AND F. B. MORENO, *Spontaneity Theory of Child Development*, SOCIOMETRY, 7 (May, 1944).

which may have been inadequate. These inadequacies become obvious to the individual, the director, and the group.

The following questions are raised: In the course of a Role Training Program administered to members of a deviant subculture, will the role playing ability of the subjects improve? Will tendencies toward conformity to the values of the dominant culture increase? Is there a relationship between improvement in role playing ability developed in the course of a Role Training Program and conformity to general social values? Role playing, Role Training, and related techniques have been used to produce attitudinal and behavioral changes in a wide variety of settings in the areas of Mental Health, Industry, and Education. Should not Role Training produce similar changes in inmates of a correctional institution? This study is based on the need for finding answers to these questions.

A Role Training Program was administered to inmates of the Riker's Island Penitentiary between September and December 1956, as part of their preparation for release on parole. In this paper we shall discuss the nature of the training administered, changes observed in role playing ability, attitudes toward conformity to general social values, and the relationship between changes in role playing ability and changes in other social values.

The subjects were inmates of the Riker's Island Penitentiary selected from the one hundred and seven whose release on parole was anticipated to be between November 27, 1956 and December 21, 1956.⁷ Excluded were: 1) those with less than sixth grade reading ability; 2) those under the age of twenty or over forty-one; 3) known homosexuals; and 4) those with major warrants pending. The remaining sixty-six were divided alternatively from alphabetical listing into experimental and control groups. The thirty-three inmates assigned to the experimental group were divided into two training groups of seventeen and sixteen members. Prior to instituting the Role Training each experimental and control group member was given five tests which were repeated after the training was completed. They were:

⁷ The study was conducted with the cooperation of the New York City Department of Correction, the warden of the Riker's Island Penitentiary, and Dr. Paul Benedict, Chief Psychiatrist, Department of Correction.

1. A Role Test—A test of role enactment rated by three judges.⁸

2. An Empathy Test—Each subject was rated on the accuracy with which he predicted the rating made by the person with whom he interacted.⁹

⁸ *A Role Test*—The physical structure of the test situation was as follows: Along one side of the test room, behind individual tables, sat three judges. A few feet from where they were seated was a table on which a tape recorder was mounted. A few feet farther away was another table behind which sat the auxiliary ego, the trained assistant who was to play the same role in interaction with each subject. In another room the subjects, in the company of the Director, awaited the test call. Each subject was conducted into the test room by the Director and given the following instructions:

"You are a truck driver for a moving company. On your way back to the warehouse, after making your delivery, you had a breakdown. You hired a mechanic to fix the truck. It took him two hours. Because of this breakdown you are two hours late getting back. The boss wants to see you. There he is." (Director pointed to the Auxiliary Ego. The Auxiliary Ego then assigned the subject a number, starting with one as the test began, and continuing in rotation until the last man was tested.) The test began.

Neither the judges nor the Auxiliary Ego had any way of knowing which persons were in the experimental or control group. The Director did not follow any set pattern in escorting men into the room. They were escorted into the room in turn as they said they were ready. The judges were all Probation Officers with Master of Arts Degrees in Sociology.

The Auxiliary Ego, in the role of boss, applied four stimuli. He then said: "Now you are the boss and I'll be the driver." They reversed roles and four additional stimuli were applied. The subject was given as much response time after each stimulus as he desired to take. No subject had any knowledge of the role prior to receiving his instructions in the test room. The Role Test administered after the treatment was completed was given in the same manner as the one described above except for the situation selected. In the Post-Test the instructions were as follows:

"You have been a dishwasher in a restaurant for three months. You asked for a chance to become a short order cook. The boss gave you a week's trial. The trial is over. The boss wants to speak to you. There he is." (Director pointed to the Auxiliary Ego and the test began in exactly the same manner as previously reported.)

Prior to the test, the judges were given a rating sheet for each subject. They were asked to familiarize themselves with the twenty possible deficiencies in Role enactment listed on the sheet. They were instructed to place a check mark on the rating sheet each time a subject made an error indicating a deficiency. Judges were asked to rate each subject while he was performing in the role. They were given on the minute between subjects to complete their ratings. They were further asked to rate without reference to each other so that each rating would reflect the independent evaluation of each judge.

⁹ *An Empathy Test*—After completing the Role Test, each subject was handed a form on which he was asked

3. Human Relations Inventory—A projective test designed to measure tendencies toward conformity to social values.¹⁰

4. Judgment in Social Situations Test.¹¹

5. Observation of Human Behavior Test.¹¹

The following hypotheses were formulated with respect to the inmates in each group:

1. Members of the experimental group would display greater ability to play roles than members of the control group.

2. Members of the experimental group would display greater ability to take the role of other than members of the control group.

3. Members of the experimental group would show greater tendency toward social conformity than members of the control group.

4. Members of the experimental group would show better judgment in social situations than members of the control group.

to rate his performance in the Role Test. He was also asked to predict the rating given him by the Auxiliary Ego and by the judges. The Auxiliary Ego had been instructed to rate each subject immediately after his performance in the Role Test. The criteria for rating included five possible deficiencies: Incorrect Response, Display of Impatience, Display of Impoliteness, Lack of Feeling, and Failure to Respond to Others. With respect to each deficiency the subject had to rate himself: Superior, Excellent, Very Satisfactory, Satisfactory, or Unsatisfactory. He also was required to predict which rating he was given by the Auxiliary Ego and the judges.

¹⁰ *Human Relations Inventory*—This test was designed to measure the conformity to cultural and social pressures that become manifest in the acts and attitudes of members of a society. A process of indirect or projective measurement which has been described as the direction of perception technique of attitude measurement is utilized. Bernberg scored the responses obtained from various 'conforming' groups in order to provide a normative basis for comparison with a non-conforming group. The test was then submitted to non-conforming groups including one hundred and sixty inmates of a California Prison and subsequently to other prison groups, and in each case a significant difference in the predicted direction was found.

See: R. E. Bernberg, "The Direction of Perception Technique of Attitude Measurement," *International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Research*, Vol. 6, 1951, pp. 397-406 for validation.

¹¹ *A Social Intelligence Test*—The Social Intelligence Test was designed to measure certain factors of judgment, information, and memory related to dealing with people and carrying on social relationships. The special edition used in this study consisted of two parts: Judgment in Social Situations and Observation of Human Behavior. Both were administered at the same time. Although the validation of this test has been inadequate, it has been reported to be useful as a rating of ability to deal with people. The two parts were rated separately.

See: Frances S. Burks, "The Relation of Social Intelligence Test Scores to Ratings of Social Traits," *Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 8, 1937, pp. 146-153.

5. Members of the experimental group would show greater ability to observe human behavior than members of the control group.

6. Persons that improved in role playing ability would display greater ability to take the role of other than would non-improvers.

7. Persons who improved in role playing ability would display greater tendency toward social conformity than non-improvers.

8. Persons who improved in role playing ability would display better judgment in social situations than non-improvers.

9. Persons who improved in role playing ability would display greater ability to observe human behavior than non-improvers.

10. Persons who improved in role playing ability would make a more satisfactory economic and social adjustment after release than would the non-improvers.

11. Persons who improved in role playing ability would show a lower rate of recidivism than would non-improvers.

THE ROLE TRAINING PROGRAM

The Role Training Program consisted of fifteen role training sessions each approximately one hour and forty minutes in length. Training was given in each of three major areas, five sessions devoted to each area. The three major role areas around which the training was developed involved occupational, family, and community roles. Within each role area emphasis was placed on certain roles which were considered crucial. These were:

1. *Occupational Roles*—Job Applicant—Employer, Worker—Fellow Worker, Worker—Foreman, Worker—Employer, Worker—Union.

2. *Family Roles*—Son—Mother, Son—Father, Brother—Sibling, Husband—Wife, and Relative, including cousin and nephew.

3. *Community Roles*—Roles played by the individual in his relationships with the School, Church, Neighbors, Public Authority (Parole Officer and Police), and Friends, including former friends and the making of new friends.

The needs of each particular group tended to influence the subject matter of each session as did personality differences of the subjects. Nevertheless, insofar as possible, the above mentioned roles were stressed. Five sessions were devoted to each role area, and each subject was afforded at

least one opportunity to participate as protagonist¹² in each of the three major areas.

INSTRUMENTS AND TECHNIQUES

The five instruments of Psychodrama, the Stage, the Subject, the Director, Auxiliary Egos, and the Audience were used throughout.¹³ Since no portion of the room available for the sessions was elevated, the forward portion of the room was designated as the stage. All action took place in that portion of the room and all the subjects were seated in such a manner as to make the action visible and audible to all. At no time did the group 'play at roles'. Whatever action took place involved a protagonist who was presenting an actual problem, past or present. The scenes portrayed were reenactments of actual experiences, when initially presented.

The Director was non-didactic, permissive and accepting, viewing the subjects as persons capable of meeting their own problems and of helping one another. At no time did he become analytic, interpretive or repressive. The Director had a trained assistant who portrayed the roles required by the subjects' world, acting under the instructions of the Director. This person, referred to as an Auxiliary Ego, participated in most of the sessions.

During the first five sessions the Auxiliary Ego played virtually all of the roles required to complement the action of each protagonist. After the fifth session auxiliary egos were frequently drawn from the group. This was done insofar as practicable so that as many members of each group as possible could be involved in the action. The trained Auxiliary Ego was always used when it was necessary to play a feminine role because the subjects resisted portraying such roles. The Audience, or group, participated in a discussion of each problem immediately after the problem was presented in action by a protagonist

The techniques used included Self-Presentation, Soliloquy, Projection, Role-Reversal and Mirror. The double technique was also used extensively.¹⁴

¹² The protagonist is the individual whose problem is presented to the group as an active participant.

¹³ J. L. MORENO, *PSYCHODRAMA*, Vol. I, Beacon House 1946, for description of instruments and techniques.

¹⁴ The techniques referred to above may be described as follows:

Self-Presentation—The subject is asked to state his problem, his diagnosis, and his proposed treatment.

Soliloquy—The subject is asked to state what is

Role-Reversal was used every time a subject played a role so that he might gain practice in playing two roles and further, so that he might have an opportunity of perceiving himself while playing the role of other. Each of the above mentioned techniques was utilized when deemed appropriate by the director.

STRUCTURE OF A ROLE TRAINING SESSION

The Director assumes the leadership role and starts each session with a directed warm up. This is a technique for focusing the attention of the group around a specific role or role cluster. The warm up continues until a protagonist emerges from the group and goes into action. To portray persons required by the protagonist, the Director may assign his Auxiliary Ego or utilize members of the group. After the action portion of the session, the Director encourages the group to discuss the problems raised by the protagonist. Insofar as possible, each session of the Role Training Program administered in the course of this study, followed this pattern.

THE WARM UP

The Director began each session with a warm up that lasted between ten and fifteen minutes. He started the warm up with a discussion of the need for training in a particular role. After a preliminary presentation of the problems involved he asked for comments by the members of the group. A discussion by the subjects of their past experiences with the particular role generally developed. In the course of such a discussion a protagonist was moved into action. The sole technique which the Director employed to focus the attention of the group on a particular role was the warm up.

THE ACTION

Once a protagonist emerged, he was encouraged, with the assistance of the trained Auxiliary Ego,

on his mind. He may be asked to do this when in any role.

Projection—The subject is asked to create a scene as he believes it will be in the future.

Role-Reversal—The subject is asked to change roles with the person with whom he is interacting in a given scene.

Mirror—Someone familiar with the behavior of the subject portrays him.

Double—A trained auxiliary ego plays the role together with the subject, providing stimuli for thought and action.

For detailed description of these techniques see J. L. Moreno, *Who Shall Survive*, Beacon House, 1953.

to act out successful and unsuccessful past experiences in which the role was involved. In each scene he was asked to reverse roles at least once so that he could attempt to act in the role of the 'other' with whom he had previously interacted. In the role of 'other', he was generally asked to soliloquize about himself, frequently with the aid of a double. Other techniques, previously mentioned, were used as they were deemed appropriate.

THE DISCUSSION

After the action, the group was encouraged to discuss the problems presented. Suggestions based on past experiences were welcomed. In the course of such discussions, if other members of the group desired to perform in the role presented, they were permitted to do so. Most often another protagonist emerged and went into action. This would result in further action and a broadened discussion.

EXTENT OF PARTICIPATION

In Treatment Group I, ten of the fourteen subjects participated as protagonists in action in occupational roles, family roles, and community roles. Three of the remaining four participated as protagonists in both occupational roles and community roles. Only one member of the group did not participate as a protagonist. All members of the group were active in discussions involving all three role clusters.

In Treatment Group II, twelve of the sixteen members participated as protagonists in action in occupational roles, family roles, and community roles. Two of the remaining four participated solely in occupational roles. The other two did not participate as protagonists at any time. All of the members of the group, including the two who had never participated as protagonists, took active part in discussions and achieved some degree of involvement in all three role clusters.

RESULTS

In order to evaluate changes that occurred in the course of the treatment, scores obtained by members of the experimental group were compared with those obtained by members of the control group, on each of the five tests that were administered before and after the treatment. When compared with the control group, the improvement of the experimental group on the Role Test was significant. The improvement of the experimental group on the Human Relations Inventory was also statistically significant. On the Empathy Test, the

Judgment in Social Situations Test and the Observation of Human Behavior Test, the mean post-test scores of the experimental group increased in a favorable direction over the pre-test scores, although the increases were not statistically significant.¹⁵

Frequency of improvement of the Negro members of the experimental group was compared with frequency of improvement of the White members on each of the five tests and no significant differences were found. Similar comparisons were made between those under twenty-five years of age and those twenty-five and over, between three educational categories, and between drug users and non-users. No significant differences were found. However, non-drug users had a gain in mean score of 3.0 on the Human Relations Inventory, and a 4.6 gain in mean score on the Observation of Human Behavior Test. Both of these gains were significant at the .05 level. Drug users did not have any gains in mean scores which were statistically significant. Other differences between the various social categories were noted but none was statistically significant.

Eighteen members of the experimental group who improved, five points or more in standard scores on the role test, were compared with ten who did not improve. These two groups are referred to as improvers and non-improvers. The non-improvers had scores on the post-role test lower than their scores on the pre-test or had an improvement of less than five points. On the Empathy Test, the difference in means between the pre-test and the post-test scores obtained by the improvers was significantly higher than the difference in means of the non-improvers, ($t = 2.33$).¹⁶ On the Human Relations Inventory, the difference in means between the pre- and post-test was 3.5 for the improvers and $-.1$ for the non-

¹⁵ The following table of t scores summarizes the results of these tests:

	Role Test	Empathy Test	Human Relations Inventory	Judgment	Observation
t-Score	4.06*	1.03	1.86**	.33	.179

* These differences would occur by chance less than once in a thousand.

** These differences would occur by chance less than five times in one hundred.

¹⁶ These differences would occur by chance less than two times in one hundred.

TABLE I
RELATION BETWEEN PAROLE VIOLATION AND
IMPROVEMENT ON ROLE TEST EXPERIMENTAL
CONTROL GROUP AND COMBINED GROUPS*
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Role Test Showed:	Non-Violators	Violators
Improvement.....	16	2
No Improvement.....	3	7
Total**.....	19	9
CONTROL GROUP		
Improvement.....	2	2
No Improvement.....	19	9
Total***.....	21	11
COMBINED GROUPS		
Improvement.....	18	4
No Improvement.....	22	16
Total****.....	40	20

* At the start of the treatment program there were thirty-three subjects in the Experimental Group and a like number in the Control Group. At the end of the study, there were thirty in the Experimental Group; two withdrew at their own request and one was transferred to another prison. The Control Group was intact. Two members of the Experimental Group and one member of the Control Group refused to take the test.

** Chance would account for this distribution only about once in one thousand times.

*** Chance would account for this distribution about fifty times in one hundred.

**** Chance would account for this distribution more than five times in one hundred.

improvers. This difference was significant, ($t = 3.78$).¹⁷ There was no significant difference between the mean scores of improvers and non-improvers on the Observation of Human Behavior Test nor on the Judgment in Social Situations Test.

On March 24, 1957, about three months after the members of the experimental and control groups used in this study were released from the prison, a check was made of parole violations. The relationship between improvement on the role test and parole violation is illustrated by Table I.

¹⁷ These differences would occur by chance less than once in a thousand times.

As can be seen from the table, subjects in the experimental group are much more likely than those in the control group to improve on their role test scores. The subjects in the experimental group who do improve on their scores are much more likely to be non-violators of parole than those who do not improve. This provides some indication of the value of the Role Test as a possible predictive device. Obviously, those persons least interested in therapy show the poorest results on tests designed to measure improvement. Here we have some evidence that they are also the poorest parole risks. Such conclusions, are, of course, tentative. Follow up studies in the years to come must provide the true measure of the effectiveness of this treatment program.

CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the results of this study indicates support for hypotheses one, three, six, seven, and eleven. The results did not support any of the other hypotheses. The fact that the other hypotheses were not supported by the tests used may, in a large part, be due to the inadequacy of the measures. Certainly, it is not likely that all of the change-producing experiences involved in this training program were within the purview of the tests. What is apparent from the results is that a group participating in a Role Training Program improved in skill at playing occupational roles. It is reasonable to infer from this fact that general role playing ability improved. There was also evidence of increased tendencies toward conformity. When the improvers in role playing ability were compared with the non-improvers, two important findings appeared. First, the improvers in role playing ability showed a significant increase in tendencies toward conformity, when compared with non-improvers. Second, the improvers showed a substantially lower rate of recidivism after three months of freedom.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

This study has demonstrated that Role Training can be used to improve the ability of inmates of a penitentiary to play occupational roles. It is also likely that in the course of this training, role playing ability, in general, was improved. Along with improvement in role playing ability, tendencies towards conformity increased. According to leading experts in penology, a major objective of correctional practice is the increase in the com-

mitment of each inmate to the conventional value system. Role Training should be useful in accomplishing this objective.

It is certainly not unusual for society to use role playing for its ends. Bram in discussing the expansion of role playing by children, in the learning process, points out how this role playing is influenced by society. He writes; "But it is at this point that society steps in and interrupts the free flow of projective fantasies with practical routines, social etiquette, school attendance, and other rituals. Role playing ability is not discarded completely but becomes rechanneled into socially designed functional patterns.¹⁸ Most of the inmates of our penal institutions do not have social agents to rechannel the role playing described by Bram, into socially designed functional patterns. Most of them have never had a successful record of employment in which the essential occupational roles could be learned. Most of them have had

very poor family relationships and their community participation has been largely in groups with delinquent subcultures. It has been demonstrated that role training administered to inmates of a prison prior to release on parole improved role playing skill, and that in the course of such training, attitudes were modified in the direction of conformity. If additional studies produce similar findings, correctional institutions should in due course, include a Role Training Program in their rehabilitation plans.

Although the subjects of this study were adult inmates of a penal institution, there is no reason for limiting this training to adults. There were no significant differences on any of the tests administered, between the scores attained by men under twenty-five years of age, and those over twenty-five years of age. Thus, it is very likely that a Role Training Program would be effective with the youthful population of a reformatory. It can also be applied in dealing with probationers.

¹⁸ JOSEPH BRAM, *LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY*, p. 21.