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THE CASEWORK ROLE IN A PENAL SETTING

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Dr. Brown's paper deals with the caseworker's role from the standpoint of the conflicts inherent in that role's performance within the penal setting. The caseworker's solutions to these conflicts are set forth in accord with the writer's observations. In addition, some modifications in the casework role are suggested to relieve these conflicts.

The restrictions and limitations on functioning, so much a part of the prison setting, have long been recognized for their influence on the inmate's conception of himself and his role in the world. Lesser attention has been paid to the effect of this environment on the personnel who have helped to create it and now must cope with it. It is the author's intention to consider this environment and to delineate some of the ways in which that environment comes to act on and affect persons' work roles and conceptions of these roles. This paper will focus on the role which casework service comes to play in the institutional setting. The field of casework is cited because it is the author's feeling that this work role, perhaps above all others, faces the greatest intensification of the role conflicts customarily met in prison work.

It must be emphasized that this study is not intended to be an exhaustive investigation of the role of casework, much less of the role of personnel generally in a prison environment.¹ It is intended to provide some insights into these areas and to provide a base for future investigation.

THE CONCEPT OF ROLE

A man's role is the face he presents to society. It is the social identity he selects or has determined for him and, as such, it largely determines how society will treat him. The role, or social face, of an individual will vary for the same person from social situation to social situation, e.g. from home to work. It must be held in mind, too, that behavior in any one role may differ for the same two

individuals with the same role designation, e.g. in the role of father. Moreover, in virtually any role there is an element both of coercion and choice. In an ascribed role where the individual is fitted to his role, he still prescribes at least some of the attributes of that role. Even the prison inmate, whose role as inmate has been wholly determined by persons and forces removed from him and thus might seem cast in granite, can still seek to "straighten up" or to give the administration "a hard time"; he can "do his own time" or be a "snitch". He has been assigned a role, but how he plays it is, at least partly, up to him. Indeed, he can even choose not to play the role at all and attempt to escape or to do his time in the "hole". Thus, even in a seemingly fixed or wholly assigned role—that of prison inmate—there can be broad modifications dictated wholly, or in part, by the individual.

The role of casework, to be sure, involves no such assignment of role. The individual here seeks the role and, once obtained, the role is an achieved, not an ascribed one. However, it is a role within an institution and, consequently, it comes with certain role expectations on the part of the institution. These may or may not be the same expectations as those held by the person being fitted to his role. Some of these are purely bureaucratic expectations. The caseworker is expected in at 7:30 A.M. He is expected to prepare his work within a certain fixed time period. He is expected to attend a certain number of meetings, carry out interviews during a certain part of his day, have his lunch within a certain relatively fixed time period, and leave not earlier than a certain time. All of these expectations are those which would be made within the context of any organization and are of such a nature that the caseworker expects them to be made of him. These

¹ It should be noted that the role of casework in the federal prison setting with which this study concerns itself will differ from casework's role in a state prison setting in which caseworkers are likely to be both less numerous and less well trained. See Johnson, *The Present Level of Social Work in Prisons*, 9 CRIME AND DELINQ. 290 (1963).

bureaucratic role demands affect work conditions only and not the basic nature of the work role or the individual's conception of himself in that role. As such, they cause little tension and adjustment to them is fairly swift and easy. It can readily be seen that bureaucratic role demands alone could come to affect the caseworker's conception of himself and his role, *e.g.* if demands were made to have caseworkers alone of all professional staff punch a time clock, or conversely if caseworkers alone of all staff could report to work at 10 A.M.

Other role expectations imposed by the organization are more capable of producing tension as these demands directly affect the nature of job duties. As opposed to the routine and fully anticipated bureaucratic role demands, these critical role demands represent limitations on functioning which may not be fully anticipated and which may materially affect the very nature of both the work role and the person's conception of himself, *e.g.* the youth who volunteers for military service to gain increased prestige and respect from others only to be subjected to the initial menial tasks and physical harassment.

The caseworker comes to his job in the prison prepared to participate in the planning of an inmate's activity and in effecting the inmate's rehabilitation insofar as this is possible. He is trained to evaluate an individual's strengths and weaknesses, his areas of conflict and to give what direction or counseling he feels necessary to the individual's better functioning. Thus, the caseworker comes to the prison setting prepared to undertake the planning and integration of the inmate's various activities in an effort to better prepare him to live effectively and lawfully outside the institution. This is the casework role as the prison constructs it,² the role as the caseworker has selected it, the role for which he has been trained.³ Prepared by his study for treatment he enters the world of custody. This is not to say that the caseworker comes to the prison world naively. He will certainly have made himself aware of many of the handicaps he must face in coming to work in a prison setting. He may have

some quixotic idea about effecting changes in, or of working around, the existing structure; but it is doubtful that he is also unaware of the pressure he will be facing in performing the duties of a treatment role in a custodial institution. However, while aware of this ideological conflict between custody and treatment which he must face, the caseworker is likely to be far less aware of the more purely psychological conflict that has as its root this ideological cleavage. It is this latter conflict with which we will be concerned.

THE CASEWORK ROLE

Herein are involved two critical role demands whose impact on the caseworker's conception of his role and of himself can, at best, be only imperfectly understood prior to his working in a penal setting. The first involves the status of rehabilitation and consequently of the worker concerned with rehabilitation. It has become something of a cliché to emphasize the concern of society, and by extension the concern of those who serve society, *i.e.* prison officials, with custody. Like all clichés there is a strong element of truth here; however, there is marked danger of exaggeration as well. Throughout the country able prison administrators supplied with adequate budgets are very much concerned with efforts at rehabilitation. What does appear to exist, however, is a system of priorities in penal administration such that while rehabilitation may be striven for, society demands top priority go to custody, and these demands must be met. Thus, correctional officers far outnumber treatment personnel and undoubtedly always will. Investigations are initiated when custody breaks down and a prisoner escapes; not when treatment breaks down and a prisoner is returned after prior efforts at rehabilitation.

In spite of this necessary custodial bias, the caseworker's job, as it is defined on paper, would appear to be the most responsible and demanding in the penal setting. He is to plan and integrate the prisoner's activities, to counsel with him, assess his progress, make whatever changes are necessary in programming his rehabilitation and, finally, to plan for the successful re-emergence of the inmate into society. Actual practice does not often measure up to this high standard. The caseworker finds himself with too many clients for whom to plan and direct activities. In spite of his training and inclination he has little time for

² See such reviews as BARNES & TEETERS, *NEW HORIZONS IN CRIMINOLOGY* 642-44, 754-57 (1951); JOHNSON, *CRIME, CORRECTION, AND SOCIETY* 603-06, (1964).

³ See especially FERGUSON, *SOCIAL WORK: AN INTRODUCTION* 401-08 (1963); Studt, *An Outline for Study of Social Authority Factors in Casework*, 35 *SOC. CASEWORK* 231 (1954).

effective counseling with inmates. He is reduced to a discussion of immediate problems or of requests for immediate favors from inmates sufficiently persistent to eke out some portion of this time. Time to assess progress in rehabilitation is very nearly non-existent and actual changes in program are as likely to be initiated by other persons, *e.g.* the inmate or custodial personnel, as by himself. Feedback about inmates' adjustment after release from the institution is minimal at best. Perhaps, more importantly, the caseworker has too little power to effectively carry out his plans. Thus, he finds himself bowing to something called "institutional need" in planning the inmates' activities such that he finds homosexuals are not assigned to certain areas and aggressive behavior disorders are not assigned to others or he learns that clerks are needed in the hospital. He finds himself, too, dependent on the far more numerous correctional officers in the carrying out of his plans as to how a man should be treated; yet he has no authority over the correctional officer and must often depend only on personal relationship with an official in custody to carry out his plans for treatment.

In this situation the caseworker will sometimes characterize himself in the same way as does his client, as a "glorified clerk"; or in the words of other caseworkers as doing a job "anyone could be trained to do in no time", or as doing a job "a monkey could be hired to do". The felt lack of status, lack of achievement, is in harsh contrast to the standards laid down in the job description. He has administrative duties without administrative powers. While there is always some discrepancy between expectation and practice, one might consider the gap between these two which exists for the caseworker and the analogous gap existing for the correctional officer.

To make matters still more difficult the caseworker cannot fall back as easily on formalized routine as can other treatment personnel who find themselves similarly armed with treatment techniques while enmeshed in a custodial philosophy.⁴ Thus, the caseworker cannot fall back on a structure of formal education classes as can treatment personnel in education; nor does he have the routinized psychological examinations and report writing of the psychologist. His work, by defini-

tion, is less circumscribed than is that of these other staff members and even though he may try, he cannot so easily carve out a niche in which he can wholly refrain from informal contacts with clients, or in which he has little need for relating his work to other staff members, particularly to custodial personnel. He, above all others, must do treatment while playing ball with custody. If he dares try to hold onto the ball and exert too much control over the game he is not likely to secure the needed cooperation of custody and administration. He can either play ball or quit the game. If he stays in the game, of necessity he must secure the good will of custodial and administrative personnel and thereby their cooperation to do his own job effectively. At the same time he must attempt to maintain his own group identity, *i.e.* treatment, and not allow himself to become merely an arm of custody, for this too is a way of quitting the game without leaving the playing field.

These temptations should not be underestimated. Where the dominant structure is authoritarian and custody-oriented, and where he must relate effectively to that structure, the caseworker is under great pains to do so while maintaining an identity separate from the larger, more powerful, organization. The caseworker must wear two hats and he is bound to wear each a little crookedly. He will not be custodian, but he is not likely to make full use of his casework techniques either. Some compromise becomes an essential part of his job. We have seen that to do his job effectively the caseworker must make himself in some respects acceptable to the prison power structure which is dominated by the custodial ideology. He must appear, at least, receptive to that ideology. This is not to say he must become its warmest adherent; rather it is to say he must affect some custodial values if he is to relate to the custodial model. Once making this commitment to work in the custodial world and to make some adaption of oneself, one's values, and one's techniques to it, it becomes essential to reduce the contradictions between one's training and prior values, *i.e.* social service, and the modifications it has been necessary to make in these values.⁵ To do this requires

⁴ Here see GOFFMAN, *ASYLUMS* 81-3 (1961) for a discussion of the "retreat into paper work, committee work or other staff-enclosed routines" by staff in the total institution.

⁵ For a discussion of the effects of placing the individual in two such contradicting positions see FESTINGER, *A THEORY OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE* 98-138 (1957). For selected research in this area see also ROSENBERG, HOVLAND, MCGURIE, ABELSON, & BREHM, *ATTITUDE ORGANIZATION AND CHANGE* (1960).

some convincing of oneself that custodial treatment, *i.e.* a tough approach to treatment, is legitimate. That this compromise is effected is illustrated by caseworkers' comments that: "You have to tell them no; you have to exert controls on them"; or "I believe if a man really wants to go to Lexington (for treatment of drug addiction) he can go when he gets out of here".

Some such justification of a changed social service role is necessary if the caseworker is to remain at peace with himself.

Thus far, we have discussed the necessity of adaptation of the casework role in an effort for the caseworker to obtain cooperation and more effectively do his job. However, there are other sources of job satisfaction that likewise demand some modification of role to allow for their achievement.

Included among factors viewed as major sources of job satisfaction within any organization are the intrinsic nature of the job, *i.e.* the job content, and one's relations with co-workers, and relations to the organizational structure. Attending first to job content, we have already explored the substantial lack of power with which the caseworker must cope in planning comprehensive programs of rehabilitation for the inmate as well as his frequent inability to receive feedback on the success of rehabilitative efforts made. This diminishes his ability to feel truly in control of the treatment process, or knowledgeable about its results; thus it diminishes job satisfaction.⁶ In addition, the recipients of whatever efforts are made, the inmates, are likely to contribute little to the caseworker's sense of effectiveness by expressing appreciation or gratitude for his efforts. Rather, the caseworker is likely to be classed by the inmate with the rest of his captors as part of the group with whom he must deal, but need not appreciate.

The other source of job satisfaction, that involving one's relations with co-workers and the organizational structure,⁷ is more readily avail-

able to the caseworker. However, to be an effective source of reward and satisfaction this source must come to include more than the casework department alone. By virtue of its inability to compete effectively with the dominant custodial ideology, association with the casework department alone is unlikely to give its members a sense of satisfaction with either achievement or status. There is likely to be sought then, the good will and approval of one's associates other than caseworkers and of the sources of power within the organization, *i.e.* of custody. In this way one can feel oneself a part of a larger and less vulnerable team. To the extent that the individual lacks other sources of job satisfaction and finds his immediate work group insufficiently supportive he is likely to make efforts to adapt himself to the more custodial framework. Thus, we might expect the newer casework trainee to be particularly susceptible to this custodial philosophy. Only with greater experience and/or increased self confidence can he deviate from the larger group and rely more largely on his own internal frame of reference by which to judge his performance. At least initially, and thereafter to the extent he feels it necessary, affiliating with a source of power and respect lends to the individual some felt measure of these qualities for himself. Where one's membership group is relatively small and lacking in strength, the appeal of support from a larger, stronger group with which one can affiliate oneself can be substantial.⁸ Thus, studies have indicated how the college student of a more conservative political background may be deprived of valued participation in the mainstream of campus life unless some modification of political views takes place. Under the threat of remaining thus isolated there is considerable pressure to modify one's attitudes and thereby achieve affiliation with the larger group.⁹ In the same way, some modification in the direction of greater controls is easily rationalized as "necessary for these men"; it thereby allows one to affiliate, in part, with the more

pany." In addition, see HERZBERG, MAUSNER, PETERSON & CAPWELL, *JOB ATTITUDE: REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND OPINION* (1957) for a review of research in this area.

⁸ For a discussion of the attractions of group membership and the effects of group membership on individual attitudes and beliefs see Cartwright and ZANDER, *GROUP DYNAMICS, RESEARCH AND THEORY* 165-260 (1960).

⁹ Newcomb, *Attitude Development as a Function of Reference Group: The Bennington Study*, in *READINGS IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY* 265-276 (Maccoby, Newcomb and Hartley ed. 1958).

⁶ See VROOM, *WORK AND MOTIVATION* 115-19 (1964) for a review of studies relating diminution in job satisfaction to a diminution in participation in planning and decision-making.

⁷ Here, see BELLOWS, *PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSONNEL IN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY* 288 (1949), who states that "the manner in which a new employee is accepted by and adjusts to his fellow workers may determine to a large extent his satisfaction with his job, his attitude toward his job, employer, boss, and the firm, his amount of production and quality of work . . . and even the length of time he remains with the com-

numerous custodial team and more powerful custodial ideology.

THE MALE ENVIRONMENT

A second role prescription which would appear of lesser importance, but which is similarly capable of contributing to compromise with the custodial model is the prevalence of the all-male environment. Consider the role of the caseworker as contrasted with that of the correctional officer in such an environment. The correctional officer has responsibility for the control of men. He has custody over other men. His role is not unlike that of the father in a family responsible for control, capable of meting out or influencing the giving of rewards as well as acting as the strong punitive figure. The caseworker, on the other hand, occupies a role in which he is called upon to appear warm and receptive to inmates' difficulties, to be giving of help and support. If punishment is necessary he calls upon the correctional officer. His position is, in some respects, not unlike that of the mother in a family giving whatever sustenance it is felt is merited and calling upon another figure when harsh punishment is needed. Indeed, the usual division of penitentiary staff labor between the AW (C), a figure with essentially masculine, controlling and punitive functions, and the AW (T), a figure with essentially feminine, receptive and giving functions, appears to heighten this familial analogy.

The caseworker, then, is thrust into this masculine environment and called upon to play an essentially non-masculine role. Social workers of all kinds have long been caricatured in feminine terms by their critics, *e.g.* as being too "soft", as "marks", as "sob sisters", as "soft touches", as too "easy", etc. Little wonder, then, that the male in a setting for anti-social, ergo aggressive, males might attempt to escape any such characterization. Moreover, the necessity of playing this essentially non-masculine role in a strongly masculine setting can be seen to combine with some already felt powerlessness in effectively charting the courses of inmates. This would appear to lend still more impetus for the worker to take on the attributes of the powerful and unqualifiedly masculine custodial philosophy, thereby associating oneself with the more powerful, masculine proponents of that philosophy. The caseworker then is tempted to begin questioning himself, not once, but constantly; "Am I being manipu-

lated", *i.e.* is he being put in the position of being too "soft", too "feminine"? This is not to say, however, that the inmate does not try to get the caseworker to do what he wants done and does not, in fact, try to manipulate the caseworker into a situation in which he will do what the inmate wishes. After all, the inmate has no tool open to him but manipulation, whether by means of logical argument, sympathetic appeal, or simple belligerence. However, the caseworker by virtue of yielding to the inmate's wishes, of allowing himself to "go soft", runs the risk of playing a feminine role. Consequently, the effort to avoid appearing to be manipulated, to appear unqualifiedly in control of the situation, can come to assume a place pre-eminent over other concerns. In this way he avoids being "conned", or appearing weak, and he can continue to project an image of himself in keeping with the self-concept desired. Yet, he must avoid intolerable disparity between action emphasizing control in the penitentiary and the treatment ideology he brings with him from his social work training. A solution lies in the increased acceptance of the custodial philosophy and its emphasis on a setting of limits as the prime treatment, with consequent de-emphasis on other areas of treatment involving a planned program of rehabilitation and the giving of assistance.

SOME SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS

While we cannot realistically plan on putting an end to all role conflict put upon the caseworker within the penal setting, we might at least concentrate efforts on relieving that conflict and affording the caseworker greater freedom, both real and felt, to carry out rehabilitation. A start might be made, as has been done in some institutions, whereby the associate warden by prior definition, holds no brief either for custody or treatment, but acts as integrator for the two functions. Accordingly, the correctional officer could thereby be drawn into the business of rehabilitation without his relinquishing custodial functions as the caseworker currently, by definition, has certain custodial duties. Merely in terms of manpower some such step is an absolute necessity. The number of qualified caseworkers available at any one time will never be sufficient to allow for intensive treatment and follow up.¹⁰ Alternatives must be explored. One such would be

¹⁰ Schnur, *The New Penology: Fact or Fiction?*, 49 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 331 (1958).

to use the manpower available in the form of the corrections officer. Here, alone, there are sufficient numbers to allow for meaningful relationships to be formed between the inmate and staff. Here an inmate's institutional problems could be met and largely resolved by persons immediately available and intimate with his case.¹¹ At the same time, the caseworker could devote a lesser portion of his time to meeting with inmates concerning problems encountered in the institution and could spend more time consulting with the correctional officers concerned with his cases and planning and discussing with them total treatment of the inmate (hereby embracing custody as treatment). Thus, staff members would not go their own ways under their separate department heads, but would cooperatively develop programs and, at least hopefully, would not undo each other's work. Glaser notes that the correctional officer has considerable real and potential influence on inmates and details how steps have already been taken to reduce the distance between the caseworker and correctional officer in some institutions.¹²

¹¹ This would appear particularly true of the correctional officers functioning in work supervisory capacities. Not only are these officers involved in an area of functioning vitally important to the inmate's rehabilitation, but they appear in a more normal capacity, i.e. that of boss or supervisor, and one might expect their opinions and ideas to be more tolerable than those of the officer in the housing unit or corridor.

¹² GLASER, *THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PRISON AND PAROLE SYSTEM* 192-213 (1964).

A reduction of the caseworker's appointment schedule would free him for a second important area of functioning—that of family and community contact. Where the family or community resources are intact and non-criminal, the encouragement of continued communication would appear to be a most powerful force in effecting rehabilitation of the inmate. Where such resources are not available, but deemed necessary, the caseworker could attempt to stimulate them. The family, or selected community resources—provided they are healthy and non-criminal—are likely to be the only meaningful force for good the caseworker can rely upon from the onset of his contact with the inmate.¹³ The staff member, be he the officer assigned to a tower or the chaplain, is initially a member of the out-group and can become a relevant figure for the inmate only with considerable effort and real difficulty—if at all.

Where the caseworker concentrates efforts on (1) the rehabilitation program of the inmate, using extensive consultation with the correctional staff, and (2) on the maintenance or establishment of whatever "healthful" community contacts are available, the caseworker may be able to perform the rehabilitative role for which he has been trained without intensification of conflict between his and other roles.

¹³ See SYKES, *SOCIETY OF CAPTIVES*, 65 (1958) for a discussion of the gradual separation of the inmate from the free community.