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ETHNICITY, PROFESSIONALISM, AND BLACK PATERNALISM:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES \*

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BACKGROUND

In recent years, the field of social welfare has been making an effort to close the gap between agency services and community needs. One of the reasons for this gap has been the implicit conflict between client, professional, and agency needs. One of the methods to help agencies more effectively serve poor communities has been the introduction of the indigenous non-professional as part of the service delivery system. Nonprofessionals provided two functions: bridging relationships between agency and community, and helping to enhance the quality of services by relieving presumed staff shortage.

Social welfare legislation of the 1960's reflected a renewed interest in the plight of the poor. This legislation, connected to an active civil rights movement, helped expand services to the poor. Mobilization For Youth represented a major experiment in the utilization of nonprofessionals in enhancing services to poor people in America. Charles Grosser, who was actively involved in this experimental program, conceptualized the role of the nonprofessional from this advantage point. Grosser (1966) defined the indigenous nonprofessional as:

"...a peer of the client and shares a common background, language, ethnic origin, style and groups of interest... he 'belongs', he is a 'significant other', he is 'one of us'. The style of the nonprofessional is significantly related to his effectiveness, because it matches the client (61)".

George Brager (1965) summarized the complex function of the indigenous nonprofessional as a social-class mediator. He specifically noted:

"One important programmatic goal in hiring nonprofessionals is to increase the meaningful participation of other urban slum residents in social welfare and community programs...The indigenous worker may also serve as a 'bridge', interpreting the residents to the agency and its personnel and vice versa (34)".

In addition, to the social-class mediating function, Riessman (1965) described another function of the helper principle: "as the nonprofessional benefit from their new helping roles, they may actually become more effective workers and may therefore provide more help to others at a new level. Thus...a positive onward and upward spiral...may result (89)".

After evaluating the Mobilization For Youth experiment utilizing nonprofessionals, Grosser challenged the effectiveness of the social-class mediator function put forth by Brager and Riessman: "The indigenous staff member responds more like the middle-class professional worker than like the lower-class client. We suspect that recruitment, socialization, and indoctrination strengthen the tendency toward middle-class values in indigenous staff member (1966:62)".

Pearl and Riessman (1965) advocated job development and training as essential elements of a comprehensive action strategy designed to attack poverty. Training the nonprofessional dictated a humanistic approach that would maximize his unique attributes and skills. Rationale for this action strategy was two-fold. First, the nonprofessional should not constitute cheap labor for social service agencies. Nonprofessionals should have opportunity for "truly substantial advancement in job station (13)". Second, the bridge function should be reinforced through training. The former rationale has manifested itself into what is popularly termed the 'career-ladder' concept. The outcome of the career-ladder program should be verticle mobility for the nonprofessional through continuous education and employment advancement. Pearl and Riessman noted:

"The new career concept has as a point of departure the creation of jobs normally allotted to highly-trained professionals or technicians, but which could be performed by the unskilled, inexperienced, and relatively untrained worker; or, the development of activities not currently performed by anyone, but for which there is a readily acknowledge need and which can also be satisfactorily accomplished by the unskilled worker (Pearl and Riessman, 1965:13)".

Utilization of the career-ladder concept, as a mechanism to attack poverty should not be separated from the "bridge" function. Employment of indigenous persons by social service agencies should benefit the new worker as well as the agency. In a later publication, Riessman (1969:33) used the term 'cross-socialization' to describe this phenomenon. Kurzman (1970), Berman and Haug (1973), and Houston (1970), are representative of professionals who advocated reassessment of the career-ladder concept in social welfare. It is time to stop romanticizing the career-ladder concept and begin critically to evaluate its latent functions. Specifically, the career-ladder concept 'may possibly be encouraging the extension of social service at the risk of curtailing social change (Kurzman, 1970: 23)'. "The possibility that low-income, indigenous para-professional is employed by the institution for the purpose of diverting or deflecting the militancy of community groups...the potential of formal co-optation of indigenous leaders"...appear to be elements of the new career movement that make change difficult (23-4). The pathway out of this dilemma, according to Berman and Haug (1973:57) and Kurzman (1970:26-7), is a "second career movement" predicated on the functions of advocacy and ombudsman in which the indigenous nonprofessional has the potential to help humanize the human services industry. Thus, the nonprofessional has an important role to play in fostering accountability between social agency and client-system.

#### PROBLEM AND PROCEDURE

The assumption around the use of nonprofessionals as members of the agency team suggest that the "bridge" function is enhanced when the new worker and the client-system are similar in such factors as ethnicity, class, cultural background, religion, and so on. Data from a 1968 survey tested Grosser's hypothesis: "that staff similarity with the client in ethnicity... will result in greater accuracy regarding the client and his community (1966:60)". Grosser's hypothesis was tested at a black staffed community action agency, serving a black ghetto in a large metropolitan city in the northeastern section of the United States. Harlem, U.S.A. is the fictitious name for this community. The sample was initially divided into two groups: professional and nonprofessional. Each group was further stratified along departmental lines to make the sample representative of total agency staff. A standardized questionnaire was given to both professional and nonprofessional in order to make direct comparisons more feasible. The two questionnaires consisted of identical questions. The instrument administered to professionals, in addition, asked how they thought a typical adult resident of Harlem, U.S.A. would respond to identical questions of community need.

This technique provided a means to explore the effect of professionalism on staff perception. The study assumed that non-professional staff would be closer to perceptions of adult residence of Harlem, U.S.A. based on similarity of blackness and socioeconomic factors - i.e., class, education, occupation, and so forth. An index was developed on the basis of the accuracy with which staff members predicted community perceptions. Ratings for professional and nonprofessional were trichotomized into high, medium, and low agreement with adult residents of Harlem, U.S.A., and statistically tested for significance.

FINDINGS

Findings regarding comparative self-perception of adult residents of Harlem, U.S.A. by professional and nonprofessional workers were: one-quarter (25%) of the nonprofessional staff and half (50%) of the professional staff were in low agreement with the community. Nearly one-third of the combined staff were in medium agreement - 33% and 36% respectively for nonprofessional and professional. Significantly, nearly half (42%) of the non-professional were in high agreement with the community; while, only 14% of professionals were similarly categorized. A statistical measure of analysis of variance indicated a significant difference between professional and nonprofessional staff. Table 1. presents the distribution of staff agreement with community perceptions.

Table 1 Agreement with Residents of Harlem, U.S.A. Perceptions of their community by Agency Staff		
Agreement with Black Community	NONPROFESSIONAL %	PROFESSIONAL %
LOW	25	50
MEDIUM	33	36
HIGH	42	14
No. Cases	(28)	(28)
Percent	(100)	(100)

F Test, 8.55 at .01 level of significance

Findings partially supported Grosser's hypothesis that ethnic similarity, between staff and community, is likely to create greater similarities in perceptions around community need with the consequence of more effective service for the client-system. Nonprofessional's closer agreement was a consequence of similar social class position instead of similarity in ethnicity as Grosser (1966:60) suggested. To explore the possible influence of class on nonprofessional staff's self-perceptions, the technique of cross tabulation was utilized. This study assumed that family of orientation had greater influence in molding perception than family of procreation. Thus, worker's class was operationatized as father's occupation. When father's occupation was dichotomized into non-manual and manual status, the modal category was manual which indicated a similarity with the adult residents of Harlem, U.S.A. Thus, the majority of nonprofessional staff had a blue-collar home orientation. When one focused on where staff spent their childhood-in terms of rural, urban, or suburban community-the overwhelming majority of nonprofessionals were raised in a urban community. Nonprofessional workers, better than 2-to-1, spent their adulthood in the target community; thereby, increasing their closeness of perception with adults of Harlem, U.S.A. The variable of age, though generally not associated with class, showed a strong relationship between youth and high agreement. This paper assumed the finding of age may be understood in the life orientation of the workers. Older professionals tend to be influenced by the 'assimilation' ideology which emphasizes individual accomplishment and responsibility. In contrast, younger nonprofessionals were oriented to a 'separatist' ideology that stressed collective achievement and communal responsibility. Nonprofessionals were overwhelming younger than their professional counterparts. Additionally, they were four-to-one in high agreement with perceptions of the black community.

The factors of father's manual occupational status, childhood and adulthood place of residence suggested that the non-professional is similar to the typical adult resident in Harlem, U.S.A. The dynamics of social class and physical proximity suggested that nonprofessionals are closer to the target population in their perceptions of community need. Therefore, he should be able to function as an effective 'bridge' between agency and community.

The other part of Grosser's hypothesis, that dealt with professional staff, was not supported by this study. Father's occupational status did not show a positive relationship with the predictive capacity of professionals serving Harlem, U.S.A. They, like nonprofessionals, spent their childhood in urban areas. Residency (childhood and adulthood) did not sensitize professionals to community needs. Thus, blackness, class, and place of residence

did not explain professional's low perceptual agreement with adults from Harlem, U.S.A.

Professionalism had a stronger influence on professional's perception than either blackness or social class. The finding about professionalism is this paper's major point of discussion. I will discuss findings about professionals in light of the process of professional socialization. The literature suggest that professionals are often in conflict between demands of the client-system and the agency serving the client. This conflict is exaggerated by the fact that bureaucratic organizations have a conservative orientation. Thus, social agencies ignore client and professional needs.

### DISCUSSION

This study addressed itself to the issue of staff and client similarity based on ethnicity - blackness. My review of the literature did not find a single study that addressed itself to the issue under investigation. However, the literature revealed a vast amount of material on the ideological conflict between professionalism and bureaucracy. This conflict assumes client-orientation of professions is seldom shared by agency bureaucracy. Thus, professionalism and bureaucracy constitute the conceptual framework within which findings of this study are discussed. Initial inspection of findings suggested that professionalism explained the relationship between blackness and perception of nonprofessional and professional staff serving Harlem, U.S.A.

Vollmer and Mills (1966), recognized authorities on the professionalization process, stated:

"the sociological approach to professionalism is one that view a profession as an organized group which is constantly interacting with the society that forms its matrix...and which creates its own subculture requiring adjustments to it as a prerequisite for career success (10)".

Their emphasis on 'conformity' as a prerequisite for career success implies conflict between individual and professional goals. Slater (1970) elaborated on this conflict for traditional professions as restriction of membership and minimum service at maximum cost to the client (136). My paper's position is that Slater's remarks are applicable to the social work profession. Dysfunctions of professionalism are germane to this study. The socialization process among professionals have

generally assumed that, in addition to learning technical skills, one acquires values, attitudes, and a new self-concept. Concern with the development of a new self-concept has special meaning for this research. According to Kadushin (1969), Dante and Gurovitch (1972:1178), and Corwin (1961) the professional self-concept is derived from the content of the socialization process. Individual factors are not significant. Specifically, "no so-called background variables of class, ethnicity...is related to...self-concept (Kadushin, 1969:394)". "Of primary significance...is the grasping of new conceptions... which create transformation in the relevant perceptions and beliefs (Corwin, 1961:604)". The professionalization process is here summarized as an exchange between worker's autonomy and his professional ideological commitment. A professional frequently becomes a slave to his profession in exchange for his and his clients autonomy. Bay and Bay (1973) defined this phenomena as 'professional dominance', the tendency to "emasculate...professions and papaprofessionals as change agents (62)". Epstein (1970) did not see this conflict as an 'either or' situation. Through construction of a 'role orientation and conflict-approval typology', he concluded that "bureaucratic orientation is conservatizing, a client orientation is radicalizing, and a professional orientation-taken alone - is neither conservatizing nor radicalizing (92)". The critical question professionals must respond to is: for whom are they going to utilize their professionalism? Professionals, despite their ethnic similarity (blackness) with Harlem, U.S.A. were very poor predictors; in contrast, nonprofessionals were good predictors. This general finding is logical in terms of the influence professionalization has on the development of one's self-concept. Nonprofessional staff have not had their perceptions of Harlem, U.S.A. distorted. The classical dilemma confronting social service practitioners is how to reconcile the conflict between client orientation of the helping profession with the conservative viewpoint of agency bureaucracy.

Jennings (1970), Bennis (1965:34), Wasserman (1971), Hardcastle (1971:60-1), Hanlan (1971:198), and Pruger (1973) recognized this complex situation and proposed several solutions which are summarized. First, the professional must stand by the client by adopting the role of advocate, in addition to, the traditional enabler role. Second, agency bureaucracy must redefine its mission in humanistic terms. Thus, the agency must become a flexible-adaptable mechanism where practitioners are able to integrate client, professional, and agency interest.

The finding that black professionals were poor predictors revealed a pervasive phenomenon appropriately conceived as 'black paternalism'. The tendency for some black professionals to exploit or prostitute their blackness for personal, instead of collective,

goals. Frazier (1947), (1957), (1957), and (1962), Wiley (1967), Richard (1969), Wilcox (1972), and Funnye (1970), to mention a few, have documented this phenomenon among blacks as a reaction to institutional racism in American society. Frazier, one of America's most noted sociologist, spent most of his professional career documenting this phenomenon as black professionals 'vested interest' in segregation. Black professionals receive social, economic, political, and psychological rewards from taking advantage of their less fortunate group members. Wilcox (1972), in a provocative open letter to black educators in higher education, addressed himself to the issue of black paternalism: "Those with higher education usually come...to exploit the miseries of the local residents...(103)". Black paternalism is augmented by the communal ideology of the black power movement.

### IMPLICATIONS

Findings of this study suggest several theoretical and practical implications for social welfare services. However, implications are restricted to the phenomenon 'black paternalism'. This paper takes the position that black paternalism is a consequence of institutional racism. Racism manifests itself in a self-concept that places utmost importance on professional success - political, social, economic, and psychological - which comes at the expense of black people. This black paternalistic self-concept is best understood from an 'assimilationist model' which places importance on individual, instead of collective, achievement and responsibilities.

This paper strongly advocates a 'new' self-concept for black professionals predicated on the communal-orientation of the black power ideology. The norms of the American social system defines black professionals first as black; and second, as professionals. Black professionals in America thus live a marginal existence. This paper strongly suggest that blacks will have to create viable educational mechanisms that will aid the development of a professional self-concept founded upon collectivism. This communal-collective orientation for the professional is not possible under current conditions of racism. Thus, a 'separatist model' is advocated. The 'separatist model' will provide black professionals opportunity to reconstruct reality in terms of the 'right to fail' doctrine which demands freedom of self-determination.

This new community-oriented professional self-concept provides an antidote to black paternalism. Thus, black professionals can aid black people in their struggle to receive relevant social welfare services.

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