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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ETHNICITY IN STAFFING CORRECTIONS

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Until recently the total thrust of efforts to improve the staffing of corrections has been towards the recruitment and development of trained personnel. In the past decade it has begun to be recognized that factors other than training have to be taken into account. Largely as a result of California's groundbreaking Community Treatment Project the personality of staff is now considered by some to be as important as their training and in a few programs those with certain types of personality and training have been assigned to work, i.e., "matched", with juvenile offenders who have consonant types of personality and problems.¹ Although less insistently and influentially, there has also been recognition that the ethnicity² of correctional personnel has a bearing on the effectiveness of treatment of offenders, particularly those from minority groups. However, little has been done in the seven years since the first and last discussion of this subject in the literature to implement its conclusion that "cultural differences among offenders" indicates the need for "recruitment of increased numbers (of correctional personnel) from minority groups."³ There has been some increase in recruiting Blacks, but this has taken place mainly as a fair employment measure because of the new political power of this group rather than out of concern for improving treatment, as evidenced by the fact that very few Chicano and Puerto Rican personnel work with the considerable numbers of offenders from these politically weaker groups in the United States' southwest and northeast. This discussion addresses itself to the failure to recognize the crucial importance for corrections of the ethnicity of its service personnel. It presents a theoretical rationale for and some program and policy implications of such recognition.

The prevailing disregard of ethnicity in staffing correctional programs can be attributed to racism, credentialism and other maladies of our society. Admitting these are contributing factors, I contend that the principal cause is the individualistic orientation of the helping professions and social welfare in general and social work and the field of corrections in particular, reflecting the dominant WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) ideology of the United States which minimizes the significance when it does not deny the existence of cultural differences and the ethnic groups from which these derive. Since such differences are undeniable in the racially and linguistically distinctive minority groups which have lately been insisting

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upon their separate identities, they have finally begun to be attended to. However, even after Attica, conforming to the WASP-middle class norms of the helping professions⁴ to which it looks for leadership, the importance of ethnic differences is still greatly underestimated and inadequately responded to by the correctional establishment. This is manifested in the accepted position that all that is necessary for staff of any ethnic background to work effectively with offenders from other ethnic groups is an understanding of their culture.⁵ I contend that even the most competent professional use of a deep understanding of the offender's culture by staff of different cultural background can not lead to correctional rehabilitation. For the latter is a social process through which the offender "unlearns" anti-social norms and values (social control) and internalizes socially acceptable ones (socialization) of his particular community, essentially his ethnic group,⁶ in order to return to and assume a constructive role in it. And, as with all social control and socialization, this can take place successfully only if members of the offender's ethnic group are among the chief agents of this process, i.e., the correctional staff.

In their colloquial and political senses, the terms social control and socialization have problematical connotations for helping professionals. However, they are used here in the social scientific sense for the two most general processes of social systems. Social control has been defined as the process which "tends to counteract a tendency to deviance from fulfillment of role expectations" and socialization as the process which instills these expectations, "develop(ing) in individuals...the commitments and capacities which are essential prerequisites of their future role performance."⁷ It is obvious that corrections involves social control. However, that it also involves socialization is not so evident. Other definitions of socialization bring out its applicability to correctional rehabilitation: "the acquisition of attitudes and values, of skills and behavior patterns making up social roles established in the social structure;" "the...process by which an individual [develops] behavior...customary and acceptable for him according to the standards of his group."⁸ While it is not necessary for present purposes to go much beyond general definition of this complex phenomenon, two further points must be made in light of age levels and circumstances of juvenile and criminal offenders.

Although many psychoanalytical-oriented hold that socialization takes place principally if not exclusively during early childhood in the family, it is now generally considered by scientific students of the subject to be a "continuous process which is going on at all stages of development" in all social institutions which the individual participates in.⁹ From the foregoing it is clear that corrections involves the process of socialization, but correctional practice has not been seen in this light until quite recently. This has been the case despite the long-understood fact that correctional institutions, as differentiated from correctional services or practice, are agencies of socialization. Folk wisdom, practice knowledge, and scientific study all tell us that, in opposition to their objectives, correctional institutions tend to function as schools of criminality, i.e., they socialize offenders into antisocial and criminal roles.¹⁰ What I am

calling attention to here is the relatively new conception of correctional practice as a process of non-criminal socialization or resocialization, replacing the offender's anti-social roles, norms and values (removed through social control) with ones acceptable to his community.¹¹ Exemplifying this, Studt's 1965 discussion of professional practice in corrections treats it as "resocialization" which is explicitly considered to be a combination of social control and socialization.¹² Similarly, although not using these terms, a 1966 publication reflecting the views of leaders in juvenile corrections and criminology characterizes the treatment of delinquency as "a problem of learning and unlearning."¹³

If corrections is a process of social control and socialization, what are the implications for the issue under discussion? In general terms, it implies that the basic requirements for these processes must prevail in corrections for it to achieve its goal of rehabilitation, i.e., resocializees and resocializing agents must be participants in the same face-to-face group and members of the same community and sub-culture of which the group and its norms are a part. Since the most important community for most Americans, particularly those overrepresented among adjudicated criminals and delinquents, is their ethnic group,¹⁴ this implies that the staff of correctional programs must include individuals of the same ethnicity as offenders if resocialization of the latter into their community is to take place.

This conclusion is not concurred with by others who view correctional rehabilitation as resocialization. While they generally agree that it should be patterned as far as possible after the normal processes of socialization and social control and therefore see the need for involving in the resocializing process members of the offender's community, i.e., his ethnic group, they attach no importance to the ethnic identity of correctional staff. For example, Studt holds that "resocialization must be modeled after the primary socializing processes, using the same social and personal resources to accomplish its goals." She infers from this the need for going beyond traditional treatment patterns and organizing for each offender a "resocializing community" approximating his normal community. Due to institutional constraints, in residential programs Studt sees this consisting of certain inmates and staff. It may be assumed that among such inmates would be (if available) members of the offender's ethnic group, for Studt advocates that non-residential programs include in the "resocializing team...significant persons who...live in the [offender's] normal community...among the offender's family, his peers, his employment associates...." While this, in effect, acknowledges the essentiality of the common sociocultural background of resocializees and resocializing agents, it does so only as regards non-staff. The ethnic identity of staff is not even implicitly touched upon. On the other hand, fully half the article is devoted to the many professional skills workers require for carrying out their responsibilities in the resocialization process. In addition to organizing and directing the resocializing team, such skills are seen as enabling the worker to make "a unique contribution to the resocializing process as the person who helps the offender learn from his new social experience."¹⁵ But these skills

can be effectively employed in carrying out these responsibilities, particularly the crucial latter one, only if certain social and psychological prerequisites relating to staff and offenders are present.¹⁶ As one of the few discussions of this problem in the literature suggests:

One important factor in understanding why some [juvenile correctional] institutions are able to mobilize inmate support for staff goals of [rehabilitation], and why some inmates are effectively socialized by their institutional experience, while others are not, is the social-psychological process of identification. Unless inmates come to accept staff members as significant others, unless they come to feel a part of the institution so that its goals become their goals, we can hardly expect the staff to enlist the aid of the inmate culture, or to be successful in its task of people-changing.¹⁷

I contend that a major if not the principal obstacle to the acceptance by offenders of staff as "significant others" in the resocializing process is their different ethnic identities. The characteristic failure of offenders to feel part of the correctional resocializing system dominated by ethnically different staff is not, as generally supposed, mainly the result of prejudice. Even when mutually respectful relations exist, it is primarily due to the fact that ethnically disparate staff and offenders have different, more or less conflicting conceptions and expectations of social roles and the values and norms they incorporate. One recent discussion makes essentially the same point.

Life style, perception and value systems vary. They are different in kind in different classes and ethnic groups, not only different in degree. Moreover, not only the contents of the value systems differ, but also the way they are organized and transmitted...Our trouble [in corrections], then, has to do with value -- heterogeneity in time and place, with occupational, class, regional and ethnic variation, all of which could be complementary and compatible, but evidently are not. There is a clash of values, goals, and philosophy... If there is an important difference between his ["the correctional worker's"] cultural background and that of his clients, he is a stranger in more ways than one to the very people with whom he is expected to work.¹⁸

The absence of consensus on role definition and role expectations which this passage brings out is what, in our view, makes successful resocialization of offenders of one ethnic group by staff of another extremely difficult if not impossible.¹⁹

If one accepts the validity of this position, does it follow that only staff of the same ethnicity as offenders can provide them effective correctional services? No. From what is known of the processes of socialization and social control, although desirable it is not necessary for the worker who has the one-to-one counseling

relationship with the offender to be a member of the latter's ethnic group. For, like all socialization and social control, correctional resocialization is a social process in which many individuals and groups take part. This is why Studt insists upon a "resocializing team" or "resocializing community" rather than exclusive reliance upon the traditional one-to-one counseling approach. However, it does follow that the resocializing team should include staff of the same ethnic background as the offender in positions of authority. Not only so that they will be among the "significant others" that the offender is resocialized by but that being part of the resocializing system they facilitate and maintain the offender's identification with it leading to his "accept(ing) its goals, values, and norms as his own." In stressing the importance for resocialization of such "institutional identification" as both alternative and complement to identification with given individuals, Adamek and Dager note that the former can be brought about by various organizational strategies.²⁰ But, as with all other writers on the subject, they do not relate these to ethnic identity of staff and offenders.

Seven years ago, the proceedings of the only conference to date on cultural differences in corrections concluded:

Certain correctional systems are now experimenting with attempts to classify offenders by psychological type and match these with correctional workers. Similar experiments need to be undertaken in matching worker and offender in terms of cultural variables.²¹

The need for this has been underscored by the findings of the major study of psychological matching that there are very different proportions of certain personality types among offenders of different ethnic groups and that the typology being used can not be applied to substantial numbers of Black and Chicano offenders.²²

Studies of the effects of ethnic similarity and difference in staffing corrections should include, but not be limited to, matching worker and offender. From the viewpoint of correctional rehabilitation, it is important that they also compare the effects on offenders of institutions and staff teams of varying ethnic composition. Many such studies are needed to guide practice and policy in this area, but I submit that there is already substantial evidence supporting the view that the ethnic factor is a significant one in staffing corrections -- that, in fact, it is significant in staffing all social services²³ -- and that administrators and other correctional personnel are professionally obligated to address themselves to this issue without delay.

While further complicating an already complex issue, in doing so the fallacy of considering only racial and linguistic minority groups to be ethnically distinct should be avoided. Recognizing analogous sociocultural differences among Italian, Jewish, Polish, etc. "whites"²⁴ and adopting the approach advocated by this paper towards them as well as Blacks, Chicanos, Indians, Puerto Ricans, etc. may seem an insuperable administrative problem. However, it could turn out to be less a

problem than an essential component of programs more effectively dealing with the problem of correctional resocialization.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ted B. Palmer, "Personality Characteristics and Professional Orientations of Five Groups of Community Treatment Project Workers," California Treatment Project Report Series 1967, No. 1; Ted B. Palmer, "An Overview of Matching in the Community Treatment Project," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Psychological Association, San Diego California, March 1968.
2. Ethnicity here denotes the sociocultural identity deriving from membership in "any group which is defined or set off by race, religion, or national origin, or in some combination of these categories." Milton M. Gordon, Assimilation in American Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 27-28.
3. Rudy Sanfilippo and Jo Wallach, "Cultural Differences: Implications for Corrections" in Roma K. McNickle, ed., Differences that Make the Difference: Papers Presented at a Seminar on the Implications of Cultural Differences for Corrections, Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, Washington, D.C., August 1967, p. 67.
4. Despite considerable change in the direction of social modalities of helping in accord with the cultural identities of those helped, the professions are still on the whole subject to the critique on this score written three decades ago by Kingsley Davis, "Mental Hygiene and the Class Structure" in Patrick Mullahy, ed., A Study of Interpersonal Relations (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1949).
5. For example, see the views of officials of the Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training in the "Foreword" and "Introduction" to McNickle, op. cit.
6. For the most extensive discussion of the ethnic group as community see Gordon, op. cit., pp. 34-54. Also see E.K. Francis, "The Nature of the Ethnic Group," American Journal of Sociology, 52 (March, 1947), p. 399 and Robin M. Williams, Jr., American Society (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1963), p. 492.
7. Talcott Parsons, The Social System (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1949), p. 206 and Talcott Parsons, Robert F. Bales et al, Family, Socialization and Interaction Process (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), p. 298.
8. Robert K. Merton, George N. Reader, Patricia M. Kendall, The Student Physician (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 40-41; Irvin L. Child, "Socialization" in Gardner

Lindzey, ed., Handbook of Social Psychology (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1954), Vol. I, p. 655.

9. Ibid., p. 687 and Clyde Kluckhohn, "Culture and Behavior" in ibid., p. 922. For a discussion of "socialization in extra-familial social systems" see Parsons, op. cit., Chapter VI.
10. E.g., Peter R. Garabedian, "Social Roles and Process of Socialization in the Prison Community," Social Problems, (Fall, 1963); Stanton Wheeler, "Socialization in Correctional Communities," American Sociological Review, 26 (October, 1961).
11. E.g., Raymond J. Adamek and Edward Z. Dager, "Social Structure, Identification and Change in a Treatment-Oriented Institution," American Sociological Review, 33 (December, 1963); Lloyd W. McCorkle and Richard Korn, "Resocialization within the Walls," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, 293 (May, 1954).
12. Elliot Studt, "Social Work Practice in Correctional Services," Encyclopedia of Social Work (1965), pp. 220-222. While Studt sees probation and parole as part of the correctional re-socializing system, she emphasizes the role of residential programs. Others see a great role for non-residential programs, e.g., James E. Garrett and Peter O. Rompler, Community Resocialization: A New Perspective (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. Press, 1966)
13. T.C.N. Gibbons and R.H. Ahrenfeldt, Cultural Factors in Delinquency (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966), p. 95 and Chapter VI. This volume consists of position papers and consensus reports of an international conference on delinquency.
14. It must be noted that the crucial importance of ethnicity is not called into question but supported by the importance of social class. For each ethnic group has its own social class structure which supersedes that of the larger society for its members. See Gordon, ibid.
15. Studt, op. cit., pp. 221-222. There is also no discussion of the social identity of staff in Elliot Studt, Sheldon L. Messinger and Thomas P. Wilson, C-Unit: Search for Community in Prison (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968). Similarly, reflecting the view of most leaders in juvenile corrections, Gibbons and Ahrenfeldt hold that "learning and unlearning" can take place through "guided group interaction" irrespective of social identities of those concerned. Gibbons and Ahrenfeldt, op. cit., pp. 102-105.
16. Despite the importance attributed to the worker in the last citation, Studt considers his direct role in helping the offender "learn" only one of the many factors involved in resocialization. In our view it is (typically) the primary factor. For the primacy of correctional staff in resocialization due to their superior position, reciprocal relation and control of reward and punishment vis-a-vis the offender see Adamek and Dager, op. cit., p. 932.

17. Ibid. "People changing" is equated by Adamek and Dager with socialization which is considered the "business of such [juvenile correctional] organizations."
18. Peter O. Rompler, "Some Theoretical Approaches: Application to the Task of Probation" in Garrett and Rompler, op. cit., pp. 56-57. Italics in the original.
19. The importance of role consensus and complementarity for re-socialization is discussed in some detail by Studt, who includes correctional staff and other "specialists in remedial services" with members of his family and community among "the offender's role partners (who) together provide the human relationships that are the basic tools of any socializing process and...resocialization." Studt, op. cit., p. 221.
20. Adamek and Dager, op. cit., pp. 932-933.
21. Sanfilippo and Wallach, op. cit., p. 68.
22. Jerome Beker, "A Critical Appraisal of the California Differential Treatment Typology of Adolescent Offenders," Criminology, 10 (May 1972), pp. 29, 38, 44.
23. Alfred J. Kutzik, "Class and Ethnic Factors," in Florence W. Kaslow, ed., Issues in Human Services (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1972).
24. For evidence of the existence and salience of ethnicity among "whites" see Gordon, op. cit. and Andrew M. Greeley, Why Can't They Be Like Us? (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1971).