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The Influence of the Agency Environment on Clinical Practice

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE AGENCY ENVIRONMENT
ON CLINICAL PRACTICE*

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ABSTRACT

In an in-depth, exploratory study of their percep-
tion of treatment in a family service agency, it was
found that clients stressed the impact of the agency's
social and physical environment on the helping process
and its outcome. Workers, in contrast, took the environ-
ment for granted or had little to say about it. This
paper discusses these findings and selected practice
implications.

It has long been recognized that an agency's phys-
ical and social environment influences the nature and
quality of services provided by its staff. Social work
theorists with diverse orientations to practice have
stressed that the agency setting should be viewed as an
important part of the therapeutic process (cf. Hollis,
1972; Perlman, 1957; and Smalley, 1967). However, the

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specific nature and extent of these influences have not
been clearly understood or considered fully. In partic-
ular, there has been limited exploration of clients' views
regarding the impact of the agency environment on the
service.

As we are increasingly realizing, feedback from
clients can be useful in suggesting practice implications
and issues for further investigation. In this paper I
therefore discuss the views of clients and workers re-
garding the role of the agency environment in clinical
practice. In so doing, I draw upon selected findings
from an in-depth study of client and worker perception
of treatment in a family service agency (Maluccio, 1979).

NATURE OF STUDY

The purpose of the overall study was to learn how
clients and workers view their interaction, their satis-
faction or dissatisfaction with it, and the factors in-
fluencing its course and outcome.

The study was carried out at a mid-sized sectarian,
multi-function family service agency located in an urban
area in the northeastern United States. The agency is
comparable to most member agencies of the Family Service
Association of America in respect to size, staff and pro-
grams. The research focused on its counseling program.

The study used an exploratory research design.
Data were collected primarily in qualitative form through
individual, in-depth interviews with a randomly selected
sample of 33 adult clients (in 25 cases) and their social
workers soon after termination of the service.[1]

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[1]Clients agreed to participate in the research in 25
of the 28 cases contacted. For details on sample selec-
tion and other aspects of the study's methodology, see
Maluccio (1979:24-46).

The sample was representative of the client popula-
tion at the agency. The majority of clients were white,
married, Catholic women under the age of 40 who came from
diverse socio-economic backgrounds and who had sought help
with marital or parent-child problems. Most of them had
completed at least high school, and nearly half had
attended college. The duration of contact with the agency
was less than six months for over two-thirds of the cli-
ents. The number of treatment interviews ranged from 1
to 45, with the average being 10.

Each of the 11 social workers who were active in
the agency's counseling program participated in the
study. All were employed by the agency on a full-time
basis. All but one held M.S.W. degrees and had majored
in casework. The exception was a B.A. level worker with
extensive practice experience. As a group, the workers
were highly experienced, with years of post-M.S.W. em-
ployment ranging from two to twenty.

The interviews with clients as well as practition-
ers were held soon after termination of the service. I
conducted all of the interviews with clients and with
practitioners, in their homes and offices respectively.
I had no prior information about the client other than
his or her name and address. First I interviewed the
client and then, a few days later, his or her worker. By
plan, I did not share with the worker anything that the
client had told me, in order to maintain confidentiality
as well as avoid influencing the workers' responses.

With clients as well as practitioners, I used an
interview guide covering content areas related to each
phase of the helping process and its outcome.[2] The in-
terviews included both open-ended questions asked of all

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[2] I employed the focused interview delineated by Mer-
ton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956). For full copies of the
interview guides with clients and social workers, see
Maluccio (1979:220-233).

respondents and specific questions probing into the client's or worker's views, impressions, feelings, and perceptions. Essentially the same questions were asked of clients and practitioners. Typical questions pertaining to the agency environment were:

> "What did you think about the agency as a whole?"

> "What did you think about the appearance of the agency?"

> "What could be done to make people feel more comfortable in going to an agency such as this?"

All interviews were taped. Data were analyzed through the "inspection" procedure described by Blumer (1969) for use in qualitative research.[3]

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Over two-thirds of the clients offered positive comments about the agency's social environment, that is, the agency's staff, social climate or atmosphere. Representative remarks were:

> We got a very warm reception.
> Everyone was friendly.
> Very pleasant people.
> They were all ready to help you.
> The lady at the front desk was so pleasant.
> They always seemed so glad to see me.
> You didn't feel like a cog in a wheel.

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[3]The essence of this procedure is the intensive, focused examination of the empirical material relating to the "analytical elements" or concepts and variables being studied.

Several more detailed quotes from clients follow:

Miss Kraft: It was good the way they handled it. Well, you didn't have to go through a lot of rigmarole like in a hospital. You didn't have to talk to many different people ... fill out a thousand forms ... You didn't have to wait forever to see the counselor once you got there. They made you feel good ... They were paying attention just to you.

Miss Appel: In the beginning I wondered why they were always so nice to me ... why everyone I met in the hall smiled at me ... I thought that maybe they felt sorry for me ... but then I realized that they really liked me ...

Mrs. Donnelly: The waiting room when you first go in - I thought that was excellent ... They have things to do which is good - you know, it calmed people down a little bit before they went upstairs ...

They were very, very nice, especially the girl at the desk when you first go in ... She is a very, very likable person and she's just the receptionist. You see, right there, it's like they have an open door ... If I had gotten a cold feeling, I probably wouldn't have gone upstairs or never finished.

Even people who were dissatisfied with the service or its outcome had positive impressions of the agency as a whole. For example, one of the clients who dropped out said:

Mrs. Norton: They were very nice, not like other places I've been to. In my life I've been to a lot of welfare places and hospitals where you feel like they don't want to talk to you nohow ... Here they treat you like a real person ... like someonw who has feelings ... They don't act like you're there just because it's free.

As seen in the above excerpts, clients expressed
a variety of favorable comments about the agency's staff
and climate. A recurring theme was comparison of the
agency with other community systems such as hospitals
and welfare agencies; clients contrasted the agency's
warm climate with the impersonal or dehumanizing quality
of larger bureaucratic organizations. Other key themes
pertained to the friendliness of staff members, their
readiness to be of help, and the feeling that clients
were regarded as individuals.

Workers, on the other hand, had little to say
about the agency's social environment, frequently in-
dicating that they had not considered its meaning for
clients or discussed it with them. The only exception
was in relation to the receptionist: most workers brought
out that she played a significant role with clients and
that clients often commented positively about her.

ROLE OF THE RECEPTIONIST

As suggested in several quotes in the preceding
section, most clients singled out the receptionist as a
prominent member of the agency's staff. They pointed in
particular to their pleasure in knowing her and their
feeling comfortable with her. At the time of the study,
the receptionist was a warm and caring person who related
easily and spontaneously to people and who was very ef-
fective in meeting clients and making them feel at home.
Her work area was located directly across from the wait-
ing room, thus facilitating interaction between her and
the clients while they were waiting for their appoint-
ments. Many clients reported that she was very inter-
ested in them and that they could talk easily with her
about such matters as current events or, in some in-
stances, about some of the changes and experiences in
their lives from week to week. Several clients indicated
that,as a result of the receptionist's encouragement,
they decided to continue in treatment despite their am-
bivalence.

As these findings imply, the role played by the receptionist in the helping process demands further attention. It is obvious that, in entering a new system such as a social agency, an applicant or client forms initial impressions that can influence his or her attitudes toward the service. Yet, as various authors have suggested, receptionists at times are set up in such a way as to be barriers to service (cf. Cumming, 1968:115). Others have observed that the receptionist or secretary in a mental health setting is an essential part of the success or failure of the program:

> ... secretaries are forced by necessity to function as part of the therapeutic team in community health centers. They talk first with prospective patients, family, and interested members of the community on the phone ... The secretaries usually make and change appointments, handle fee dispositions, and transact with the patients and family in the waiting room ... (Nyman, Watson, and James, 1973:368).

Despite the significance accorded to the functions of the receptionist or secretary, very little research has been carried out in this area. In one of the few available studies, Hall (1974) analyzed the reception process in several British social agencies. He concluded that receptionists have a marked impact on the delivery of services, since they perform a variety of functions, including: (1) being the first point of contact with the agency at the time of the initial interview; (2) offering support and encouragement through their informal relationship with the client; and (3) acting as the client's advocate or controlling the client's access to the social work staff (pp. 124-218).

The roles of the receptionist and other staff members such as secretaries should therefore be examined and developed more systematically. For example, an agency may consider how to enrich the reception process and maximize its potentially positive impact. Training programs may be introduced to facilitate the integration

of receptionists or secretaries into the therapeutic team
(cf. Benitez, 1979; Nyman, Watson, and James, 1973).
Ways may be found to enhance the roles of the cadre of
clerical and maintenance staff, which is often an under-
used resource in various agencies.[4]

IMPACT OF AGENCY'S SECTARIAN AFFILIATION

Another important component of the agency's social
environment was its sectarian affiliation. Nearly half
of the clients referred to this aspect through comments
such as:

> I went there because it's part of the Church.
> They helped me even though I'm not Catholic.
> They're guided by religion.
> It was better to be in a place that's Catholic.
> They understand better because they're a
>   Catholic organization.

Most of these comments reflected a positive view
of the agency as an extension of the church. The agency's
religious affiliation was thus another factor that in-
fluenced some people to become involved with it, to use
the service, and to have positive expectations from it.
For instance, some clients indicated that they chose this
particular agency specifically because they felt more
comfortable in a Catholic setting. As implied in some of
the above quotes, these persons expected that in such an
environment they would be better understood and more ef-
fectively helped.

For some of the clients, their identification of
the agency and the worker as members of their reference

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[4]Benitez (1979) describes an interesting training pro-
gram for clerical staff that has helped to enhance the
therapeutic environment in a family service agency.

group facilitated their becoming engaged in treatment:

> Mrs. Mosca: At first I wasn't clear why
> she [the worker] was asking some of these
> questions about our life together ... Not
> that they were strange questions ... Well,
> they were private matters between me and my
> husband ... But I didn't mind so much, being
> that this was a Catholic place ... I figured
> they know what they're doing.

The clients' comments about the meaning of the
agency's religious affiliation support Jerome Frank's
(1974) thesis that people bring to the helping situation
a variety of expectations and attitudes which may be
mobilized in the process of healing. This is particu-
larly true when the helping person is viewed by the cli-
ent as a member of his or her reference group:

> Despite the stubbornness of maladaptive
> attitudes, the psychotherapist, as a socially
> sanctioned expert and healer and a member of
> the patients' reference groups, may be able
> to mobilize forces sufficiently powerful to
> produce beneficial changes in them (Frank,
> 1974:45 - Italics added).

In other cases, the agency's religious affiliation
or the client's related expectations interfered with the
helping process. Mrs. Talcott, for example, had gone
there wanting to "save my marriage at all costs" and was
shocked when the worker mentioned the possibility of a
divorce in joing sessions with her and her husband. She
soon withdrew. In the research interview, she expressed
her firm conviction that a Catholic agency should help
couples to reconcile by emphasizing that divorce is con-
trary to church teachings. Mrs. Talcott could not under-
stand why the worker not only did not try to do this but
also in the course of treatment presented separation or
divorce as alternatives for consideration. The discrep-
ancy between Mrs. Talcott's expectations and the worker's

response contributed to their mutual frustration and her premature withdrawal from the service.

In contrast to the clients, practitioners rarely referred to the agency's religious affiliation and its potential impact on client expectations and the course and outcome of treatment. It is likely that workers did not attribute special significance to the sectarian component partly because the agency serves persons of all denominations; in accordance with stated agency policy, workers are expected to practice their profession freely and to avoid imposing their own values on clients.

The clients' responses suggest, however, that the agency's sectarian affiliation did have a special meaning for them that may have affected the helping process. In this agency setting as in others, the sponsorship under which an organization operates should be appreciated as one of factors influencing the client's use of treatment as well as the worker's involvement. Perhaps the most crucial point here is that an agency's affiliation or sponsorship can have different ramifications for different clients. Furthermore, a client's image or expectations of an agency may be quite different from those of the worker. By being attuned to the particular meaning of the setting and its sponsorship for a given client, practitioners are better able to deal with the client's expectations and values and their influence on the helping process (cf. Turner, 1978).

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

As practitioners and theorists have noted (cf. Germain, 1976; Seabury, 1971; and Turner, 1978), the agency's physical environment is another feature that may affect client-worker interaction.

In giving their impressions of the agency as a whole, at least two-thirds of the clients in fact offered remarks about the physical setting. Most of these were negative comments about the location and physical appearance of the agency, the size and condition of the waiting

room and offices, and the lack of parking. These comments
came from satisfied as well as dissatisfied respondents.
It may be that some persons found it easier to criticize
the physical environment rather than the workers or other
staff members with whom they had developed a personal re-
lationship.

Some typical remarks about the physical setting
were:

Location	Appearance	Office
I was leery about going there.	An old build-ing.	Tiny offices ... I felt closed in.
Parking very bad.	Looks like it needs a coat of paint.	Office looked cold; no rug or pictures.
Didn't like going to that area.	Physical surroundings bad.	Office too small.
Hard to get there.	Looked run-down.	Office seemed empty.
Location very poor.		

All of these comments pertained to the main office
of the agency, which was located in an area awaiting re-
development. The location was more accessible to city
residents than to suburban residents, who constituted a
substantial proportion of the clientele. At the time of
the study, several buildings around the agency's office
had been torn down. The clients' negative evaluation of
the physical surroundings was not exaggerated. The build-
ing was indeed in poor shape. Since the agency was due
to move eventually to another location, the administra-
tion was reluctant to invest in extensive maintenance or
renovation.

While declaring their dissatisfaction with the
quality of the physical environment, over one-third of
the clients also proceeded to explain it as something
that they had expected in view of the agency's non-profit
status and its identity as a charitable organization.

Some representative remarks follow:

> Mrs. Mosca: It was poorly kept, an old build-
> ing ... but that's what you can expect for this
> type of agency ... You know, a charitable agency.
> They can't have a fancy place or location.

> Mrs. Gates: As a subsidized agency, it's
> always working on a minimal budget. They can't
> afford really adequate facilities.

> Mrs. Crompton: The building isn't too appeal-
> ing ... It's very plain ... Well, you know, they
> can't do much about that, since the fact of the
> matter is that most people who go there are poor,
> elderly, or on welfare ... They couldn't afford
> to pay for anything more elaborate.

One wonders how the helping process was influenced
by the client's negative views about the physical environ-
ment of the agency or perception of it as an organization
for the poor or those on welfare. The clients in the
three excerpts above were middle-class persons who in-
dicated that they had selected this agency at least part-
ly because they could not afford more expensive treatment
from other sources such as private practitioners. In gen-
eral, they reported that they were satisfied with the
service and its outcome. While these clients were con-
cerned about inadequacies in the agency's physical en-
vironment, in the long run this factor did not seem to
matter to them enough to affect the outcome. For one
thing, as with most other middle-class respondents, they
tended to disassociate themselves from the charity cases
which they perceived as constituting the bulk of the cli-
entele. Mrs. Lodano, for instance, was one of the sub-
urban residents who questioned whether she belonged in
this particular agency, even though she and her husband
had found the service to be very helpful:

> Well, oh ... Someone from the suburbs usually
> wouldn't go there ... We couldn't afford any-
> thing else at the time ... Oh, I felt a little

odd whenever we met someone who was obviously
poor in the waiting room ... My husband felt
like me ... We didn't really belong there.
Those people had more serious problems ...
They were really poor.

I asked Mrs. Lodano and other clients why they
continued with the service and why they found it effec-
tive despite their strong negative feelings regarding
the physical setting. In response, they generally re-
ferred to their strong attachment to their worker and
conviction that he or she was helpful. It appeared
thus that other variables, such as the worker's com-
petence and the strength of the client-worker relation-
ship, counteracted the potentially negative influence
of the agency's physical environment.

Other clients, from diverse socio-economic back-
grounds, felt even more strongly about the environment
and noted ways in which it affected the helping process.
For example, after expressing his understanding that the
agency realistically had limited resources, Mr. Mosca
stressed the significance of adequate facilities:

I don't know if they can afford it, but
they should do something about the physical
surroundings. The only thing I could hope
for would be to have the facility in a decent
location ... The physical setup makes an im-
pression on people ... I think they could do
a better job if the facilities are improved...
People would feel better about going there ...
Well, maybe the counselors themselves would
feel better.

Some respondents suggested that certain qualities
of the physical environment affected the way they felt
about themselves:

Miss Becker: I liked the location because
it was close to my job ... but the building
was something else. They should do something

about it ... fix it up a little bit ... You
know, it made me feel worse about myself,
because I couldn't afford anything better.
If they changed it, maybe the social workers
would like it better.

Over one-fourth of the clients were especially
critical of the size or appearance of the worker's off-
ice:

Mrs. Donnelly: It feels good when you
first meet her [the worker] ... She shakes
your hand or she shows some sign of affec-
tion ... Then you go to her office and the
room is completely different from what she's
showing you. You know, it's cold and it
looks empty ... It was kind of hard, but I
felt, well, they didn't have the money be-
cause it was an association ... It was
connected with the church ... That's why I
overlooked it.

Mr. Crompton: The office was small and
very crowded. You know, whenever my wife
and I went in together, it was hard even to
move around ... Well, we laughed about it
... I don't think that the office has a lot
to do with counseling, but I felt strange in
there ... Oh, I kept thinking that maybe I
should go somewhere with better offices ...
Sometimes we wasted time talking or thinking
about the office.

Miss Moore: The room was very small -
just a desk and some chairs. The social
worker put in some plants and tried to
make it homey ... but it was still an office
... The room looked empty like I felt for
quite a while ... Sometimes, well, it made
it hard to get going.

In light of the many negative remarks about the off-
ice, workers should be more sensitive to its meaning for
particular clients. At the same time, administrators as
well as practitioners should consider ways of improving
the office and the messages that it conveys to clients.
One of the clients made some suggestions along these
lines:

> **Mrs. Donnelly**: Um, I think I would change
> the room, the colors, you know, put things on
> the wall to make it feel like it could be a
> house. Or, maybe, a lamp or something which
> you would see in a house. Um ... I would make
> it not so cold.

While these suggestions are rather obvious, social
workers seem hesitant to implement them. It appears that
"we ... fail to make use of the information available
from others on the effects of color, lighting, furniture
arrangement, and amenities on providing the kind of set-
ting that is desired" (Turner, 1978:193).

Our reluctance in this area may be due to more
than the realistic factor of limited financial resources.
Before making substantial improvement in regard to the
office or other features of the agency's physical en-
vironment, we may need to change some of our underlying
attitudes. For example, since most social agencies
historically have been developed to meet the needs of
the poor, we as social workers may still be preoccupied
with the value of parsimony and ambivalent about provid-
ing comfortable physical facilities for our clients -
and for ourselves. Furthermore, we may not fully apprec-
iate the impact of the physical setting on the helping
process, because of our traditional emphasis on other
components such as the client-worker relationship.

The findings discussed thus far in this section
were drawn from the majority of clients who were satis-
fied with the service. The indication is that the phys-
ical setting has a differential impact on them, depending
on such factors as their personality and expectations,

the quality of the client-worker relationship, and the de-
gree of satisfaction with the service. This is also evi-
dent in the views of dissatisfied clients. Several did
not say anything about the environment or indicated that
they paid little attention to it:

> Mrs. Cain: I don't know about the agency's
> setting ... Well, it's not easy to be aware of
> your surroundings when there are other things
> on your mind that are so paramount ... Maybe
> now if I went in there I might see things or
> react to the place differently but I don't
> think that I was really looking for that kind
> of thing at that time.

> Mrs. Norton: I never paid much attention
> to the agency ... You know, I was more con-
> cerned with my problems.

Other dissatisfied clients, like the following, had
strong feelings about the physical environment:

> Mrs. Bates: Oh, I have nothing to say
> about the people ... You know, the people
> were all very polite from the time I called
> and so on ... Oh, the location and the agency
> itself ... It's in a very bad section of town
> where we had evening appointments and you are
> leery of going there - of going in and out of
> the building at night ...

> The building itself, like I say ... the
> first impression - it is a very dreary build-
> ing and it does give you a kind of creepy
> feeling when you're already creepy when you're
> going for help, you know ... You're leery,
> wondering what to expect and when that is
> what you're confronted with - a dreary place -
> I think it has a little bit of effect on you.

For some of these persons, the physical environment appar-
ently was another source of dissatisfaction that rein-

forced their negative attitudes toward the service, the
worker, or the agency. These clients' negative perception
of the value of the agency may have hastened their pre-
mature or unplanned termination.

Workers were aware that clients might have feel-
ings about the agency's physical environment, particularly
its location. In general, however, they noted that they
rearely discussed this topic in treatment sessions and
that it was something about which they were not likely to
get feedback. Several practitioners suggested that they
were so accustomed to the agency's physical condition
that they paid little attention to it. Others said that
they were tolerating the poor physical facilities in an-
ticipation of the agency's move to better quarters. In
addition, some workers' comments reflected their convic-
tion that the physical environment is not as important
as the personal relationship with the worker. As one of
them put it:

> As with most people, Joyce didn't think
> about the agency but about me as the worker.
> Well, ... maybe the physical environment
> made some impression on her initially - but,
> as we went on, there was no indication that
> it mattered to her.

But the issue of the impact of the physical en-
vironment on the helping process and its outcome should
not be glossed over. Most clients remarked about it, al-
though their responses reflected a variety of views.
Moreover, it is noteworthy that for many clients the poor
quality of the physical environment accentuated the stig-
ma of going to this particular agency, which they already
perceived as a setting for poor or lower-class clients.
This evidence supports the assertion that "space, design
and decoration in our agency settings communicate mess-
ages about their status and worth to users of service and
affect self-esteem and psychic comfort" (Germain, 1976:
20).

In view of these results, it is surprising to find
that little attention has been devoted to this matter

through research or writing within social work. There has
been limited consideration of the agency's physical en-
vironment in basic social work texts (cf. Hollis, 1972;
Siporin, 1975). Yet, the findings of environmental psy-
chologists and others demonstrate that the physical en-
vironment is a significant determinant of human behavior.
Through his naturalistic research, Barker (1968) has
highlighted the unique properties of "behavior settings"
-such as a social agency- and their influence on the
functioning of human beings operating within them. Moos
(1976) has imaginatively analyzed a range of environment-
al determinants of behavior, including physical space,
building design, and social climate. Ittelson, Proshan-
sky, and Rivlin (1970) have shown that the physical set-
ting is one of the major variables contributing to the
effectiveness of therapeutic programs in a psychiatric
hospital. Germain (1978) has examined the importance of
space as an ecological variable in social work practice.

In one of the few pertinent studies conducted by
social workers, Seabury (1971) analyzed the physical
setting in six different social work agencies ranging
from a private practitioner's office to a large public
welfare center. He found that there were different space
arrangements in such areas as waiting rooms and interview-
ing offices. The various physical patterns conveyed dif-
ferent messages to clients. For example, while both the
family service agency and the public welfare center were
large, bureaucratic organizations, the latter had a dis-
tant and dehumanizing atmosphere, while the former con-
veyed a sense of cheerfulness, comfort, and warmth.
Similarly, the hospital social service department pre-
sented a most unpleasant appearance, while private offices
and private agencies seemed most comfortable.

Seabury (1971) concluded that the optimal arrange-
ments of the physical setting in any agency should be
based on its functions and the needs of its clients. At
the present time, however, there are few guidelines to
assist agencies in this effort. Consequently, it has
been proposed that social workers collaborate with other
professionals such as architects, as a means of improving

service delivery (cf. Wittman and Wittman, 1976). In addition, further research in this area is essential, to clarify the specific role that the environment of an agency may play in treatment and to devise ways of maximizing the positive impact of the physical setting.

CONCLUSION

It is not appropriate to draw definitive generalizations on the basis of data derived from an exploratory study such as the present one. However, it is interesting to note the markedly different views of clients and social workers concerning the impact of the agency environment on the helping process and its outcome.

Practitioners had little to say about either the social or physical environment of the agency or took it for granted. As I have reported elsewhere (Maluccio, 1979:115-140), they attributed greater significance to the role of the client-worker relationship. Perhaps workers are more conscious of their investment in the helping relationship and understandably need to emphasize its importance.

From the perspective of clients, however, the findings suggest that an agency's environment is an important component in the process of a person's becoming engaged with the worker and using the service. It is noteworthy in fact that the clients' impressions of the agency persisted to the point of the research interview, which occurred after the termination of the service and thus in many cases long after they had initially been exposed to it.

Obviously, client-worker interaction occurs within a broader context that includes the agency with all of its physical, social, and operational features. As Lennard and Bernstein have pointed out (1969:205), "the adequacy or inadequacy of treatment environments is not independent of the larger context of which they are a part."

Consequently, an essential task in clinical prac-
tice is to evaluate the quality of an agency's environ-
ment as a salient force in the life spaces of clients
and workers and as a critical component of the helping
system. This means, first of all, that a practitioner
needs to evaluate the quality and meaning of the environ-
ment for each client. Secondly, and perhaps more im-
portantly, numerous questions should be asked at a
broader level, such as the following:

> Does the setting give a first appearance
> of concern, competence, comfort, of a place
> where an individual, family or group will
> find the kind of understanding and wise help
> that is sought? Or does the setting give
> the message of incompetence, lack of respect,
> lack of privacy, lack of comfort that could
> well deter persons? (Turner, 1978:191).

On the basis of the answers to such questions, an agency's
staff and administration should be better able to effect
necessary changes making the environment more attractive
and supportive to both clients and practitioners.

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