Political De-Moralization of the Poor: Organizing Lower-Class Families of the Mentally Retarded

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ABSTRACT

   This paper employs an analytic framework based on organizational
incentives to explain the failure of recent welfare reform efforts.
The data consists of observations, interviews, and routine in-
house reports collected on a federally funded program, Project
STAR. The project was developed with the aim of mobilizing
lower-class and minority families of the mentally retarded in
support of reform of mental retardation services in five cities
in the U.S. A service-inducement strategy was pursued by the
reform organization to overcome the difficulties of enticing
lower-class families of the retarded to participate in organiza-
tional activities. This strategy appears to have had several
unintended consequences on the reform project. The concern with
identifying and providing social services became a major pre-
occupation of the reformers. To the extent to which parents did
participate because of the receipt of welfare benefits, this
diminished the reform organization's autonomy relative to the
existing welfare network. A further impact of this service-
inducement strategy was political demoralization of the parents
of the retarded. The "service" focus appears to have attracted
parents the least predisposed towards community change. Once
involved in the organization, the impact of organizational acti-
vities was of reinforcement of this predisposition. Analysts of
welfare reform organizations need to pay greater attention to
the cooptative impact of welfare benefits. The data suggests
the failure of community mobilization can be explained by the
organizational incentives used. The problem reform organizations
face is in finding the proper mix of purposive, material and
solidary inducements which both recruit and retain participants,
at the same time allowing the pursuit of mobilization goals.

INTRODUCTION

   An underlying thrust of social policy in the United States

has been to ensure access to the policy-making process of social
groups in society. In the case of unorganized social forces, the
poor and minorities, the role of government has been to politically
mobilize the communities in which they live. (Greenstone and Peter-
son, 1973). Community organization as a public policy has assumed
that professional reform organizations can mobilize unorganized
social forces into voluntary associations for social action.
With few exceptions, however, efforts at community mobilization
of the lower-class have met with little success. (Clark and
Hopkins, 1968, Rose, 1970, Helfgot, 1974). This paper examines
the internal dynamics of a national effort to mobilize lower-
class families of the mentally retarded. It is argued that the
mobilization strategy of the government-sponsored reform organiza-
tion provides an explanation for the failure at community organiza-
tion. The organizational incentives offered to promote community
participation among the poor lead to de-politicalization and
demoralization. Rather than promoting participation in the insti-
tutions of society, government-sponsored mobilization efforts may
well foster dependency and social fragmentation. The organization
to be analyzed is Project STAR. The organization was developed
with the aim of mobilizing lower-class and minority families of
the mentally retarded. The group, once organized, was expected
to provide a setting for social reform of the social welfare
service sector.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes three methodological strategies: observation,
historical records and lengthy personal interviews. The multiple
approach adopted in this study was taken, in part, because no
single source of data could provide all of the information considered
necessary for a vivid analysis of the problem under consideration.
(Bouchard, 1976)

For a number of years the author was Research Director of
Project STAR. This position provided a particularly strategic
position to observe the origin and implementation of this major
welfare reform effort. In the role of Research Director the author
had complete access to the files and records associated with the
development and operation of the project. The position also offered
the opportunity to meet and establish friendly relationships with
professionals and community representatives in the five cities in
which STAR functioned.

SOCIAL POLICY AND MASS SOCIETY

The movement towards the extension of social welfare in the
United States has been continuous but slow. With these changes,
explanations for the expansion of social welfare have increasingly
been of concern for social scientists. Arguments about the causes
of the expansion of welfare are varied as well as ideological.
In a seminal work Gronbjerg (1977) identifies a number of reasons
for the growth and transformation of social welfare. In one sense,
the expansion of social welfare is a direct response to poverty.
In this "stratification" approach, welfare has developed as a way
of helping the unfortunate in our society. Social welfare problems
have increased as the public became aware of and concerned with
the presence of poor people in our society. Social welfare is a
way of responding to poverty and economic dependency.

The welfare expansion can also be viewed from the larger per-
spective of sociological theories about mass society. The expansion
of social welfare is a further step in the extension of "citizenship".
The expansion of welfare programs extends the concept of citizen-
ship to include not only political participation, but "economic"
citizenship as well. The definition of social welfare has been
enlarged so as to encompass conditions other than just stark
deprivation. The extension of social welfare becomes part of a
larger process of modernity rather than a reflection of the
objective needs of the population.

This drift toward encouraging participation by heretofore
excluded segments of the population has been developed by Shils
(1975) in his discussion of "mass society". According to Shils
there is a trend toward the inclusion of sub-groups of the popu-
lation into the central value system and the cultural symbols of
society. This has occurred primarily through the expansion of
education, social welfare, and mass communications. Public educa-
tion, radio, television and social welfare have made possible a
closer tie between the central institutions of society, and widely
diffused social groups. Citizenship within this perspective,
includes access of the various groups in society to the political
processes by which social policy is developed.

Historically public policy and the public interest have been
defined in terms of the organized interests in society. Theodore
Lowi (1969)suggests in his inquiry into public philosophy,

> Organized interests pretty much fill up and
> adequately represent most of the sectors of
> our lives, so that one organized group can
> be found effectively answering and checking
> some other organized group as it seeks to
> prosecute its claims against society...it
> is assumed that "counter-veiling" power
> usually crops up somehow.

The "process" of policy formulation is elevated as the justi-
ficiation for a particular policy. The ends of policy and their
consequences becomes a forgotten issue. Governmental action, accord-
ing to this public philosophy, is to ensure access of the various
interests in society to the policy-making process, and to ratify
the agreements and adjustments worked out among the competing
groups. (McConnell, 1966)

MENTAL RETARDATION REFORM

This "mass society" view of social welfare places into
perspective the myriad goals and activities of government-sponsored
reform organizations. Poverty, rather than being a situation to
be eliminated, has become instead a status around which an interest
needs to be organized. Social welfare programs, especially those
known as "community development", have focused on organizing the
poor. Since the poor and racial minorities are seen as an
unrecognized force in society, public policy has focused on creat-
ing the formation of an organized interest among them. Drawing on
a sociological orientation and interest-group political theory,
government policy has experimented with community organization and
group action to restore a sense of "community" to low-income
individuals.

A pluralist view of policy formation explains the content
of social welfare policy towards the mentally retarded. Mental
retardation policy reflects the activities of organized interest
groups in society. The mobilization of middle-class parents of
the retarded together with the power of professional medical groups
has led to a proliferation of public and private welfare programs
with an emphasis on helping a tiny segment of the mentally retarded.
(Albee, 1968, Segal, 1970, Fontana, 1978) The programs are based
on the assumption of organic damage and permanent deficiency.
(Mercer, 1973) This encompasses only a small number of the mentally

retarded. The group which is ignored or "disenfranchised" are basically poor, non-white and mildly retarded. Their mental retardation status is due in some cases to depressed environ- mental conditions. The large number of minority and lower-class individuals in the "mildly" retarded category has also been attri- buted to mis-labeling. The President's Committee on Mental Retarda- tion (1968) has expressed the view that a number of the retarded may in fact be "six-hour retarded children".

> We now have what may in fact be called a six-hour
> retarded child-retarded from 9 to 3, five days
> a week, solely on the basis of an IQ score,
> without regard to his adaptive behavior which
> may be exceptionally adaptive to the situation
> and community in which he lives.

Thus, a mental retardation status may stem from culturally biased instruments. This perspective on mental retardation depicts minority and lower-class retarded as victims of exploitative social, political and educational institutions.

> National concern in the late 1960's and 70's with the conver- gence of race, poverty and mental retardation led to government- sponsored efforts to organize lower-class parents of the retarded. The ultimate objective would be to maximize their influence in welfare and educational policy formation. Developing a level of indigenous organization was seen as a necessary ingredient for interest formation. As Shorter and Tilly suggest (1974)

> individuals are not magically mobilized for
> participation in some group effort regard-
> less of how angry they feel...their aggres-
> sion may be channeled to collective ends
> only through the coordinating, directing
> function of an organization.

It was within this context that Project STAR was developed by the President's Committee on Mental Retardation and the National Urban League, and funded for three years by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The reform project emphasized the need to extend the rights of "citizenship" to lower-class families of the retarded. The project was funded to promote the participation of minority and lower-class individuals in the formulation of programs and services for the retarded; to change the discriminatory

processes involved in labeling minority children as retarded; and
to increase the involvement of lower-class and minorities as consumers
of welfare services for the mentally retarded.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION STRATEGY

The community organization efforts began in five cities in
1971. Each of the five sites were awarded approximately $100,000
a year for each of the three years. In each project there was
a director, two social workers, two para-professionals, and a
clerical staff. Each local project was to recruit a group of 100
minority and lower-class families of the retarded. The "social
action" activities were to be developed by the project staff and
families of the retarded, while social services were to be provided
by existing welfare organizations in the community.

Once the reform project began its operations, the immediate
task was to recruit lower-class parents of the mentally retarded.
The first contact with potential members was geared primarily to
mobilization purposes. Most observers have noted the difficulties
of organizing individuals holding a negative status in society.
(Turner, 1968) Joining an organization of welfare clients might
be viewed as associating oneself with a status one hopes to escape.
In addition, the parents were asked to identify with a group of
lower-class parents of the mentally retarded--who were negatively
stereotyped in society. The common notion of the poor as "disad-
vantaged" or "deprived" presented a further unappealing reason for
association. Recruitment would probably have been hampered by the
self-guilt that burdens many parents of the mentally retarded.
An example being a mother in one city who indicated to the staff
that her retarded child was "god's punishment for my evil past".

Obstacles to joining the reform organization were also presented
by a kind of economic rationality of the poor. Mancur Olson (1965)
has suggested a keen logic on the part of the lower-class when
weighing social participation.

If the members of a large group rationally seek
to maximize their personal welfare, they will not
act to advance their common or group objectives
unless there is coercion to force them to do so,
or unless there is some separate incentive,
distinct from the achievement of the common or
group interest, offered to the members of the

group individually on the condition that they
help beat the costs or burdens involved in the
achievement of group objectives.

These obstacles to inducing social participation suggested to the
community organizers of Project STAR a mobilization strategy geared
to tangible inducement. The reform organization became interested
in creating an image of the organization as a sure source of
welfare benefits. It was expected that the project would assume
importance to the families of the retarded as a conduit for various
social and health services. The information and referral services,
plus extensive follow-up on referrals, insured there would be a
tangible return for participation.

In their first encounter with parents, Project STAR organizers
described the reform organization, its local sponsorship, and its
goals. The key to success was seen as the ability to convince
parents they could get better welfare services for their children
only if they joined Project STAR. This was accomplished by showing
the potential member the improvements in services (e.g., re-testing
for IQ, welfare services, employment programs, etc.) that might
result from involvement in STAR. After reviewing the services
with the potential member, the STAR staff then proceeded to discuss
the parent's experiences with social welfare agencies in the
community. They were asked "How helpful were health and welfare
agencies in providing assistance to your retarded child?" After
some discussion, the parents were asked the crucial question, "Would
you like to join with other parents of children having limited
capacity in working towards making the agencies more helpful to
low-income families?". The organizers found that many parents
were quite willing at this point to express an interest in parti-
cipation. About three quarters of those contacted during this
initial recruiting drive indicated an interest in working together
with other parents to improve services. After several months of
canvassing the neighborhoods, the goal of 100 families per project
site was reached.

MAINTAINING ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPATION

The willingness of low-income parents to participate in the
reform projects, as evidenced by their response to the recruiting
drive, is not an unusual response from this segment of the popu-
lation. Kraft and Chilman's (1966) review of research into organiz-

ing low-income parents indicates that the problem lies not in
soliciting an interest in participation, but in bringing the
social action program into actuality. The recruiting drive tied
together the receipt of material incentives, i.e., health and
welfare services, with purposive incentives, i.e., the stated goal
of social mobilization and social reform. Why did the parents
express an interest in joining STAR? Studies of neighborhood
orgranization among the lower-class suggest that large numbers of
poor people can be induced to join voluntary associations, but
only in a very restricted set of circumstances. Saul Alinsky's
(1946) community drives have been predicated on the expression of
hostility and conflict.

> The community organizer digs into the morass of
> resignation, hopelessness, and despair, and works
> with local people in articulating (or rubbing
> "raw") their resentments...When those prominent
> in the status quo call you an agitator, they
> are completely correct; that is, in one word, your
> function, to agitate to the point of conflict.

This approach may experience difficulty with welfare clients.
Studies of the experiences of welfare clients indicate a relatively
high level of client-satisfaction with their case workers.
Handler (1971) indicates that this is probably due to the fact that
when welfare recipients apply for benefits, they come not as
rights-bearing citizens claiming what is entitled to the, but as
supplicants. Bailes' (1974) history of the National Welfare Rights
Organization suggests that agitation was not a necessary ingredient
in eliciting initial participation. What was necessary was the
concreteness and individual impact that welfare benefits usually
precipitate.

Translating the stated willingness to participate into direct
involvement in organizational affairs became a problem for the
mobilization efforts. The early history of STAR was characterized
by efforts to maintain the interest and involvement of the parents
in the activities of the reform organization. An early report from
one STAR city (1973) expressed this difficulty of organizing parents
of the retarded into groups to discuss their common problems
with the welfare system.

> A parent group of Chicano families is having a
> difficult time becoming stable. Many of the Mexican -

American mothers cannot leave their home during the
evening due to custom, and their families are large,
making it very difficult for mothers to leave during
the day. STAR workers are providing baby-sitters
when possible, but again, a feeling of doubt exists
with these mothers even concerning this service.
We are starting to provide extensive individual
services (casework) to these families. We are
encouraged by the response to this service.

In response to the precarious position of the parent discussion
groups, the attention of organizers became directed towards providing
increased material benefits to the parents as an incentive towards
their participation.

The major benefit that STAR had to offer the lower-class parents
was its organizational linkage to existing health and welfare
organizations. There were extensive formal and informal relation-
ships that the project had developed with the local human service
network. In order to carry out the promises made to deliver welfare
benefits, the project staff began to spend most of their time in
referral of clients to local service agencies. Records kept at
the project sites indicate there were over 1500 referrals for
services during the first two years of operation. (STAR, 1973)
The demands that this placed on the project is evidenced by the
amount and range of activities to follow up on the referrals. To
facilitate the delivery of services to the parents, the staff were
involved with escorting parents to service agencies, and partici-
pating in meetings with the parents and service agency personnel.

This benefit-inducement strategy proved to be an effective
incentive towards parents' participation. The strategy worked in
that parents started to come to meetings held in the project's
offices. The meetings, however, of necessity focused on the basic
social problems of the families. A report from one city gave the
following assessment of the parent groups:

As the number of participating families increased,
the social workers established the first four of Project
STAR's planned 8-10 groups. Much experimentation
was used to improve member turn-out and group
effectiveness. The groups were still in their
rudimentary forms, but a start had been made.
However, it is still too early in the first
stages of the project to report on the best
method of conducting the parent groups. We have

found that the staff must first concentrate on
any basic problems essential to the survival of
the family before its members will agree to
regular meetings. Basic problems of existence
need attention before the families can begin to
branch out into means of bringing about
institutional change. (STAR, 1973)

Other project sites were experiencing similar problems of maintain-
ing organizational participation. The dilemma of staff time being
monopolized by service delivery activities is documented in an
early report from one site.

Sixty percent of the total project time was spent in
face to face contact with families of retarded
children in pursuit of individual and group referrals.
(STAR, 1973)

Parents came to the reform project with a multitude of problems
and requests for assistance. Table 1 records the distribution of
requests for services made to Project STAR.

TABLE I. Request for Services From Project STAR: 1970-1972

TYPE OF REQUEST	FREQUENCY
Intervention with School System	11.6%
Have Retardate tested or re-tested	14.4%
Vocational training or employment for retardate	21.5%
Summer camp placement	1.4%
Job for family member	4.6%
Food, clothing, housing or financial assistance	10.7%
Assistance with welfare department	8.4%
Counseling	3.9%
Remedial Education	5.3%
Health Care	7.8%
Transportation	1.8%
Legal Services	1.1%
Other	7.5%
	100% (438)

Clearly the overwhelming majority of problems brought to the attention
of the reform project has little to do with the political issue of
mis-labeled minority children. Only fourteen percent of the requests

were related to the possible mis-classification of a child. The
remaining requests had to do with routine social welfare services.

Although social services proved useful in promoting attendance,
they also had limitations. Welfare benefits and information had
a short lifetime. They could be given to the same person only once.
Once the parent received a welfare service, she no longer needed
the organization. Thus, the receipt of a specific service by a
parent exhausted the influence of that service as an inducement to
participation. This presented the reform project with a constant
dilemma of scrambling to come up with new methods to maintain the
parents in the organization. After welfare benefits lost their
drawing power, staff turned toward other incentives to retain parent
participation. For example, in the early part of 1971 nine meetings
were held in one city with parents of the retarded in attendance.
The meetings consisted solely of an audio-visual presentation
illustrating methods and techniques for child-rearing. In the
similar vein, other parent groups provided a forum for the "Child-
hood Stimulation Program" of a local University. The staff gave a
demonstration on education toys and books for young children. The
meetings focused on methods to stimulate pre-schoolers' communi-
cation skills.

In all of these inducement techniques, the effort was made to
offer certain benefits in the form of information and access to
social programs for those who made continued contributions to
organizational activities. This became a problem in that the staff
were unable to continually link parent meetings or other organiza-
tional activities to the receipt of material benefits, or even to
information about such benefits. The result was a search for new
methods to induce participation. The reform project started to
provide "side"benefits and intangible rewards to participants.

The national office of STAR and the local projects had sizeable
amounts of money earmarked for "travel and conferences." The
national office had $44,000, while local projects had $2000 each
year in their travel budgets. The money began to be used to "reward"
active participants with free transportation, lodging, and other
expenses for conferences and meetings around the country. Parents
were sent, together with staff, to attend conferences in Denver,
Montreal, Anaheim; Chicago, St. Louis and San Francisco. Although
this inducement proved attractive to the parents, it had distinctive
drawbacks. Providing free travel, room and board ran into thousands
of dollars a year. In comparison to social welfare services, this
was not an expense that the reform project could transfer to local
social welfare agencies. The expenses of service-inducements

were mainly borne by local welfare organizations, who provided
the welfare benefits. Travel expenditures, however, wer borne
directly by Project STAR. This type of participation incentive
was a major drain on organizational resources, limiting its wide-
spread usage. It therefore, had a limited impact because its use
was restricted to proportionally few parents in each project.

A less obvious, but by no means unimportant factor in partici-
pation, was the attraction of solidary incentives. (Clark and
Wilson, 1961) Solidary incentives are basically intangible in the
sense that the benefit has no monetary value, and cannot be easily
translated into one that has. These inducements include the act
of associating and socializing with members of a particular group.
For some of the parents in the reform project, a factor in
participation was the attraction of meeting friends (or potential
friends), or at least fighting loneliness and boredom. The relative
importance of these motives is difficult to measure and undoubtedly
varied from member to member, project to project. However, the
project appeared to be a way of socializing with one's peers.
In one city, for example, the monthly parent meetings were great
social occasions, at which refreshments (coffee, cake, etc.) were
shared. Parents would often stay after the meeting to gossip and
socially intermingle.

While the friendship and social inducements did not create a
financial drain on the organizational resources of Project STAR,
reliance on them as an inducement for participation had certain
costs. There usually were no more than a handful of members who
were attracted by this incentive. For those members who were
getting together primarily to have a good time, there was little
reason to engage in reform or issue-orientated activities.
Similarly, those who were primarily motivated by friendship or a
desire to end boredom were probably less likely to view racism as
a cause for their family's problems. They thus were less responsive
to the reform objective of building a level of indigenous organiza-
tion among low-income parents of the mentally retarded. (Bailes,
1972)

SOCIAL SERVICES AND ORGANIZATIONAL AUTONOMY

The activities developed to entice members of poverty groups
to participate in community activities appear to have had several
unintended consequences on the reform project. A service-induce-
ment strategy was pursued by the social reform organization to

overcome the difficulties of enticing lower-class parents of the
mentally retarded to participate in organizational activities.
Since STAR was not equipped to provide the services itself, it
was forced to rely upon referrals to the existing social welfare
organizations for these benefits. Therefore, to the extent to which
clients did participate because of these welfare benefits, this
diminished STAR's autonomy relative to the existing welfare network.
Litwak and Hylton (1962) have suggested that organizational autonomy
is dependent upon two factors: interdependency and standardization.
Interdependency between organizations occurs when one organization
must take another into account if it is to accomplish its goals.
The dependency of STAR on welfare agencies for its internal incen-
tives to lower-class parents tied its mobilization goals to the
actions of local welfare organizations. Standardized actions refer
to behavior which is repetitive in character. The daily routine
nature of client referrals between STAR and the local welfare
network established a type of organizational linkage that did not
previously exist. Organizational relationships between Project
STAR and the established welfare agencies that were to be reformed
presented a series of constraints that limited STAR's ability to
move towards the goal of institutional change. Clients became
involved in STAR because of the promise of services. Demands for
services were thus coming from both clients and staff. The service-
inducement strategy required the ready accessibility of an array
of services from the local welfare network. This presented a problem
of organizational conflict of interest. The failure to implement
reforms can no doubt be explained in part by this dependency. The
desire to mobilize the parents of the retarded through the use of
welfare benefits generated pressure on the staff. In a real sense,
a choice had to be made between confrontation or mobilization. To
publicly confront the welfare organizations on their programs and
policies would threaten the accessibility and supply of organiza-
tional resources that were being used to mobilize the parents.
Thompson and McEwen's (1958) analysis of organization-environment
interaction suggests that the operative goals of an organization
are influenced by a "field" of organizations. While this has been
amply demonstrated in economic analysis, the case materials from
STAR suggest that the impact can be seen with social welfare reform
organizations pursuing multiple goals.

   The emphasis in providing service-inducements deflected the use
that was made of the meetings between parents. Rather than politi-
cally mobilizing lower-class parents, techniques and gimmicks to
foster participation in the groups became a major preoccupation of

STAR staff. Since welfare benefits were some of the most effective
and cheapest devices, they came to consume an ever increasing
proportion of the time and thoughts of the project staff. As
Selznick (1960) suggests, solutions to day-to-day problems in
organizations often become substituted for the original or professed
goals of the organization. This was the dilemma that confronted
Project STAR. The preoccupation with welfare services as a means
of retaining parents deflected from community organization and
became the operative goals of the reform project. The project
moved away from a concern with the mobilization of lower-class
parents to a primary focus on individual parents and their welfare
needs. Table 2 records the number of parent-group meetings held
in 1970 through 1972 and the number of referrals for services made
on behalf of parents during this same time period.

TABLE II. Parent Group Meetings and Referrals For Social Welfare
          Services (1970-1972)

YEAR OF PROJECT	NUMBER OF PARENT GROUP MEETINGS	NUMBER OF REFERRALS FOR SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES
1970	132	218
1971	55	515
1972	37	624

The inverse relationship between the number of service referrals
and parent-groups meetings, documents the movement from a mobiliza-
tion to a service referral focus for Project STAR.

    The shift in emphasis that took place occurred without a conscious
decision on the part of the staff or the leadership of the organiza-
tion. The data in Table 2 indicates the wide variation between
official and operative goals. Perrow (1961) suggests that operative
goals tell us what the organization is trying to do, regardless
of what the official goals say are the aims. The evolution of
STAR into a basically service-related organization was mainly a
reaction to internal pressures without a reference to a concrete
model of where the organization was going.

SOCIAL SERVICES AND CLIENT DE-MOBILIZATION

    A number of observers have noted that one of the primary

functions of social welfare is social control. Galper (1975)
suggests that social services foster particular behavior patterns
in clients, both as a condition of usage and as a consequence of
service. The basis of his criticisms is the notion that social
services are structured as to service the labor market. The Social
Security System is an example of a social welfare benefit that
compensates for the inadequacies of the labor market and ties people
firmly to it. For a variety of social service programs, a return
to work status might well be taken as the operational definition of
success. The emphasis on work is not the only area in which social
conformity is emphasized by social welfare. The rules and regula-
tions of many programs have functioned to regulate client behavior.
Regulations have been used to influence sexual conduct, family
relations, rights to privacy, budget expenditures, and so on. As
one observer noted, being on welfare means the loss of control over
one's life. (Mandell, 1975)

    The case materials from Project STAR suggest a further impact
on clients---demoralization. The maintenance demands of the parent
groups, aside from imparting an organization focus on individual
service needs of lower-class parents, also appear to have attracted
members of the lower-class the least predisposed towards community
change. Once involved in STAR, instead of promoting a frame of
reference among the parents that was conducive to community
mobilization, involvement in the parent groups appears to have had
an opposite effect. If they were to be effective in mobilizing
parents of retarded children, the STAR organizers needed to enhance
a "collective" orientation among participants. If the effort were
successful, instead of giving priority to their own private interests,
the parents would adopt a view that their interests are tied to
the interests of others in a similar situation. The parent groups
would provide an opportunity for parents to reinforce each other
in efforts to better their social conditions. In addition to this
collective orientation, mobilization of the parents would require
that participants take a critical or questionning attitude toward
the mental retardation status assigned to their child. This was
clearly one intended purpose of the groups--to help create situations
that exposed the processes that led to a disproportionate number
of minority children being labeled as mentally retarded.

    In order to get a sense of the impact of group-participation
on the perceptions of the parents in the reform organization, a
measure of "collective orientation" was utilized. Sumati Dubey
(1971) has developed a scale to measure a collective perspective

among lower-class individuals. This variable suggests a larger
conceptual scheme to account for basic strategies that the lower-
class could adopt to improve their social and economic status.
Blum (1965) and his associates posit two possible strategies:
individual or collective mobility strategies. A person with an
"individual" mobility orientation would believe that the individual
is responsible for his plight, and it is he who is responsible for
changing it. Consequently, it is his interest which is of paramount
importance, not the interests of the lower-class as a social group.
An alternate response to individual mobility is "collective"
mobility. This strategy would encompass the belief that one's own
conditions cannot improve unless additional economic resources,
social power and the like are made available to all members of
one's social group. As a measure of this variable, the following
five items were used to operationalize "collective" orientation:

   1. Without sit-ins, lie-ins, and picketing, welfare clients
       will not get adequate financial help.

   2. The only way for welfare clients to get what they want
       is to organize themselves in a united front.

   3. Non-violent demonstrations, like picketing or sitting-in,
       are the best way for the poor to get what they want.

   4. The only way for the poor to improve their condition in
       American society is to fight violently with the power
       structure.

   5. People treat you right only when they know you can strike
       back at them.

Respondents were defined as either "individualist" or "collective"
depending upon whether they received high or low scores on the
scale.

   Our measure of participation in the parent groups was based
on the attendance records of parents kept by the project staff.
There were two categories created to differentiate among the
participation rates of parents: never attended, or attended more
than one-quarter of all the meetings. It was assumed that
attendance at more than one of four meetings would allow the group
to have an impact on the participant. Table 3 records the relation-
ship between attendance at parent meetings and the view that one's
interests are tied to a larger social group.

TABLE III.   Parent Group Participation and Social Problem Orientation

SOCIAL PROBLEM ORIENTATION	PARENT GROUP PARTICIPATION	
	Never Attended Meetings	Attended More Than One-Quarter of All Meetings
Individualist	45%	60%
Collectivist	55%	40%
	100% (64)	100% (111)

    If we examine the two groups of parents, those that never
attended a meeting, as opposed to those that attended more than one-
quarter of all the group meetings held, we notice some differences.
The parents who never attended a meeting apparently have a higher
collective orientation than those who were participants. In other
words, they are more likely to view social change as a collective
enterprise. Fifty-five percent of the non-attenders could be
considered as having a collective orientation, compared to only
forty percent of those who attended the meetings somewhat regularly.

    To infer a causal relationship between attendance at meetings
and an individualist orientation toward social problems is probably
premature. As table 3 suggests, there were a large proportion of
parents, 45 percent, who were "individualists," even though they
never attended meetings. What we might be witnessing is a process
of self-selection. The service activities developed by Project
STAR to increase participation might have selectively attracted
members of the community that were least predisposed towards a
collective solution to social problems. If this were the case,
then the impact of the group was probably one of reinforcement.

    Another area existed where there was a relationship between
attendance at parent group meetings and social orientation. This
was the question of whether parents were critical of the retarda-
tion label assigned to their child. The parents were asked whether
there was any doubt in their mind that their child was retarded.
Parents who indicated some uncertainty were asked to explain the
basis of their doubt. Those parents who were uncertain gave a
variety of reasons for their doubts, such as, "child was not tested

adequately", "child just slow, not retarded," "child retarded
because he/she is black or poor," "observation of child outside of
classroom." Those that were "uncritical" had no doubt about their
child being retarded. Table 4 records the apparent impact of
attendance at parent group meetings and criticisms of retardation
status assigned to their child.

TABLE IV. Attitude Toward Mental Retardation Status and Parent
          Group Participation

ATTITUDE TOWARD MENTAL RETARDATION STATUS OF CHILD	GROUP PARTICIPATION	
	NEVER ATTENDED MEETINGS	ATTENDED MORE THAN ONE-QUARTER OF ALL MEETINGS
Critical	67%	56%
Uncritical	33%	44%
	100% (66)	100% (116)

Apparently the parents who attended meetings regularly showed more
of a disinclination to view their child's retardation status as a
political or racial phenomenon. Those who attended the meetings
were less aware of the processes that lead to minority children
being labeled as retarded, or at least did not believe that such
processes applied to their child.

   Any inferences we develop from these data are tentative. The
relationships displayed in the tables, while not statistically
significant, are analytically suggestive. The data suggest that
analysts of social welfare reform organizations should pay greater
attention to the cooptative impact of welfare benefits. It appears
that the social welfare benefits delivered to STAR parents might
have had the unintended effect of reinforcing an already apolitical
orientation among lower-class parents. Those who were "active"
parents appeared to be less sensitive to the issue of mis-labeled
minority children and less supportive of a social strategy of
collective action. Although there are no direct data to explain
this apparent relationship, a number of theoretical formulations do
lay a groundwork for an understanding.

TOWARD A THEORY OF POLITICAL DE-SOCIALIZATION

Cloward and Piven (1965) have highlighted the role of welfare
services in socializing welfare clients to a conservative political
stance. They argue that client passivity and conformity are
encouraged by conditional welfare benefits without adequate proce-
dures for appeal. In general, welfare bureaucracies have been
granted discretion in the distribution of various benefits.
Handler's (1972) study of welfare policy and federalism suggests
that the flexibility or looseness of the welfare system at the lower
levels of administration can be understood as a general agreement
between the central government and the local community that the
"moral reform" of the poor be handled at the local levels. This
suits politicians and administrators at the higher level since they
are more than willing to avoid taking a stand on controversial
questions. The result has been to allow the lowest level of
administration to make what are, in effect, decisions as to eligi-
bility for benefits. The regulations governing many welfare services
are, therefore, shot through with discretion. In this situation
welfare clients are at the mercy of individualized, ad-hoc discre-
tionary decisions.

The discretionary power of welfare organizations is enhanced
by the connection between expertise and welfare benefits. The
distribution of welfare benefits has increasingly been seen as
requiring expert skills. This approach is exemplified by the
changes in welfare services during the 1960's. A series of
amendments to the Social Security Act promised a reduction in poverty
through an intensive effort of trained and skilled caseworkers.
However, beyond prescribing that in order to qualify for federal
funds, a social worker could not carry more than 60 persons, little
was said of the relationship between caseworker and client. The
precise nature of the intensive service and how social workers'
activities were to reduce dependency were never clarified. (Gilbert
and Specht, 1974) This linkage between expertise and benefits
extends further the discretion of social welfare organizations
over clients. The "scientific" basis of knowledge and techniques
has had the effect of shielding welfare bureaucracies from a review
by political leaders and public groups.

The enormous discretionary power of welfare bureaucracies over
the distribution of benefits has the potential of being an instru-
ment of social control. Ordinarily, a group gains power and increased
public benefits through organization, conflict, and political
machinery. Today's poor, however, are able to secure benefits
through passivity and acquiescence. For example, a number of

observers of health services have noted the relationship between
sick role behavior and the receipt of services. The more like
a helpless object the patient is, the easier it is for the medical
staff do their work. Lorber's (1975) study of hospitals suggests
that for the sake of the smooth and efficient operation of the
institution, medical personnel encourage "uncomplainingness" and
"undemandingness" in patients. A study of dying patients also
found efforts at social control. Nurses scolded, reprimanded, and
avoided patients who asked lots of questions, created emotional
scenes, or refused to cooperate with hospital routines. (Glaser
and Strauss, 1965).

The increased involvement with welfare organizations following
participation in the STAR parent groups may have exposed parents
of the retarded to influences that reinforced political demoraliza-
tion. Bureaucratic procedures reinforce the premise that the poor
have few rights. The discretion inherent in the distribution of
welfare benefits allows the bureaucracies the freedom of arbitrary
action. Once the poor have internalized this view of welfare, they
become accepting of the vague administrative procedures and
conditional benefits. The manipulation of benefits is a powerful
mechanism of social control. It can take the form of either the
withdrawal of essential resources as punishment for dissent, or
selective appeasement, as when certain benefits are granted to
the leaders of a community, while the grievances of the larger
group remain. Political demoralization appears to occur since the
welfare recipient is likely to be overwhelmed with a sense of
powerlessness, frustration and resignation. The arbitrary procedures
and actions contribute to alienation. The individual moves through
life no longer experiencing himself as the master of his own destiny.
When this occurs, the client sinks into a state of political and
social inertia.

The types of social welfare benefits offered to STAR parents
may have possibly contributed to political demoralization. The
benefits they received were ones which were not linked to acceptable
social roles. Rather, the client categories by which the welfare
agencies defined eligiblity were "non-roles." Gilbert (1970)
suggests that client dependency and fragmentation are reinforced
through the use of isolative benefits.

This reinforcing is done by defining eligibility
for benefits in terms of unacceptable role
categories or non-roles: the clients are
unwed; uneducated, unemployed. They are also

unlikely to form groups that associate them with
the role failure such a categoric status repre-
sents. Collective action is stymied.

CONCLUSION

Our study of the internal dynamics of Project STAR suggests
the utility of an analytic framework based on organizational incen-
tives as a way of studying welfare reform organizations. The major
attraction of Project STAR to the lower-class parents of retarded
children was the receipt of welfare and health services. The reform
project can therefore be described as dependent upon material
incentives. Administrators of such organizations are under great
pressure to obtain the resources that will provide an inducement
to participation. The preoccupation with material incentives from
local welfare agencies can account for the eclipse of community
mobilization.

Analysis of the incentive system also provides a possible
explanation for the failure to successfully organize lower-class
parents of the retarded into social action groups. In multi-purpose
organizations such as STAR, the organizations's reform goals are
not an important incentive and have little impact upon participation.
This explains the reluctance of parents to be involved unless there
were tangible gains to be made. Given the relative unimportance
of the stated mobilization objectives, the organizers were able
to be tactically flexible in the types of rewards offered to parents,
e.g., services, travel, sociability, etc. The preoccupation with
maintaining material incentives, however, resulted in scant atten-
tion being paid to the political functions of social services.
The price of organizational maintenance was the necessity to adopt
activities which may have in the long run, proved inimical to community
mobilization. The exposure to increased welfare services through
the parent groups appears to explain, in part, the diminished
collective orientation of parents and their willingness to accept
the mental retardation label assigned to their child.

The reliance on welfare benefits rather than ideology as an
incentive for participation was recognition of STAR's weak political
position to effect changes in the welfare system. Social change,
implied in the ideology of community mobilization, would have been
painfully slow, or even an impossible task, given the resources of
the reform project. Reforms in intelligence testing and in services
for the mentally retarded were only in small part amenable to change
from the local level. Most of the mental retardation organizations

in the five sites were part of national and state associations.
Local efforts to reform them would most likely have produced minimal
reforms in programs for the lower-class retarded. STAR was, however,
in a strong position to deliver on the promise of welfare benefits.
Its linkages with community agencies made the supply of service-
incentives predictable. This was, therefore, a more secure
inducement for participation than the promise of institutional
reform.

This analysis of one attempt at interest-formation among lower-
class families of the mentally retarded suggests a "rational"
behavior on their part. The case materials further suggest the
failure of community mobilization can be explained by the
organizational incentives used. Project STAR's problem appeared
to lie in finding the proper mix of purposive, material, and
solidary inducements which both recruit and retain members of the
lower-class, at the same time allowing the pursuit of mobilization
goals.

From the Project STAR experience it appears that the use of
welfare benefits to organize lower-class communities may well
reinforce passivity and political inertia. This may explain in
part, the apparent failure of recent reform efforts to mobilize
the poor and extend their social and political rights.

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