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The Anatomy of "Burn-Out;" The Love Paradigm as Antidote

Norman N. Goroff

The phenomena, "burn-out," contains all of the factors of disappointment, disillusionment, fatigue, hopelessness, and powerlessness that a person experiences when coming face-to-face with the inherent contradictions between a desire to help fellow human beings and the structural demands and limitations of a social service enterprise wherein control is the central concern.

The resulting reactions are not symptomatic of an individual deficiency, but are appropriate to an intense conflict between the idealism involved in "altruistic helping" and the reality of an enterprise that may give lip service to the ideal of helping, but in practice is largely concerned with exercising social control over those who seek help.

The role of the social services as institutions of social control has been described by Goroff (1974) (1983) Cloward and Piven (1971) Mandell (1975) and others. Power exists when there are sanctions available to use in enforcing decisions. The capacity to grant or withhold financial aid unless the person lives up to "standards," the capacity to go to court to enforce decisions, the capacity to declare a person mentally incompetent, are sanctions available in bureaucratically organized social service institutions.

The organizational structure of most social service institutions contribute a great deal to the generation of feelings that have been designated "burn-out." The hierarchially organized staffing pattern wherein authority flows from the top down, communicates disrespect for all others below the top. As Buber (1972) notes, a power relationship is disrespectful to both the powerful and the powerless, because it does not affirm the essential dignity of the person involved in the relationship. To be told that one is "not good enough" by those on top of the pyramid, is to be assaulted. Being assaulted is not conducive to the development of a sense of purpose to help others. It rather creates a tension that frequently results in the person's erecting protective barriers. Hierarchially structured organizations encourage the development of a strong sense of competition. Competition is inherent in a system where many want to obtain the limited re-

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wards of promotion. This competition tends to create individuals who disassociate from one another, and therefore do not nurture one another as persons to persons. The sense considerable tensions. It is important to note that within an organization based on the power paradigm, the staff structure is received as rational, efficient and natural.

Much has been written concerning the professional in bureaucratic organizations (Goroff, 1969). The essential point to recognize is that there are inherent value conflicts and that each person attempts to resolve their conflicts.

Frequently these conflicts are irresolvable within the formal organization. The pattern of control is ingrained in the formal relationships. Professionals act on the basis of their best judgement and these actions are not automatically reviewable by others. In most bureaucratic social service organizations, the actions of persons on each level are automatically reviewable by those on the level above. Although the actions and decisions may not be reviewed, the fact that they are subject to review, places the individual in a precarious position. The feeling that someone is always looking over their shoulder may cause considerable tensions.

One possible solution to the conflict is for the development of an informal organization within the confines of the formal organization which will be based on a different set of assumptions.

An informal organization based on the Love paradigm can contribute much to the people involved to counteract the negative aspects of the hierarchical structured organization. Relationships based on caring and respect provides an essential nurturing that all human beings need.

The Love paradigm defines relationships among persons that are based upon caring, respecting, responding and understanding one another. They are egalitarian relationships which recognize the existence of many differences among persons while affirming that all have equal integrity and dignity. The relationship is characterized as an I-Thou rather than an I-IT or It-It (Buber, 1971).

To counteract the isolation and aloneness that is experienced in a competitive situation, persons share with one another their experiences with others and receive the comments of their colleagues. The consultation thus offered is recognized for what it

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is, sharing of viewpoints in which the person is responsible for incorporating that which makes sense to him/her. It differs from traditional supervision in that the "authority of position" is replaced by reciprocal influence.

When the possibility of establishing an informal mutual-nurturing groups among the staff is not available, such a group needs to be developed outside the work place. All human beings require nurturing, the recognition that one's existence is important to other persons, that one has become part of the others' life and world life and that they have become part of yours.

It is most important that the person not allow others to define them. In power relations, the attempt to define a person, and thus control them, is one of the ways that dominance is obtained.

A worker who objected to a supervisor's suggestion, which in reality was an order, was accused of having "problems with authority" and advised to seek help. If the worker accepted that definition, the person would have succumbed to the dominance of supervisor's role. In the human service field, the use of "diagnostic" statements in order to avoid dealing with the substantive issues is a frequent ploy in the "game of dominance." In another situation, a person who was forced to participate in an event which caused considerable and unnecessary pain, told the supervisor that (s)he was angry for being subjected to an avoidably painful situation. The supervisor suggested the worker talk to someone about "difficulty in dealing with anger." The situation was discussed with faculty advisor who noted that the anger was an appropriate response.

The attempt to impose definitions of persons is part of the hierarchially structured bureaucratic organization. It is important that one attempts to transcend the definitions and accept themselves as being and becoming, complete and the best that they can be "on this day." If people can transcend the negating communications received from the work-place, the unrealistic expectations that are implied will not cause unnecessary pressure and pain.

The definitions that others attempt to impose on persons are not only "psychologically-based diagnostic statements" but also include goals which are to be achieved. The expectation that "child protection workers" ought to be able to prevent deaths from child abuse is clearly stated in the question of "why did

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the worker not prevent this death?" There are many illustrations of attempts to create unrealistic expectations for human service workers. These expectations, when accepted by the human service workers, have two very important consequences. On a personal level, the worker can never meet these unrealistic expectations and is thus "never good enough." Being "never good enough" is a constant assault on oneself, and contributes to the disillusionment that is part of "burn-out." The second consequence is to divert attention away from our social world, how we organize our lives together and how we socially sanction violence in human affairs, and place responsibility on the individual human service worker and the organization, who have failed to prevent that violence.

In the Love paradigm, there is no attempt to dominate or control others. There is an acceptance that each person is responsible for themselves and accepting their responsibility to others. In the Power paradigm there is an assumption that the human service worker is responsible for those who seek help. Assuming responsibility for others is dehumanizing in that it turns the "other" into an object, a "thing" whereby one can demonstrate personal skill if the "thing" performs as one wills or conversely a personal incapacity will be highlighted if there is a failure to perform. When one is responsible for another, one needs to control the other to assure the outcome. Since in reality, it is virtually impossible to predict or control the outcome, an assumption of responsibility for others is paramount to placing oneself in a situation where the end result can be disappointment, anger and disillusionment; i.e. "burn-out."

We are collectively responsible for the social creation of situations that cause human beings pain and despair. We are collectively responsible to change those situations. We are not responsible for what other people do within their situation.

We may laugh with persons and share their joy; we may cry with persons and share their pain; but we take no credit for their joy nor blame for their pain unless it is the consequence of something we personally have done.

Within the Love paradigm, persons are responsible to one another rather than for one another. The relationship between persons is an end and not a means towards another end. Authentic relationships require persons granting to each other a share

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in their being. It does not depend upon one person letting go before the other. We recognize that individuals have the inherent right to respond to another's attempt to influence them in any way they see fit. It is important to note, however, that persons do not have the right to impose avoidable pain on others. Responding to one another as persons reaffirms that each has dignity and integrity. It is a relationship in which persons care for one another and hence nurture one another. This is an essential aspect of providing people with the ingredients necessary to prevent personal disillusionment and disappointment. While one may feel indignant at the injustice that persons experience, indignation and anger are different from disappointment and disillusionment which are debilitating emotions. Indignation and anger may be invigorating emotions, stimulant to action.

Within the parameters of the Power paradigm, help flows from the worker to those seeking help. The relationship is asymmetrical, with the human service worker in the giving position and the person seeking help in the receiving position. A consequence of this type of relationship is to make it professionally unsuitable for the worker to accept any nurturing for the person seeking help. Otherwise the worker will be accused of "meeting one's own needs" clearly implying that the worker is to be "selfless." This is an unrealistic expectation for the worker, but it is consistent with the Power paradigm's requirement that the person seeking help feel obligated to the worker. Help within the Power paradigm is not offered "tax-free," rather the recipient is expected to conform to the agency's definition of what is considered appropriate behavior.

Within the Love paradigm, the relationship between the worker and the person receiving help is a reciprocal one in which each person cares, respects, responds and tries to understand the other. This is the essence of a mutually-nurturing relationship. Although the worker does make professional knowledge and skill available to the person seeking help, it does not prevent them from nurturing one another. This does not constitute "unprofessional" behavior on the part of the worker, rather it is a most humanly appropriate response to accept the nurturing offered by those who come for help. The ability and readiness to accept such nurturing from all with whom one becomes involved is an important antidote to their feeling "burned-out."

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Many human service workers are frequently involved almost exclusively with people who are experiencing considerable pain and despair. The enormity of the problems that people experience do create pressures for the workers. There are times when it feels as if the total world takes on the image of enormous pain. The overload of situations in which people are in distress, coupled with the worker's acceptance of responsibility for them, at times results in a feeling of helplessness. One response to these feelings of helplessness may be to blame "the victim" for their pain by adopting an "individual deficiency explanation" for their troubles. This shifts the burden of responsibility from the worker to the person. Responsibility is defined in this situation as "blaming" rather than being responsive. The worker may tend to "shut down" feelings, becoming numb to the pain of others.

Within the Love paradigm, the worker assumes responsibility to the person and not for the person. The pain and despair that persons experience are viewed as being the result of how we collectively organize our lives together. There is also the recognition that the range of options available to people are not equally distributed throughout the population and that the existence of limited options is unjust. The worker may attempt to help the person think through their options at this particular point and try to make choices that would reduce the pain and despair. Frequently, as Viktor Frankl has noted, most of the pain we humans experience is a result of spiritual distress, an existential vacuum – a meaninglessness in living. The worker, by caring, respecting, understanding and responding to the person, reaffirms the person as having dignity and thereby brings meaning into the relationship and to the person. This provides the basis for the person to continue the process of seeking meaning in the events of one's life. For the worker, instead of feeling overwhelmed and helpless because of the large numbers of people in pain with whom he/she is in contact, there is the sadness and joy that comes from becoming involved in the life and world of other persons. Instead of "blaming the victim" there is a helping responsiveness. Workers do not service people, they become part of each other's world and together make their history. "We do not cure people or make people better. We share a human experience with the person with faith that, if we exchange love only for love and trust for trust, we will contribute to each other, an essential component of the hu-

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man experience – that of nurturing and being nurtured” (Goroff 1983).

The awareness of the enormity of the injustices we human beings have collectively created causing so many of our fellow human beings such great pain and despair and the sense of powerlessness that persons feel to affect this situation, frequently results in a concentration on the therapeutic orientation. If we cannot change the social world, we may seek to change the individual. We seek to concentrate on helping individuals because we define it as apolitical, and as a fulfillment of the ideal of helping our fellow human beings.

It is important to help fellow human beings, but it is not an apolitical act. The framework one uses in defining the situation has significant political implications. A framework which locates the pain that persons experience as a personal deficiency is a conservative approach. Implicit within this framework is that all is well with how we have organized our lives together; the source of people’s pain is located in their failure to resolve a previous conflict, or to adequately negotiate a previous stage of development, or an inability to deal with authority or with anger, and so forth.

A framework which recognizes that although the pain persons experience is felt within themselves but the cause or source of that pain is because of how we collectively have organized our lives together, is a radical approach. Radical in the sense of a considerable departure from the traditional.

The recognition that relationships with persons wherein we seek to help them can be defined as political activity is important in coming to grips with the reality of our participation in the constant creation and recreation of the social world. We need to “own” our position on the basis of our commitment to a philosophy and not try to avoid it on the basis of performing an apolitical therapeutic act (Goroff 1981).

The important factor to consider is that we create the social world through our actions and interactions. It is also true that social change is ubiquitous. The question we face is whether our attempts to influence the direction of change towards a humane world is by overt action. We recognize that social change is a process, a series of events, over time, and not a single event. We participate in the continual creation of the social world and as

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such we do have the capacity to affect a variety of situations.

In the Power paradigm, social change is seen as resulting from conflict between countervailing power groups. There is a conceptualization of pluralistic groups competing with one another for advantages. Unless one belongs to one of these groups, it is assumed that it is highly unlikely that one can affect the social world. The abstract sociology that reifies society, frequently results in persons feeling despair about the probability of creating a humane society.

The sociology that derives from the Love paradigm is concerned with the ways that persons affirm one another as having dignity and integrity. It clearly recognizes that human beings create the social world through their actions and interactions and strive to create a humane world for human beings and other living things. It reflects the difference between "knowledge for manipulation" and "understanding for creating," between the illusion of "value free" and the clear commitment to humane values, between a sociology that supposedly describes what exists and provides a rationale for it and a sociology that has a vision of what ought to be, a humane world, and provides a guide to help create it. We see ourselves as actors rather than reactors, as participants in the process of humanizing the social world. We have a time perspective that recognizes process and thereby prevents a sense of powerlessness from developing when a focus is placed on immediate results.

The factor of expectations plays an important part in the development of disappointment. When one is imbued with the importance of one's profession, and believes the extravagant claims that are made, there is a great probability for disappointment. The claims that social services could cure poverty during the 1960 War on Poverty resulted in great expectations and equally, great disillusionment. The claim that we can stop child abuse is equally fallacious. We need to recognize that we do not possess such powers and that only if we become a non-threatening part of each family's world can we even begin to have an impact that is noncoercive. We cannot cure people or make them better. We can attempt to control them. We can become "soft cops" and "benevolent helpers" who torment those people who seek help because we are doing it "for their own good" (C.R. Lewis, 1970).

Our expectations need to recognize that the people we are

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working with have an inherent right, as persons with dignity, to make their own decisions. Within the broader context of the social world, we need to see ourselves as actors who help create the world.

Probably one of the more insidious causes of disillusionment and disappointment is the institutional requirement to maintain records. Recording has become a fetish which creates the illusion of work being performed without the substance of work, i.e., helping people. Recording may present ethical problems when one considers that the persons requiring help had not given the institution permission to create a record of their problems. It is an invasion of privacy and a violation of trust for the worker to maintain a "case record." Studies have demonstrated that in excess of fifty percent of a worker's time is devoted to recording and supervisory conferences related to persons seeking help, whereas only about forty percent of the worker's time is devoted to direct contact with those persons.

Accumulating information can be an aspect of control. One needs only to recognize how much information is available on people and how this information is frequently used to deny persons their rights, to control and to subjugate them. For human service workers, a conflict may present itself between their desires to be helpful to those who need help and the requirements of the institution for detailed recording in order to be able to graphically justify their existence and demonstrate how "effectively" and "efficiently" they "service" their "population in need." For some workers, case-recording is demanded of them in terms of continued employment, thus placing them in a situation that has been defined as being "between the rock and the hard place." If they don't write records they may lose their jobs. If they do write records, they don't have enough time to be involved with those seeking help.

It is obvious that record-keeping is an integral part of the Power paradigm. Within the Love paradigm, there is no need for such record keeping. We recognize the interrelationship of people, that we are all constantly being and becoming, i.e. changing. Putting down on paper the views of one person of a particular event, i.e. a conversation represents neither where the other was at that time nor where they may be when next the people come together.

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The best one can say about any record is that it is an abstraction from life and hence is fiction. It might serve the same bureaucratic function if the organization engages a person who enjoys writing this form of fiction, has a flair for it and can fill in the spaces in "case-records" while the human service workers spend their time with those people needing their help. It should be essential that the persons about whom the "records" are written have given their permission and have both the opportunity to see everything in those records and the right to delete, change or amend anything they so not agree with.

The human service workers' sense of their own personal inadequacy has a significant impact on "burn-out." Much of the theories, knowledge and relationships among people in a competitive culture is designed to create and support the sense that the individual is not good enough. This situation has been elaborated at length in an article "The Social Construction of the Feeling of Personal Inadequacy; An Aspect of Social Control" (Goroff 1984). The central theme of that essay is that feelings of person inadequacy, which frequently are translated by the person into feeling of self-depreciation, are encouraged and supported by much of social science theories. A consequence of feeling "one is not good enough" is to accept as "natural" the current unequal organizational structure of rights, privileges and obligations. Those on "top" have a right to be there because they are superior to those on the "bottom." Within the context of comparison and self-evaluation, the individual will never be "good enough" because there will always be someone who will have more of some "thing". An acceptance of oneself as not good enough combined with the other factors discussed in this essay cannot help but cause the person considerable pain, disappointment, disillusionment and dissatisfaction, i.e. "burn-out."

It is not sufficient simply to feel adequate. The feeling of adequacy needs to be viewed within a framework of a value orientation which affirms the value of life and the inherent right of all people to live in dignity and with integrity. The very process of self-evaluation, however one views oneself, may be seen as an alienating act. Nevertheless, if a choice must be made, it must be for a sense of adequacy which reaffirms the person's dignity and integrity and has a commitment to Love.

If we can come to a point of feeling complete without eval-

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uative or comparative components, then we will have overcome the feelings of alienation. This situation is summarized in the Hasidic statement:

"If I am I, because I am I,
And you are you because you are you,
then I am I, and you are you.
However, if I am I because you are you,
and you are you because I am I
then I am not I and you are not you."

It may help overcome feelings of despair if we are able to accept the reality that being involved in the process of creating a humane world provides one with personal meaning in life as well as reflecting a commitment to the values inherent in the Love paradigm. We need a vision of a utopia; "a good place" (a place with social and distributive justice for all human beings). "Utopianism's aim is to change the world not to offer a recreational escape from it." (DeMaria 1982).

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