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THE PRINCIPLE OF INDIVIDUALIZATION

IN SOCIAL CASEWORK

by

Raymond Furcull Gansy

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Social Work
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Social Work

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1929, the report of the Milford Conference noted that the actual practice of social casework was more precise than the philosophy and methods underlying this practice. It was felt that this situation had to be remedied if social casework was to develop.¹ Again, in 1949, the lack of definitive concepts and precise terminology was pointed up as creating misunderstandings and barriers which limited social work education and training.²

Even today, there are basic concepts and terms in social casework that are used widely but are not clearly defined. But there is a growing awareness of the need to clarify terminology. One of these concepts is individualization. The purpose of this thesis is to arrive at as clear an understanding as possible of the ideas contained in this concept and to formulate a definition of it.

To achieve this purpose, a body of social work literature was studied. The principal sources were Social Casework, formerly known as The Family, and books published since 1930. Selected works in the field of social case-

¹ Social Case Work, Generic and Specific (New York, 1929), p. 11.

² Editorial Notes, Journal of Social Casework XXX (October 1949), 340-341.

work were studied, plus a few others that seemed to have special pertinence to the subject. Since psychiatric influence in the 1920's caused much new attention to the understanding of the individual, it was felt that little of pertinence to the subject would be found in earlier books or periodicals. Therefore, Social Casework was reviewed only from 1930 to 1955.

A method of scanning was used to gather material. Since only one author wrote specifically on individualization, it was necessary to select other topics under which material for the subject might be found. These topics were: acceptance, attitude, casework methods, casework relationship, client, individual, and interviewing. Pertinent excerpts were posted on individual file cards. The ideas were later organized under headings which then provided the outline for the thesis.

This study is limited to an understanding of and the formulation of a definition of individualization in social casework. Other concepts and principles of casework are included only as they relate to an understanding of the concept of individualization.

At various times, the principle of individualization has been referred to as "of the essence of casework,"³ "the foundation of modern casework,"⁴ "one of the fundamental principles of casework,"⁵ and "the primary purpose"

³Eleanor Neustaedter, "The Social Caseworker and Industrial Depression," The Family XI (January 1931), 275.

⁴Virginia P. Robinson, A Changing Psychology in Social Case Work (North Carolina, 1934), p. 7.

⁵Marion Weidenreich, "Function as a Psychological Concept—a Dissenting Opinion," The Family XXV (April 1944), 62.

of casework.⁶ Despite such strong reference to the importance of this principle, no articles have been written to clarify or define it. Authors of books have referred to the principle but have seemed to take it for granted that it was accepted and understood without need for definition or clarification.

The following definition by Father Biestek of the principle of individualization offers the most definite and logical foundation for the ensuing study of the principle: "Individualization is the recognition and understanding of each client's unique qualities, and the differential use of principles and methods in assisting each toward a better adjustment. Individualization is based upon the right of human beings to be individuals and to be treated not just as a human being, but as this human being with his personal differences."⁷

This definition seems to contain certain concepts that will be developed in the study. These concepts, which are enumerated according to their place in the thesis, are: the right and need of the client to be individualized; recognition by the client of this individualization; worker's knowledge, skills and attitudes as these relate to this principle; ways of transmitting understanding to the client; and the place of this principle in the casework relationship. Development of these topics through the material representing the profession's thinking should lead to a clearer, more concise understanding of the principle of individualization.

⁶Mary J. McCormick, Thomistic Philosophy in Social Casework (New York, 1948), p. 3.

⁷Felix P. Biestek, S.J., "An Analysis of the Casework Relationship," Social Casework XXXV (February 1954), 60-61.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THE PRINCIPLE OF INDIVIDUALIZATION

Before proceeding to a study of the elements of this principle, it is well to take a brief glance at the history of the profession of social work and at the particular development of social casework. Through a study of these, the comparatively recent emphasis on the potentials of the person-to-person relationship is pointed up. This emphasis in turn reflects the need to understand the principle of individualization and its development in the field.

History of Social Work

Throughout the centuries charity has been focused upon services given by an individual to an individual. Although this did not represent the same type of individualized service as offered today, the basic concept of person-to-person care was an established practice.

Christ placed a command of personal love of neighbor on all His followers. That He expected them to individualize is signified in the mandate that they love one another as they love themselves and that they do to others as they would do to Him.

The medieval saint, Francis of Assisi, who had what may be described as casework intuition, saw through external appearance what a man really was

and used psychological means in helping to liberate the human soul. Later, such practical spiritual leaders as St. Vincent de Paul in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and Frederic Ozanam in the nineteenth saw each man as an individual as well as a social being. They "searched for a man's inner attributes which his obvious failings obscured."¹

"With the growth of our Anglo-American legal system, poor relief practices were instituted by our Colonial and early American forefathers. Implicit in their concept of democracy as a way of life which they were intent to attain was a faith in man, in his worth, his possibilities, his ultimate dependability. Accordingly, there was concern that no man should want the means of survival."² Such aspirations did not mean that even minimal needs were always met or that the dignity of man was upheld.

In 1880, the recorded history of social work year by year began in the proceedings of national conferences. The first report of the charity organization movement was given before the National Conference of Charities and Corrections that year. "In its statement of objectives, two different emphases were apparent, on the one hand, the old concern for pauperism and its control and, on the other, the new interest in the individuals revealed to the visitors."³

At the National Conference in 1886, George B. Buzelle said: "Classi-

¹Fern Lowry (ed.), Readings in Social Case Work (New York, 1939), p. 68.

²Charlotte Towle, Common Human Needs (New York, 1952), Introduction.

³Robinson, Changing Psychology, pp. 6-7.

fications of our fellow men are apt to prove unsatisfactory under the tests of experience and acquaintance with the individual. The poor and those in trouble worse than poverty, have not in common any type of physical, intellectual or moral development which would warrant an attempt to group them as a class."⁴ Miss Robinson refers to this statement as the "enunciation of the principle of individualization, the foundation of modern casework."⁵ This growing awareness of the individuality of those served was the beginning of the present concept of individualization.

With the development of the charity organization movement, methods other than relief were devised, such as investigation, cooperation and registration. "We must assume that from the first the friendly visitor . . . achieved her success with her families through a rare individualization of each one even though her understanding was intuitive only, and her methods . . . were advice, persuasion and exhortation."⁶ In 1895, the National Conference classified all cases into three types: degradation, destitution, conditions requiring special work for children. Work was usually done with families, and recognition of individual differences rested on the innate ability of the friendly visitor.

At the turn of the century, the growing respect for the individual was reflected in the charity organization movement with its recognition of the person and his particular needs. "The motto of the early charity organiza-

⁴Ibid., p. 7.

⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁶Ibid., p. 8.

tion societies, 'not alms but a friend,' indicated a shift from the protective attitudes of fifty years earlier."⁷ Mary Richmond's book, Friendly Visiting Among the Poor, published in 1899, expressed the philosophy of the period, the value of the human relationship between one person and another.

"Prior to the First World War the major emphasis in social work was upon the social factors which influenced individuals who had problems. For man it was a time of social and economic determinism."⁸

From 1905 to 1920, social work in families was beginning to establish its own identity and to slip from the domination of economists. "In 1917, with the publication of Richmond's Social Diagnosis, casework emerged as a technical discipline devoted to the study of human beings and their social problems. The title suggested a new level of professional relationship, in contrast to the old 'investigation' with its connotations of one person's doing something to another."⁹

Before moving on to a consideration of the development of social casework, it is well to note here that "from this earliest forty-year period, from 1880 to 1920, scarcely anything remains of importance for today's casework practice except this one trend of opposing forces This struggle of opposing tendencies, together constituting an unbroken trend in time, is

⁷Richard Sterba, M.D., Benjamin H. Lyndon, Anna Katz, Transference in Casework (New York, 1938), p. 13.

⁸Herbert Hewitt Stroup, Social Work--An Introduction to the Field (New York, 1948), p. 7.

⁹Sterba, Lyndon, Katz, pp. 13-14.

the struggle between the individual and the social, the one and the many, the psychological and the economic, the inner experience and the external event."¹⁰ In 1917, Mary E. Richmond summed up the reason for the gradual evolution from general relief work to social casework. She said: "In the early stages of a democracy, doing the same thing for everybody seems to be the best that administrative skill is equal to, but later we learn to do different things for and with different people with social betterment clearly in view."¹¹

History of Social Casework

With the developments in psychiatry after World War I, "social workers eagerly grasped at opportunities for more understanding and new methods of working with people. They began to say that a person's situation was not as important as the person in it, and what it means to him. Feelings and ideas became their stock in trade, rather than rent money, clothing for a family, or knowledge of how to organize a campaign to clean up a slum neighborhood."¹² In the period from 1919 to 1930, social caseworkers were more interested in the application of psychological principles and in hidden mechanisms of attitude and motivation and less in environmental situations.¹³ This decade

¹⁰Anita Faatz, The Nature of Choice in Casework Process (North Carolina, 1953), pp. 9-10.

¹¹Mary E. Richmond, Social Diagnosis (New York, 1917), p. 367.

¹²Bertha Capen Reynolds, Social Work and Social Living (New York, 1951), p. 6.

¹³Josephine Strode, Introduction to Social Case Work (New York, 1940), p. 29.

saw the emergence of a common casework field in which the individual, his adjustment and development, became accepted as the essential problem.¹⁴

The publication in 1930 of Miss Robinson's book, A Changing Psychology in Social Case Work, was a milestone in the growth of the profession. It placed emphasis upon the client as the center of the helping process, as noted in the quotation immediately above. It also "placed the dynamic of casework help in the relationship which developed between the client and the professional person."¹⁵ The intellectual approach in social diagnosis (Mary Richmond) made these contacts uniquely different from neighborly contacts, and the feeling coupled with the diagnosis helped to build the relationship.

Advances in the social, biological and psychological sciences deepened man's understanding of human needs, motivations, and the conditions of life essential for man's physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. A fundamental principle of social casework, that each individual must be regarded and treated separately from any other individual, was becoming part of the philosophy of the times in 1930; and thus social casework was contributing to social progress.¹⁶ This philosophy proved effective when the large public assistance programs of the 1930's drew many untrained and unprepared people into the administration of the program. "The real challenge to their skill was not in the task of assembling facts to prove need

¹⁴ Robinson, Changing Psychology, p. 80.

¹⁵ Reynolds, Social Work and Social Living, pp. 107-108.

¹⁶ Malcolm S. Nichols, "The Contribution of Case Work to the 'Hygiene' of Living," The Family X (January 1930), 279.

and residence, but in ability to keep relief recipients in the stream of community living, and in full use of their citizenship. . . . It is individualization of service, and keeping people aware of their true status as citizens in a democracy which makes the difference between deterioration of human beings and their actual growth under adversity."¹⁷ The influence of a growing body of casework method probably effected the work of these untrained workers in their administration of emergency relief on such a large scale.

Casework is that branch of social work that is primarily concerned with the individual and the effects upon him of social problems, and secondarily with the social problems themselves. Other branches of social work, such as community organizations, social group work, and social action, all by their nature belong to the opposite tendency which places emphasis upon a broad program, external adjustment and economic solution. "To the doors of the casework agency comes every variety of human problem. They are brought by individuals, by individuals representing families, and this fact of individual presentation constitutes the basic point of approach on which casework has always relied."¹⁸ This basic approach reflects the philosophy of social work which is closely related to the philosophy of the nation, as to how it values people and the importance of their welfare.

The decade, 1940-1950, was "marked by a heightened awareness of the

¹⁷Reynolds, Social Work and Social Living, pp. 48-49.

¹⁸Virginia F. Robinson, Training for Skill in Social Case Work (Philadelphia, 1942), p. 15.

potentials of the person-to-person helping relationship. Its possibilities for providing growth-producing and therapeutic experiences have come to be more completely understood and the relationship factors have been brought under more disciplined control, both in practice and in teaching."¹⁹ The decade was marked by a synthesis both of knowledge and method of casework. "Today we accept the concept that the dynamics of the client-worker relationship is the core of casework treatment."²⁰

In summarizing the development of social work and casework the following paragraph offers a concise view of this:

Private family service looks back upon an enviable history of over one hundred years. As an institution it has gone through many stages, adapting itself to the changing temper of the times, growing with the needs of the community and everlastingly learning by experience. Our origins are with a rather condescending concern for the poor, with an effort to teach them to adopt a "better life", and we hoped for change by reprimand and environmental manipulation. Our strivings earned us respect, perhaps, but certainly not love, and as we observed the results of our endeavors as social workers, we became increasingly uneasy with our way of work. We turned to science, developed a body of professional knowledge. . . . Above all, we now stand committed to a democratic respect for the rights of the individual. Our association with the people we serve is one of shared partnership.²¹

Principle of Individualization

To understand the evolution of the principle of individualization, it

¹⁹Oora Kasius (ed.), Principles and Techniques in Social Casework (New York, 1950), p. 3.

²⁰Sterba, Lyndon, Katz, p. 16.

²¹Sylvan S. Furman (ed.), Reaching the Unreached (New York, 1952), p. 73.

is necessary to have seen how casework process developed. Casework has "as its primary purpose the extension of service to persons on an individualized basis through the organized program of social agencies."²² Some professional elaboration of the ideas contained in this concept of individualization will be helpful here to point up the areas that will be developed in the following chapters.

Malcolm S. Nichols, in 1930, stated that "each person is an individual human being, each problem is a specific one, each solution must be based on the peculiar circumstances surrounding a particular situation."²³

Mary J. McCormick wrote of "the concept of man as a being who possesses within himself a personal identity and a personal value that belong to him alone and that must be recognized and protected"²⁴

In a Department of the Army publication, the most distinctive process of social work is noted as "that process which deals directly and differentially with persons who have problems relating primarily to their social situation and which endeavors, individual by individual, to understand what help is needed and to assist the individual to find and utilize the help indicated."²⁵

The American Association of Social Workers sees its principles arising

²²McCormick, Thomistic Philosophy, p. 3.

²³Nichols, The Family X, p. 279.

²⁴McCormick, Thomistic Philosophy, p. viii.

²⁵Department of the Army, Military Psychiatric Social Work (Washington, 1950), p. 1.

from and identified with the beliefs and aspirations of a democratic society with "firm faith in the dignity, worth and creative power of the individual."²⁶

The underlined words indicate the concepts under which the principle of individualization will be developed. These concepts were enumerated at the end of Chapter I when they were noted as being contained in Father Biestek's definition.

Summary

The development of the field of social casework points up the fact that it is in the area of the individual's action and reaction patterns that there is most possibility for effective change. Therefore, it is in this area of person-to-person relationships that the profession finds its legitimate and primary function. Since this centers on the individual client, a clear understanding of the principle of individualization is needed. The comparatively young field of social casework has seen much modification, elaboration and redefinition of concepts. The body of this thesis shall attempt to sum up the profession's thinking on the principle of individualization.

²⁶ American Association of Social Workers, Standards for the Professional Practice of Social Work (New York, 1951), p. 3.

CHAPTER III

INDIVIDUALIZATION AND THE CLIENT

Casework is client-centered. It has always relied upon the individual presentation of the problem. Diagnoses are made and goals are planned individual case by individual case. Treatment is on an individualized basis, through a person-to-person relationship.

These services have been individualized because the client has a right to be treated this way and a need to feel understood and accepted as an individual. He will recognize whether he is so treated and understood, and he will react accordingly.

In considering the principle of individualization in relation to the client, we shall here consider the client's right and need to be individualized, his recognition of the worker's individualization of him, and its effects upon him.

Right of the Client

Man is "a being who possesses within himself a personal identity and a personal value that belong to him alone . . . irrespective of internal limitations or of external adversities."¹ "Human personality has intrinsic value

¹McCormick, Thomistic Philosophy, p. viii.

for the social worker, not because it can be molded or rehabilitated, but because it is worthy of respect in its own right. No rehabilitation is necessary to make a human being worthy of respect."² This fact of the dignity of each human being establishes the singular importance that caseworkers must recognize in each client.

If individuals are important, "they are entitled, singly because of their humanness, to respect and to aid when it is needed."³ They must be respected if they are to be helped effectively. This respect goes further than just consideration because of a person's innate dignity. We must also respect a "person's right to control his own life, enjoy personal and civil liberties, and pursue happiness and spiritual goals in his own way."⁴

Besides recognition of a client's essential worth, we must recognize him as a human being with his own singular and unique nature. "It is probable that, among the gigantic crowds of human beings who have inhabited the earth, no two individuals have ever been of identical chemical constitution. The personality of the tissues is linked in a manner still unknown with the molecules entering into the construction of the cells and the humors. Our individuality takes roots in the very depths of ourself."⁵ Therefore, "although the nature itself is common to all mankind and similar

²Lowry, Readings, p. 48.

³Stroup, Social Work--An Introduction, p. 4.

⁴Gordon Hamilton, Theory and Practice of Social Case Work, 2nd ed. (New York, 1951), p. 6.

⁵Alexis Carrel, Man the Unknown (New York, 1935), p. 241.

in all, it is individuated in each person."⁶

The client has a right to be himself, and we know that "environment and life experiences, as well as innate capacity, determine the character and conduct of any individual."⁷ We know that "individual behavior is the result of a complex of many interacting external and internal stimuli; that emotions, feelings, and memories influence thinking and behavior and that human beings tend to reject anything in a situation they cannot connect with past experience."⁸ The client, along with the right to be himself, has a right to be understood as he is.

Individual clients have a right "to be different in certain respects from other persons."⁹ If the client is different from others, the help he needs is also in some way different. We have already said that the client has the right to direct his own life. Casework help, therefore, must be differentiated to meet the particular needs of the individual client and to help the client "to use his own abilities and resources, and to work out his problems. . . ."¹⁰ Each person's nature is "capable of integrating and directing its own forces in a way that is different from that of every other

⁶McCormick, Thomistic Philosophy, p. 5.

⁷Strode, Introduction, p. 134.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Felix P. Biestek, S.J., "The Non-judgmental Attitude," Social Casework XXXIV (June 1953), 239.

¹⁰Hamilton, Theory and Practice, p. 44.

individual nature."¹¹

In summary, this section shows that the client has a common human nature that has intrinsic value. His dignity and worth establishes a right to respect. Since he has individual differences that make him a particular person, he has a right to be recognized and understood with his differences; and he has a right to be himself and to direct his own life. Therefore, he has a right to receive differential help that will enable him to understand and to cope with his own problems.

Need of the Client

Just as the client has a right to respect, recognition and understanding, he also has needs that seem to correspond to these rights. Workers have "become more conscious of the sensitivity of the individuals to the approach made by the caseworker."¹² "Normally a threat of reduction to nonentity comes with the absorption of the individual into the mass. This threat is even greater if it comes to the individual at a time when he is exposed to other anxieties. His sense of personal identity is less easily conserved if he is treated without personal discrimination."¹³ If the client has lost self-esteem, there are new dependent needs.

First, the client needs to be accepted and respected as a human being.

¹¹McCormick, Thomistic Philosophy, p. 5.

¹²Lowry, Readings, p. 151.

¹³Fern Lowry, "Case Work Skills and Fundamental Human Needs," The Family XIV (July 1933), 162.

Dr. Greenleigh, in enumerating basic needs of human beings, calls this "the need for self-esteem that is sometimes termed the dignity of the human being. . . ." ¹⁴

However, "each individual is conscious of being unique. Such uniqueness is real." ¹⁵ Therefore, each individual with a psychosocial problem needs more than respect as a human being; he also needs "to be dealt with as an individual rather than a case, a type, or a category." ¹⁶

To feel that he is being dealt with as a particular individual he needs to be understood. He needs someone to listen to him in a different way than is possible with friends. He needs "a person who will respect and understand his need to feel the way he does, a person who does not begin at once to try to change him, but who is concerned with the way he is feeling about being there and about the reasons that have brought him." ¹⁷ The client needs to be able to relate the meaning he attaches to his problem.

Each client's needs are "distinct and unique in character and each demands some variation in the treatment technic utilized. . . ." ¹⁸ Even if the worker cannot individualize eligibility requirements, he can differentiate

¹⁴ Lawrence Greenleigh, M.D., "Some Psychological Aspects of Aging," Social Casework XXXVI (March 1955), 102.

¹⁵ Garrel, Man the Unknown, p. 244.

¹⁶ Biestek, Social Casework XXXV, 59.

¹⁷ Frederick H. Allen, Psychotherapy with Children (New York, 1942), p. 91.

¹⁸ Family Welfare Association of America, Differential Approach in Case Work Treatment (New York, 1936), p. 4.

need for other services. The more the worker is able to understand an individual problem the better able he is to help the client meet a further need--to help himself as much as possible.

Miss Weidenreich indicated that the client needs to feel that his problem is unique but also needs to be reassured that his experience is not unique but is shared by many other people. This assurance is necessary lest the client feel he is isolated from his social reality.¹⁹

In summary, this section notes that a client's need to be individualized is heightened by sensitivity to reaction when in difficulty. Therefore, he needs to have his impaired self-prestige restored first. Then he needs to be understood for the particular problem he presents and to have the help differentiated as much as possible.

Recognition by the Client

The client comes to the worker with some difficulty. "Anxiety, distress and incapacity are always personal and can best be understood through the individual approach. Any really helpful relationship must be an individualized one."²⁰ How does the client, in a state of heightened sensitivity, recognize this individualization?

At the moment of contact, "any element of the interviewing situation which detracts from the essential person-to-person nature of the interview must be removed if interviewing is to be successful."²¹ Circumstances that

¹⁹Weidenreich, The Family XXV, p. 63.

²⁰Hamilton, Theory and Practice, p. 5.

²¹Department of the Army, Military, p. 23.

would make the client wait a long time or that would necessitate interviewing in a public area would detract from the client's feelings of worth. If there is voluminous note taking, the client "correctly assumes that the interviewer is less interested in him as a person than in the information he can provide."²²

In order to have his damaged self-esteem restored, the client needs the worker's "undivided attention, privacy, and help in discussing the topic of greatest interest to him--namely, his situation and request."²³ By receiving every opportunity the worker can create to show how far he can decide and plan for himself, the client can restore his self-confidence.

If the interviewer is able to prepare himself well, "his familiarity with available existing data convinces the patient, as nothing else will, that he matters and that his time is regarded as valuable."²⁴

The client will recognize interest if he "is encouraged to tell his own story and describe and give his views of the situation. He feels understood because of the worker's respect for him as an individual with rights and needs, but particularly because of the acceptance of his feelings about himself, about coming for help, and about his immediate situation."²⁵

"After a relationship has been established in an interview the patient tries

²²Ibid.

²³Hamilton, Theory and Practice, p. 152.

²⁴Department of the Army, Military, p. 22.

²⁵Hamilton, Theory and Practice, p. 154.

to say what he means and tries to act as he feels. This effort by the patient to make himself understood must be met with understanding by the social worker if the interview is to be successful.²⁶ The interviewer must start where the client is and not impute his own meanings to anything the client says.

There are other ways the client can recognize the worker's respect, recognition and understanding of him as an individual. These will be covered in Chapter V as ways of transmitting the individualization to the client.

Effect on the Client

The client's recognition of the individualization by the worker will produce certain effects. Only as he "regains his self-respect will he be able to make constructive use of the agency."²⁷

If the interviewer has reviewed available data before an interview, "the patient is likely to respond favorably to the social worker's inquiry as to whether what he knows of the patient's situation corresponds with the patient's view of it."²⁸ However, if the client feels a lack of attention, he "reacts by giving the bare objective facts of his case rather than his subjective feelings which are often the most important items."²⁹

Only as the client feels recognized as a particular individual and feels

²⁶Department of the Army, Military, pp. 28-29.

²⁷Towle, Common Needs, p. 21.

²⁸Department of the Army, Military, p. 22.

²⁹Ibid., p. 23.

understood with his special problems, will he be able to enter into a helping relationship. The success of the relationship, therefore, rests on the individualization of each client.

Summary

A client has a right to be respected as a human being and to be recognized as a particular person. He has a right to be himself and to be understood with all his particular differences when asking assistance. Since he has particular problems, he is entitled to differential help that will help him to work out his own problems.

The client has an increased need for respect, recognition and understanding when experiencing some anxiety or distress. He must feel recognized as a particular person and understood in a way that will enable him to relate his problems and the meaning he attaches to these. He needs a particular approach to the solution of his problem so that he can be helped to work this out himself as much as possible.

There are many ways in which the client recognizes the worker's individualization of him. His response, positive or negative, will depend upon the degree to which he feels respected and understood as a particular individual of singular importance.

The material noted in this chapter agrees essentially with Father Biestek's definition of individualization, noted in Chapter I. His definition includes recognition and understanding of each client's individual differences, and this would seem to include respect for the client. His

definition, however, does not seem to include the need of the client to help himself as much as possible as one part of the restoration of lost self-prestige.

CHAPTER IV

INDIVIDUALIZATION AND THE WORKER

The worker must be very active in the individualization of each client. Certain prerequisites for the worker if he is to be able to individualize and the very process of individualization by the worker shall be covered in this chapter.

Prerequisites for the Worker

Individualization rests on the inherent worth and the unique qualities of each client. "Activities . . . like those of casework are designed to meet the needs of human beings in such a way that the inherent value and unique dignity, the personal identity and personal worth of each one of these human beings, is protected and preserved."¹

If the caseworker is to show the client he values him and his needs, he must have a respect for individuals. "Any ability to help others effectively rests on respect for the human personality"² Even before meeting the client, the worker must "begin to see and feel and to think of the in-

¹Mary J. McGermiak, Diagnostic Casework in the Thomistic Pattern (New York, 1954), p. 5.

²Gordon Hamilton, "Helping People--The Growth of a Profession," Journal of Social Casework XXIX (October 1948), 294.

dividual as a human being, rather than as a depersonalized applicant or recipient"³

The social worker must have more than a respect for people; he must also be ready to respect each client's individual differences. "The worker's attitude plays a major part in the success or failure of an interview. The skillful interviewer is able to see the person with a problem as a human being with an individual personality, to identify with him by virtue of recognizing his individuality"⁴

The worker's attitude so strongly determines whether he will respect people and their individual differences that it is necessary to consider ways the worker can be aware of himself.

The successful social caseworker must be aware of factors in his own personality which will limit his ability to establish a relationship freely with any patient with whom he works. We tend to believe that our own attitudes toward persons in groups other than our own are essentially right and natural. . . . It is only the exceptional individual who can rid himself of prejudices which he has had for most of his life. The most effective way of preventing prejudices from interfering with the casework processes is for the . . . social worker to recognize his own feelings in this respect and deliberately to compensate and be aware of them in situations where his prejudices are likely to affect his work.⁵

"The casework method seeks to free the worker as much as possible from individual bias or prejudice and enables him to see the individual in the

³Towle, Common Needs, p. 113.

⁴Arne F. Fenlason, Essentials in Interviewing (New York, 1952), pp. 204-205.

⁵Department of the Army, Military, p. 12.

light of the influences which have shaped his development and consequently his behavior. . . ."⁶ The best way for a worker to overcome predetermined attitudes is a sound understanding and acceptance of the principles of human behavior. This will prevent attributing behavior "to wilfulness, heredity or some other inconclusive factor. . . ."⁷

With this understanding of human behavior, the worker is also prepared to secure the significant facts in discovering the true situation. Such discovery fulfills the agency's first responsibility, that of understanding. The facts, then, are the base for the worker's opinion and interpretations, rather than preconceived notions or prejudices.⁸ And, the case worker should have the additional knowledge of community and cultural values.

With respect for individual differences, the caseworker must have a "high degree of sensitiveness to the unique quality in each human being."⁹ He must have warmth toward others. "To be useful to another who is trying to change himself and his attitude, the social worker must have a gift for intimacy. He must be willing to enter into the feeling experience of the client, willing to listen to his view of his problem and of his experience, willing to go patiently along with him in his struggle for a solution."¹⁰

⁶Fern Lowry, "Objectives in Social Casework," The Family XVIII (December 1937), 264.

⁷Department of the Army, Military, p. 14.

⁸Margaret Cochran Bristol, Handbook on Social Case Recording (Chicago, 1936), p. 30.

⁹Mary E. Richmond, What is Social Case Work? (New York, 1922), p. 158.

¹⁰Hamilton, Journal of Social Casework XXIX, p. 295.

The worker must also "want to add something to the comfort and happiness of the other person . . . because she really cares about what happens to this particular individual."¹¹ Over and above this desire to help the client, the worker must be able to recognize and relieve feelings of insecurity, anxiety and irritability. Most caseworkers "have to learn the meaning of these attitudes and develop skill in reducing the fear, in restoring the damaged self-esteem. . . ."¹²

"The caseworker has been learning in recent years to become attuned to the needs and desires of the person coming to us for help--to distinguish what the client needs from what our own subjective needs make us want to give him. . . ."¹³ This awareness of his own needs may affect the caseworker's service to the client and goes further than his awareness of his attitudes to human differences. The worker must also be ready to plan treatment on an individualized basis. To do this he must realize "that different persons benefit from different kinds of help given in different ways."¹⁴

With all of these aspects of preparation for individualizing the client, we must not forget that the worker must also be alert lest he overemphasize individual needs and neglect the problem's proper relation to the total social perspective.

¹¹Florence Hollis, Social Case Work in Practice (New York, 1939), pp. 6-7.

¹²Hamilton, Theory and Practice, p. 152.

¹³Family Welfare Association of America, Differential Approach, p. 19.

¹⁴McGormick, Thomistic Philosophy, p. 33.

The caseworker must also be able to accept the client with all his problems and individual differences and to be non-judgmental throughout the helping process.

In general, the caseworker must be "very active in self-preparation for the role of a helping person, . . . zealous for the acquisition of the best thinking that is produced in casework and in the allied sciences, and . . . develop proficiency in the best casework skills and techniques."¹⁵

Before the interview, the worker can also remove any elements that might detract from the individualized nature of the interview. He should try to arrange for a private interviewing room, whenever possible, and should plan to be ready to see the client at an appointed time. Further ways of planning ahead for the interview are considered later, since they are ways of transmitting respect and understanding to the client.

Worker in the Process of Individualizing

As the worker meets his client, he must remember that people in trouble, of any sort, are emotionally upset and tend to be very sensitive to reaction. They are likely to assign great meaning to what the worker says and does and how he does it.

In times of stress the person may lose respect for himself. Such lack of self-respect "will always be accompanied by a reduction of one's respect

¹⁵Felix P. Biestek, S.J., "The Principle of Client Self-Determination," Social Casework XXXII (November 1951), pp. 371-372.

for others and therefore by the expectation of a decrease of the respect which one may expect from others."¹⁶

Therefore, "[v]ery early in the relationship, the patient requires indication from us by our behavior and discussion that he is respected as an individual. The restoration of his impaired self-prestige becomes one of our immediate treatment objectives."¹⁷ In their work with the men and families of the National Maritime Union, the social workers "found maintenance of self-esteem and of a sense of belonging to be of primary importance, and the various kinds of help . . . differ chiefly in the effect they have upon this fundamental necessity."¹⁸

The worker can also show the client that he matters if he has prepared for the contact and can ask whether his views of the situation correspond with the client's.

To use and conserve the strengths the client brings into his contact with the agency, the worker must begin at first contact to help the client feel that he is recognized as a person. The client "may logically fall within a certain category, [but] he will at the same time take on his own distinctive color."¹⁹ This does not mean workers must deny norms but

¹⁶Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, M.D., Principles of Intensive Psychotherapy (Chicago, 1950), p. xiii.

¹⁷Florence Haselkorn, "Casework with Syphilitic Patients," The Family XXIV (May 1943), 92.

¹⁸Reynolds, Social Work and Social Living, p. 35.

¹⁹Jeanette Regensburg, "Contributions of the Social Worker to Clinical Psychology," The Family XVI (November 1935), 203.

emphasizes that each case is different and must be individualized. There is always the danger in classification of people according to groups that the worker will see the class or category rather than the individual—unique and distinct.

As the worker sees each client, he must be able to begin where the client is—at his own level. "That the interviewer must hear each one with understanding and sympathy surely calls for a sort of chameleon mind which adapts itself so quickly and completely that she finds herself immediately thinking and feeling with each applicant as she interviews one after another."²⁰ "The applicant is encouraged to tell his own story and describe and give his views of the situation. He feels understood because of the worker's respect for him as an individual with rights and needs, but particularly because of the acceptance of his feelings about himself, about coming for help, and about his immediate situation."²¹

"[s]ervice is most nearly satisfying when it is given on an individualized basis through direct personal contact with the human being who is the central figure in it."²² Such service produces information about dates and events, but more importantly gives "valuable pictures of the patient's attitudes and feelings toward the important environmental factors that influenced his development and illness. What happened to him is important

²⁰Louise Mullikin, "At the Intake Desk," The Family XIII (February 1933), 346-347.

²¹Hamilton, Theory and Practice, p. 154.

²²McCormick, Thomistic Philosophy, p. 42.

social data, but of more significant import is the meaning he himself attaches to these happenings. Often his own evaluation of his feelings toward certain situations he has faced offer extremely valuable clues in respect to determining the source, nature, and quality of his conflicts."²³

The more the client is enabled to tell of his own feelings, the more individualized becomes the worker's conception of both client and problem. The worker gradually comes to see "a person, . . . moving in a web of family and community relationships, . . . social background and psychological depth . . ."²⁴ He sees the wholeness of the social situation with the individual's feelings and problems relating to this whole. Only as he sees client and situation as they act on each other can he really know either client or situation.

The good interviewer knows that the client "wants and needs someone to listen to him in a different way."²⁵ Usually, people are unable to express themselves with friends because they are cut off and their feelings are not understood.

The social worker's way of listening is very different from every day social contacts. He knows that the client needs to feel understood. To meet this need he must see the subjective components in each objective situation. He must always be on the alert to sense the client's feelings so he can under-

²³Department of the Army, Military, p. 8.

²⁴Harriet M. Bartlett, Medical Social Worker (Chicago, 1934), p. 184.

²⁵Department of the Army, Military, p. 29.

stand him as an individual in relation to his problem.

This means the worker must hear the client as well as listen to him. The most vital concern of the client "may not be revealed to us in loud staccato notes, but softly, blended subtly with other more melodious themes."²⁶ "Understanding the unexpressed meaning of the patient's conversation and responding to it are among the important skills an interviewer must develop. . . . Only careful listening and thinking about what the patient is saying will enable the social worker to understand him."²⁷

With an understanding of the individual's feelings, the worker personalizes these experiences by "stressing how the client has felt about an experience. . . ."²⁸ But, the worker must be cautious lest he endow the client with feelings which are his own or are generalizations.

In addition to the worker's personalizing of the experiences, he must also appraise the outer reality the client has had to face. Casework thus "can understand him and gauge the degree of his health or illness by his use of reality."²⁹

In addition to gaining an estimate of the kind of personality structure, the caseworker attempts to gain some impression of the individual's current capacity to function and to recognize the motivating forces in his behavior. The patterns of behavior, the inter-connections between symptoms and various life events, the type of "acting out", the agreement or disparity between the behavior and the relaxed feeling, the degree

²⁶Family Welfare Association of America, Differential Approach, p. 17.

²⁷Department of the Army, Military, pp. 28-29.

²⁸Weidenreich, The Family XXV, p. 62.

²⁹Sonia E. Penn, "Environment in Flux," The Family XXIV (January 1944),

and its appropriateness, the present anxiety, the kind of defense mechanisms and the extent to which they are used, the capacity of the person to deal with his feelings as well as reality issues, and the nature and quality of the response to the caseworker; all give indications of the extent and nature of emotional involvement and of ego capacity of the individual. This understanding of the psychodynamics together with an appraisal of the degree of health or pathology of the personality structure provide the basis for determining the kind of help that can be appropriately offered.³⁰

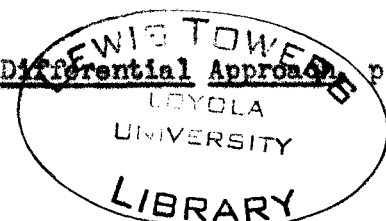
With such understanding of the client's feelings and of the psychodynamics, the worker is in some danger of losing sight of the entirety of the situation. In his haste to understand the client's unconscious motivations, the worker might forget his conscious desires. He might become "blind to the interplay of social, physical, intellectual, conscious, and unconscious emotional factors. . . ."³¹ If he does this, the worker fails the whole self of the client and thus lacks some understanding of him and his problem.

With a sound knowledge of client and problem, treatment goals are set. These are planned to meet the particular needs of each client and to help the client help himself as much as possible. It takes time, however, to bring about goals. Just as the goals themselves are individualized, so is the pace of treatment. The caseworker "moves only as fast as the person himself can move without being overwhelmed and, in the process, carries the interpretation only as far as the person himself is able to absorb it."³² The worker must free himself from the shackles of one technique to use whatever

³⁰ Cora Kasius (ed.), A Comparison of Diagnostic and Functional Casework Concepts (New York, 1950), pp. 16-17.

³¹ Family Welfare Association of America, Differential Approach, p. 13.

³² McCormick, Diagnostic Casework, p. 97.



one best meets the client's needs as they really are.

With constantly increasing knowledge and continuous developments in each case, the worker must be able to change his approach if this knowledge or new developments indicate it.

Summary

The caseworker takes knowledge of himself and of human behavior into each interview plus knowledge of the particular client if he has seen him previously. With self-awareness and professional skill and discipline, the worker maintains his perspective, keeping the client's needs at the center.

He preserves the client's dignity through meeting his needs within the agency setting. He individualizes the client in the process of meeting these needs by understanding his need and the subjective and objective facts relating to this. The whole process of individualized help has positive value for the client whose particular problem and the feelings surrounding it have met with misunderstanding elsewhere.

Father Biestek's definition presupposes the prerequisites for the worker as enumerated in this chapter. Recognition and understanding of each client's unique qualities rest on the self-awareness and knowledge of human behavior that the worker possesses. And, his differential use of principles and methods presumes basic skills and techniques.

CHAPTER V

TECHNIQUES FOR TRANSMITTING INDIVIDUALIZATION

TO THE CLIENT

If the client needs to feel respected and understood, the worker has the obligation to meet this need in each contact. Since the client's sensitivity to reactions and meanings is heightened at times of stress and anxiety, he wants and needs someone to respond in a different way than is usual between friends.

These responses can be expressed in various ways. This chapter shall show responses that are generally applicable to all clients and others that vary with each individual and his needs; further, some responses that are overt and readily discernible, and others that are transmitted through feeling and subtle undertones.

In his preparation, the worker can plan for each contact so that the client immediately feels respected and to some extent understood. There are techniques that can be used throughout each interview that transmit to the client a feeling of worth and of being understood as an individual. Since casework is an art, there are also special skills that must be developed to help the client with his needs. These techniques and special skills shall also be covered in this chapter.

A. Preparation for Contact

1. When the worker calls the client regarding an appointment, he can immediately transmit respect and understanding. If the client is a mother of several small children and is asked if an appointment hour would conflict with nap schedule or would cause her to travel with the children in rush hour, she feels that this worker already respects her wishes and needs and understands her position to some extent. If a businessman, the client responds to an understanding worker who asks about the convenience of an appointment during working hours.

2. When the client arrives for his appointment, "the setting of the interview should be one which is conducive to making . . . him feel that he has the undivided attention of the interviewer and that he is not likely to be overheard."¹ Therefore, "[a]ny element in the interviewing situation which detracts from the essential person-to-person nature of the interview must be removed if interviewing is to be successful."²

3. Appointments should be kept on time. If the client has had to wait in a crowded room, recognition of this fact shows the worker's understanding of the client's probable discomfort. If the client had no appointment and was seen after a long wait, the worker's recognition of this at the beginning of the interview might help restore the self-esteem that is often further damaged while awaiting an interview. The place of the interview is important

¹Department of the Army, Military, p. 23.

²Ibid. [i.e., p. 23].

so that the client will feel his confidences are respected and the worker can give full attention to him.

4. "If the interviewer has prepared himself well, he and the patient are free to use the interview period to discuss the problem which has brought the patient and social worker together."³ The interviewer can thus be prepared to speak the client's language and be familiar with the cultural medium in which the client presently lives. In this way, he is at least ready to respond easily to feelings regarding the data he has prior to contact. In fact, with some previous knowledge of the client and the wise use of his own casework methods, the worker can insure "minimum exposure to those stimuli which create self-consciousness, defensiveness, resentment, or fear in . . . [the client's] response to the worker, and maximum opportunities for developing confidence in and acceptance of the worker."⁴

5. Besides these methods, as enumerated from the source material, there are several other aspects of the preparation that can bespeak respect and warmth to the client. A clean, pleasantly decorated office helps to set the anxious client at ease. And, a receptionist and staff oriented to consideration for the worth of each client establishes a warmth with the client at the moment of contact.

In all of these varied ways the worker can transmit to the client a feeling of respect and worth with understanding at least for this basic need.

³Ibid., p. 22.

⁴Lowry, The Family XVIII, p. 266.

B. Techniques with Client

1. "Careful observation of the patient as he approaches helps the interviewer begin his interview at the place the patient is ready to begin it."⁵

The smiling client needs a different greeting than the sullen, dejected one. In beginning where the client is at the moment of contact, the worker imparts the conviction that the client is a particular person; and the client can feel early that he is being recognized as a person.

2. Then, the worker gives the client undivided attention and "help in discussing the topic of greatest interest to him—namely, his situation and request."⁶ "The applicant is encouraged to tell his own story and describe and give his views of the situation. He feels understood because of the worker's respect for him as an individual with rights and needs, but particularly because of the acceptance of his feelings about himself, about coming for help, and about his immediate situation."⁷

Such a beginning, with the client's needs and interests meeting with some acceptance and understanding, "has positive value to persons whose ego capacity has been weakened by negative life experiences."⁸ The worker shows a desire to add to the comfort and happiness of the client by showing that he cares what has happened to him.

3. "Listening gives the social worker a chance to become acquainted

⁵Department of the Army, Military, p. 27.

⁶Hamilton, Theory and Practice, p. 152.

⁷Ibid., p. 154.

⁸Kasius, Comparison, p. 19.

with the patient and to know what language he speaks, figuratively and literally. Listening to the way the patient uses language lets the worker know how to speak to him so as to make himself understood."⁹

4. Then, if the worker has familiarized himself with available data, he can ask if his idea of the situation corresponds with the client's. Just such familiarity with existing data convinces the client, "as nothing else will, that he matters and that his time is regarded as valuable."¹⁰

5. As the client tells his story, he gives "his own feelings toward certain situations he has faced [which] offer extremely valuable clues in respect to determining the source, nature, and quality of his conflicts."¹¹ Since the emphasis in casework is to understand the individual who comes for help, the client's own story reveals "the motive forcing the individual, and what significance the situation has for him."¹²

6. The worker must be warm and responsive as the client relates his own story, need, request, and feeling. The worker "must be willing to enter into the feeling experience of the client, willing to listen to his views of his problem and of his experience, willing to go patiently along with him in his struggles for a solution."¹³

⁹Department of the Army, Military, p. 29.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 22.

¹¹Ibid., p. 8.

¹²Helen Wallerstein, "New Trends in Casework as Developed by the Depression," The Family XV (November 1934), 209.

¹³Hamilton, Journal of Social Casework XXIX, p. 295.

"The worker's activity in the interview is characterized by a tendency to personalize the experience through which the client has passed. . . . This is achieved in part through stressing how the client has felt about an experience, but it is not identical with this activity. It requires in addition an appraisal of the outer reality the client has had to face."¹⁴

And, if the worker is to understand and personalize these experiences, he must understand something of the unwritten standards that affect the client's life. "[T]hese standards are realities in the client's life. As such, they affect the goals of casework."¹⁵

7. In this responding to the client, the worker should try to talk the client's "language, figuratively, [which] cuts through whatever background differences exist between the interviewer and . . . [client] and reaffirms the bilateral helping relation."¹⁶

8. This whole process of attentive, understanding listening "should be accomplished in an atmosphere of objectivity, permissiveness and acceptance. The . . . interviewer should be noncritical and nonjudgemental. He should reflect by deed and implication, the mission and policy of the unit."¹⁷

9. "The nonjudgemental attitude is not one of tolerance or intolerance of the feelings or acts of patients. Rather it is a detached attitude which

¹⁴Weidenreich, The Family XXV, p. 62.

¹⁵Biestek, Social Casework XXXII, p. 374.

¹⁶Department of the Army, Military, p. 31.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 7.

transmits to the patient the idea that the social worker is seeking only to understand why he acts and feels the way he does."¹⁸ The worker can further transmit this by enlisting the client's cooperation in "helping him to see the purpose of the information. . . ."¹⁹ He can understand the reason for information if the data is collected purposefully. Only data "which will have a direct bearing upon the diagnosis and treatment should be sought. . . ."²⁰ The worker places "emphasis on understanding the individual as he is, and on history and background only as they throw light on the individual's present needs and indicate his capacity for growth."²¹

Another element mentioned above as being part of the atmosphere of the interview is that of acceptance. "It is necessary to accept the patient as a person who deserves and needs help, but it is not necessary to accept his behavior. The social worker's attitude of sympathetic understanding of why the patient has behaved the way he has will help the patient mobilize his strength to strive for a more adequate conformance with his . . . reality situation."²²

During this listening, encouraging and enabling process, the worker is attempting to determine "as accurately as possible his client's present

¹⁸Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 9.

²⁰Ibid. [i.e., p. 9].

²¹Marjorie Boggs, "Present Trends in the Caseworker's Role in Treatment," The Family XII (July 1932), 158.

²²Department of the Army, Military, p. 13.

condition with respect to self-maintenance, the factors which have been responsible for it and the resources available within him and to him which may be used in the process of helping him to a better adjustment."²³ "This understanding of the psychodynamics together with an appraisal of the degree of health or pathology of the personality structure provide the basis for determining the kind of help that can be appropriately offered."²⁴

10. In formulating treatment goals, the worker should help the client "make his own decisions toward a goal that he is helped to set for himself Experience has demonstrated that this approach, removing as it does the threat of control, compulsion, or censure, tends to minimize [his] feeling of helplessness. . . ." ²⁵ The worker is respecting the right of the client and is efficient in allowing the client freedom and responsibility in making decisions.

The worker should give "the client every opportunity she can create to show how far he can decide and plan for himself and what are the fears and impediments that must handicap him. Even the filling out of an application blank can be made an opportunity. In innumerable ways, the social worker can stimulate or destroy his confidence in himself."²⁶

11. In the course of treatment, the worker should consider the pace

²³Report of the Milford Conference, Social Case Work, pp. 21-22.

²⁴Kasius, Comparison, p. 17.

²⁵Minna Field, "Role of a Social Worker in a Modern Hospital," Social Casework XXXIV (November 1953), 399.

²⁶Pauline V. Young, Interviewing in Social Work (New York, 1935), p. 183.

needed by each individual client. "The caseworker moves only as fast as the person himself can move without being overwhelmed and, in the process, carries the interpretation only as far as the person himself is able to absorb it."²⁷

12. The worker must also "be flexible, to see general objectives without losing sight of specific ones. It involves her ability to define her treatment approach in relation to her constantly increasing knowledge, of the continuous developments in the life-stream of the case, and her freedom to change her approach when new knowledge or new developments indicate it."²⁸

13. Another technique, not noted in the source material, is the verbalization of the confidentiality of material discussed in the interview. This helps the client to feel more assured of the interest and understanding of the worker. This is even further assured by the worker's asking permission to seek information from a source other than the client.

The techniques of social casework are planned to meet the particular needs of each client. Even if the client is ineligible for service or if the very eligibility requirements cannot be individualized, the worker can still help the client to feel respected and individualized. Besides the techniques referred to here, there are special skills for transmitting individualization to the client.

C. Skills Needed

1. To begin with, it is well to remember that casework "is an art, not

²⁷McCormick, Diagnostic Casework, p. 97.

²⁸Family Welfare Association of America, Differential Approach, pp. 6-7.

a science . . . ; all practice in human relations has in it something of the element of art."²⁹ Therefore, "as we continue our interviews with a particular client it becomes clearer what kind of person he is and . . . how we can be of most assistance. We must adapt our ideas and methods to him."³⁰ This adaptation of technique calls for skill acquired by intuition, preparation and practice.

2. Records help the worker to re-study the patient and to recollect appropriate, individualized responses and ways of working with the particular client so that he continues to feel understood.

3. The worker can then remember the reality of the client's outlook. "Any social worker in her contacts with children must be able to look at their problems not only with the mature judgement and objectivity of the adult, but also, she must make an effort to see the child and his problems from the child's point of view."³¹ This ability to adjust responses to different outlooks and varied intellectual capacities calls for special skill. This skill, "by training and sensitivity, is able to communicate to the troubled person a feeling of being 'with' him, a professional identification. . . ."³²

²⁹Frank J. Bruno, The Theory of Social Work (New York, 1936), p. 558.

³⁰Jeanette Regensburg, "Usefulness to the Client of a Continuing Relationship with the Worker in Social Treatment," The Family XV (January 1935), 301.

³¹Leontine P. Belmont, "Case Work Techniques in Work with the Blind," The Family XXIII (March 1942), 12.

³²Robert M. Schmalz and Henry Freeman, "Case Work Skills in a Worker's Service Bureau," The Family XXV (March 1944), 21.

4. "Understanding the unexpressed meaning of the patient's conversation and responding to it are among the important skills an interviewer must develop. . . . This effort by the patient to make himself understood must be met with understanding by the social worker if the interview is to be successful. Only careful listening and thinking about what the patient is saying will enable the social worker to understand him."³³

5. As he listens and responds, "[t]he worker chiefly stresses that he understands all this has meant much to the client; thus he draws the immediate attention of the client to the subjective feeling of the aspect of the experience."³⁴ Since this might give the client the feeling that his situation is unique and tend to isolate him from his social reality, the worker must be able to assure him that his "experience or failure is not unique but is shared by many other people."³⁵

6. The worker also must keep the total picture of the client in focus. "We are apt to forget the client in his entirety. In our desire to meet his feelings needs, we overlooked his physical ones. In our haste to understand his unconscious motivations, we sometimes forgot his conscious desires. We became blind to the interplay of social, physical, intellectual, conscious, and unconscious emotional factors in our haste to learn and practice the latest technic [sic]."³⁶ The skill to keep this total picture in focus is

³³Department of the Army, Military, pp. 28-29.

³⁴Weidenreich, The Family XXV, p. 63.

³⁵Ibid. [i.e., p. 63].

³⁶Family Welfare Association of America, Differential Approach, p. 13.

essential, since it is the caseworker whose unique function is this total social situation.

7. In the worker's attempts to personalize the client's experiences, he must be skillful in noting what these experiences meant to the client and what he is trying to say in telling them. The identification with the client's experiences must be skillfully handled so that there is sufficient individualization. The client must not be endowed with the worker's feelings or with generalizations.³⁷

8. As the client relates the character of his problem, the worker must be alert to this person's "reactions to that problem as those reactions are sharpened by verbalization and discussion. . . . This means that the case-worker will have to decide, on an individualized basis, when to limit his service to whatever aspect of a difficulty the person discusses voluntarily and when to take the initiative in exploring phases of it that are beyond the sphere of consciousness and that may, if brought into consciousness, prove to be disturbing and traumatic."³⁸

Summary

All the varied techniques and skills enumerated in this chapter must be individually applied if the particular client is to feel understood and

³⁷Muriel Gayford, "Content of Field Teaching in Medical Social Work," The Family XXIII (April 1942), 51.

³⁸McCormick, Thomistic Philosophy, p. 49.

helped. This helping process begins at the time of the first contact with the agency. Therefore, the staff and even the atmosphere of the office must lend itself to acceptance of the client as a person worthy of respect.

The worker's skillful use of casework techniques is shown in the ability to fit these techniques to each individual situation at the appropriate time and in the most helpful, individualized way. When the client feels understood, as perhaps he has not been in any previous social contact, the relationship deepens, the client is enabled to relate more freely; and he may disclose more intimate details of his situation or past experience that help the worker to individualize him further.

These techniques and skills are the vehicles for the recognition and understanding of each client's unique qualities. They fit the basic thinking of Father Biestek's definition of individualization and greatly elaborate what is so tersely phrased as the differential use of principles and methods.

CHAPTER VI

INDIVIDUALIZATION AND THE CASEWORK RELATIONSHIP

The caseworker's "specific skill is skill in relationship. The Milford Conference referred to relationships as 'the flesh and blood' of social case treatment. Perhaps an even more appropriate metaphor would be 'the blood stream'"¹ Father Biestek refers to the client-worker relationship as the soul of casework.²

Father Biestek also refers to the principle of individualization as one of the seven elements of this very important casework relationship.³ Therefore, it is important that the connections between the principle and the relationship be studied in this chapter.

A definition of casework and the casework relationship will give the framework within which individualization takes place. The Department of the Army has defined the process of social casework as "the most distinctive process in social work . . . which deals directly and differentially with

¹Swithin Bowers, O.M.I., "The Nature and Definition of Social Casework," in Kasius (ed.), Principles and Techniques, p. 124.

²Social Casework XXXV, p. 57.

³Ibid., p. 60.

persons who have problems relating primarily to their social situation and which endeavors, individual by individual, to understand what help is needed and to assist the individual to find and utilize the help indicated."⁴ Casework, as a process between two individuals, is different from the other social work processes. It is dedicated to "the one, to the importance of the single, separate life expression. . . ."⁵

"The casework relationship is the dynamic interaction of feelings and attitudes between the caseworker and the client, with the purpose of helping the client achieve a better adjustment between himself and his environment."⁶

Good casework is impossible without a good relationship. "A good relationship is necessary not only for the perfection, but also for the essence, of the casework service."⁷ And Miss Hamilton points out that "[a]nxiety, distress and incapacity are always personal and can best be understood through the individual approach. Any really helpful relationship must be an individualized one."⁸

This interaction of two personalities in the client-worker relationship actually improves the individuality of each. "Dr. Flanders Dunbar speaks of a 'relational action in living bodies which, while producing changes in the

⁴Department of the Army, Military, p. 1.

⁵Faats, Nature of Choice, p. 5.

⁶Biestek, Social Casework XXXV, p. 61.

⁷Ibid., p. 58.

⁸Hamilton, Theory and Practice, p. 5.

bodies, at the same time leaves the individuality of these not only identifiable and unimpaired, but even improved relative to their former states.' This is true of social, as well as bodily, relationships."⁹

The client's individuality can be reaffirmed and improved because one of the major components of the relationship is "an acceptance of the individual personality with its margins of uniqueness. . . ."¹⁰ The client is enabled, through the relationship, "to gain a deeper realization of his own person and his problems."¹¹ The client realizes that he is being recognized as having the right to be himself and not what another would make him. Workers show a great "respect for the client as an individual, . . . [for] his own powers of self-help and self-direction, and a willingness to let him use them to his utmost capacity to solve his own problem."¹²

The individual client, therefore, as a total person, is the subject matter of social casework and the participant in the casework relationship. This relationship, as a meeting of client and worker, has help for the client as its purpose. The relationship is "the medium through which the help is given; it is inseparable from techniques."¹³

⁹Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰Bowers, in Kasius (ed.), Principles and Techniques, p. 123.

¹¹Biestek, Social Casework XXXII, p. 371.

¹²Lois Meredith French, Psychiatric Social Work (New York, 1940), p. 232.

¹³Biestek, Social Casework XXXIV, p. 239.

The techniques enumerated earlier in this study, therefore, are a necessary part of the casework relationship. These techniques include the early recognition, perhaps in the warm setting of the office itself, of the worth of and respect due the individual client. They include the ways of working with the client so that he always feels recognized and understood as an individual with his own unique personality.

The elements of acceptance, purposeful expression of feelings, self-determination, confidentiality, sensitivity and the non-judgmental attitude were seen as essentially related to the individualization of the client. Father Biestek added individualization to these as one of the seven elements of the casework relationship. "These seven elements, therefore, are the conceptually distinguishable parts of the casework relationship. However, they are not separable in reality, because each element necessarily requires a union with all others. A defect in any one of them implies a defect in the entire relationship; the absence of any one of them signifies the absence of a good relationship."¹⁴

A look at several of these elements as they unite with that of individualization will show their interdependence. The principle of acceptance means "recognition by the caseworker of the innate dignity, ultimate destiny, human equality, basic rights, and needs of the client. . . ." ¹⁵ The more the worker is able to individualize the client in the helping process, the more accepted he will feel. He will feel understood and respected.

¹⁴Biestek, Social Casework XXXV, p. 60.

¹⁵Ibid. [i.e., p. 60].

Client self-determination is also closely connected with individualization since it affirms "the rights of the individual to make his own choices and decisions."¹⁶ The client realizes more of himself and his total personality when he is enabled to help himself. And, this principle, if individually applied, helps the client to know that the worker understands the areas in which he is able to make his own decisions at a particular time.

Summary

Individualization, as a principle of casework, is transmitted through techniques and skills developed in the previous chapter. These techniques, however, exist in and are useful only through the medium of the casework relationship. The relationship is the "soul" of casework; the principle of individualization is only one element of it. All elements in the relationship are interdependent, and all must be present for a good relationship.

¹⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to review a body of selected works of the profession to see what had been written on the principle of individualization. It was hoped that the ideas in this principle could be clarified and a definition formulated from the material gathered.

First and foremost, it can be said that the sources agreed essentially as to the meaning of this principle of casework. However, no one source presented any thorough coverage of all aspects of the principle as they are collected in this study.

The sources revealed much material on varied aspects of casework that, when brought together, showed the history and rationale of individualization and the aspects underlying its application in casework.

The sources relating to the history of the principle in social work revealed that the emphasis on person-to-person relationships has pervaded the field for centuries. However, greater emphasis has been put on the potentials of such close relationships in comparatively recent times. At present, the sources point up a tendency to study and to develop the techniques and dynamics of the client-worker relationship.

Although charity was always focused on services, individual by individual, the press of the times formerly did not permit service on the individ-

ualized basis on which it is offered today. Gradually, those in poor relief began to see how poorly the general classifications fit the individuals served. With the development of psychiatry and the greater understanding of the dynamics of human behavior, social workers began to concentrate on the person with the problem rather than the problem itself. However, it was not until after the Depression that there was any real attempt to individualize the client, except as previously done by the worker's intuition. A growing body of casework method and the heightened awareness of the potentials of person-to-person relationships has gradually brought the profession to the present day when the client-worker relationship is seen as the core of casework treatment. This relationship centers on the individual client, and this emphasis points up the need for a clear understanding of the topic of this thesis.

The source material established the client's right and need to be individualized. The dignity and worth of each human being establishes his right to respect. Since each individual is completely unique, he has a right to be himself and to have his individual differences recognized and understood. With the right to control his own life, the client also has the right to help himself as much as possible in the process of casework help. The sources did not establish the client's right to whatever help he needed but indicated that the help, if available, must be given in a differential way.

In enumerating the client's need to be individualized, the sources pointed up the client's sensitivity in times of stress. He has a need to be respected so as to restore his self-esteem. Since he is conscious of being unique, he also needs to be recognized as a particular person with his own individual

differences: To feel understood with these differences, the client needs to be able to tell his story as he sees it. He then needs to have the helping techniques differentiated for his particular problem.

The sources showed slight disagreement on how well able the client is to accept his problem as unique. It was suggested that the client needed reassurance that his experience had been shared by others.

The client, in his state of heightened sensitivity, can recognize whether he is being respected and understood as a particular person with his own differences. If he must wait a long time or be interviewed in a semi-public place, he will feel that the worker is not ready to give him his full attention or does not recognize his worth as a particular person. If the client cannot tell his own story or is not helped to decide for himself as much as possible, he will see that his worth as a person and his particular needs are neither recognized nor understood.

The sources noted that the client can use the agency constructively only if he regains his self respect and feels understood. He will be unable to enter into a successful relationship if he is not individualized.

The material also enumerated ways the worker can individualize the client. As prerequisites, the worker must respect people and be aware of attitudes in his own personality that would prevent him from respecting the client's individual differences. As a help to overcoming predetermined attitudes, the worker should understand and accept the principles of human behavior. The worker must be warm and sensitive to the particular qualities and needs of each client and must be able to relieve anxiety and insecurity in an individualized way.

From the very start, the worker must show that he respects the client and sees him as a particular person of real worth. As the client then tells his own story, he feels understood, especially through the worker's acceptance of his feelings about his experiences. The worker understands the client more as he learns more of the client's feelings and experiences. He can then respond to the subtle undertones to the client's story that are picked up only as the relationship develops.

The worker has to keep the total social situation in focus and must be able to set appropriate goals to be arrived at by particular techniques adjusted to the individual's problem.

There were many ways suggested in the sources for the worker to individualize the client. These related to preparation for contact and techniques and skills in the treatment process. In the appointment call, for instance, the worker can show respect and understanding for the client's needs, schedule, etc. Private interviewing space and undivided attention are non-verbal ways to show the client he matters. If the worker can know ahead something of the client's social milieu he is able to transmit more understanding to the client at the very start.

Besides the techniques mentioned above by which the worker transmits respect and understanding, the sources also noted that an accepting, non-judgmental attitude should pervade each interview. The worker can help the client see the purpose of certain data and thus transmit his desire to understand the client.

The worker must be skilled in adapting ideas, methods and techniques to the individual client, his problem and the goals of treatment.

Since this individualization takes place only through the medium of the casework relationship, the sources were also scanned for references to the connection between these. All of the techniques enumerated are part of the interaction between client and worker in the relationship. Just as the client will not use the help constructively if he is not respected and understood, so also the help is impossible without a good relationship. This entails more than individualization. There are seven elements of the relationship, and the absence of one means absence of a good relationship.

Through the relationship the individuality of the client can actually be improved. He gains a deeper realization of his own person and his problem.

The material agreed essentially with Father Biestek's definition of individualization used as the foundation for this study. However, his definition is short and needs much elaboration. It presumes knowledge of many of the aspects under which the principle was covered in this study. With the lack of a definition embodying the elements of this principle as found in the source material, there is a need to gather these essential elements together in the formulation of a more comprehensive definition.

The following is a descriptive definition of the principle of individualization embodying the essential concepts as found in the sources:

Individualization is the respect for and recognition of the dignity and singular importance of each client, the understanding of each client's particular needs and differences, and the differential use of methods and techniques in the setting of goals and the treatment that enables each client to help himself as much as possible toward a better adjustment.

Individualization is based on the right and need of each client to feel respected and recognized as a person of worth with his own individual differences. It is further based on the need to be understood and to have his differences considered throughout the helping process so as to retain his self-esteem and to remain

actively engaged in helping himself.

Individualization is transmitted to the client by verbal and non-verbal means. Some of these means are closely related to other elements of the casework relationship, such as acceptance, sensitivity and client self-determination. The relationship is essential to good casework, and individualization must go hand in hand with the other elements of the relationship.

Although the material gathered seems to have covered all the concepts embodied in the principle of individualization, it seems that more consideration should be given to a study of the part this principle plays in the treatment process, especially as an element of the interplay in the casework relationship. This could be best developed in a thorough study of all the elements of the relationship as they depend on each other and to some extent include each other.

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