A Report of
An Exploratory Study on the
Adjustment Problems of Displaced Persons

Conducted by
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June, 1954

This study was undertaken with the objective of exploring certain factors which facilitate, or serve as barriers to, the assimilation of displaced persons. While not aiming at definitive findings, it sought clues which might later be subjected to more extensive research, and attempted to develop, at the same time, a method for such further research. Conducted on an intensive basis, information was obtained by various means. Detailed personal interviews were held with employees at a needle work factory in central New Jersey, a long self-administered questionnaire was filled out by the workers in the shipping department of a small ceramics plant in the northern part of the state, exploratory conversations were held with various key persons both in management and union capacities, and several research conferences and seminars involving expert consultants were held at the University.

The tentative findings of this study, which will be discussed in more detail in the following pages, may be summed up at the outset in two points:

1. In a substantive sense, four related hypotheses may be set forth on the basis of the exploratory interviewing:
   a) The social relationships of the factory are basic to assimilation;
   b) The ritualism of steady work provides more than economic security;
   c) Work as such provides a common language;
   d) Language competence both solves and creates problems.

While these hypotheses need further test, they do, nevertheless, appear to provide insights which may be of current practical use in action programs.

2. A research approach which focuses upon interpersonal relationships, rather than upon the individual traits of persons, promises to shed new light upon the nature of the adjustment process.
Such an approach, as will be briefly discussed below, strongly suggests that the understanding of such disparate phenomena as prejudice or acceptance requires the "piecing together" of these interpersonal relationships according to some theoretical model.

The immediate background.

It was a matter of policy that one aspect of the University's co-sponsorship of the New Jersey Resettlement Project should involve some small research effort consistent with the practical aims of the Project. This task was assigned, on a cooperative basis, to the Department of Sociology and the Institute of Management and Labor Relations. After considerable discussion, which took note of the limitations of both time and money, it was determined that one of the most relevant efforts would consist in the development of new methods for the study of adjustment phenomena.

The need for a new approach.

Much has been written about the Americanization of immigrants, the melting-pots, and the processes of assimilation. This literature, despite its recognized historical importance, has, however, included but few attempts to study the problem in rigorous theoretical terms, together with the aid of "hard" empirical techniques. Often purely descriptive, and frequently characterized by exhortation and humanitarian appeals, the bulk of the studies in this field have emphasized either the prejudice of the indigenous population or the handicaps of the newcomers. A study model which kept sight of the individual and yet which emphasized interpersonal relationships at the informal, everyday level seemed to be needed.

The nature of the exploratory interviewing.

It is not appropriate here to report on the several research instruments -- questionnaires, schedules, models and forms -- which have been developed and partially pretested to date. These technical operations are ready for further development and application whenever the opportunity presents itself. What may be reported here with possible profit are certain hypotheses which have been developed from a series of twenty odd intensive interviews designed originally to throw light upon the values held by the workers, both recent arrivals and the well established. These interviews, as has been indicated above, were conducted along sodiometric lines. This means that the questioning was focused primarily upon people. Thus, in order to elicit data on values, the interviewer might first ask who is admired, and then seek to determine the values espoused by the person named. In this fashion not only is light shed upon significant relationships, but at least part of the tendency to want to give "right" and "proper" answers is avoided. One or two examples drawn from the interview material may be helpful in pointing up the nature of such interactive data. Thus the following conversation not only identifies a "significant other" but also tells a good deal about the values of the respondent:

Q. Is there anyone at the plant that you especially admire as a person?

A. Well, there is this girl.

Q. What is she like?
A. She's very nice, blond, talks and laughs much, is always very happy.

Q. Yes...?

A. She's popular. Well liked by most everybody. But...I don't know how much some like her. She talks right back.

Q. How's that?

A. She talks back to the older workers. She wouldn't be pushed around.

Q. Is she American or a refugee?

A. She's American. She doesn't like the few who try to push people around and don't like the refugees. They mix everything up.

Q. What do you mean?

A. When you are from somewhere else, you can see that they don't like you...She's not like that...but you can't always tell who is going to be that way so you sort of hesitate to approach anyone...

Or consider the revelations in the following conversation between the interviewer and a former factory owner in Latvia who is apparently currently satisfied with his status as a worker. They are discussing the latter's foreman, John, who has been characterized as a "nigger," although the questioning has just brought out the fact that the term was used descriptively and not in any derogatory fashion.

Q. Tell me more about John.

A. When we are not working, when there is a break, I can talk to John like I talk to any other worker. I can say, "John, this is not right." And he can tell me if he thinks I am right or wrong.

Q. Is there much talk?

A. We don't talk much during work. He (John) may say to cut out the talking and finish the job. Some people talk too much when they should be working. But when the job is finished he lets them rest and they talk then.

Q. Is there anything more about John? What's he like?

A. He is very popular. He is well liked by most everybody.

Q. Does he have any of these characteristics? (Showing a test card which carries brief descriptions.)
A. Well, I'd say that he doesn't care very much about getting ahead himself. He's just naturally a good worker...

Such a perception of the foreman, simply as "a good worker," together with other data developed elsewhere in the interview, provide an interesting illumination of the currently low level of aspiration of this previously privileged person.

Insights provided by the research data.

Quite apart from the research problems involved in the development of a method for studying adjustment behavior, the exploratory intensive interviews have yielded several substantive insights which may well be worth reporting. Keeping in mind the fact that these particular data refer to only one factory situation in New Jersey, that no systematic effort was made to draw a sample of all the displaced persons employed in this factory and that with few exceptions the interviews were conducted with persons who had at least a minimum working knowledge of English, the following hypotheses point up some of the crucial questions with which action programs must necessarily grapple: --

1. The social relationships of the factory are basic to assimilation.
In most of the interviews the evidence indicates that the work situation provides a ready-made and steady source of social relationships for the newcomer and consequently that it is a critical stage in the assimilative process. A young Latvian woman, for example, after describing her trek across Europe after the war, blurted out that her seven months as a handsewer in the plant had given her a new sense of security:

"...you meet people and you have friends. Then you move away or they move away. So you get friends and you lose friends. That's the way it is all the time. Now, the only friends I can make is here (at the plant). At home where I live, I can't make any friends. I just go home, and get the supper and go to bed. I can't make any friends at home."

Similarly, a middle aged Estonian, when asked about his friends, replied:

"I see them first time here and we are all working here together."

On the other hand, despite the fact of the existence of such ready-made patterns of relationships several of the respondents remain relatively isolated after two years, although there are possible clues to the process involved. In some of the cases, for example, one is struck by the intense hurts experienced in gaining acceptance.

"...sometimes (at the beginning) something is go wrong and they think, 'why you come here... why don't you go back where you come from?' Maybe I hear this one time but I never forget... But then after a while everything is okay... all new people who come here is happy."

The acute isolation of the worker may well be typically short-lived. (See #3 below)
2. The ritualism of steady work provides more than economic security. For many, the simple fact of working in a stable environment is of prime significance. In case after case, the act of working is clearly both means and end. Even with elementary social relationships at a minimum both within and outside the plant, the satisfactions of meeting the daily expectations involved in the work situation seem to be basic. Consider the former blacksmith in Yugoslavia, whose leg was blown off by a German grenade, who worked as a shoemaker for the International Refugee Organization in Austria, who later got a job in a jewelry factory after the IRO moved on, who, until coming to this country less than two years ago, had spent nearly half of his adult life either as a prisoner of war or in a hospital camp, when, in answer to a query as to how he was getting on in this country, replied:

"...I do machine work. No difficulties. Is good job. I work. Is easy work for me. I stay as long as I can. I not want something else..."

Nor is the case of Mr. L. very different. He was born in the Ukraine 66 years ago, moved to Poland after the first world war where he worked regularly as a member of a track repair crew on a railroad. In 1942 he was taken to Germany as a farm laborer. Living in a series of camps, he continued this work until the Americans came. At that time he obtained work as a driver for UNRRA, after which he worked for another American relief organization. From 1946 until he came to this country late in '50 he lived continuously in DP camps. After working for some months on a chicken farm, Mr. L. was hired as a sewing machine operator in the plant where he is still working. In response to a series of questions designed to get at his experiences in the plant and his total pattern of adjustment, the following excerpts from his testimony tell the story:

"...not many people from the Ukraine here, but easy to learn job... I no talk to much people. I do work--go home--have television... This is good factory and a good state..."

Lest the cultural impoverishment of the preceding case be considered the only explanation for the willingness to accept such an apparently minimal existence, a not dissimilar pattern is to be seen in the adjustment of persons from quite different backgrounds. The case of a 52 year old packer in the shipping department is not atypical. Born and educated as a lawyer in Latvia, he not only has held responsible government positions but at one time was part owner and general manager of a silk factory which employed nearly two thousand workers. But the impact of war was both swift and ironical and the Latvian statesman is next seen washing dishes in a Massachusetts hospital. A packer, now, for nearly three years, and with a fair command of English, he talks about his turn of fortune:

"...and when I came first (to the plant) the foreman was helpful. He told me to take it easy; that he knew that I didn't know the language. To take it easy and just do my work. People acted well and helped me...Some people don't know what they want. Come here, don't like work; don't like New Jersey. Go to California. Work a few months; don't like it there; come back here...(But) wages good here and Social Security. When you are 65 you get money. Plus the money you have saved can give you a decent living... (Perhaps) I would like to work in my profession but language is too much of a problem...I am too old to change. Got my car.
Maybe next year I start building my house...I will always be worker..."

There is, in short, an evident lack of job aspiration among most of the DP's who were interviewed. While they give many reasons for this orientation, there seems to be one element common to most of the cases. As expressed by one: "When you been any place a long time, then is home. I been (in the plant) two and a half years." In effect, after many years of insecurity, a beachhead has been established which the DP wants to solidify. The desire for establishing a tiny zone of security even brought two respondents spontaneously to mention that not only were they going to stay at the same job ("God willing") but that they plan to remain in their same apartments. The main motivation seems to be for continuity within their respective environments.

3. Work as such provides a common language. If these data suggest the importance of work as such as a security giving phenomenon they also lend support to the related hypothesis that work is a kind of universal language quite independent of culture bound words.

"Sometimes when people are new, it is hard. First, it is language. But work anywhere is the same..."

"...if they (new people) need a job, they fit it...As long as you're a good worker, everyone gets along. All the people are very friendly."

"And in the plant if you work you can't talk. I am on piece work. I start right at 8 o'clock...We are friendly with the American girls but just don't talk to them much because of the language..."

"New people have it pretty good unless they don't like to work. (He?) I do my work and mind my own business. (Best friend?) A good hard worker and minds her own business..."

"Oh, I don't speak English perfect, but I get along all right... If they (new workers) like to work, they do all right. If they come here to work. Everyone I talk to seems to like to work."

It is clear that a significant, though non-verbal, type of interaction is almost automatically set in motion by the work situation and that this elementary form of communication plays a significant function particularly at an early phase in the adjustment process.

4. Language competence both solves and creates problems. The data of the exploratory interviews are in complete agreement in calling attention to the importance of the language "barrier." Not only do the DP's comment on this at various points, but it is one of the most frequent observations made by the indigenous workers. It is as though they said,
"These newcomers have the same problems as the rest of us but on top of it all is the language difficulty." Yet the underlying values are clear. There can be little doubt that both "sides" to the interactive process want assimilation, and that language is the important key capable of unlocking the intervening doors.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that if the language problem could be solved, it would bring about ready solutions to such problems as occupational upgrading, community acceptance, or political participation. The evidence rather tends to emphasize the complexity of the functional significance of language in the assimilative process. At certain points in the process, for example, there is a kind of latent ambivalence toward language on the part of the DP's. On the one hand, their motivation to learn English is very strong, whereas on the other hand, they're afraid of it because it constitutes a potential threat to their security. It is perhaps understandably easier to keep quiet and mind one's own business in the fostering work situation than to expose one's self to the risks and hazards of the new opportunities made possible by verbal interaction. As one respondent put it:

"(But) speaking better (English) doesn't help...If you are quiet, it is OK; but if you open your mouth you're in trouble."

Nor is this feeling apparently unrelated to some of their earlier experiences:

"I've been through so many things...screening and the like...I like to keep my mouth shut...I don't think it is the language."

The evidence on this is very indirect and sketchy but in some cases it is almost as though the language barrier were consciously preserved as a protective device against a series of frightening and unknown problems. It is as though some sixth sense said, "Let us not rush things."

Such a negative value upon language tends to support the earlier observation that the work situation itself permits a highly significant form of interaction even though few if any words may be exchanged. And it is perhaps of more than passing interest that of all the DP's interviewed the only one who talked seriously of returning to Europe had the best command of English. While this is obviously an anomalous case, it does nevertheless serve to underscore the argument.

In conclusion, while these four hypotheses are far from being either completely specified or rigorously tested, they are reported here because the practical demands of the current situation regarding newcomers to our society are such as to require all available insights and wisdom regardless of their ultimate scientific validity.

The nature of the methodological problem

Turning now to a brief consideration of new methods, the discussion necessarily becomes both theoretical and technical.
Specifically, we wished in the long run to throw light on the proposition that the degree of internalization of the norms of the new culture is related to the degree of the immigrant's integration into informal social groups belonging to the new society. For example:

As Maurice Davies put it in 1936, "Other things equal, the rate of assimilation varies directly with the number and intimacy of contacts; by the same token, it is retarded by isolation." (World Immigration, The Macmillan Company, 1936, p. 499.)

Or, in George Homans' formulation, "The more frequently persons interact with one another, the more alike in some respects both their activities and their sentiments tend to become." (The Human Group, Harcourt Brace, 1950, p. 120.)

While such general formulations are generally accepted, little, in fact, is known about the detailed nature of such a relationship or of the process by which it is established. Rather than attempting, however, to deal with statistical aggregates or with survey material (i.e. characterizations of demographically describable populations or segments thereof), the aim of the Rutgers research has been to develop procedures for studying adjustment problems at the face-to-face, or interpersonal level. Such an approach, which is relatively new to social science research, focuses basically upon the interaction between two or more persons and is sometimes called dyad analysis. The research interest is not upon the characteristics as such of the subject or the object of the interactive dyad--rather it is upon the relationship between the two.

**General design of study.**

It was felt that the exploratory research should be conducted in a factory setting, since employment requires the adoption by the foreign worker of certain minimum standards and practices, at the same time providing informal opportunities for wider association and acculturation. The values studied accordingly were not exclusively occupational in nature, but also included certain central values of the wider community.

It was further proposed to study such values, not merely as internalized norms of the individual, but as they may be integral parts of concrete role-relationships. Espousal in any absolute sense of such a value as "success" or "hard work" often proves to be mere lip-service to an idea which actually takes on different forms or gives place to other values in different social situations. Accordingly, it was our plan, first, to attempt to observe two aspects of the relationship between each pair of workers, A and B, and then to observe the way in which these two aspects may depend upon each other. The two aspects, as described by Talcott Parsons, (American Sociological Review, 1953, p. 624), for example, are:

1) the cathetic or attitudinal aspect of the relationship between A and B; how is each disposed to act toward the other?
2) the cognitive or object-categorization aspect; how does each tend to perceive and define the other? Specifically, what values does each see embodied in the other?

The relationship between the two aspects may be further observed by studying such questions as: Is A more or less apt to like B, if he regards him as embodying such values as hard work, owning his own home, taking good care of his family, and the like?

The research was to be formulated around the dyad as the unit of analysis: that is, how does each pair of workers interrelate, rather than how does each worker relate to the group as a whole? Dyadic analysis of the cathetic aspect is very familiar. It is the basis of the sociogram (though not the sociometric rating) in which A and B choose (or do not choose) one another, or of Bales' studies of who talks to whom. (Cf. R.F. Bales, Interaction Process Analysis, Addison-Wesley Press, 1951) It is currently in use in another Rutgers Project for study of interaction between adolescents classified by sex, status, color (Negro-white). Dyadic analysis of the way in which B is perceived and defined by A is less familiar, however. Bales, for example (Parsons, Shils, Bales, Working Papers on the Theory of Action, The Free Press, 1953) asks sociometric questions such as "Who has the best ideas?" but then makes no direct use of the dyadic data but counts the votes to obtain object scores received from the group as a whole. Use of object measures is carried still further in a methodological inquiry (Riley, Riley, Toby, et al., Sociological Studies in Scale Analysis, Rutgers University Press, 1954) which explores the relation between position (total cathetic choices received) and reputation (total cognitive choices received). The object measures are regarded as superior to dyad measures where a system of many dyads is involved; nevertheless, the difficulties which have been experienced in handling such data may have resulted from the aggregating of elements which did not properly belong together in a system. A fuller understanding, it is felt, may be obtained by study of the smallest unit before any aggregating takes place: viz., how does the single cathetic item (A likes, admires, talks to B) relate to the single cognitive item (A thinks B is a hard worker) at the dyadic level?

An exploration of this sort is in itself new and potentially significant. But the analysis must be carried several steps farther in order to bear on the acculturation question at hand. For example, both A and B must be classified in some such terms as: length of time in the United States or number and frequency of informal associations with assimilated workers. Such data, if they can be obtained in sufficient and manageable form, should be germane to the objective as stated above.

The feasibility of this research approach.

Although much further work remains to be done before a full scale sociometric study of the type envisioned here could be launched, the effort to date has not only been rewarding in providing fresh insights into the problem but also in arriving at a clear determination of the feasibility of such a method. It is now abundantly clear that the complex human relationships of a factory may be studied as a system, and that this system has two
important aspects involving patterns of action, on the one hand, and structuring of individuals, on the other. Although the principle of division of labor in informal groups was enunciated by Durkheim half a century ago, it has received relatively little attention in much of the current methodology of empirical research. Nor has such a research model been bent to the task of studying the types of adjutative phenomena which are of interest to us here.

What this means is a shift from a survey approach to traits to a more intensive analysis of relationships. It means that the several persons in any interactive situation must be "put together" since it is now clear that different individuals may contribute differentially whether they are studied as the subjects in the process or as the objects.