ORGANIZATIONAL CATEGORIES AS VIEWING CATEGORIES
Evaluating Clients' Personality Traits in two Danish Rehabilitation Organizations

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how two Danish rehabilitation organizations textual guidelines for assessment of clients' personality traits influence the actual evaluation of clients. The analysis will show how staff members produce *institutional identities* corresponding to organizational categories, which very often have little or no relevance for the clients evaluated. The goal of the article is to demonstrate how the institutional complex that frames the work of the organizations produces the client types pertaining to that organization. By applying the analytical strategy of institutional ethnography I elucidate how the two rehabilitation organizations local history, legislation, structural features of the present labour market and of social work result in a number of contradictions which make it difficult to deliver client-centred care. This exact goal is according to the staff one of the most important goals for "good" social work.

INTRODUCTION[i]

A whole range of human service organizations (cf. Blau & Scott 1962) have certain common characteristics, regardless of whether their goal is to help unemployed people, battered women, alcoholics or other "marginalized" groups. First of all, an organization of this kind presupposes particular roles and identities and thereby helps formally to produce structural relations between staff and clients (cf. Hacking 1986; Loseke 1989; Miller & Holstein 1991;

Holstein 1992; Margolin 1997). Thus, by definition both parties enter institutionalised relations of asymmetry, or what I designate as "ruling relations" (Smith, 1987; 1990; 2001). "To be a client is, by definition, to be a *person in need*; to be a person in need is also to be a *weak* person (…) clients in the troubled-persons industry are, by definition, people who need something – they wouldn't be clients if they didn't need anything", as Loseke (1999: 160 – emphasize in original) writes. Typically, the natural point of departure for human service organizations is to conceive of the client's problem as an individualized phenomenon, which can be "engineered" by the organization in some way or another, while conveniently denying the possibility that problems may originate from the structural conditions of social work itself or changes in society like the emergence of unemployment for particular groups.

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY AND EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

This paper explores the institutional complex that unemployed people have to deal with in a Danish setting and analyses how the "documentary reality" of two rehabilitation organizations (cf. Atkinson & Coffey 1997) produce specific client identities. I will show how "key texts co-ordinate the local sites of people's work" (Smith 2001: 160) producing client identities attached to the institutional complexes with which the categorization process is interweaved (or even produced by). Although it is clear that the stated goal of a rehabilitation organization is to help unemployed people to become self-supporting or to develop a better livelihood, any organization of this kind is nevertheless part of what I coin an "institutional complex", which – as we shall se – restricts or even blinds the staff members in their evaluation of clients.

By directing a focus towards institutional features of client identities I am contributing to the research in institutional ethnography (cf. Smith 1987; 1990; 2001; 2002). This analytical strategy challenges the organizationally produced image of the client as an individual with a problematic essence. It avoids viewing identities as particularistic individual traits, understanding identities rather as products of social processes embedded in detectable institutional contexts. Changing the analytical object from individuals and the production of private selves to institutional complexes producing clients (institutional identities) makes us aware of the social mechanisms that *construct* natural categories like, for instance, "reluctant clients". Even though I focus on the process which leads to the construction of claims about clients – thus producing an analysis corresponding to a constructionist approach to social problems (Spector & Kitsuse 1987 [1977]) – I prefer to apply what Best (1993) has termed a "weak" reading of the theory, thus allowing the incorporation of e.g. statistical data as more or less accurate.

The empirical material presented in this analysis is part of a corpus belonging to a project focused upon the meeting between clients' and staff members in 2 rehabilitation organizations. The organizations are placed in 14 administrative districts in Denmark serving between 5-32 municipalities each. Since I am employing institutional ethnography as my analytical strategy, I have used various kinds of empirical material, i.e. participant observation notes, interviews[ii], and documentary material. In order to protect the participants' anonymity I have fictionalized names and places. My choice of two organizations is in accordance with my wish to explore the "reality" of organizations from different perspectives (in this article I draw, however, exclusively on my interviews with staff and the documentary material of the

organizations). 1) In organization A, where the length of my fieldwork was three and a half months, I participated on the same terms as the clients: I did the activities they did and participated in the various meeting they attended. In this organization I had my "informal" contact with this group. I conducted interviews with ten clients approximately three times each and interviewed eleven staff members employed in various capacities. Being especially interested in how written text influences the staff members' evaluation of clients (the "actionable capacities" of textual material (cf. Smith 2001)), I was allowed to copy all the journals of participating clients and other documentary material. 2) In organization B the duration of my fieldwork was one and a half month. In this organization I "followed" the staff and as such attended various meetings, workshop activities etc. and had my "informal" contact with this group. I conducted one interview with each of eight clients and interviewed twelve staff members employed in different jobs comparable to the employment structure in organization A. In organization B I was also allowed to copy client journals and other documentary material.

In addition to that, the empirical material consists of telephone interviews with one rehabilitation organizations in each of the 14 administrative districts in Denmark. These interviews combined with my fieldwork material show a remarkable coherence in the organization of the work. By "work" I mean the descriptions of clients, the length of their stay, the educational background of staff members, the type of activity and the type of documentary material the organizations receive from the municipalities or produce themselves. On a "formal" level the two organizations in which I conducted fieldwork correspond to the rehabilitation organizations in the other 12 districts in Denmark.

THE GOALS, ACTIVITIES AND INSTITUTIONAL COMPLEX OF THE ORGANIZATIONS

The goal of Danish rehabilitation organizations is to help clients whose status is ambiguous. Their ambiguous status results from the fact that they "fall" between organizational categories of the welfare state, often because there is a disproportion between their medical descriptions and their wish to work. In many cases they feel they are to sick to work, but are diagnosed in such a way that they can't apply for a social pension. Conversely, they want to work, but suffer so many diffuse pains that neither they nor their supervising caseworker in their municipality has any suggestions as to which job they might be able to handle. A common problem – or common denominator, one might say – is that their medical descriptions do not suggest directions for their supervising caseworker, and thus they become "matters out of place", as Douglas (1966) convincingly puts it. The purpose of the organization is to produce a report providing an image of the individual client that is "action orientated" (cf. Hanson 1993) for the supervising caseworker at the municipal level making it possible for her to determine the future economic status of the client (pension, flex job[iii], ordinary job or training on rehabilitation). The actual diagnostic process in the organizations involves staff members focusing on a wide spectrum of various aspects of the clients' life, from assessing their work capabilities, abilities to cope with the new situation as unemployed in their families, to more personal and psychological levels. Often the diagnostic process also implies "moving" the client towards a more "realistic" picture of herself, since it's a normal assumption among staff members that part of her problems are self-inflicted. Applying this idea staff is enabled to "help" the client, and in so doing their practice in the organization

corresponds to the dominant discourse of individuality in present-day society (cf. Holstein & Gubrium 2000). The technology of the organizations is "fuzzy", thus activities include sewing baby shoes, playing computer games, working out in the gym, painting silkscreen paintings, cooking meals – as well as more psychological activities like group discussions on personal themes, communication training, talks given by psychologists, or visits from old war veterans. The staff members in the organizations consists of caseworkers, psychologists, doctors, physiotherapists and 'contact persons', who run the various workshops and act also as personal supervisors for the clients.[iv]

A central task for staff members is to create a factual description of the resources and limitations of the clients. This is accomplished after a stay at the organization for approx. 3-6 months, during which time the clients are observed performing the activities described above. Staff members meet and discuss the progress of individual clients on a weekly basis, and as the stay draws to a close a report of the client is produced (see Buckholdt's and Gubrium's (1979) analysis of "staffings", which provides an illustrative example of this type of meeting).

Partly because the number of persons receiving pensions has grown during the 1980s and beginning of 1990s and partly because of a changing opinion towards unemployed, the legislation has gradually been changed with the largest effect in 1998 obliging the local municipalities – rather than the state – to finance social pensions. Statistics demonstrate that this has had a drastic lowering effect on the amount of social pensions awarded. Other statistical information indicates that the practice of the municipalities differs enormously, and since the two participating

rehabilitation organizations serves 11 and 20 different municipalities respectively, they are confronted with very different institutional units (through the supervising caseworkers in the municipalities). Thus, the "diagnosis" of a client is not necessarily connected to *her specific personal situation*, but in many cases rather to the specific *economic policy of her municipality*. An analysis of the rehabilitation work must as a consequence relate to these aspects which are "organized in powerful ways by trans-local social relations that pass through local settings and shape them according to a dynamic of transformation that begins and gathers speed somewhere else" (De Vault & McCoy 2002: 752). Consequently I view the meeting between clients and staff as "ruling relations", a term borrowed from Smith to focus attention on the fact that the complex of organized practices "involve a continual transcription of the local and particular actualities of our lives into abstracted and generalized forms" (Smith 1987: 3). In this transcription, forms of consciousness are created that are properties of an organization or a discourse rather than of individual subjects. Thus, institutions perform a work of ruling in that they organize, coordinate, regulate, guide and control human subjects.

This institutional complex influences work conditions at the two rehabilitation organizations by e.g. making it a rule that "good" social work in the organizations is to avoid recommending pensions. This condition applies especially for the social workers in the organizations, since they as a group have the daily contact with the supervising caseworkers in the municipality. Contact persons in the organizations deal primarily with clients and are thus – as a result of their organizational position – more focused on the needs of clients (cf. Anspach's (1987) research on decision-making in different professional groups in a hospital ward).

FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE

This section investigates how staff members reach different assessments of clients, i.e. what parameters are used in the evaluation that will eventually lead to the communication of the assessments as a form of "factual" knowledge about the situation of the client. Within this perspective facts are not actual events, but events that have gone though "proper procedure", which has "transformed them into facts" (Smith 1990: 27).

It is this "proper procedure" of Smith's that I would like to investigate in relation to the different techniques used by the staff members in determining a client's situation. One contact person, Susan from organization B, focuses attention on this relationship, as evidenced in the following dialogue about the way the reports are made. Please note how Susan's description shows that many different stories may be told of a person. The specific story she "chooses" depends on a range of factors, not least observations of the client made by other staff members.

> Susan: If someone is about to apply for, say, a pension – or wants to apply for a pension. I have no influence on it whatsoever. But somehow it is important to describe a lot of the physical things they've been doing. (...) If it's someone who's about to start a flex job somewhere, there's no point in spelling out all the physical activities they've had. It's more a case of describing all the resources they have in that area. This means that legally we are obliged to describe all the resources and that's what I do. But now that you ask specifically, it is changed according to whether they're entering the labour market, applying for a pension or going into

training. (...)

Interviewer: What if the client has one agenda – i.e. wants one thing – and you actually believe they should do something else? How do you make the description then? According to what *you* believe they should do, or according to what they want to do? Say you have a client who would like to get a pension and you think she might as well start a flex job?

Susan: Then I describe the resources, which that person has. I mean – how shall I put it – the resources she has proved to have. Eh...but I probably also...yes, I think that maybe I write something in between. Because I probably also describe the limitations that person has. (...) [But I] have to write about the resources no matter what. But in order to help the client I also describe their limitations. Otherwise it would be unfair. I mean I have to write what I've seen.

Interviewer: What I'm really asking is, well, one sees an incredible amount of different things. One could write a novel about each...

Susan: Yes, yes. That's true.

Interviewer: So some sort of selection happens. (...) You emphasise certain things and some things you don't emphasise. And how do you do that?

Susan: Well, how do I do that. (Pause) (Sighs) I don't know. (...) That's a hard question. (...) I think it largely depends on, if we're in doubt (pause) how I observe that person then it becomes very important to me to describe that person in a way – how shall I put it – (pause) so that

everyone [referring to the other staff members] would be able to recognise him/her. I think it's like that. That means it also refers to what we've talked about among the staff, what we've talked about during contact talks, what's seemed to be important during the status meetings [a formal talk between the client and a selection of staff working on her case]. (...) My doubt should preferably benefit the client. So it shouldn't be a case of me making an account that's coloured by how *I* think it ought to be.

This dialogue between Susan and myself shows how the procedures she follows when making the final report depend partly upon the aim of the reporting (whether to aim for the labour market, apply for a pension or ask for educational support), partly upon the types of activities and goals inherent in the social services legislation. When Susan says that she "has to write about the resources no matter what" she draws attention to the (new) demand for reports, which should not aim exclusively for a pension. Immediately afterwards she points to her specific organizational position, as the one that has to "help the client", even if this implies describing the limitations of the client: her "doubt should preferably benefit the client", as she explains. It is evident that Susan is aware of the effect her description may have (even if she says initially, "I have no influence on it whatsoever"), since she chooses to describe the limitations of clients who express a wish for a pension, although she thinks they might be able to handle a flex job. The dialogue illustrates the difficult task of staff members when they finally create those "facts" about the person who they believe will match the description of how a particular client "is".

According to Holstein (1992: 27), despite the apparent factuality of "person descriptions" in

human service rhetoric, they will necessarily provide "perspectival, if not partisan, versions of the matters described." This institutional feature cannot be solved by the staff writing endless stories about clients, where they focus on limitations as well as resources, since "there is always more information that might be provided" (ibid.).

TEXTUAL REALITIES

Silverman (1993) notes that we have entered an "interview society". It seems equally likely that we have entered a "documentary society", when we analyse the local practices of human service organizations. Apart from comprehensive records of the clients, the rehabilitation organizations have loads of documents describing methods, evaluation areas (see below), local educational programs, questionnaires, and documents on financial matters. The actual evaluation of clients is based upon written material available to both participating rehabilitation organizations and includes a description of the subjects to be evaluated as well as various methodological reflections. In the following analysis I will present the two organizations evaluation areas, which newcomers (always including staff and sometimes clients too) are presented with in their first encounter with the organization.

Organization A had an outline of the different areas in which they had to evaluate/help the client. These areas included an evaluation of pain level, staying power, pace, working positions (categorized as "physical resources and mobility"); co-operation ability, independence, stress resistance, self-confidence (categorized as "psyche and conflict preparedness"); instruction comprehension, skills, motor functions (categorized as "learning skills, memory and concentration"); problem

solving, planning, overall perspective (categorized as "flexibility"); quality assessment of own work (categorized as "performance expectations"); motivation, responsibility, flexibility, attendance and working time (categorized as "work moral").

In organization B the clients were introduced to figure 1 (see below), containing an overview of the workshops (and a few other activities) as well as information on which areas of their personal situation clients might expect to have evaluated. The purpose of this introduction was to make clients choose activities suitable to their particular situation. Clients of this organization did not attend any particular workshop, as they did in organization A, but could join several different ones if they wished. All clients, however, had to participate in group work, training and relaxation exercises.

Figure 1: Overview of institution B's workshops combined with evaluation areas

Workshop/ Clarification of (evaluation of)	Computer workshop	Textile workshop ᵛ	Kitchen and diet	Group work	Training	Relaxation	Swimming
Working positions (Standing, walking and/or sitting)	X	X	X			X	
Learning ability	X						
Instruction comprehension	X		X		X		
Carefulness	X	X					
Concentration	X	X	X				
Staying power	X	X	X				X
Creativity	X	X					
Memory	X				X		
Independence	X	X	X		X		
Office work abilities	X						
Skills		X	X				
Fine motor function		X					
Co-operation ability			X	X			
Need for aid			X				
Ability to new thinking				X			
Body sense					X	X	X
Planning ability					X		X
Body challenge inclination					X		

Work ethics					X		
Body coordination					X		
Body awareness						X	
State of tensions						X	
Stability							X

A comparison of the evaluation areas from organization A and B shows that a number of the same concepts are used. In fact, if concepts such as B's "ability to plan" is sided with A's "planning and overall perspective" it turns out that only a few areas do not correlate. Similarly B's concept of "work ethics" is the equivalent of A's "work moral". Further, a number of concepts are identical, e.g. "work position", staying power, instruction-comprehension, memory, learning ability, concentration, co-operation and independence". As Smiths notes (2001) "texts creates action" and has – as we shall see – in this case the profound effect of transforming organizational categories to specific personality traits of persons. In this process institutional selves (cf. Gubrium & Holstein 2000) are made stable despite the goal of interacting with "the whole person"; persons are transformed into cases (cf. Hummel 1977).[vi]

The different assessment areas can be divided into two main groups: 1) Personal capacities of clients and 2) Physical capacities of clients. Many of the personal assessment areas – e.g. co-operation ability, learning ability, independence, self-confidence, initiative and flexibility – are popular terms in present Western society. Today employers of both new firms and old institutions as e.g. universities expect the

employees to engage positively in a development of their personal self that reflects the same values as many of the rehabilitation organizations assessment areas. Applying the idea that organizational values cannot be separated from dominating values in present society, it seems expectable that also clients are perceived as a group of people that should strive for a development of their personal self. Brian, a sub-manager in organization A, presents his organizations tie to uncontested values in the present labour market very clearly:

> Brian: The firms are very focused on the personal aspects today (…) It's a fact that if people have been sitting at home, has been isolated, and then they act differently. I mean, they actually loose the social competence of being with other people. And what is in demand today is the *personal aspect*; that people can get along with you, that you function well socially, and whether you can take an initiative. (…) So that is what we have to work on here in the organization.

It is the "personal aspect" that is in "demand" today, as Brian explains. In doing so he associates the assessment areas of the client's "social competence" and "initiative" with a feature of present-days labour market, i.e. an institutional feature transformed into a central personality trait worth measuring. The personal assessment areas of the organizations are an integral part of the "psy discipline" (Rose 1999) reflecting that the prime task of the organizations' work is to *diagnose* individuals, in this way documenting the unequal access to the production of knowledge (Smith 1987) for staff and clients. These two conditions – established values in present Western society and the diagnostic practice of "psy disciplines" – might explain why the personal assessment areas of the organizations have become so obvious to evaluate. The physical assessments areas – e.g. staying power, pace, working

positions and motor functions – might be viewed as a "remnant" from an industrial era in the 1950s where the rehabilitation organizations were developed. The problem is, however, that the monotonous unskilled work that was in demand then has more or less disappeared in many Western countries including Denmark. The group targeted by the rehabilitation organizations has, however, remained the same; that is mainly unemployed, unskilled labour. This creates a fundamental disjuncture (cf. Smith 1987) for the staff for two reasons: 1) There is no demand for the qualifications (or lack of them) of the unemployed persons referred to the institution and 2) The evaluation areas primary correspondence to an organizational "reality" contradicts an important goal for the staff – as mentioned on many situations – that is to deliver "client-centred" care and engage in a "equal relation" with the client (Margolin 1997). These goals are in general perceived as an important departure for the work in occupational therapy (Corring & Cook 1999).

In the following analysis I will focus on the productive effect of the evaluation areas as presented above and attempt to demonstrate their hyper-reality (cf. Hanson 1993), i.e. the process under which they dominate other understandings. I want to show how these organizational categories produce specific client identities that reveal the organizations textual reality (and history). Even though I place texts centrally in the analysis, I do not wish to reduce the interaction between staff and clients to text. Their function as "fundamental media of co-ordinating people's work activities" (Smith 2001: 175) becomes perceptible only when I combine the textual material with interview and observational material.[vii]

ORGANIZATIONAL CATEGORIES AS VIEWING CATEGORIES – STAFF MEMBERS TALKING ABOUT THEIR EVALUATION PRACTICE

Example 1

In the following I present an extract from a focus group interview with three contact persons – Sally, Jacob and Peter from Organization A. The purpose of their evaluation is clearly to enable the "system" to take action, i.e. *determine* a situation, which calls for action. Despite the staff members wish to capture the individuality and uniqueness of the clients, notice how the organizational categories serve as guidelines for the staff when they talk about their evaluation (Peter explicitly refers to the documented evaluation areas of his organization).

> Sally (works in a computer workshop): Now, of course my starting point is the computers. That's my main area. If there's someone who's never seen a computer before – well, then it's about turning it on and try to find a program. Are they confident to use it? A lot of the older people who come here are a bit scared of computers. From that I can see whether they're able to learn new things. (...) Do they remember that program tomorrow, and the next day? Do they remember which button to push and how to find that program? Or don't they? That's a pretty sure way of doing it. Then you can see if they need help all the time to carry on with the manual they're given. Do we need to help them all the time or are they able to continue with the exercises? (...)
>
> Interviewer: So, you can check whether they are able to learn something new? Whether they remember it?
>
> Sally: Yes

Jacob (works at an assembly workshop): And their concentration.

Sally: And initiative to carry on with things, too. It's possible to see those types of things. We can also see for how long they can sit by a computer (...)

Peter (who also works at the assembly workshop): [We can see] whether they're able to meet on time. Co-operate with others. And whether they can behave well...social exercise. Besides that we have a long list I look at sometimes down there. That's to do with initiative and work approach, skills. [Refers to his organization's assessment areas] (...) It could be, say, to make a doll's pram. Then you give a verbal instruction. "You need to mark it up here, and then you have to cut it and if you run into problems ask this and that person". Then you've already made a task description and then you can check whether he understands the instructions? Can he carry it out? Does he bite off? Does he stay and finish the job or is he off chatting somewhere instead? (...)

Interviewer: So that enables you to see if they remember what you've said or whether they have to ask all the time? (…)

Peter: It also ties up with initiative because if they get stuck because we're in a meeting and nothing more happens that day. Then that's poor initiative. (...)

In the discussion above we see an example of how staff members use organizational categories to structure how they evaluate clients. They focus on learning abilities of the clients (Sally: "Are they able to learn new things", Peter: "did he understand the instruction", memory (Sally: "Do they remember that program tomorrow, and the next

day"), independence, concentration and initiative (Sally: "whether they need help all the time (...) or are they able to continue with the exercises ", Peter: " Does he stay and finish the job or ..."), physical staying power (Sally: "We can also see for how long they're can sit by a computer"). In regards to initiative Peter gives the example of a client who gets stuck because the contact persons are in a meeting and supplements that they can further evaluate whether the clients meet on time and can "co-operate" and behave in general (Peter's concept of "social exercise"). This example demonstrates the actionable capacities – even determining capacities – of texts acquiring constitutive status in the evaluation process.

The staff members' statements demonstrate that the institutional complex with which their work is interweaved creates an evaluation process that corresponds to organizational categories. This process is "circular" in the sense that the category determines which features of any given personality is relevant for them to focus on, and thus in turn makes the report "effective in terms of the code" (Pence 2001: 213). In using the organizational categories as viewing categories, they – despite their wish to capture the essential, private selves of clients – firmly establishes institutional selves in terms of the textual reality of the organizations in question.

Example 2

The next example concerns staff members from organization B, who were asked how they evaluated clients. The dialogue with Ellen, who manages the computer workshop, is typical of the subjects that cropped up during our discussion of clients. Ellen is talking about Marie, a client who gradually "recognizes" her problems:

Ellen: I can use Marie as an example. She came to see me because she wanted to make a table on the computer. So I showed her the easiest kind to see just what she's like. She got the instructions she needed. Nothing more. Because she already knew a bit about it. Let her sit and try it out for a bit. Because actually it's possible for them to read about it. (...) Then I thought she was being quite lazy. She called me over all the time. (...) And according to me that mean she somewhat lacks the ability to concentrate in depth, if you know what I mean? So we talked to her about it ["We" here refers to Ellen and other staff working on Marie's "case"] (...) and she recognized those couple of examples. And agreed. Or she'd heard it before and "well, I'll try and get better at that". That's how I do it (...) I said to her: "You call me over too quickly. I think you can do more things than you put across". It's too easy for her (...)

Interviewer: Yes. Is it independence you can evaluate in that?

Ellen: Yes, right. "Memory" is evaluated the same way actually. Are the same questions asked? It's also "instruction comprehension". (Pause) Her "creativity" I will definitely evaluate. She makes this table – what is it like? Did she manage anything new? Does she think it can be made in a different way or does she just automatically do it in the way suggested. (Pause)

Interviewer: You mean, can she add something on her own?

Ellen: Yes. Can she influence it by her...Eh…well that's a bit...(pause)

Interviewer: Is that what you say, then? That it would be good if she were able to do that?

Ellen: I ask her whether this is the way she wants it to look. And if it is, we say "Yes" and not – "well, take a look now, there's all this..." But we did that with her after all. "Well, I think it could be a bit nicer." I said, or something like that, maybe: "There could be a bit more on there". So she played around with different borders and background colours and those things. (...) I think it's fine that she plays around with it. (…) But I guess the creative...I mean, to say she's a creative person depends on the final product, I guess. If she ends up with an ordinary table just like everyone else's, just a copy. Then I wouldn't call her creative. (...)

Interviewer: "Carefulness"? Is that also how she...?
Ellen: Yes, that's kind of...You could tell from this task too. There were these tables in the bottom. Somehow she'd designed it so that her text started at some random place four hits down the line. So I asked her: "You want it to be like that? Or do you want it fixed?" Well, that's carefulness and things like that. "Or do you just want to go on?" (Pause) And "concentration", that you can kind of see when they sit there. Are they mainly paying attention to what's going on in the room: "What is she doing? Is her game of solitaire just about to come out?" Or can they get engaged in what they're doing, despite things going on around them?

As in the example from organization A, we are confronted here once more with a staff member who creates a profile of a client according to the organizational categories. Thus in effect making personality traits like "instruction comprehension, level of concentration, memory and creativity" central features describing Marie.

It is a bit unusual for the workshop manager to present the assessments of a client to

her while she is being evaluated, but Ellen mentions that she and her colleagues "talk to her about" her lack of "ability to go into depth, or impatience" and later Ellen suggests – not the norm either – that Marie put a bit more work into the table to make it "nicer". The fact that Ellen intervenes in the evaluation situation is probably due to a perception of Marie as less gifted, which makes the staff members see it as their responsibility to help her along a bit more. The reason why I perceive this intervention as only "a bit unusual" is that it happens regularly that staff members present clients with assessments during the evaluation so that they may assess if the clients are developing during their stay, i.e. if they "recognize" the assessment; in fact, this is the typical way to measure development. Clients who refuse to change their view are perceived as being in denial (Loseke 1999), an illustrative example of a central feature of social work: the asymmetrical structure of ruling relations, which automatically defines interactions between staff and clients. When Ellen attempts to help Marie to become less impatient and more careful, she can evaluate Marie's "mobility". Ellen talks more about (partly due to my questions) how she can evaluate Marie's creativity. She says, "… it is fine that she [Marie] plays around with it [the table]". Marie shows interest for the activities in the computer workshop and in this sense she co-operates with Ellen. From my discussions with staff on the clients' personal development (and observations of the daily interactions) I found that co-operation is a central feature of client personality that is evaluated in the organizations, and it has a great influence on the overall assessment. Co-operation relates to the organizational goal of determining clients' development potential, i.e. willingness to perceive their situation in accordance with the assessments. This goal is reflected in social work *per se* (cf. Margolin 1997; Loseke 1999) and is thus closely tied up with institutional complexes working on a fundamental level not necessarily

comprehensible to the staff (or the clients).

THE RULING RELATION ORIENTING THE MEETING BETWEEN STAFF AND CLIENTS – DOCUMENTED IN TEXT

One workshop in organization B carried out evaluation based on assignments that were documented in writing. In order to give an example of how the staff assessed the different evaluation areas, I will briefly outline the activities used for measuring e.g. motivation, independence and precision. In the upcoming analysis I will, however, mainly focus on the ruling relation orienting the meeting between staff and clients, which is – as we shall see – documented in the written assignments.

The workshop in question is a textile workshop where the following areas are evaluated during various activities (described in brackets): Motivation, staying power, work pace (the sewing of bib); independence, ability to work under time pressure and retain a broader perspective (the painting of silkscreen pictures); precision, motor function (the sewing of baby shoes); concentration, sewing skills, quality assessment, work pace (the sewing of two napkins); carefulness, quality perception, precision, work pace (the sewing of napkin for basket) and finally the measurement of precision, motor function and self-awareness (the cutting of cards). Below, two assignments are reproduced (emphasizing added). The clients who decided to join the textile workshop were given the assignments as they went along, and were evaluated – and evaluated themselves – while they performed the assignments. Typically the staff member would observe the clients while pretending to be engaged in similar activities in the workshop. The purpose of this concealed way of evaluating

clients was according to the staff to avoid distracting the clients by their observations. In many cases the staff member at some point intervened and "helped" the clients' in their assessment. This "help" might be viewed as a practice to ensure harmony with the organizations' textual reality.

Bib

The purpose of this assignment is to evaluate your approach to monotonous but physically demanding work. This gives you, *and us*, the opportunity to assess your motivation, staying power and pace.

Working pace:

A My working pace closely resembles the standard on the labour market

B I probably take 1,5-2 times as long as the standard on the labour market

C I use at least 3 times as much time as the standard on the labour market

Breaks:

A I only take the breaks listed in the week schedule

B I take a break approx. every half hour

C. I take a break every 10-15 minutes

D In total I spend more time on breaks than working

How long time did you spend on the assignment?

How well did you do physically?

Painting silkscreen pictures

The purpose of this assignment – apart from using the pictures as decoration in the workshops – is to give you, *and us*, the opportunity to asses the process from idea to result, as well as your independence, ability to work under time constraints and retain an overall perspective.

Result:

A I found it easy to combine the different colours and reach the result I wanted.

B It did not turn out the way I expected, but I am satisfied with the result

C I had a hard time imagining the result and I'm not satisfied.

Independence:

A I prepared the assignment single-handedly and did it by myself.

B I had help getting started and then prepared the assignment myself.

C I waited for someone else to take an initiative

Overall perspective:

A I immediately grasped the possibilities and limitations of the assignment and had sufficient time to carry it out.

B I had a bit of help getting started but then I understood the assignment, although I didn't quite have time enough to finish it.

C I had a hard time grasping the overall idea and felt under pressure.

How well did you do physically?

Viewing the assignments it appears that an important aspect of the evaluation is to define the specific conditions of the assessment *and* to test the client's self-awareness. Notice how the text explains that the purpose of the assignment is "to give you, *and us*, the opportunity to assess…". In the case of Marie, described by Ellen earlier, the assignments provided the staff with an impression different from what they had learned from speaking with her. This is an illustrative example of the asymmetrical positions human service organizations provide for clients and staff, i.e. the dominant relation orientating the encounter between the two. This institutional aspect makes it difficult – or even impossible – to deliver "client-centred" care. The problem, it would seem, is that many clients have not yet "realized" their situation and may be reluctant to "admit" it. Diana, who is contact person in organization A and runs the textile workshop, engages in the following dialogue with me, when we begin to talk about Marie:

> Diana: Marie has really done what she could to prevent me from discovering that she had a hard time with these assignments [described above]. And it was obvious to me that she had a hard time doing them.
>
> Interviewer: And in what way can you use that knowledge, I mean the fact that she has a hard time doing the activities assessing her skills for the labour market? It is that connection?
> Diana: Yes. It's a combination of describing her as a person lacking in confidence and at the same time saying that she has the ability. If she has a very specific task that she's familiar with from A-Z. Then she can do it. Actually she can do it perfectly. She sewed a really nice apron. She needs specific tasks that are visible and she needs to know; it's like this

and this (...)

Interviewer: Could you find out the same things from talking to her?

Diana: (Pause) I don't think so. Because I don't think Marie really wants to admit it. She has a hard time recognizing that this is how it is. She's very much the type who goes, "Oh no, it's so boring" (...) But in fact that's what she's best at. (...) She probably wants to give a different image of herself because she doesn't really want to face the fact that this is how it is. But she's obviously more satisfied now when she does the work. I mean, I can tell that she's more like, "Great, now I can do it" and that's positive, isn't it? So maybe she'll eventually recognize that it's good for her to do these things.

As we see from the dialogue a central part of Diana's task is to work with false self-perception: to make Marie "recognize" her situation in accordance with the staff. The specific assignments showed that Marie was "a person lacking in confidence", although she could carry out the tasks under close supervision. And it was revealed that her criticism of monotonous work (being boring) was used to cover the fact that she was not very good at anything and consequently has to resign herself to monotonous work in the future. This knowledge provided staff members with an opportunity to work on Marie's false self-perception, the result being, according to Diana, that her self-esteem improved thanks to the small victory of mastering basic tasks. The example shows how institutional features of social work – staff members' undisputed knowledgeable position – produces the hyper reality of organizational categories.

THE PRODUCTIVITY OF ORGANIZATIONAL CATEGORIES

In this final section of the article I shall analyse a report on a client in order to illustrate how the organizational categories creates a "textual object" (Campbell 2001). The final reports on clients in both organizations are structured in a similar way: they contain statements made by the contact person, caseworker and in most cases a doctor, a physiotherapist and/or a psychologist as well. This combination of staff provides a pretty good picture of the "proper procedures" of the work (cf. Smith 1990). Since the purpose is to examine the situation of a client as defined by the physical (doctors and physiotherapists), the psychological (psychologists) and the social aspects (contact persons who focus on the "whole" client and caseworkers who combine all the information), the combination of staff and the structure of the report seem logical from a diagnostic perspective.

I have chosen to present a report of Benny from organization A, since his report exemplifies many of the relevant analytical features of the 18 clients' reports I have used in my project. I have emphasized the organizational categories as well as other evaluation areas described to me by the staff members in interviews. The purpose is – once again – to show the ways in which organizational concepts function as viewing categories determining Benny's description. I have chosen a report of a client with a longer educational background than most other clients. This makes it possible to show how the organizational categories (corresponding to the industrial era that gave rise to this specific type of organization and also to the fact that most clients have very little education) result in a description of Benny totally at odds with his capabilities. The organizational categories determine which "facts" about Benny are produced, even if they do not necessarily determine the conclusions drawn about

him.

Benny's report

Benny is 40 years old. He has participated in a number of courses and has had different types of jobs for short periods. He is trained in computer science but has only worked in this field for one month. In the summer of 1999 he was diagnosed with a serious disease in the connective tissue and has been receiving health benefit since then. In the workshop report Benny is described as a person who has had (and still has) a number of psychological problems. He is described as a "loner" who seems to have "lacked challenging interaction with a spouse or other equals" and as a result has developed "low self-esteem". Benny is "quiet and withdrawn" and typically becomes "uncomfortable, nervous and irritable" during conversations. Since he started seeing a psychologist, however, the contact person notes a "pronounced improvement". Benny has started to "accept" his difficult situation and "has gained more self-awareness". This psychological description establishes Benny as a client who has begun to interpret his situation according to organizational categories. This makes Benny a co-operating client, as the following description of his physical/moral condition shows:[viii]

> Benny started his work evaluation with a small assignment, i.e. photocopying approx. 200 A4 pages on our photocopier. Afterwards he had to sort them and make 4 binders with teaching material. As is always the case with Benny, there are no problems in terms of *instruction-comprehension, concentration, planning, overall perspective* and the like. He certainly doesn't have intellectual problems. In the exercise mentioned Benny had problems simply using a puncher. He got pains in

his fingers and arms. Walking approximately 100 meters from the photocopier and back made him a bit short of breath (...) Instead Benny was asked to assemble a wine shelf. Physically an easy task, but with demands in regards to *good concentration and overall perspective.* The assignment involved the drilling of 44 holes of 33 mm diameter each with a small drill. Handling the weight of the machine (1 kg) alone caused him pain. It was not possible to measure the time of the actual drilling. The problem was the same: *Intellectually no problems,* but great pains in joints in fingers and arms. Afterwards Benny's knees and hands were in pain. After this assignment Benny was given the task of assembling a feeding board. He had to glue the parts together. But Benny said right away that he was not capable of pressing the glue out of the tube. So the glue was poured in a bowl and Benny could now do the gluing using a small brush. Still Benny worked at a very slow pace. He complained about pains in his joints. Pressing the wood parts together with a pressure less than 100 gram provoked pain (...) *Despite a sensible resource administration* his joint pains started again. (...) Finally Benny has several times helped a participant in our jewellery workshop with jewellery prints. (…) *Socially a nice gesture* to do for another participant. In his excitement about contributing to a special piece of jewellery, Benny worked on forming and braiding silver rings using small tongs. This provoked great pains and Benny had to stay at home the next day.

Despite the somewhat gloomy description of Benny's physical resources, it is stated in the short conclusion by the social worker at the organization that:

> Benny possesses a number of resources valued on the labour market, *such as good intellectual resources, good at getting an overall perspective and planning, able to take the initiative.* He has good abilities for acquiring new skills, and he is a good communicator. (...) If Benny is granted time and flexibility in a relevant company, combined with continued psychological treatment, it is considered realistic to hope that he might find employment on the labour market, despite his physical problems.

In a telephone conversation conducted a year after Benny had left the organization, he told me that the supervising caseworker at his municipality had provided him with a flex job, which he had been doing for four hours a day ever since. He worked at a school teaching IT and education. The best part of his stay at the rehabilitation organization, he said, was that he had started seeing a psychologist. He had known from the beginning that he would never be able to do factory work, which, in his view, was the only kind of work the organization was able to evaluate (cf. the description of Benny is based on manual tasks only).

It is hardly necessary to point out that the image of Benny is formed according to organizational categories. I have highlighted these in order to show how the "personal" description transforms Benny into a textual object. It should be noted that even though Benny's description emphasizes the things he is incapable of doing physically – and this should be seen in the light of the fact that he was evaluated in a workshop, where the majority of clients ended up with pensions – he is one of three clients from my project in organization A who found a flex job. This is a paradox, since Benny's workshop description has obvious "pension-traits" and thus corresponds perfectly to the organizational precondition that this specific assembly

workshop should primarily diagnose clients perceived as very sick.

Depressing as it may be, the description of Benny's physical condition does not carry much institutional weight since it concludes with a recommendation that he should be employed on the labour market, even emphasizing his resources in a positive way. This paradox can be explained in terms of the organization's activities and responsibilities and the different positions and tasks of the social workers and contact persons towards the municipality and the needs of the client, respectively. In Benny's municipality "no more pensions was awarded" as the social worker in the organization explained, why a conclusion aiming at pension "would be of no use for him", as she explained. Benny expressed pain many times doing the activities in the workshop, which might relate to his conviction that he would not be able to do this kind of work for a living. This condition might explain the restrictive and negative portrait of Benny (he could not press glue out of a tube etc.) made by his contact person. Even though the picture is at odd with Benny's capabilities it corresponds to Benny's lack of preference for a job that involves primarily manual tasks. The portrait of Benny, however wrong it may be, can be seen as the contact persons way of "helping" Benny now that the departure is manual tasks. That way the picture confirms the contact persons organizational position as the one that should "help" Benny without challenging the activities at the workshop – his organizations textual reality.

The analysis of the paradox also needs to include Benny's good will towards staff members, which is emphasized several times. The point is that co-operative clients, i.e. clients who show up and show interest for the organization's work are not

perceived as being in "denial", which gives them an opportunity to influence the work in the organization (at least the concluding description). In this case the staff members are dealing with a client who has "recognized" his situation. Benny continuously expressed an interest for a job in IT or teaching *and* for the work in the organization. So even though these wishes challenge the activities in the organizations (since they could only assess manual tasks) they are reproduced in the final conclusion. That way Benny's co-operability, i.e. his ability to "recognize" his situation – becomes a different important condition to include in an analysis on e.g. organizations effect on clients' possibilities.

Benny's case (as well as the staff members' statement in the previous sections) demonstrates facts inherent sociality (cf. Smith 1990; Potter 1996). In his case it is illustrated that "facts" are created in a complex institutional process including the organizations textual reality (interweaved with the organizations goals, activities, "target group" and "assumed" labour market), structural features of social work (Benny as co-operative), present legislation and labour market etc.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Danish rehabilitation organizations are at a crossroads between a developed labour market demanding skilled labour; municipalities trying to cope with a rapidly changing legislation which, over the last 8 years, has made them financially responsible for social security pensions and a group of clients, mostly unskilled labour, generally in their late forties and typically suffering from various ailments induced by years of low wage, physically demanding jobs. It must be obvious that this kind of institutional

complex severely restricts the staff in their interaction with clients. So, despite the fact that most staff members in interviews mention empowerment strategies (see Townsend (1998) *Good Intentions OverRuled*) and their ability to deliver "client-centred" care (Campbell 2001), their practice abounds in examples of the institutional complex blinding their view as far as the evaluation of clients is concerned. Despite every "good intention" to the contrary they are involved in the production of *institutional identities* corresponding to organizational categories, which very often have little or no relevance for the clients evaluated.

Three areas in particular illustrate similarities in the 18 participating clients' reports, as reflected in the organizational categories guiding the view of clients. They are: learning potential, resource administration, and flexibility/initiative (as in Benny's report). If knowledge is a social accomplishment (cf. Smith 1987) and thus cannot be separated from the hegemonic discourse of societies, the thesis that learning ability, self-understanding and independence/flexibility are three central features of present-day Western societies would seem to be confirmed. As far as the physical evaluation of clients is concerned, as evidenced in all reports, it is apparent that the industrial era in which these specific organizations were developed has influenced the process of evaluation profoundly. In those days it may have been reasonable to evaluate pace, motor function, staying power etc. But today, when this organizational, historically produced "logic" is more or less irrelevant, the activities in rehabilitation organizations become highly "exotic", since the current (Western) labour market has no need for such skills.

The final paragraph in this paper concerns the implementation of institutional

ethnography as an analytical strategy. To the best of my knowledge this is the best strategy if you want to analyse the practices in human service organizations. However, it tends to represent persons working in this kind of organization as very powerful, in effect reducing clients to passive, helpless victims. This does not always correspond with the practise in the organizations. In accordance with Smith's (1987) dictum that analysis should have a base in local everyday life, I found that individual factors – like the management of co-operation on the clients' behalf – have profound effects for their possibilities of making their views heard in the interaction with the staff. But however unique the interaction from one person to another may be in creating potential powerful negotiation positions for clients, my analysis demonstrates that interaction in organizations always involves at least three parties: client, staff, and *text* - which, as Campbell (2001: 243) notes, constitutes "a particular sort of relation". It is a relation, which demands from the client very special resources (for instance a willingness to co-operate with the organization although the work there might seem useless), if her/his wishes for a future life are to influence the dialogue with the organizational reality.

NOTES

[ii] All interviews last about one to one and a half hour and have been transcribed. Following Holstein & Gubrium (1997; 2002) I consider interviewing an "active" enterprise between two (or more) parties. As noted by the ethnomethodologists already in the 1960s, the production of all meaning is a social phenomenon (Garfinkel 1967), and that goes for interviews as well. Thus, the dialogue of interviewing is not "a pipeline for transmitting knowledge", but dialogs where meanings are "cooperatively built up, received, interpreted and recorded by the interviewer" (Holstein & Gubrium 1997: 113+119). Since fieldwork enables the researcher to become familiarized with e.g. the specific organizations everyday life, one of this methods great advantages are that the

"cooperative"-ness status of the interview preferably tips over in the organizations (and thus the respondents) favour. Participation and observation thus enables the researcher to gain access to *organizational relevant stories*, rather than simply verifying the *research agenda* (cf. Järvinen (2001) for a critique of research agendas influence on interviews).

[iii] Flex job means a job on specific and reduced terms.

[iv] This specific type of welfare organization corresponds more or less to the area of occupational therapy; see e.g. Townsend (1998).

[v] Apart from the 7 areas listed here, further evaluation is carried out in regards to precision, sewing skills, quality assessment, work pace, motivation, self-awareness and the ability to cope with time pressure and retain an overall perspective on things (see analysis in an upcoming section).

[vi] Besides many of the authors I refer to, a number of classical studies from the 1960s and 1970s have focused on this process, e.g. Goffman (1961), Hasenfeld & English (1974), Prottas (1979), Lipsky (1980).

[vii] See Miller's (1997) discussion on the advantage of combining a textual analysis with ethnographic observational material

[viii] I have chosen to provide an elaborate review of Benny's physical/moral condition (omitting descriptions of his psychological condition), because I want to provide the reader with an impression of the wealth of detail characteristic of workshop descriptions generally.

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