DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 138 525 SO 009 998

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TITLE Professional Confidence and the Graduate Student's Double Bind.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 27p.; Revision of a paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association (New York, New York, August 30-September 3, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Problems; Degree Requirements; Educational Improvement; Educational Problems; Educational Theories; Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Institutional Environment; Intellectual Development; Professional Education; *Professional Training; Relevance (Education); Socialization; Social Sciences; *Sociology; Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics

ABSTRACT

The socialization of sociology graduate students is examined to determine why graduate students often lack professional confidence, promise, and maturity. A review of professional development literature indicates possible problems. The student who lacks professional and occupational objectives, commitment, and works at less than full potential is described in section I. Section II discusses lack of graduate program standardization, unstructured curriculum, competitive grading, and student exploitation as sources of the problem. Section III describes the central cause of student problems as a double bind, consisting of the contradictory communications that sociology is a discipline of shapeless complexity and that the primary goal of the graduate student is to tie up all loose ends. These two communications, entitled the fallacy of shapeless complexity and the fallacy of closure, are characterized in sections IV and V, followed by solutions to the problem in section VI. The solution is to improve student and faculty awareness of and communication about the double bind and then to attempt practical reform of examination procedures, degree requirements, and knowledge development. References are included in the document. (Author/DB)

PROFESSIONAL CONFIDENCE AND THE GRADUATE STUDENT'S DOUBLE BIND

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PROFESSIONAL CONFIDENCE AND THE GRADUATE STUDENT'S DOUBLE BIND*

Introduction

Even before Riesman (1962:18) suggested that, as compared to sociology graduate students, "law students do not become more stupid and more cowed than they were as undergraduates" and, consequently, are not hindered by a lack of professional confidence and self-esteem, the professional development of sociologists has been open to continuous discussion and debate. Riesman and many others, before and since, continue to strike a nerve in the discipline by cultivating awareness of and possible explanations for this problem.[1]

Whether or not the professional confidence problem is unique to sociology is not the question here. Neither is the degree of the problem within the discipline. While both questions are research worthy, our starting point is merely that the problem exists and our purpose is to examine it in new light by focusing on the individual action of the student in a unique double bind situation arising from structural and interactional patterns within the graduate experience.

From a review of literature on the professional development of sociologists one can glean two possible sources of the confidence problem, neither one of

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*The author wishes to thank the following individuals who provided ideas and suggestions at various stages in the development of this paper: Gregory W. Arling, E. Sherwood Bishop, Carl Boymel, Robert M. Coppinger, James I. Foreman, Ellsworth Furman, James A. Nolan, Ralph Sell, Michael Scott, and David J. Smallen. An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the 71st Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, August 30 - September 3, 1976, in New York.

which deals with the approach taken here. The first source is the individual student who, for a variety of personal reasons, is responsible for his/her own confidence crisis. The second is a less than perfect educational and professional socialization process which hinders the development of a confident professional self-image. Analysis of these explanations can provide some background.

The Graduate Student as a Source of the Problem

Borgatta (1969) found lack of commitment to the discipline as a major problem among graduate students, one resulting from undefined professional and occupational objectives, the use of graduate education for vocational advancement in corporate structures, and the failure of many to put in a "full shift" of work because of marital, social, and intellectual preoccupations. Horowitz (1968:144) also observed the lack of commitment, noting that the student's general and unstructured interest in the discipline "becomes crystallized only to the extent that he becomes plugged into a monetary system of rewards" mainly through assistantships, fellowships, or something similar. Thus, it may be argued that weak disciplinary commitment leads to weak professional commitment and, eventually, professional confidence problems.

That students may be at least partly culpable can be inferred from Sibley's (1963) The Education of Sociologists in the United States. He found the caliber of sociology graduate students to be far from the best, albeit not the worst, and added in agreement with Borgatta that students generally work at much less than full potential. When the middling caliber of students is compounded by less than complete professional commitment, the problem can be understandable in terms of student-related causes.

Other accounts, both formal and informal, of the "quality" of graduate

students have noted the discipline's tendency to draw emotionally unstable individuals who lack confidence before entering graduate school. This coincides with a long-standing belief that sociology tends to attract psychological misfits characterized by maladies such as alienation (Mannheim, 1973). The "unstable before entering" interpretation is another individualistic view of the problem.

While individualistic explanations may explain behavior in certain situations, they are simplistic and, like all such explanations of human behavior, they avoid uniquely sociological influences arising from structural, environmental, organizational, and interpersonal variables. Moreover, they avoid the possibility that individual behaviors may result from certain conditions rather than act as a cause.

Graduate Education as a Source of the Problem

Most explanations have centered on the graduate education process particularly dysfunctions in organization and socialization.

Horowitz (1968) discussed the undermining influences of organizational defects such as the lack of program standardization and the bureaucratic-economic dimension of graduate training which includes competition for funding. Beck and Becker (1969) recognized hindrances associated with admissions, comprehensives, degree and course requirements. Jenks and Riesman (1969) also discussed the hindrances created by certain structural roadblocks. Riesman (1962) noted that some differences between law and sociology students arise from differing educational organization: the law school, being highly structured, provides students with a more clearly defined subject matter whereas the graduate school is much less structured and provides students with a less clearly defined subject matter. Organizational arguments rely on the relationship between organi-

zational structure and behavior.

The essence of socialization arguments is that graduate education consists of experiences that promote a self-concept susceptible to professional confidence problems. Riesman (1962:20), for example, noted the developmental benefits of the freer dialectical give-and-take in law school where "the law student is encouraged, in part of course by forensic tradition, to talk back to his professors, even in large classes, with a verve and lack of fear of what might happen to him. . . ." In graduate school, on the other hand, especially as a result of what Caplow and McGee (1958:71) termed "discipleship," the student is more apt to accept professors' views and subscribe to professors' definitions---of the student's role (Horowitz, 1968), of the student as sociologist, of the discipline, of career preferences (Gottleib, 1961), and of graduate school in general. In other words, dependency and docility are enhanced by the graduate experience and this has predictable negative consequences on professional confidence.

Other socializing experiences that could promote an unconfident identity include atomization of learning and competitive grading (Young, 1974), exploitation of graduate students for research purposes (Horowitz, 1968), intellectual despotism (Harris, 1971), "straightjacketing" students into one professional model (Hughes, 1963:890; Lee, 1976), departmental factions and cliques (Borgatta, 1969), minimal career counseling and professional socialization (Siebold and Babin, 1976), comprehensive examinations (Beck and Becker, 1969), and the breeding of student conformity and dependency (Riesman, 1962; Lee, 1976).

A New Look at the Problem: The Graduate Student's Double Bind

This study examines the professional socialization dimension of graduate education as a major source of the confidence problem. Professional sociali-

zation is generally defined as the process of developing the student's professional self-image which includes specific values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Merton et al., 1957:287). Within the professional socialization process, it is clear that various structural factors and interpersonal experiences "become organizing frames of reference . . . which shape the student's socialization experience and influence the development of his 'professional self'" (Carroll, 1971:63). This study's main premise is that the current structure of graduate socialization in sociology includes a double bind which hinders the student's development of professional self-concept and confidence.[2]

The process which the double bind entails has three parts: (1) during the course of graduate study students receive from specific sources two important communications which (2) are not only contradictory but bogus, and (3) constitute a double bind. It will be argued that this double bind underlies much of the graduate student's professional confidence problem.

The first half of the double bind, transmitted to students early in their careers, is the communication that sociology is not only a boundless, indeterminable and amorphous discipline, but encompasses vast amounts of highly complex materials which the student cannot possibly comprehend. This communication's main ingredients, therefore, are complexity and shapelessness and its main effect is to overwhelm the student with how much he/she does not and, seemingly, cannot know. This communication will be termed the fallacy of shapeless complexity. The second half of the double bind is the communication that comprehensive knowledge must be had if the student is to be successful in professional pursuits. It states that a necessary goal is to "put everything together," to "tie up all loose ends." It implies a condition of finality and comprehensiveness in intellectual endeavors. This communication will be termed the fallacy of closure.

The double bind into which the student is socialized consists of these fallacious communications. One communication, pointing to an infinitely complex, yet shapeless, sociological knowledge pool, conveys the message that great amounts of knowledge are beyond reach; yet another communication conveys the message that closure must be attained. Indeed, the predicament might even be thought of as a triple bind, for not only to the communications conflict, but their contents are fallacious. To further complicate the matter, students are generally unaware of the double bind because, as Bateson points out, it is usually an unconscious process.[3]

These bogus and contradictory communications lie at the root of the confidence problem because they undermine a self-assured perspective toward the discipline's subject matter by placing the student in a dilemma where his/her approach to knowledge development is torn between two fallacious extremes. By undermining confidence toward subject matter, the double bind undermines self-concept and professional confidence. Indeed, it can even lead to other problems of a more serious social psychological nature.[4]

The Fallacy of Shapeless Complexity

Undergraduate exposure to sociology, while it varies from institution to institution, tends to be at a superficial level. Yet, the graduate student usually brings with him/her a kind of smugness, a basic security derived from confidence in prior education (albeit it can be based on intellectual naivete) and an enthusiasm to learn and progress. This "latent identity" (Gouldner, 1957:286) gradually changes after exposure to a few graduate courses as the student begins to recognize and internalize messages communicating the fallacy of shapeless complexity. Confidence and enthusiasm quickly change to perplexity, insecurity, and disorientation.

Perhaps the first communicator of the fallacy is the graduate seminar. Advanced courses almost always require dexterity with fundamental materials. But such is not always the case in a good number of seminars because (1) there is often a lack of sufficient knowledge regarding fundamentals and, (2) many get their first exposure to an area through an advanced seminar. Thus, students entering seminars with "loose ends" or those with no prior knowledge are suddenly deluged with bibliographies, theories, methods, and hypotheses. Background deficiencies are compound by the bombardment of advanced materials and, rather than achieving greater knowledge synthesis, confidence is shaken because the fallacy of shapeless complexity is communicated.

Faculty members also communicate the fallacy. That they do so in their teaching was indicated by Sibley (1962:32) who noted much of the student's perception of a seemingly shapeless sociology was a result of professors' inadequate course preparation and their tendency to ramble from topic to topic, responding to questions in an ad hoc manner. Many professors have problems with communication and do a poor job relating whatever they say, ad hoc or prepared. Exacerbating this is the scant attention given to student experimentation with ideas, verbal and written (especially those outside of acceptable paradigms). Good critique, an essential part of professional development, is often hard to come by and when the student looks for criticism and advice in comprehending seemingly complex materials, he/she is often left wanting.

To be sure, students aid in communicating the fallacy. This is done in at least two ways. First, because they are highly malleable, they accept at face value much of what they experience, including communications relating the fallacy of shapeless complexity. After the fallacy is internalized it is enhanced by other types of insecurities resulting from low social status and tenuous economic security. Secondly, the fallacy is transmitted through peer

contagion. Students reinforce it upon each other through various interactions. Included here would be games, ploys, and other forms of play, such as name dropping, one-upmanship, and even more serious varieties (Berne, 1964).

Another communicator of this fallacy might be termed "the communication of an infinitely salient literature." One need only examine the "publications received" section of any issue of Contemporary Sociology or review some published bibliographies to realize this point. Furthermore, the vast reading lists typical of graduate seminars, along with the implication that they represent what must be learned in a relatively short period, communicate the fallacy early in the student's career. Since all such reading lists carry the caveat that they are partial, there is the further message that considerably more information is available, if the student cares to look. By trying to deal with vast amounts of reading material from two, three, or four courses, the student becomes convinced that complexity and shapelessness are indeed realities.

Of course it can be argued that such reading lists need to be placed in realistic context as something that cannot be swallowed whole, at once. The lists should perhaps be approached as vehicles which mainly provide wide exposure, or as a sample of sources from which a subsample should be read, or as a bibliography for future reference. In other words, the lists can be placed in more realistic perspective, but why aren't they?

An answer to this question is important in understanding the nature of the double bind. Many students do not know how to approach the lists "realistically" (and what follows could also apply to seminars, faculty instruction, and student interactions) because, utilizing Bateson's third characteristic of a double bind situation (note 2), they cannot make metacommunicative statements about messages transmitting the fallacy. This means that, while the bounds of

human limitation may indicate that all books on a reading list cannot be read, let alone digested, a metacommunicative statement such as, "The reading list should not be taken as something to be read, learned, and digested during this short time span so I will read and learn as much as I realistically can," is difficult to make. Reasons for this will be detailed later when the double bind is more carefully analyzed.

The argument presented here does not deny the significant degree of complexity within or the expansiveness of sociology. However, the fallacy of shapeless complexity perpetuates an extreme condition of shapelessness and complexity where the student is made aware of how much he/she does not and cannot know. It fosters a sense of intellectual anomie wherein the student becomes hopelessly baffled by the apparent infinity and amorphousness of sociological reality. It alone may be sufficient to promote a confidence crisis but it becomes all the more severe when compounded by the fallacy of closure.

The Fallacy of Closure

While the fallacy of shapeless complexity enhances a sense of impossible vastness, the fallacy of closure at once demands that all subject matter be mastered. The basket of unanswered questions collected from course work and other academic experiences must be woven into a unified whole.

Most would agree that knowledge accrues through a continuing though not necessarily incremental process of idea development and synthesis. There is, however, a clear difference between synthesis and closure. The process of synthesis is a dynamic one unifying divergent and/or complementary principles into new patterns. The synthesis of ideas is limited by, among other things, the information available and is subject to change and revision. Closure, on the other hand, refers to a state of finality. The search for closure is a search for "the answer" or "the final solution" translated as "complete

knowledge."

The idea of closure and perhaps even a "closure mentality" seems to permeate much of the graduate educational experience. For example, sociological "schools" and even "cults", each having their own sense of closure, communicate the idea. So does the sacredness given sociological luminaries whose ideas are viewed as "the last word on a subject rather than the first" (Park, 1941:36). Another contributor is the tendency to treat many ideas as doctrines, "doctrines which . . . give us, or seek to, a final and authoritative statement of the truth . . ." (Park, 1941:40)

Other communicators of the fallacy of closure are structural elements within graduate education. One such example is degree requirements (or quasi-requirements, or whatever they may be called in a particular department). These are usually based on the assumption that, after a program of study, the student should arrive at a specific destination supposedly characterized by a certain assumed advanced level of knowledge. Once requirements are completed, however, a student may have not arrived at this advanced level but may have acquired only a very general knowledge of fundamentals while having just begun the process of cultivating advanced knowledge. Because of the fallacy of shapeless complexity, moreover, a student may complete requirements with an even greater sense of how much he/she does not know.

Another contributor to the fallacy of closure is the thesis proposal. Here the student is expected (by the thesis committee and, eventually, by him/herself) to bring together the (read all) relevant literature on and demonstrate conceptual closure of the research problem. The underlying message is that comprehensiveness must be achieved in regard to the antecedent and proposed research. Students often resubmit proposals after developing additional insights and, indeed, additions and revisions are usually necessary; but in many in-

stances the proposal is submitted three, four, five or as many times as necessary for the thesis committee to judge it as having conceptual, theoretical, and methodological closure. Eventually, the student learns that the proposal must be a truly comprehensive statement, it must have closure.

The most important structural factor is the comprehensive examination. A good deal of graduate socialization is geared toward this event and it assumes a major role in the student's life. The pursuit of closure is given great impetus by comprehensive exams, for their traditional definition demands COMPREHENSIVE KNOWLEDGE and what can this mean but closure? Thus, one's task is clear: get comprehensive knowledge. An anxious look at previous departmental examinations as well as those appearing in journals such as The American Sociologist (August 1969:198-226) only enhances the belief.

Therefore, the fallacy of closure impresses the student with the necessity of achieving complete knowledge. But the fallacy of shapeless complexity reinforces the complex and shapeless nature of the discipline. The essence of the professional confidence problem is that an unmanageable condition (shapeless complexity) is compounded by an impossible quest (closure). On the one hand there is amorphousness and information overload, on the other, the belief that completeness must be achieved. The graduate student is caught in this baffling predicament as it undermines his/her approach to subject matter and eventually his/her professional confidence.

Approaching a Solution to the Confidence Problem

Why and how do students internalize the fallacies of shapeless complexity and closure? At least part of the explanation lies with their inability to metacommunicate, that is, communicate about communications, transmitting the double bind. The third characteristic of the double bind was mentioned earlier

as the inability of the victim to comment on communications so as to accurately comprehend and correctly realize their fallacious and contradictory nature. Bateson (1972:215) refers to the metacommunicative level as "the level we use to correct our perceptions of communicative behaviors." The inability to metacommunicate rests with the individual's relationship to communications and the context in which they are transmitted. To metacommunicate in a double bind situation is to somehow comprehend two different messages; but given the intensity of the situation, the belief that messages must be accurately understood, and the conflicting nature of the messages, metacommunication becomes very difficult.

Any solution to the double bind dilemma must necessarily begin at the metacommunicative level. An important first step for students is to recognize the difference between the "literal meaning" and the "realistic meaning" of a communication. The former is meaning at its ostensible value, whereas the latter is meaning at a more practical level. It seems that many students, entrapped by the double bind, have limited themselves to literal meanings. Recall Watzlawick et al.'s discussion of three common results of a double bind situation (note 4), the second being that the individual eventually comes to accept all messages with complete literalness while abstaining from independent analytical thinking (i.e., metacommunication). Communication surrounding the reading list example mentioned earlier is illustrative: the literal meaning is that the lists represent what must be read, known, and understood; the realistic meaning is something much less, namely, that the lists represent major sources that should be read and comprehended as much as possible, but which cannot be digested whole, at once. The literal meaning is where the etiology of the fallacies lie while the realistic meaning recognizes fallacious communications and understands the lists cannot be comprehensively known. Recognition

of the realistic meaning requires that the initial communication, "this is the assigned reading list" and its implied communication, "this and more is what you must know if you want to be competent in this subject area," must be commented upon through the metacommunicative system.[5]

But metacommunication is no easy task because to arrive at realistic meaning and comment upon communications would require that the student question and redefine (1) factors integral to the accepted environment, and (2) his/her own identity. That is, to question messages communicating the fallacies is to question their sources (professors, peers, legitimated procedures), as well as personal observations, procedures, interactions, and indeed much of the socialization process of graduate study. This is surely no easy task. On the other hand, since most students develop a personal identity centered on rigorous advanced study and the desire to be professional sociologists, a disregard for messages perceived as important to one's career would violate this self-concept. To view comprehensive examinations, for example, as anything but a test of closure would be to question what one has learned, the procedure itself, as well as one's identity as concerned about career. In the same way, it is difficult to take assigned reading lists at anything but literal meaning because to do so would be to question the legitimacy of the list, the professor who created it, and the belief that the list may be necessary for closure which is in turn necessary for professional success.

In other words, the communications which underlie the fallacies and the double bind are integral to the graduate socialization process, student values, and student identity; to question the communications is to question values, identity, sources of information and more. For these reasons metacommunicative statements are difficult to make and the double bind remains at the unconscious level.[6]

Awareness of the double bind and its communicators is a crucial second step in beginning the metacommunicative process. Messages transmitting the fallacy of shapeless complexity, for example, must be clearly recognized: reading lists, vague seminars, nebulous professors must be viewed as ingredients of the fallacy. Identity and values would require redefinition should this cognizance occur, as would the student's relationship to procedures and other sources of fallacious messages. The same awareness would be required for the fallacy of closure: to keep from being engulfed by the pursuit of an unattainable end, one must first be conscious of its impossibility, as well as specific communicators of the fallacy (comprehensive exams, thesis proposals and so forth).

Awareness has to be followed by a practical attempt to bring structure, understanding, and manageability to sociological information. Rather than approaching knowledge development through the two extremes presented by the fallacies, there must be a better orientation. The exact "hows" must be left to the student. One suggestion might be to begin by establishing a limited synthesis of limited materials, realizing this is a temporary creation to which will be added additional ideas, theories, comparisons, conflicts, etc. Other suggestions could be had from sources like C. Wright Mills' (1959) essay "On Intellectual Craftsmanship." Students should want to communicate about alternative approaches and one function of a much needed graduate student newsletter (Young, 1974) could be to provide the forum. But whatever the approach, the process of knowledge development must be recognized as a dynamic one requiring continuous intellectual growth.[7]

To lessen their contribution to the double bind, faculty members must also become conscious of the double bind and their part in the process. For many professors, behavioral and attitudinal modifications are necessary.[8] Yet,

faculty should go beyond awareness, behavioral, and attitudinal changes to the level of their control over program organization and student socialization. A multidimensional contribution is required.

The final step would have to deal with structural factors. Proposals made by others deserve repeating. One is to bring standardization of duration and requirements to graduate programs. The lack of consensus regarding "core" courses, candidacy requirements, and the length of time for completion helps create the precarious environment conducive to the double bind. The historically stated reasons for the undesirability of standardization in academic professions such as sociology seem to have lost much credence with time (Berelson, 1960:87).

Another important structural change would deal with comprehensive exams. Questions abound regarding the function and definition of comprehensives. While the ostensible function is to ascertain suitability for doctoral candidacy, the true function is generally known to be ritualistic (Jako, 1974). Claims that comprehensives, or rather the preparation which they entail, enhance intellectual development, seem dubious. Because they serve to reinforce the fallacy of closure, for example, preparation for them can actually serve to heighten insecurity and debilitate intellectual development.[9] Beck and Becker (1969) rightly noted that the time and effort expended for comprehensives prevents alternative experiences (research projects, exploration of other disciplines, language or computer skill development) which could be more beneficial.

The definition of comprehensives is also unclear. Currently, in many or even most departments, they are defined as just that--a test of comprehensive knowledge. Yet it is clear that a comprehensive examination, especially after a few years of study, is ludicrous and only serves to perpetuate the fallacy of

closure. While completing study in the typical American graduate department, most students have only begun to lay parameters, select specializations, and pursue advanced knowledge. Considering that most full and half-time students (1) spend their first two years either getting a Master's degree, sampling different areas, or strengthening basic areas (statistics, methods, theory), (2) spend one year or more dealing with advanced methods, statistics, and theory courses, and (3) spend up to six months or more on a language requirement or its equivalent, the actual amount of time spent on substantive areas is usually limited to not a great number of courses and the dissertation. Can a comprehensive examination be possible when knowledge accumulation has been, in many cases, a matter of establishing parameters and laying foundations? Ironically, the dissertation--the first attempt at significant advanced study--takes place after the comprehensive exam. Beck and Becker (1969:230) have said that:

> many [students] appear to approve of [comprehensive] examinations on much the same grounds as faculty. They say that without the stimulus of the examination they would never try to put the whole field together in some coherent and intelligible way. We agree that the objective is important, but note that it is a problem every sociologist faces throughout his working life and that the first approximation achieved under the threat of exams might be achieved in less annoying and artificially stressful ways.

This author could hardly agree that "putting the whole field togehter" is important; indeed, such attempts are bound to fail because they are predicated on the fallacy of closure. Of course, an advanced degree of synthesis, characterized by thorough understanding of the major components of an area is necessary for advanced scholarly work; but to think that the whole field can be put together is an unrealizable goal which can only contribute to the double bind.

This author agrees with Max Weber's epistemological orientation which saw the plentitude of the sensible world rendering impossible any complete and comprehensive explanations (Aron, 1964:69). In agreement with Beck and Becker, however, it must be recognized that the achievement of truly advanced knowledge must be envisioned as a life long process. The perennial task of the scholar is search and the graduate student is merely beginning what will be a life's commitment to knowledge search. With this in mind, it is important that comprehensives be redefined perhaps as exercises to discover (for the student and the examining committee) the student's ability to examine limited materials in a limited time span, or as an exercise to enhance the dissertation through some methodological, theoretical, or substantive analysis. In any case, the examination process should be one that does not exact too great a price. It should reflect an understanding of graduate study as the beginning not the end of knowledge search.[10]

Conclusion

If the immediate purpose of this paper has been to examine the problem of professional confidence among sociology graduate students, its ultimate purposes are pragmatic, namely, to expose one aspect of graduate socialization promoting this problem and hopefully aid the metacommunicative processes of graduate students.

Prospects for exposing the fallacies, eliminating the double bind, and the process of metacommunication must commence immediately beginning with awareness of the double bind itself, its communicators, and the difference between literal and realistic meanings of communications. Secondly, structural changes are needed on comprehensive exams, degree requirements, and other ingredients to the fallacies and the double bind. Both approaches are important to solving

the problem, for while structural changes will help provide environmental conditions necessary for profession confidence, in the meantime a harmful situation must be given immediate attention. However, metacommunication should be immediate only in the sense that urgent attention is needed; in reality, vigilance toward the double bind should be constant in that even the most ideally structured graduate program could not guarantee immunity. If these proposals take effect, an important barrier to student confidence and professional development can be eliminated, or at least alleviated.

In his presidential address to the American Sociological Society, Carl C. Taylor (1947:8) said: "I have for a long time worried about the fact that it takes young sociologists five to ten years to recover from what happens to them in their graduate training."[11] He attributed this to causes much different from those discussed here but, like Taylor, how graduate education influences graduate students has been our essential concern. However, the necessarily limited scope of this paper leaves much room for additional conceptualizations of the confidence problem. It is hoped that this analysis will lead to further consideration of the topic.

NOTES

1. A definition of professional confidence would appear to have three dimensions. The first is self-concept, the professionally confident person having an identity characterized by self-esteem as a competent member of his/her profession. The second is attitude, the professionally confident individual expressing a positive disposition of intellectual assuredness toward the profession's subject matter. The third relates to action wherein attitudes and self-concept are translated into professionally related activities such as proficient communication (through whatever means) with colleagues.

2. Bateson's idea of the double bind, derived from communication theory, provides the theoretical basis for this conceptualization of the student confidence problem. He defined the double bind as a situation where an individual receives two messages from the same source, one message contradicting or denying the other. According to Bateson (1972:208-209), there are three characteristics of a double bind situation:

   a. An individual is involved in an intense situation and believes it is vitally important that he/she understands accurately the messages communicated.

   b. Yet the individual is caught in a predicament where two orders of messages are being communicated, one of which denies or contradicts the other.

   c. The individual is unable to comment on the messages so as to correctly deal with their contradictory nature; i.e., he/she cannot make metacommunicative statements (communications about communications) and the double bind remains unconscious.

3. This study's usage of the double bind is an adaptation rather than a strict application of Bateson's original conceptualization. It differs from his in at least three ways. First, Bateson says the double bind is created when a message is, in itself, a communicator of two contradictory meanings; whereas here the view is that a single message does not itself communicate both fallacies but is part of a series of messages that have the net effect of creating a double bind. Second, both dimensions of the double bind in this adaptation are viewed as fallacious, that is, their content is not only contradictory but false, constituting somewhat of a triple bind. Third, one purpose of this study is to aid graduate students in metacommunicating about messages which create the double bind and, therefore, the double bind is not viewed as a problem which must remain unconscious.

4. The double bind has been shown to be the source of a variety of personal and interpersonal problems and, indeed, Bateson's earliest formulation was related to schizophrenia. Watzlawick et al.(1967:217-218) discussed three typical reactions to a double bind. First, the individual, recognizing that something is awry, "is likely to conclude that he must be overlooking vital clues either inherent in the situation or offered him by significant others." But because the double bind is unconscious, the searching is usually fruitless and can lead to great frustration. Second, like the army recruit who cannot comprehend the baffling logic--or lack of same--in army life, a person in a double bind is likely, "to comply with any and all injunctions with complete literalness and to abstain overtly from any independent thinking." Here the metacommunicative system becomes inoperative, in part because the individual lacks the confidence to comprehend communications, and over-compliance to authority ensues. Third, the individual

withdraws from the situation of social contact, hoping that distance will solve the problem. The withdrawal can be physical or psychological and can lead to withdrawn individuals, defensive and insecure. The parallels to problems among graduate students are all too apparent.

5. The Thomas axiom--that situations perceived as real will be real in their consequences--can relate to the metacommunicative problem. It seems that many situations are defined as real because individuals cannot metacommunicate about messages emanating from them. Thus, if graduate students define the fallacies of shapeless complexity and closure as real (even unconsciously), if messages are accepted at literal meaning and are not metacommunicated about, student actions will so reflect. The double bind will flourish until the metacommunicative system becomes effective.

6. Hughes (1958:267) noted that concealment and ego protection are essential to all social relationships including those associated with the world of work. Viewing graduate study as work, concealment and ego protection may provide a social psychological explanation for the double bind remaining unconscious. Since the student's ego involvement is intense and the fear of failure high, concealment (of a communication's fallacious nature, of contradictory communications, of bogus communications, of environmental communicators, of the double bind itself) could easily be a defense mechanism. Critical analysis of the double bind could create personal disorganization and destabilize the work situation.

7. Those few faculty who are concerned with aiding the development of graduate student teaching should be aware of the double bind and the problems it presents, not only in knowledge development but knowledge transmission as well.

Painfully aware of his/her lack of closure yet baffled by shapeless complexity, many students approach the first teaching assignment with great apprehension. Concerned faculty (and students) should consider possible ways of dealing with the double bind as it related to teaching.

8. All graduate faculty would surely benefit from the insights provided by Rogers in "The Characteristics of a Helping Relationship" (1968:Chapter 3).

9. Recall Einstein's comment that, "after I had passed the final examination, I found the consideration of any problem distasteful for an entire year" (Quoted in Rogers, 1968:693).

10. The sacredness of comprehensive examinations perhaps parallels the once sacrosanct Master's thesis. Many departments, clinging to tradition, resisted alternatives to theses (such as equivalent course work or a Master's essay or paper) even though a changing educational climate called for more flexibility. A study of the change from highly structured Master's programs to more open and flexible one's (or their elimination) may provide insight for possible changes in comprehensive examinations.

11. Lee (1976) brought this quote to my attention.

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