

Human Service Work as Rhetoric

This book is about the everyday activities and relationships making up the social world of a Work Incentive Program (WIN) located in a small city in the Midwest. WIN's purpose is to help persons receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in finding jobs and getting off of welfare (Coudroglou, 1982; Johnson, 1973; Segalman and Basu, 1981; Stein, 1976). The program was organized to impose a variety of work norms on persons receiving such aid. Most clients were required to look for jobs and regularly report to the WIN staff on their job seeking activities. Clients assessed by the WIN staff as inadequately fulfilling program requirements were removed from WIN and, depending on the clients' AFDC statuses, lost all or a significant portion of their welfare grants.

WIN as a Street-Level Bureaucracy

Looked at one way, WIN is a "street-level bureaucracy" because it is a public agency which provides direct services to the public and its staff enjoys a relatively high degree of discretion in providing benefits and imposing sanctions on its clients (Lipsky, 1980). Analyzed as a street-level bureaucracy, WIN has much in common with public schools, hospitals, police departments, welfare agencies, low-level courts, and legal services offices. All such organizations involve applying general public policies to the concrete circumstances of persons' lives. In doing so, street-level bureaucrats give practical meaning to the policies. As Lipsky (1980: xii) states,

the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertain-

ties and work pressures, effectively *become* the public policies they carry out...public policy is not best understood as made in legislatures or top-floor suites of high-ranking administrators, because in important ways it is actually made in crowded offices and daily encounters of street-level workers...policy conflict is not only expressed as the contention of interest groups but is also located in the struggles between individual workers and citizens who challenge or submit to client-processing.

Lipsky analyzes street-level bureaucracies as filled with tensions, dilemmas and uncertainties emanating from workers' relationships with high-level policy-makers, clients and the public. He emphasizes three major sources of problems in such work. First, street-level bureaucrats are expected to provide services to all persons in need while also processing clients in efficient and effective ways, two goals that are not always compatible. A related source of work problems involves street-level bureaucrats' management of limited resources. The difficulty is partly a matter of adjusting to frequent changes in resources provided by legislatures and other funding sources. But, even when relatively high levels of resources are provided, street-level bureaucrats are never given sufficient resources to fully address all of their clients' problems.

A third set of problems involve street-level bureaucrats' relationships with clients and the public. Although they vary across institutions, Lipsky states that street-level bureaucrats are frequently alienated from their clients and the public because they perceive clients and the public as unsympathetic to their problems and overly demanding of scarce organizational resources. Problems in street-level bureaucrat-client relationships are most obviously seen in the angry exchanges which sometimes follow the announcement of street-level bureaucrats' decisions. The exchanges often turn on the clients' claims that street-level bureaucrats are arbitrary and unfair. Street-level bureaucrats frequently counter such claims by portraying their decisions as mandated by the facts under consideration or organizational policies. According to Lipsky, the long-term effect of such exchanges is an atmosphere of distrust and tension in street-level bureaucrats' interactions with clients and members of the public.

Basic to Lipsky's analysis of work and social relations in street-level bureaucracies, then, is an image of street-level

bureaucrats' development of *coping strategies and practices* which are useful in managing troublesome aspects of their work. They include unofficial work routines, schemes for classifying clients and others, and methods of rationing services. According to Lipsky, such strategies are rational responses to working conditions that make the achievement of public policy goals problematic, if not impossible.

Lipsky's study is an important contribution to the sociological analysis of human service professionals and their work problems. He provides a sympathetic account of the practical constraints faced by street-level bureaucrats in attempting to fulfill their professional obligations, constraints that are not always appreciated by others. Although it is based on a different theoretical perspective, this analysis is also concerned with the practical problems associated with street-level bureaucrats' work and the ways in which they seek to manage them. It is similar to Lipsky's analysis in, at least, three ways.

First, this study is concerned with the ways in which WIN staff members dealt with problematic aspects of their work, including those emphasized by Lipsky. Second, the analysis treats the WIN staff as rational persons who sought to properly fulfill their professional obligations while working under difficult circumstances. Finally, the study emphasizes the ways that WIN staff members and others in their work world gave practical meaning to general and abstract public policies by interpreting and applying them to the diverse and concrete circumstances of everyday life. The interpretive activities are analyzed as central features of the WIN staff's work and, through them, staff members sought to fulfill their professional responsibilities and achieve organizational goals.

Despite these similarities, this study differs from Lipsky's in several important ways. The differences are discussed in the next section which also considers the general perspective and concerns of the study.

Descriptive Practice in Street-Level Bureaucracies

Basic to Lipsky's approach is an image of street-level bureaucrats as coping with problems created by others and over which they have little or no control. In a sense, the approach treats street-level bureaucrats as victims; that is,

they are described as persons who are unjustly harmed or damaged by external forces (Holstein and Miller, 1990), Their responses are also described as victimlike. Like other victims, Lipsky states that street-level bureaucrats can only react to the problems brought on them by others. He further states that in coping with their work problems, street-level bureaucrats create other problems for themselves and their clients. Thus, a vicious cycle emerges in which street-level bureaucrats' attempts to manage problems created by others become the basis for further problems and injustices.

There is, however, another way of analyzing this aspect of street-level bureaucrats' work. It focuses on the ways in which street-level bureaucrats portray aspects of their work as problems and actions as coping strategies and tactics. The approach centers in treating street-level bureaucrats' portrayals of their work as descriptive practices. On the surface, descriptive practices are nothing more than reports about observable and/or factual qualities of objects or events. But they are more than this. Descriptive practices are ways of assigning meaning to aspects of everyday life and expressing persons' orientations to them. For example, when street-level bureaucrats portray their work worlds as filled with problems and their actions as professionally responsible efforts to cope with the problems, they simultaneously highlight aspects of their work circumstances and express an attitude toward them. They also de-emphasize other aspects of their work worlds that might be used to describe their work circumstances as unproblematic.

The "human service work as filled with problems" description (and orientation) is similar to that expressed by Lipsky in analyzing street-level bureaucrats' work, because it emphasizes the ways in which street-level bureaucrats are constrained and sometimes victimized by forces beyond their control. Consider, for example, the following statement made by a human service worker about the amount of paperwork that she is required to do.

There is a lot of paper work in this job...There is a lot of accountability, and I'm not sure that it is worth all the effort that we put into it. It just takes away a lot of my time and energy that I need to be doing other things with the [clients]...Obviously there is a balance, and obviously you can't have programs unless you can verify that they are doing

something to the funding sources. . . . But there's a point where it gets out of control and off balance. (Dressel, 1984: 33-34)

Looked at one way, the human service worker's portrayal of the paperwork requirements of her job is a common-sense version of Lipsky's approach to street-level bureaucracies. Specifically, she portrays paperwork as a problem that is externally imposed by funding sources who seek verification that programs are being properly implemented. She also portrays paperwork as a constraint that limits her choices and actions and takes time away from other, more important activities. In highlighting and portraying paperwork as a problem, then, the human service worker casts her actions as efforts to cope with troublesome conditions that are beyond her control.

Although street-level bureaucrats frequently portray their work in ways similar to Lipsky's and other social scientists' analyses, they are not the same. There are two major ways in which street-level bureaucrats' common-sense portrayals and orientations differ from those of social scientists. First, street-level bureaucrats' portrayals of their work are expressed as practical orientations to situationally emergent problems and concerns. They are not intended as enduring analyses, but are inextricably tied to the practical issues at hand. The portrayals are procedures for making sense of the issues and taking action toward them. Thus, street-level bureaucrats' portrayals of themselves and their work may change as they deal with different practical problems in different situations. Street-level bureaucrats portray themselves as constrained and coping on some occasions, but not on all. Indeed, on some occasions they portray themselves as having considerable discretion in responding to their work problems.

Second, street-level bureaucrats' portrayals and orientations to social reality are expressed in different social contexts than those of social scientists. Street-level bureaucrats are involved in a variety of relationships and interactions that include persons who are assumed to hold different (frequently opposed) perspectives on issues of interest to them. Such persons may include organizational superiors, clients, and even colleagues who are sometimes portrayed as having different perspectives on the purposes of their work. Whoever they are, street-level bureaucrats orient to other persons as potential sources of trouble, because they are potential sources of resistance to street-level bureaucrats' attempts to "properly" do their jobs.

One way in which street-level bureaucrats attempt to manage potentially "troublesome" others is through their portrayals (descriptions) of the practical issues which emerge in their work. The portrayals are definitions of the issues and justifications of street-level bureaucrats' preferred responses to them (Emerson and Messinger, 1977). For example, in describing clients' troubles as physical or mental disorders, street-level bureaucrats justify responses involving medical intervention and treatment. The medical portrayal is also a way of countering alternative descriptions involving dispreferred responses, such as legal and punitive responses. Street-level bureaucrats' portrayals of practical issues, then, are ways of producing social conditions (understandings and orientations) making it likely that potentially troublesome others will act in preferred ways. Further, one reason why street-level bureaucrats' descriptive practices may change across situations is because the troubles and troublesome others which their portrayals are intended to manage also change.

In sum, analysis of street-level bureaucrats' descriptive practices emphasizes their active construction of their work worlds. Street-level bureaucrats do so by interpreting the practical meanings of others' decisions and actions for their choices and actions. The interpretations are more than simple reactions to the constraints imposed by others; they involve taking account of others by assigning meanings to their decisions and actions. Street-level bureaucrats use meanings assigned in this way to anticipate others' responses to practical issues and justify actions intended to avoid (or minimize) troubles resulting from their anticipated responses. Such descriptive and interpretive practices are aspects of virtually all of street-level bureaucrats' work, particularly their efforts to effectively and properly respond to their clients' troubles.

Further, street-level bureaucrats' descriptions are frequently expressed as rhetoric. Although it is used in a variety of ways by contemporary social scientists, the term *rhetoric* is used here to refer to any communication that is intended to persuade others (Burke, 1950).¹ It is one way in which persons assign identities to themselves and others. For example, the above statement portraying paperwork as a problem with which the human service worker must cope may be analyzed as rhetoric. It is an effort to persuade others that the paperwork requirements of the speaker's job are excessive, clients' needs are not being fully met because of the requirements, and

she is a frustrated human service professional. The human service worker also used the latter claim to assign a preferred identity to herself and deflect whatever blame others might ascribe to her based on the amount of time she spends on paperwork.

Taken together, these aspects of the human service worker's portrayal are rhetorical procedures for producing preferred understandings of her work. The understandings have practical implications because they are used to justify a sympathetic orientation by others to her professional activity and counter alternative and dispreferred orientations. The portrayal might also be used to justify changes in the human service worker's work activities, such as reducing the amount of paperwork required of her and emphasizing other activities involving direct contact with clients which the worker portrayed as more important. More generally, rhetorical analysis of this and similar statements made by street-level bureaucrats emphasizes their political use of language. We further consider this issue in the next section.

Rhetoric as Political Discourse

Street-level bureaucrats' rhetoric is political because it is expressed as arguments. Arguments differ from other types of social interaction because the participants take partisan positions on the issues at hand. The positions are often expressed as quasi-theories which are rationales for explaining and justifying persons' preferred solutions to practical problems (Hall and Hewitt, 1970; Hewitt and Hall, 1973). Because the conclusions of quasi-theories are foregone, quasi-theorizers' major concern is with identifying "facts" which others will treat as convincing evidence for their conclusions. Hewitt and Hall (1973: 370) state, "What is essential to the quasi-theory is its logic, which is one of cause and effect, though quite disarranged temporally if viewed from a scientific standpoint. The use of quasi-theories involves the postulation of a cure, followed by an analysis of cause and effect that supports the cure."

Arguments are also organized to produce winners and losers. Street-level bureaucrats "win" their arguments when others acquiesce to their positions. Depending on the circumstances of an argument, acquiescence might involve explicit statements of agreement with street-level bureaucrats' claims

and recommendations, implicit agreement that is expressed through others' actions that conform with street-level bureaucrats' recommendations, or others' withdrawal of criticisms of street-level bureaucrats' claims and recommendations. Through rhetoric, street-level bureaucrats also cast others' acquiescence as voluntary actions based on rational assessments of the issues at hand and their options in responding to them. That is, street-level bureaucrats cast others' acquiescence as based on the persuasiveness of their arguments, not coercion.

Further, rhetorically produced and justified acquiescence is situationally contingent. It must be reproduced in subsequent interactions with potentially "troublesome" others (Paine, 1981). The process of rhetorically producing and reproducing acquiescence is similar to that analyzed by Goffman (1959) as the definition of the situation. It centers in producing a working consensus which is a short-term, practical and shared orientation to issues of mutual concern. He further states that a working consensus

involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored. (Goffman, 1959: 9-10)

Put differently, rhetorical analysis of everyday life in street-level bureaucracies challenges many of the assumptions that underlie common-sense and most social scientific understandings of organizational process. One such challenge involves the assumption that there is one enduring social reality within which we all live (Schutz, 1970). The approach taken here emphasizes the variety of ways in which social reality may be described (constructed) across situations. It also focuses on the ways in which descriptions of social reality change as the practical circumstances of everyday life change. Further, because street-level bureaucrats and others in their work worlds orient to some descriptions (definitions) of social reality as more preferable than others, their social interactions are political encounters centered in rhetoric and argumentation.

The encounters may be analyzed as reality contests because they are organized as arguments about two or more competing reality descriptions having different consequences for the interactants. The contests turn on the competing parties' (arguers') abilities to sustain their claims and recommendations in light of others' criticisms and counter claims. As

with other contests, rhetorical competitors do not always have equal access to resources that might be used to advance their arguments nor are they all equally adept in argumentation. For example, street-level bureaucrats often have access to organizational records and other documents that are not available to their clients. The documents are rhetorically useful because street-level bureaucrats cite them as objective evidence of the accuracy of their claims. Clients are at a disadvantage in such interactions because they seldom have access to alternative documents which they might cite as objective evidence supporting their claims.

This approach to language and social reality is similar to that taken by Potter and Wetherell (1987). They describe their approach as discourse analysis and show how it is based on many of the concerns and assumptions of speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, et al., 1979), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984; Pollner, 1987; Zimmerman and Pollner, 1971) and semiology (Saussure, 1974; Barthes, 1964; Manning, 1987). Although different in some ways, each of these influences on Potter and Wetherell's perspective treat language and its use as consequential and a topic for systematic study. As Potter and Wetherell (1987: 35) state, speech act theorists, ethnomethodologists and semiologists

are not trying to recover events, beliefs and cognitive processes from participants' discourses, or treat language as an indicator or signpost to some other state of affairs but are looking at the analytically prior question of how discourse or accounts of these things are manufactured.

Although the term *discourse* is used in diverse ways by contemporary social scientists, I will follow Potter and Wetherell's lead by using it to refer to the ways in which street-level bureaucrats and others in their work worlds produce accounts of practical issues.² The accounts are expressed as descriptions of practical issues and interactants' options in responding to them. Through their descriptions, street-level bureaucrats and others construct versions of social reality that, on occasion, become matters of negotiation. It is in such negotiations that the rhetorical aspects of street-level bureaucrats' and others' descriptions of social reality are most easily seen, including the ways in which their interactions are organized as reality contests. Study of such interactions is also a source of insight about the ways in which working consen-

suses and acquiescence are rhetorically produced in street-level bureaucracies. They are produced as short-term agreements to honor some versions of social reality over others.

Central to the rhetorical analysis of street-level bureaucrats' discourse is a concern for the ways in which they justify their preferred versions of social reality. Justifications are significant for street-level bureaucrats for, at least, two reasons. First, street-level bureaucrats use justifications to counter criticisms from others advocating alternative versions of social reality. Indeed, street-level bureaucrats sometimes anticipate and respond to others' criticisms by justifying their claims and recommendations before they are voiced. It is a rhetorical strategy and tactic for managing potentially troublesome others.

Second, street-level bureaucrats use justifications to cast acquiescence to their positions as a realistic response to their disagreements with others. Such justifications make it possible for others to honor street-level bureaucrats' reality descriptions while saving face; that is, while allowing others to maintain identities as competent, thoughtful and well-meaning persons. Street-level bureaucrats partly do so by portraying their potential and actual critics as reasonable and well-intentioned persons who are overlooking important aspects of the issues at hand. Street-level bureaucrats use this portrayal of others to cast acquiescence to their arguments as evidence of others' reasonable attitudes and proper intentions.

Finally, this analysis of rhetoric in street-level bureaucracies is similar to Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discourse analysis in treating reality descriptions as partial and biased renderings of everyday life. Street-level bureaucrats and others construct and justify their reality descriptions by emphasizing some aspects of everyday life and glossing over others. This statement is not intended to suggest that there is a single comprehensive or correct reality description against which other descriptions can be judged. Rather, it is intended to highlight a practical problem encountered by street-level bureaucrats in justifying their positions in social interactions with potentially troublesome others. The problem involves others' abilities to counter street-level bureaucrats' descriptions by pointing to aspects of everyday life that are de-emphasized and left out of their descriptions. Such criticisms may be further developed to justify alternative reality descriptions and orientations to practical issues.

The latter possibility is significant for street-level bureaucrats because it is a major, ongoing source of potential trouble in their relationships with others. Others' criticisms are never fully or ultimately countered; rather, they are a potential aspect of all street-level bureaucrats' interactions. This practical circumstance is a major reason why rhetoric must be treated as a significant and pervasive work activity of street-level bureaucrats. It is central to their implementation of public policies and achievement of organizational goals. We next consider other practical circumstances associated with street-level bureaucrats' use of rhetoric.

Rhetoric and the Practicalities of Street-Level Bureaucrats' Work

There are at least three practical circumstances that are related to street-level bureaucrats' use of rhetoric. They involve defining and remedying social problems, formulating and justifying decisions, and claiming professional status. The rest of this section is concerned with the ways in which street-level bureaucrats' use of rhetoric is related to these aspects of their work. They are discussed in turn.

The Rhetoric of Problems and Remedies

As Lipsky (1980) states, a major issue in street-level bureaucrats' relations with their clients involves many clients' unwillingness to acquiesce to street-level bureaucrats' claims and recommendations about the clients' problems. The issue is made more complex by the fact that street-level bureaucrats are frequently reluctant to compel acquiescence by using legal, professional and organizational resources which might be used to impose their orientations on others. Street-level bureaucrats' inability or reluctance to compel acquiescence through coercion is perhaps best addressed in Emerson and Messinger's (1977) and Emerson's (1981) analyses of the micro-politics of trouble. They analyze human service and social control organizations as hierarchies of remedies or responses to the reported troubles of clients.

According to Emerson and Messinger (1977), organizational remedies to persons' troubles range from first-resort (or preferred) to last-resort decisions and responses. As Emerson (1981: 4) states,

...first resorts represent the best way to manage a particular sort of trouble. First-resort decisions are typically presented as what *should* or *ought* to be done, regardless of practical contingencies and local limitations: Given the efficacy of "moral treatment," for example, each and every person found insane should be sent for cure to the asylum. In contrast, last-resort decisions are typically framed in an idiom of *necessity*: The claim is that "we *have* to hospitalize," that there is no alternative but to turn to this particular response

Thus, a basic feature of street-level bureaucrats' work involves categorizing persons and troubles in relation to available remedies which range from those treated as most preferred (and typically used) to last-resort (least preferred and used) responses. The latter responses are typically portrayed as the most severe and coercive available. In portraying some responses as last resorts, street-level bureaucrats cast the responses as inappropriate and, therefore, unavailable to them in dealing with most of the persons and troubles that come to their attention. Further, many (if not most) of the responses treated as appropriate for dealing with "normal" persons and troubles involve efforts to persuade others. For example, rhetoric is basic to police officers' handling of "typical" family disputes, nursing home professionals' and patients' development of mutually agreeable treatment plans, and family therapists' framing of their clients' troubles so that they will choose to remedy them in preferred ways (Gubrium, 1980; Ker Muir, 1977; Miller, 1987).

Indeed, rhetoric is a pervasive aspect of criminal justice organizations and the work of legal professionals. Not only do legal professionals try to persuade adversaries and judicial decision-makers, but much of their work involves persuading their own clients and others whom they wish to help. For example, public defenders frequently represent clients who resist plea bargaining proposals that the attorneys believe to be in their clients' best interest (Maynard, 1984; Sudnow, 1965). When clients resist public defenders' recommendations, they respond with persuasion. It becomes their work. Consider, for example, the following statement made by a public defender to a client who was reluctant to acquiesce to a recommended plea bargain.

Look, you know as well as I do that with your prior conviction and this charge now that you could go away from here [to

prison] for five years or so. So just calm down a minute and let's look at this thing reasonably. If you go to trial and lose the trial, you're stuck. You'll be in the joint [prison] until you're 28 years old. If you plead this one charge without the priors [prior convictions] then we can get you into jail maybe, a year or two at the most in the joint. If you wait until the preliminary hearing and they charge the priors, boy you've had it, it's too late. (Sudnow, 1965: 267)

In sum, rhetoric is a pervasive and practical aspect of street-level bureaucrats' work. Through rhetoric, they fulfill their professional obligations (including gaining client or public cooperation) without "unwarranted" recourse to last-resort responses.

Rhetoric and Organizational Decision-Making

Rhetoric is basic to, at least, two general features of intra- and inter-organizational decision-making in street-level bureaucracies. First, it is an aspect of staff meetings, which are recurring events in street-level bureaucracies. Although the meetings are partly occasions for sharing information about issues of practical concern, they also frequently involve negotiations about how to respond to the issues. Such negotiations are facilitated by the frequent requirement that professionals having quite different interests in the issues develop mutually agreeable responses to them. Rhetoric is a primary medium through which participants in such meetings seek their practical interests, including their interest in fulfilling their responsibilities to clients, colleagues and the public.

Consider, for example, the following statement made in a staff meeting in a residential treatment center serving children diagnosed as emotionally disturbed (Buckholdt and Gubrium, 1979). The meeting involved assessing the children's special problems, needs and abilities as well as making treatment recommendations. The assessments were simultaneously diagnostic and rhetorical because the meeting participants formulated and advocated for their preferred understandings of the children's problems and responses to the problems in their interactions. A related aspect of their rhetoric was the discrediting of other understandings of the children's problems.

This is your classic emotionally disturbed kid: acting out, swearing, on medication, causes trouble....And swearing! It

[the client's record] says he's been saying all kinds of juicy things since kindergarten. You should see the teachers' comments....I wouldn't say he's ready for the day treatment program. I *really know* this kid from what I've read here and he sure isn't ready for day treatment. Floyd [the program's education supervisor] agrees with me. Whoever recommended day treatment probably doesn't really know him in the school...(Buckholdt and Gubrium, 1979: 192-193)

In the final analysis, then, street-level bureaucrats' rhetorical formulation of cases and remedies is as important as the facts in shaping the development of mutually agreeable decisions. Equally important, the rationales offered by street-level bureaucrats to justify their recommendations may involve a wide variety of factors, some of which might be used in other situations to justify quite different conclusions.

The second way in which rhetoric is a part of decision-making in and between street-level bureaucracies involves their hierarchical arrangement of case evaluation. Specifically, actions taken by street-level bureaucrats are often routinely assessed by higher level agency officials and/or officials of other organizations who then support, modify or reject the bureaucrats' recommendations. In describing their actions, street-level bureaucrats anticipate and counter possible challenges by potentially troublesome others by treating record-keeping and related descriptive practices as rhetorical activities. That is, they are partly recorded with an eye to persuading others that the decisions and actions in question were justified.

Such rhetoric is perhaps most obvious in criminal justice organizations where actions taken by police officers are routinely assessed by district attorneys, judges and juries. Thus, police officers' presentations of criminal cases are partly intended to persuade others to acquiesce to their portrayals of events as crimes (Sanders, 1977). In processing sexual assault cases, for example, police officers typically consider how district attorneys will evaluate and respond to the cases (Sanders, 1980). Because police officers frequently assume that district attorneys are mostly concerned with the convictability of cases and not with issues of truth or justice, they try to produce reports that provide clear, legal bases for concluding that the reported sexual assaults have taken place, the true perpetrators have been arrested, and the arrested parties

can be convicted. Although expressed in a dispassionate and legalistic language, such reports are implicitly persuasive.

Rhetoric is also an aspect of intra- and inter-organizational case evaluation in welfare agencies, juvenile courts and other street-level bureaucracies (Emerson, 1969; Higgins, 1985; Warren, 1982). For example, involuntary mental hospitalization decisions typically turn on the ability of candidate patients and their representatives to convince judicial decision-makers that tenable living situations are available to them in their home communities (Holsten, 1984, 1987). Knowing this, many community mental health professionals who seek involuntary commitment for clients and others produce documents that describe candidate patients as both mentally ill and unable to secure appropriate living arrangements outside the hospital. The documents are rhetorical because they are descriptions of aspects of candidate patients' lives which are intended to persuade potential readers to acquiesce to recommended courses of action.

Viewed as rhetoric, then, all descriptive activity in street-level bureaucracies is political discourse because it always advocates particular understandings of social reality. One such understanding is that street-level bureaucrats are knowledgeable and caring professionals in whom clients and public should place their trust.

Professional Standing as Rhetoric

Street-level bureaucrats' concern for justifying their claims to professional standing is partly related to the public's reluctance to accord them the same deference given to physicians and others typically treated as real professionals. There are at least two practical bases for public skepticism about street-level bureaucrats' claim to professional standing. The first involves the conditions under which street-level bureaucrats come into contact with the public. The contacts are often treated as unwanted intrusions into persons' lives. Further, clients sometimes treat recommended remedies as inappropriate for their circumstances, if not harmful to them.

The second factor involves persons' assessments of the distinctiveness and value of street-level bureaucrats as possessing knowledge and skills that are widely disseminated in the society, including among clients themselves (Haug and Sussman, 1969a, 1969b). It is also claimed that street-level

bureaucrats have no special insight into their clients' problems or special ability to help. A variant of this claim depicts street-level bureaucrats as possessing incorrect knowledge or, at least, incorrect perspectives on the circumstances with which they are attempting to deal. Such depictions are used to challenge street-level bureaucrats' claims to special expertise and right to intervene in other persons' lives.

Rhetoric is the major way in which street-level bureaucrats counter such challenges. They do so by emphasizing their privileged knowledge about clients' troubles and how troubles should be solved as well as their compassionate understanding of clients' perspectives and experiences. Street-level bureaucrats' efforts to persuade and justify may involve claims to characteristics associated with more prestigious occupations (such as medicine and law), the recounting of street-level bureaucrats' records of success in remedying client troubles and/or descriptions of aspects of street-level bureaucrats' lives that "show" that they can "really" understand clients' perspectives and concerns. However it is expressed, such rhetoric justifies street-level bureaucrats' intervention in other persons' lives.

It may also be used to cast clients' responses to street-level bureaucrats' claims to professional knowledge and standing as tests of their commitment and/or ability to remedy the clients' troubles. That is, clients' who challenge street-level bureaucrats' claims may be assessed as uncommitted to "really" solving their troubles or unable to do so without professional guidance. Clients so assessed may be assigned "uncooperative" or "troublemaker" identities and treated differently than other clients assigned "normal" identities. For example, a frequent aspect of street-level bureaucrats' justifications of last-resort responses to some clients' troubles involves portraying the clients as uncooperative and, therefore, deserving more severe responses than other clients.

Although their studies are about two very different street-level bureaucracies (a working-class school in England and alcohol treatment facilities in the United States), both Willis (1977) and Wisemann (1979) note and analyze the practical importance of street-level bureaucrats' assessments of clients' responses to their claims to professional expertise and authority.³ The teachers used assessments of students' attitudes toward school to explain their students' academic failures (they

weren't trying) and predict their futures. The teachers predicted that students with bad attitudes toward school would fail to achieve occupational success because they did not use their school years to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes toward authority needed for success in the work world. The alcohol treatment professionals used assessments of clients' attitudes toward treatment to justify their selective placement of clients in therapy programs. They stated that clients who refused to take responsibility for their problems as they were advised to do by the alcohol treatment professionals were unlikely to benefit from therapy.

Gubrium (1980) also analyzes how human service professionals in geriatric organizations manage meetings with "troublesome" clients. Clients become troublesome when they object to the staff members' orientations to their troubles. Gubrium states that staff members treat such objections as challenges to their efforts to present themselves as competent and caring professionals. Initially, staff members attempt to manage clients' objections by ignoring or glossing over them.

This occurs so long as the patient's objections are not too loud nor persistent enough to make the briefing inaudible or otherwise undeliverable. Should patients' disagreement grow beyond what is taken to be routinely acceptable, they are reminded that their behavior is "inappropriate. They may even be told, with patronizing firmness, "Adults simply don't act that way," or "We mustn't be so childish," or "Let's try to be calm and more reasonable about this." With the patient's persistence, the interaction of the patient becomes increasingly enraged with staffers' diversion from what is the patient takes to be the issue at hand and where staffers, in turn, increasingly become irritated by what they believe to be the patient's unrealistic, immature conduct. Should the patient refuse to calm down and cooperate in decorously completing the routine, the patient is led from the meeting, whereupon the staffing is completed. (Gubrium, 1980: 340)

In sum, rhetoric is a basic and practical aspect of street-level bureaucrats' work. Through rhetoric, street-level bureaucrats express and justify their orientations to practical matters and manage troublesome others. The rhetoric centers in explanations and justifications of organizationally approved understandings and orientations to clients' troubles and other practical issues. One consequence of street-level bureaucrats'

rhetoric and others' acquiescence to their claims and recommendations is the perpetuation of organizational routines and relationships. Thus, street-level bureaucrats' efforts to persuade have implications that go beyond the diverse and concrete problems that their rhetoric is intended to remedy. Rhetoric is a major way in which street-level bureaucracies are legitimized and maintained in everyday life. We next consider the social organization of rhetoric in street-level bureaucracies.

Social Organization of Rhetoric in Street-Level Bureaucracies

Street-Level bureaucrats' rhetoric centers in formulating arguments which justify their orientations to practical issues and to which others are likely to accede. The arguments are generally expressed as conclusions (declarations of preferred responses to practical issues) and rationales (justifications of the conclusions). In the abstract, such arguments may be endlessly negotiated and elaborated. In practice, however, arguments were situationally resolved and terminated, although they are always potentially open to reconsideration and renegotiation in subsequent interactions. Street-level bureaucrats' arguments turn on anticipated or stated criticisms of others to their claims about practical issues and recommendations for managing these issues (Perelman, 1979). Their arguments are intended to justify their claims and recommendations.

Street-Level Bureaucrats' Justifications

Street-Level bureaucrats justify their claims and recommendations by specifying the conditions to which they apply and/or the authority on which they are made (Toulmin, 1958). Street-level bureaucrats sometimes portray the conditions associated with their claims and recommendations as general, perhaps even universal, circumstances which everyone must accept. In this way, street-level bureaucrats portray the circumstances associated with their arguments as facts of life and cast their claims and recommendations as generally valid for a wide variety of practical issues. For example, street-level bureaucrats make such claims and justifications in interviews concerned with the general conditions and problems of their work world. In doing so, they gloss over the practical contingencies associated with concrete situations which might be cited to counter their claims and justifications.

As with the following response by a prison correctional officer to an interviewer's question, street-level bureaucrats also use general claims about their work circumstances and problems to assign preferred identities to themselves and others. The correctional officer also uses his portrayal of the prison system to explain why correctional officers act in officially disapproved ways.

We are Indians in the correctional system. Everyone shits on us. We have no togetherness in this place [prison]... We are the screws no one really cares about... we are shipwrecked in the society and are always labelled as the bad guys... they [prison administrators] treat us like assholes and we will eventually become nothing but assholes. (Stojkovic, 1990:215)

Most of the time, however, street-level bureaucrats justify their claims and recommendations by portraying aspects of concrete situations and the issues at hand as conditions making their claims valid and recommendations appropriate. This practice is partly related to the organization of many street-level bureaucrats' work which centers in the management of cases. Although they are sometimes classified into general types, street-level bureaucrats treat most cases as somewhat unique and, therefore, requiring individualized attention. In social interactions concerned with cases, then, street-level bureaucrats seek acquiescence from others by portraying their claims and recommendations as responsive to the unique needs and/or best interests of the client at hand.

Consider, for example, the following argument reported by Holstein (1987) which involves a county attorney's recommendation that a woman (candidate patient) be involuntarily committed to a mental hospital. The candidate patient stated that she wanted to live in a cardboard box located below a set of railroad tracks and justified her preference by favorably comparing the box to subsidized public housing.

Now I know Miss Wells claims that this [cardboard box] is as good as the subsidized public housing programs the DSS [Department of Social Services] has suggested she look into, but we have to consider more than its construction aspects. ... You can't allow a woman to be exposed to all the other things that go on out there under the [railroad] tracks. Many of those men have lived like that for years, but we're talking about a woman here. A sick and confused woman who

doesn't realize the trouble she's asking for. She simply cannot live like that. That's no place for a woman, especially after dark.... She's not taking it [being a woman in the midst of men] into account. She doesn't realize how dangerous it is for her. It's up to the court to protect her... (Holstein, 1987: 315)

The county attorney's argument is an example of how street-level bureaucrats sometimes use images of gender to justify their recommendations and actions. Specifically, the attorney contrasted the candidate patient's status as a woman with that of men and used the contrast to justify different responses to otherwise similar troubles experienced by men and women. Different treatment of women was further justified by reference to the court's obligation to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Thus, the county attorney's argument involved both a specification of the conditions to which her recommendations applied (they applied to women because women are uniquely vulnerable to physical assault) and the authority on which the recommendation was made (it was warranted because the court has a responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves).

The conclusions and rationales that make up street-level bureaucrats' arguments are interrelated because each is used as a background for assessing the other. Specifically, street-level bureaucrats and others use rationales as interpretive frameworks for assessing the appropriateness of recommendations and conclusions. The assessments focus on the grounds for street-level bureaucrats' conclusions. They might involve one or more of the following questions: what are the empirical bases for the conclusions; what are the "real" motives underlying the conclusions and rationales; and do the persons making recommendations have adequate professional expertise and authority?

For example, the above recommendation of hospitalization might be challenged by asking for evidence that the patient is uniquely vulnerable to assault, questioning the county attorney's motives in justifying her recommendation based on the candidate patient's gender, or arguing that the court is required to disregard gender in making decisions about candidate patients. In negotiating such issues, street-level bureaucrats simultaneously produce mutually agreeable conclusions and rationales for their actions. Such negotiations are fre-