

PROGRESS AND PITFALLS IN SOCIOMETRIC THEORY

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SOCIOMETRIC METHODS AND THE SURFACE-DEPTH CLEAVAGE WITHIN GROUP STRUCTURE

Sociometric tests show in a dramatic and precise fashion that every group has beneath its superficial, tangible, visible, readable structure an underlying, intangible, invisible, unofficial structure, but one which is more alive, real and dynamic than the other. This was found to be true of groups which have a highly formalized institutional character as well as of groups whose structure is informal, fluid and transitory. It was found that in a work or business relationship individuals do not respond in an objective and adequate manner; an individual, for instance, who had the opportunity to choose freely among two physicians who were considered of equal skill and requiring equal monetary expenditure, chose the one whom he liked best for some "personal reason". The skill angle, the economic angle and the private preference angle were subtly interwoven, resulting in one particular, specific choice. Another individual who had an opportunity to choose partners for a recreational situation, going fishing, had to put up with a carpenter across the street instead of a musician whom he would have preferred. In conclusion we can say that formal *and* informal groupings, whatever the criterion, do not differ sociometrically; they have in common the division between an upper and an under structure of personal relations.

The "personal reason" referred to in the above paragraph is nothing mysterious. It is a *displacement* of social feeling projected into an inappropriate situation. It is imaginable that in an utopian sociometric society the tele sense of individuals will be so highly differentiated and trained that when an individual chooses an associate for working together, he would be influenced *only* by the objective requirements for the work situation and not by some cultural or amatory aspirations he may have, because they will be taken care of in the other groupings in which he participates. In such a society every criterion of grouping would be equally permissible and no individual will have to look for the realization of his social feelings in situations undesigned for their expression.

One of the difficulties which we have encountered in sociometric work is the definition and analysis of social criteria. Social criteria are the foci around which individuals cluster and around which groupings of varying de-

degrees of constancy and duration are formed. The more specific the criteria are the more care has to be taken to construct a sociometric test accordingly and the better are the chances that it will tap the most spontaneously intimate and real structures which individuals produce among themselves. There are studies which are not based on *any* criterion—"Whom do you like or dislike." They should not be called sociometric. There are studies which use vaguely defined criteria—"Who are your best friends, and who are your enemies." It is obvious that the more vaguely the criteria are defined, the less precise will be the sociometric test instrument and the less complete and more distorted will be the findings. Loosely defined criteria indicate that the aim of the sociometric investigator is not clear. A sociometric test does not merely require a subject to give a verbal response to a verbal quest. It tries to mobilize the subject, to arouse in him an action response, an action response however which he may have denied himself but which is the deepest, present expression of his spontaneity. Every sociometric test attempts to warm up the subject to act in behalf and in accord with his subjective reality level. It encourages him to act out, to be himself; it permits him to have a goal, a goal for himself, a goal of his own. If we ask a person therefore, whom do you like or dislike, he may relate to us at best some of his social perceptions but the process of self mobilization and realization is left out of the subject's world. But when we ask him in all earnestness to choose the one he wants to share a room with he is confronted with a situation, he has to make a decision, to think through the relationship, knowing that it may be consummated. In order that a test should help him in furthering the autonomy of his social relations the test has to apply to him, not he to the test.

A frequent pitfall has become the notion that by watching the activities of informal groups, as playing cards, going fishing, hitch hiking, picnicking, the intimate private structure of a group comes to the surface and that sociometric test procedures are thus superfluous. This trend of thought has been particularly encouraged by the Hawthorne experiment¹ (and by other studies of cliques, gangs, etc.). This experiment, however noble and worthy in itself tries in vain to use interview and observational techniques to supplant the sociometric test. I have warned against this pitfall in the early days of sociometry for methodical as well as for practical reasons. In any effort to disclose the interpersonal structure of a group, interview and observational

¹Roethlisberger and Dickson, "Management and the Worker", Harvard University Press, 1939.

techniques without the sociometric test are hopeless and incomplete gestures. After the sociometric test is applied however, a focus of inquiry and a focus for action is established which intensifies the value of interview and observation many times. From the point of view of systematic sociometric research the Hawthorne experiment belongs into a class of studies using pseudo sociometric clues and a pseudo sociometric language without applying sociometric instruments and a *thinking through* the findings—and without *carrying them out* to benefit the workers. It is the animal technique of the “maze” applied to a human situation. The workers are treated like guinea pigs instead of like autonomous, mature human adults. As the main results of the Hawthorne experiment were published at a time when a well established sociometric climate existed, the laborious work must be considered a regression.²

A period in the development of sociometry comes to an end which may well be called “halfway sociometry”. The halfway sociometrists of the last decade, especially some of the workers coming from general and abstract sociological schools, preferred broad and vast sounding questionnaires of interpersonal relations with a flair for sociometric concepts to the sociometric test itself. These questionnaires fell more easily into practicable academic methods of research but they diluted and deflated the sociometric method. The true sociometric test as we planned it is a revolutionary category of investigation. It upsets the group from within. It produces a social revolution on a microscopic scale. If it does not produce an upheaval in some degree it may arouse suspicion that the investigator has modified it so—in respect for an existing social order—that it becomes a harmless, poverty stricken instrument.

PSYCHO-SOCIO DRAMATIC METHODS AND THE PSYCHO-SOCIO CLEAVAGE WITHIN GROUP STRUCTURE

Psychodramatic and sociodramatic methods disclose that each individual or group of individuals belong simultaneously to a privately structured and

²It is unfortunate that Dr. Roethlisberger and Dr. Dickson did not apply sociometric methods in their study; this is particularly deplorable because Dr. Elton Mayo, the senior exponent of the study, was appreciative of our sociometric experiments as early as 1931 and had read some of the material published (see letter from Elton Mayo in “Application of the Group Method to Classification” by J. L. Moreno, in collaboration with E. Stagg Whitin published by the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor, p. 82, 1931 and 1932, current edition “Group Method and Group Psychotherapy”). Indeed, *no* study of group structure can be taken seriously if it does not use sociometric methods wholeheartedly; they certainly can be improved but they cannot be bypassed.

a socially structured world. In fact, the hypothesis that a cleavage exists between private and social within every individual and in every group has been the reason why two different instruments, the psychodrama and the sociodrama have been constructed. The differentiation between psychological and social structuring takes place in every group, in home as well as in work groups, in school as well as in recreation groups, in formal as well as in informal groups. The impact of our social and cultural order is so all inclusive and penetrating that there is no grouping of any sort which is not permeated by some degree of collectivity. In turn there is no grouping able to exist without being permeated by some degree of spontaneous subjectivity because of the individual resistance to a given social order.

Helen Jennings,³ in an interesting report concerning the difference in sociometric structure between psyche and socio makes the following statements: ". . . a population tends to form two distinguishable kinds of groups: (I) sociogroups, *i.e.*, groups where sociometric structure is based on a criterion which is *collective* in nature; . . . (II) psychegroups, *i.e.*, groups where sociometric structure is based on strictly *private* criterion which is totally *personal* in nature;" . . . "An analysis of the sociometric data based on the 'unrestricting' criterion, leisure-time (and/or) recreation), in the same community . . . reveals that the sociometric structure of groups formed around this criterion differs from the sociometric structure of groups formed around 'restricting' criteria (working, and/or living, in same group) to such extent and in such manner as to suggest we are dealing with 'groups' which are fundamentally different."

Helen Jennings, in making a very valuable point as strong as possible arrives here at a formulation which may create in readers not well acquainted with sociometric work a misunderstanding as to the meaning of our terms. We have reserved the term "group" for the total picture of the interaction of all factors operating on the psycho-social level, similar to the term organism which is reserved for the total picture of all factors operating on the biological level. To divide, therefore, a population into two categories, socio- and psychegroup, adds a new unnecessary hypothesis. It suggests the idea that there are two fundamentally different categories of groups whereas we agreed up to now that groups of every type are endlessly and continuously formed around specific criteria and as being filled with some psychic and some social structures. We can differentiate, as useful abstractions, between psycho and socio structures within a group, *in situ*, on the

³Helen H. Jennings, "Sociometry of Leadership", Sociometry Monograph, No. 14, Beacon House, 1947.

reality level as we are differentiating between psychodrama and sociodrama on the instrumental level. But just as we do not claim that we have a psycho and sociodrama per se, we cannot claim that there is a psyche and socio group per se. We do not want to convey the false impression that the psyche does not operate in home groups (or in a negligible way) and that the socio does not operate in recreational groups (or in a negligible way). The possibility of miscomprehension is eliminated if we hypothecate a split between psycho and socio within the sociometric structure of a group, the psycho trend showing greater intensity in certain groups, the socio trend showing greater intensity in certain other groups.

There is no sociometric evidence for the hypothesis that there are groups which are strictly collective, dominated by a collective pattern of behavior and groups which are strictly private, dominated by a private pattern of behavior. But there is increasing evidence of a *psycho-socio continuum*. The notion of two worlds, a private and a social, is based on views rarely challenged: a) That there is a psyche which is a private product reigning in splendid isolation, and that there is a socius, the product of social forces; b) that our social and cultural order is a devilish imposition upon our private psyches and if we could deliver ourselves from this order we would have our private psyches back undiluted, unhampered, in their original state of free spontaneity.

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