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SOCIOMETRY II: METHODS

Since Moreno developed sociometry, both the classical method and some variations have been refined significantly. Rather than attempt to fully describe the technicalities of this approach, I will offer a very brief review and some commentary on a number of the more commonly used techniques. The reader is encouraged to study other sources for particulars (Hale, 1985; Carlson-Sabelli, 1992; Treadwell, Kumar, Stein & Prosnick, 1998).

In classical sociometry, people in a group or community are invited to respond to relevant questions about their preferences to be with certain others in various roles and/or specific situations. Generally, this is a paper-and-pencil test and sometimes prepared forms may be used to facilitate the process. The questions asked are ideally based on realistic choices, ones that could potentially be fulfilled: With whom would you like to be on a work team? With whom would you like to sit at meals? With whom would you like to share a dormitory room? These preferences might be ranked: Who would be your first choice? Your second choice? Your third? Also, sometimes the questioning in-

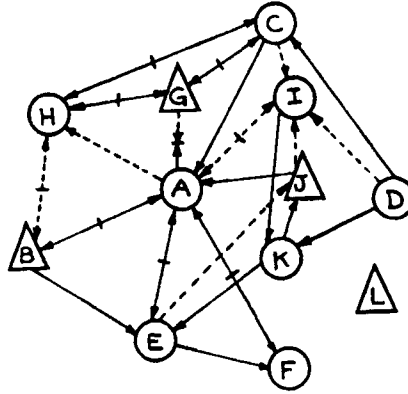


Figure 19-1.

cludes, "With whom would you *least* like to be paired for (such and such a role)?" Who would be your second least preferred partner?

The responses are then tabulated and the results shared back with the community, sometimes in the form of a sociogram (see Figure 19.1). Based on these responses, the group is then helped to agree on assignments that accord as much as possible with the preferences indicated, especially where they are reciprocated. Equally important, the group is helped to discuss their findings and deal with the issues that inevitably arise when this level of interpersonal disclosure is made.

Unfortunately, as mentioned in the previous chapter, and contrary to Moreno's express desire, sociometry was far more often used as a research tool with little real sharing of the results with the subjects.

RESISTANCES TO SOCIOMETRY

One of the problems of using the method as Moreno intended is that the sociometrist would have to be remarkably skilled in working out the issues that are raised in the course of using sociometry. The challenge of expressing explicit preferences is frankly scary, bringing up a number of anxieties. Some typical fears that people have commonly expressed might include: "I'm afraid that. . ."

- if you find out I like you more than you like me, you may laugh at me or take advantage of me.
- if you find out that I prefer someone else to you, you will resent and possibly hurt me in retaliation, or I will hurt your feelings and then I'll feel guilty.
- if they like me more than you, you may be hurt, or worse, jealous or envious, and from that, spitefully hurt me.
- if I don't prefer the people who are popular, they won't like me, so, even though I like you, I'm afraid to show it.
- although I prefer you, I also prefer that person a bit more, but if he doesn't prefer me, I don't want you to be mad that you weren't my first choice, and then I won't get either of my preferred choices.
- you'll find out I don't prefer you at all, as a matter of fact, I'm repelled by you, but: (a) I am afraid to tell you why; (b) I don't know why, it's not clear to me; (c) I am afraid to get involved in exploring the basis for my antipathy—a fear of hurt and resentful feelings all around.

Sociometry, then, brings to the surface a host of very vivid intrapsychic and interpersonal issues, and just as there are resistances to exploring the depth of the intrapsychic realm in psychoanalysis, so also are there individual and collective resistances to exploring the interpersonal field. In some ways, it's worse. People nowadays are more familiar with ordinary psychology and many will admit to having feelings and complexes that might have been shocking 50 or 70 years ago. But interpersonal themes are still taboo, and the challenge of revealing preferences evokes a layer of sensitivity that is sharper than the ordinary level of defensiveness in group therapy or personal growth groups.

Another layer deeper and again quite sensitive is the related sociometric procedure of revealing the *reasons* for the choices. People sense the inevitability of this component and it is frequently quite uncomfortable. It's as if they subconsciously think, "Uh-oh, if I engage in this process, I'll have to look at why I like and/or dislike the different people here in the group, and I can sense that the reasons for these preferences involve feelings which I'd be ashamed to admit—even to myself!"

The criteria by which people prefer or don't prefer others are often deeply meaningful and sensed as emotionally vulnerable. If dreams are the "royal road to the unconscious," as Freud said, then sociometry is a candidate for the "jet stream" to the unconscious. The bases for

preferences regarding work, church, mate, hobby, and style of clothes have many connections to the unconscious life, and furthermore these connections take on more significance than dreams because they are so obviously determining factors in living. Thus, people sense that pursuing these issues could rapidly lead them into levels of self-examination that many would rather avoid.

Another resistance to sociometry is the feeling, "Why bring up interpersonal problems if there's no apparent way to work them out?" If people haven't learned the infrastructure of a number of conflict-resolution skills, they feel that it's better to leave well enough alone. This is entirely rational. If you can't do surgery without possibly killing the patient, don't do it. Surgery required a host of other technologies—antiseptic procedures, anaesthetics, muscle relaxants, safe blood replacements, etc.—in order to become an effective and accepted part of medicine. Similarly, to do sociometry, which exposes remarkably sensitive issues, requires a knowledge of a number of reparative measures as well as believing that the group leader and other group members also know about these measures.

Add to this the dynamic of collective resistance: Group members tend to collude consciously and unconsciously in denying the actual reasons for various group tensions or subtle acting-out behaviors, or denying even the presence of significant tension. Instead, they entertain the illusion that problems will magically go away. Also denied is the truth that avoided problems tend to be compounded if not addressed explicitly.

This mixture of the prevalence of the use of denial and the lack of knowledge of interpersonal skills, I think, is a major contributor to our present, unhealthy level of social alienation. Psychodramatic and sociometric methods such as role reversal, doubling, and role analysis can be used constructively to address this problem. As people learn to use the skills of group and interpersonal awareness as tools, they may become ready to face knowing who in the group is isolated or rejected and for what reasons, whose perceptions about being liked or disliked are mistaken, which subgroups exist, and what the different roles or criteria are by which one can be recognized. Our present culture is characterized by a number of social changes that require a heightened level of psychological flexibility and creative coping skills. These can be developed through educational group experiences that utilize sociometry and psychodramatic methods.

Until the infrastructure of attitudes and psychosocial skills is developed, groups and organizations will resist the use of sociometry. Therefore, preparation for the process, the warming-up of the group,

may require days or weeks of instruction, less threatening experiential exercises, the building of group cohesion, and the raising of motivation so that knowing seems to have more of a payoff than avoiding.

As part of this warm-up, or as an alternative, there are a number of less threatening, sociometric-like techniques which can also help a group deal with its own dynamics. For example, Remer (1995, p.82) suggests the use of presenting an anonymous sociogram, based on the group's choices, and having the various group members imagine (and enact) what it might be like to be in the various positions shown—the star, the isolate, etc. Another variation mentioned is the projective sociogram in which group members guess where they are positioned, imagining how they are chosen by the others. It is important to allow sufficient time for the thorough processing and working-through of the feedback, which may involve follow-up sessions.

Here, I suspect that Moreno's narcissism and boldness blinded him to the levels of interpersonal anxiety that most people are burdened with; yet, in this regard, his weakness paradoxically may have been his strength. He was allowed to envision people encountering each other with levels of spontaneity and freedom that few others could even imagine, and it may yet come to pass. It was an idea that caught on—others glimpsed it too! It was this vision that fueled the encounter group movement! And in the years to come, if it should pass that economic pressures force people to live in communities, this technology may well be part of the lubrication that allows them to work through the frictions that inevitably arise.

OTHER SOCIOMETRIC METHODS

The most commonly used sociometric techniques are moderately different from classical sociometry in a number of ways. Some involve the process of consciously choosing and allowing oneself to be chosen (or not), but without any systematic diagramming and discussing of the choice process. Other methods such as role analysis and the social network diagram involve representing clearly relational dynamics which only incidentally include telic dynamics, and these were discussed in chapter 17.

CHOOSING PARTNERS

One of the major principles of sociometry is that people tend to work better with those with whom they feel positive tele, and even more so

if that is reciprocated. In most cases, this principle is ignored or overridden. In many schools, organizations, and other programs, people are assigned as partners based on some arbitrary criterion used for the convenience of the administrators, such as height or the alphabetical order of the last name.

As a result, many people numb their own sensitivity towards choice-making. It is useful in workshops and other group settings, especially where some introspection and learning of group dynamics is a goal, to cultivate this sensitivity. This is done simply through practicing the activity, having structured experiences in which one has the opportunity to choose, and then discussing with the person chosen why that choice was made.

For example, in a workshop designed to build role-taking skills, I use a series of dyadic exercises, each one having one of the pair interviewing the other in a new role. Between exercises, I have the group members look around to choose a partner for the next dyadic experience. Then, after this next choice interaction, I suggest that the new pairs so chosen take time to talk with each other about why they chose each other and how they felt about choosing and being chosen (or not).

This warm-up fulfills several functions. First, it builds group cohesion by helping people to find a number of "allies" with whom one has shared a small experience. Second, the choice-making exercises the intuitive telic function. Third, group members become slightly desensitized to the fear of not being chosen or of hurting others by choosing someone else. Fourth, people begin to notice and think about their choosing or avoiding-choosing style. Finally, the technique warms the group up to the very rich and evocative theme of feeling preferred or rejected in family or social contexts.

In discussing the choice with the new partner, more feedback is accessed. Some people have trouble finding those who reciprocate their choice, and that's food for thought, too. The group needs to be reminded that clarifying the reasons for a choice may not involve actual reason, *per se*. The reasons may have to do with thoroughly irrational factors, subtle reminders, something about a hairdo, or some fragment that was said. Some of these are remarkably perceptive and accurate, and other reasons are really inaccurate, more projections. Either way, if it's structured in a lighthearted fashion, the individual begins to feel more comfortable talking about it even if the choice making can't be based on logical or objective elements.

CHOOSING A PROTAGONIST AND/OR AUXILIARIES

However protagonists are chosen, whether by the director or by the group, tele is operating to some degree. It pays to notice and think about this process in order to become more aware of the dynamics in the group and one's habitual reaction pattern. Group members may choose a protagonist for many reasons, from being sexually or intellectually attracted by another and wanting to learn more about them to simply feeling drawn toward those who seem to "really want to work." There are a number of aspects of protagonist choice, which is further discussed by Bradshaw-Tauvon (1998) and Blatner (1996). Here are some additional near-sociometric techniques.

Directors often invite those who might want to be a protagonist to let the group know, perhaps by stepping forward from the circle of group members. (It's better if everyone is standing—being seated requires a greater degree of warm-up to dare to put oneself forward.) Then those who have indicated their interest are asked to say a bit about what they want to work on. Finally, the group members are asked to get up or step forward and stand behind (and perhaps put one of their hands on the shoulder of) the potential protagonist whose issue seems most relevant to each of their lives. Whoever gets a majority of group members supporting their theme then becomes the protagonist for the enactment which then proceeds. This honors the group's overall concerns and also makes the choice less a matter of personal rejection.

In ongoing groups, however, a number of other dynamics may emerge—certain people putting themselves forward as protagonists more often and with some feeling, others perhaps too reticent. As patterns are discerned, they need to be addressed explicitly which is part of the group processing that complements the use of action methods.

Then, when the protagonist is selected and the problem is beginning to be explored, the auxiliaries are chosen—most often by the protagonist. The director asks who else is present in a given situation and, as these figures are named, the director asks the protagonist to pick someone in the group who could play that role. The details of selecting auxiliaries are discussed elsewhere in the literature (Blatner, 1996; Holmes, et al., 1998). The significant point to be made here is that the subtle cues that occur in the choice are often significant examples of the "co-unconscious" at work (See discussion of this quasi-telepathic phenomenon on pg. 191.).

ACTION SOCIOMETRY AND "SCULPTURE"

These techniques involves the concretization and portrayal of the perceived relationships in a group (Seabourne, 1963). In a way, it is a physical representation of a social network diagram (discussed in chapter 17), the different roles being represented by group members as auxiliaries taking positions in the stage area as if they were sculptured figures in a diorama. The distances from the protagonist and each other, their posture, their gestures, and the like all represent vividly how the protagonist perceives this relational network.

Applied to families, action sociometry has been called *family sculpture* (or just "sculpture") and also "statue building." This method for working with family dynamics was developed independently in the late 1960s by David Kantor who had learned some psychodrama from Paul Corynetz, one of Moreno's students, in the 1940s (Duhl, 1983). Apparently Virginia Satir also developed the method in the late 1960s, perhaps influenced by the multimodal approaches being used in encounter groups by Will Schutz.

Since then a number of elaborations on action sociometry have been published (Duhl, Kantor, & Duhl, 1973; Constantine, 1978; Sherman & Fredman, 1986; Wegscheider-Cruse et al., 1994; Duhl, 1999). It can be applied not only in various types of group work but also in the teaching of group dynamics (Duffy, 1997). For example, several group members in turn might set up their own sculptures and then discuss it. Sometimes the figures are also given imagined typical lines to speak, which adds another dimension; then, the protagonist might enter the scene and have the opportunity to respond to the various roles.

In group work, action sociometry may be used to assess the hidden linkages in a group. The director invites the group members to get up and put a hand on the shoulder of someone they know from before, or perhaps someone they feel they want to get to know better. They may even be invited to use both hands to connect to two people, which generates some giggling as subgroups are dragged around, the result revealing clusters, mutual pairs, and chains.

THE SPECTROGRAM

This "linear" form of action sociometry is among the most useful techniques for addressing a wide range of issues that come up in a group (Kole, 1967). Many themes don't yield to a simple vote of being

for or against something, but rather the reactions, feelings, or situation may be better represented by having the group members stand and place themselves somewhere along an imaginary line, with one end being one side of a question and the other end of the line the opposite. This concretizes the multiple, subtle reactions. Some examples of questions that might be represented by a spectrogram might include:

How much experience have you had with psychodrama? Most on one side, least on the other.

How comfortable are you with the group process?

How successful was your social experience in your high-school years? In your college years?

How frequently do you argue with your significant other?

How strongly are you for "choice" or "against abortion?"

There are many variations. The director may have the group talk with each other, negotiating where they stand, comparing their responses. "I think I'm more this way than you, because . . ." "No, I think *I'm* more, because . . ." Or, the group may be asked to respond without any talking. After the line forms, those on the ends may dialogue and even try changing parts. To bring out the issues of ambivalence, those standing at the ends leave the line and those in the middle are then drawn out using a modified criterion.

Sometimes a group member suggests a variation on the question, so that the group redistributes itself. Or another type of question may be asked and then another spectrogram is drawn perpendicular to the first, so that people place themselves in one of four quadrants.

The common denominator in all these techniques is that sociometric principle of helping a group to give itself feedback about where people stand in relation to others regarding feelings of closeness, attraction, or common interest. This feedback comes through the cooperative process of deciding on meaningful questions and expressing the responses in diagrams or some physical fashion.

FOCUSED QUESTIONING

Finally, sociometry depends to a large extent on the construction of the questions, focusing the attention on which dimension of the role is being considered. Not only questions of direct preference may be asked, but also "perceptual sociometry," exploring what people per-

ceive or intuit or wish or fear that others might feel towards them. Family systems work has added "circular" questioning: "Who do you think X will pick to be the leader?" (Williams, 1998)

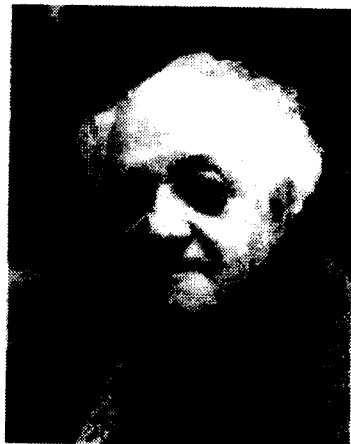
SUMMARY

Sociometry is a rich field and these two chapters note only some of the high points, emphasizing those elements that I think need to be considered and are not always presented elsewhere.

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