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Sociometry and Small Group Research: A Footnote to History

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ABSTRACT. As part of a bibliography of small group research published in 1954, J. L. Moreno, the father of sociometry, included references to his works that he felt were most important for the analysis of interpersonal behavior in small groups. All of these works were cited in the revised edition of *Who Shall Survive?* (1953) and include his analysis of "tele," the social atom, networks, and sociometric laws. Although fewer sociometric studies have been published in the past 20 years than during the 1950s and 1960s, when interest in interpersonal choice was at its height, Moreno's approach continues to be represented in research on intimate relationships and social networks.

IN 1954, FRED STRODTBECK AND I PUBLISHED a bibliography of small group research in the journal *Sociometry*. The term *small group* referred to groups that were small enough for each participant to have had at least a potential opportunity to respond directly to the comments of each other participant during the period under consideration. Most of the research dealt with small natural or laboratory groups or with the analysis of the effect of small group participation upon the individual. "Sociometric" articles were included when they dealt with interpersonal choice in small groups or small networks.

The bibliography included some 1,400 items covering the period from 1900 through 1953. As an aid to the user of the bibliography, we asked nine persons who were working in the field and had contact with different schools of thought to go through a draft of the bibliography and check the books and articles they considered important substantive and methodological contributions. J. L. Moreno, the father of sociometry, was one of the judges; he was also the chairman of the editorial committee of *Sociometry*, a journal he had founded. The other committee member was Edgar Borgatta, acting editor of *Sociometry*. When Moreno read the bibliography, he added a number of sociometric items that he

thought should be included as relevant for small group research. When we looked at his additions, we thought that some of them were not that central, so we left them out in the version we submitted to the journal. Moreno, however, put them back in. Thus, without intending to, we generated an authentic list of the articles that Moreno, himself, thought were important for small group research.

As a further indication of his opinion concerning the relationship between sociometry and small group research, Moreno added his own article to that issue of *Sociometry*, which would otherwise have contained only the bibliography and our introductory remarks. Moreno's article was entitled "Old and New Trends in Sociometry: Turning Points in Small Group Research" (1954). He described briefly six trends of thought that prepared the way for sociometry and small group research: industrial, biological, psychoanalytic, psychological, ethical, and sociological. In each case, he indicated how sociometry advanced the field. Sociology, in particular, was ready for a "jump into social reality" that was supplied by psychodrama as a laboratory for the study of group dynamics, communities (such as the Hudson School for Girls, where novel techniques of living and research could be put into operation), and the synthesis of group, action, and observation methods. He noted the arrival of a new approach in the form of *perceptual* sociometry, in which individuals were asked to guess the extent to which they would be chosen by other persons.

For Moreno, sociometry had a broader focus than the simple measurement of interpersonal choice in small groups. He included the analysis of whole societies, in which sociometric data were to be used as a basis for change toward more creative social environments for the individual actors. He saw sociometry as part of what he termed a *triadic system* that also included psychodrama and group psychotherapy (Moreno, 1970).

Of the 27 articles by Moreno in the published bibliography on small groups (Strodtbeck & Hare, 1954), 2 are translations or reprints, leaving 25 entries. Moreno is the sole author or editor of 20 of the articles. For the remaining 5 articles, he is the senior author. Thus, this selection may be considered as representative of his work up to 1954. During the 45 years that he had been publishing (1908–1953), Moreno had written some 45 articles or books, out of a total of 153 items (Hare, 1986), with sociometry in the title. Two thirds of these items are included in the small groups bibliography. The additional items dealt mainly with applications of sociometry to communities or social issues. In two articles, Moreno discussed the relationship between his theory and those of Mead, Comte, and Marx.

An indication of Moreno's definition of sociometry is given in a 1948

article entitled "The Three Branches of Sociometry." He identified the three branches as (a) dynamic or revolutionary sociometry—combining social change, diagnosis, and measurement; (b) diagnostic sociometry—dealing with measurement after a new social order is put into place; and (c) mathematical sociometry—including the sociogram, sociomatrix, action matrix, and their generalized mathematics (Moreno, 1948).

In the same article, Moreno summarized his main sociometric generalizations (1948):

1. The tele phenomenon—social attraction (gravity) above chance.
2. The law of the social atom—consistent patterns of attraction and repulsion around an individual.
3. The network phenomenon—channels of information transmission.
4. The sociodynamic law—(a) few people receive the majority of the choices, and (b) there is more opportunity for choice in large groups and an increased number of choices per person.
5. The sociogenetic law—higher forms of group organization evolve from simple ones (from youth to adult, from preliterate to modern societies).
6. The law of social gravitation—people move toward each other from one location to another if attraction is high and repulsion low.

Although this short list provides a summary of Moreno's main conclusions from his research, a more comprehensive and detailed list of "general hypotheses and recommendations for further research" of 107 hypotheses is given in the 1953 edition of *Who Shall Survive?* (Moreno, 1953, pp. 696–717). *Who Shall Survive?* was one of only six books in the small groups bibliography that was rated as an important contribution by seven or more of the nine judges who reviewed material for our 1954 work.

In the remaining 22 years of his publishing career (1954–1976), Moreno published 157 articles or books. Of these, only 12 had the word sociometry in the title. Thus, whether one counts articles or examines the content of the work, it is clear that the most productive "sociometric" period for Moreno was early in his career, from 1932 through 1938. At that time, he was conducting research and implementing changes in the social organization at the Hudson School for (delinquent) Girls with the collaboration of Helen Jennings. Most of the data from this research was published in the first edition of *Who Shall Survive?* in 1934, with a more extensive version in the revised edition in 1953. After 1938, psychodrama became a major focus of Moreno's activity; 89 of the 271 items published after that year either have the word *psychodrama* in the title or are introductions to books on psychodrama.

In 1948 Moreno predicted that "the historians of the year two thousand

will probably credit sociometry as the true beginning of a meaningful and useful sociology. It was the unique contribution of sociometry to have discovered and systematically investigated the fundamental nature of the 'socius' and henceforth to have laid the foundation of a dynamic science of the group.' More than 40 years have passed since the prediction was made. Compared with the 20-year period following Moreno's prediction, when sociometric research was at its height (Hare, 1976, chap. 5 and Appendix 3), sociometric studies appeared less frequently during the period 1975–1988 (Hare, Blumberg, Davies, & Kent, 1991, chap. 5 and Appendix). Interest in interpersonal choice, now called "close" or "intimate" relationships, however, captured the interest of social psychologists during the latter period, and the idea that it is important to study social networks is still in vogue.

The mirror image of Moreno's approach to identifying networks of interpersonal relationships by asking about interpersonal choice has appeared in the "new field theory" of Bales (Bales & Cohen, 1979). Whereas Moreno asked people with whom they would choose to work and inferred that the choices were based on compatible behavior or values, Bales asks people about their behavior or values, then predicts that persons who are similar will choose to work together effectively.

The theories of Moreno's sociometry and Lewin's group dynamics (Lewin, 1951) both inspired major advances in research in the 1950s and 1960s. Neither approach, however, supplied a method of measuring the basic dimensions of interpersonal choice or interpersonal relationships. This was to come later. Moreno's emphasis on the importance of spontaneity and creativity continues in the group therapeutic method of psychodrama that he originated. Thus, although Moreno may be cited by name in some instances as part of the classic period of small group research, the impact of his ideas is still very evident.

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