

Section 1: Theory and Research

Choosing the Unchosen: Counteracting the Sociodynamic Effect Using Complementary Sharing

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When Moreno says that our subject of inquiry is nothing less than healing the whole of mankind, he challenges us to embrace differences. This article explores diversity, and describes using complementary sharing in a forced choice action sociogram. This technique enhances the diversity and cohesion of the group by helping the participants discover the wisdom of those not chosen.

KEYWORDS: Chaos theory; cohesion; choice; complementary sharing; criteria; diversity; forced choice action sociogram; principle of complementarity; reverse sharing; sociometric choice; sociometric consciousness; the law of sociodynamic effect; surplus reality; tele; the unchosen; yin and yang.

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.

He may be cleaning you out for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

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Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent as a guide from the beyond.

(Rumi, 1995, p. 109)

Choice is not necessarily free; we are conditioned to choose what is familiar. Neurobiology informs us that we are creatures who are hard-wired to choose based on our past experiences, aided by our memory. As Dan Tomasulo (2010) suggests, we learned as a species many thousands of years ago, “These berries don’t make us sick, so why try the new berries?” Our usual choices, conserved rather than spontaneous, provide for stability, not novelty. We may be interested in growth and change; however, because we usually make our decisions automatically, without conscious awareness, using the “same-old, same-old” patterns developed as early as our childhood experiences, our choices do not change us. How can we become more conscious of our choices and choose to transcend our patterned processes? How can we open new possibilities to choose more spontaneously and creatively?

Jacob L. Moreno, founder of psychodrama and sociometry, was deeply concerned with this question of our choices, particularly as they operate in our relationships. Moreno (1943) investigated human choice and coined the term *tele* to denote the energy he believed underlies all our relationships:

Group research shows that [feelings, emotions and ideas] find their expression between people, in interpersonal and intergroup relations, traveling throughout the network, sometimes visibly, sometimes not. . . . The energy involved in these streams of feelings and mood which feeds them we assume to be “tele.” (p. 320)

He noted that our choices for one another—whether positive, negative, neutral, or ambivalent (Carlson-Sabelli, Sabelli, and Hale, 1994, p. 175)—are often unconscious and yet affect who is included and who is not.

Moreno further described the phenomenon of feedback and how it impacts our communities. This principle states that when people interact socially, the energy released by the expression of *tele* is recycled back into the community. When this happens, the energy is amplified, as people react to the energy and add energy of their own (Mosher, 2000).

Moreno cautioned us because we tend to choose what is familiar, hence making the same choices again and again, the socially rich get richer with relatively more positive feedback, while the negative energy is also amplified, and the socially poor get poorer. He called this phenomenon the “law of the sociodynamic effect” (as cited in Hale, 1981, p. 11). It is important for us as leaders and healers to counteract this effect in various ways. When Rumi (1995) says, “This being human is a guest house” and invites us to “welcome and entertain” every guest, and exclude no one (p. 109). As sociometrists, we are also concerned with inclusion. How can we help ourselves and others accept the unchosen and the gifts they might bring to us?

According to John Mosher (2000), Moreno's science of sociatry (the study of the dynamics of societies) is "a science of diversity development, articulating a technology [which includes sociometry] for accessing and healing the structure of groups" (p. 98). The sociogram makes our choices conscious and explicit; thus, sociometric procedure reveals the hidden attractions, repulsions, and neutralities in our relationships. In a forced choice action sociogram, an instrument of sociometry, "forced choice" refers to the instruction to distinguish a choice (which may force us out of our comfort zone); based on an internal sense of interconnectedness, "sociogram" refers to the configuration of our choices, graphed and visible to everyone in the group; and "action" refers to the enactment that makes the choices visible and creates the sociogram (Mosher, 2000). When the choices are charted in a sociogram, the hidden tele becomes visible, measurable, and conscious; thus, sociometry allows the group members to become aware of their choices, enhancing the sociometric consciousness of the group (Hale, 1981).

When we make a sociogram of our choices, ordinarily, some people are not chosen. It is possible to use role training, especially in a small and intimate group, to enhance the number of connections within the group so that the unchosen might, with some greater likelihood, become chosen. It is also possible to establish new criteria again and again to rearrange the sociograms in different ways, with criteria chosen to encourage group members to make choices they would not habitually make, hoping that the "unchosen" in one configuration would be chosen in another. We can also use random choice, such as when group members are directed to mill around, stop at the sound of a bell, and choose the closest group member. In this situation fate chooses for us, potentially increasing the diversity, to the degree that the group members are open to exploring these choices.

However, a sociogram reveals and sometimes creates or exacerbates a preferential system within the group. If, as Moreno (1953) said, the subject of our inquiry is the whole of mankind, and diversity dictates that we include everyone, how do we chose the unchosen? How can we choose in less-rehearsed and conserved ways, outside of our usual mode, and become more spontaneous and creative with our choices? If we are concerned as leaders and healers with counteracting the sociodynamic effect, what wisdom for our community is held by those at the periphery—and how do we access it? What gifts for the group might be held by the unchosen participants at the tails of our sociograms? How do we, as Rumi (1995) suggests, "Welcome and entertain them all! Meet them at our door laughing, and invite them in?" (p. 109).

As usual, Moreno and the tradition of psychodrama have key teachings for us. He understood that to counteract the sociodynamic effect, we need to choose the unchosen. The sociodynamic effect provides stability, and choosing the unchosen can be disruptive as new information enters the system, even while creating opportunities for growth and change (Wheatley, 1999). Committed to the belief that sociometry is not only diagnostic but also healing, Moreno studied this problem as it emerged in the action sociograms he directed. Zerka Moreno (2006) pointed out:

The essential reason for doing sociometric investigations is not just to make relationships visible and available for interpretation, but to reconstruct groups to maximize sociostasis and find some resolution to the problem of the unchosen and rejected (p. 296).

In his unpublished later papers, Moreno brilliantly reminds us, as noted by Ed Schreiber, that energy, like electricity, flows in *two* directions, not just one (Sabelli and Schreiber, 2010), as does *tele*. *Tele* runs both ways, and we can capitalize on this. To counteract the sociodynamic effect and choose the unchosen, we can do a reverse sharing (Schreiber, personal communication, April 17, 2010).

In a workshop “How Choosing Changes Us” at the 2010 annual conference of the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama, we explored the challenge of diversity. We opened the workshop reciting the poem “The Guest House” by Rumi (1995), warming up the participants to experience “an unexpected visitor” during the workshop—whether that would be a person, a dream, an idea, or an experience—opening them to welcome the unexpected and the new. The participants shared their responses to the poem afterward with the group, creating a chorus of thoughts, images, wishes, and intuitions. We then directed the group to form dyads, using *tele*, and to share “what unexpected guest are you wrestling with now in your life?” Continuing the theme of welcoming the unexpected, we moved the group into an exercise using surplus reality, a technique that invites participants into an altered state of awareness, to enter the realm of imagination (Blatner, 1996), so that new possibilities—that is, unexpected guests—could be included.³ Using drumming and guided imagery, we invited the participants to connect with themselves, allow themselves to imagine an animal ally that would help them meet the challenge of the unexpected and more fully connect in the group. We next encouraged them to move through the space, transforming themselves into their chosen animal, “acting as if” they *were* their selected animal. The participants moved slowly at first and by themselves, adding animal noises when and if they chose. They were directed to continue to attune⁴ to their internal state, and to the perceived states of others around them.

Time was provided to allow the participants to integrate their felt sense, and from this state, they were encouraged to look around the space, and to feel

³ According to John Mosher (2000), to create change, “consciousness [needs to draw upon] the chaos of possibilities and [leave] the staid order of habitual ideas, feelings, wants, and actions to unfold into new regions of dynamical complexity” (p. 100). Choosing the unchosen seems to be paradoxical, but surplus reality is particularly suited to resolving paradoxical or contradictory situations. In forcing a choice while in surplus reality, we can create a new experience, something ordinarily outside our comfort zone. Choices can be made that are informed by the previously hidden or dormant attractions, and stereotypic patterns are broken.

⁴ Attunement occurs when an observing part of the self “tunes into” or accommodates an experiencing part (Siegel, 2011).

themselves in relationship to others. They were encouraged to move in dyads and then triads, and then with the whole group, each at their own animal pace, with the drum beating in the background. A flowing movement pervaded the group, warming up the participants to dancing with spontaneous and creative connections and disconnections with each other, creating action sociometry, in which choices for one another are made spontaneously, with playfulness and fluidity, and, what Carlson-Sabelli and colleagues (1994) has called “a mutuality of influence” (p. 153). As the drumming became slower and quieter, the movement of the group also came to a still place, and the participants formed a circle—a symbol for the inclusion of everyone.

As workshop facilitators giving meta-messages of impending goodness, we guided the participants to create a forced choice action sociogram by choosing the person in the group who they felt had a gift for them, someone who was holding something they needed more of, or someone whose energy most resonated with the spirit of the animal helper they had chosen. We asked them to look around the circle and feel into their choice for one another, so that the choosing came from their intuitive sense rather than from rote or conserved patterns, rehearsing choosing the unknown (Wheatley, 1999). They were instructed to put a hand on their heart when they had identified the person they selected. As a group, they formed a forced choice action sociogram, each participant moving to the person they had chosen and putting a hand on the shoulder of the person they identified. We then asked them to arrange themselves in such a way that all choices for one another were visible to the entire group (Hale, 1981). Within the sociogram, beginning with the ones not chosen at the tails of the sociogram, and moving toward those most chosen, as in common sociometric procedure, each participant shared why they had chosen that particular person. The person chosen, if so moved, could share how it felt to have been chosen for the stated criteria. These practices focus on the act of choosing and on the person chosen.

In order to honor those *not* chosen, the facilitators *reversed* the sharing process, implementing the complementary sharing technique. Instead of moving from the outside in, toward those most chosen, we began with the “stars” at the center of the sociogram and directed each participant to name something that resonated for them while facing the person who had chosen them, sharing outward toward the periphery. The sharing flowed to those people at the ends of the choice lines.

At the tails, those participants not chosen by anyone in the exercise were directed to turn outward into the empty space beyond the group. They were asked to use surplus reality to speak to someone important in their psychological world, perhaps someone in their social atom, or perhaps a spirit presence. A woman spoke to a force in the universe, “I trust you are helping my daughter in her time of illness;” a man spoke to his wife, “I love you, I have always loved you;” and another spoke to Moreno, overwhelmed with gratitude for the experience of belonging within the group, thanking him for bringing us this powerful work. In this workshop, as the sharing traveled outwards towards the periphery, the group became increasingly awed and cohesive, and many were deeply moved by the integrity and authenticity of these and other statements of the unchosen.

When studying the chosen, the unchosen become background; when focusing on the unchosen, those chosen become background—yet both are valid and each deserves exploration. So, too, we named the procedure of sharing and sharing in reverse “complementary sharing.”⁵ Chinese philosophy also explores complementarities, teaching that there are no chosen without the unchosen, and no unchosen without also the chosen. Thus, they depend on each other and define each other. Moreover, just as the symbol of yin and yang proposes that within darkness there exists a trace of light, and within light there exists a trace of darkness (Simpkins and Simpkins, 2010), a touch of the unchosen resides within the chosen, and a touch of the chosen resides within—and secretly mirrors—the unchosen, further underscoring their connectedness.

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Our ultimate therapeutic aim was to move the participants toward and perhaps into what Moreno (1953) has named the “first universe,” the timeless, formless energy field (also described by quantum physics) where diversity is not an issue (as cited in Mosher, 2000, p. 40). In such a primordial universe, we are all one. By contrast, we normally experience the “second universe,” the one in which we ordinarily see, feel, and experience life. In the second universe, the mind makes distinctions, and our egos separate us through comparisons and oppositions. The second universe is ruled by the separations made by our differences. As we access tele, we move into the first universe. In the closing discussion, many participants of this sociogram—in which tele was made explicit in both directions—expressed gratitude for the experience, with more than one person reporting they felt the “oneness of all of us,” the connectedness and unity of the first universe.

Chaos theory, as described by Reamer (2006), Carlson-Sabelli et al. (1994), Mosher (2000), and Wheatley (1999), teaches that it is at the edge, between order and chaos, that new possibilities exist.⁶ The participants at the tails of our sociograms are at the boundary of the social formation, the boundary between the formed and the formless. These individuals, closest to the immensity of the cosmos, may hold truths that bridge the group, ordinarily in the second universe, to the first universe and beyond. So it is, in some traditional cultures, the individuals at the

⁵ Niels Bohr (1934) helped launch quantum physics by proposing the principle of complementarity, now widely accepted, regarding wave-particle duality. Although an observer can measure a particle or a wave but never both simultaneously, waves and particles are complementary in describing light (Mosher, 2000; Wheatley, 1999).

⁶ *Surplus reality* has been defined as “the intersection between different realities, known and unknown, where the ego’s ability to control and distinguish ceases. This is a state in which one does not experience things as one used to do, but looks upon them from another unfamiliar perspective” (Blomquist and Rützel, 1994, p. 235).

periphery of the community, such as Shamans, are recognized as spiritual leaders, honored for holding a sacred role (Harner, 1980). In a group or in a community, speaking to the formlessness of the universe from the edge of the formed, the “unchosen”—the boundary keepers for the group—may hold the wisdom that the group needs not only to be socially cohesive but also ethical and spiritual.

Closing Discussion

In summary, as human beings we are hard-wired to seek comfort and avoid pain. We prefer familiarity, and difference challenges us. Difference calls into question the identity we have developed for ourselves. To stay comfortable, we resist exploring diversity. Fortunately, we also seek newness, growth, and change, and to create change, we can embrace the unchosen. In Moreno’s (1953) vision—“a truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less of an objective than the whole of mankind”—he challenges us to embrace diversity (p. 3). Even if our differences trigger us in various and unpredictable ways, as therapists, we seek ways to work with the differences existing in our relationships and in our groups. These experiences are not always easy, but they can be powerful in the challenge they bring and in the truth that emerges. As Rumi (1995) wrote, “Welcome and entertain them all . . . they may be clearing you out for some new delight” (p. 109). Embracing the challenges of diversity offers us the opportunity to increase our awareness, so that our choices can transcend our patterns of seemingly safe and familiar choices.

A forced choice action sociogram, with sharing done both forward and in reverse, is a tool that uncovers the gifts of tele, gifts that might be otherwise hidden. Complementary sharing, a technique that relies on the two-way nature of tele, teaches us to disclose the gifts of those not chosen. It invites us to access and appreciate those gifts, counteracting the sociodynamic effect. Further, by using surplus reality to give the unchosen at the periphery an opportunity to share into the space beyond the group, we evoke the expression of otherwise hidden truths, truths that bridge us to the first universe. These disclosures allow us to experience the miracles in embracing diversity, as the whole group becomes aware of the truths held by those not chosen. Zerka Moreno (2006) described, “The tele of the unchosen surprises us; it is a knowing beyond knowing” (p. 300). In recognizing that the unchosen offer us wisdom, we can, as Rumi (1995) suggested, embrace them as “guides” to the “beyond” (p. 109).

In carrying on Moreno’s legacy, these experiences develop our awareness, offering us the wisdom we need to choose who and what were otherwise unchosen. Counteracting the sociodynamic effect with action techniques such as complementary sharing, we increase the diversity and cohesion of our groups. Moreno (1953) noted, “Conflicts and tensions in the group fall with the decrease [and reversal] of the sociodynamic effect, that is, with the reduction of the polarity between the favored ones and the neglected ones” (p. 705). We experience growth and change as individuals and as groups; further, with such techniques, we can move from the second universe into the first, as individuals and as communities.

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