

WARM-UP TO A SOCIOMETRIC EXPLORATION*

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Every group has underlying structures which to varying degrees influence the alternatives we acknowledge, the choices we make, and consequently, the energy we expend in response to each other, and to our positions in life. Dr. J. L. Moreno, who originated both the concept of the therapeutic group (1913)¹ and that of the therapeutic theatre of psychodrama (1910),² created *sociometry*³ as the conceptual framework for understanding group structure and resulting group interaction. The primary purpose of a sociometric exploration is to develop *sociometric consciousness*, to provide training in the awareness of that underlying network of feelings between self and others, and between others. A number of devices (techniques) exist which accomplish this purpose to some degree. In this paper I am concerned with the sociometric test devised by Moreno which results in the *sociogram*. This is the sociometric exploration which is conducted on the basis of criteria for which participants choose to (or choose not to, or to be neutral toward) spend time and share space at some pre-announced activity. The utilization of the sociometric test is especially beneficial to groups concerned with personal growth, organizational development, communication or human relations skill training, and group leader or psychodrama skill training.

There is a vast literature on the origins, development, utility, techniques and procedure of sociometry theory which the reader is urged to explore. The impetus for this paper comes from a statement in *Who Shall Survive?* (1953):

Sociometric procedures should be greeted favorably as they aid in bringing to recognition and into realization the basic structure of a group. But such is not always the case. They are met with resistance and even with hostility by others. Therefore a group should be carefully prepared for the test before submitting to it.⁴

Moreno further suggests that resistance to the sociometric test (hereafter referred to as sociometric exploration) is due to "ignorance of what sociometric procedure is, and the fear and resistance to the consequences."⁵ In this paper I suggest a means for acknowledging and dealing with these concerns.

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First, a group leader needs to be aware of the wide range of sociometric procedure available, and whenever possible match a procedure to the expressed group or individual need. Selecting a sociometric procedure requires a sensitivity to the group similar to that required when choosing a particular "warm-up" or "starter" utilized for getting a group ready for action, or for sharing themselves. Every newly formed group needs some warm-up procedure for dealing with the issues of inclusion in the group, to allow for group members to present themselves, to tell how they relate to the purpose of the group, to share additional needs they may have, and to make known what they have to offer the group. Some group leaders prefer that this introductory process happen organically thereby generating data about the group for future action and reaction. A sociometric exploration fits this initial group need and provides a group focus in order that individual needs can be viewed in relation to this overview of group structure.

A sociometric exploration can be conducted at other times in the group's history: when there is a heaviness due to unexpressed feelings; when there is disruption due to lack of, or too much, attention to rejected or isolated group members; when group members express irritation with being locked into too few roles; when group members would like to gauge growth and change with respect to their position in the group. The sociometrist becomes sensitized to these cues and can present *at the moment of need* a procedure best suited to explore the particular situation.

What becomes of importance at this point is an adequate and reassuring presentation of what is involved in the sociometric exploration to take place. The following elements should be included in that explanation:

- 1) How the suggested procedure applies to the here and now situation.
- 2) What the potential value of sociometric consciousness is for the participant, and for the group.
- 3) What the procedure to be followed is, and what is being asked of the participants.

Note: The sociometrist should be ready with examples, and be open to or even suggest questions.

The following is an example of a warm-up to a sociometric exploration conducted with a psychodrama training group. Certain key elements remain true for every exploration while other steps are included due to the nature of the group and the information desired from the exploration. The sample has been purposely extended to include many of the questions and concerns expressed by participants prior to proceeding. It therefore cannot be used as a gauge for the amount of verbal explanation needed. The sample is best used as a guide to dealing with frequently asked questions, all indications of the level of interest as well as the level of resistance within the group.

SAMPLE WARM-UP TO A SOCIOMETRIC EXPLORATION

THE SETTING

A group of seventeen psychodrama students-in-training have met for a morning training session. It is the second day of a two-week training period, and this is their third meeting. Seven of the group members are here for the first time. The other ten students, seven of which have at least two years of exposure to psychodrama, have an interconnected network of relationships: they either know each other from previous training periods, or they have mutual contacts among the student registry. It is shortly after 10:00 o'clock and various students are talking among themselves. Some newcomers are noticeably silent. After a brief period a beginning student, Bernie, stands up and suggests: "If nobody is going to start things off this morning I think it would be a good idea to get into action. I saw this great director at the Convention last year do a warm-up with the group that was really terrific. Now everybody try to think of an animal that you always wanted to be. When you have one in mind then come on up here (he indicates the action space) and we'll have a zoo."

There is a pause. Some people are reflecting, others are personifying tigers and birds, while still others are sitting, arms folded, and looking indignant. Bernie then urges everyone to come to the "zoo." Some go, some are hesitant, others sit tight. The group has its first out-in-the-open conflict. One member of the group who is experienced in sociometry offers a comment and a suggestion to the group.

SOCIOMETRIST'S INTERVENTION

We have here, represented in action, a sociogram of group member's choices about participating in a group warm-up. We don't know whether Bernie, as director of the warm-up, is the focus of the decision, or if being animals in a zoo is what everyone is reacting to. We can guess that it is some of both. The important thing is that we can find out. Every person has a reason for their position. I suggest that we freeze the action for the moment, and that each person reflect on those reasons. Once we've had a few minutes to think then each person in turn can soliloquize (speak those thoughts aloud).

SELECTED SOLILOQUIES

"I'm glad that someone has some energy this morning. I want to get into action and Bernie's idea is o.k."

"I don't know how things are done here, so I'm waiting until more people get into action before I join in. I never thought of being an animal and I don't know what to be."

"I came on up here but I'm not sure that is where I want to be. I'm not sure what is supposed to happen, but it makes me nervous to sit around and wait. Since Bernie has been here before I thought this was an o.k. thing to do."

"I don't like doing a warm-up just for something to do. There seemed enough for us to do with the warm-up left over from yesterday without stirring up more stuff. I don't mind getting into action but I want to know why first."

"I decided to come on up because I wanted to get to know some of the new people, and being animals didn't seem so threatening. I wonder if Bernie knows what he is getting into, but I decide that some of us are experienced enough to help him out if things get too far out of hand. He has to learn sometime."

"It seemed to me that Jake should be running things since he has the most experience. I've done the zoo thing before and it can be a real mess."

COMMENTS

Once each person soliloquized it became evident that the newer members of the group felt lost and were looking for facilitation and leadership; and, that the older students were reluctant to assume, or relinquish, the role of leader. The group had not had time, or opportunity, to *recognize* its leaders, nor had they acknowledged its isolates. At this point the sociometrist suggested that the group might benefit from a sociometric exploration. He was asked to explain what that entailed.

SOCIOMETRIST'S INTRODUCTION TO THE EXPLORATION

Every group has an underlying external structure and a sociometric structure which merge into a state which Moreno termed "social reality."⁶ Right now we know more about our external structure because it is more visible. We know who has been here before, and who hasn't. Some people have staff status and some don't. We know names, where people are from, and something of each other's backgrounds from the sharing we did yesterday. One other factor which has some significance for us this morning is that there is no one appointed to be *in charge* for this particular session. To a lesser degree we know something about our sociometric structure, which is the network of interrelations we have, have had, and expect to have for each other. We're beginning to get the idea of who knows whom, and to act on some of the "vibes" existent in the group. Essentially we are still in the state of *beginning* to know each other. According to Moreno our group is *in statu nascendi*.⁷ It is an excellent moment for us to examine the currents of feeling which exist between us and others. Another concept of Moreno's which it is important to

mention here is that of *tele*:⁸ the feeling of attraction, or repulsion between two people. If there is *tele* between two persons the potential for interaction is there; however, a time and space must be provided or sought in order for that interaction to take place. *Tele* is not to be confused with transference which can also be an attraction or a repulsion, however the feelings are projected onto an image one has of someone rather than the actual person. As we continue to grow as persons and take responsibility for the quality of interaction we have in our life it becomes important to examine *what it is* that draws us close to some, warns us away from others, or has us wavering and uncertain.

Moreno devised the sociometric exploration as a way to examine those feelings which lead us to choices for each other, and which can be evaluated through interaction. In a sociometric exploration the group selects criteria for interaction, some shared activity for which specific time and space is indicated. Each person then makes choices for others to share an activity with, based on those criteria. The Center here provides forms for sociometric explorations. On the forms space is allotted for you to indicate those you choose to spend time with, choose not to spend time with, or choose to remain neutral toward on the basis of the criterion. There is no limit in this particular exploration upon the number of choices you make in each of the categories. It is important that each person in the group is included in one of the three categories. Space is given so that you may write down the reason for the choice which you have made. There is also a form which can be used for examining our perceptiveness or the degree of sociometric consciousness existent in the group. On that form we make perceptual guesses about who chose us, and why? Who did someone else choose, and why?, etc.

Before going further I want to check to see where you are with doing this together this morning, and to answer any questions which you may have at this point.

Question: All that we will be doing is making choices on these forms?

Sociometrist's Reply: Making choices and trying to give reasons for those choices is primarily all that is being asked. After everyone has done this it is necessary to assemble the information into a usable format. Anyone who wants to learn this part of the process is invited to help. Also, each person will be assigned a partner in whatever activity we decide upon so that one strong positive connection into the group can be experienced in action. It is very important to follow through on the choices we make. Later when we look at the information we have generated about ourselves it will be important for you to share with everyone else about how you experience the sociometry of this group. The three charts over there (Plates I, II and III) outline the basic steps involved in a sociometric exploration: a warm-up phase, an action phase, and a sharing phase.

W A R M - U P P H A S E

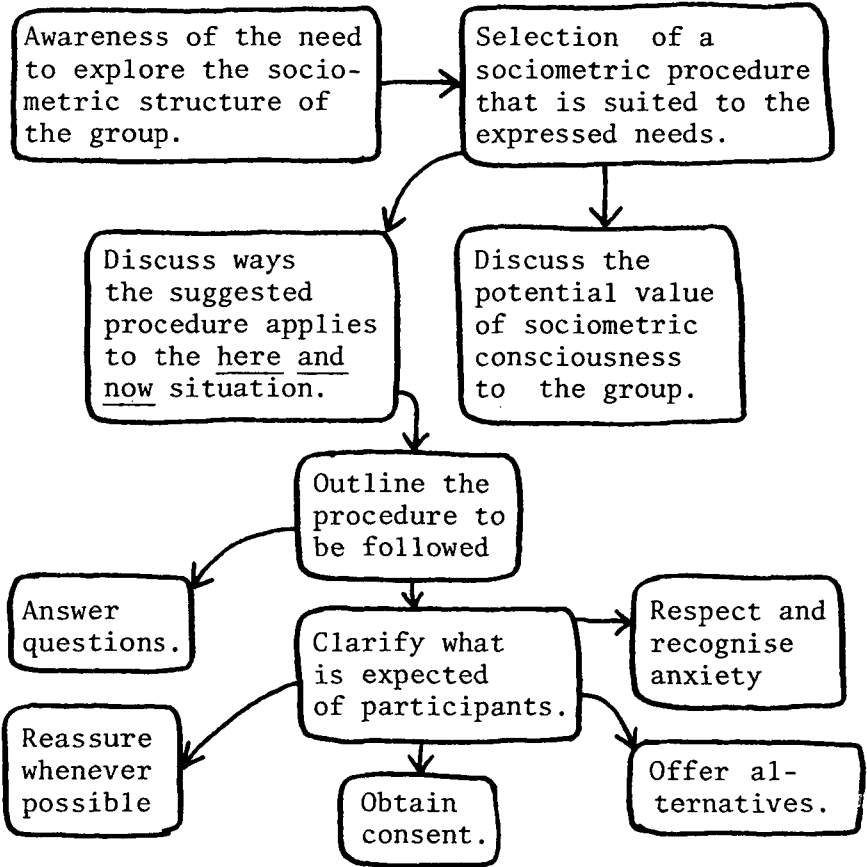


Plate I

A C T I O N P H A S E

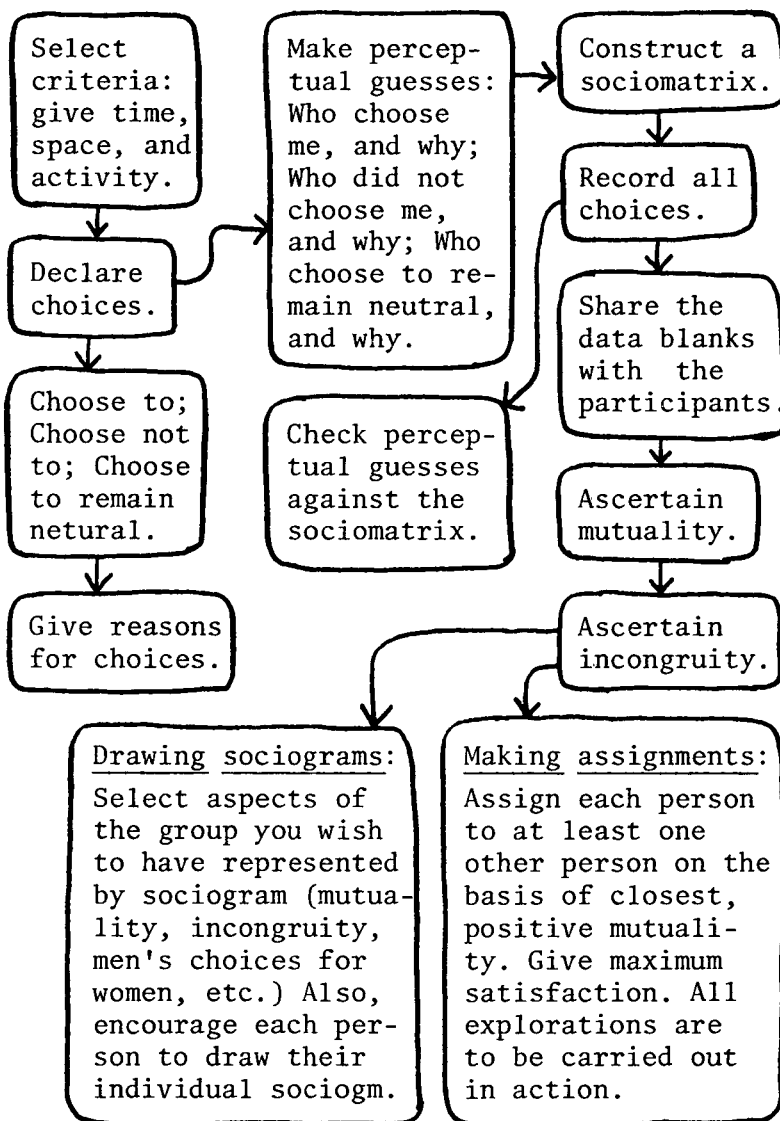


Plate II

S H A R I N G P H A S E

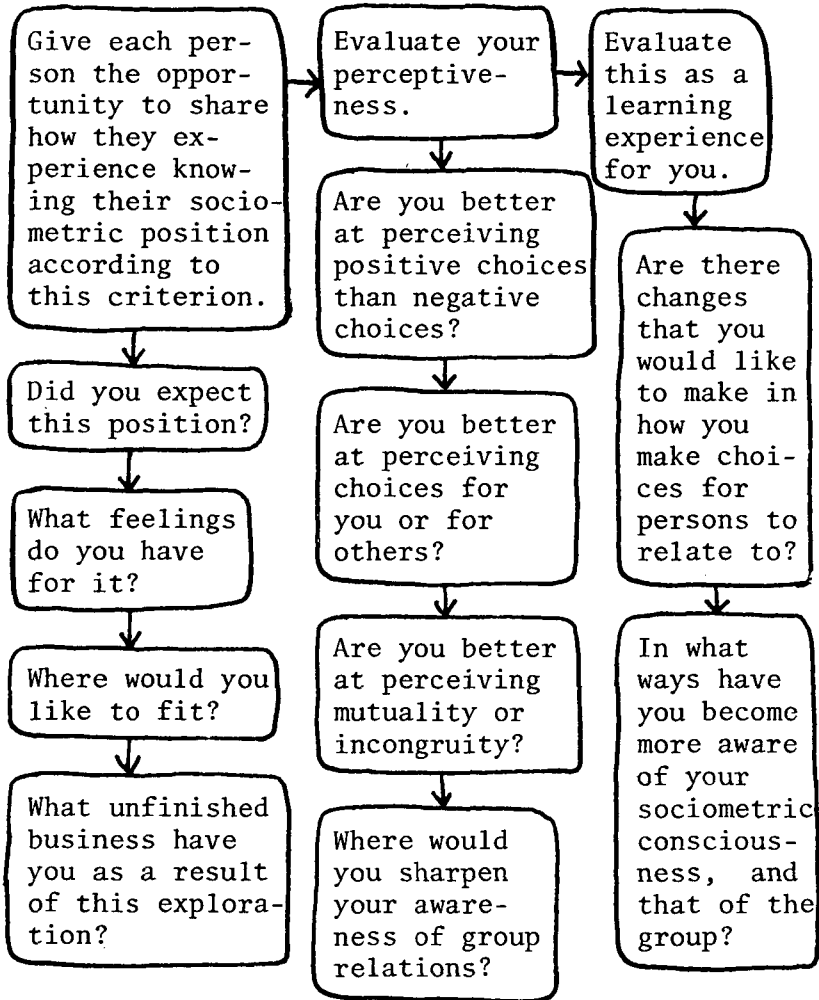


Plate III

Question: How is this going to help us decide who is the leader? Isn't it automatically someone who has been here a long time?

Sociometrist's Reply: A sociometric exploration only indicates where the potential for leadership lies within a group.⁹ Leadership emerges from a process in which we all share. The length of time that someone has been here is one element of the process which comes from the external structure I referred to before. It could also be true that a person has developed a manner of interacting, a style of responding to the needs of others which is recognized as beneficial to the group. Much of the approval and recognition this person receives is due to the sociometric process. Different criteria produce different leaders. Leadership often moves from one person to another at varying time points and in different places. As our sociometric consciousness develops we will be able to recognize the shifts and movement of leadership in a group.

Here are sociograms from a previous group (Plates IV, V and VI). On the sociogram of choices for whom do you choose to work with on sociograms for two hours, Stewart and Hank are the sociometric stars. They were the most frequently chosen on the basis of the criterion explored. Their status within the group means that they have support and therefore are in a position to lead. Whether they actually choose to lead is another matter. Note that Stewart has a great deal of mutuality (people whom he chose, also chose him). Hank has received a number of choices which he did not reciprocate. It might be possible to deduce that Stewart is the more willing leader of the group. First it is important to know the reasons for the various choices. In the sociogram "Who do you choose to go out to eat with?" (Plate VI) there is quite a different configuration. There Frieda is also in a star position. It is possible to deduce that in social matters Frieda is the one expected to get things started.

In order for us to ascertain where the potential for leadership lies in this group it will be important to select criteria which will give us information more related to the training for which we have come.

Question: Aren't our choices kept confidential?

Sociometrist's Reply: Your question reminds me to tell you that the sociograms I showed you are sociograms of an actual exploration conducted several years ago. The names of the participants were all changed to ensure confidentiality. To answer your question more specifically, it is possible to conduct a sociometric exploration in which all individual choices are kept confidential. One person would be entrusted to handle all the data and to reveal only the resulting assignments. Not knowing who chose whom, and not sharing with each other about choices, makes it necessary for us to fall back on our unenlightened perceptions and guesses. We may have gained some sociometric consciousness by becoming aware of our preferences; however, we are unable

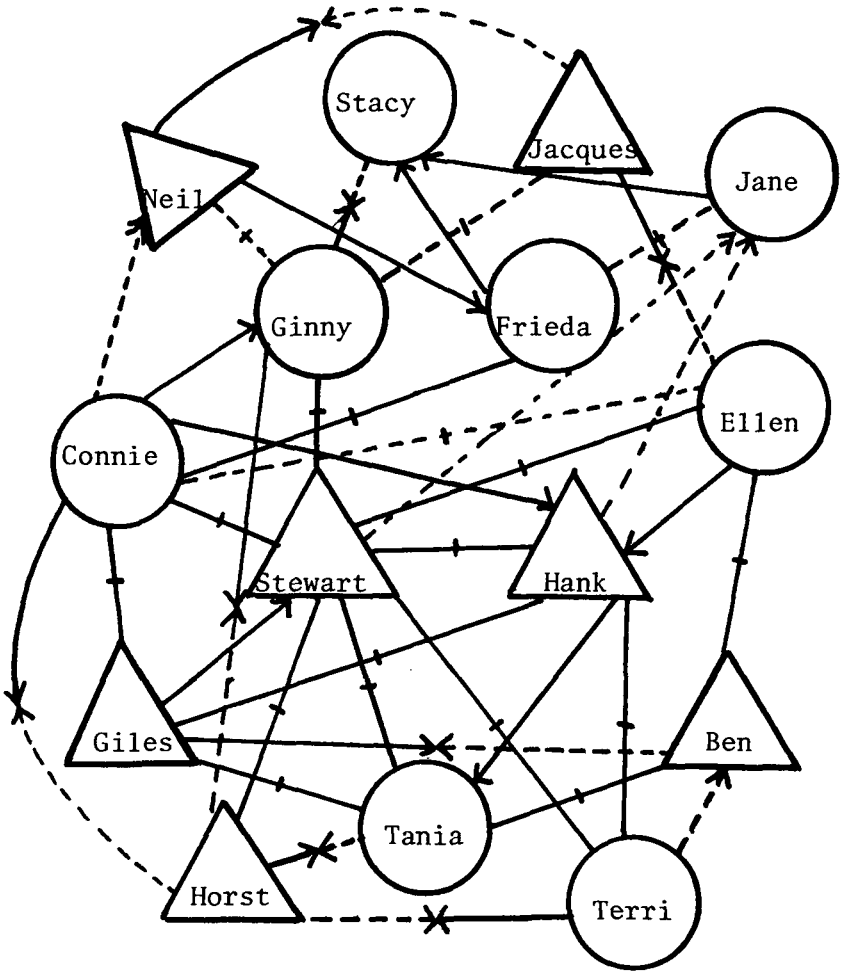


Plate IV

S O C I O G R A M

Criterion: To work with on sociograms
for two hours in the library

— positive choice --- negative choice

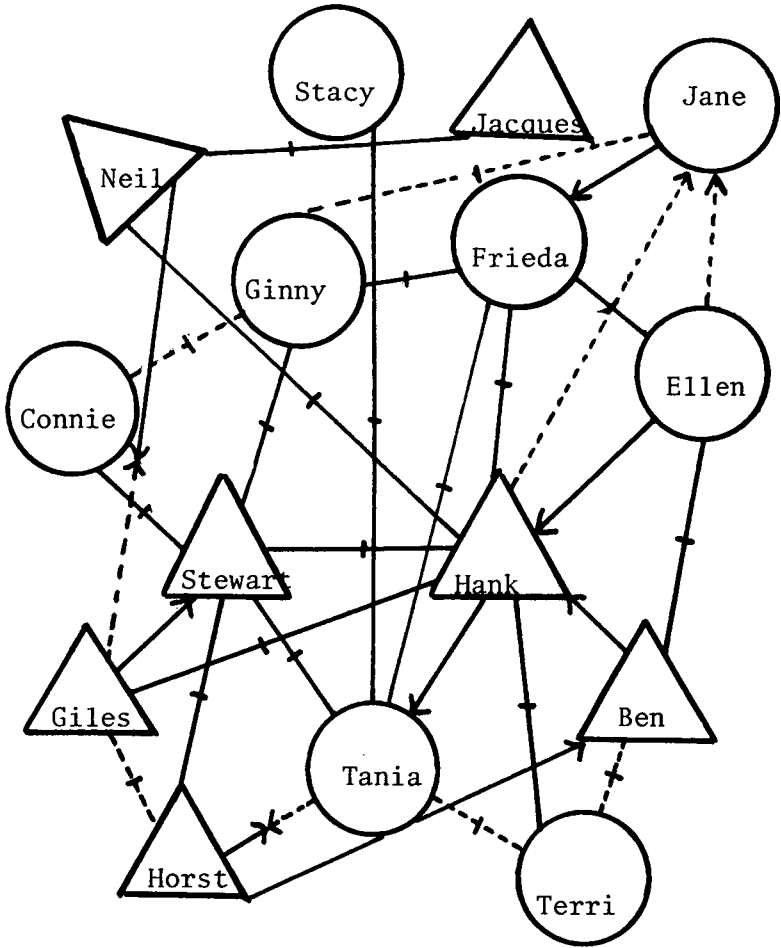


Plate V

S O C I O G R A M

Criterion: To have as your "double" for
½ hour, in private

— positive choice ---negative choice

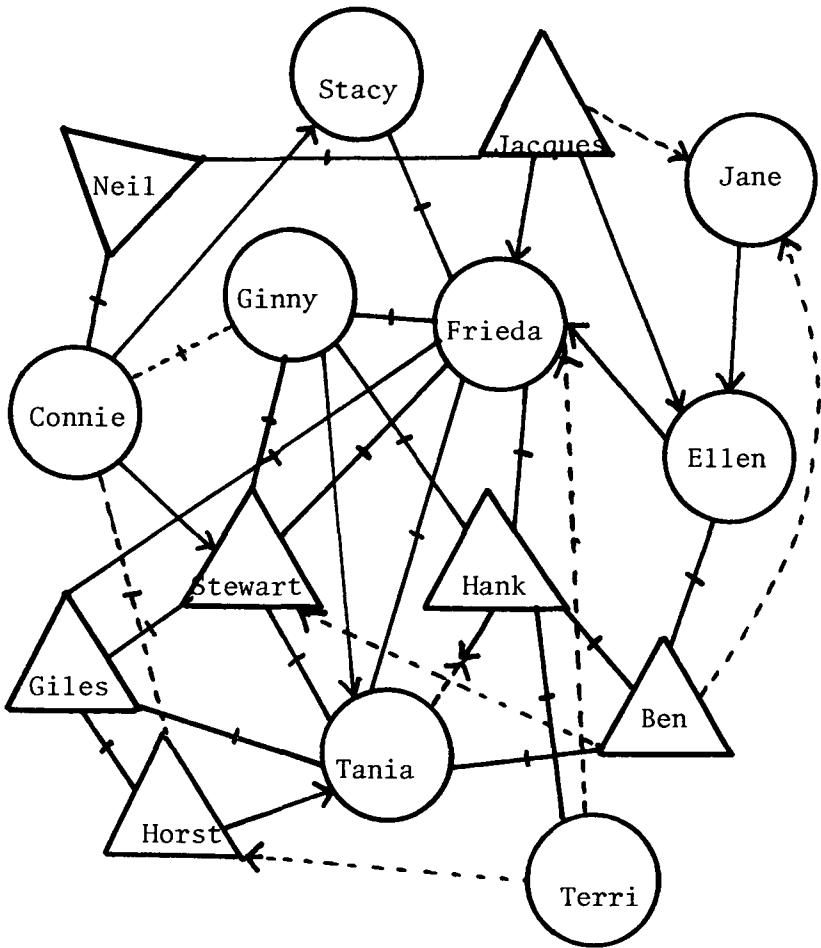


Plate VI

S O C I O G R A M

Criterion: To go out to eat with (2 hours)

___ positive choice --- negative choice

to confirm mutuality or incongruity, and, we are no further in our knowledge of group *tele* processes.

Question: Doesn't this sort of thing cause a lot of hard feelings?

Sociometrist's Reply: It can, yes. However, there is an underlying current of feeling seeking expression and confirmation in each of us. If opportunities aren't provided for that expression, we find ways.¹⁰ This is often what causes "sideways" or other inappropriate communication between people, which result in those same "hard feelings." A sociometric exploration is not intended as an instrument for dumping unpleasanties on others. It is a mechanism for tuning-in to the self, and for reporting as accurately as possible what response we have to each other. Fortunately psychodrama is available to us as a means for working through conflicts or other repercussions which are revealed to us through the sociometric exploration.

Question: I came here to learn psychodrama. If I like somebody I go up and tell them. This looks like putting on paper something that could be done in life. I don't really get the connection.

Sociometrist's Reply: The two may not seem connected but there is a connection. You may have heard Zerka Moreno¹¹ say that: "Psychodrama is a laboratory for learning how to live." Sociometry is the conceptual framework for psychodrama, it teaches us how and to whom to relate, and it too has instruments for exploration which are of the "laboratory" kind. By recording on paper our choices and reasons for choices we are able to do this together at a fixed point in time. We are able to have an "aerial" view of our sociometric network, as well as the person-to-person view. This process trains us to recognize and respond to sociometric factors more adequately as they occur *in situ* because we have developed a sense for the whole picture. We can go up to people and tell them that we like them. What is more difficult is dealing with the negative and rejective feelings that we have for each other. A sociometric exploration makes it possible for us to explore both and to become more aware of skill in dealing with the feelings we have for each other as a totality. Sociometry will add to your skill as a psychodramatist. One of the functions of a psychodramatist is to assist others in conceptualizing and integrating what he is learning. Unless we can do that we do not maximize the learning opportunities.

Question: I feel anxious about doing this. I don't know why. It seems to make sense to me.

Sociometrist's Reply: I can understand your anxiety and assure you that any exploration into the less known is anxiety-provoking. On the one hand we already have a conceptual and perceptual process working for us, one which we have developed more or less on our own and at a risk to ourselves. Here

we are again at another crossroads in learning. The anxiety is from not knowing the results and what impact this new learning will have on us. Respect your anxiety. It is a gauge for determining the amount that you are comfortable in sharing. Be aware of it and when it keeps you from being as explicit as you could be. We are both participant, observer and researcher in this exploration.^{1 2} As you proceed in this experience focus on yourself, the level of anxiety and utilize that information, as well as what you do or do not reveal to others. We are exploring the *here and now* and your anxiety is a part of that.

One thing you might do to learn from your anxiety is to fill out two forms: one that you are comfortable handing in, and one which includes all the choices you would make if you felt less anxious about revealing that information. Once we have drawn the sociograms and have a picture of the group choices, refer to the second form and evaluate for yourself what differences the more "real" choices would have made in the sociometry of the group.

Question: Do we have to reject people?

Sociometrist's Reply: If on the basis of the criterion you are honestly not able to choose someone, then you indicate either a neutral or a negative choice. It is not wise to skip over that portion because it seems unpleasant. If you feel unsure of yourself in this area, it may be helpful for you to visualize yourself actually engaged in the activity suggested by the criterion with each person. Focus on the feeling this generates, and if you determine that you would rather not choose someone on the basis of this criterion, then indicate that, and try to give a reason.

Each of us has experienced rejection, and is able to sympathize with the rejected. We have also experienced the hurt and the confusion of not knowing where we stand with someone. We have felt frustrated with their inability to be straight with us. A sociometric exploration is an opportunity for learning how to make choices and to take responsibility for our feelings.

Total rejection of another person is rare in my experience. By examining our negative feelings for another person in relation to a variety of criteria we may arrive at a shared activity (length of time and amount of space) that is comfortable for both of us. It is only by checking this out that we can *know* each other and can assess the potential of the relationship. Sometimes positive choices may be traumatic for a person, especially if they have been unable to accept themselves in positive ways. It becomes the responsibility of the group to deal with the information generated, to keep alive the search for criteria which will maximize movement within the network of the group.

Question: Why don't we get started. This talking about it is making me nervous!

Sociometrist's Reply: Good question. I'm glad to have an idea of who is ready to go ahead. We have been in the warm-up phase of the exploration. Unasked questions and unexpressed concerns inhibit our spontaneity and eventually the validity of this experience.^{1 3} We all warm-up at different speeds. Evidently we have prolonged your warm-up. Let me check with the others and see who is ready to go ahead with this exploration.

Comments: There were no further questions. A willingness, even eagerness to begin was indicated. The group decided to design criteria which assisted them in recognizing group leadership as it related to aspects of their training as psychodramatists. The following criteria were selected:

Whom do you choose to work with on sociograms for two hours in the library?, and

Whom do you choose to share a doubling experience with (to double for, and to have as your double) for ½ hour in private?

From here the group moved through the action and sharing phase of the exploration (See Plates II and III). Two people chose to fill out the second form, and then decided to turn in the more explicit one. Often the act of making choices relieves the participants of enough anxiety to make it possible for them to take more risks than they had previously given themselves credit for.

As the week progressed various comments were made by group members which were indications that they were more aware of how group decisions were made. Toward the end of the week the group requested another sociometric exploration in order to confirm their perceptions of the changes which had occurred in its sociometric structure.

This example attempts to cover many of the concerns expressed by groups contemplating a sociometric exploration. The sociometrist is urged to meet those concerns with knowledge of the process, and with respect for the participants.

NOTES

1. J. L. Moreno. *Who Shall Survive?* Beacon, N.Y., Beacon House, 1953, p. xxviii.
2. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
3. *Ibid.*, p. xix.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
5. *Ibid.*
6. J. L. Moreno. *Sociometry, Experimental Method and the Science of Society.* Beacon, N.Y., Beacon House, 1951, p. 127.
7. *Op. Cit.*, p. 311.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 53-54, 311-328.
9. For more information on this topic consult: Helen H. Jennings. *Sociometry of Leadership* (Sociometry Monographs, No. 14) Beacon, N.Y., Beacon House, 1947.

10. Carl E. Hollander and Sharon Leman, "Sociometry," *Sensorsheet* (A co-publication conceived by the Environmental Studies Project and the Earth Sciences Teacher Preparation Project) Winter, 1973, p. 5.
11. Zerka T. Moreno is the Director of Training in Psychodrama, Sociometry and Group Psychotherapy at the Moreno Institute, Beacon, N.Y.
12. Moreno. *Who Shall Survive?* p. 61-62.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 110.