

Sociometry in Action

How we get together in groups

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When an individual is with others who respond to him and whom he wants to be with, he has greater security. The more secure he is as a person, the more released he feels and can behave in the group. As he is emotionally freer of tension and doubt and hesitations of different sorts, he can contribute and function better within the total group. The internal morale of the group increases as individuals find they can contribute and interact broadly with one another.

One important blockage in group-work is that individuals don't have the securities they need with each other in groups. A way of overcoming lacks in security is to bring the natural groupings into play, thus preventing lots of individuals and lots of potential leadership from being submerged.

The sociometric test is a simple method for revealing actual natural groupings and diagnosing personal association patterns. Each individual is asked to express with whom he would like to associate in a common situation in which an action is to be undertaken, such as in a community house recreation group, classroom, factory shoproom, for example. In these instances, each individual may be asked whom he would like to play with, to sit with, or to work with.

When these choices are diagrammed we have a sociogram. Thus the sociogram is a picture of the choices of the members for one particular occasion and is valid for that type of occasion only.

The immediate possibilities for

sociometric grouping will vary in different settings. Thus, in homerooms one arrangement may be for seating, another different arrangement may be for committees, although the same children are involved. An example of one kind of question is given which some schools use at change of semesters to compose their homerooms on the basis of pupils' choices. "What other boys or girls do you want to be in the same homeroom with you next semester? You may give three choices, naming the boy or girl you most want to be grouped with as your first choice, then the one you want as second choice, and as third choice. It's hard to arrange room enrollment for all choices by each person, but everyone will have at least one of his choices. We should keep our choices confidential because some people will be choosing you whom you may not have chosen since you had only three choices."

In nearly all group situations, there are occasions which come up where people must be aligned in some manner with one another. A common situation occurring in many kinds of groups is the use of committees. *Being on the same committee with you* then is the criterion for the choices.

Common Criteria

But whatever the particulars of the sociometric test and its wording, all tests which meet the standard of being genuine sociometric opportunities have to live up to the following criteria:

a. The situation should be *real* for the choosing; choices are not hypothetical; they are made for an *actual* situation, in the same terms as the action is going to be;

b. The test is not an end in itself; its results are always put into effect to change the arrangements for working or living in accordance with the choices; sociometric arrangement is only setting the stage for a better group work situation;

c. There is an *immediacy* to the choosing: it is for *right now*, tomorrow or next week, not some vague time in the future or two months later.

Obviously, the technique of getting sociometric results is a matter of giving every individual in a group a role in which he can act in his own behalf toward a situation in which he is or is going to be. The role which is given him has to be sufficient to draw out his most wanted, perhaps most inwardly kept wishes in respect to whom he wants to be with in the situation facing him.

Thus the manner in which the sociometric question is put is important to securing valid results. Motivating elements should be emphasized. To address a group of boys and girls with "I'd like to know with whom each of you would like to be in the same recreational group at our community center" is insufficient. The question must be put in specific terms: "Each of you knows best whom you would enjoy being with in the same group at our community center for the times you will be working and playing together. No one can know this as well as yourself. We shall be arranging our new schedule for groups next Monday. As today is Friday, I can figure out the membership in groups by Monday if you would like to choose associates today. We will keep with the same people we choose today for eight weeks, and then have a chance to choose again. Keep in mind all the boys and girls you have come to know here whether they are absent today or not. Let's give three choices, or four if you like. Wherever possible, I'll arrange the groups so that the individual gets all his choices. But it is very difficult to give all people all their choices because lots of people might choose one person. All of them are just as important as this one person is."

It will be noted that the individuals can tell, from this statement, exactly what the choices are for, why they are asked for them, when the choices will be put into operation, and precisely how long the groupings made from the choices will last before another opportunity for choosing is given. Also, that the term "sociometric test" (which possibly can imply right and wrong answers) is avoided, since it is not a "test" in the usual sense of the word. Usually only the positive choices are

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Readers who are interested in the development of this group method will welcome the council's forthcoming book, "Sociometry and Human Relations Practices."

taken. However, in some places, it is important to take rejections also. Again, the *manner* of taking rejections should be matter of fact and direct. After the choosing is done, the director can say: "Each of you knows also if there are any people you feel particularly uncomfortable with in the situation we are choosing for, or who may feel this way about you, where a feeling of uneasiness or annoyance between them and you may come up in the situation. So I can arrange our grouping to avoid this; if there are any you feel this way about or think they do about you, put their names at the bottom of the paper. If there aren't, leave it blank." It is important that no implication of one individual judging another is raised. The stress is on the two-way nature of negative feelings.

This is particularly crucial in situations where tensions or conflicts are high. Then rejection data are needed for better diagnosis of the group dynamics—for locating the urgent group problems. Many of the unaccountably unfavorable outcomes of groupwork become understandable when the interpersonal structure of the group is known.

How Choices Are Carried Through

The technique of carrying choices into action is built out of a systematic consideration of how to provide everyone with the most he can have. In doing this, it is understood, the choices are used precisely for the situation involved in the choosing. This is important because often it is not possible to generalize that an individual choosing certain persons for one situation in his life necessarily wants to be with them in other, different situations. One index of social growth, in fact, is the extent of capacity to relate one's self selectively to persons who in turn respond in particular situations.

Two principles can be followed in carrying out choices for optimal satisfaction: assuring that every individual is provided with some of his choices and, second, insofar as possible assuring that the highest degree of choice expressed or the highest degree of choice meeting with reciprocation is used in the grouping.

This, of course, means that an individual who is unchosen or who chooses others than those who choose him receives his first choice; that an individual who is reciprocated by his second choice but not his first choice receives

his second choice. The aim is to provide the individual with companions, for work or living, to whom he is most attracted and in whom he is most likely to find mutual response. When rejections have been taken, the member is given a situation where he is least likely to face rejection—away from those who actively have rejected him as associate. It has been observed that under such conditions he is often able to live down his situation and build anew a better interpersonal setting for himself when he is given a fresh start.

The sociogram of a group is a charting of the dynamic interrelationships expressed by the members of a group at a given time. As such, it should always be considered in relation to the time it was taken. Since person to person responses are never static, there are often occasions when the groupworker may wish to compare the structure of the group at one time with its structure at another time.

In doing this, it is necessary to keep in mind that while inter-personal relations are always in a state of flux, the shifts in feelings between individuals are not rapid but relatively constant. It is therefore important that any second or further repeat sociometric test be given at a time interval long enough to make sense to the group members—to justify it actually from their point of view. In order that this be true, the time interval must be long enough to register a fairly large amount of change in the structure. The evidence suggests an interim of seven or eight weeks meets these criteria in many groups: from the members' viewpoint it is felt as the ripe time to choose again and from the groupwork director's viewpoint, it is found necessary to keep up with the developments in social growth happening in the group as a whole.

There are, of course, situations where particular projects call for a shorter or much longer time arrangement of the choice structure. But the principles applying are still the same: the sociometric test should primarily meet the felt needs of the members and not a research need of someone studying their interactions.

Sociometry in Action

In relation to groupwork, sociometry offers many explicit uses. One of these may be taken for illustration.

A teacher had been asked by several girls in the school what they should do;

they wanted to be Girl Scouts but no near-by troop had room for them. A poll of fifth and sixth grade girls showed sixty-four "candidates." The question then became, how to decide who was to be in which troop.

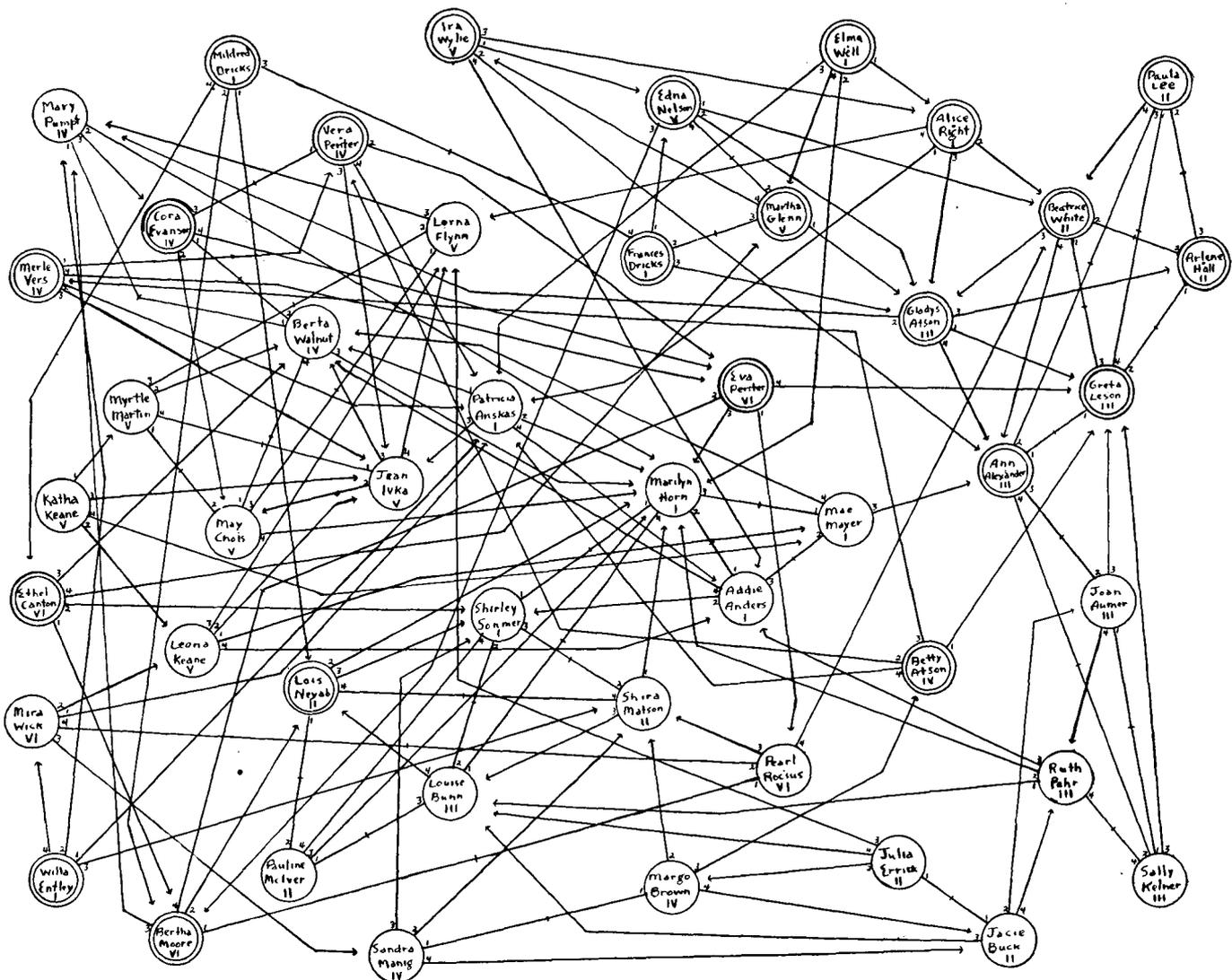
"Since a troop usually divides into 3 patrols of 8 or 10 each for discussion, planning, and working purposes," the teacher reported, "we decided to use a sociogram to find 6 natural groups—3 for each troop. The question we used was: What four girls would you most want to have in your patrol? Influencing placement was the need for balancing the number of white and Negro girls in each troop. From the sociogram we made sure that everyone got at least one choice, but still gave very conscious consideration to the racial situation. A few girls not showing on the sociogram came in after the meeting; they were asked to state a single choice and placed with the person chosen. We had hoped to maintain the ratio to which the children are accustomed in school (about 30 percent Negro) but instead close to 50 percent of the girls who came were Negro. Still holding to choices, we tried to figure the patrols so that neither race would be overwhelmed by the other. It has worked out beautifully.

The accompanying sociogram (see page 43) shows the choice patterns from which groupings for patrols were made. Classroom sociograms made for purposes of seating arrangements had shown no tendencies toward cleavage between Negro and white pupils. The Girl Scout patrol sociogram, however, shows that some members of each race chose members of their own race exclusively, as well as a generally greater tendency toward separate racial cliques, for this situation which involves "facing the community."

The community setting in which this school is shows many conflicts between Negro and white persons. The school itself, however, had managed to keep interracial tension at a minimum. Sociometric choices offer at the various grade levels also reflected no distortion of positive expression by members of either race in preference for itself. This school was on the alert to keep community patterns of feelings from affecting the in-school life of its children.

From the patrol sociogram a possible inference was that the choice-patterns were reflecting the expectations of the members of both races that "outside school" they would not be allowed to

GIRL SCOUT SOCIOGRAM



Legend ○ = white girl ● = Negro girl —————> = one-way choice 1, 2, 3, or 4 = degree of choice
 —————> = mutual choice I, II, III, IV, V, or VI = Group Assigned

Sociometric Questions = What four girls would you most want to have in your Patrol?

Sociometric Placement for Membership in Two Troops of 3 Patrols Each from Sociogram for Girl Scouts Patrol

- I**
- Marilyn Horn
 - Shirley Sonmer
 - Addie Anders
 - Mae Ann Mayer
 - Willa Entley N
 - Patricia Anskas
 - Alice Right N
 - Elma Well N
 - Frances Dricks N
 - Mildred Dricks N

- II**
- Pauline McAver
 - Lois Neyab N
 - Jacie Buck
 - Julia Errick
 - Beatrice White N
 - Arline Hall N
 - Paula Lee N
 - Shira Matson

- III**
- Greta Leson N
 - Ann Alexander N
 - Sally Kelner
 - Joan Auman
 - Ruth Pehr
 - Gladys Atson N
 - Louise Bunn
 - *Dora Atson N

- IV**
- Berta Walnut
 - Mary Pumpf
 - Cora Evanson N
 - Vera Penter N
 - Betty Atson N
 - Merle Vers N
 - Margo Brown
 - Sandra Manig
 - *Flora Lespie

- V**
- Katha Keane
 - Myrtle Martin
 - May Chols
 - Jean Ivka
 - Lorna Flynn
 - Leona Keane
 - Martha Glenn N
 - Ira Wylie N
 - Edna Nelson N

Note: Influencing placement in patrols was the need for balancing the number of white and Negro girls while giving each person some of her choices. Six* girls do not appear on the sociogram. They entered after first meeting. One girl, Louise Bunn, forfeited her choices on request of teacher for sake of others.

- VI**
- Mira Wick
 - Pearl Rocius
 - Bertha Moore N
 - Eva Penter N
 - *Mammie Tow
 - *Lucy Davis N
 - *Ida Maddon N
 - Ethel Canton N
 - *Elaine Harvard

associate with the very persons with whom they could and did in school.

The procedure of sociometric placement was used in this instance to meet an apparent intergroup problem. The Girl Scout director built on the premise that the higher the internal morale of a group the more it can withstand pressure from other groups. She did this in several specific ways.

First, in the patrol arrangement, each individual received some of her choices. Second, insofar as possible, leadership positions in terms of extent of choices received, were spread in each patrol. Third, each patrol was arranged to have about an equal number of members of both races, making the bi-racial situation common. Thus, no member need be self-conscious regarding race in respect to her particular patrol, and none could know that any other members had shown preferences for their own race.

This technique of sociometric placement is useful generally in situations where any group factor appears to be affecting choice-patterns. For example, where boys and girls tend to choose their own sex. The classroom is then arranged so that boys and girls are spread randomly about instead of each on separate sides of the room (while, of course, each person receives some of his choices). When choice arrangement does not visibly betray the group factor cleavages, the next sociogram is apt to bring to overt expression the choices which had been unexpressed but felt all along. (It becomes "all right" to say how you feel.) When the classroom is given the appearance of a monastery and a convent side by side, the next sociogram is almost certain to show the same or more extreme inter-sex cleavage. (It becomes "not the thing to do" to choose the other sex.)

Last, not least, auspicious timing was used, from an intergroup education viewpoint, the occasion of forming of Girl Scout Troops, to aid the members to demonstrate to the community the practicability of interracial projects.

Groupwork Implications

The relation between this method of grouping and the dynamics of attitude change in the individual is demonstrable. Influences travel along inter-personal lines of attraction (Moreno). Very specific attitude changes happen along the lines of person-to-person responsiveness (Newcomb). Personality

changes are highly related to person-to-person setting (Jennings). People we like influence us more than do either things or people having no personal meaning to us. Hence the likelihood attitude expansion will take place is greater once the individuals, as persons, are attracted to each other. The evidence now is increasing which shows forming of mutual relationships with them *precedes* changing of a given attitude. Groupwork is thus justified in utilizing the emotional outgoingness of the individual toward specific other individuals to build a setting in which he is *free* to change, even in attitudes toward the self.

Second, before attitude changes can occur, the individual apparently must feel free enough to ventilate, to express openly, what attitudes he has, with confidence he, as a person, will not be rebuffed; he can do this more surely in a group sociometrically arranged.

Third, there is evidence—and this is fundamental to any work with groups—that sociometric arranging of a group *at the start* (before activities are planned or begun) will enhance the possibilities both for successful outcomes of activities and for group processes which are satisfying to the members.

In the practice of groupwork, this very point is sometimes reversed: an "interest" is set up and individuals are recruited around it (as, art) when the objective is not its furthering but developing inter-personal structure in the group in such manner that each individual can work out his particular psyche problems. It is more economical of time and energy and therapeutically effective to construct the group originally out of sociometric choices for associates in the group—so as to have a basic pattern of inter-personal attractions out of which activities spontaneously develop.

Fourth. The third point above appears to rest on the fact that spontaneity of individuals is greatly augmented by inter-personal attraction, the choices themselves being a form of spontaneity. Thus, when people are placed together who have greater spontaneity toward each other, they tend to create more, act more intelligently, and do more in general, than when they are placed with others with whom they do not "click."

Fifth. The third and fourth points above appear to rest on the evidence that no one (psychiatrist, groupworker, caseworker, psychologist, teacher, par-

ent) can choose as well for an individual as by and large he is able to do himself. He is the one who is an ultimate authority on what he *is feeling* at the moment when a sociometric decision is put to him. This does not imply he is the best estimator of why he is at present feeling as he does towards particular persons. Nor does it imply he is a reliable authority on his own emotional history or on the kinds of emotional patterns he may be exhibiting. It implies only that he knows toward whom he is emotionally drawn and, secondly, when he is allowed opportunity to be with them, that he is found to have chosen in a manner *which benefits him and the other individuals*.

Genuine Choices

Perhaps it should be re-emphasized here that this refers to sociometric choices—actual choices for a real situation which he is facing where he is motivated to give his genuinely felt choices and which he knows are assured him. It does not imply that choices which he *seems to be making from an observer's standpoint* carry the same efficacy. The evidence is that the individual's observed behavior is not a reliable index to what associates he wants; too many factors beyond his control may affect what behavior he shows. (*E.g.*, his own timidity toward approaching someone who is already surrounded by others; desire to make others think he doesn't care to be with those who do not invite him.)

The security of anonymity given to sociometric choices may be also an important factor releasing him to express his most confidential feelings. It is understood, of course, that how the sociometric placement was figured out from the choices is kept confidential by the group director. The individual does not know that he is, perhaps, unchosen; he knows only that he has been given one or more of his choices and he knows everyone else has too, so he can feel *he has a right to being where he is*, and he can, of course, feel also that in all probability some of those placed with him chose him. In any case, the situation was fair for everyone.

Under these circumstances, the individual can have *reality* feelings of security. (He needs less to seek recourse in fantasy.) In sociometric practice, this is found to free much more capacity of the individual than had been shown in his behavior in

(Continued on page 63)

Out of
POSTWAR BERLIN

Comes this Page

from a

Caseworker's Diary

Every morning at 7:47 hours, mostly even sharp, I am going with the crowded omnibus to the out-office of a large Berlin VBK [welfare center]. The ride is only short, however long enough to make me feel hungry, due to the meager breakfast. Four dry slices of bread are still in my purse, and in addition to this a carrot as extra allowance. With steely energy I am holding onto my principle not to start with the second breakfast before entering the office-rooms.

In the omnibus I am seeing people who are riding somewhere to the surroundings of Berlin in order to collect provisions for hoarding. How fine that must be, to come home once with a full rucksack, to make parents and brothers and sisters once happy, and to be satisfied. The daily worry for the sick father and the big brother who is attending the Technical University on food card 3 and standing in the preliminary examinations, being always hungry, renders me frequently so tired and discouraged. However, being a social worker I must not think of the own need; the misery of the others is greater, fathers and sons are missing or still PW's, and almost everywhere the war has left inexpressible grief behind.

Before the door of the office-room, the first callers are already waiting. The consultation hour starts only at nine hours, but the people are used to waiting, to standing in queue and to come early. They know also that

they will be served at the Public Welfare Office before official hours if it is ever possible. A haggard, tall, evil-smelling woman enters the room. She is one of the mothers who received continuous assistance in cash and kind through the Nazi government and was accustomed to keep house on full larders. She is unable to put up with the economy now required; the last usable items are sold; the money is spent; the children have no longer any clothing and linen; and to the four legitimate children an illegitimate one, allegedly from a Russian progenitor, has been added.

The food card rations were never sufficient for the family, and the children had to steal in foreign gardens. The eldest son has recently left the family because he wants to get enough to eat at a farmhouse. The suckling

For this remarkable document, *Survey* editors are indebted to Marguerite Boylan (see "Rebuilding Social Services," *THE SURVEY* midmonthly, October 1947). Following her return from Germany last fall, she received this "Report of a Female Caseworker," dated October 31, 1947, from the director of the Welfare Branch of the Military Government in Germany. *THE SURVEY* prints this report in order to bring to American social workers an authentic picture of the personal and professional lives of their colleagues in a devastated European country. By special request the name of the caseworker who wrote the report is being withheld.



Acme
"Every morning . . . the crowded omnibus"

had to be taken to the hospital yesterday because he was seriously undernourished. At the end of the month the family is ordered to vacate the living shack by the Building Police, since the mother has used the wood planking and the roof trees for firewood during the last cold winter and since the living shack is now pervious to rain and threatened to falling down.

Lamenting and debilitated, the woman is sitting in front of me: "What will now become of us, where shall we go, when will my husband come back, why have the men to go to war, why does the Russian not release the men? Please take care that my big boy will come back, he was the only bread-winner in the family. Please do call at the hospital at once and ask how my little girl is, I want to have the child back." Complaints and questions on end, and few possibilities to help; however, help must and will be given. The mother must comprehend that she has got so deeply into trouble through her own mistake, and that she only will be able to master the hard life through diligence and honesty, cleanness and goodwill. The woman must feel that she will be helped if she is ready to convert herself.

Again the door is opened. This father was here already yesterday. He is a master artisan, having been bombed out for three times and now living in an emergency home. His wife returned from East Prussia twelve days ago. She had been forced to work for the Russians, had been raped, and has given birth to a child two days ago in the small hut where her husband