

Sociometry: Expanding on the Meaning of the Term

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The word sociometry has been given to a field of study which includes far more than measurement. What are ways you describe the field to prospective students? What other terms do you use for this field of sociometry?

Sociometry, historically

Sociometry as it is currently practiced is both a quantitative methodology and a qualitative methodology as well as a collection of theories not limited to community building, role theory, social planning theory, social network mapping, interpersonal relations, group dynamics, healing of society (sociatry) theory of action, spontaneity theory and the cultural conserve, etc. The field of sociometry began during the second quarter of the 1900's when the field of sociology was examining social psychology. There was an explosion of interest in research and empirical study: "at the turn of the century, social psychology was beginning to show signs of shifting from an area of speculation to one of empirically based generalizations... even though the range of observations or experimentation was often very limited."¹ In 1952 Henry J. Meyer of New York University wrote an article about Moreno's recently published Sociometry, Experimental Method and the Science of Society: an approach to a new political orientation. "What emerges from a reading of the various selections in this book" ranging from autobiography, speculations and argument, on the one hand, to definitions, statements of theory, research reporting and criticism, on the other "is a view of what sociometry is to Dr. Moreno. Like other new approaches, sociometry cannot be confined to the ideas of its creator. Having launched sociometry into the world, even Dr. Moreno cannot control the meanings it will have to many people. This is one indication of the stimulations sociometry affords."² "The full import of the writings in this book cannot be grasped unless one keeps in mind that sociometry is a philosophy of living, springing from a profound belief in the spontaneous and creative in human beings and a desire to release such forces from the fetters of institutions and culture."³ "Because of this belief in the central place of spontaneity in genuine human relations, Moreno makes no distinction between a philosophy of society, social research, and social action."⁴

In 1975 Martin Haskell published through his business Role Training Associate of California the book Socioanalysis: Self-direction via Sociometry and Psychodrama. He writes that socioanalysis is a form of sociotherapy for the individual.⁵ By this time Robert and Ellen Siroka had established the Institute for Sociotherapy in New York City which offered training in sensitivity, encounter, sociometry, psychodrama as well as counselling. In 1976 Peter Dean Mendelson published his extraordinary doctoral

dissertation Rethinking Sociometry: Towards the reunification of Theory, Philosophy, Methodology and Praxis 6 Mendelson has minutely and eloquently examined the state of present day sociometry. The meatier sections of his dissertation investigate the existence of bifurcation in the application of sociometry: "Moreno believed that sociometry was being mis-applied and distorted. He himself recognized (and this of course is of utmost importance) that sociometry was being transformed as it underwent a process of bifurcation. As Moreno's theory and philosophy were being relegated to the background, the very meaning of sociometry as originally formulated appeared to become increasingly undermined. Moreno was forced to remind sociologists that there was far more to sociometry than the compulsive focus on measurement and quantification; he asked them to re-examine what sociometry was meant to be." 7 "Thus sociometry, according to Moreno, is not only an instrument for exploring the status of a population, but primarily an instrument to bring a population to a collective state of self-expression in respect to the fundamental activities in which it is or is about to be involved." 8

In 1986 Linnea Carlsen- Sabelli 9 began to combine sociodynamics and sociometry in investigations of choice-making in groups. The sociodynamic aspect of the sociometric test provided for persons to report underlying ambivalence present in the choice process (pull to choose/not choose) and following this with the sociometric test which was focused on the decision whether to choose, not choose or remain neutral. Computer programming allowed for the merging of these two sets of data and to depict sociometric choices in three dimensions, (in phase space). A number of computer programs were developed to handle sociometric data and depict sociograms. Tom Treadwell developer of ComSoc covers a number of these programs on his website. 10 With the growth of the field of social network analysis and organizational network analysis the processes, terminology, interventions, and ethics have undergone dramatic changes.

Describing the field to your trainees

A review of the history is significant as it helps to track the various ways Moreno's students and colleagues have communicated with other and like-minded professional identities. In describing the field of sociometry to your trainees you might want to engage them in a brainstorming activity to develop a definition of sociometry which includes sociometry as a philosophy, sociometry as action (including "assignment therapy"), and sociometry as a research tool. In 1986 students in a training seminar of mine wrote this definition. It does not refer to measurement at all, but I offer it as an example:

"Sociometry is intended to raise consciousness about (1) the current choice-making activity in a group; (2) potential choices for partners with whom one shares time, space, energy and information; and (3) the effects of actual and potential choices on group structure and the tensions, struggles and complementarity of that structure. It is also designed to bring together those persons capable of harmonious interpersonal relationships in order to (1) increase the felt sense of belonging; (2) strengthen networks; and, (3)

provide a safety net of support for taking risks and self-disclosure. Finally we believe sociometry will enable participants during sociometric events to develop versatility in social interaction, and increase their ability to face and tolerate intimacy, conflict and change.â€• 11

In answering this question, Diana Jones, a certified sociometrist (ANZPA) and trainer shared this compilation of terms: â€œ social network exploration, relationship mapping, social atom exploration, exploring informal networks of relations in groups, developing interpersonal perception (Hale) , people networks, building connections, psycho-social geography of a group/community (Moreno), working with subgroups and their values and inter-connections, measuring the relationship between people in groups. So I use a range of terms...â€•12

In 2004 Marv Thomas published a sociometry book entitled Personal Village: How to Have People in Your Life by Choice not Chance. In the forward he credits Moreno but the term sociometry is not used in the text; however, his language and approach is beautifully descriptive and inclusive of Morenoâ€™s vision of human groups.¹³ This book is most useful for persons wanting to introduce sociometric principles to persons using non-academic language.

In conclusion, I believe it is important for student to know what has happened to the field of sociometry and ways in which they, as future practitioners and trainers may address the stripping away of the sociometric theory base from the methods. Peter Mendelson writes: â€œMany of the methods of sociometry (for instance role training) were easily amenable to conservative exploitation. Methods, in and of themselves, are clearly more open-ended than theory. For the meaning of a theory, once it is established, is more or less constant: it can not, willy-nilly, be taken to mean just anything. If the theorist has made the meaning clear, subsequent users of the theory are constrained either to follow the theoristâ€™s meaning or explicitly to revise (or less explicitly, to distort) it....A problem, however, arises when methods are (as they usually can be) used in a manner incompatible with the general philosophical aims of the theory from which they emanated. And, this, frequently, is what happened to sociometry. Sociometric methods and techniques were open to conservative exploitation precisely because they were so open ended. They quite clearly could be (and were) used to solidify and more firmly establish existing social systems and their personnel rather than to alter social systems and structures (or to redistribute power and redefine goals)," 14

1 Borgatta, Edgar F. (1966) â€œThe Impact of Social Psychology on Group Psychotherapyâ€• in J.L. Moreno, et.al The International Handbook of Group Psychotherapy, NY, Philosophical Library, p. 212.

2 Meyer, Henry J. (1952) â€œThe Sociometries of Dr. Morenoâ€• Sociometry Vol. 15 (August-November) p. 355.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid, p. 357.

5 Haskell, Martin R. (1975) Socioanalysis: Self-direction via Sociometry and Psychodrama. Long Beach, CA, Role Training Associates of California, p. 13

6 Mendelson, Peter Dean (1976) Rethinking Sociometry: Towards the reunification of Theory, Philosophy, Methodology and Praxis , a doctoral dissertation, St. Louis, Washington University. 442 pages.

7 Ibid., p.179

8 Mills, Wright The Sociological Imagination . NY, Oxford University Press, 1959, p.117.

9 Carlson-Sabelli, Linnea, Hector Sabelli and Ann E. Hale, "Sociometry and sociodynamics" in Psychodrama Since Moreno (1994) London, Routledge, p. 150-154.

10 Tom Treadwell, EdD., TEP makes various programs available via his web address is <http://coral.wcupa.edu/sociometry>

11 Hale, Ann E. "Sociometry of company life: a guide for Playback Theater, company actors and directors" an unpublished paper, Roanoke, VA, 1989, p.2.

12 Jones, Diana (September 19, 2006 1:41am) E-mail correspondence RE: Trainer Sociometry Question, Sept 9-23, 2006. 1 page. Diana Jones is the principle of The organization Development Company located in New Zealand. She makes available on her web site a listing of terms to help sociometrists and social network analysis folk become "bilingual" . See http://www.sociometry.co.nz/social_network_analysis.htm

13 Thomas, Marv, (2004) Personal Village: How to Have People in Your Life by Choice not Chance Seattle, WA, Lakeridge Press, <http://www.personalvillage.com>

14 Mendelson, p. 276.

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