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A NOTE ON SOCIOMETRY AND GROUP DYNAMICS

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The time has come to point out some of the errors which have been made in the course of the history of sociometry and which have added greatly to the confusion as to what sociometry represents. One of the red herrings was the blanket "assumption that an individual's sociometric score, whether calculated by the crudest or by the most refined techniques, is a measure of his acceptance *by the group*." This is, "if not a fallacy, at least a not wholly true interpretation of sociometric facts."¹

Obviously, an acceptance by a group is not possible. The group is a dynamic reality but it is not someone who can answer questions or someone who can accept or reject. However important it is to separate the sociological from the psychological plane of systematization, we should not mix up this methodological problem with the elementary problem of inquiry: whom to choose as an associate in a specific activity.

Another red herring has been the so-called group decision advocated particularly by Kurt Lewin. Just as a group cannot accept or reject an individual, a group cannot make decisions. It is an unfortunate and misleading phrase.

As the theory and practice of what might be called group decision stems in essence from sociometry and is closely related to "sociometric group action" and "sociodrama," let us take an illustration from our own literature and consider the theoretical principles involved in sociometric group action and sociodrama. The first principle is the active and full group or *audience participation*. "Die Teilnahme des Publikums: Die Wandlung der Zuschauer in Zuschauerspieler, des Zuschauerraumes in ein Zuschautheater versetzt die Regie in ein neues Versuchfeld. Die Teilnahme des Publikums muss von Willkür befreit sein."² "The participation of the audience must be gradually freed from chaos and lawlessness."² . . . "The total population is invited to a

¹ It is a pleasure to read this honest admission of Northway in her book *A Primer of Sociometry*, pp. 38-39, that she is "at least partly responsible" for this misconception. I remember having protested repeatedly but the vogue in favor of this interpretation was too strong and so I let it go, hoping that experience and time will cure the mistake.

² See *Das Stegreiftheater*, 1923, p. 12, *The Theatre of Spontaneity*, p. 23, Chapter "Die Teilnahme des Publikums" (Audience Participation). Here the concept of audience participation is discussed in the context of roleplaying and sociodrama. I refer here to the German edition of the book with which Lewin was acquainted before he came to the U.S.A.

meeting and addressed in respect to the question of how the population can be selected for the new community." . . . "It is easy to gain the cooperation of the people tested as soon as they come to think of the test as an instrument to bring their wills to a wider realization, that it is not only an instrument for exploring the status of a population, but primarily an instrument to bring the population to a *collective self-expression* in respect to the fundamental activities in which it is or is about to be involved."³

The second principle is *the warming up of the participants in the direction of action*, the linking up of motivation with action. A sociometric test fixes the act of choice and the expected change and realization of choice into the actional drive of the participant; the warm up to the sociometric choice carries the participant through into action. "I have developed two tests in which the subject is in action for his own ends. One is the sociometric test. From the point of view of the subject this is not a test at all and this is as it should be. It is merely an opportunity for him to become an active agent in matters concerning his life situation. . . . The second test meeting this demand is the spontaneity test. Here in a standard life situation the subject improvises to his own satisfaction."⁴ . . . "Sociometry in communities and the psychodrama in experimental situations make a deliberate attempt too bring the subjects into an experimental state which will make them sensitive to the realization of their own experiences and action-patterns. . . . *In the social sciences, the subjects must be approached in the midst of an actual life-situation and not before or after it.* They must be truly themselves, in the fullest sense of the word. . . . It is evident that *the situation to be measured must be caught in statu nascendi and the subjects warmed up to it.* This emphasizes the enormous importance of the concept of the Moment for all conceptual thinking relevant to the preparation of truly genuine experiments in human societies."⁵

The relation between motivation and action is the crux of dynamic sociometry and dynamic sociodrama. The linkage between motivation and

³ See *Who Shall Survive?*, First Edition, 1934, pp. 356 and 341. I am purposely quoting from the first edition here because it is the one with which Lewin was acquainted many years before he became active in sociometric research and group dynamics.

⁴ See the first edition of *Who Shall Survive?*, p. 15.

⁵ See "A Frame of Reference for Testing the Social Investigator," *SOCIOMETRY*, Vol. III, No. 4, 1940, p. 317; this too, was written long before Lewin published his study on group decision, "Forces Behind Food Habits and Methods of Change," *Bull. Nat. Res. Council*, 1943, 108, 35-65.

action is cemented by the warm up to an act of choice which has, in dynamic sociometry, the character of a resolution, in sociodrama the character of social integration and cohesion.

There must be some factors in tele which make choice making *in expectancy of forthcoming action* much more significant than without it, and also more effective when a large number of individuals are involved, than when choice and action is to be taken by an individual alone. *The psychology of action cannot divorce the act from the actor, the actor in situ, and the single actor cannot be separated from the ensemble of actors in situ.* A decision making in groups, whether it is made in religious, political or industrial settings, without the application of sociometric and sociodrama methods cannot be comprehended. That may be the reason why the group dynamic workers have promptly appropriated, as if by an act of group decision, role-playing and sociodrama for their research.

The third principle is *the result of the meeting* which I have called the "omnitele," the *consensus* of the group, a catharsis of integration, a social learning process obtained through rapid clarification and action insight. This is what Lewin calls group decision. But the question is not the name which is given to this experience, the question is how this process manifests itself, what consequences it has and how it is measured. The effect of the consensus becomes visible in the life situation later, in situations in which the social problems treated in the session come to a test.

If, at the end of a sociodrama session a vote is taken and if in a group of one hundred participants there is but one dissenter, then there is no "group" decision. As it happens rarely in sociodramatic sessions that there is unanimous decision on any social issue, group decision, understood as the complete approval of all participants, is a fiction. One way to measure the warm up of a group to its gradual and growing participation and integration is neither voting nor the magic assumption of a unanimous decision; it is the securing of the sociogram of the group taken at short intervals in crucial stages of the session, either by keen observers or through actual testing before the meeting begins and after the session is ended.⁶

⁶ See "Sociometry and Sociodrama in Industry," by J. L. Moreno and Edgar Borgatta, *SOCIOMETRY*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, 1951.