

- Moreno, J. L. (1975). *Psychodrama (Vol. 2): Foundations of psychotherapy*. Beacon, NY: Beacon House.
- Sax, G. (1980). *Principles of educational measurement and evaluation* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Thorndike, R. L., & Hagen, E. (1977). *Measurement and evaluation in psychology and education (4th ed.)*. New York: Wiley.

RORY REMER

*Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky*

Using Strong Sociometry as an Interpersonal Feedback Tool

With this report on our use of Moreno's formulation of sociometry, we hope to renew interest in Moreno's definition of sociometry. After our delineation of Moreno's formulation, we examine a particular application for providing feedback regarding a person's impact on others within the context of therapist training.

Moreno's Sociometry

Moreno believed that sociometry was not only the measurement of interpersonal relationships but also the use of that measurement to study the warming-up process to choosing. He recognized that simply stating the choices was different from implementing and experiencing them. In fact, he saw that this specific potential for the use of sociometry was often missed or ignored because even veteran sociometrists neglected the study of warming-up to selecting or rejecting *in situ* (Moreno, 1951). Our goal was to exploit the potential of "strong" sociometry for examining the tele in a group for the purpose of self-exploration. We also wanted our students to learn about the use of the sociometric method and its strengths and weaknesses.

An Application of Strong Sociometry

In many programs for training therapists, self-knowledge and personal growth are considered essential. A vehicle for addressing these aspects is one's awareness of the impact one has on others. Sociometry provides a powerful method for clarifying, expressing, and conveying this information in a tangible form.

In the Counseling Psychology Training Program at the University of Kentucky, the experientially oriented courses have a personal growth component. In the course on group counseling and particularly in the seminar, Counseling Psychology: Psychodrama, we teach the sociometric procedures, which are a vital component of the learning experience. Sociometry is employed to provide students with interpersonal feedback and input into their growth process. The impact of the method is meant to be felt firsthand so that the students will experience it as their clients will when they, as therapists, use it in their own practices.

Preparation

Before we engaged the group in our sociometric experiment, we discussed the ground rules to ensure adequate warm-up. Students knew that they were expected to make choices, would be expected to act on those choices, and would be responsible for explaining the reasons for their choices. During the warm-up, we encouraged the students to process their anticipated reactions to the experiment thoroughly to reduce undesirable results as much as possible. We recognized, however, that the full impact of the implementation is usually not appreciated until the hypothetical becomes the actual.

The Experiment

We gave the following instructions to ensure that the requirements for strong sociometry would be attained. We told them that their choices would be implemented in doing small-group work, which, in this case, meant empty chair/situational psychodramas. Students were to choose two others with whom they wanted to be involved to form the required group of three to do the exercise and to choose two with whom they did not wish to be involved. Students knew that choices would be used in the small-group formation for the exercise and to demonstrate the use of sociometry for promoting interpersonal feedback. The choice data were collected confidentially from private ballots and were submitted to the instructor, who constructed the choice matrix and the sociograms. First, the triads were formed, and the situational psychodrama exercise was completed. Then, the sociograms and choice matrix on which they were based were displayed to the class members. Finally, the reasons for the choices—selections and rejections—were discussed.

So that we are clear, the main objective of the experiment was not to produce a more effective exercise (although that was one result), but to provide a vehicle for examining the tele in the group. We could have employed any criterion of choice (e.g., "With whom would you like to sing a duet?"). That would

have served the purpose of producing the choices and the subsequent exploration just as well, so long as the full sociometric process was followed.

The Impact of Experiencing the Strong Sociometry Experiment

After the sociograms were presented and the warm-ups to the choices explored, class members wrote brief reaction papers about their experiences. The following quotes are representative of the students' reactions to the feedback process afforded by the sociometry in one specific case, the sociometric assignment of partners for doing an empty chair exercise.

Before they participated in the experiment described, students' attitudes toward "strong" sociometry were characterized by statements such as these:

Initially, my experience with the sociometric exercise was characterized by considerable fear of being rejected as well as a sense of discomfort with the process of shifting to a deeper level of interaction with other group members.

First, I was uncomfortable saying with whom I would rather not interact. To do so seemed to obligate me to state why I didn't choose that person.

I felt exposed—my views and feelings about other group members were out in the open.

As the process continued, the students' views changed, as is evident from the following statements:

However, as the exercise progressed, I began to feel a sense of excitement, a feeling of liberation, although I was no more comfortable than when the exercise began. The sense of liberation came from knowing where I stood with others in the group, and that they knew where they stood with me. There was little, if any, room left for pretense.

The effect of knowing what choices were made by whom was very interesting.

By implementing the choices made by each group member, the consequences of choosing were made explicit. . . . Seeing the choices implemented made me confront myself and my choices.

Statements made by the students at the end of the process seemed to indicate that the students had gained personal, interpersonal, and technical insights:

The first thing I learned about myself with this exercise was that I am considerably less honest in my relationships than what I'd like to be.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that I was not deeply hurt by the rationale given to me about being rejected. I felt calm and secure in my sense of self. I discovered that there will be persons who will choose me and persons who will reject me, perhaps for the same reasons.

When we were together in class during the ensuing weeks, it stayed in the back of my mind what people had chosen each other and the groups from which I was excluded. I learned that I did not mind not having been selected by certain peo-

ple but was quite concerned that those whom I did not choose would understand why. By that time, I had figured out the reasons for my choices and it was important that those group members involved knew the reasons. I wouldn't want them to guess some negative intent on my part and possibly have hurt feelings.

I presumed that, like me, they had some relatively simple non-personal motive for not choosing me. I did, however, feel more allied with the person who did choose me and found myself making more of an effort to speak to the person who was not selected by anyone lest they feel left out of the group.

I learned that I can be comfortable with my decisions and choices, even ones that include "rejecting" others . . . I can be and am comfortable with being "accepted" and "rejected" by others . . . one can always rationalize the actions of others, but hearing the other person verbalize the rationale behind their choices is more comforting to me.

I learned that viewing other people when they were feeling uncomfortable resulted in my wanting to rescue them.

Observations

After considering the students' remarks, we made two general observations. First, we concluded that those who experienced the use of strong sociometry gained insight into themselves, others, and the process of choosing. Second, we recognized that there was attendant discomfort among the students from participating in the experience.

The two issues that engendered the strongest reactions involved the choosing experience. Specifically, these reactions focused on the rejections. There have been instances where one's being chosen, especially as the "star," brought a negative response because of the responsibility that person felt for the group. Regardless of the reality that both aspects of choosing are consistently part of day-to-day life and that those involved in the process can understand this truth cognitively, we observed that making the choices explicit produced discomfort. Although we recognized that not all discomfort is dysfunctional and that it can provide motivation for putting feedback in a usable form, we concluded that we had not answered the question of how to reduce discomfort to a utilitarian level so that the gains made from employing sociometry are not outweighed by the energy necessary to cope with the uneasiness.

Cautions

We have labeled Morenean sociometry "strong" because of the impact it can have on individuals. Although this approach has great potential for providing input necessary for growth and change, it has the potential to be harmful. Those involved may not be psychologically stable and may become dysfunctional after receiving the feedback.

People are wary of getting and giving feedback for good reason. The reality of not being chosen and of not choosing someone must be dealt with. The strong sociometry technique, particularly if insensitively and ineptly used, can be very detrimental to participants and viewed by some as an attack, real or imagined, on one's defenses.

We hope that knowing the reasons behind the choices will help the people receiving the feedback to sort it and to use it for what it is worth to them. Because we work with therapist trainees, we have often assumed that they can process the feedback they receive. Sometimes we have been wrong. The outcome has been distressing, both for the recipient of the input and for the rest of the group. Such drawbacks can be avoided by attending to the manner in which the reasons for the choices are presented.

Conclusion

We contend that the application of Moreno's (1951, 1953) theories of strong sociometry provides an effective tool for promoting self-knowledge, interpersonal and intrapsychic insight, and concomitant motivation and backing for change. However, without awareness of the possible negative side effects and without adequate precautions, the applications can be painful and even harmful. In addition to the focus on the warm-up to the use of strong sociometry, which we have emphasized here, some minor modifications in the sociometric process should decrease the chances of engendering detrimental results. Research, however, will be necessary to determine whether such modifications to Moreno's formulation, when implemented, might significantly dilute the positive effects of his sociometric theories.

REFERENCES

- Moreno, J. L. (1951). *Sociometry, experimental method and the science of society: An approach to a new political orientation*. Ambler, PA: Beacon House, Inc./Horsham Foundation.
- Moreno, J. L. (1953). *Who shall survive? Foundations of sociometry, group psychotherapy and sociodrama* (2nd ed.) Beacon, NY: Beacon House.
- Remer, R., Lima, G. C., Richey, S. R., White, S., & Gentile, T. J. (1993). *Using strong sociometry to teach sociometry*. Unpublished manuscript. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky.

RORY REMER
GERALDO C. LIMA
STEPHEN R. RICHEY-SUTTLES
STEVEN WHITE
TERESA J. GENTILE
University of Kentucky