Abstract: Focuses on the ability of clinical sociometry to define relationships and space between people in family systems. Themes of construction of meaning, intensity, time and space; Forms of sociometry which track people's construction of events in time by the use of spatial correlates; Argument that people's lives are shaped through interpretation of experience over time.

CLINICAL SOCIOMETRY TO DEFINE SPACE IN FAMILY SYSTEMS

ABSTRACT. If living systems incorporate only such new information as is consonant with their existing structures, there is room, the author contends, for sociometry to be classified as an "approved provider" of non-alien information. In this article, the author focuses on (a) the themes of construction of meaning, intensity, time, and space; (b) outlines forms of sociometry to track people's construction of events in time (their stories) by the use of spatial correlates; and (c) suggests that because time and space inescapably constitute human existence, people's lives are shaped, even constituted, through interpretation of experience over time. The

nature of their stories, or constructs-in-time, determine real directions in their lives and relationships. Examples are given throughout from family therapy.

WHEN A THERAPIST ENTERS A CLIENT'S WORLD and proposes that things can be different from what they are, sometimes that client shuts down. How can this be? Maturana and Varela (1980) propose that living systems are autonomous, self-creating organizations that simply go on being themselves in their own way. If they are too disturbed by something outside, that disturbance is perceived as a threat to autonomy, and the system spits out the intruder or intruding idea. Therapists call this resistance. When a disturbance comes from outside that seems to enhance the system's autonomy, the system will reform around that disturbance. It makes a new configuration; it means something different to itself.

Enter the sociometrist. Appropriate sociometric interventions can extend systems' definitions of themselves and allow room for change. Sociometrists are measurers, strategically neutral persons who recognize a system according to all its connections and do not try to change it. The practice of sociometry involves neither the desire nor the need to change that which is being mapped. Sociometrists do not need to know how to live better than the client system does or presume to know that system better than it knows itself. With luck, a sociometrist does not have to be spat out of the system.

Because sociometry only measures, the sociometrist is able to accept and confirm another system as it is. The neutrality of the measurer or metrician allows the family to define itself and to choose a way of being that may suit it better than the old way. At the end, the sociometrist and the family can peacefully leave each other when their work is finished; each party is aware that it seeks nothing from the other.

Defining the Systemic Process by Sociometry

Systemic therapy attends to the way meanings are constructed out of social interaction--the tunes we collectively make up and then dance to. The subject of the therapy can be an individual, a couple, a family, or a larger organization--no matter. Systemic therapy, like psychodrama, focuses more on relationships, systems, and space between people than on intrapsychic processes. Moreno's original notion of role was decidedly interpersonal: "[T]he functioning form the individual assumes in the specific moment he [sic] reacts to a specific situation in which persons or objects are involved" (1964, p. iv). Only by recognizing the interaction of roles within a family does one have a chance of recognizing the system's unique way of being itself. The therapist and the clients must consider these questions:

What is more important in this family--academic success or a rich emotional life?

When people in this family argue, does it mean they care more about each other or less?

When she is crying, do you think she is being stubborn in her attempts to gain a foothold on the attention of this family, or do you think she is spontaneously expressing raw emotional pain?

Sociometry is a measure of companionships and changes in companionships. As an instrument of movement, it charts emotional relationships in perpetual motion. To record is also to create. Information, although emanating from the observed system, is created about the patterns that connect people--alliances, triangles, and shifting emotional currents, which are the contours of interpersonal space (Williams, 1991). When the actual and hypothetical connections between people are recognized, the system can expand its domain. The release of information is of a circular nature that matches the circular nature of causality in a group of people. Solutions or proposals for betterment are not necessary. The solutions are there already and can be activated when the domain is expanded and when there is room to move.

The sociometric mentality can well suit family therapy: Relations of space, time, energy, and movement are critical to systemic ideas of human behavior. Physical and visual sociometry, however, is under exploited in family therapy. With the exception of Virginia Satir, few high-profile family therapists seem to be aware of the possibility of translating systems theory into physical form, using space and of allowing spatial metaphors to stand for human relationships. Yet questions that family therapists routinely ask, in order to help the family define the system for itself--Who in the family enjoys stealing the most? If the fighting stopped, who would experience the greatest sense of emptiness, of the void? Who would be the first to recognize that Debbie runs away because she wants her father and mother to get close?--are truly companion-measures and can be regarded as sociometric. Family members can answer in different ways: conversationally or by drawing on a whiteboard or by moving across the room and taking up particular positions.

Deepening the Systemic Process With Action

People do not have to be very long together before their problems become locked on linguistic rails, switched into circuits leading to leaden conclusions--the same conclusions they reached an hour ago, last week, or last year. Using words alone, family members are less likely to surprise one another by what they say--they have heard it all before.

They may have heard it all before, but certainly, they have not seen it all before. Sociometry, especially when it is performed in action, carries a new meaning out of the dark and says "Boo!" In moving over a map of meaning (which just a second ago was only a carpet in a therapist's office), the body's swing induces a swing of the mind. Members take a position in interpersonal space that represents their position in inner space: They compare their opinions, values, and choices with the opinions, values, and choices of their intimates. Bodies and consciousness swing together. Meaning becomes so strangely personal, so obviously interpersonal. The room itself becomes a matrix of belief.

Freed from their blanket of words, the underlying emotional tracks on which the family runs emerge into the open. Now that these tracks, and where they lead, glint in the light, the compulsion to follow them goes: This is not the way it has to be; it is simply the way it was. New pathways can be made, explored, and placed beside the old, so that the way it was and the way it may be can be compared. Which way of being suits members better? Who was most attached to the old ways? Whom did the old ways most protect? Who went on the old way because some other loved person was already on it? These types of questions help the system to define itself to itself. The sociometrist is not recommending anything but is simply providing ways for people to describe their relationships.

Sociometry's secret is the use of space to represent other factors--time, valency, intensity. Scaling represents the simplest form of recording difference in degree. One of the most frequently used methods in the modern brief therapies (e.g., de Shazer, 1988), scaling is heaven-sent for action methods. Unlike talk therapists who do scaling, action-methods practitioners are able not only to ask about differences but also to have them enacted. It is easy work for a sociometrist to make space represent time or intensity or division of opinion. For example:

Peter, who complains of "feelings of inadequacy" because of his poor relationship with his father, is asked physically to create a ten-point scale with 10 representing "Extreme confidence--no approval-seeking behaviour," and I standing for "Total lack of confidence, and always behaving in an approval-seeking manner." He places himself on 5, the position he feels himself to occupy most of the time. In the interview-in-role, he describes his experience at that level. When asked whether he has ever been less than a 5, Peter says that in his day, he has been at a 3. He moves to that spot, and is again interviewed in role, describing all his feelings, beliefs, actions and relationships with other people at a 3. Then, back at 5, he elaborately describes how he

made the transition from a 3 to a 5, with the therapist "responding to responses" (White, 1986) and amplifying Peter's personal agency by attributing success to himself. He is then asked where he would be on the scale to be happy with himself. Peter says "A nine!" He moves up the scale, point by point, describing the difference between a 5 and a 6, a 6 and a 7. Curiously, he looks increasingly uncertain as he moves up the scale-- embarrassed almost. He says he does not know what a 10 would be like, and is fairly vague about a 9, or even an 8. "Perhaps a seven would do me pretty good," he says. Two months later, Peter commented that by looking at where he was and where he had come from, he realized how he had changed. He had been "too idealistic" about where he wanted to be: "I was not accepting where I was at, and that was creating a lot of inner conflict ... the ability to accept being at where I am now sunk right into my psyche ... it felt stupid to be otherwise."

This linear form of sociometry concerned difference in degree, which is one of the most frequently garnered types of difference in therapy (How bad is your depression--on a ten-point scale? Show the amount you have been most hassled by your children compared with the amount you are now hassled by them.). It is not, however, particularly circular in its conception. More circular forms, and the reason for them, will be discussed later.

Sociometry provides "hot" knowledge to its consumers and their therapists. It provides "cool" knowledge, too. Even while it so vividly immerses people in experience, it simultaneously shows them the system that is their context. Non-interventive sociometry, providing information on one's system as it is without gloss, can enable people to transcend that system and create a new one. Giving a sort of read-out of the system as is allows room for creating new patterns and thus changing the system. The sociometrist disturbs the system by asking questions about what is and what will be. These questions provide room for existing definitions and new definitions to be generated, if desired.

The Social Construction of Reality

Sociometrists are not interested in truth, only in interactions, opinions, and choices, which is just as well. In making an argument for the use of sociometry in clinical settings, one needs three preliminary propositions. The first is to assert a constructivist rather than a structural view of our knowledge of the world; because these constructions have a temporal base (past, present, future), they may be called "stories" or narratives. The second is to suggest that any changes in the world of living creatures comes about as a response to information, and that information consists of the perception of difference. And the third is to assert that influence in a group, such as a family, occurs and is best tracked in a circular fashion.

Social Construction of Reality

Contemporary systemic practitioners favor a constructivist view of reality, that is, that although it is acknowledged that there is a reality, we cannot know it and have no absolute access to it. Instead, we construct it, primarily through interpretations emerging in dialogue with other people. In the postmodern word, the search for universal truths has given way to an acceptance of the validity of an ever-changing collection of local narratives (Rorty, 1990). We do not make up reality on our own; rather, it is a mixture of personal, social, and cultural ingredients.

The basis of sociometric investigation is not a psyche which is bound up with the individual's organism but individual organisms moving around in space in relation to other things or other organisms also moving around them in space. (Moreno, 1953, p. 178)

Because we cannot know reality, we also cannot know how someone else ought to be; social construction theory repudiates the idea that there is only one fight way to live, to be a family, to be a group, to be a group

member, or to be a therapist.

Even emotion, experienced so personally, participates in lived, interaction-al process (Harre, 1986): a social, linguistic, and physiological process that draws its resources from the human body, from the meanings that people create around an event, and from the world that surrounds a person. Likewise with memory--the structure of the social world and the recaller's place within it constrain and give shape to emotional experiences themselves. Our identity, our very selfness, is a story we tell and get told. If understanding takes place in the intersubjective realm, then it follows that change in understanding also takes place within that realm. This is where sociometry is most useful because it maps the intersubjective realm and illuminates transactional patterns.

Perception of Difference

In the material world, linear notions of causality--A causes B--are sometimes adequate to provide explanation for events, at least simple ones. Where A is some force, such as a cue striking a billiard ball, B, the effect on B can be predicted, and the impact of the cue might be said to have caused the rolling of the ball. In the world of the living--trees, tigers, ants--linear notions, however, do not apply. The members of that world, to be sure, are subject to physical causality, such as gravity. But when one moves even slightly outside of physics, to a change of temperature perhaps, then the living respond to the difference by sweating or growing goose bumps or moving to the shade or the sun or fanning themselves or turning their leaves sideways or going for a dip. The response-list could go on, but billiard balls they are not. A living being might have one or scores of tactics simply to deal with something as simple as a change of temperature.

Far less do linear notions of causality apply when the living are such full-time meaning-makers as human beings. Persons certainly respond in ways that a billiard ball cannot ever be said to have responded. Sure, they respond to information about difference, such as change in temperature, by physiological means, just as tigers do. They might make a decision to go swimming or put on a coat. But sociometrists are interested in when they interact with each other. People bump up against each other most of the time, either directly or in their imagination. They also adapt meaning systems from each other--culturally and ethnically, in families and in groups. For the most part it is simply not successful to suggest that one person's behavior causes another's because (a) that person responds from one of many options available, depending on how he or she construed the meaning of the event; and (b) the causality is to a degree circular, so that it might equally be said that the response causes the stimulus (I leave out in this discussion structures of power with respect to gender and economics, but see Hoffman [1990] and therapeutic writers such as White and Epston [1989] who have developed ideas for therapeutic conversations based on Foucault's notions of power and structure.)

At the level of the sociometrist's interest, then, human beings respond to information, which always comes in the guise of difference or change. Crucial differences are those between human beings or differences within the same human being at one time versus another; difference in intensity; difference in motivation, intent, values, or gender; differences in the amount that two people are loved by a third person, and so on. Where differences make a difference, they are called information, and human beings, says Bateson (1979) respond to information. Relevant differences (information) usually involve a relationship between two or more people, or two or more events or things, or one person at one time versus at another time. Once again, action methods and sociometry are ahead of the field in their ability to represent differences.

Circularity and Sociometry

The notion of circularity is critical to understanding systems functioning. A circular explanation of events suggests that members of a human group are constantly involved in circuits of interaction based on existing meaning. In performing actions from assumptions based on these meanings, the group members in turn create further meaning. Often, this new meaning is just the same as the old. Members wish to arrive at a new story but keep coming up with the old.

Members of the group are said to exercise recursive influence on each other--that is, A influences B who influences C who influences A, and so on. As this kind of talk becomes somewhat uninterestingly abstract, let us start with an example, follow it through in theory, and return to some sociometric questions that might be asked. Please note that much of this theory and many of these questions would also apply to other groups of people who have been together for a time, such as a therapy group or an organization.

Annie is a 21-year-old hospital orderly living at home with her 18-year-old brother, Mark, and their parents. Annie has had several sessions in hospital for anorexia and obsessive behavior and, although she exchanges necessary words with other people, will mostly speak only to her father.

A sociometrist might note from this brief description the possibilities of an alliance between Annie and father and between mother and son. It would depend on one's therapeutic timing whether one sociometrically enacted this apparent division. My own sense is that early enactment would be rather crude and that it is preferable to trace the evolution of meanings in the family, especially around the main story, "Annie is sick."

Although the behavior and story of one family member (Annie) inevitably influences the behavior and story of the others, it cannot be said that it causes the behavior and story of others for the following reasons:

1. People respond primarily to meaning or information, that is, their interpretations of behavior rather than the behavior itself.
2. These interpretations, or stories, arise from the story the group tells about that person (e.g., "Annie is the sick one in this family;" "Annie is dependent on her father;" "Annie's problems stop mother's going out to work").
3. Some of these interpretations are not accessible to consciousness.
4. Ways of interpreting actions (stories about action) are gathered not only from that group but from other groups--that is to say, the life experience to date of all parties. For example, a teenage girl's interpretation of herself as being "fat" even though she is manifestly thin is more than an individual interpretation; it is mixed up with told and untold stories of gender and culture.
5. Individuals act on the system but are, at the same, time influenced by the communications they receive from the system, which is influenced by the communications they give to it, and so on ad infinitum. This last proposition would hold for Annie, for Mark, for father, and for mother.

Let us take two of the stories that the family tells about Annie and that Annie no doubt tells about herself: "Annie is dependent on father," and "Annie had trouble at school ." The meanings and behaviors a family enacts form patterns; systemic sociometrists (Is the word "systemic" redundant when one writes the word "sociometrist?" Let us hope so.) Lay open those patterns for the family to see. The revelation of the patterns invites the family to rethink and reorganize around a new pattern. So, when the family says, "Annie is dependent on her father," the (sociometric) question can be asked: Who is more stuck in the relationship-- Annie or her father? Stuckness is taken from its context of a thing in Annie and placed in a new context--that of relationship. If Annie is stuck on father, father might be stuck on Annie; one cannot be dependent on one's own.

The comparative nature of the question (more stuck) alerts members to the difference, and the circular nature of the questioning may start to introduce a circular definition of events. When criteria imply that everything is somehow connected to everything else, certainties begin to crumble.

Annie's stuckness on her father, and her father's (greater or less--let us not worry about the answers the family gave) stuckness on Annie could lead to another set of questions around the context of this stuckness; that is, what is the effect on other people of their being stuck on each other, and what would happen if they were not? In other words, who does it help when Annie is dependent on her father?

Here a different kind of definition is again invited: the notion that if Annie were dependent on father this might help someone else. This is a new sociometric criterion, around which the family may arrange themselves. One might shift the mapping to a hypothetical future, still around this reported dependency, and ask these questions:

If Annie were not dependent on her father, would father be more or less close to mother?

If father were not dependent on Annie, would Mark be more or less successful at school?

The sociometrist/family therapist might then move to one of the other stories about Annie--that she had trouble at school. (A "story," remember, does not mean that something is untrue. It is simply a construct that has a past, a present, and a future.) The question could be: Does saying that Annie had trouble at school imply that she has less of a problem at home? Any statement of an "is," a fact, can invite comparison with the "non-is." The concern for sociometrists is not so much the event in itself but the information value of the event and especially the circuits of interaction around that information.

Let us say that one of the meanings of Annie's trouble at school was that mother stayed home from work. Did Annie cause her mother to stay home from work? If this question were asked directly (which is inadvisable because it keeps the family in exactly the sorts of meanings in which they are already involved and which are not proving useful to them), the family might say yes. Because of their existing meaning structures, they cannot possibly say no. But a mother's staying home from work when a child is sick is actually a performance of meaning; these meanings are garnered culturally from stories about mothers, from stories about mothers within the family, and from stories about ill children from mothers themselves. Elaborations of these meanings might become the basis for the next set of criteria:

Does mother stay home because Annie is sick, or does Annie become sick because mother chooses to stay home?

Would father be more or less pleased if mother had a full-time career?

Is Mark's career more enhanced or less so by his mother's staying home?

Circular questions, remarks Tomm (1988, p. 8), tend to be characterized by a general curiosity about the possible connectedness of events that include the problem, rather than by a specific need to know the precise origins of the problem. Annie does not cause her mother to stay home; the family chooses to respond, out of a universe of possible responses to Annie's sickness, by the mother's staying home. These responses form patterns that can be mapped sociometrically, either with words (merely getting verbal answers to the questions), on paper or on whiteboard, or in action.

Types of Criteria for Assessing Differences

Having expanded, albeit briefly, on some of the constructs regarding how people know reality and the circular nature of causality in human systems, I wish now to focus more specifically on some of the types of criteria that may be posed to families or groups: differences in degree, differences in perception of relationships, and differences in time.

Differences in Degree

So far, the work of the social constructionists has been used to speculate on the nature of our perception of reality and the work of Bateson has been used to suggest that, physical forces such as gravity aside, human beings change as a result of new information, be it a matter of difference in temperature or difference in opinion. The first set of sociometric criteria, therefore, might concern differences and similarities in degree. Issues of race, class, gender, and culture can be included:

Do you think you are more open about your arguments than most families or less?

Do you think, as a Catholic family, that you come more under the influence of guilt than other Catholic families, or less?

Who most subscribes to the view that it is OK for there to be one kind of treatment for poor families, and another kind for wealthy families?

Who in this family is most likely to believe that young women should attempt to look like figures on an advertising billboard?

Who thinks that it is right that when a man comes home from work he is tired and in need of relaxation, and when a woman comes home all she wants to do is see her family and prepare their food?

Our sensory systems find it difficult to detect gradual change; so, although we might know differences (which, you will recall, when important enough to us, become news or information), we may not know them until asked about them or until the differences are compressed in some way so that they are brought sharply into contrast.

The therapist might give these directions to a group: If he had realized how many people think about suicide at some stage or other in their lives, would John be more or less comforted? Stand here if you think he would be more comforted, and here if you think he would be less comforted. I would like to suggest that these contrasts account for the surprise element in sociometry. Until we place ourselves on a line, we do not know where we are in the line. The other part of the surprise, of course, is where the other people are.

Suppose that a father thinks that if he beats his children more, they will misbehave less. The sociometrist can flip the explanation and look at the other side. He might ask:

If you lost your temper less, do you think your children would still do the things they do or would they be less inclined to do them?

If your mother realized, deep down, that you appreciated the things she did for you, would it be easier or more difficult for her to say goodbye to you?

Would it be easier or more difficult for her to tolerate some of your mistakes?

(To father): If you were to recognize that you lost your temper and went too far in your caring for your children, do you think they would respect you more or less?

Difference-in-degree questions need not only be asked about persons; they can address things, values, and constructs themselves, all in aid of the family's defining itself. Questions might be raised about the degree to which various biological, social, and psychological factors might be operating in the family. For example, if a family member is stealing, it may be useful to inquire as to who in the family steals the most (where "stealing" might come to mean emotional theft), but it can also be useful to ask the values of the members around the stealing. Let us suppose the issue had been discussed for some time, and various members had views on just how bad a thing stealing was. Questions may best be put in circular fashion--that is, not directly to the person involved, but to one person about others. For example, the therapist should ask: Do you think X (your brother, your mother, your sister, your father) sees stealing more as morally wrong or more as socially destructive or more as a sick compulsion? Who most believes that anorexia nervosa will continue to run Sarah's life? Who in the family least believes that? These questions can help to clarify underlying assumptions about the nature of the problem. The family members identify their domain. The members define themselves as they are, but along dimensions supplied by the therapist. They make connections and discover possibilities that have not occurred to them before.

Differences in Perception of Relationships

Questions about perception of relationships are slightly different from questions about intensity in which members arrange themselves on a line according to the potency of their beliefs. Relationship questions provide information about alliances, coalitions, and stuck points within the family or group. Obviously, the information does not only go to the therapist or group leader. The main receivers of the news are the members themselves. The sociometrist need not necessarily "do" anything with this information because the information is about difference and because it helps to define the group as it is. The information itself becomes a powerful component in the change process.

Other sociometric processes familiar in action-methods circles might be disjunctive sociograms. The therapist might give these directions to the group: Stand to this side if you believe that Paul's attempts to kill himself are because he is angry at someone, and stand to that side if you believe it is because he is depressed. The therapist could develop three sociograms by suggesting that anyone who feels that something motivates Peter to attempt suicide should stand over there. The sociometrist introduces new connections or distinctions in thought and action by placing together previously unconnected bits of information in the questions asked. By the information alone, the family or group members may be stimulated to create a new pattern for themselves. Information, in the form of difference, which is the form of sociometry called companion/measure, changes the receiver. In sociometry, the members are both the givers and receivers of information; together with the therapist, they engage in a process of collective knowledge construction.

Inquiry about differences in perception of relationships can also take the form of differences between individuals (e.g., Who gets most annoyed when Philip is praised?) and differences between relationships (e.g., Is Sam (the group leader) closer to Mavis or to Angie?). Not every member need necessarily take an active part in a sociometric process, especially when that process is one of questioning, to which rapid verbal answers are given. Sociometric maps do not always have to be printed; they can exist in people's minds as well. The process of asking questions of one family member in the presence of others only apparently places the others in the role of observers. They do observe, to be sure, but it is not quite accurate to say that they are observers. As well as seeing and hearing the responses that the others give, they obtain information from their own private responses to the questions and they note the differences between these private responses and the actual responses that have been given. They also note differences between how the addressee did respond and how they as observers may have anticipated the response (Tomm, 1987, p. 176).

Differences in Time

There does not seem to be a human problem--or, at least, a psychological human problem--without a temporal dimension. Time is lived differently according to the person, the place, and the circumstances. Time does not have the same consistency when one has a migraine or when one is asleep, on holiday, or watching a movie. Temporal differences refer to changes that have occurred or might occur in the interval between two points in time. These differences can be represented in words or by space. Indeed, it is often in the compression of time, or, as White (1986) calls it, "collapsing time," that two things or events or sets of relationships can be brought sharply against each other so that the difference between them can be noted. The case report presented here illustrates some of the questions that can be asked about time. Later, these questions will be broken into divisions--past and past, past and present, past and future, present and future, and two futures.

Weary Penny. Twenty-one-year-old Penny, the eldest of four children, lives at home with her parents. At the first interview, she appears to the therapist as "loaded and weary." She was referred by a friend because she had been many times suicidal in her final year at school and had once again attempted suicide 3 months ago. She feels "hopeless about the future."

The therapist asks Penny: In what ways does your surrender to hopelessness place your future in your own hands, and in what ways does it place it in the hands of others? The therapist next asks Penny to consider what new possibilities would open up for her if she were to side more with this new picture of herself as a person?

Here hopelessness is externalized (White, 1986), and Penny is asked to make a judgment on the effects of her surrender to it. Hopelessness, which was right up against her, part of her, constituting her, suddenly is at one step removed. These questions about hopelessness need to be considered: Does your emptiness invite others to participate more fully in your own life? Do you think Penny's emptiness invites others to participate more fully in her life? Do you think she will be a slave to her past or master of it?

She needs to leave home but construes the world as bad and frightening. Her 16-year-old sister is bulimic and was raped when she was 14. She attempted suicide last year. Her mother, an ambitious and successful career woman, was also raped when she was 14. Penny says that she gets her fear of the world from her mother.

When asked to describe the voice telling her that she is no good, Penny calls it "the incarcerating voice." The therapist asks for the origins of the voice, and together they begin to deconstruct it (past). By asking Penny to continue with her explorations of the origins of the voice, she works across time and continues to objectify and make strange what has been the all-too-familiar. Asking Penny her opinion of the opinion of the voice continues this process (the present). As the separation from the voice becomes clearer, it becomes more possible for her to orient herself to pans of her experience not accounted for by the voice (present and past). Further questions, such as: If there were some unfinished business between you and the voice, who would be the first to raise it? and Suppose it was impossible for your father to admit his meanness of spirit to you, how long would it take you to become generous of spirit to yourself?, move to the future.

In systems with rigid transactions, time stands still. "Time is arrested because pertinent information no longer circulates, and pertinent information does not circulate because time is arrested" (Ausloos, 1986, p. 552). The past cannot be used as a resource for living in the present, either because it has become rooted in an unchanging story that is transformed into tradition or myth or because it is forgotten as rapidly as it happens. Plans cannot be made, either because what is planned will change nothing or because it is impossible to

predict the incidents that might occur between the planning and the event. Both types of systems can only live in the present, without a future.

Investigating the past is one of therapy's standard procedures. As Gibney (1988, p. 185) remarked "Time and space, timelessness and spacelessness, families staying the same while professionals entertain themselves with the collection of 'objective data'...--these phenomena weave through much of clinical practice." Too constant an exploration of the past can unwittingly flag a message we may not wish to signal: It can make the observed system seem necessary. The client may think: "Since only this reality, this story exists, it is the only one possible." Rather than a deterministic approach to time and memory, where the past creates the present, it may be preferable to have a narrative view (Bruner, 1986) in which the present creates the past. That means that, to a degree, what we believe about the past constitutes the past. We read the past and the future according to our story.

Sociometrically, the components of past, present, and future can be worked on simultaneously. The relations between past and present start to change because they are seen from a different point of view: If the past can be different, which is to say, can be seen differently, a different future can be predicated on it. (Again, I exclude from this statement several matters, including those of sexual violence, where detailed political and gender-based critique is essential.) The premise for change becomes the co-creation of a series of possible worlds and possible stories from a universe of possible stories (Parry, 1991).

Categories for Questions Concerning Difference in Time

Tomm (1984) proposes some categories of temporal difference, and I will follow these for the remainder of the discussion, giving illustrations of each category.

Past and Past. When people have been stuck in problematic patterns for a long time, they may be making crucial distinctions with unwarranted certainty. Simply having the domain defined can, in itself, allow movement and ease their ability to entertain different distinctions. Sample questions might include: Were Peter and Les closer before Harry left home, or after he left? When grandfather became ill, was Lucy closer to Mary or to Jack? Given that all families have problems dealing with anger, when did you first realize yours was just like other families?

When perception changes, reality changes too. Likewise, when a sociometrist asks, Who noticed the "symptom" first?, the element of time enters the otherwise fixed notion of symptom, and the symptom starts to be regarded less as a thing and more as an interaction or even a message from someone to someone. For example, Who noticed that Tom was going downhill and beginning to avoid people?

When sociometrists show a system as it is, according to all its connections, they provide a domain in which the system experiences the freedom to choose the particular way it will organize itself. This domain offers an opportunity for self-creation. The recognition or acceptance of a system's unique way of being itself effectively frees the system to respond to the presenting problem more freely. It acknowledges that the system itself is the only valid source of resources for dealing with threats to survival. Such thoughts, presumably, also lie behind the use of the mirror in psychodrama and empathy in conventional therapy.

Past and Present. Whenever a sociometrist asks questions--When did you begin thinking this way? or How long have you been having these ideas?-the client's perception becomes connected to a particular moment in time. The problem is thus defined as it was; the question implies that there was a time before which no problem existed and after which it may no longer exist. Now the problem is relativized, and it may start to lose its hold.

The therapist might ask these questions: When did Angela (a self-starving adolescent) decide to lose her appetite? If this line represents her whole life, can you stand on a spot when that time was? Do Peter and Les fight more now, or did they fight more when Harry was still with the group?

Various means have been devised for recording temporal aspects of family history. The standard genogram format may give dates but does not show temporal patterns directly. As Friedman, Rohrbaugh, and Krakauer (1988) remarked, coincidences of life events, relational repercussions of loss, and life-cycle fit--the timing of marriages, births, and so forth--can be easily missed. These authors proposed a time-line genogram, in which the vertical axis is a time scale extending back many years, perhaps even 100 or more. Duhl (1981) developed a chronological chart, a grid for recording experiences and reactions of family members over time. Stanton (1992) described his method for graphically clarifying the relationship between life-cycle events and the onset of problems.

In activities such as "A Walk Down Memory Lane," a couple simply walks a time line representing the period from the day that they first met until the present. Each step represents a significant event or decision. Each person has the fight to describe the significance of the next step. If it had been a step for one of them, it is still taken as a step by both, even though it may have been insignificant for the partner. The couple can take as many steps as they like, so long as they keep the events in chronological order (Williams 1989). This sort of format makes use of a linear construct of time according to which the past seems to determine the present and constrain the future. Nevertheless, it is of some comfort for a couple to see where they have been and where they are now. The present makes sense to them in the light of the small steps of their history--this is when they decided to get engaged; this is when they bought the house; this is when one of them considered an affair; this is when they decided to have a baby, but could not; this is when their first, their second child was born; this is when grandpa died and they went into crisis, and so on. Taking people through their personal history--the history of their marriage, the history of their depression, their athletic history, their spiritual history, or whatever-- is a fine example of hands-off sociometry. The couple's premises and actions are not under scrutiny; they simply walk a line leading to the present. Blame is absent. Symptoms, which may have made the family confused and upset, become understandable. The family shows only "what is," but in the very showing, a domain of freedom is provided, and necessity's grim grip loosens.

Past and Future. Therapy might well direct people's attention to the past, but it does so in order to deconstruct present beliefs about how the system has encouraged the present solutions rather than other ones and what network of interactions have been created around these present solutions. That deconstruction creates the present solutions. Attention might then shift to the future and to the evolution of present relationships into the future, and hypothetical and future questions are generated to introduce alternative readings of the present and the past. Hypothetical questions are posed about the past and the present as the therapist tries to search for other definitions in the past different from those already accepted and to provoke the client to imagining different possibilities. For example, If X had never happened, how would Y be changed now? If A had happened, how would your relationship with B be?

The past is created in the present by more than a single person. It is co-created through interaction, and our immediates and our culture change our vision of the past. Memory is one of those processes that involves the social and emotional construction of selves. Historical memory might be construed as an interpretation of the past shared by most of a culture (Boscolo and Bertrando, 1992, p. 126). The present is the fruit of the past, but because it constantly recreates the past that created it, this new past has an effect on the present.

Present and Future and Two Futures. In the first session with a client or family, it is customary to begin with the present, that is, with the presenting problem and the meanings given to that problem, attempts to solve that problem, and other people who may be involved with the problem, either in the family, workplace, school, and so on. When these meanings are well enough established, the therapist may shift attention to the past, considering how these meanings have evolved over time. What event seemed to precipitate the evolution of these meanings? Who is involved in this network of interactions, and how are they involved? Next, what do these meanings mean for the future, and how do the clients think present relationships will evolve into the future?

Numerous family therapists (e.g., Penn, 1985; Tomm, 1988; White, 1989) have written on questions setting a future, and Chasin, Roth, and Bograd (1989) have published their innovative work in Family Process on dramatizing ideal futures and reformed pasts with couples. Certainly, vital questions for solution-focused therapists concern time in the future--the time beyond the end of therapy. They might ask questions such as the following: When therapy comes to an end, who will be the most upset? Who will have changed the most? Who will most notice those changes? Who will be the most relieved when it is all over?

The future need not be the future that the clients predict. The therapist may introduce different sorts of futures in order to make the past live--e.g., Erikson's "Pseudo Orientation in Time." With chaotic systems, the therapist can give back the past, permitting a future to exist in time. Acting in the future can have several different effects. The therapist can accept the problem as given and as definitive but somehow insinuate a different future by saying, "For the present, it might be premature for you to change," or "For the time being, go on doing things as you are doing now." The future then enters the temporal reality of clients as an unexpected future as if the problem were of no account or as if the problem could lose its validity in time. That is possibly why the Miracle Question (de Shazer, 1988), or variations on it suggested here is so powerful.

- When Bill is no longer threatening suicide, who will be the next person wanting to distract mother from her pain?

- If next week Bill decides that he will go back to work, would father or mother take most of the credit?

- What difference will knowing this about yourself make to your next steps?

White (1989, p. 44) referred to questions regarding the future as "unique possibility questions." These are questions that invite family members to speculate about the new personal and relationship futures that are attached to their new stories about themselves. The questions encourage family members to investigate alternative knowledges of self and relationships and to uncover what hints these alternative knowledges might provide about future possibilities and the steps that might be taken to realize them. "Steps" are always a danger (being close to "goals," i.e., processes that the family is already involved in but are not working out), and so discussion of impending steps is usually accompanied by a debate on the readiness of family members to take the next step. During this process, the new direction becomes more tangible, appearing to take a life of its own. The future, as it were, becomes "now."

Conclusion

Sociometrists holding a constructionist view of the world try to apply that view to their own processes; that is, although they might be skillful at their job, they do not know "reality" either. Lyn Hoffman (1990) prefers to describe her role as "visiting ethnographer" (as opposed to visiting expert) who has no "definition of pathology," no idea of "dysfunctional structures," and no "set ideas about what should or should not change." Sociometrists are skillful at what they do but are not charismatic experts in human living. The intent behind their criteria is

predominantly exploratory. They are measurers, explorers, researchers, journalists, and scientists who chart the uncharted and report the unreported. Their guiding presuppositions are interactional and systemic. Their criteria are formulated to bring out the patterns that connect persons, objects, actions, perceptions, ideas, feelings, events, and beliefs. All of these are grist for the sociometric mill.

Relationships between parts of any system are reciprocal and hence circular. Processes designed to find out about relationships, therefore, need to reflect this circularity. Sociometry, as practiced, already has some of these characteristics, in that it is inherently nonlinear and nonreductionist and is able to encompass the political and cultural as well as the personal. The sociometrist triggers the release of information into a system by inquiring about differences. Ideally, sociometric criteria are designed to reveal clients' structures of meaning; the criteria are set to yield information about differences relating to issues with which the client, family, or group is struggling. The sociometrist does not know what these new meanings will be; nor does the client. In this, they are equal.

REFERENCES

Ausloos, G. (1986). The march of time: Rigid or chaotic transactions. Family Process, 25, 549-557.

Bateson, G. (1979). Mind and nature. New York: Bantam Books.

Boscolo, L., & Bertrando, P. (1992). The reflexive loop of past, present, and future in systemic therapy and consultation. Family Process, 31, 119-130.

Bruner, J. (1986). Actual minds, possible worlds. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Chasin, R., Roth, S., & Bograd, M. (1989). Action methods in systemic therapy: Dramatizing ideal futures and reformed pasts with couples. Family Princess, 28, 121-136.

de Shazer, S. (1988). Clues: Investigating solutions in brief therapy. New York: W. W. Norton.

Duhl, F. (1981). The use of the chronological chart in general systems family therapy. Journal of marital and family therapy, 7, 361-373.

Friedman, H., Rohrbaugh, M., & Krakauer, S. (1988). The time-line genogram: Highlighting temporal aspects of family relationships. Family Process, 27, 293-303.

Gibney, P. (1988). Disintegrating the house that objectivity built. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 9, 183-193.

Harre, R. (Ed.) (1986). The social construction of emotions. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Hoffman, L. (1990). Constructing realities: An art of lenses. Family Process, 29, 1-12.

Maturana, H., & Varela, F. (1980). Autpoiesis and cognition: The realization of the living. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidl.

Moreno, J. (1953). Who shall survive? New York: Beacon House.

Moreno, J. (1964). Psychodrama, Vol I. New York: Beacon House.

Parry, A. (1991). A universe of stories. Family Process, 30, 37-54.

Penn, P. (1985). Feed-forward: Future questions, future maps. Family Process, 24, 299-310.

Rorty, R. (1990). Philosophical papers, Vol I. New York: Cambridge Press.

Stanton, M. (1992). The time-line and the "why now" question: A technique and rationale for therapy, training, organizational consultation and research. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 18, 331-343.

Tomm, K. (1984). One perspective on the Milan Systemic Approach: Part 2, Description of session format, interviewing style and interventions. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 10, 253-271.

Tomm, K. (1987). Interventive interviewing: Part 2. Reflexive questioning as a means to enable self healing. Family Process, 26, 167-183.

Tomm, K. (1988). Interventive interviewing: Part 3. Intending to ask lineal, circular, strategic or reflexive questions? Family Process, 27, 1-5.

White, M. (1986). Negative explanation, restraint, and double description: A template for family therapy. Family Process, 25, 169-184.

White, M. (1989). The process of questioning: A therapy of literary merit? In M. White, Selected papers. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications, pp. 37-46.

White, M., & Epston, D. (1989). Literate means to therapeutic ends. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Williams, A. (1989). The passionate technique: Strategic psychodrama with individuals, families and groups. London: Routledge.

Williams, A. (1991). Forbidden agendas: Strategic action in groups. London: Routledge.

~~~~~~~~

By ANTONY WILLIAMS

ANTONY WILLIAMS is a member of the Department of Psychology at LaTrobe University in Australia. His address is 46 Young, Kew, Victoria 3101, Australia.