

COMBINING ROLE AND SOCIOMETRIC TESTING—
A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

FLORENCE B. MORENO

Psychodramatic Institute, Beacon, N. Y.

THE SITUATION

The present role study has been stimulated by a study made by Leona Kerstetter¹ in which sociometric data had been gathered in connection with the New York University Youth Workshop. This group has organized the East Riviera Youth Council in the East Harlem section of New York City. The recreation program is centered in the Benjamin Franklin High School for boys. A research program which included sociometric testing in the form of a survey assisted in gaining information as to the kind of hobbies the boys chose as well as the companions they wished to share them with.

The survey, including the sociometric test, was given to two groups, both sections of a 9th grade class, ages 13 to 15; one was an average group, the other a low group in I. Q. ratings. The boys, in choosing their companions for hobbies and activities, were not limited to choices within the classroom; they were allowed to choose an unlimited number of companions from anywhere in the city. In the average group, results showed a lack of cohesion in the group, since 58% of the choices were made for boys outside of the group. Of the 42% choices made within the group, 72% were mutual pairs; three of the pairs were mutual first choices. In the low group, the results revealed a still greater lack of cohesion, since 80% of the choices were made for boys outside of the group; 20% of the choices went within the group; 27% of the 26 boys were isolated so far as choices within the group were concerned. The choices coming from outside of the group were not determined. There were no triangles and no pairs.

On the basis of the sociometric findings, an interview scheme which included role testing was planned for members of both groups to uncover the deeper implications in the sociometric data.

The purpose of this study is: 1. To supplement the interview method with individual and group role testing in order to discover the deeper

¹Members of L. M. Kerstetter's psychodrama class, New York University, served as recorders of data.

ramifications of sociometric relationships and to remedy the group's lack of cohesion; 2. To use the results in the present paper as illustrations of role testing methods.

INDIVIDUAL ROLE TESTING

Method: Each boy was tested separately; the roles given to each boy were selected by a jury of five familiar with the cultural setting in which the tests were given. About one hundred roles were listed by the jury as being pertinent in a specific culture. Finally, fifteen out of the hundred were voted upon as being still more specifically related to the culture, and as those roles which the boys should have come into contact with at some time or another. The following roles were used in the present study: policeman, teacher, mother, father, brother, sister, priest, truant officer, gangster, storekeeper, bus driver, landlord, street cleaner, doctor, nurse. During the test, two recorders were present and one boy of college age to act as an auxiliary ego to warm up each boy to role enactment by giving a sample performance of a role configuration, the amount of dialogue, action, etc. He enacted a role which was not listed on the selected fifteen.

The preliminary instructions are an important warming-up process, particularly if they strike the core of children's interests. In our former study on role testing² with the elementary school level, the play level was used by presenting the procedure as a game. In the present study, it seemed appropriate to approach adolescent boys with "getting a job". The role testing would seem, then, a logical way of "trying out" to see how adequate they may be in these jobs, and also to determine their insight into roles taken by other people whom they might have to get along with wherever they are. Therefore, the following explanation of the procedure was given to each boy:

"You remember last semester we conducted a recreational survey to find out your hobbies. You recall that one of them was dramatics. Today we are going to have a special kind of dramatics in which you are going to be allowed to act out these people in different jobs. No matter what job you may get you are going to come into contact with people in many jobs, such as the street cleaner, doctor, taxicab driver, etc. It is important for us to understand all people and one way of doing it is to share the same experiences—to put ourselves in their places and see how it feels to clean the streets, take care of sick people, or drive people around in a taxi and hear their complaints, etc."

²Moreno, F. B. and Moreno, J. L., Role Tests and Role Diagrams.

After the preliminary instructions, the actual role testing began. Each role was introduced to the boy with the following instructions: "Show us what policemen (for example) do". If he hesitated, he was told that he may do anything he wants to do in the way of speaking and acting just as the boy who gave him a sample performance. After he has enacted all of his roles, he is also asked to check from the one hundred roles those he would have chosen if he were allowed a choice. This indicates his role affinities and serves as a means of extending his role range by allowing him to enact roles he particularly chooses.

The individual role tests were given to members of the average group in intelligence but low in group cohesion. Strategic members of the sociogram were chosen as a starting point. Two boys choosing each other exclusively were tested; an isolated boy within his own group and the boy he chose outside of his group were also tested. Four individual tests have been completed in this group at the time of this presentation.

Results: 1. There were not a sufficient number of boys tested to give any significant explanation for the lack of cohesion in the group *as a whole*. However, the results of the role tests given to the mutual pair confirms the assumption in a previous study that compatibility might depend upon the role dominances of one individual being complemented by corresponding role weaknesses. For example, in the case of the pair tested in the present study, the brother and father roles—in fact, most of the masculine roles—were dominant in one individual, while in the other they were weak. Herein it may be added, however, that mutually dominant roles can, in interaction, enhance mutual interests and become a factor in producing mutual attractions, for example, the roles of storekeeper and teacher.

2. As in the previous study of mutual attractions, the role enactments of the one individual were on the whole more dramatic and more fully configured than in the other; the role range of one was greater than the other.

3. In sum, there is no static condition with regard to role relations; the total combination of roles interacting and influenced by the flexibility of individual spontaneity is one determining factor in the compatibility of the mutual pair.

4. As the study continues, pairs, triangles, and isolates can be further defined by the use of the above procedures—the continuing of role tests. On the basis of these, areas of role training can be developed to enhance leadership and group cohesion.

Role Scoring: The criterion of adequate role performance was determined by the jury who selected the fifteen roles. By adequate performance, we meant a role *configuration* which may be a partial one including sufficient characteristic phases to make the role easily recognizable, or which include *all* necessary phases to make it a *complete* configuration. Members of the jury listed role phases to form a characteristic framework as it exists in the culture of those tested. The following is a sample of a typical framework of the role of the policeman including the necessary phases characteristic of the cultural setting where this study took place: (1) traffic policeman; (2) aid or helper; extricator or guide; (3) executor of law and order (with respect to petty crimes, etc.); (4) patrol duty; (5) executor of law and order with respect to more serious crimes (gangsterism, murder, etc.); (6) lawbreaker such as bribe taking, etc.; (7) officer at main police station (reporting to station, etc.). The following is a sample of a subject's performance and its rating:

"Hello, 23rd precinct? Drunkard beating his wife. I'll be over. (Changes position. Knocks on wall.) What's this I hear about your husband beating you? It isn't true? Sorry I bothered you." Answers phone. "What? woman threatens to jump out of the window? Trace that call. I'll be over. Pardon me, woman jumping out of the window. (Walks across stage) Are you the party that called? No? False call? That's the second time—will have to take you in, next time."

After he had enacted the role he was asked if he liked doing it. He stated he did not. This was indicated by a minus (—) sign. He elaborated upon a certain fragment of the role with considerable intensity which was symbolized by two stars (**). As it was not a complete configuration but nevertheless recognizable he received two XX's. Symbolically, his rating for this role would be: —**XX. The number of roles he was able to enact with complete or partial recognition were added to determine his role range. Still further steps are being taken to determine a cultural quotient in which the role score would be calculated in relation to chronological age.

GROUP ROLE TESTING

Methods: Group role testing aims at deriving a quicker, though partial, measure (as compared with individual tests) of the cultural climate of the group. Only three members of the group actually enacted the roles. The individuals in the group voted as to which of the three roles they liked, not on the basis of adequate portrayal, but on the basis, for example, of actually coming into contact with such a policeman, a street cleaner,

or a truant officer. By asking them to record "why" they liked them, role identity was analyzed as well as motivations for choice and personal data. The preliminary instructions were as follows:

"You remember last semester we made a recreational survey to find out your hobbies. You recall that one of them was dramatics. This morning we are going to have a special kind of dramatics in which you are free to express yourselves by pretending that you are people in different jobs. No matter what job you may choose you are going to come into contact with people in many jobs, such as the street cleaner, doctor, taxicab driver, etc. It is important for us to understand all people and one way of doing it is to share the same experiences—to put ourselves in their places and see how it feels to clean the streets, take care of sick people, or drive people around in a taxi and hear their complaints, etc. We are not going to be able to give you all an opportunity "to be" these people, so we are going to choose three boys from your group; each one is going to show us how people of different jobs perform, and then we are going to ask the rest of you to notice which of the three people you liked the best, and in one sentence—why you liked him. We will ask you to write this down *after* the three boys perform."

These instructions are not standardized for all situations. The wording must be changed to meet the cultural "climate" of the classroom as well as the interests of the group. The above instructions would not be appropriate in all schools of differing educational philosophies.

After the preliminary instructions were given, two auxiliary egos (boys of college age³) were asked to give us samples of what we meant by "being" these people. One of the auxiliary egos left the room; the other was instructed: "Show us what the soda jerker does." If he stopped after acting part of the role, he was told to show us more if he could, and that he could go on with his acting as long as he wished. After he had given his performance, the next auxiliary ego was called in and given the same instructions. After the two enactments, the group was told, as a trial before the actual procedure, to write down which of the two *soda jerkers* they liked the best, imagining that they would actually meet them in a drug store. These two highly dramatic presentations warmed the group up so that they seemed eager to participate; they also had the opportunity to attain a perception of role configurations, the amount of verbalizations, action, etc.

³Members of L. M. Kerstetter's class in psychodrama, New York University, functioned as auxiliary egos.

Three boys, A, B, and C were selected on the basis of their positions in the sociogram; A and B were isolates, and C was the most chosen. They were asked to come to the front of the room and were told that they were going to be the performers. A was to be the first performer, so B and C were told to leave the room so that each of their performances would be a new experience. After A, B, and C had each enacted the role of the policeman, the group was asked, as in the sample, to write down which *policeman* they liked the best, and (2) to tell "why" they liked him; the same procedures were used for the roles of street cleaner and truant officer. These three roles were chosen from the fifteen used in the individual tests, because they represented two contrasts, the two authoritative roles, on the one hand, and the inferior role, on the other.

Results: 1. One of the most chosen boys on the sociogram was likewise the most chosen when functioning in the three different roles.

2. The two isolates received some choices when functioning in the three different roles, whereas sociometrically they made no choices nor received any.

3. The above indications suggest that sociometric relations could be intensified when choice is made on a role criterion.

4. Audience motivations for choosing one or the other roles fall into the following categories: (1) recognition of duty; (2) showing interest in the role; (3) dramatic conviction ("acted it so it looked real"); (4) stereotyped recognition ("that is how our truant officer really is"); (5) ("made us laugh—liked that"); (6) stereotyped status of a role ("liked the street cleaner because he kept quiet"). Analysis of the motivations appears to reflect the local cultural atmosphere, the projection of values of the classroom, the stereotyped mirroring of authorities connected with the community and school which is of importance in improving the interpersonal relations of adults and children, and the attitudes in respect to role status.

5. As in the previous role study, slowness in warming up to and weakness in role enactment, indicating a low *s* factor, appeared in this study also to accompany a low sociometric position.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Individual role testing has proved to be a useful supplement to the interview method, since role functioning has elicited pertinent facts which might otherwise entail probing and its consequent withholding of information.

2. Group role testing has suggested further role training for leadership and the improvement of the isolate's position, both of which could enhance group cohesion.

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Florence B. Moreno

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