SMALL GROUPS AND CONFLICT

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Summary

Social science analysis tools are presented to analyze small groups and communities. Three widespread methods are given in detail: sociometry, clique analysis and social network analysis. These give numeric and other indicators of immersion in a group or community and can be used to link to other indicators such as social support, health, reciprocity of exchange, kinship, participation, social capital and community conflict. Examples of dispute resolution and community environmental management are given.

1. Introduction

Our analysis so far forces us to look closely at the resources in a conflict, the number and the types of people involved, and the way that those resources are allocated (see *Structural Sources of Conflict, Political Facets of Conflict* and *The Language of Conflict*). This all includes social capital resources such as status, education, and social organization. When we arrive at small groups and communities, the analysis is the same but the interconnections become complex, partly because they are often hidden in the history of the people involved, and partly because there are many resources being handled simultaneously. There is also the complication we saw when looking at language in conflict, that many conflict structures shape the participants to use more and more abstract terms in the argument, because such terms can both flummox the other person and act as hedges against negative consequences. This means that a lot of the small group conflicts are ridden with abstract terms and principles that make it difficult for the analyst to break through to what is really going on. But for the astute analyst, the very use of abstract terms itself will give a clue about what is going on already.

We have also seen that groups and alliances form to solve social dilemma conflicts, although this is not necessarily true historically. That is, people most often do not make conscious (verbal) decisions about what groups they will form and what they hope to get out of those groups. Most groups are already formed and structured when we are born and we join them through stratification of society (selection) or through some events in our socialization that might have little other relevance to that choice.

Groups have one focus, then, upon cooperating and organizing the group to gain resources, and this might involve competition with other groups in some cases, leading to language categories for "us" and "them." The group resources can help hold the group together but more typically, and probably because of inequalities in resources allocation within groups, ritual events allow the group or the leaders to monitor compliance and production. These can be performance rituals or language rituals (see *Why the Social Sciences are Different I* and *Using Language to Keep People in Social Relationships*).

Groups also have another focus on how the organization within the group works: how the allocation is decided and how the group is politically managed. Much time is therefore spent on status and political considerations. To outsiders this often appears excessive, but it should be clear by now just how important such managing is. For example, the petty disputes in parliaments seem a waste of time to outsiders but the analysts need to put the disputes into context. They are disputes over:

- who control which resources;
- the production of resources;
- access to resources.

They are the very stuff of life. As another example, the disputes over ancestors found in groups studied by social anthropologists might also seem a waste of time to outsiders, but we have already seen that lineage is usually equivalent to the allocation of resources so these disputes are again really disputes over the very stuff of life (see *Using Language to Keep People in Social Relationships*).

Types of Groups Considered:

The groups we are considering here for analysis are *households*, *families*, *neighborhoods* and *communities*. These all vary markedly and any analysis will pick up peculiarities of each that cannot be generalized. Your analyses, as mentioned above, need to look at who controls what, who produces what, and who has access to what. For families these produce conflict over parenting practices, children's roles around the house in doing work, and what children are not allowed to touch and how many sweets they can have. For communities these produce conflicts over status and leadership roles, where things are stored, who is allowed to look at the accounts, and what to do with free-riders who do not contribute enough.

Types of Analyses Considered:

The groups we are considering for analysis are households, families, neighborhoods and communities. As has been done throughout, we will look at some very general analysis tools that have to be adapted to several levels and situations. The major analysis tools will be these:

- Sociometric analysis of liking and status;
- Social network analysis;
- Clique analysis;
- Social identity approaches;
- Dispute resolution analyses;
- Community-based environmental management approaches.

2. Analyzing Status: Who Likes Whom?

In analyzing status and liking we are measuring very complex variables composed of multiplex ties or generalized resource relationships developed over time (see *Why the Social Sciences are Different II*). These can sometimes be inferred from analysis of social networks and social cliques (see below): those at the center of a social network or clique are probably higher status and liked more.

2.1. Sociometric Analysis

Sociometry is a tool of analysis that has mainly been used with children but there is no reason why it should not be used with adults in small groups. People are simply asked for the three people they like the best and are sometimes also asked about the three people they dislike the most. The latter is difficult to do outside the classroom (since the number of "people" is unbounded) and it is now considered unethical to ask children even in classrooms. Children in schools are sometimes asked whom they would most like to sit next to.

From these liking scores we can derive a number of other useful measures, which can be demonstrated through a study by Coie and Dodge (1983). They asked children for the names of the three children they liked the most and the three children they liked the least, for two groups (3rd graders and 5th Graders) over five years. They therefore had a good record of how the social status of the children changed.

First, two composite scores were made. The *Social Preference* of a child was the number of times that child was chosen as the most liked by someone minus the number of times they were chosen the least liked. Can you see the logic of this? A high score means they are liked by at least some children and also not disliked by many. The *Social Impact* of a child was the number of times that child was chosen as the most liked by someone plus the number of times they were chosen the least liked. Can you see the logic of this one? The total is the amount of impact they seem to have on the other children, whether liked or disliked.

From these two scores a range of other composite measures were developed and are outlined in Table 1. First, the raw scores are transformed into standardized scores or z-

scores. These standardized scores put a group of numbers into a new distribution such that zero is the average, higher than average scores get a positive number, and numbers less than the average get a negative number. Most scores on this new distribution fall between scores of -3.00 and +3.00. No matter what was originally measured, or what rating scale was used: a standardized score of, say, -1.50 always means that the original score was a reasonable way below the other scores that were measured; a standardized score of +0.15 always means that the original score was pretty close to the average. These standardized scores are useful because different measures using different scales can be easily compared.

ANALYSIS 1.

Ratings of everyone in the group for three people they like the most and three people they like the least.

ANALYSIS 2.

Social Preference = the number of times chosen as the Most Liked

minus the number of times chosen the Least Liked

Social Impact = the number of times chosen as the Most Liked

plus the number of times chosen the Least Liked

ANALYSIS 3. Categorization using standardized Social Preference and Social

Impact

scores.

Popular

Social Preference > +1.00, Liked Most score >0 and Least Liked score < 0

Rejected

Social Preference < -1.00, Liked Most score < 0 and Least Liked score > 0

Neglected

Social Impact < -1.00 and absolute Liked Most score of 0 (i.e., no one

named them as most liked)

Controversial

Social Impact > 1.00, Liked Most score > 0 and Least Liked score > 0

Average

Social Preference between -0.5 and +0.5

Other

Everyone else not assigned to a category group...

Table 1: Sociometric Analyses

So from the standardized *Social Preference* and *Social Impact* scores, five categories of social status can be developed in this model. For example, children labeled as "Popular" must have a high Social Preference score, be above average for the number of Liked Most ratings (standardized), and be below average for the number of Liked Least ratings. "Rejected" children are below average for Social Preference, below average for Liked Most, and at least some children dislike them. That is why they are rejected. Compare that to the "neglected" children, who have little Social Impact at all, meaning that other children neither like nor dislike them, and there is no one who actually named them as someone they liked. Clearly, such children are not fitting in well and could have severe problems.

"Controversial" children (so labeled) are interesting, because they have a high Social Impact, meaning that there are a lot of children who like them and a lot who dislike them—yes, they are controversial! Of the other groups, "average" are liked by one or two others, and there are other combinations that have no label. One thing we must remember for all of these sociometric scores is that they only apply to ratings within a classroom or school. A neglected child might have a host of admiring friends outside of that school or that classroom, and only be neglected within the measured group. Knowing they are neglected in the classroom is still very important, but it does not give us the entire picture.

As mentioned, Coie and Dodge looked at children in each of the five categories in the first year of measurement and the last (fifth) year of measurement. The average class scores are very similar, giving the impression that social status categories do not change much. However, this does not tell the complete story, since the children were changing categories quite a bit over five years. For example, of the original Controversial children in Year 1 of measurement, most of them were either Popular or Rejected by the fifth year of measurement, with only a small group still being categorized as Controversial. Of the Rejected children, a third remained rejected, a third became Neglected, and a third were now Average. Of the original Neglected children, a quarter of them became Popular, half of them Average, but a quarter still remained Neglected. Predicting which of the Neglected children are in this last group, those remaining Neglected over five years, is an important task for research, and Coie and Dodge developed some other measures which helped predict this sort of pattern so that interventions could be carried out.

2.2. Clique Analysis

Another form of analysis is to find out who hangs out with whom. Some extremely useful analyses have been made in this way of adolescents' risky behaviors and their social networks. A typical opinion is that there is something called "peer pressure" that forces teenagers belonging to a group to do everything that group do, especially the bad things. People commonly say that teenagers all dress the same and do the same things because there is peer pressure in their groups. We will see that this is probably wrong although the homogeneity is correct. Clique analyses also ask who likes whom and who hangs out with whom, but then categorize people into groups who commonly hang out together. Definitions are given for cliques, liaisons, and isolates. Typically, this is done with computer programs because it is so difficult. One of the best programs is called NegopyTM and examples can be seen on its Website: http://www.sfu.ca/~richards/negopy.htm. Informal definitions are as follows:

- *cliques* : groups of closely interconnected friends;
- *liaisons*: people who do not belong to any particular group but know people across several groups;
- *isolates*: people belonging to no cliques, at least within the population measured.

More formal definitions are like the following, taken from Shrum and Cheek: *Isolates*: An isolate is an individual who has:

i) No links to any other individuals in the system (Type 1); orii) Only one link to another individual (Type 2, includes dyads).

Liaisons: A liaison is an individual who is linked as a:

i) Tree node; that is, a link connecting into branching structures with isolates (Type 2) at one end and group members or liaisons at the other;

ii) Direct liaison, most (>50.1%) of whose interaction is with group members (but not any one group);

iii) Indirect liaison, most (>50.1%) of whose links are with other liaisons.

Groups or Cliques: A group is a set of at least three individuals each of whom has most of his/her linkages with others in the group, is connected by some path to all other members, and remains connected when up to 10% of the group is removed (preventing situations in which two groups with few connections are identified as a single group).

One point to be careful about again is that isolates are measured as isolates within a system. That is, a person might be measured as an isolate within a classroom or a school, but have many friends outside of those limits.

Bauman and Ennett have done many impressive studies of the role of adolescent groups on smoking, drinking and drug use, and others have shown similar results with other behaviors. As an example of this research, Ennett and Bauman surveyed 1092 adolescent ninth-graders across five schools in an area, and 75-85% of those students completed a questionnaire. They were asked for their three best friends, and by using coded identification numbers, students from any of the five schools could be named as best friend and traced to their own data gathered at another school. While these friends could be anyone in the school system, 95% of network links were between kids in the same school.

Ennett and Bauman used the NegopyTM computer program to categorize the children into three categories: cliques, liaisons, and isolates. The results were surprising. A common assumption is that smokers hang out in cliques that pressure members to

smoke, but across the five schools the percentages of smokers on average were 26.9%, 10.3%, and 10.2% for the isolates, liaisons, and cliques respectively. That is, most of the smokers were isolates and there were fewer smokers in the cliques and liaison categories. So how do you go about explaining these results? Ennett and Bauman came up with four possible explanations.

First, they suggested that being isolated might cause one to smoke, or that being isolated means fewer social constraints. Second, it could be that cigarette smoking causes social isolation. Ennett and Bauman found that most cliques were comprised entirely of nonsmokers, and they might expel people (deselection) from their group if they took up smoking. We will come back to this "exclusion" explanation. Third, both smoking and isolation could be caused through a third variable and have nothing else to do with one another. For example, adolescents who are depressed might become isolated and also take up smoking, even if these two events are not otherwise related. Finally, isolates could be in cliques outside of the school system. However, as mentioned earlier, 95% of the links were within the school system, although Ennett and Bauman did not allow siblings to be named as the most liked friends. It could be that the isolates hung around with older siblings who smoked, and there is actually some evidence for this from other research.

The evidence, then, is that "peer pressure" as it is commonly called does not operate quite as thought. All the research suggests that selection into and out of groups is more important than what goes on within those groups. If someone is a nonsmoker then they are more likely to make friends with a nonsmoker than a smoker and be selected into a non-smoker group—it is not that they just somehow get into groups and are then peer-pressured to stop smoking.

There are three other twists to this research. The first twist is that, whatever peer pressure there is, it should not be thought of as a bad thing necessarily. We saw that Ennett and Bauman's study found that most of their cliques tended to consist entirely of nonsmokers. So if there is peer pressure at all, then it is actually helping to reduce the number of smokers rather than acting to increase it! Peer influence can be a positive thing. The second twist is that much research suggests that people overestimate the similarity among group members, especially groups other than their own. We will come back to this when looking at ingroup and outgroup effects, but this is clearly part of the illusion that peer pressure makes all adolescents do the same thing. Peers within groups are quite aware of small differences; it is only outsiders who miss these subtle differences. The final twist is that far from adolescent smokers being compliant sheep in groups of peers who pressure them to smoke, other research shows that girls who smoke are more self-confident and socially skilled than nonsmoking girls.

3. Analyzing Social Networks: Who Gives What to Whom?

Analyzing social networks is about analyzing who gives what to whom and who receives what from whom. That is, it is about the allocation and distribution of resources. While this typically works through families in non-western groups, and in many western groups, the literature is mostly on social networks comparing family and non-family. For example, what can you get from a neighbor? Can you borrow money

from a neighbor? How much? Can you borrow money from your parents, and under what conditions? Do you have to pay it back? How quickly? As a member of a western society, you can usually ask someone on the street for the time, and they will usually tell you. Why? What resources do they get out of it in exchange? They might get to ask someone else for the time, but they will probably never see you again. So why do they answer you and what would happen if they did not answer you?

Social network approaches are common in community psychology, social anthropology, and geography. We simply find out who is exchanging with whom, what they are exchanging, and see how that relates to other social variables of interest. Anthropologists do a very similar thing, but they usually trace descent groups as their networks. For the populations that social anthropologist typically have dealt with, descent groups are the most important social networks and sometimes the only ones of interest. Tracing where resources came from in traditional people who have become urbanized gradually brought non-kin social networks more and more into social anthropology. In western societies, however, we have many relationships with many people who are not kin in any way. Social scientists also look at which of their social network groups people "use" at different times. Sometimes, for example, even in western societies, as children get older they start spending more and more time with a side of the family different to the one that the family normally has associated with. They might become interested in their other uncles and aunties, not the ones the family has spent most time with. Notice that there is a change of consequences or resources when they do this: there can be fewer direct resources needed from their own parents, because the other side of the family helps supply them, which can be of some benefit at this age. The social networks (or descent groups for social anthropology) can also change when resources become scarce. The Mae-Enga of New Guinea talk about themselves as patrilineal, forming their close ties mainly through the father's relatives, but many other relatives often live with them and farm in the same community. However, when times get hard and resources such as land become scarce, relatives have to leave. Those not

related patrilineally move back to their own paternal relatives. Tracing the resource exchanges through all of these group ties is very difficult, and social anthropologists usually find that they have to live with a group of people for a year or two before they begin to see the patterns.



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Biographical Sketch

Bernard Guerin is Professor in psychology at the University of South Australia. Before this he studied at the University of Adelaide, took a Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the University of Brisbane, and taught at James Cook University in Townsville, Australia. His interests span the entire realm of social science, and he has been concerned for some years about the superficial barriers erected between the "different" social sciences. He has finished two new books: one on integrating the social sciences and one on practical interventions to change the behavior of both individuals and communities, again incorporating all social science approaches. He has published over 45 peer-reviewed papers, and has presented this integrative material on invited visits to Japan, Mexico, Brazil, Hungary, Sardinia, and across the United States. His two earlier books are *Social Facilitation* (CUP) and *Analyzing Social Behavior: Behavior Analysis and the Social Sciences* (Context Press).