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The Chicago School

In our search for a science of relating, it might be appropriate to start with the ' Chicago School' of 'pragmatists' which flourished in the early years of the century and included Dewey, Cooley and George Herbert Mead. They emphasised the close relation between the individual human and the local neighbourhood group including the family, seeing the individual as in some way a function of the group, and the individual's concept of self as something given by the group. Cooley (1956), for example, says:

> ...human nature is not something existing separately in the individual, but a group nature or primary phase of society, a relatively simple and general condition of the social mind.

And Mead (1934) says:

> And thus it is that social control, as operating in terms of self-criticism, exerts itself so intimately and extensively over individual behaviour or conduct, serving to integrate the individual and his actions with reference to the organised social processes of experience and behavior in which he is implicated. The physiological mechanism of the human individual's nervous system makes it possible for him to take the attitudes of other individuals, and other attitudes of the organised social group of which he and they are members, towards himself, in terms of his integrated social relations to them and to the group as a whole; so that the general social process of experience and behavior which the group is carrying on is directly presented to him in his own experience, and so that he is thereby able to govern and direct his conduct consciously and critically, with reference to his relations both to the social group as a whole and to its other individual members, in terms of this social process. Thus he becomes not only self-conscious but also self-critical; and thus, through self-criticism, social control over individual behaviour or conduct operates by virtue of the social origin and basis of such criticism. That is to say, self-criticism is essentially social criticism, and behaviour controlled by self-criticism is essentially behavior controlled socially.

According to this thinking of the Chicago School, the self concept and behaviour is controlled by the group, and therefore the qualities of the individual depend very much on what sort of group they are members of. This applies not only to the qualities which are common to group members, but also to the degree of variation which is induced among them. For instance, a group of girls in the same form of a high school may be equally friendly with each other, and induce the same sense of belonging in each girl; on the other hand, it may consist of a central clique and peripheral girls who are excluded from membership of the clique (Tattum, 1986), and in this group the clique members will develop a sense of belonging whereas the others will be constrained by the group into developing a self-image which is characterised by ideas of rejection, unlovability, unpopularity and their behaviour will lack the sanction to participate in important group processes such as decision-making. In relation to the group as a whole, these girls are constrained into an unwelcome position of distance on what Birtchnell (1991) has called the closeness/distance dimension of relating.

The same applies to adult groups, which may induce a sense of belonging in everyone, or may induce a graduated variation in belongingness, or may divide people categorically into those who belong and those who do not. This is seen in extreme degree in those groups which contain secret societies (Simmel, 1961a).

If we turn to what Birtchnell calls the vertical dimension of upperness/lowerness we find an equal variation between groups in the amount of variation they induce in their individual members. The vertical dimension measures variation in power, which may manifest itself in several ways such as leader\follower, dominance/subordination, nurturing/being nurtured, and the corresponding subjective feelings of power/impotence and independence/dependency. All groups are stratified along the vertical dimension if they contain both children and adults. In the case of groups containing only members of the same sex and roughly the same age, the situation is more variable. Some groups are egalitarian, others are stratified in various ways, usually consisting of a leader and followers, with variable stratification among the followers. There are many ways in which a group induces vertical differentiation, such as voting in elections, the informal allocation of prestige, the inheritance of titles, interpersonal intimidation, patronage, and competitive examinations.

The stratification of a group is a systemic process in which recursive interactions may occur, and in which it may be difficult to allocate cause and effect to individual

members. Bateson (1972) coined the rather cumbersome term of 'complementary schismogenesis' to describe the positive feedback interaction between dominant behaviour on the part of one person and submissive behaviour on the part of another, leading to a change from a symmetrical relationship to one which was complementary in terms of power. Sindermann (1987) pointed out how there is a "Matthew effect" in the allocation of prestige in the scientific community, such that "To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away, even that which he hath". Viscount Simon opined that "Repuation is like capital; the more you have of it the easier it is to increase it". Rowell (1974) complained about the use of the term "dominance hierarchy" to describe the structure of monkey groups, pointing out that much of the motivation for asymmetry came not from the dominant animals but from those who either were, or were about to become, subordinate; and she pointed out that the term 'subordinacy hierarchy' might be more appropriate for such groups. Chance (1992) discusses the work of Bion (1959) who, from his experience of therapeutic groups, concluded that

> there is a strong tendency in any given group to the development, at any given time, of a powerful over-dependency on the nominal leader who is, in some inchoate way, felt to be in possession of all knowledge and problem solutions if only they could be pressurised, propitiated, sacrificed to, entreated, etc., to vouchsafe them such magical and god-like powers projected wishes and attributes to the leader. This was accompanied by a corresponding, unconscious, irrational, profoundly powerful devaluation of the abilities and potential capabilities of the rest of the membership.

Gilbert (1992) has pointed out the evolutionary development from groups in which power is seized by coercion and intimidation to those in which it is offered willingly to those who are attractive and appear to meet the needs of the group. In other words, over the course of hominid evolution, a hedonic social structure has been superimposed on the more primitive agonic structure which is typical of most baboon and macaque groups today and which probably characterised human ancestral groups at some stage in their lineage.

For our present purpose, we are not concerned with the method but simply with the fact of stratification, which means that such groups will induce in some members a feeling of upperness and in others a feeling of lowerness, and this will reflect the opinions of the other members of the group about them, in other words, their prestige. These feelings of upperness and lowerness are likely to be unrealistically exaggerated; in the case of lowerness, they may either be inculcated by agonic intimidation on the part of the leader or by hedonic 'devaluation of abilities' on the part of fellow members.

Other groups do just the opposite, and strongly resist any differentiation along the upperness/lowerness dimension. This applies to most of the hunter/gatherer societies which still exist. Thus Wilson (1988) says:

> The stress placed by some peoples on egalitarianism often appears in a negative manner as the avoidance of hierarchy and status. The culturally prescribed reaction of indifference and belittling to the success of a hunter or the deliberate withholding of gratitude suggests that such people as the !Kung or the Pandaram realise that they have to fight against a tendency that could eventuate in hierarchy. Whether this tendency to stratification or status is natural or learned by example from sedentary neighbours is not apparent, but the ethnography clearly points to a self-conscious awareness of the dangers of arrogance and accomplishment and their relation to hierarchy. Egalitarianism is thus ruled or structured by prescriptions and proscriptions aimed at securing and upholding it and above all insisting on universal entitlement irrespective of qualifications.

As Cooley said (op cit): 'Always and everywhere men seek honour and dread ridicule, defer to public opinion....', but whereas in Western societies honor is given to those who 'deserve' it and who usually already have a good measure of it, thus creating a positive feedback system or 'Matthew effect' leading to social stratification, in the hunter/gatherer societies those very same qualities elicit ridicule, leading to a negative feedback system which prevents differentiation in terms of social rank. It is very significant that cultural traditions have the power to determine which of these mechanisms operates, because it gives hope that, if we find that societies which practice inclusiveness of membership and egalitarianism have better mental health than those which favour stratification and ingroup/outgroup barriers, then there is hope that social engineering may have an effective role in prophylactic psychiatry. Of course we know that more modern societies have pushed the hunter/gatherers to the fringes of the habitable world, suggesting that in the competition between small groups an egalitarian social structure has not been very successful in the recent past; and we also know that the popular demand for stratification in modern societies is very great at all levels (one only has consider the popularity of lotteries as a means of stratifying the community in terms

of wealth); but possibly at some level of organisation it might be realistic to foster a more egalitarian and less exclusive social structure.

If mental health is related to the self-concept of being valued and belonging, then we would predict better mental health in societies which induce no within-group variation in these qualities, because everyone would be the same and one certain thing about mental ill-health is that it does not affect a whole community at the same time. It is to the stratified communities that we would look for mental health problems, and these might be related to both of Birtchnell's dimensions. We would expect less than perfect mental health in those who are excluded from the girl's clique in the playground, or from the adult secret society, and in general in all those who are classified as "beyond the pale" by their reference group. In relation to the upperness/lowerness dimension, the situation is less obvious. Positions of lowerness can be satisfying and acceptable to their occupants, as Aldous Huxley demonstrated so graphically in his novel Brave New World. However, the desire for high or rising rank is widespread among primate societies, and it is interesting that Jane Goodall (1989) suggested that those of her chimpanzee males who did not show this quality might be in some way abnormal:

> Dominance as a concept will surely always have its ups and downs in the behavioural literature and in discussions between scientists, but there is absolutely no question that the chimpanzee does have an inherent, powerful, and compelling desire to work his way up through the dominance hierarchy. So much so that when we have the odd individual, as we do at Gombe, who does not seem particularly interested in his social rank, we regard him as distinctly unusual and want to burrow into his childhood to see if we can find clues there as to why he shows this surprising lack of the dominance drive.

The desire for high rank not only makes the individual unhappy if society allocates him a low rank, but the interpersonal process of obtaining high rank may have mental health implications for others. As Simmel (1956b) writes:

> ...the desire for domination is designed to break the internal resistance of the subjugated (whereas egoism usually aims only at the victory over his external resistance)

It seems likely that the stress on a hunter/gatherer who is kept equal in spite of a desire to dominate would be less than the stress on someone kept in a subordinate role in spite of a desire for equality.

In order to investigate these matters more fully, we need to descend to a lower level of analysis, exploring the self-concept of individuals and the way that it is related both to mental health and social relations, and also looking at the interpersonal signals by which group members induce these changes in each other.

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