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ABSTRACT

The Support Development Group is an approach which explores and develops a theory for the relationship between network characteristics and notions of psychosocial adaptation. The approach is based on the assumption that teaching people to view their social world in network terms can be helpful to them. The Support Development Workshop is presented in four basic steps: (1) teaching participants to map their social networks, (2) conducting informal peer discussions about networks and support, (3) introducing network structure into the dialogue about support and coping, and (4) discussing implications for individual and collective action to encourage positive dialogue between the participants and their networks. Ideas about networks and psychosocial adaptation which may be useful for preventing personal and social dysfunction and enhancing personal and social development are discussed. Details on the workshop are included in the appendix. (NRB)

SOCIAL NETWORKS, PSYCHOSOCIAL ADAPTATION, AND PREVENTIVE/DEVELOPMENTAL INTERVENTIONS: The Support Development Workshop

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Social Networks, Psychosocial Adaptation, and Preventive/Developmental Interventions: The Support Development Workshop[1]

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The work I've been involved in is based on a couple of premises. The general premise is that the social or personal network is an especially critical level of analysis for understanding psychosocial adaptation. The social network has a strong bearing on issues such as social integration and identity; establishment of norms and issues of conformity and deviance; personal effectance and social power; and (the major focus for today) social support and personal coping. The unique value of the social network concept stems from several qualities. First, it is a structural concept, which includes not only the aggregate qualities of an individual's acquaintances, but also the pattern or structure of their relationship to one another. Secondly, it is an intermediate level of social structure between the microstructure of dyads, families and small groups, on the one hand, and the macrostructure of communities, culture, race, and social class on the other (Granovetter, 1973). Finally, it is comprehensive with respect to the person, in that it cuts across the various life spheres and settings in which he or she is engaged. It was perhaps this quality which led the anthropologist, Jules Henry (1958), to refer to the social network as the "personal community". As such it represents an ideal basis for integrating our thinking about personal and social processes on a variety of levels.

This personal community has received considerable attention as a basis for psychosocial intervention. Perhaps most dramatic have been efforts to define

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clinical problems in network terms and to intervene directly with networks to ameliorate such problems (e.g. Speck and Attneave, 1973; Rueveni, 1979; Curtis, 1974). This approach to clinical intervention has several potential advantages. It defines the problem, or at least responsibility for addressing the problem, as existing within a natural social system. The function of the "therapist" is to help that system function more effectively in relation to the psychosocial well-being of its members. This work makes explicit a system which may have been previously implicit, and renders it more accessible to conscious use and development. Finally, such intervention may have effects which are reciprocal, radiating, and generative. That is, they may be beneficial to those in the network who provide support as well as those who receive help; these effects may spread through the network; and it may increase the adaptive potential of the network for dealing with future problems and promoting positive psychosocial development.

Obviously, these latter effects of a remedial network intervention are "preventive" in nature: They may prevent recurrence of problems and promote better coping in the future. What about the preventive use of network intervention when there is no "crisis"? Are there ways to work with these concepts which have the primary goal of positive development in "healthy" people?

Actually, many existing forms of intervention, such as community development and community organization, could be reformulated in network terms as preventive/developmental psychosocial interventions. Such formulations would require a theoretical model for the relationship between network characteristics, especially network structure, and notions of psychosocial adaptation and well-being. As a means to explore and develop such theory, I have used an action/research approach called the Support Development Group. This approach is based on the assumption that teaching people to view their social world in network terms can, in some instances, be helpful to them. It can help them

make sense of their social experience and exercise some rational choice in dealing with their networks or attempting to change them individually or collectively.

The Support Development Workshop

I will very briefly describe the format of the support development workshop and then focus on some ideas about networks and psychosocial adaptation which may be useful for preventing personal and social dysfunction and enhancing personal and social development. Some more details on the workshop are included in the appendix and others can be found in a chapter Ben Gottlieb and I wrote for a recent book on Social and Psychological Research in Community Settings (Gottlieb and Todd, in Muñoz, Snowdon and Kelly, 1979).

The workshop includes four basic steps: (1) teaching a method for mapping a social network and having participants draw such a map; (2) informal peer discussion about networks and support based on reactions to the mapping; (3) introducing some notions about network structure into the dialogue about support and coping; and (4) discussing implications for individual and/or collective action to encourage positive dialogue between participants and their networks.

(1) Mapping. Basic details of the mapping technique are presented on page two of the appendix[2]. When you go through these steps, you end up with a map of your network which represents your significant others, your psychological closeness to each of them, and the extent and nature of their connections to one another. It is a complex process which benefits from plenty of time to work, share reactions, formulate and revise until a representation of the network is achieved that seems valid to the person doing the mapping.

[2]Another format for mapping has been developed by Carolyn Attneave and can be obtained by writing to her at 5206 Ivanhoe N.E., Seattle, WA 98105.

(2) Informal Discussion. The mapping itself evokes a lot of reactions, and time is allowed for people to discuss their reactions and their maps if they wish in a relatively unstructured format. This discussion often focuses on the number of people in the networks, the relative closeness or intensity of relationships, changes that have taken place or are about to take place, and the nature and adequacy of social support. This often includes a discussion of attitudes about seeking support when it is needed and accepting it when it is offered.

(3) Introduction of Structural Network Concepts: Toward a Theoretical Model of Network and Psychosocial Adaptation. The next step of the workshop is to introduce concepts of network structure into the discussion and explore ideas about the relationship between structure, social support, and personal coping. This introduction may be extensive and formal in some groups, or selective and informal in others. Right now, I'd like to focus on some of these ideas in a more formal way, to present one working theoretical model.

How are social networks, and especially network structure related to psychosocial adaptation and well-being? In the process of this work, I have drawn on existing literature and the workshops themselves to develop a theoretical model of networks, support and adaptation. At the present time, there is an exciting accumulation of theory, applied work, and empirical research which explores such notions and allows us to test some of the specific relationships they suggest. Rather than review this literature, I'll call your attention to a recent article by Roger Mitchell and Ed Trickett (1980) which reviews and integrates much of this information.[3] For now, I'll briefly outline the theoretical model I've been using which took as its starting point some ground-breaking work by Barry Wellman and his associates at the University of Toronto (Wellman, 1979).

[3]Other good sources for relevant literature are the American Journal of Community Psychology, the Journal of Community Psychology, the Journal of Social Networks, and especially, Connections: The Bulletin of the International Network for Social Network Analysis. Information and/or membership for the latter can be obtained by writing to INSNA, Structural Analysis Programme, University of Toronto, 563 Spadina Avenue, Toronto M5S 1A1, Canada.

This model draws on the notion of network density, or connectedness, as a key structural variable (see page three of the appendix). I have assumed that density is correlated with other structural qualities such as network size and permeability of boundaries. I don't know what the weight of empirical evidence is at this point on such correlations between structural variables, but I suspect that we will have to develop more differentiated typologies which might, for example, specify some consequences of large and small high-density networks and large and small low-density networks. For the moment I have focused primarily on density as the central structural variable and looked at two extreme types: the integrated network and the dispersed network. I have also included one intermediate structure, the segmented network, which is most common in some populations, including mental health professionals and college students. In this network, there are discrete clusters or sectors of the network which are relatively unconnected and which may vary in density within clusters. I'll focus here on the two extremes.

What social processes are correlated with these differences in network structure? I've focused on relationships, communication, and norms. I expect the relationships in the integrated network are more likely to be close and emotionally significant (though not necessarily positive), whereas relationships in the dispersed network may be less close and more focused on specific functional or instrumental exchanges. Communication would be more extensive in the integrated network, given the multiple paths information can travel, and norms might be expected to be more consistent, more firmly enforced, and based more strongly on commitment and obligation. Communication in the dispersed network, on the other hand, may be more limited and selective, and norms more diffuse or varried and based on exchange and reciprocity.

What then about social support? The "density hypothesis" originally advanced by Wellman and his associates was a nicely "conditional" one. It suggested that the dense network with its strong ties would provide strong emotional support, while the dispersed network, with its extensive functional ties, would provide high access to information and tangible resources. I believe the evidence suggests there is some truth in that hypothesis, but that the situation is considerably more complex than that.

In the integrated network, for example, I believe that nurturant support may be conditional on at least three factors. (a) Network norms for support must be positive. Carolyn Attneave (1969) has described a highly integrated tribal network in which the norms were highly destructive for personal and social well-being, and we have the notion of the enmeshed family in the schizophrenia literature. (b) The provision of support may be conditional on good behavior. The importance of this factor was originally brought home to me through a fascinating and unfortunately neglected chapter by Jack Glidewell in the Handbook of CMH (Glidewell, 1972). More recently, Bart Hirsch's work (1980) suggests that high density networks were less supportive than low density networks for women in transition, possibly because high density networks are less tolerant of personal change. (c) Finally, the actualization of social support will depend on whether it is accepted (Tolsdorf, 1976). This is an important individual difference which may be highly affected by the extent to which support is interlaced with issues of conformity, autonomy and control in the dense network. Under some of these conditions, the presence or absence of key support roles -- such as confidant, advocate, or link to outside resources -- may be critical for the individual's adaptive efforts.

The critical issues in the dispersed network have to do with social and personal conditions which allow the provision of necessary emotional support and the actualization of the potential for high instrumental support. Again,

I would expect that network norms are important, particularly in the extent to which they proscribe cooperative or competitive interaction. The low density network which is simply disengaged, or small and impoverished, is unlikely to be supportive in any sense. Personal coping issues in the dispersed network include (a) active seeking of support, (b) the management and utilization of diversity, and (c) the location, creation and maintenance of structures for emotional support and cooperative exchange. Again, these processes may be enhanced by the presence of key support persons who serve as emotional supporters or buffers, brokers, or linkers, or mobilizers and activists in relation to the dispersed network.

(4) Action. When ideas like these are introduced into Support Development Workshops, they often seem to be constructive aids to analysis and problem-solving. These concepts give people a basis for making sense of their own complex social realities and seeing patterns or structures which were previously implicit. They focus on the strengths and weaknesses of different structures rather than a simple good/bad distinction. They acknowledge the importance and validity of individual differences and encourage an open-minded attitude about such differences. And finally, these ideas affirm the active role of individuals in responding to, maintaining, or changing the structures in which they participate. I think the presence of these qualities in much of the work and literature now appearing in this area bodes well for the continuing development of social network ideas which can guide interventions for improving the well-being of persons and communities.

The specific intervention I have described is a somewhat narrowly educational one. Fortunately it is one which seems to be educational in both directions, as it has been a very productive source of ideas about these issues. As we understand more about these processes, other forms of intervention become increasingly

possible and appropriate. This past semester, a graduate practicum team expanded the design of the Support Development Workshop in two directions: (1) they added a network simulation as an opportunity for participants to extend their learning of network concepts to a more experiential form, and (2) they wanted to work with people who were part of an ongoing social structure -- a dormitory corridor. Unfortunately, from the standpoint of exploring these ideas (though not in other respects), the dialogue with students on the corridor took on a life of its own, and by the time an extensive entry process was negotiated, there was no time left in the semester to do the workshop! However, the social network concept is well-suited to linking to larger social structures and such linking further expands the usefulness of the concept to community psychology.[4]

[4]Materials and references on the use of social network concepts in relation to neighborhood and human services can be obtained from David Biegel, School of Social Work, University of Pittsburgh and W. Robert Curtis, Social Matrix Research, Inc., P. O. Box 9128, Boston, MA 02114.

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WORKSHOP ON PERSONAL NETWORK MAPPING[1]

Outline of the Workshop:

1. Introduction. The importance of relationships and social support for general well-being and coping with crises. Social network as a way to think about patterns of relationship and how they affect you.

2. Mapping Your Personal Network. A structured process of network mapping and maps. (Disclosure of network maps to others will be volunatry.)

3. Theory and Discussion: Social Network Patterns and Social Support. Theory that relates network structure to social support and other factors that affect the supportiveness of networks. Discussion of network maps in terms of these ideas.

4. Application: Network Awareness and Problem-Solving for Self and Others. Discussion of how to use network ideas and techniques for improving your own support system and for guiding your actions as a helper or change agent.

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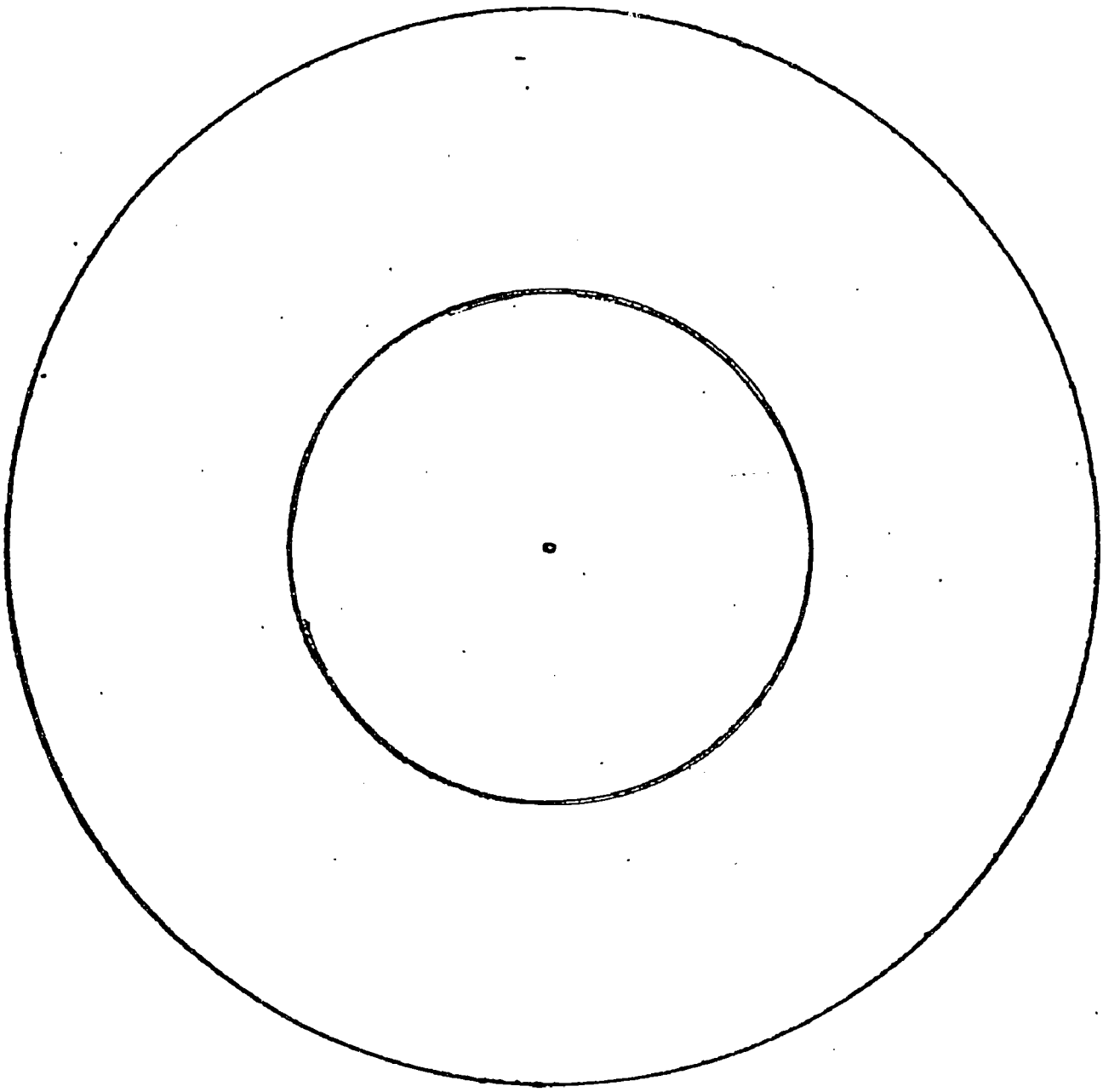
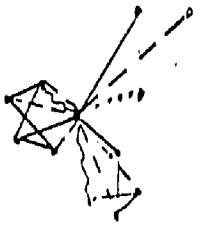
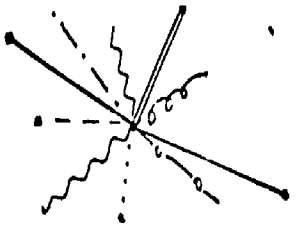
[1]This workshop was prepared by David Todd, Department of Psychology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA. It is based on work supported by a Faculty Research Grant at the University of Massachusetts. The format presented here was designed for a Support Network Conference sponsored by the Franklin-Hampshire Community Mental Health Center in Old Deerfield, MA in 1977. This revision was prepared as a handout for a symposium at the American Psychological Association Meeting in Montreal on September 3, 1980. Other versions which include a greater emphasis on the collection of data for research are available.

Network Map



Inner circle: Zone of Intimacy
Middle ring: Intermediate Zone
Outer ring: Zone of Acquaintance

SOCIAL NETWORKS, PERSONAL COPING AND SOCIAL SUPPORT: A THEORETICAL MODEL

	Integrated Network	Segmented Network	Dispersed Network
			
Network Structure :	Highly connected Smaller, Closed boundary	Segments differ	Loosely connected Larger, Open boundary
Relationships:	More intimate Similar Multidimensional	Limited between segments Segments differ	More instrumental Diverse Unidimensional
Communication:	Extensive	Segmented	Limited, selective
Norms & Autonomy:	Consistent norms Commitment and Obligation High conformity Low privacy	Potential differences between segments	Diffuse norms Exchange and reciprocity High autonomy High privacy
Social Integration:	High	Segments differ	Low
Availability of Social Support:	High nurturance if network norms are positive (may be conditional on good behavior) Limited instrumental (e.g. access to information and tangible resources)	Segments differ	High instrumental if network norms are for cooperation Limited nurturance
Key Support Roles:	Confidant Advocate Bridge to outside	Sector-spanner	Integrator/linker Mobilizer/activist Broker/buffer
Personal Coping Issues:	Conformity/Deviance Accepting support Negotiating control/autonomy	Managing boundaries and differences between segments	Seeking support Managing diversity Creating structures

DISCUSSION ISSUES

A. Giving Support

1. Relationships and Support. What kinds of relationships and support do you have? What's missing or too abundant?

2. Overall Network Structure. What is the overall structure of your network and how does that affect the relationships and support you get or need? Connectedness? Diversity?

3. Segmentation. Is your network divided into segments and how does that suit you? Do you get or need "cross-segment" support? Are the segments of your life well-enough integrated? Too integrated and intrusive?

4. Segment Structure. Is the structure of each segment appropriate to what you want from it? Do you try to meet needs in some segments that are not consistent with their respective network structures?

5. Key People. Who are the key people in your network and what role do they play in providing support? Are their links into your network appropriate for their role? Do they get what they need from you and are there "conditions" on their support?

6. Network Norms. What are the norms in your network for providing support? Give it when asked? Offer it when needed, whether or not it's asked for? Withhold it?

7. Seeking/Accepting Support. Do you accept help or reject it when it's offered and seed it when you need it? How does your style "fit" with the norms of your network about providing support?

B. Giving Support

1. Identifying Network Issues. Can you help the person see how their network does or could provide support for dealing with their issues and ways to improve support within their network?

2. Network Resources. Are there others in the network who could provide additional or better support? Should your help be coordinated with that of others?

3. Mutual Help. Is is appropriate to link this person with others who have similar issues for mutual help?

4. Reintegration with a Network. If you provide direct help, can you also help the person make a transition to an ongoing support system?

5. Community Structures. Are there community structures (programs, activities, groups) which could be changed or created to foster supportive social networks?