

Draft of Ph.D. Thesis Statement
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1. The general idea:

The concept "face-to-face interaction" is frequently employed in social science literature, although few writers bother to define the term in a clear and adequate way. Where clear-cut definitions have been offered, significance seems to have been sacrificed.¹

Many social scientists seem to impute two vague characteristics to face-to-face or social interaction. Starting perhaps when Cooley wrote: "By primary groups I mean those characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation," there has been a tendency to assume that face-to-face interaction among a number of persons is likely to increase the degree of mutual sympathy and accommodation among them.² And, since Mead's time, there has been

¹Perhaps the most fruitful examples of this may be found in E.D. Chapple, "Measuring Human Relations," Genetic Psychological Monographs, 22 (1940), and A.E. Haysfall and C.A. Arensberg, "Teamwork and Productivity in a Shoe Factory," Applied Anthropology, 8 (1949), pp1 13-25.

²C.H. Cooley, Social Organization, (New York: Scribners, 1916), p.23.

a tendency to think of face-to-face interaction as being particularly "social", since communication arrangements of this kind permit each participant to modify his on-going act quickly with reference to its indicated effect upon the other participants.

In recent times, many persons have studied social interaction as a by-product of their interest in other things, e.g., psychological adjustment, informal social structure, problem-solving, transmission of rumor, etc. In much of this work, behaviors which are crucially different from the point of view of the particular student are equally and similarly examples of social interaction, and behaviors which are of crucial significance from the point of view of the general characteristics of social interaction, are of only of secondary interest to the particular student. In other words, the specific characteristics of behavior arising from the fact that it is knowingly performed in the presence of others seems to have been studied only in a limited way.

It seems to this student that all occasions of face-to-face interaction have something in common. The immediate presence of another, whether or not conversation is involved, seems to introduce a standard set of social conditions, even though these conditions may be met and faced and handled in quite different ways.

It is difficult to study the ways in which we modify our behavior, by virtue of its occurrence in the presence of others, because we so much take for granted the principles and rules that operate to guide us in these matters. It would seem that one way of partly solving

this problem is to collect a large number of instances where persons cause offense or embarrassment to one another, for at such times participants and participant observers can become relatively conscious of expectations that have not been fulfilled. In order to collect instances of this kind, this student believes that extended participant observation is essential.

Three years ago it became possible for the student to conduct a field study of a rural community in Scotland.¹ The island of Unst, northernmost of the Shetland group was selected. It is an isolated, sparsely-covered rock, eleven miles long and four miles wide. The island has a declining population of 1000. All the inhabitants are Protestant, and almost all were born on the island as were their parents and their parents' parents before them. Unst has a marginal crofting economy ; the average crofter has a few ~~shaman~~ score sheep, a few ponies and cows, and a few acres of arable land. In addition to crofters, there are a few families of the gentry class, and a sizable service class, the latter being crofters one generation removed. The island is divided roughly into three settlement areas; each area contains a third of the island's population and a nucleus of service institutions.

The general purpose of the research was to study the rules of conduct which islanders adhered to while engaged in social interaction with one another. Since the island is relatively isolated from the rest of the Shetland group (and certainly from the mainland of Eritain), it was expected that most of the social relationships and statuses of the inhabitants would be played out within

¹The study was financed by the Department of Social Anthropology and the Social Science Research Committee of the University of Edinburgh.

the confines of the island. Since the population was relatively small and almost all native-born, it was expected that observations of a person's conduct during social interaction could be placed in a wider context of general information about his role, his relationships, and his reputation on the island.

The student lived for twelve months over a period of a year and half on the island, in the guise of a college student interested in agricultural economics. An attempt was made to become as much as possible an ordinary and acceptable member of one of the three communities, one that is called Baltasound. The tendency for recreation to be organized on a community-wide basis as an undertaking open to the public, and the tradition of neighborly assistance with croft tasks, made it possible to observe, participate in, and record varieties of social interaction.

After some data had been collected and partly analysed, it became apparent that a shift in original emphasis would be required.

First, it became apparent that what students usually have in mind by the term "social interaction" is "conversation among persons who are immediately present to one another." At this time, it seemed to the writer that conversation might be studied as a process of communication, and that it was reasonable to think of communication as a means by which information is transmitted from a sender to a recipient. Social interaction, then, might be treated as the transmission of information between persons who are immediately present to one another.

Secondly, it seemed to the student that the kind of information transmitted between persons who were immediately present to one another was roughly of two different kinds. One kind of information, which might be called "technical", served as an instrument in the coordination of on-going task-oriented activity; the other kind of information, which might be called "social", consisted of expressions of personal characteristics of the sender, especially the conception he had of himself and those present. This student is chiefly interested in the transmission of social information, that is, information about the self of the individual who transmits it.

Thirdly, it seemed that a study of the transmission of social information could not be adequately handled if attention were restricted to the kind of social information transmitted during conversation by means of conversation. The data suggested that important information was transmitted by the gestural and "involuntary" components of a sender's conversational flow. The data also suggested that important information was transmitted by activities such as dress, demeanor, involvement in, and handling of, tasks, ~~and~~ by food-offerings and by courtesies of all kinds. These systems of gesture occurred between persons who were present to each other, whether or not they were engaged in conversation with each other at the time. In order to take the reception of these non-verbal sources information into consideration, it seemed necessary to be concerned with information that was gleaned by an observer, as well as information that was intentionally conveyed to him. It seemed necessary to consider the information that a sender was careful not to convey, information that he was unsuccessful at not conveying, and information that others falsely assumed he had conveyed. It may therefore be felt that the term "communication" carries too great

an implication of intentionality and verbalization to be applicable to the area under consideration. It may be felt that a more neutral and less restrictive term, such as "transmission" or "expression" ought perhaps to be used in its place.

Fourthly, analysis of preliminary data suggested that rules regarding the transmission of information about self, that is, rules regarding self-expression, ought to be considered in relation to the strategies and ruses that are practiced as a means of adjusting to these rules.

These considerations, taken together, led to a slight shift in the aim of the research and in field activity. The basic problem of the proposed thesis may therefore be stated as follows:

WHAT ARE THE MORAL RULES AND STRATEGIC PRACTICES
IN A SMALL COMMUNITY WHICH GUIDE THE EXPRESSION
OF AN ACTOR'S PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS
BY VIRTUE OF HIS BEING IMMEDIATELY PRESENT TO OTHERS?
In other words, in Unst, what behavior is associated with
immediate transmission of information about self?

2. The Literature:

In general, material on rules of conduct during social interaction seems to be distributed evenly and thinly throughout the sociological literature.

1. There is a literature in experimental social psychology dealing with the effects of "presence of others" upon the task-oriented behavior of subjects.¹ This material

¹For example, see, J.F. Dashiell, "An Experimental Analysis of Some Group Effects," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 25, (1930), pp. 190-199, and M. Sherif, The Psychology of Social Norms, (New York: Harper, 1936).

is of limited value for the proposed thesis because the researchers were mainly concerned with behavior that was not specifically meant as, and/or taken for, an expression of the personal attributes of the subject. This material is relevant here because it deals at the most general level with the factor of "presence of others", and because it provides a limiting boundary past which the proposed inquiry need not go.

ii. There are scattered comments throughout the literature on the tendency for "participation" in informal interaction to take on the function of expressing, symbolizing and conveying social equality among the participants.¹ This material provides an important starting point for analysing the information that is transmitted by the act of being present or absent at a given social occasion, and by the act of participating in one conversational cluster and remaining out of another. In general, this material leads to a consideration of the ways in which the ecological position of a person's body, as well as the position of his house and place of work, are made to serve as sign-vehicles for transmitting social information.

iii. There is a social anthropological literature dealing with three very general kinds of social conduct between persons: joking, avoidance and respect.² Similar data, less systematically gathered, are available in studies

¹An example may be found in W.L. Warner and P.S. Lunt, Social Life of a Modern Community, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), especially the discussion of "cliques", pp. 110-112.

²See, M. Mead, "Kinship in the Admiralty Islands," Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, 34, pt. 2, (1934); A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, "The Mother's Brother in South Africa," South African Journal of Science, 21, (1924); _____, "On Joking Relationships," Africa, 13, (1940); _____, "A Further Note on Joking Relationships," 19, (1946); D. Paulme, "Parente a plaisanteries et alliance par le sang en Afrique occidentale," Africa, 12, (1939); R. Firth, We, The Tikopia, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1936), pp. 307-324; W.L. Warner, A Black Civilization, (New York: Harper, 1937), pp. 109-113; M. Fortes, The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi, (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), pp. 91-95; P. Mayer, "The Joking Of "Pals" In Gush Age-Sets," African Studies, 10, (1951), 27-41.

of human relations in industry.¹ This material has to do with the ways in which two persons, each of a particular status, treat each other in social interaction. Hypotheses are presented or implied concerning conduct that is found in three important social situations;

- a. Occasions when the persons present to each other have good cause to be antagonistic to one another, and yet good cause to express and maintain solidarity.
- b. Occasions when one of a number of persons who are present to each other is engaged in a role that is incompatible with his relation to the others present.
- c. Occasions when one of a number of persons who are present to each other holds great power over others present.

These data present basic strategies for the avoidance of "difficult" social situation and for the prevention of interaction tensions. In the proposed thesis, an attempt will be made to follow along the same line.

iv. There is a study of race relations by Doyle dealing in part with the ceremonies observed by persons during momentary social interaction, when the participants are of widely different social status.² This study points out the need of examining the difference between gestures of a "formal" or "empty" kind, and other kinds of gestures. It also points out the need to distinguish the letter of a law of etiquette from the spirit in which it is carried out, both when a difference between the letter and the spirit of the law is openly conveyed, and when a difference of this kind is successfully concealed.

v. There is a rapidly growing literature on what has come to be called "interaction in small groups." One phase of this research has to do with the roles, demands and assumptions -- all of a psychological kind --³ that are developed by participants during interaction. A second

¹For example, W. Whyte, Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1948), pp. 310-311.

²B.W. Doyle, Etiquette of Race Relations in the South, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937).

³See, W.R. Bion, "Experiences in Groups," Human Relations, 1,3, (1948); 1,4, (1948); 2,1, (1949); 2,4, (1949); 3,1, (1950); 3,4, (1950). See, also, F.Redl, "Group Emotion and Leadership,"

phase of this research has to do with problem-solving and with communication arrangements.¹ Both phases of this work provide some data on the kinds of moral norms which participants feel ought to apply during social interaction. From the point of view of the proposed thesis, the limitations of past "small-group" studies derives from the fact that the subjects of the studies usually owed their presence in the interaction to a relatively narrow range of purposes, and were usually related to fellow-participants in a limited number of ways.

vi. There is an early literature on what is considered to be desirable and undesirable conduct on the part of participants in formal discussions.² In this material a three-fold division of kinds of offensive conduct seems to emerge. There is misconduct which breaks declared or formal rules in such a way that the chairman is able and willing to make explicit to the participants the nature of the offense. There is conduct which disrupts the solidarity and euphoria of the participants, causing embarrassment, tension or discomfort, but which causes this disruption in such a way that the offender cannot be frankly sanctioned by open reference to the nature of his offense; tactful correction is required. (In such cases, participants can often agree

Psychiatry, 5, (1942), and K. Lewin, R. Lippitt and R. White, "Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created Social Climates", Journal of Social Psychology, 10, (1939)

¹See, B. Steinzer, "The Development and Evaluation of a Measure of Social Interaction," Human Relations, 2, 2, (1949); 2, 4, (1949); H.J. Leavitt, "Effects of Communication Pattern on Group Performances," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 46, (1951); G.A. Heise and G.A. Miller, "Problem Solving by Small Group Interaction Using various Communication Nets", Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 46, (1951); L. Festinger, et al, Theory and Experiment in Social Communication, (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1952); R.F. Bales, et al, "Channels of Communication in Small Group Interaction," American Sociological Review, 16, (1951); R.F. Bales, Interaction Process Analysis, (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1950); John James, "A Preliminary Study of the Size Determinant in Small Group Interaction," American Sociological Review, 16, (1951)

²See, for example, H. Elliott, The Process of Group, Thinking. (New York: Association Press, 1928), ch. 4 and 5.

that an offense has been committed, while at the same time not agreeing as to the exact nature of the offense or the nature of the sanction that ought to be accorded to it.) There is, thirdly, behavior which does not effectively contribute to the avowed purpose of the meeting; this behavior is inefficient rather than improper. In this literature, the exploration of the role of the chairman is particularly relevant to the proposed thesis.

3. Leading ideas:

The proposed study is an attempt to treat social interaction as a process of communication, broadly defined. Behind this approach are two basic ideas:

The first idea is that any particular event that is or can be associated with an individual in some way or other is commonly taken -- by the individual and/or others who are present -- as a statement or expression of his general characteristics. These events become advertent or inadvertent means of conveying information about self. Important among the matters upon which the individual informs others is the conception he has of himself and of those present. As studies of informal organization in industry have shown, even an event that is specifically defined as part of an impersonal technological framework for action may be made to carry and may be taken to carry information about self.

The second idea is that face-to-face communication has certain sociologically relevant communication characteristics:

a. When two persons are in face-to-face or "immediate" communication, gestural indications of each person's on-coming response are conveyed to the other rapidly and continuously. Hence, the "feed-back" type of corrective control, to which G.H. Mead gave so much importance, is

highly facilitated.¹ Each participant in the interaction can tactically and tactfully adapt his behavior to the tested or indicated behavior of the other.

b. When two persons are in face-to-face interaction one of the two persons cannot readily make a statement about the other and then, at a later time, deny to the other that he had made the statement. Similarly, reception of a statement becomes a visible process, and the recipient cannot readily deny having received a given statement. On the other hand, statements made about a person in his absence can usually be denied. We may expect, then, that behavior toward those present is, in some sense, more "responsible" than behavior toward those who are absent at the time.

c. When one person is in the immediate presence of another, he is in a position to observe a wide range of characterizing events associated with the other, whether or not these events form part of the voluntary and witting communication of the other.

d. Communication involves the use of symbols which stand for somethings^s else but which are not that something else. Hence, it is possible, within limits, for persons to convey attitudes, feelings and conceptions which they do not in fact possess, or to restrain themselves from conveying conceptions which they do in fact possess. Communication also involves "involuntary expression", and so it is possible for recipients to check and test the information that is voluntarily offered to them.

When we play the two basic ideas against each other, a preliminary framework is obtained for guiding a study of face-to-face interaction. The constant is the rules or norms which persons feel ought to guide the expression of information about self; the variable is the degree to which and the way in which a particular situation fulfils all the communication characteristics of face-to-face interaction.

¹For example, Mind, Self and Society, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), especially, p. 13 (f.n.), pp. 42-51, pp. 80-81, pp. 145-146.

4. The data:

The data for the proposed thesis derives from participant observation by the student for a period of twelve months in the social life of the community. During that period an attempt was made to guide participation in two directions. An effort was made to participate in almost all of the different kinds of situations in which islanders entered into face-to-face interaction with one another (e.g., meals, work, schooling, shop-loitering, parties, socials, weddings, funerals, fishing, etc.), and to do this with as many different sets of participants as possible. Here the stress was on variations concerning purpose and participants of an interaction. An effort was made, secondly, to participate with the same set of participants in a particular kind of interaction through many occasions of its recurrence. Here the aim was to reach a state where the presence of the observer would minimally influence the behavior of the participants, and where there was some likelihood of witnessing offenses and communication situations which occur infrequently but which throw light on behavior that regularly occurs.

5. Technique:

At large gatherings, during the first few months of his stay, it was feasible for the student to make a written record of observed acts and conversations, while the acts and conversation were actually occurring.

Occurrences at small gatherings were recorded during the evening of the day in which they occurred, or during periods of relative privacy during each day's participation activity.

None of the mechanical means that are now available for taking a complete record of aspects of behavior during an interaction period were employed. Economic, technical and social reasons prevented the student from using these techniques. The student attempted, however, to obtain adequate coverage of events during interaction by participating in a great deal of interaction, and by making a special effort to record happenings which seemed at the time to be insignificant and unnoteworthy. Since the proposed thesis is chiefly concerned with the kinds of offenses that occur in social interaction, and not in the precise frequency of their occurrence, the method of collecting data was considered adequate. Observations made during interaction were checked against the student's information about each participant, as well as against significantly related events which occurred later during the same interaction and during consequent interactions. Another check was provided by the fact that the student had to determine how to behave, as well as what to record, on the basis of his observations. Therefore there was a very practical check, administered by the subjects themselves, on insufficient or faulty observation.

In analysing the data, the technique has so far proven helpful ⁱⁿ distinguishing between two orders of fact:

1. the morally sanctioned rules or norms regarding proper conduct while in the presence of others -- this treated with respect to the immediate response

of embarrassment and offense caused by the breaking of a rule, and the corrective sanction directed against the offender,

- ii. the strategies and ruses employed to avoid breaking the rules, to re-introduce solidarity when rules were broken, to achieve ends prohibited by the rules without actually breaking the rules.

6. Tentative outline:

The Social Rules Regarding Expression of Oneself
To Others

Part One; Introductory

Chapter 1. The Problem

Chapter 2. The Literature

Chapter 3. Overview of the Community

Chapter 4. The Self-conception of the Crofter

Chapter 5. The Case-studies:

i. the Socials

ii. the Hotel

iii. the Recreation Club

Part Two; Conceptual Framework and general communication data

Chapter 6. The components or aspects of a communication

Chapter 7. Immediate social communication as a model

Chapter 8. The contexts or units of immediate communication

Part Three; Special communication data

Chapter 9. Norms associated with participation in conversati

Chapter 10. Norms associated with participation in social occasions

i. "Appearance" patterns

ii. Courtesy patterns

iii. involvement in role

Chapter 11. Behavior in situations where perfect conditions for immediate communication are not realized

Chapter 12. Summary of conclusions, and implications for a general theory of the self.

7. Contribution:

In the study of social interaction, students have been concerned with a number of quite different things. The proposed thesis will represent an effort to abstract from social interaction a single, coherent order of data having to do with some sociologically relevant aspects of communication. It is hoped this will contribute to the development of a conceptual framework for studying certain sociologically relevant aspects of all instances of social interaction.