

(1) Psychology and Sociology: Responses to Margaret Phillips (1942-47)

Small-group Psychology

1 Group Functioning of a String Quartet

Keller's first formal involvement with small-group psychology came with this response to a questionnaire he received in July 1942. This was drawn up in 1940 by the sociologist Margaret Phillips and passed to him by 'Miss G. Marle' in the Lake District, where he was touring with a string quartet. (For a discussion of Phillips, see the Editor's Preface above.) His response took the form of a 26-page letter and demonstrated the 'psychological trend' of his thought. It is a document of great intensity and includes a preliminary critique of the questionnaire itself. He writes: 'The two particular groups I am choosing for this purpose are (a) the population of an internment camp [on the Isle of Man] in which I resided for several months, and (b) a string quartet of which I have been a member for several years.' Section (b) is set out here, and a separate summary of section (a) in the notes (section (a) itself is too diffuse to publish). Keller's quartet had formed in Vienna and reconvened in England, though its membership fluctuated (in Austria Franz Schmidt had played 'cello); at this point it would have included Dr. Oskar Adler (leader), Hans Keller (second violin), Sybil Maturin (viola), and Keller's mother ('cello).

The following paragraphs respond to the headings drawn up in Phillips's questionnaire (the relevant sections are set out below); as Keller chose not to answer every one of Phillips's points, their numbering is discontinuous. Keller's response appears to be rooted in Freud's seminal essay, 'Group Psychology and the Individual' ('Massenpsychologie und ich-analyse', 1917): this defined groups in terms of aim, leadership, and membership. The themes of display, courtship and Eonism (found in the remarks on the Internment Camp) were addressed by J. C. Flugel in the Psychology of Clothes (London, Hogarth Press, 1930). Both the questionnaire and the text have been lightly edited.

The exercise brings together the two cultural approaches Keller describes in 'England' (above): by drawing up categories for observation, Margaret Phillips works in the English way, from the 'outside in'; by probing the internal dynamics of the group, Keller works in the Continental way, from the 'inside out'. It appears that Keller met Phillips only in the following year, in August 1943, and that this was his first encounter with her work.

Questionnaire (Margaret Phillips)

OBJECT OF THE INVESTIGATION

To discover the conditions under which groups function (or fail to function) effectively and harmoniously both internally and in relation to the outside world.

METHOD PROPOSED

The study of particular groups over a period of time either by members of the group or by observers in close contact with it. Where possible it is suggested that a diary be kept and notes written up whenever

developments occur. It is likely that a study of the same group by two or more members (observers) independently would yield good results. I shall be grateful for any help in enlisting the co-operation of other [observers] likely to be interested – especially in making any independent study of the same group. Points that might be noted include the following:

I To what extent does the group achieve or fail to achieve:

- 1 Internal unity and co-operation*
- 2 Effective collaboration with other groups*
- 3 Harmony with the outside world*

II How is this to be accounted for? The following factors are suggested for consideration:

- 1 Leadership*
- 2 Common aim or purpose*
- 3 Common activities and enterprises undertaken*
- 4 Common religious or political convictions, philosophy or scale of values*
- 5 Common pattern of living*
- 6 Common training, ritual, ceremonial*
- 7 Common social or educational background*
- 8 Common interests outside the group*
- 9 Degree of group-consciousness achieved by the members – e.g. as to the group's aims and methods, its history, tradition or record of achievement*
- 10 A written constitution*
- 11 The form of government, e.g. autocratic or democratic*
- 12 Financial responsibility*
- 13 The size of the group*
- 14 Groups within the group*
- 15 Rivalry or competition with other groups*
- 16 External opposition: a common enemy*
- 17 Common internal grievances*
- 18 Differences of age, sex, class, temperament, race or nationality among members*
- 19 Personal ties or differences between individuals*
- 20 Does change in personnel of group affect unity?*

III Does the degree or nature of unity change as time goes on? [If so,] why?

IV What needs of the individual does the group satisfy? Are the benefits he receives or the services he renders more important in attaching him to the group?

V How do the attitudes to the group of the leader, the official [and] the ordinary member differ?

VI How does the level of living and thinking within the group compare with that achieved by the individual?

N.B. It is not necessary to answer these questions as they stand. They are only intended to indicate the scope and the direction of the inquiry. All information will be regarded as confidential and so used as to give no clue to the identity of either the writer or the group. Any suggestions for the improvement of this outline will be welcomed.

Response (*Hans Keller*)*II.I Leadership of the group, and its role in achieving internal unity*

Leadership in the string quartet has been responsible for much of the internal unity, and for some disintegrational processes.

- (1) From the purely musical point of view, a string quartet without a leader who possesses a great amount of authority and initiative is unthinkable. The fact that usually members of such a group are fully aware of this condition contributes a great deal towards the suppression of jealousy, envy, and rivalry, and to the widest possible unfolding of the submissive tendencies, whatever their psychic origin. In our case this could be observed very clearly (i) because the 1st violin's authority and initiative was so great that it did not offer any weak points where he could have been attacked, and (ii) because the other members of the quartet showed, for the most part, a degree of musical and artistic education which would have made it difficult for them to rob the leader of his influence, even had he possessed less. His position as leader was over-determined, so to speak.
- (2) Nevertheless, as I have indicated before, his authority did give rise to manifestations of rivalry and envy, and thus for a short period, disintegrative processes were observable. It follows from (1)/(ii) that this could happen only if at least one of the other members was not capable of exhibiting the necessary degree of artistic education. This was the case with a female viola player who was a member of our quartet (necessarily) for a short time. Not only did her behaviour and her attitude towards the leader and towards the rest of the quartet exhibit signs of envy (in regard to the position of the first violinist), but she also rebelled obviously against the endo-psychic loss of individuality and power which came about through the strong influence which the leader exerted even on her – a fact to which she herself seemed frequently to have been alive. In other words: just as those members who fulfilled condition (1)/(ii) suppressed their 'revolting' tendencies and gave free reign to [discernible] submissive tendencies, the viola player in question was painfully aware of the fact that her submissive tendencies exhibited a considerable activity against her will. She consequently attempted to protect her endangered individuality by both concealed and open revolt, this attempt being also correlated to, and intensified by, her envy, her wish to be a leader herself. It might be interesting to note in addition that she displaced part of her manifestations of these anti-leader tendencies upon the other two members of the quartet, and this she did in a twofold manner: on the one hand, she rebelled against the other members, identifying them with the leader (this process being facilitated by the great amount of loyalty which the other members displayed to the leader); on the other hand, she often tried to treat the other members as her own protégés who were misused by the leader and who consequently needed her protection and her leadership. Thus she acquired in her estimation the position of at least a sub-leader who, moreover, owing to her (spasmodically imagined) superiority over the leader, could be considered, in other respects, the real leader of the quartet.

The main cause of the displacement can be sought in her partial submissive acceptance of the leader's influence, whilst the twofold form of the displacement (rebellious and leading) is, as regards its determinative factors, too obvious to need a further explanation. Shortly after she had retired from our quartet she formed a chamber music ensemble in which she was the actual leader, the subordinated members all belonging to the male sex. (In our quartet she had been the only female.)

Let me add that I do not, for a moment, believe that the decisive factor which I mentioned sub (1), i.e. the degree of artistic education, is one which can be accepted, without further analysis, as a psychologically workable variable, without regard to its dependence both upon the kind of development of the psychic organisation of which it is a manifestation, and upon the external circumstances which may condition either its free display or its involution. However, a discussion of this detail would lead us too far afield from the realm of interpretative observation, and would perhaps force upon you conclusions, the hypotheses underlying them you may not feel willing to accept.

II.2 The Common Aim of the Group

There are some interesting details to be mentioned with regard to one specified practical common aim, namely public performance. A string quartet is, by its artistic nature, an ensemble in which most of the members are impelled to restrain to a great extent those tendencies to display their personal artistic powers and their technical skill in which, on other occasions, say at soloistic performances, they are used, indeed, mostly entitled, to indulge. I do not speak of the quartet's first violinist in this connection, because the player who has to perform the leading part is, even from a purely artistic musical standpoint, least compelled to this suppression.

Many writers would regard any tendency to display as of an exhibitionistic nature. Whether we accept such a view or not, we have to bear in mind, in this specific case, that a performing musician always is to some extent acting as if he were courting his audience. Remember that we must regard exhibitionism 'as fundamentally a symbolic act based on a perversion of courtship,' that the perversion on which it is based is not qualitatively to be distinguished from those displaying tendencies which are in normal cases, subordinated to the sexual organisation, and that every form of courtship, *ex definitione*, implies an element of display. In an isolated, intensified, exaggerated form such display would have to be regarded as bearing perhaps all of the essential characteristics of exhibitionism proper, though in a much more limited, and much less obvious degree, and, of course, in a much more sublimated form and accordingly on a different psychic level. Remembering all that, we cannot escape the conclusion that where we have to deal with an act of courtship (whether on the sexual level or not) in which the tendencies to display are pretty strong, or even appear to predominate, we have to suppose that at the root of these tendencies there should be found urges of a narcissistic nature. As regards their qualitative traits, they would be at least related to the basis of what, under exceptional conditions of constitution and development, we would consider to be manifestations of a clearly exhibitionist nature.

Now to continue. It was very easily to be observed in our quartet (as in others) that some of the players showed, according to different occasions, three different 'playing attitudes', as it were. The different occasions are (i) playing for the enjoyment of the players themselves, (ii) rehearsing for a public performance, and (iii) the public performance itself. The attitude of the players in question in the case of (i) was one of more or less successful, in any case of fully intended, suppression of the tendencies to display. During (ii) there still could be detected the strong artistic intention to suppress the tendencies: however, the approaching event of the public performance already showed its influence upon the player: whilst executing passages of a relatively soloistic kind, the tendency to display began to break through in a way not fully justifiable by his own artistic standard, i.e. his artistic conscience. At (iii) finally, the suppressive intentions and their efficacy were weakened remarkably, and at the same time the tendencies to display appeared with all the potential energy behind it. Purely accompanying figures were played frequently as though they were cadenzas, and most of the original intentions were flooded by the now much stronger, and at least developmentally much more

primitive, tendencies to display, so that for the time of the performance, and also as regards the player's retrospections, his own artistic standard and conscience, and the judgments influenced by it underwent partly a paralysis, and partly a regressional modification. He would have been surprised, had he been able to hear a gramophone record of the performance.

After having observed this process in others, I investigated as critically as possible the changes of my own playing attitude and observed very similar results in myself.

Thus the common aim [of performance] which has now been discussed had a detrimental effect upon the achievement of internal (artistic) unity and co-operation and, from the standpoint of a strictly musical-artistic scale of values, the way from (i) to (iii) is one of deterioration and involution, just as it can be termed, dynamically, as one of evolution.

II.4 The common religious or political convictions, philosophy or scale of values of the group

Affinity of individual philosophies and scales of values is, in my experience, almost a necessary condition for a successful functioning of artistic co-operation, not only in that it binds the members together through congeniality outside the specific artistic activities, but also because very frequently it constitutes a correlativum to common attitudes towards artistic values and modes of artistic interpretation and reproduction. I have come to this conclusion not only by observing the development of the string quartet of which I am a member (the personnel of which varied at some time), but also after inspection and interpretation of numerous other groups of an identical or related nature. [Re. II.7] [A common] social background hardly comes into play in this connection. [Re. II.9] The more the artistically influenced group-consciousness was developed, the more successful were the suppressive tendencies, and therefore the more was achieved in respect of unity.

II.18 Differences of age, sex, class, temperament, race or nationality among members of the group

The greatest amount of unity seems to be achieved in a string quartet the members of which are all of one sex. This descriptive conclusion has been arrived at by me as well as by the leader of our quartet in consequence of long-time experience both with the quartets in which he and I played, and (indirectly) with those the development of which we had the opportunity to observe. Where the personnel of the quartet, with regard to sex, is mixed – and here we arrive at a detail where I am able to state something about the age factor – it would appear that a high degree of unity can be achieved on condition that the female members (at least) are not too young. But as these conclusions have been arrived at in consequence of inductions on a predominantly symptomatic level, I think I should warn you to accept them with caution, notwithstanding the fact that I believe in their validity. But let us also consider the sexual factor itself more properly: from my experience it appears that whenever some form of sexual tension (in the narrower meaning of the term) exists between two members of the quartet, there is much more probability that if other strong counter-forces are not present, this fact will make against unity. On the other hand, where there exists between two members an actual sexual relationship, as for instance when a married couple plays in a quartet, this condition does not make against unity; indeed, it often seems to contribute towards internal co-operation, provided that the conditions of the sexual relationship itself are favourable, and that other counter-acting forces, as for instance a secret longing of a third member, are absent.

But this is only a seeming contradiction, for the following reasons: (i) the unity and high degree of co-operation achieved through the one-sex-condition has, inter alia, its source in the (then more probably prevailing) affinity of artistic outlook of the different members; [on the other hand] the unity achieved through the existence and the influence of a frictionless sexual relationship owes much of its existence to the emotional equilibrium both between the partners

themselves, and among the rest of the quartet, where it comes about through the very strong suggestive influence (in this case based upon processes of identification and projection) which a happy relationship [in these] favourable conditions always exerts. Now there is no doubt that affinity or identity of artists' outlook which is based upon the direction the development of instinctual energy takes ([among] members of the same sex) is of greater significance for artistic unity and co-operation than an emotional equilibrium, the latter moreover frequently accompanying the former. If (ii) we finally take into account the fact that counter-forces, such as jealousy, will more easily make their appearance under the conditions that prevail in the sexual-relationship case, we will give up the thought that such a relationship might contribute to unity. For the thought contradicts the statement that the maximum amount of unity will probably be found in a quartet consisting of members of one and the same sex.

But again I have to warn you: the fact that one proposition does not damage the validity of another is in itself no proof that the other proposition is undamageable: the basis I gave to the aforementioned symptomatic induction is probably valid, but I may have left out other determinants which might wipe out the actual effectiveness of the known ones.

As far as my observation goes, I cannot make any statement about the factor of class difference; differences of nationality did not play any role at all.

II.19 Personal ties or differences between individuals in the group

During one period my mother was one of the members of the quartet; the amount of internal unity during this period equalled that during others.

II.20 Change in personnel [and its effect upon] group unity

Artistic unity is endangered temporarily through changes [in personnel], because it is only possible through a long process of co-operation to achieve that high standard of internal unity which is required in the present case for artistic purposes: this fact holds good even under very favourable conditions. On the other hand, if the change only involves persons who at some previous period have already co-operated with the quartet or its leader (as was the case with my mother), the fact of the change itself has no serious influence upon unity.

V The difference in attitude to the group of the leader

Outside the playing itself, there cannot be noticed any difference between the attitude of the leader to the group, and between that of other members; at least not inasmuch as such a difference would be conditioned by the two facts of 'being-a-leader' and 'being-an-ordinary-member'. Within the playing activities, the leader assumes an almost entirely dominating role, whilst the other members' attitude towards the rest of the group is one of equal associateship. The leader succeeds not only in expressing his necessary instructions in a modest way (the characteristic of 'domination' applying more to the frictionless way in which the instructions are obeyed), but also in making his will and influence effective through the medium of his playing itself. The latter process is the most sublime and impressive way of successful and unopposed domination I know. It would be interesting to know how far identification plays a role in this process; but this would be no easy task.

VI The level of living and thinking within the group compared with that achieved by the individual

In consequence of the exalting effect of the group activity, the level of thinking within the group is generally, at least as concerns the majority of members, a higher one than, or at least

equal to, the level achieved by an imaginary individual typifying the average individual level of the existing group. But this is a precarious question.