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Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- Distinguish between primary and secondary groups.
- Explain the functions of groups.
- Understand the role of reference groups.

- Know the influence of group size.
- Understand the characteristics of bureaucracy.
- Know what Michels's concept of "the iron law of oligarchy" is.
- Understand why social institutions are important.

We all feel strongly about our names. We do not like it when people mispronounce our names and we are quick to correct them. Parents give their children names that they think will help their future life prospects. The popularity of names, however, changes with the times. The parents today who are naming their little girls Madison, Olivia, and Hannah would be horrified if someone suggested they name their new baby Bertha, Gertrude, or Myrtle. Yet, these were very popular names in the past. (See Tables 6–1 and 6–2.) Names help identify who we are and what groups we belong to. They can be used to show that we are part of a particular ethnic group, social class, or religious group. People have changed their names to avoid being identified with a certain group. Naming a baby, then, is the parent's first act to show that the child is part of a certain group.

The Nature of Groups

A good deal of social interaction occurs in the context of a group. In common speech the word *group* is often used for almost any occasion when two or more people come together. In sociology, however, we use several terms for various collections of people, not all of which are considered groups. A **social group** consists of *a number of people who have a common identity, some feeling of unity, and certain common goals and shared norms*. In any social group, the

individuals interact with one another according to established statuses and roles.

The members develop expectations of proper behavior for people occupying different positions in the social group. The people have a sense of identity and realize they are different from others who are not members. Social groups have a set of values and norms that may or may not be similar to those of the larger society.

For example, a group of students in a college class may have some common norms, which include taboo subjects, open expression of feelings, interrupting or challenging the professor, avoiding conflict, and length and frequency of contributions. All these are usually hidden or implicit and new members have to learn them quickly. Violations of the norms will involve sanctions (for example, disapproval), which may include comments, disapproving looks, or avoidance of the "deviant."

Our description of a social group contrasts with our definition of a **social aggregate**, which is made up of *people who temporarily happen to be in physical proximity to each other, but share little else*. Consider passengers riding together in one car of a train. They may share a purpose (traveling to Washington, D.C.) but do not interact or even consider their temporary association to have any meaning. It hardly makes sense to call them a group—unless something more happens. If it is a long ride, for instance, and several passengers start a card game, the card players will

Table 6–1**Most Popular Baby Names for 2004**

Rank	Male Name	Female Name
1	Jacob	Emily
2	Michael	Emma
3	Joshua	Madison
4	Matthew	Olivia
5	Ethan	Hannah
6	Andrew	Abigail
7	Daniel	Isabella
8	William	Ashley
9	Joseph	Samantha
10	Christopher	Elizabeth

Source: Social Security Administration, <http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/>

Table 6–2**Baby Names That Used to be Popular**

Male	Female
Cecil	Agnes
Chester	Bertha
Dewey	Bessie
Elmer	Beulah
Floyd	Gertrude
Homer	Myrtle
Mack	Pearl

Source: Social Security Administration, <http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/>

have formed a social group: They have a purpose, they share certain role expectations, and they attach importance to what they are doing together. Moreover, if the card players continue to meet one another every day (say, on a commuter train), they may begin to feel special in contrast with the rest of the passengers, who are just “riders.” A social group, unlike an aggregate, does not cease to exist when its members are away from one another. Members of social groups carry the fact of their membership with them and see the group as a distinct entity with specific requirements for membership.

A social group has a purpose and is therefore important to its members, who know how to tell an “insider” from an “outsider.” It is a social entity that exists for its members apart from any other social relationships that some of them might share. Members of a group interact according to established norms and traditional statuses and roles. As new members are recruited to the group, they move into these traditional statuses and adopt the expected role behavior—if not gladly, then as a result of group pressure.

Consider, for example, a tenants’ group that consists of the people who rent apartments in a building.

Most such groups are founded because tenants feel a need for a strong, unified voice in dealing with the landlord on problems with repairs, heat, hot water, and rent increases. Many members of a tenants’ group may never have met one another before; others may be related to one another; and some may also belong to other groups such as a neighborhood church, the PTA, a bowling league, or political associations. The group’s existence does not depend on these other relationships, nor does it cease to exist when members leave the building to go to work or to go away on vacation. The group remains, even when some tenants move out of the building and others move in. Newcomers are recruited, told of the group’s purpose, and informed of its meetings; they are encouraged to join committees, take leadership responsibilities, and participate in the actions the group has planned. Members who fail to support group actions (such as withholding rent) will be pressured and criticized by the group.

People sometimes are defined as being part of a specific group because they share certain characteristics. If these characteristics are unknown or unimportant to those in the category, it is not a social group. Involvement with other people cannot develop unless one is aware of them. People with similar characteristics do not become a social group unless concrete, dynamic interrelations develop among them (Lewin, 1948). For example, although all left-handed people fit into a group, they are not a social group just because they share this common characteristic. A further interrelationship must also exist. They may, for instance, belong to Left-Handers International of Topeka, Kansas, an organization that champions the accomplishments of left-handers. The group has even designated August 13 as International Left-Handers Day. Thousands of left-handers belong to this social group.

Even if people are aware of one another, that is still not enough to make them a social group. We may be classified as Democrats, college students, upper class, or suburbanites. Yet for many of us who fall into these categories, there is no group. We may not be involved with the others in any patterned way that is an outgrowth of that classification. In fact, we personally may not even define ourselves as members of the particular category, even if someone else does.

Social groups can be large or small, temporary or long lasting: Your family is a group, as is your ski club, any association to which you belong, or the clique you hang around with. In fact, it is difficult for you to participate in society without belonging to a number of different groups.

In general, social groups, regardless of their nature, have the following characteristics: (1) permanence beyond the meetings of members, that is, even when members are dispersed; (2) means for identifying members; (3) mechanisms for recruiting new members; (4) goals or purposes; (5) social statuses and

Table 6-3**Relationships in Primary and Secondary Groups**

	Primary	Secondary
Physical Conditions	Small number Long duration	Large number Shorter duration
Social Characteristics	Identification of ends Intrinsic valuation of the relation Intrinsic valuation of other person Inclusive knowledge of other person Feeling of freedom and spontaneity Operation of informal controls	Disparity of ends Extrinsic valuation of the relation Extrinsic valuation of other person Specialized and limited knowledge of other person Feeling of external constraint Operation of formal controls
Sample Relationships	Friend-friend Husband-wife Parent-child Teacher-pupil	Clerk-customer Announcer-listener Performer-spectator Officer-subordinate
Sample Groups	Play group Family Village or neighborhood Work team	Nation Clerical hierarchy Professional association Corporation

Source: Human Society, by K. Davis, 1949, New York: Macmillan.

roles, that is, norms for behavior; and (6) means for controlling members' behavior.

The traits we described are features of many groups. A baseball team, a couple about to be married, a work unit, players in a weekly poker game, members of a family, or a town planning board all may be described as groups. Yet being a member of a family is significantly different from being a member of a work unit. The family is a primary group, whereas most work units are secondary groups.

Primary and Secondary Groups

The difference between primary and secondary groups lies in the kinds of relationships their members have with one another. Charles Horton Cooley (1909) defined primary groups as groups that

[A]re characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation. They are primary in several senses, but chiefly in that they are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideas of the individual. The result of intimate association, psychologically, is a certain fusion of individualities in a common whole, so that one's very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group. Perhaps the simplest way of describing this wholeness is by saying that it is a "we"; it involves the sort of sympathy and mutual identification of which "we" is the natural expression.

Cooley called primary groups the nursery of human nature because they have the earliest and most fundamental effect on the individual's social-

ization and development. He identified three basic primary groups: the family, children's play groups, and neighborhood or community groups.

Primary groups involve *interaction among members who have an emotional investment in one another and in a situation, who know one another intimately, and who interact as total individuals rather than through specialized roles*. For example, members of a family are emotionally involved with one another and know one another well. In addition, they interact with one another in terms of their total personalities, not just in terms of their social identities or statuses as breadwinner, student, athlete, or community leader.

A secondary group, in contrast, is characterized by *much less intimacy among its members. It usually has specific goals, is formally organized, and is impersonal*. Secondary groups tend to be larger than primary groups, and their members do not necessarily interact with all other members. In fact, many members often do not know one another at all; to the extent that they do, rarely do they know more about one another than about their respective social identities. Members' feelings about, and behavior toward, one another are patterned mostly by their statuses and roles rather than by personality characteristics. The chair of the General Motors board of directors, for example, is treated respectfully by all General Motors employees—regardless of the chair's gender, age, intelligence, habits of dress, physical fitness, temperament, or qualities as a parent or spouse. In secondary groups, such as political parties, labor unions, and large corporations, people are very much what they do.

Table 6-3 outlines the major differences between primary and secondary groups.

Functions of Groups

To function properly, all groups—both primary and secondary—must (1) define their boundaries, (2) choose leaders, (3) make decisions, (4) set goals, (5) assign tasks, and (6) control members' behavior.

Defining Boundaries

Group members must have ways of knowing who belongs to their group and who does not. Sometimes devices for marking boundaries are obvious symbols, such as the uniforms worn by athletic teams, lapel pins worn by Rotary Club members, rings worn by Masons, and styles of dress. The idea of the British school tie is that, by its pattern and colors, it signals exclusive group membership, has been adopted by businesses ranging from banking to brewing. Other ways by which group boundaries are marked include the use of gestures (special handshakes) and language (dialect differences often mark people's regional origin and social class). In some societies (including our own), skin color also is used to mark boundaries between groups.

Choosing Leaders

All groups must grapple with the issue of leadership. A leader is *someone who occupies a central role or position of dominance and influence in a group*. In some groups, such as large corporations, leadership is assigned to individuals by those in positions of authority. In other groups, such as adolescent peer groups, individuals move into positions of leadership through the force of personality or through particular skills such as athletic ability, fighting, or debating. In still other groups, including political organizations, leadership is awarded through the democratic process of nominations and voting. Think of the long primary process the presidential candidates must endure in order to amass enough votes to carry their party's nomination for the November election.

Leadership need not always be held by the same person within a group. It can shift from one individual to another in response to problems or situations that the group encounters. In a group of factory workers, for instance, leadership may fall on different members depending on what the group plans to do—complain to the supervisor, head to a bar after work, or organize a picnic for all members and their families.

Politicians and athletic coaches often like to talk about individuals who are “natural leaders.” Although attempts to account for leadership solely in terms of personality traits have failed again and again, personality factors may determine what kinds of leadership functions a person assumes. Researchers (Bales, 1958; Slater, 1966) have identified two types

of leadership roles: (1) **instrumental leadership**, in which a leader actively proposes tasks and plans to guide the group toward achieving its goals, and (2) **expressive leadership**, in which a leader works to keep relations among group members harmonious and morale high. Both kinds of leadership are crucial to the success of a group.

Sometimes one person fulfills both leadership functions, but when that is not the case, those functions are often distributed among several group members. The individual with knowledge of the terrain who leads a group of train crash survivors to safety is providing instrumental leadership. The group members who think of ways to keep the group from giving in to despair are providing expressive leadership. The group needs both kinds of leadership to survive.

Making Decisions

Closely related to the problem of leadership is the way groups make decisions. In many early hunting and food-gathering societies, important group decisions were reached by consensus—talking about an issue until everybody agreed on what to do (Fried, 1967). Today, occasionally, town councils and other small governing bodies operate in this way.

Because this consensus gathering takes a great deal of time and energy, many groups opt for efficiency by taking votes or simply letting one person's decision stand for the group as a whole.

Setting Goals

As we pointed out before, all groups must have a purpose, a goal, or a set of goals. The goal may be very general, such as spreading peace throughout the world, or it may be very specific, such as playing cards on a train. Group goals may change. For example, the card players might discover that they share a concern about the use of nuclear energy and decide to organize a political-action group.

Assigning Tasks

Establishing boundaries, defining leadership, making decisions, and setting goals are not enough to keep a group going. To endure, a group must do something, if nothing more than ensure that its members continue to make contact with one another. Therefore, it is important that group members know what needs to be done and who is going to do it. This assigning of tasks, in itself, can be an important group activity (think of your family discussions about sharing household chores). By taking on group tasks, members not only help the group reach its goals but also show their commitment to one another and to the group as a whole.

This leads members to appreciate one another's importance as individuals and the importance of the group in all their lives—a process that injects life and energy into a group.

Controlling Members' Behavior

If a group cannot control its members' behavior, it will cease to exist. For this reason, failure to conform to group norms is seen as dangerous or threatening, whereas conforming to group norms is rewarded, if only by others' friendly attitudes. Groups not only encourage but often depend for survival on conformity of behavior. A member's failure to conform is met with responses ranging from coolness to criticism or even ejection from the group. Anyone who has tried to introduce changes into the constitution of a club or to ignore long-standing conventions—such as ways of dressing, rituals of greeting, or the assumption of designated responsibilities—probably has experienced group hostility.

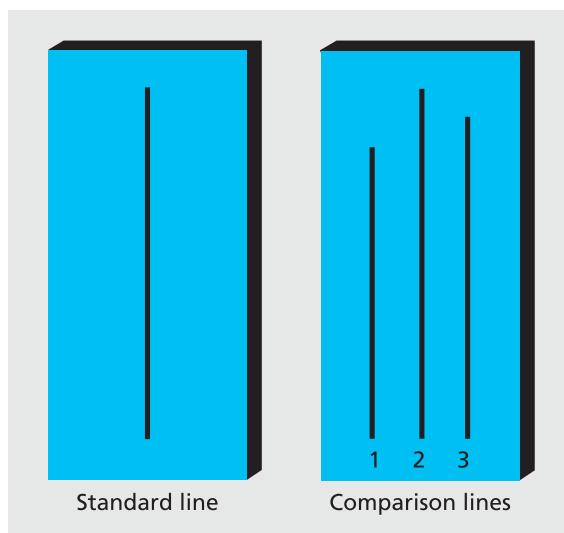
Primary groups tend to be more tolerant of members' deviant behavior than secondary groups. For example, families often will conceal the problems of a member who suffers from chronic alcoholism or drug abuse. Even primary groups, however, must draw the line somewhere, and they will invoke negative sanctions (see Chapter 7) if all else fails to get the deviant member to show at least a willingness to try to conform. When primary groups finally do act, their punishments can be far more severe or harsh than those of secondary groups. Thus, an intergenerational conflict in a family can result in the commitment of a teenager to an institution or treatment center. Secondary groups tend to use formal, as opposed to informal, sanctions and are much more likely than primary groups simply to expel, or push out, a member who persists in violating strongly held norms: Corporations fire unsatisfactory employees, the army discharges soldiers who violate regulations, and so on.

Even though primary groups are more tolerant of their members' behavior, people tend to conform more closely to their norms than to those of secondary groups. This is because people value their membership in a primary group, with its strong interpersonal bonds, for its own sake. Secondary group membership is valued mostly for what it will do for the people in the group, not because of any deep emotional ties. Because primary group membership is so desirable, its members are more reluctant to risk expulsion by indulging in behavior that might violate the group's standards or norms than are secondary group members.

Usually, group members will want to conform as long as they experience the group as important. Solomon Asch (1955) showed just how far group members will go to promote group solidarity and con-

Figure 6–1 Group Pressure

In Solomon Asch's experiment on conformity to group pressure, groups of eight students were asked to decide which of the comparison lines (right) was the same length as the standard line (left).



formity. In a series of experiments, he formed groups of eight people and then asked each member to match one line against three other lines of varying lengths (Figure 6–1). Each judgment was announced in the presence of the other group members.

The groups were composed of one real subject and seven of Asch's confederates, whose identities were kept secret from the real subject. The confederates had met previously with Asch and had been instructed to give a unanimous but incorrect answer at certain points throughout the experiment. Asch was interested in finding out how the individual who had been made a minority of one would respond in the presence of a unanimous majority. The subject was placed in a situation in which a group unanimously contradicted the information of his or her senses. Asch repeated the experiment many times. He found that 32% of the answers by the real subjects were identical with, or in the direction of, the inaccurate estimates of the majority. This was quite remarkable, because there were virtually no incorrect answers in the control groups that lacked Asch's accomplices, which rules out the possibility of optical illusion. This illustrates an instance in which individuals are willing to give incorrect answers in order not to appear out of step with the judgments of the other group members. (For further discussion of the impact of group members, see “Controversies in Sociology: Does Society Shape Our Memories?”)

Although groups must fulfill certain functions in order to continue to exist, they serve primarily as a point of reference for their members.

CONTROVERSIES IN SOCIOLOGY

Does Society Shape Our Memories?

 Any police officer will tell you that eyewitness accounts of events can differ dramatically. Not only are our memories of events shaped by our interaction with other people, but, it turns out, they can be shaped by certain biases we may hold.

Every day we encounter news reports. Most are accurate, but some turn out to be inaccurate. Which ones are we likely to believe? Which ones are we likely to remember?

For example, at the beginning of the Iraq war, there were many reports of the possible discovery of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Although these reports were subsequently shown to be false, six months after the invasion, one-third of Americans still believed the WMDs had been found.

In another case, after reading a story about a jewelry theft, people continued to believe the suspect named was guilty, even though his alibi as to his whereabouts during the time of the crime turned out to be true.

Several things seem to be happening here. People tend to remember things that logically go together even if it did not actually happen. Imagine that subjects are given a list of words that include, for example, *thermos, sandwich, beverage*. They may later “remember” that words such *napkin* or *apple* were also on the list, because they all relate to the topic, “lunch.”

Second, as we saw with our discussion of the Asch experiment, people’s memories of events can also be influenced by others who may hold contradictory positions.

It also turns out that people have “mental maps” of social life and the world in general. Once we have decided to either believe or not believe something, any

later change or retraction will merely be filtered through our position on social life or politics.

On the WMD example, Americans were more supportive of the invasion of Iraq than Germans or Australians. Because the Germans and Australians were skeptical of the reasons for going to war in the first place, they tended not to believe events they thought were erroneously reported. Americans, who were more supportive of the invasion, ignored many of the corrections of misinformation. This would help explain why they continued to believe WMDs were found even when that was reported not to be the case.

This willingness to believe false information that fits our views can be particularly troubling in political campaigns. One side can make a false claim about the other side’s candidate, allow it to echo through a news cycle, then contritely retract it, knowing full well that receptive audiences are likely to still believe the initial lie.

We have to acknowledge that we have preconceived notions of people or events. We tend to believe what fits in with the social worlds that we are a part of and reject that which does not fit our expectations. Accepting this would be the first step toward becoming more objective about the world around us.

Sources: Stephan Lewandowsky, Werner G.K. Stritzke, Klaus Oberauer, and Michael Morales. “Memory for Fact, Fiction, and Misinformation: The Iraq War 2003.” *Psychological Science* Vol 16, No. 3; Sharon Begley. (2005, Feb. 4). “People Believe a ‘Fact’ That Fits Their Views Even If It’s Clearly False.” *Wall Street Journal*, p. B1.

Reference Groups

Groups are more than just bridges between the individual and society as a whole. We spend much of our time in one group or another, and the effect that these groups have on us continues even when we are not actually in contact with the other members.

The norms and values of groups we belong to or identify with serve as the basis for evaluating our own and others’ behavior.

A reference group is a group or social category that an individual uses to help define beliefs, attitudes, and values and to guide behavior. It provides a comparison point against which people measure themselves and others. A reference group is often a category we identify with, rather than a specific group we belong to. For example, a communications major may identify with individuals in the media without having any direct contact with them. In this respect, anticipatory

socialization is occurring, in that the individual may alter his or her behavior and attitudes toward those he or she perceives to be part of the group he or she plans to join. For example, people who become bankers soon feel themselves part of a group—bankers—and assume ideas and lifestyles that help them identify with that group. They tend to dress in a conservative, “bankerish” fashion, even buying their clothes in shops that other bankers patronize to make sure they have the “right” clothes from the “right” stores. They join organizations such as country clubs and alumni associations so they can mingle with other bankers and clients. Eventually, the norms and values they adopted when they joined the bankers’ group become internalized; they see and judge the world around them as bankers.

We can also distinguish between positive and negative reference groups. Positive reference groups are composed of people we want to emulate. Negative

reference groups provide a model we do not wish to follow. Therefore, a writer may identify positively with those writers who produce serious fiction but may think of journalists who write for tabloids as a negative reference group.

Even though groups are in fact composed of individuals, individuals are also created to a large degree by the groups they belong to through the process of socialization (see Chapter 4). Of these groups, the small group usually has the strongest direct effect on an individual.

Small Groups

The term **small group** refers to *many kinds of social groups, such as families, peer groups, and work groups, that actually meet together and contain few enough members so that all members know one another.* The smallest group possible is a **dyad**, which *contains only two members.* An engaged couple is a dyad, as are the pilot and copilot of an aircraft.

George Simmel (1950) was the first sociologist to emphasize the importance of the size of a group on the interaction process. He suggested that small groups have distinctive qualities and patterns of interaction that disappear when the group grows larger. For example, dyads resist change in their group size: On the one hand, the loss of one member destroys the group, leaving the other member alone. On the other hand, a **triad**, or *the addition of a third member,* creates uncertainty because it introduces the possibility of a two-against-one alliance.

Triads are more stable in situations when one member can help resolve quarrels between the other two. When three diplomats are negotiating offshore fishing rights, for example, one member of the triad may offer a concession that will break the deadlock between the other two. If that does not work, the third person may try to analyze the arguments of the other two in an effort to bring about a compromise. The formation of shifting pair-offs within triads can help stabilize the group. When it appears that one group member is weakening, one of the two paired members will often break the alliance and form a new one with the individual who had been isolated (Hare, 1976).

This is often seen among groups of children engaged in games. In triads in which alliances do not shift and the configuration constantly breaks down into two against one, the group will become unstable and may eventually break up. In Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World*, the political organization of the earth was defined by three eternally warring political powers. As one power seemed to be losing, one of the others would come to its aid in a temporary alliance, thereby ensuring worldwide political stability while also making possible endless warfare. No power



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Triads are usually unstable groups because the possibility of two-against-one alliances is always present.

could risk the total defeat of another because the other surviving power might then become the stronger of the surviving dyad.

As a group grows larger, the number of relationships within it increases, which often leads to the formation of **subgroups—splinter groups within the larger group.** Once a group has more than five to seven members, spontaneous conversation becomes difficult for the group as a whole. Then two solutions are available: The group can split into subgroups (as happens informally at parties), or it can adopt a formal means of controlling communication (use of *Robert's Rules of Order*, for instance).

For these reasons, small groups tend to resist the addition of new members because increasing size threatens the nature of the group. In addition, there may be a fear that new members will resist socialization to group norms and thereby undermine group traditions and values. On the whole, small groups are much more vulnerable than large groups to disruption by new members, and the introduction of new members often leads to shifts in patterns of interaction and group norms.

Large Groups: Associations

Although all of us probably would be able to identify and describe the various small groups we belong to, we might find it difficult to follow the same process with the large groups that affect us.

As patrons or employees of large organizations and governments, we function as part of large groups all the time. Thus, sociologists must study large groups as well as small groups in order to understand the workings of society.

Much of the activity of a modern society is carried out through large and formally organized groups. Sociologists refer to these groups as **associations**, which are *purposefully created special-interest groups that*

have clearly defined goals and official ways of doing things. Associations include such organizations as government departments and agencies, businesses and factories, labor unions, schools and colleges, fraternal and service groups, hospitals and clinics, and clubs for various hobbies from gardening to collecting antiques. Their goals may be very broad and general—such as helping the poor, healing the sick, or making a profit—or quite specific and limited—such as manufacturing automobile tires or teaching people to speak Chinese. Although an enormous variety of associations exist, they all are characterized by some degree of formal structure with an underlying informal structure.

Formal Structure

For associations to function, the work that the association must accomplish is assessed and broken down into manageable tasks that are assigned to specific individuals. In other words, associations are run according to a formal organizational structure that consists of planned, highly institutionalized, and clearly defined statuses and role relationships.

The formal organizational structure of large associations in contemporary society is best exemplified by the organizational structure called bureaucracy. For example, when we consider a college or university, fulfilling its main purpose of educating students requires far more than simply bringing together students and teachers. Funds must be raised, buildings constructed, qualified students and professors recruited, programs and classes organized, materials ordered and distributed, grounds kept up, and buildings maintained. Lectures must be given; seminars must be led; and messages need to be typed, copied, and filed. To accomplish all these tasks, the school must create many different positions: president, deans, department heads, registrar, public relations staff, groundskeepers, maintenance personnel, purchasing agents, secretaries, faculty, and students.

Every member of the school has clearly spelled-out tasks that are organized in relation to one another: Students are taught and evaluated by faculty, faculty members are responsible to department heads or deans, deans to the president, and so on. Underlying these clearly defined assignments are procedures that are never written down but are worked out and understood by those who have to get the job done.

Informal Structure

Sociologists recognize that formal associations never operate entirely according to their stated rules and procedures. Every association has an informal structure consisting of networks of people who help out one another by “bending” rules and taking proce-

dural shortcuts. No matter how carefully plans are made, no matter how clearly and rationally roles are defined and tasks assigned, every situation and its variants cannot be anticipated. Sooner or later, then, individuals in associations are confronted with situations in which they must improvise and even persuade others to help them do so.

As every student knows, no school ever runs as smoothly as planned. For instance, going by the book—that is, following all the formal rules—often gets students tied up in long lines and red tape. Enterprising students and instructors find shortcuts. A student who wants to change from Section A of Sociology 100 to Section E might find it very difficult or time-consuming to change sections (add and drop classes) officially. However, it might be possible to work out an informal deal—the student stays registered in Section A but attends, and is evaluated in, Section E. The instructor of Section E then turns the grade over to the instructor of Section A, who hands in that grade with all the other Section A grades—as if the student had attended Section A all along. The formal rules have been bent, but the major purposes of the school (educating and evaluating students) have been served.

In addition, human beings have their own individual needs even when they are on company time, and these needs are not always met by attending single-mindedly to assigned tasks. To accommodate these needs, people often try to find extra break time for personal business by getting jobs done faster than would be possible if they followed all the formal rules and procedures. To accomplish these ends, individuals in associations may cover for one another, look the other way at strategic moments, and offer one another useful information about office politics, people, and procedures. Gradually, the reciprocal relationships among members of these informal networks become institutionalized; “unwritten laws” are established, and a fully functioning informal structure evolves. (For a discussion of applying the informal structure to job hunting, see “News You Can Use: The Strength of Weak Ties in Job Hunting.”)

Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

The Chicago sociologists, in their studies of the city, used some of the concepts developed by Ferdinand Tönnies (1865–1936), a German sociologist. In his book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tönnies examined the changes in social relations attributable to the transition from rural society (organized around small communities) to urban society (organized around large impersonal structures).

Tönnies noted that in a *Gemeinschaft* (community), relationships are intimate, cooperative, and personal. For example, author Philip Roth (1998),



NEWS YOU CAN USE

The Strength of Weak Ties in Job Hunting

Here is a common frustrating job-hunting story: With a great GPA and good references, you send out dozens of resumes to online job postings, newspaper ads, and company recruitment websites, and hear . . . nothing. Then you get news that a less skilled friend whose father's golf buddy works in a top company has landed a plum job. Is the old cliché—"It's not what you know, but *who* you know"—really true?

In some cases, yes. Mark Granovetter, author of a famous study on the strength of what he called "weak ties," found that 56% of all professional job applicants found their job through personal contacts. Only 16% landed jobs through advertisements or employment agencies.

But the nature of those contacts may surprise you. Typically, the person who opened the door was not a close friend or relative, but someone who actually did not know the job seeker very well. Granovetter called these relationships "weak ties." These are the bonds that exist between individuals who see one another infrequently, and whose relationships are casual rather than intimate. Today, we often characterize these clusters of acquaintances as social networks.

But why would weak ties work better than strong ones? Aren't the people who know you well the ones most likely to have your best interests at heart? That may be, but because of their very closeness, they are likely to be exposed to the same sources of information. People outside that tightly knit circle, however, have networks that reach much further afield. By getting to know them, you essentially tap into their networks, just as they, then, have access to yours.

Additionally, people who know us less well are less likely to pigeonhole us based on our past experiences or skills. This is especially true for job seekers who want to branch out into new areas. When you want to reinvent yourself, the people who know you best may hinder rather than help you. They may be supportive, but they could try to preserve the old identities you are trying to shed.

The best strategy for a job hunter, then, is to try and expand your circle of acquaintances. College buddies, friends of friends, professional associations, social clubs, church groups, and civic organizations all can lead to relationships that qualify as "weak tie" networks. (They can also, of course, lead to enduring friendships and personal growth!)

Websites such as Friendster and LinkedIn have been launched to facilitate these kinds of social networks electronically. As people increasingly understand the reciprocal power of social networks, they are more willing to facilitate such relationships. People with contacts in many social networks ultimately do better in the job market.

Sources: Mark Granovetter. (1983). "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited." *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 1, pp. 201–233; Herminia Ibarra. (2002). *Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing Your Career*. Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press.

in his book *American Pastoral*, describes such a community:

About one another, we knew who had what kind of lunch in the bag in his locker and who ordered what on his hot dog at Syd's; we knew one another's physical attributes—who walked pigeon-toed and who had breasts, who smelled of hair oil and who oversalivated when he spoke; we knew who among us was belligerent and who was friendly, who was smart and who was dumb; we knew whose mother had an accent and whose father had a mustache, whose mother worked and whose father was dead; somehow we even dimly grasped how every family's different set of circumstances set each family a distinctive difficult human problem.

In a Gemeinschaft the exchange of goods is based on reciprocity and barter, and people look out for the

well-being of the group as a whole. Among the Amish, for example, there is such a strong community spirit that, should a barn burn down, members of the community quickly come together to rebuild it. In just a matter of days a new barn will be standing—the work of community members who feel a strong tie and responsibility to another community member who has encountered misfortune. (For a discussion of how the Amish try to maintain a Gemeinschaft, see "Social Change: Limiting Technology to Save the Community.")

In a *Gesellschaft* (society), relationships are impersonal and independent. People look out for their own interests, goods are bought and sold, and formal contracts govern economic exchanges. Everyone is seen as an individual who may be in competition with others who happen to share a living space.

Tönnies saw *Gesellschaft* as the product of mid-nineteenth-century social changes that grew out of



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A small town is likely to produce a **Gemeinschaft**, in which relationships are intimate, cooperative, and personal; a city is likely to produce a **Gesellschaft**, in which relationships are impersonal and people look out for their own interests.

industrialization, in which people no longer automatically wanted to help one another or to share freely what they had. There is little sense of identification with others in a *Gesellschaft*, in which each individual strives for advantages and regards the accumulation of goods and possessions as more important than the qualities of personal ties. Modern urban society is, in Tönnies's terms, typically a *Gesellschaft*, whereas rural areas retain the more intimate qualities of *Gemeinschaft*.

In small, rural communities and preliterate societies, the family provided the context in which people lived, worked, were socialized, were cared for when ill or infirm, and practiced their religion. In contrast, modern urban society has produced many secondary groups in which these needs are met. It also offers far more options and choices than did the society of Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft*: educational options, career options, lifestyle options, choice of marriage partner, choice of whether to have children, and

choice of where to live. In this sense, the person living in today's urban society is freer.

Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

Tönnies wrote about communities and cities from the standpoint of what we call an ideal type, in that no community or city actually could conform to the definitions he presented. They are basically concepts that help us understand the differences between the two. In the same sense, Émile Durkheim devised ideas about mechanical and organic solidarity.

According to Durkheim, every society has a *collective conscience*—a system of fundamental beliefs and values. These beliefs and values define for its members the characteristics of the good society, which is one that meets the needs for individuality, for security, for superiority over others, and for any of a host of other values that could become important to the people in that society. *Social solidarity emerges*

SOCIAL CHANGE



Limiting Technology to Save the Community

Some groups go out of their way to preserve a certain lifestyle or a sense of community. Often, decisions about the introduction of technology will either preserve or hinder the development of community.

The Amish, a tight-knit religious community of about 225,000 located in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and several other states, are widely known for refusing to allow automobiles or technology into their community. They all wear the same identical plain clothing without buttons, live in houses without electricity, and cultivate the fields with horse-drawn machinery. Yet you would probably be surprised to find out that the Amish also use cell phones, gas barbecue grills, and inline skates. How could we explain this contradiction?

The Amish lifestyle is based on specific decisions made about the impact of technology on community life. The telephone has been the source of intense controversy among the Amish since the 1920s. Eventually the telephone was accepted because it could be used to call doctors, veterinarians, and merchants. But this did not mean that you should have a phone in the home. Rather, the phone should be in a communal location where it could be used by many people. But this is much less convenient than having a phone in the home. Why would you have a phone that you can only use to call people from some communal location? Well, think about the number of times a phone call has interrupted a conversation. Have you ever left a family meal to take a phone call? Now that the cell phone can follow us to most

locations, a phone call has the ability to interrupt all kinds of social encounters. Relegating the telephone to some communal spot outside of the home sends the message that the telephone conversations are much less important than those taking place in the community or the home. Keeping the telephone at a distance is a symbolic way of making it your servant, rather than the other way around.

Along the same line, some Amish craftsmen who need electricity in a workshop may use a diesel generator to charge a bank of 12-volt batteries. It would certainly be much easier to have electricity connected to the workshop. But Amos, an Amish craftsman, pointed out that the Bible teaches them to separate themselves from the world: "Connecting to the electric lines would make too many things too easy. Pretty soon people would start plugging in radios and televisions. . . . Batteries and generators only work for a short time and you have to work to keep them going. It is a way of controlling the use of electricity. We try to restrict things that would lead to us losing that sense of being separate, to put the brakes on how fast we change."

Does the cell phone, the beeper, the BlackBerry, call-waiting, or automated voice mail enhance our community life? If we decided that community came first, how would we change our use of technology?

Source: Adapted from Rheingold, Howard, "Look Who's Talking" *Wired*, January, 1999.

from the people's commitment and conformity to the society's collective conscience.

A mechanically integrated society is one in which *a society's collective conscience is strong and there is a great commitment to that collective conscience.*

In this type of society, members have common goals and values and a deep and personal involvement with the community. A modern-day example of such a society is that of the Tasaday, a food-gathering community in the Philippines. Theirs is a relatively small, simple society, with little division of labor, no separate social classes, and no permanent leadership or power structure.

In contrast, in an **organically integrated society**, *social solidarity depends on the cooperation of individuals in many different positions who perform specialized tasks.* The society can survive only if all the tasks are performed. With organic integration such as is found in the United States, social relationships

are more formal and functionally determined than are the close, personal relationships of mechanically integrated societies.

Although we may take for granted the movement from Gemeinschafts to Gesellschafts, or mechanically integrated to organically integrated societies, it is only relatively recently in the course of human history that cities have become the dominant type of living arrangements.

Bureaucracy

Although in ordinary usage the term *bureaucracy* suggests a certain rigidity and red tape, it has a somewhat different meaning to sociologists.

Robert K. Merton (1969) defined **bureaucracy** as "*a formal, rationally organized social structure [with] clearly defined patterns of activity in which, ideally,*



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Modern bureaucracies have an organizational structure that makes it clear what rights and duties are attached to the various positions.

every series of actions is functionally related to the purposes of the organization.”

The German sociologist Max Weber (1956) provided the first detailed study of the nature and origins of bureaucracy. Although much has changed in society since he developed his theories, Weber’s basic description of bureaucracy remains essentially accurate to this day.

Weber’s Model of Bureaucracy: An Ideal Type

Weber viewed bureaucracy as the most efficient—although not necessarily the most desirable—form of social organization for the administration of work. He studied examples of bureaucracy throughout history and noted the elements that they had in common. Weber’s model of bureaucracy is an **ideal type**, which is a *simplified, exaggerated model of reality used to illustrate a concept*.

When Weber presented his ideal type of bureaucracy, he combined into one those characteristics that could be found in one form or another in a variety of organizations. It is unlikely that we ever would find a bureaucracy that has all the traits presented in Weber’s ideal type. However, his presentation can help us understand what is involved in bureaucratic

systems. It is also important to recognize that Weber’s ideal type is in no way meant to be ideal in the sense that it presents a desired state of affairs. In short, an ideal type is an exaggeration of a situation that is used to convey a set of ideas. Weber outlined six characteristics of bureaucracies:

1. *A clear-cut division of labor.* The activities of a bureaucracy are broken down into clearly defined, limited tasks, which are attached to formally defined positions (statuses) in the organization. This permits a great deal of specialization and a high degree of expertise.

For example, a small-town police department might consist of a chief, a lieutenant, a detective, several sergeants, and a dozen officers. The chief issues orders and assigns tasks; the lieutenant is in charge when the chief is not around; the detective does investigative work; the sergeants handle calls at the desk and do the paperwork required for formal booking procedures; and the officers walk or drive through the community, making arrests and responding to emergencies. Each member of the department has a defined status and duty as well as specialized skills appropriate to his or her position.

2. *Hierarchical delegation of power and responsibility.* Each position in the bureaucracy is given

sufficient power so that the individual who occupies it can do assigned work adequately and can also compel subordinates to follow instructions.

Such power must be limited to what is necessary to meet the requirements of the position. For example, a police chief can order an officer to walk a specific beat but cannot insist that the officer join the Lions Club.

3. *Rules and regulations.* The rights and duties attached to various positions are stated clearly in writing and govern the behavior of all individuals who occupy them. In this way, all members of the organizational structure know what is expected of them, and each person can be held accountable for his or her behavior. For example, the regulations of a police department might state, "No member of the department shall drink intoxicating liquors while on duty." Such rules make the activities of bureaucracies predictable and stable.
4. *Impartiality.* The organization's written rules and regulations apply equally to all its members. No exceptions are made because of social or psychological differences among individuals.

Also, people occupy positions in the bureaucracy only because they are assigned according to formal procedures. These positions belong to the organization itself; they cannot become the personal property of those who occupy them. For example, a vice-president of United States Steel Corporation is usually not permitted to pass on that position to his or her children through inheritance.

5. *Employment based on technical qualifications.* People are hired because they have the ability and skills to do the job, not because they have personal contacts within the company. Advancement is based on how well a person does the job. Promotions and job security go to those who are most competent.
6. *Distinction between public and private spheres.* A clear distinction is made between the employees' personal lives and their working lives. It is unusual for employees to be expected to take business calls at home. At the same time, employees' family lives have no place in the work setting.

Although many bureaucracies strive at the organizational level to attain the goals that Weber proposed, most do not achieve them on the practical level.

Bureaucracy Today: The Reality

Just as no building is ever identical to its blueprint, no bureaucratic organization fully embodies all the features of Weber's model. One thing that most

bureaucracies do have in common is a structure that separates those whose responsibilities include keeping in mind the overall needs of the entire organization from those whose responsibilities are much more narrow and task oriented. Visualize a modern industrial organization as a pyramid. Management (at the top of the pyramid) plans, organizes, hires, and fires. Workers (in the bottom section) make much smaller decisions limited to carrying out the work assigned to them. A similar division cuts through the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. The pope is at the top, followed by cardinals, archbishops, and bishops; the clergy are below. Only bishops can ordain new priests, and they plan the church's worldwide activities. The priests administer parishes, schools, and missions; their tasks are quite narrow and confined.

Although employees of bureaucracies may enjoy the privileges of their positions and guard them jealously, they may be adversely affected by the system in ways that they do not recognize. Alienation, adherence to unproductive ritual, and acceptance of incompetence are some of the results of a less-than-ideal bureaucracy.

Robert Michels, a colleague of Weber's, also was concerned about the depersonalizing effect of bureaucracy. His views, formulated at the beginning of this century, are still pertinent today.

The Iron Law of Oligarchy

Michels (1911) concluded that the formal organization of bureaucracies inevitably leads to *oligarchy*, under which organizations that were originally idealistic and democratic eventually come to be dominated by a small self-serving group of people who achieved positions of power and responsibility. This can occur in large organizations because it becomes physically impossible for everyone to get together every time a decision has to be made. Consequently, a small group is given the responsibility of making decisions. Michels believed that the people in this group would become corrupted by their elite positions and more and more inclined to make decisions to protect their power rather than represent the will of the group they were supposed to serve.

In effect, Michels was saying that bureaucracy and democracy do not mix. Despite any protestations and promises that they will not become like all the rest, those placed in positions of responsibility and power often come to believe that they are indispensable to, and more knowledgeable than, those they serve. As time goes on, they become further removed from the rank and file.

The iron law of oligarchy suggests that organizations that wish to avoid oligarchy should take a number of precautionary steps. They should make sure

that the rank and file remain active in the organization and that the leaders not be granted absolute control of a centralized administration. As long as open lines of communication and shared decision making exist between the leaders and the rank and file, an oligarchy cannot develop easily.

Clearly, the problems of oligarchy, of the bureaucratic depersonalization described by Weber, and of personal alienation all are interrelated. If individuals are deprived of the power to make decisions that affect their lives in many or even most of the areas that are important to them, withdrawal into narrow ritualism and apathy are likely responses.

SUMMARY

- A social group consists of a number of people who have a common identity, some feeling of unity, and certain common goals and shared norms.
- Sociologists distinguish between primary groups, which involve intimacy, informality, and emotional investment in one another, and secondary groups, which have specific goals, formal organization, and much less intimacy.
- To function properly, all groups must define their boundaries, choose leaders, make decisions, set goals, assign tasks, and control members' behavior.
- A reference group is a group or social category that an individual uses to help define beliefs, attitudes, and values and to guide behavior.

- When individuals alter their behavior and attitudes toward those in a group they wish to join, they are engaging in anticipatory socialization.
- Associations are purposefully created special-interest groups that have clearly defined goals and official ways of doing things.
- A modern form of large association is bureaucracy, which is a formal, rationally organized social structure with clearly defined patterns of activity that are functionally related to the purposes of the organization.



Media Resources

The Companion Website for *Introduction to Sociology, Ninth Edition*

<http://sociology.wadsworth.com/tischler9e>

Supplement your review of this chapter by going to the companion website to take one of the Tutorial Quizzes, use the flash cards to master key terms, and check out the many other study aids you'll find there. You'll also find special features such as Wadsworth's Sociology Online Resources and Writing Companion, GSS data, and Census 2000 information at your fingertips to help you complete that special project or do some research on your own.