

## SOCIAL GROUPS AND FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS

**Groups**, people who think of themselves as belonging together and who interact with one another, are the essence of life in society. Groups are vital for our well-being. They provide intimate relationships and a sense of belonging, something that we all need.

An **aggregate** consists of people who temporarily share the same physical space but who do not see themselves as belonging together. Shoppers standing in a checkout line or drivers waiting at a red light are an aggregate.

A **category** is simply a statistic. It consists of people who share similar characteristics, such as all college women who wear glasses or all men over 6 feet tall.

## GROUPS WITHIN A SOCIETY

### **Primary Groups**

Cooley called primary groups the “springs of life.” By this, he meant that primary groups, such as family and friends, are essential to our emotional well-being. As humans, we have an intense need for face to face interaction that generates feelings of self-esteem. By offering a sense of belonging and a feeling of being appreciated—and sometimes even loved—primary groups are uniquely equipped to meet this basic need. From our opening vignette, you can see that gangs are also primary groups.

Primary groups are also significant because their values and attitudes become fused into our identity. We internalize their views, which then become the lenses through which we view life. Even when we are adults—no matter how far we move away from our childhood roots—early primary groups remain “inside” us. There, they continue to form part of the perspective from which we look out onto the world. Ultimately, then, it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to separate the self from our primary groups, for the self and our groups merge into a “we.”

### **Secondary Groups**

Compared with primary groups, **secondary groups** are larger, more anonymous, more formal, and more impersonal. Secondary groups are based on some common interest or activity, and their members are likely to interact on the basis of specific statuses, such as president, manager, worker, or student. Examples are a college class, the American Sociological Association, and the Democratic Party. Contemporary society could not function without secondary groups. They are part of the way we get our education, make our living, spend our money, and use our leisure time. **Voluntary Associations** A special type of secondary group is a **voluntary association**, a group made up of volunteers who organize on the basis of some mutual interest. Building on the term *oligarchy*, a system in which many are ruled by a few, sociologist Robert Michels (1876–1936) coined the term **the iron law of oligarchy** to refer to how organizations come to be dominated by a small, self-perpetuating elite (Michels 1911/1949). Most members of voluntary associations are passive, and an elite inner circle keeps itself in power by passing the leadership positions among its members.

### **In Groups and Out Groups**

Groups toward which individuals feel loyalty are called in-groups, while those toward which they feel antagonisms are called out-groups.

1. The division is significant sociologically because in-groups provide a sense of identification or belonging, which often produce rivalries between groups.
2. In-group membership leads to discrimination; given our loyalty, we favor members of our in-group. Sociologist Robert K. Merton identified a double standard produced by this: the behaviors by members of an in-group are seen as virtues, while the same behaviors by members of an out-group are viewed as vices.
3. Dividing the world into “we” and “them” can sometimes lead to acts directed against the out-groups.

## Reference Groups

Reference groups are the groups we use as standards to evaluate ourselves, whether or not we actually belong to those groups.

1. They exert great influence over our behavior; people may change their clothing, hair style, speech, and other characteristics to match what the reference group would expect of them.
2. Having two reference groups that clearly conflict with each other can produce intense internal conflict.

## Social Networks

Social networks consist of people linked by various social ties. Clusters, or factions that form within large groups, are called cliques. Cliques, family, friends, and acquaintances can all be bases for social networks.

1. Interaction takes place within social networks that connect us to the larger society.
2. Stanley Milgram did an experiment that demonstrated how small our social world really is; his study led to the phrase “six degrees of separation”—meaning that, on average, everyone in the United States is separated by just six individuals.
3. Other studies have both confirmed and contradicted Milgram’s findings. In order to draw solid conclusions, it seems that the choice of samples and how researchers measure links will have to be clearly defined.
4. One reason it is so difficult to overcome social inequality is because our social networks contribute to inequality.

## BUREAUCRACIES

Formal organizations, secondary groups designed to achieve explicit objectives, have become a central feature of contemporary life. Max Weber identified the essential characteristics of bureaucracies, which help these organizations reach their goals, as well as grow and endure. These include the following:

1. a hierarchy where assignments flow downward and accountability flows upward.
2. a division of labor.
3. written rules.
4. written communications and records.
5. impersonality and replaceability.

Weber believed that bureaucracies would dominate our lives through a process he called the **rationalization of society**. **Goal displacement** occurs when an organization adopts new goals after the original goals have been achieved and there is no longer any reason for it to continue.

1. The March of Dimes is an example of this.
  - (1) It was originally formed to fight polio, but when that threat was eliminated, the professional staff found a new cause, birth defects.
  - (2) With the possibility of birth defects someday being eliminated as our knowledge of human genes expands, the organization has adopted a new slogan—breakthroughs for babies—which is vague enough to ensure their perpetual existence.

Weber’s model only accounts for part of the characteristics of bureaucracies. Dysfunctions can also be identified.

1. **Red tape**, or the strict adherence to rules, results in nothing getting accomplished.
2. **Bureaucratic alienation**, a feeling of powerlessness and normlessness, occurs when workers are assigned to repetitive tasks in order for the corporation to achieve efficient production, thereby cutting them off from the product of their labor.
3. **To resist alienation**, workers form primary groups within the larger secondary organization, relating to one another not just as workers, but as people who value one another.

4. **Bureaucratic incompetence** is reflected in the Peter principle—members of an organization are promoted for good work until they reach their level of incompetence. If this principle were generally true, then bureaucracies would be staffed by incompetents and would fail. In reality, bureaucracies are highly successful.

### WORKING FOR THE CORPORATION

Managers feed better information to workers with these characteristics, bring them into stronger networks, and put them in “fast track” positions. With such advantages, these workers perform better and become more committed to the company. This, of course, confirms the boss’s initial expectation, or stereotype. But for workers who don’t look or act like the corporate leaders, the opposite happens. Thinking of them as less capable, the bosses give them fewer opportunities and challenges. When these workers see others get ahead and realize that they are working beneath their own abilities, they lose morale, become less committed to the company, and don’t perform as well. This, of course, confirms the stereotypes the bosses had of them. Self-Fulfilling Stereotypes exist in the “Hidden” Corporate Culture.

1. Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s organizational research demonstrates that the corporate culture contains hidden values that create a self-fulfilling prophecy that affects people’s careers.
2. Corporate and department heads have an image of who is most likely to succeed and they look for those whose backgrounds are similar to their own. These people are provided with better access to information, networking, and “fast track” positions. Workers who are given opportunities to advance tend to outperform others and are more committed.
3. Those who are judged outsiders and experience few opportunities think poorly of themselves, are less committed, and work below their potential.
4. The hidden values of the corporate culture that create this self-fulfilling prophecy are largely invisible.

### **Managing with Diversity in the Corporation**

1. With more than half of the U.S. workforce minorities, immigrants, and women, dealing with diversity in the workplace is becoming unavoidable.
2. Most large companies have diversity training to help employees work successfully with others of different backgrounds.
3. Not all diversity programs are equal and different programs will produce different results. Specifically, those aimed at setting goals for increasing diversity and holding managers accountable tend to be successful.

### TECHNOLOGY AND THE CONTROL OF WORKERS: TOWARD A MAXIMUM-SECURITY SOCIETY

The microchip is affecting all areas of society; it is now easier for governments to monitor our behavior and computers monitor millions of workers. Some analysts suggest that we are moving toward a maximum-security society.

#### **Group Dynamics**

**A.** How individuals affect groups and groups affect individuals is known as group dynamics.

1. The study of group dynamics focuses on group size, leadership, conformity, and decision making.
2. Sociologists recognize a small group as one that is small enough for everyone in it to interact directly with all the other members.

**B.** As Georg Simmel (1858-1918) noted, the size of the group is significant for its dynamics.

1. A dyad is a social group containing two members. It is the smallest and most fragile of all human groupings. Marriages and love affairs are examples: if one member loses interest, the dyad collapses.
2. A triad is a group of three persons—a married couple with a first child, for example. Triads basically are stronger than dyads but are still extremely unstable. It is not uncommon for coalitions to form in which there is alignment of two members of the group against another. Often, one member becomes an arbitrator or mediator because he or she always tries to settle disagreements between the other two members of the group.

3. As more members are added to a group, intensity decreases and stability increases, for there are more linkages between more people within the group. The groups develop a more formal structure to accomplish their goals, for instance by having a president, treasurer, and so on. This structure enables groups to survive over time.

**C.** Research by Darley and Latané found that as groups grow larger, they tend to break into smaller groups, people are less willing to take individual responsibility (diffusion of responsibility), and they interact more formally toward one another.

1. Darley and Latané's experiment has serious flaws when it comes to real life.
2. Henslin experienced this firsthand while in Vienna, Austria. He found that no diffusion of responsibility stopped people from immediately helping a man who had tripped and fallen.

**D.** A leader may be defined as someone who influences the behaviors, opinions, or attitudes of others.

1. Sociologists would disagree that people are born to be leaders. Rather, they find that people with certain characteristics are more likely to become leaders—those who represent the group's values, are seen as capable of leading the group out of crisis, are more talkative, express determination and self-confidence, are taller or are judged better looking.
2. There are two types of group leaders. Instrumental (task-oriented) leaders try to keep the group moving toward its goals, reminding the members of what they are trying to accomplish. Expressive (socioemotional) leaders are less likely to be recognized as leaders but help with the group's morale. These leaders may have to minimize the friction that instrumental leaders necessarily create.
3. There are three types of leadership styles. Authoritarian leaders give orders and frequently do not explain why they praise or condemn a person's work. Democratic leaders try to gain a consensus by explaining proposed actions, suggesting alternative approaches, and giving "facts" as the basis for their evaluation of the members' work. Laissez-faire leaders are very passive and give the group almost total freedom to do as it wishes.
4. Psychologists Ronald Lippitt and Ralph White discovered that the leadership styles produced different results when used on small groups of young boys. Under authoritarian leaders the boys became either aggressive or apathetic; under democratic leaders they were more personal and friendly; and under laissez-faire leaders they goofed off a lot, and were notable for their lack of achievement.
5. Different situations require different leadership styles.

**E.** A study by Dr. Solomon Asch indicates that people are strongly influenced by peer pressure. Asch was interested in seeing whether individuals would resist the temptation to change a correct response to an incorrect response because of peer pressure.

1. Asch held cards up in front of small groups of people and asked which sets of cards matched; one at a time, they were supposed to respond aloud. All but one of the group members was a confederate, having been told in advance by the researcher how to answer the question.
2. After two trials in which everyone answered correctly, the confederates intentionally answered incorrectly, as they had previously been instructed to do.
3. Of the fifty people tested, 33 percent ended up giving the incorrect answers at least half of the time, even though they knew the answers were wrong; only 25 percent always gave the right answer despite the peer pressure.

**F.** Dr. Stanley Milgram sought to determine why otherwise "good people" apparently participated in the Nazis' slaughter of Jews and others.

1. He conducted experiments in which one person (the "teacher") was instructed to administer an electric shock to the other person (the "learner") for each wrong answer given to certain questions and to increase the voltage of the shock after each wrong answer.
2. In fact, the "learner" was playing a role, intentionally giving wrong answers but only pretending to be receiving an electrical shock.

3. Since a person in apparent authority (“scientist, white coat, university laboratory”) continually stated that the experiment had to go on, most of the “teachers” gave in to that authority and continued to administer the “shocks” even when they appeared to produce extreme pain.

4. The scientific community was disturbed not only by Milgram’s findings, but also by his methods. Associations of social researchers accordingly adopted codes of ethics to require that subjects be informed of the nature and purpose of social research, and almost all deception was banned.

**G.** Sociologist Irving Janis coined the word “groupthink” to refer to situations in which a group of people think alike and any suggestion of alternatives becomes a sign of disloyalty. Even moral judgments are put aside for the perceived welfare of the group.

1. The Asch and Milgram experiments demonstrate how groupthink can develop.

2. U.S. history provides examples of governmental groupthink: presidents and their inner circles have committed themselves to a single course of action (e.g., refusal to believe the Japanese might attack Pearl Harbor or continuing and expanding the war in Vietnam) even when objective evidence showed the course to be wrong. The leaders became cut off from information that did not coincide with their own opinions.

3. Groupthink can be prevented only by insuring that leaders regularly are exposed to individuals who have views conflicting with those of the inner circle.