

Chapter 6: Societies to Social Networks

Chapter Summary

Groups are the essence of life in society. We become who we are because of our membership in human groups. The essential feature of a group is that its members have something in common and that they believe that what they have in common is significant. The largest and most complex group that sociologists study is society (people who share a culture and a territory). Because of what appears to be a “natural” need for human kind to share culture, territory, and to seek significant others, societies developed.

Anthropologists and sociologists have identified five types of societies that have developed in the course of human history. These five types of societies include hunting and gathering, pastoral and horticultural, agricultural, industrial, and postindustrial societies. Each is characterized by distinct forms of social division, social labor, and social inequality.

The hunting and gathering society has the fewest social divisions and is the most egalitarian. In this society, the men hunt large animals and the women usually gather edible plants, fruits, and other food found growing in the wild. The first social revolution was based on the domestication of plants and animals. This resulted in the development of the pastoral society, which concentrated on the herding of animals, and the horticultural society, which specialized in planting and harvesting crops. The horticultural society made it possible for permanent settlements to be established since it was no longer necessary for people to follow the food supply. In the third social revolution, the invention of the plow made it possible for large areas of land to be cultivated and harvested. The society that developed, known as the agricultural society, made large cities possible because it freed some members of society from being dedicated to the production of their own food. In the fourth social revolution, the invention of the steam engine introduced the industrial society which concentrated on the manufacturing and consumption of goods. The fifth social revolution occurred with the invention of the microchip. In this postindustrial society, the emphasis is on the development and transfer of technology, information, and knowledge. A bioeconomic society, believed to be emerging in the twenty-first century, is based on the decoding of the human genome. Some sociologists, however, believe this latest revolution is only an extension of the postindustrial society. Regardless of the change that occurs, technological innovation is critical to the development and transformation of societies.

Regardless of the technological significance of the society, all societies have a tendency to overpower the individual. This is most pronounced in the postindustrial society in which most of us now live. According to Emile Durkheim, small groups serve as a buffer between the individual and the complications and difficulty the larger society presents to the individual.

Groups can be typed in terms of their social relationships and functions. Different types of groups within society include primary groups, secondary groups, in-groups and out-groups, reference groups, social networks, and electronic communities.

To better understand how different groups work, sociologists study group dynamics, or the ways in which individuals affect groups and the ways in which groups influence individuals. Georg Simmel was one of the first sociologists to extensively study group size and the relationship between group members.

Group dynamics are affected by group size, types of leaders, and leadership styles. As small groups become larger, they become more stable and less intimate. Group leaders can be instrumental (task oriented) or expressive (socioemotional). Leadership styles include authoritarian (leaders who give orders), democratic (leaders who work toward and/or forge a consensus), and laissez-faire (leaders who are highly permissive).

Groups have a significant degree of influence over people's attitudes and actions. The Asch experiment demonstrated how difficult it is for individuals to resist peer pressure and how they have a need to belong. The Milgram experiment showed how difficult it is for individuals to challenge people in positions of authority.

A potentially dangerous aspect of a group's influence over its members is groupthink, a narrowing of thought by a group of people, leading to the perception that there is only one correct answer to which all members of the group are impelled, by loyalty and trust, to accept. The two space shuttle disasters (Challenger and Columbia) are examples of how NASA engineers had a limited view of their options in either launching or landing the shuttle. In each case, the decision resulted in a disaster. The key to preventing groupthink is to encourage and circulate research results that provide the greatest number of options for decision makers to consider in an atmosphere of free expression and academic freedom.

Chapter Outline

I. Societies and Their Transformation

- A. Groups are the essence of life in society; the groups to which we belong help determine our goals and values, how we feel about ourselves, and even how we feel about life itself.
- B. An essential element of a social group is that its members have something in common and that they believe what they have in common makes a difference.
- C. Society, which consists of people who share a culture and a territory, is the largest and most complex group that sociologists study. As society changes, so does the nature and types of its groups.
- D. The first societies were hunting and gathering societies.
 1. Their survival depended on hunting animals and gathering plants. Since an area could only support a limited number of people who obtained food this way, the groups were small in size and nomadic, moving elsewhere when the supply of food ran out.

2. They had few social divisions beyond that based on sex. There was usually a shaman, an individual thought to be able to influence spiritual forces, but their status was generally not much higher than that of everyone else.
 3. The family was the basic unit—distributing food, educating the children, nursing the sick, etc.
 4. Since what they gathered was perishable, they did not accumulate possessions. Of all societies, they were the most egalitarian.
- E. Hunting and gathering societies were transformed into pastoral (characterized by the pasturing of animals) and horticultural (characterized by the growing of plants) societies as a result of the domestication revolution.
1. The domestication of plants and animals is called the first social revolution, although the process was extremely gradual.
 2. The resulting societies created food surpluses that allowed for increased population size and some specialized division of labor.
 3. Increased trade and interaction between groups developed, and people began to accumulate objects they considered valuable.
 4. As families or clans acquired more goods than others, feuds and wars erupted.
 5. Leaders began to accumulate more of these possessions than other people did, and to pass these advantages along to their descendants. As a result, simple equality began to give way to inequality.
- F. The agricultural revolution (the second social revolution) occurred with the invention of the plow about 5,000 to 6,000 years ago. Pastoral and horticultural societies were transformed into agricultural societies.
1. Since plows pulled by animals were used instead of hoes and digging sticks, a much larger food surplus was produced. This allowed people to engage in activities other than farming.
 2. Sometimes referred to as the dawn of civilization, this period produced the wheel, writing, and numbers. Cities developed, and groups were distinguished by their greater or lesser possessions. An elite gained control of the surplus resources.
 3. Social inequalities became a fundamental feature of social life. Those with greater resources surrounded themselves with armed men to protect their possessions and growing privileges. They began to levy taxes on their “subjects.” This concentration of resources and power, along with the oppression of the powerless, was the forerunner of the state.
 4. Females became subjugated to males; Elise Boulding suggests that this change occurred because men were in charge of plowing and the cows.
- G. The Industrial Revolution (the third social revolution) began in 1765, when the steam engine was first used to run machinery in Great Britain. Agricultural societies were transformed into industrial societies.
1. The industrial societies developed and harnessed many mechanical power sources, resulting in a dramatic shift from agriculture to manufacturing as the major sources of power, wealth, and prestige.
 2. Initially, social inequality increased greatly, as did the size of the population. The individuals who first utilized the new technology accumulated great wealth, controlling the means of production and dictating the conditions under which

- people could work for them. A huge surplus of labor developed, as masses of people were thrown off the land their ancestors had farmed.
3. Initially denied the right to unionize or strike, workers eventually won their demands for better living conditions. The consequence was that wealth spread to larger segments of society.
 4. As industrialization continued, the pattern of growing inequality was reversed. Indicators of greater equality include better housing, a vast increase in consumer goods, the abolition of slavery, and more representative political systems.
- H. Industrial societies are being transformed into postindustrial societies; these social changes are linked to the new technology of the microchip.
1. Postindustrial societies are moving away from production and manufacturing to service industries. The basic component of this new society is information.
 2. The United States was the first country to have more than 50 percent of its work force employed in service industries. Australia, New Zealand, Western Europe, and Japan soon followed.
 3. Social analysts are suggesting that we are witnessing a fourth social revolution because our way of life has been radically transformed by the microchip.
- I. Some social analysts believe that another new type of society, called biotech society, is emerging.
1. Its origins go back to either the identification of the double-helix structure of DNA or the decoding of the human genome. Its chief characteristic will be an economy that centers on the application of genetic structures.
 2. Biotechnology is already replacing botany and biochemistry is replacing chemistry.
 3. It is not clear whether this is a society that will replace postindustrial society or simply be another aspect of this information-based society. Regardless, we can look forward to revolutionary changes in health care and maybe even the human species.
- J. As society is transformed, so are we. These changes even affect the way we think about ourselves and the way we live our lives. Not all societies go through all the stages; many societies today reflect a mixture of the different types.

II. Groups Within Society

- A. Groups are viewed as a buffer between individuals and society.
1. Durkheim believed that small groups serve as a sort of lifeline that helps prevent anomie.
 2. Sociologists distinguish between aggregates, categories, and groups. An aggregate is made up of individuals who temporarily share the same physical space but do not have a sense of belonging together. A category is a collection of people who have similar characteristics. Unlike groups, the individuals who make up aggregates or categories do not interact with one another or take each other into account.
- B. Sociologist Charles H. Cooley used the term “primary group” to refer to groups characterized by cooperative, intimate, long-term, face-to-face relationships.
1. The group becomes part of the individual's identity and the lens through which to view life.

2. It is essential to an individual's psychological well-being, as humans have an intense need for associations that promote feelings of self-esteem.
- C. Secondary groups are larger, relatively temporary, more anonymous, formal, and impersonal than primary groups, and are based on some interest or activity.
1. Members are likely to interact on the basis of specific roles, such as president, manager, worker, or student.
 2. In industrial societies, secondary groups have multiplied and become essential to our welfare.
 3. Secondary groups tend to break down into primary groups within the larger group, such as friendship cliques at school or work. The primary group serves as a buffer between the individual and the needs of the secondary group.
- D. 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.
- E. 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.
- F. 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. One of the ways in which people are expanding their social networks is through facebooking, an electronic way to meet “friends.”
 3. Stanley Milgram did an experiment that demonstrated how small our social world really is; he found that social networks are so interrelated that almost everyone in the United States is connected by just five links.
 4. One reason why it is so difficult to overcome social inequality is because our social networks contribute to inequality.
- G. In the 1990s, due to technology, an entirely new type of human group made its appearance—the electronic community.
1. Through the Internet, people around the world interact with one another in news groups.

2. While most news groups are a new and interesting way of communicating, some meet our definition of a group, because the people who use them have established relationships and think of themselves as belonging together.

III. 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 some 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.
 4. 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.
- C. A leader may be defined as someone who influences the behavior of others.
 1. There are two types of group leaders. Instrumental (task-oriented) leaders are those who try to keep the group moving toward its goals, reminding the members of what they are trying to accomplish. Expressive (socioemotional) leaders are those who 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.
 2. There are three types of leadership styles. Authoritarian leaders are those who give orders and frequently do not explain why they praise or condemn a person's work. Democratic leaders are those who 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 those who are very passive and give the group almost total freedom to do as it wishes.
 3. 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 asked more questions, made fewer decisions, and were notable for their lack of achievement.

4. Different situations require different leadership styles.
 5. 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.
- D. 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.
- E. 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.
- F. 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; continuing and expanding the war in Vietnam; and the Watergate scandal) 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.

KEY TERMS

After studying the chapter, review the definition for each of the following terms.

aggregate: individuals who temporarily share the same physical space but do not see themselves as belonging together (155)

agricultural revolution: the second social revolution, based on the invention of the plow, which led to agricultural societies (150)

agricultural society: a society based on large-scale agriculture (150)

authoritarian leader: an individual who leads by giving orders (164)

biotech society: a society whose economy increasingly centers on the application of genetics to produce medicine, food, and materials (152)

category: people who have similar characteristics (155)

clique: a cluster of people within a larger group who choose to interact with one another (159)

coalition: the alignment of some members of a group against others (161)

democratic leader: an individual who leads by trying to reach a consensus (164)

domestication revolution: the first social revolution, based on the domestication of plants and animals, which led to pastoral and horticultural societies (149)

dyad: the smallest possible group, consisting of two persons (161)

electronic community: individuals who regularly interact with one another on the Internet and who think of themselves as belonging together (160)

expressive leader: an individual who increases harmony and minimizes conflict in a group; also known as a *socioemotional leader* (164)

group: people who have something in common and who believe that what they have in common is significant; also called a social group (148)

group dynamics: the ways in which individuals affect groups and the ways in which groups affect individuals (161)

groupthink: a narrowing of thought by a group of people, leading to the perception that there is only one correct answer, in which to even suggest alternatives becomes a sign of disloyalty (169)

horticultural society: a society based on cultivating plants by the use of hand tools (149)

hunting and gathering society: a human group that depends on hunting and gathering for its survival (148)

Industrial Revolution: the third social revolution, occurring when machines powered by fuels replaced most animal and human power (150)

industrial society: a society based on the use of machines powered by fuels (150)

in-groups: groups toward which people feel loyalty (157)

instrumental leader: an individual who tries to keep the group moving toward its goals; also known as a *task-oriented leader* (164)

laissez-faire leader: an individual who leads by being highly permissive (164)

leader: someone who influences other people (163)

leadership styles: ways in which people express their leadership (164)

out-groups: groups toward which people feel antagonism (157)

pastoral society: a society based on the pasturing of animals (149)
postindustrial (information) society: a society based on information, services, and high technology, rather than on raw materials and manufacturing (152)
primary group: a group characterized by intimate, long-term, face-to-face association, and cooperation (155)
reference group: a group whose standards we refer to as we evaluate ourselves (158)
secondary group: compared with a primary group, a larger, relatively temporary, more anonymous, formal, and impersonal group based on some interest or activity (155)
shaman: the healing specialist of a tribe who attempts to control the spirits thought to cause a disease or injury; commonly called a witch doctor (148)
small group: a group small enough for everyone to interact directly with all the other members (161)
social network: the social ties radiating outward from the self that link people together (159)
society: people who share a culture and a territory (148)
triad: a group of three people (161)

KEY PEOPLE

Review the major theoretical contributions or findings of these people.

Solomon Asch: Asch is famous for his research on conformity to peer pressure. (165-167)
Herbert Blumer: He describes an industrial society as one in which goods are no longer produced by the brute force of humans or animals but by machines powered by fuels. (151)
Elise Boulding: This sociologist hypothesized that women's status in agricultural societies declined sharply once men were put in charge of plowing and the cows. (150)
Charles H. Cooley: It was Cooley who noted the central role of primary groups in the development of one's sense of self. (155)
John Darley and Bibb Latané: These researchers investigated how group size affects members' attitudes and behaviors. They found that as the group grew individuals' sense of responsibility diminished, their interactions became more formal, and the larger group tends to break down into small ones. (162-163)
Emile Durkheim: Durkheim viewed the small group as a buffer between the individual and society, helping to prevent anomie. (155)
Lloyd Howells and Selwyn Becker: These social psychologists found that factors such as location within a group underlie people's choices of leaders. (163)
Irving Janis: Janis coined the term "groupthink" to refer to the tunnel vision that a group of people sometimes develop. (169)
Ronald Lippitt and Ralph White: These social psychologists carried out a classic study on leadership styles and found that the style of leadership affected the behavior of group members. (164-165)
Robert Merton: Merton observed that the traits of in-groups become viewed as virtues, while those same traits in out-groups are seen as vices. (157)
Stanley Milgram: Milgram's research has contributed greatly to sociological knowledge of group life. He did research on social networks and individual conformity to group pressure. (160, 164, 167-168)
Georg Simmel: This early sociologist was one of the first to note the significance of group size; he used the terms dyad and triad to describe small groups. (161-162)