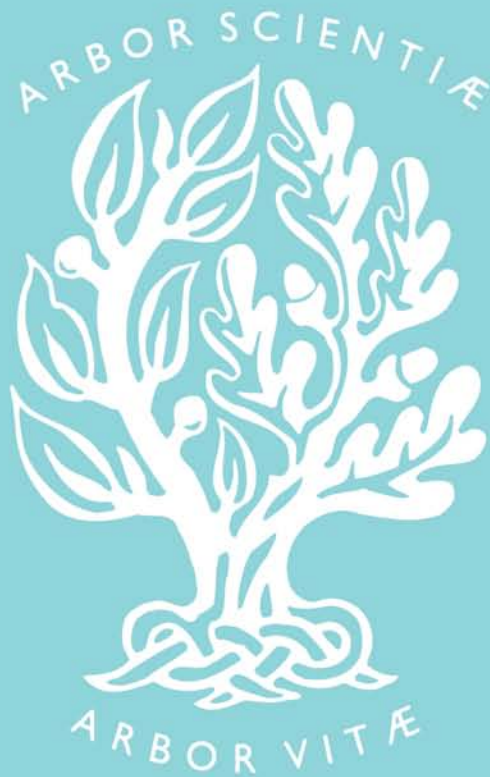


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# **SOCIOLOGY: A SYSTEMATIC INTRODUCTION**



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A SYSTEMATIC INTRODUCTION



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# **SOCIOLOGY: A SYSTEMATIC INTRODUCTION**

by  
HARRY M. JOHNSON



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#### **Publisher's Note**

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent

# Foreword

The historian of science Donald Fleming once noted that the textbook ideally records "a consensus of informed opinion, intended not to repress innovation but to give it point and zest and a prospect of general acceptance." In effect, Fleming has described this book by Harry M. Johnson, a book that is at once a manual of instruction and a significant treatise in its own right.

In describing Mr. Johnson's book as a treatise, I do not intend to make it sound forbidding. I mean only that it presents a methodical account of the basic principles of the subject and makes systematic but not extravagant use of these principles to illuminate a vast diversity of sociological data. I know of no other introduction to sociology that does this so effectively. Yet the book does not slavishly conform to a single "system" of sociology. Instead, it uses the core ideas that today constitute an appreciable working consensus among sociologists, whether these ideas are called structural-functional analysis or by some other name. The book achieves intellectual coherence, but not at the expense of neglecting intractable facts. Mr. Johnson refuses to force data about social structure, function, and change into the mold of a particular theory in those cases where the theory is not yet adequate to account for them. He treats sociological theory as both an instrumental convenience and an eventual goal. He does not employ it as a Procrustean device designed to bend recalcitrant facts to its shape.

Mr. Johnson has brought together the results of a great amount of empirical investigation through field observation, surveys, experiment, and historical and cross-cultural comparisons. These materials are not provincial in the sense that they are drawn only from sociological sources or confined to American society. Mr. Johnson's unobtrusive erudition has enabled him to make critical use of materials from such neighboring fields as anthropology, psychology, political science, economics, and history—always from the standpoint of their relevance to sociological problems and sociological thought. The book is consequently anything but a grab-bag of disparate and unconnected facts. But, I must say again, the facts are marshaled to exhibit their theoretical meaning; they are not dragooned to support flimsy speculations.

The student who would undertake to study on his own all the hundreds

of sources drawn upon by this book would be buried in an avalanche of learning. Mr. Johnson has saved him from this fate. He has sifted these materials, related them to his theoretical framework, and reported enough of their substance for the student to know not only what sociologists have found out but how they have gone about finding it out. Probably not every instructor or student will judge every one of Mr. Johnson's interpretations entirely acceptable. That is as it should be. Some of these matters are still in dispute, and, rather than exclude them altogether, Mr. Johnson has tried to indicate their currently tentative character.

Throughout, Mr. Johnson has avoided that excess of facts which keeps us from seeing "the wood for the trees, or the trees for the twigs." He has done most of the hard work needed to help us see the wood, the trees, and, on suitable occasion, the twigs too—each in its fitting perspective. I say that he has done most, not all, of the hard work because, as a genuinely educational book should, this one leaves some of the work for the instructor and the student. The book provides sociological food for thought, not mere sociological pap, complete with spoon and bib. The undergraduate student will probably find that it makes about the same demands upon his capacities as the better introductions to biology or history or psychology. For effective use, it requires some industrious study, the application of trained intelligence, and the learning of sociological knowledge rather than the repetition of sociological cant. It is not a recondite book, only an instructive one. It is the kind of book that Whitehead evidently had in mind when he observed,

Whenever a textbook is written of real educational worth, you may be quite certain that some reviewer will say that it will be difficult to teach from it. Of course it will be difficult to teach from it. If it were easy, the book ought to be burned; for it cannot be educational. In education, as elsewhere, the broad primrose path leads to a nasty place. This evil path is represented by a book or a set of lectures which will practically enable the student to learn by heart all the questions likely to be asked at the next examination.

There is no danger that this book, with its multiple uses, will lead anyone down that primrose path. Instead, the student who has mastered its substance will have acquired a thoroughgoing orientation to sociology even if he were never to take another course in the subject. For the student majoring in sociology, it provides a solid foundation for more specialized courses. And for the occasional student who goes on to graduate work in sociology, it provides the kind of methodical grounding on which he can later base his own independent studies. For them all, it gives a sense of the development of sociology by periodically tracing continuities of sociological thought and investigation.

Now that this book exists, sociologists can give a responsible and eminently satisfactory answer when they are asked to name the single text that will best introduce the serious general reader to contemporary sociology. Not, of course, that every part of sociology is fully treated in the book. It is no longer possible for a single text to encompass in detail every department of socio-

logical knowledge. Mr. Johnson has comparatively little to say, for example, about demography. But he has much to say about other important matters that usually receive little attention in introductory textbooks—for example, the subject of ideology and the functional analysis of authority systems and of bureaucracy. In any case, there are no perfunctory chapters in the book, included merely for the record. Indeed, there are few if any perfunctory paragraphs and, as a breather, only an occasional perfunctory sentence. It is, in short, a serious and closely written work sustained at a high intellectual level.

On more than one occasion, the book makes an independent contribution to our knowledge about a particular subject. Mr. Johnson's analysis of the sources of social conformity, for example, builds upon and extends other systematic treatments of this subject (which remains an important one despite currently popularized mistreatments of it). And his concluding chapter, on social change, which of course only introduces the student to this large subject, nevertheless casts new light on a complex set of murky problems.

Because they are set apart at the end of each chapter, Mr. Johnson's recommendations for further reading might easily be passed over with little attention. This, I believe, would be a mistake. In composite, these annotated bibliographies afford a critical and informed introduction to major sources of sociological findings and ideas.

With this book, Mr. Johnson joins the small circle of such masters of sociological writing as Kingsley Davis, George Homans, and Samuel Stouffer, whose command of language, both technical and vernacular, enables them to say just what needs to be said, clearly and often gracefully. Mr. Johnson writes to the student without writing down to him. Close-woven as it is, his prose is never opaque.

There would have been no point in trying to hide my enthusiasm for this book, for I could not possibly have succeeded in the attempt.

ROBERT K. MERTON

*New York, New York*  
*February 1960*





## Author's Preface

My chief goal in writing this book has been to present a systematic account of the foundations of contemporary sociology in such a way as to make it both understandable and interesting to readers with little or no previous knowledge of the subject. This goal has to a large extent dictated the coverage of the book. No doubt there will not be perfect agreement among sociologists concerning which topics should and which should not have been chosen for extended treatment. As compared with other available textbooks the book gives an unusual amount of space to social structure, functional analysis, socialization, ideology, the sources of conformity and deviation, and social change. More attention than usual is also given to institutional variation in society as a whole; thus there are rather long chapter sequences on kinship, economic and political institutions, religion, and stratification. A topic of growing theoretical and social importance treated in considerable detail is bureaucracy. On the other hand, the book touches only briefly upon such topics as population theory, the sociology of the community, formal systems of education, and the sociology of small groups. But enough is said to direct the interested student to specialized sources on these subjects as well as on those treated in more detail.

Although I have attempted to make *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction* a unified work, any experienced teacher will nevertheless be able to omit some chapters or parts of chapters in order to adapt the book more closely to his own needs. Thus, for a short course stressing, let us say, the social structure of the United States, he might with little difficulty omit certain of the more theoretical chapters.

It is a great pleasure to thank publicly some of those who have helped me. Several years ago Professor Bernard Barber, of Barnard College, and I thought of writing a text together and, although nothing tangible came of our efforts then and he is in no way responsible for this work, the book as well as its author has profited from our many conversations during the years of our friendship.

Professor Arthur K. Davis, now of the University of Saskatchewan,

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*Author's Preface*

carefully read an early version of five or six chapters and made several useful suggestions concerning the order in which some ideas should be presented.

My greatest debt by far is to the general editor, Professor Robert K. Merton. He has made many valuable specific suggestions, but he helped me above all by being a severe critic, especially early in my work, and by encouraging me generously throughout. Needless to say, in neither substance nor style have I attained the high standard he has set, but I am grateful to him for making me work harder and to better effect.

The reader will discover for himself my indebtedness to published works. I have been impressed by the truth of a remark by Samuel Johnson, that the best way to find out about a subject is to write a book about it. I am aware that I have *not* referred to all the works on a particular subject. The choice has depended in part on the particular emphases of this book. Nevertheless, my neglect of some important books and articles may well be due to sheer ignorance. I shall be grateful to any reader who calls my attention to errors or serious omissions.

HARRY M. JOHNSON

*Boston, Massachusetts*  
*February 1960*

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*part one*

*THE  
FRAME  
OF  
REFERENCE*

# 1. Sociology: *The Study of Groups*

What is a science and what is not? This question has often been the subject of fruitless debate, perhaps because "science" is a matter of degree. Many sciences have approached the ideal of systematization and predictive power more closely than sociology has. Nevertheless, sociology to some extent has the following characteristics of science:

1. It is *empirical*; that is, it is based on observation and reasoning, not on supernatural revelation, and its results are not speculative. In the early stages of their creative work, all scientists speculate, of course; but, ideally at least, they submit their speculations to the test of fact before announcing them as scientific discoveries.

2. It is *theoretical*; that is, it attempts to summarize complex observations in abstract, logically related propositions which purport to explain causal relationships in the subject matter.

3. It is *cumulative*; that is, sociological theories build upon one another, new theories correcting, extending, and refining the older ones.

4. It is *nonethical*; that is, sociologists do not ask whether particular social actions are good or bad; they seek merely to explain them.

In all these respects, sociology is far from having reached perfection; but progress is being steadily made.

## *A Definition of Sociology*

Sociology is the science that deals with social groups: their internal forms or modes of organization, the processes that tend to maintain or change these forms of organization, and the relations between groups. So complex a subject as social groups requires, for scientific treatment, precise concepts and carefully defined technical terms for them. As we shall see, the very term "groups," although it has meaning enough in ordinary usage to serve our needs for the moment, will have to be examined carefully.

The value of a science of social groups should need little emphasis. Each of us is born into a family group, and most of our actions thereafter are performed in our capacity as a member of one group or another. All

social problems, such as juvenile delinquency, "racial" discrimination, inadequate housing or education, and war, have to do with the functioning of groups or with the interaction of groups. Social policy has always been guided to some extent by more or less sound knowledge of particular groups, but it has also been guided by unexamined and even unconscious assumptions. Tested generalized knowledge about the processes that maintain or change the organization of groups will become a more and more valuable aid in solving social problems. Further, as we shall see in greater detail, the most intimate ideals, goals, and beliefs of each individual are largely shaped by the groups in which he has participated, is participating, or would like to participate. Sociology, therefore, should contribute something to one's self-knowledge. Finally, in addition to having practical value, sociology can be fascinating for its own sake, like any other serious attempt to discover facts and to explain them in terms of systematic theory.

Sociology, like any other science, abstracts from the concrete world of experience. In the first three chapters of this book, we shall deal with many facts, some of them new to beginners in sociology; but our main task will be to see in exactly what ways sociology is abstract. To do so, we must become familiar with certain technical concepts. These concepts are, of course, inter-related; together, they make up a frame of reference that will enable us to discuss our subject coherently. The frame of reference does not consist of facts; it consists of concepts with which we seek to order facts. Like any other frame of reference, the one we use here has the advantage that it makes explicit what we have decided to regard as relevant and helps us to communicate some of the facts that have been discovered. On the other hand, it also causes us to ignore certain aspects of reality. It is selective. Fortunately, the facts that emerge in the course of using the sociological frame of reference are complex enough to force sociologists to modify the frame of reference itself from time to time. Sociological *theory* consists of tested and systematic statements about social groups. These statements are expressed in technical terms which are names for the concepts of the frame of reference.

Other sciences, of course, are also concerned with human behavior. The psychology of personality, for example, consists of systematic theory about *individual* behavior. To be sure, the psychologist takes account of the fact that each individual's personality is formed in the course of his interaction with others—his father and mother, for example, and his brothers, sisters, teachers, and friends, as well as many other people. The psychologist is interested in interaction between people, however, only for the purposes of theorizing about its effects on individual personality; his focus is not on the interaction itself but on some of its effects. When he turns to the study of the mental processes involved in the combined acts of many people—for example, the study of mob behavior or of the formation of public opinion—he becomes a *social* psychologist; that is, he is applying psychology to problems that are essentially sociological, much as a biochemist applies chemistry

to biological problems. Sociology is concerned with interaction itself. A social group is a system of social interaction.

When two persons "interact," each takes account of the other, not merely as a physical object, but as an individual with attitudes, expectations, and the capacity to pass judgment; the action of each is based, to some extent, on his attitudes toward the other and his expectations about the other's probable reactions to him. The action of each person is meaningful to himself, partly on the conscious level, partly on the unconscious level; and part of its meaning to him is his continuous assessment of what meaning it is likely to have for the person with whom he is interacting. We should perhaps note in passing that knowing the meaning of behavior does not in itself enable the scientist to *explain* that behavior satisfactorily. This is true in both psychology and sociology. Investigation of meaning, however, is one of the necessary steps leading to explanation. Indeed, this is a truism, since what is to be explained is not mere outward behavior but meaningful behavior.

In order to explain the concept of a group as a social system or as a system of social interaction, we shall begin by making a distinction between "groups" and "social relationships" in general. We shall say that a social relationship exists to the extent that two or more individuals, or two or more groups, or individuals and groups to any number of either, interact with one another. Social relationships vary from tenuous, transitory interactions, such as an exchange of greetings between two Americans abroad, strangers to each other and to the people around them, to "permanent" systems of interaction, such as a family or a close friendship. The parties to a social relationship may be friendly or unfriendly; they may cooperate with one another or they may strive to destroy one another. The relationship between opposing armies is a social relationship.

All groups are social relationships, but not all social relationships are groups. A group, in our usage of the term, involves some degree of cooperation among its members for the attainment of common goals. The degree of cooperation may be slight and may even be compulsory, as in a prison chain gang; but without some degree of cooperation, there is no group. The cooperative aspect of a group does not preclude some degree of antagonism among its members. A group may be a hotbed of rivalries and even settled hatred, as some families are; yet it remains a group provided that its members cooperate at times in their interactions in order to attain some common goals. For example, the family cooperates to keep a common household, to prepare meals, to defend its members against the outside world if necessary.

Further, at any particular moment of time, a distinction can always be made between members and nonmembers of any particular group. The line may be hard to draw in barely organized or short-lived groups, but, in general, members have rights that nonmembers do not have, at least within the particular interaction system being considered. More important, members have obligations or duties that are not binding upon nonmembers. These

rights and obligations are essentially rules of behavior. They compose a complex *normative pattern*, in terms of which the members are oriented toward one another and, as representatives of the group, toward nonmembers or other groups. The members do not necessarily have exactly the same rights and obligations.

We must emphasize that the two characteristics of a group—cooperation, and the sense of belonging together that is involved in common membership—are highly variable. The members may cooperate for many purposes or for one or two; they may devote a small or a large proportion of their time to the system of interaction. Moreover, some members may be more tightly involved in the group interaction than others.

To some extent, whether we consider a particular social relationship to be a group is arbitrary. For example, we usually think of two football teams engaged in a game as two opposing groups. Each team is a cooperative unit acting *against* the other team. Each is trying to *prevent* the other from making its “goals.” Yet, from another point of view, the two teams together compose a single group, for they are cooperating with each other to achieve a decision, to see which is the better team. They cooperate in following the same rules of fair play. If some third party were to interfere with their game and try to prevent it from going on, the two teams would suddenly become aware of their *common* goal and their *belonging together*; yet the common goal and the belonging together exist as aspects of their interaction whether they are fully aware of them or not.

In one sense, a group consists of people. This seems obvious. Yet, strictly speaking, a group consists of certain persons *in their capacity as members*. Every one of these members is also a member of many other groups. Thus the football player also belongs to a family, a fraternity, a church, a school; he is a citizen (member of the state); he works in the college dining room (and is therefore a member of a work group); he participates in many friendships; having “pinned” a girl from one of the leading sororities, he is a member of another two-person group which he considers rather important. His action in all these other groups is not part of his participation in the football team.

The football player is, of course, a single more or less well-integrated personality, and his various memberships affect one another; for example, if he stays out too late dancing with the sorority queen, his timing may suffer at football practice the next day. Nevertheless, his actions at the dance are not part of the interaction system of the team. Viewed in this light, a group is an abstraction. It consists of parts of the action systems of its members. Whatever superficial appearances may be, each member is actually oriented toward other members, not as concrete persons in all their activities, but only in their capacity as participants in the same one interaction system. Some relevant “parts” of the members’ action systems are oriented not immediately toward other members but toward the common goals for which they are all striving.



There used to be some controversy about whether a group exists when its members are not gathered together in the same place, in one another's physical presence. According to the conception now prevailing, a group does not cease to exist when its members leave one another temporarily. If the football player goes home early from the dance in order to keep in training, he is acting at that moment as a member of the football squad. Thus the football team exists continuously, even though the duties of its members do not require their attention at every moment. At times a particular group membership is quiescent or dormant in one's personality, but during those times it is still ready to assert its claims, so to speak, if a proper occasion should arise.

In this abstract sense of "group," one never can observe a group in a flash of time, even when all its members are gathered together in the same room. Strictly speaking, the existence of a group must be inferred from observations made over a span of time. One must put together numerous observations of particular interactions, verbal and nonverbal, that are related to the same goal or goals. Some of the interaction of group members, however, is not directly related to their common goals; in their relationship of cooperation, they build up feelings of mutual liking, and sometimes of mutual animosity, which they express in interaction. As Homans puts it (1950, Chap. 5),<sup>1</sup> their sentiments spill over into actions that are not strictly necessary for the survival of the group.

If one wished to make a distinction in terms, one might use the word "group" to refer to the members as an aggregate of persons and the term "social system" to refer to the interaction system, in abstraction from the total action systems of the members. We shall not bother to make this distinction in usage consistently, but we must never forget that in sociology we are interested in human beings *only as participants in systems of social interaction*. As we shall see, this focus of interest makes some things about human beings more directly relevant than others.

### *Groups and Subgroups*

In sociological literature, few small groups are more famous than the so-called "bank wiring group" which was carefully studied by a team of researchers.<sup>2</sup> The fourteen members of the group worked together in a room at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company, assembling switches for central-office telephone equipment. In this task, there were three interdependent "roles," or jobs: one was connecting wires in banks of terminals; one was soldering the connections; and the third was inspecting

<sup>1</sup> Dates following the name of an author refer to references listed in full (alphabetically by author) in the bibliographical index.

<sup>2</sup> The research was done by F. J. Roethlisberger and W. J. Dickson and is reported in Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939. The present selective account, however, is based on Homans, 1950, Chaps. 3-6.

the results to see whether the wiring and soldering had been done properly. The entire group was divided into three four-man "teams," each consisting of three wiremen and one solderer. There were two inspectors (making fourteen men in all); each inspector worked with one team and shared the work of the third team with the other inspector.

Here we see that the fourteen-member group had within it three overlapping subgroups. Actually, the organization was more complex, for, in addition to these formal arrangements made by the company, there were two informal "cliques" which in membership cut across the three teams.<sup>3</sup> The members of a clique interacted with one another in several ways. For example, they helped one another in their work; they traded jobs (a wireman exchanging jobs for a while with a solderer); they played games; they pooled small sums to buy candy. Moreover, the integrity or unity of each of the cliques was somewhat dependent upon the existence of the other clique. Clique A regarded itself as superior to Clique B, and Clique B both resented A's claim to superiority and acted, at times, in such a way as to justify A's claim. At bottom, however, the differences between the cliques would probably have seemed rather trivial to an outside observer; this, of course, does not mean that they *were* trivial. The members of Clique A felt that their conversation was on a somewhat higher level than the conversation of Clique B. A bought a different kind of penny candy. A's games involved betting on various things; B members bet less often with one another but more often played a game called "binging," in which one man strikes another on the biceps, and the other strikes back to see whether he can inflict more pain than the first. There were some other differences between the two cliques, but we can disregard them in our present limited description.

One might ask in what sense these fourteen men were members of a single group. Three "teams" and two mutually opposed "cliques" obviously existed; how did they all compose a single group? The main reason for regarding all fourteen men as belonging to one group is that they cooperated in maintaining certain rules. These rules, or norms, were not known to company officials until after the research. In fact, the maintenance of the norms had the effect of maintaining the integrity of the whole group *vis-à-vis* the management. In this perspective, the management was part of the "environment" of the bank-wiring group. In order to survive as a group, the fourteen men had to perform their tasks well enough to satisfy the management. Three of the norms that arose in the group were as follows:

1. Each man must maintain, on the average, a certain established rate of output. This rate was set by the group itself, not by the management. In fact, the method of calculating wages, which management had devised, was intended to induce the men to produce as much as possible, not to produce at a fixed rate. This method made the earnings of each man dependent to

<sup>3</sup> Three of the fourteen men, however, did not belong to either clique, and another was a sort of fringe member of Clique B. These cliques were discovered only after careful observation.

some extent upon the output of the group as a whole. Within the group, any man who fell below the informal rate was known as a "chiseler."

2. The second rule or norm is implicit in the first, but it needs special attention. Each man must see to it that he did not *exceed* the informal rate of output set by the group. Anyone who violated this rule was known as a "rate-buster."

3. The third rule was that no member of the group was to report to a representative of management anything that would be detrimental to another member. To violate this norm was to be a "squealer."

The concept of norm is a central one in sociology. Every chapter of this book will have something to say about norms. A norm is an abstract *pattern*, held in the mind, that sets certain limits for behavior. An "operative" norm is one that is not merely entertained in the mind but is considered worthy of following in actual behavior; thus, one feels that one *ought* to conform to it. This feeling means that one "accepts" the norm. "Conforming" to the norm means guiding one's conduct in relation to it, keeping within the defined limits (which may be clearly or vaguely defined, according to the particular norm). Norms never do or could prescribe how one should behave down to the last detail of the concrete act. Every act is unique if regarded in all its concreteness. Whether a particular act violates a norm that is relevant to it depends upon one's interpretation of the norm; and one must apply this interpretation to the particular act, concentrating on the abstract form or pattern of the norm and ignoring many irrelevant details of the act. Thus, whether a member of the bank-wiring group spread his work out over the day or did most of it during the first few working hours, he might in either case hew rather closely to the norm for the daily rate of output. He might work with his right hand or his left: this detail would be irrelevant to the norm.

Sociologists are interested in *social* norms—that is, norms that, like the fixed rate of output, are accepted in a group. (Thus, private norms, such as most New Year's resolutions, are of little direct interest in the study of interaction groups.) Moreover, sociologists are mainly interested in *operative* social norms—that is, norms that are "sanctioned" in such a way that violators suffer some penalties in the group and those who conform are rewarded. By contrast, for example, most of the norms of the Sermon on the Mount, although they are often referred to, are not sanctioned; one is not punished socially for taking oaths or for refusing to "turn the other cheek." The norms operative in the bank-wiring group had more or less definite sanctions: A rate-buster or a chiseler was "binged" on the arm. He was ridiculed. He ran the risk of being ostracized.

In general, violators of accepted norms suffer the following kinds of (negative) sanction:

1. The persons with whom they are interacting retaliate by withholding from the violators cooperative acts and friendly expressions, the loss of which will be painful to the violators.

2. Violators of accepted norms suffer some loss of prestige. If they are

persistent violators and have therefore acquired a reputation for falling below the norms, then they have a relatively low prestige rank in the group. In the bank-wiring group, the members of Clique B ranked below those of Clique A partly because they cared less whether they fell short of output standards. In this way they were expressing their resentment against Clique A, but they were also confirming their low rank. The members of Clique B did not ignore the norms entirely; they were simply not quite so careful to conform.

3. Finally, violators are often subjected to specific penalties—"binging," ridicule, fines, imprisonment. These penalties are intrinsically unpleasant, but they also express and bring about loss of prestige. For example, a man who has never before been sent to prison suffers both from the imprisonment itself and also, sometimes much more, from his degradation.

By contrast, of course, those who conform continue to enjoy the expected cooperative performances of others; they maintain good standing in their group; and they receive rewards, or positive sanctions, such as praise, bonuses, and promotions.

In Chapter 2, we shall consider the fact that not all members of a group are subject to precisely the same norms. In the bank-wiring group, for example, the wiremen were not expected to behave, in all respects, in the same way as the solderers or inspectors. A complete description of a social norm would state (1) who is expected (2) by whom (3) to do what, or refrain from doing what, (4) in what circumstances. In addition, it would specify (5) what penalties will be forthcoming if the norm is violated, or what rewards if it is conformed to, (6) what circumstances surrounding a violation will be regarded as extenuating, and (7) who will administer the penalties or give the rewards. The laws of the state are easiest to describe in this way. But social interaction is governed by many other norms as well, explicit and implicit.

Returning to the bank-wiring group, we see that, despite internal friction, it was indeed a group, and one that contained several subgroups. A subgroup is a group entirely contained within some other group. All the members of the subgroup are also members of the larger group, and their interaction within the subgroup may be regarded as part of the interaction system of the larger group. Whether a particular interaction system is treated as a group or as a subgroup depends in part upon one's perspective. We have treated the bank-wiring group as the main group and the teams and cliques as subgroups; but in a larger perspective the bank-wiring group was itself a subgroup within the Western Electric Company. This company, in turn, is a subgroup within American society.

## *Characteristics of Societies*

Although everyone has a rough idea what is meant by calling the United States a society, the concept of society is so important in sociology that we should examine it more closely. A society is a group with certain character-

istics that we shall discuss briefly under these four headings: (1) definite territory, (2) sexual reproduction, (3) comprehensive culture, and (4) independence.

#### *Definite territory*

A society is a territorial group. Some nomadic societies move about within a much larger territory than they occupy at any one time, but they regard the whole range as "their" country. There are, of course, territorial groups within societies—for example, clans, neighborhoods, and political units, such as cities and counties.

#### *Sexual reproduction*

The members of a society are recruited, in large part, by means of sexual reproduction within the group. Many societies also obtain members by adoption, enslavement, conquest, or immigration, but sexual reproduction within the group itself remains a fundamental source of new members. Many groups other than societies, of course, also depend upon reproduction within themselves, but these other groups are excluded from the category of societies by some other characteristic or characteristics.

#### *Comprehensive culture*

Sociologists use the term "culture" in the sense given it by the English anthropologist Edward Tylor. According to Tylor (1924, p. 1), culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society." (By "society," Tylor obviously meant social life in general; "man as a member of society" means man as a participant in systems of social interaction of any sort.) Later in this book (Chap. 4), we shall consider this definition of culture in more detail and modify it slightly, but for the present it is enough to notice that "culture" in the technical sense of the social sciences is extremely broad in meaning. It is not confined to the knowledge and standards of a cultivated minority, nor is there any suggestion that all culture is necessarily "good." For example, by Tylor's definition, the art of cheating at cards is cultural, since it is "knowledge" and a "capability" learned in the course of associating with others in social life.

As in ordinary usage, however, so in technical usage we distinguish between culture in general and "a" culture, or "the" culture of some particular group. Thus we might speak of "pre-Columbian cultures," meaning the several, to some extent interrelated, cultures of the groups that existed in the Americas before the arrival of Columbus. Every group has a culture. The bank-wiring group, for example, could hardly have got along without a good deal of technical knowledge about wiring and soldering, without language (a "capability" learned in early social life), or without norms (what Tylor calls "morals" and "custom").

We must bear in mind, however, that a "group" is an abstraction. The

members of the bank-wiring group were also participants in many other social systems (families, religious groups, political parties, and lodges, to suggest a few). Much of the culture they possessed and used in their capacity as members of these other groups was irrelevant to their interaction in the bank-wiring group. In short, "the" culture of the bank-wiring group includes only that part of the total culture of its members, as concrete persons, which was involved in their common interaction system.<sup>4</sup>

To return to our consideration of societies: "the" culture of a society is "comprehensive," not in the sense that it includes the totality of human culture, but in the sense that it contains cultural patterns sufficiently diversified to enable the group to fulfill all the requirements of social life. This societal culture is not entirely possessed, of course, by every member of the society, any more than the culture of the bank-wiring group was necessarily possessed in its entirety by each member. Typically, no one member of a group possesses the entire culture of that group. Every full member must possess enough of the culture to enable him to do his part in the interaction system, but only that much.

A society has a "comprehensive" culture in the sense that the group is culturally self-sufficient. A society may of course carry on trade with other societies, but the cultural patterns involved in this trade are part of the culture of the society itself. For example, the pattern of extending credit, the recognized rates of exchange, the means of payment, the form of contracts—all these cultural patterns, although they may be involved in the interaction between societies, are part of the culture of each.

There are borderline cases. For example, many American Indian tribes have highly distinctive cultures of their own, but it is a question whether some of these tribes could survive without the cultural patterns of the (non-Indian) Bureau of Indian Affairs, and without developing substitute cultural patterns (see Levy, 1952, Chap. 3). One of the important tasks of sociological theory is to determine exactly what kinds of cultural pattern a group must have to qualify as a society or, better, what kinds of cultural pattern are necessary to enable a group to fulfill all the requirements of social life. We shall see, for example, that every society probably requires norms governing the possession and use of scarce valuable things. Such norms, called "property rights" or simply "property," can and do vary in detail within wide limits, but every society must have norms of this *kind*.

### *Independence*

A further characteristic of a society is that it is not a subgroup of any other group. This criterion does not exclude groups that are politically subject to some other group unless they have actually been absorbed by the other group. Japan was a society even when it was occupied by representatives of the United States.

<sup>4</sup> The culture of a subgroup is sometimes called a subculture. Just as "groups" and "subgroups" are relative to one another, so are cultures and subcultures.

One case perhaps requires special comment. What about the United Nations? Is it a society? At first glance, it might seem to meet all the criteria. Actually, however, the United Nations is an organization of political units called *states*. A state is only an aspect of a society, not the society itself; nor is any organization of states a society (see Chap. 13). Americans as individuals do not belong to the United Nations in the same sense that they belong to the United States. Apart from the permanent staff of the United Nations, which of course fails to meet the other three criteria of a society, the individuals who take part in the discussions, debates, and agreements of the United Nations do so only as the representatives of states. The United Nations, on account of its permanent staff, cuts across several societies, but it does not *contain* any society.

It is obvious that societies, as defined by our four criteria, are social systems of an important type. Most people's entire round of social interaction occurs within a society. All other social systems have vitally important connections with societies, either as parts of them or as systems cutting across societies but dependent upon them. There are many religious organizations, for example, that cut across several societies. But these organizations do not attempt to provide for all the needs of their members. Their culture is not "comprehensive"; it is a subculture within each of the societies. The social interaction of their members is not confined to the religious fellowship as such; it is partly concerned with secular matters in the several societies. Various aspects of the more comprehensive type of group—society—will be treated in later chapters of this book.

In what we have just said, we have implied that there *are* such groups as societies. If we wished, we could treat society (as in the expression "a society") as a "construct," an "ideal type"—a neat concept that does not correspond perfectly to any actual group in the world. Most people spend their entire lives in one "society." We might define "society," in part, as a perfectly self-contained group, a group whose members *never* interact with outsiders. In that sense, of course, virtually all actual societies are only approximations to the concept *society*, although some primitive groups may still exist that are isolated enough to be entirely self-contained.

In theoretical reasoning, it is sometimes convenient to invent concepts for which there is no exact counterpart in nature. Physicists have the concept of a "vacuum." A sociologist might add to his concept *society* the idea of perfect integration. The integration of a society has to do with the relations between individuals and subgroups. In a perfectly integrated society, the normative pattern for the whole interaction system would be such that interacting individuals and subgroups would know what to expect from each other and would approve of one another's goals. Conflict would not disappear, but it would be much reduced.

If we defined "society" as a permanent, self-contained, perfectly integrated group, it might be interesting and scientifically valuable to ask what

else must be true of such a group. A perfectly integrated society, for example, would have only one religion.

Needless to say, the concepts of science do not primarily evaluate phenomena. Thus perfect integration would not necessarily be desirable. Nevertheless, it is clear that notions such as "social conflict" and "deviant behavior" imply some *concept* of perfect integration. One of the theoretical tasks of sociology is to develop a better understanding of society in the sense of the construct that we have only touched upon in the foregoing remarks. The concept *society*, although unrealistic, might have as great scientific interest as, let us say, the concept of perfect competition in economics. We mention this possibility only in passing, however, for we shall do little in this book to develop it. In the next chapter we shall return to a less abstract plane.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

For a good discussion of the abstractness of groups, see C. K. Warriner, "Groups Are Real: A Reaffirmation," *Amer. sociol. Rev.*, Oct. 1956, v. 21, pp. 549-54. For an excellent treatment of the concepts of membership and nonmembership, see R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, rev. and enl. ed., Free Press, 1957, pp. 284-97. Pp. 308-26 contain a useful discussion of twenty-six variable properties of groups.

For a "classical" study of norms, see W. G. Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals*, Ginn, 1906, Chap. 1. The subtitle adequately indicates what Sumner meant by "folkways." The more binding folkways Sumner called "mores" (the plural form of the rarely used Latin word "mos," pronounced mo'-rez). He defined the mores as "the popular usages and traditions, when they include a judgment that they are conducive to societal welfare, and when they exert a coercion on the individual to conform to them, although they are not coordinated by any authority . . ." (Preface). Sumner's work shows in general that a great deal of our behavior is guided by cultural patterns that are socially binding to varying degrees. For a simple but useful classification of norms, see A. H. Barton, "The Concept of Property-Space in Social Research," in P. F. Lazarsfeld and M. Rosenberg, eds., *The Language of Social Research: A Reader in the Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Free Press, 1955, pp. 50-52. Barton classifies norms according to three principles: (1) whether they crystallize gradually, without deliberation on anyone's part, or have a definite point of origin in time and a definite source, such as a legislature or a judge; (2) the degree of importance that people attach to conformity; and (3) whether sanctions are formal or informal. Formal sanctions are administered by specifically designated persons; informal sanctions are meted out by any member of a group, regardless of whether he has been given any special authority. A more elaborate typology of social norms is given in R. T. Morris, "A Typology of Norms," *Amer. sociol. Rev.*, Oct. 1956, v. 21, pp. 610-13.

Although in this text we shall call attention from time to time to the methods by which research results were obtained, on the whole we must unfortunately give less space to research method than we should like. A serious student should do a little reading on his own. The following suggestions will give him a good start. On the importance of carefully defined concepts, see the first



section of Lazarsfeld and Rosenberg, eds., 1955. For an extremely clear and interesting essay which explains in detail the steps necessary to establish facts and confirm hypotheses, see S. A. Stouffer, "Some Observations on Study Design," *Amer. J. Sociol.*, Jan. 1950, v. 55, pp. 355-61. This paper describes and illustrates the fundamental reasoning involved in good research design and also some of the short cuts, legitimate and illegitimate, used by researchers. If the student has time to read only one paper on methodology, he should read this one by Stouffer. For a discussion, with illustrations, of the mutual influence of theory and research, see Merton, 1957, Chap. 2: "The Bearing of Sociological Theory on Empirical Research," and Chap. 3: "The Bearing of Empirical Research on Sociological Theory." These papers also emphasize the cumulative character of sociology. Among textbooks on research method, we recommend two for beginning students: W. J. Goode and P. K. Hatt, *Methods in Social Research*, McGraw-Hill, 1952; and C. Selltiz, M. Jahoda, M. Deutsch, and S. W. Cook, *Research Methods in Social Relations*, Holt, 1959, rev. 1-vol. ed.

#### *General note*

The reader who is interested in pursuing any special topic in sociology ought to become acquainted with certain periodicals and reference works. *The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* is often helpful. *Sociological Abstracts*, published quarterly, is extremely valuable. So is *Current Sociology*, published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); of the four issues each year, each of the first three is an annotated bibliography on a special topic—for example, the sociology of religion, or the sociology of bureaucracy—and the fourth is a classified list of books and articles in several languages. The official journal of the American Sociological Society is *The American Sociological Review* (*Amer. sociol. Rev.*). Another important American periodical is *The American Journal of Sociology* (*Amer. J. Sociol.*). In addition to articles, these two journals contain news items about the sociology departments of colleges and universities, announcements of meetings, book reviews, and exchanges of letters on controversial matters in sociology.

## 2. *Institutionalization*

Norms are so important in social-interaction systems that we shall devote a good deal of attention to them. In this chapter we shall consider certain ways in which norms cluster in complex patterns. In particular, we shall explain the concepts “social position” and “social institution.” We implied in Chapter 1 that some norms are regarded as more important than others. In this chapter, we return to this point in our treatment of “institutionalization”—a term that can refer either to a certain process or to the result of that process. Roughly speaking (for the moment), an institutionalized norm is one that is both widely accepted in a group and deeply inculcated in the personalities of its members. As we shall see, however, there are degrees of institutionalization. In few if any social systems is there perfect conformity to even the most firmly institutionalized norms. In the final section of this chapter we shall consider some of the factors that may bring about imperfect conformity or outright violation. We shall return to this topic in Chapter 20.

### *Social Positions*

As we pointed out in Chapter 1, the participants in a social system are not all expected to do the same things. Whether a norm applies to a particular person depends upon his social position in the system. One of the most important aspects of the organization, or “structure,” of any social system is the fact that its members are differentiated according to the social positions they occupy.

This internal differentiation of the system is the second aspect of the structure of groups. The first aspect we encountered was the division of the group into subgroups. The members of the group as a whole are differentiated, first, according to which subgroups they belong to and, secondly, according to which social positions they occupy in the group as a whole and in any of the subgroups to which they may belong.

The content of a social position—that is, its complex of rights and obligations—is entirely normative. In the bank-wiring group, for example, a solderer (occupant of a particular social position) was expected to have

and use certain skills: he had to know how to heat the soldering metal, how to handle the soldering iron, how much of the molten metal to apply to the wire connections. The content of his position was normative in a double sense. First, *technical* norms were involved in using the soldering materials correctly. Secondly, the expectation that the solderer, in performing his work, would conform to the technical norms was a *social* norm: if the solderer made a mistake (deviated from the technical norms), his inspector would reject his work.

At the same time, a solderer had the right to expect certain performances from others. For example, he could not do his work unless the wiremen in his team made the wire connections for him to solder. Moreover, within the larger system of the Hawthorne Works (for the bank-wiring group, remember, was a subgroup of the Western Electric Company), the solderer had the right to expect that a trucker would keep him supplied with the materials necessary for his work. These "rights" were also normative; they differ from the solderer's "obligations" only in this respect, that his obligations were norms that applied to him as an *agent* in the social system, whereas his rights were norms that applied to certain other persons in their interaction with him within the system. The solderer's rights were other people's obligations. As one possessed of rights, the solderer was a social *object* (rather than an agent); but he had to be aware of both his rights and his obligations in order to do his part properly in the social system.<sup>1</sup> The smooth functioning of the system required that each participant in it know and accept a considerable part of the whole normative pattern of the system.

It appears, then, that a social position has two parts, one consisting of obligations and one consisting of rights. A person is said to "occupy" a social position if he has a certain cluster of obligations and enjoys a certain cluster of associated rights within a social system. These two parts of a social position we shall call its *role* and its *status*, "role" referring to obligations and "status" referring to rights. Thus, every social position is a status-role. When the context would prevent misunderstanding, however, we may use either "role" or "status" to mean the entire social position. The role structure of a group is the same thing as its status structure, because what is role from the point of view of one member is status from the point of view of the others.<sup>2</sup>

A social position may be occupied, of course, by more than one person. There were three solderers in the bank-wiring group. A few social positions are occupied by only one person at a time—for example, the presidency of the United States. It is also important to note that the same person occupies

<sup>1</sup> The distinction between the actor as agent and as object is made and explored in Parsons and Shils, eds., 1951, Part II.

<sup>2</sup> This discussion of status and role follows Parsons and Shils, eds., 1951, Part II. Ralph Linton, 1936, pp. 113-14, offers a different distinction, but his is not helpful or even clear.

many social positions. A man may be a doctor, a husband, a father, a member of the American Medical Association, a citizen, and a Republican.

We can bring out certain other aspects of the concept of social position by considering another example. A master artist in Italy in the early Renaissance belonged to a guild and was subject to its strict regulations regarding quality of work and terms of payment. These regulations, then, defined the role of master artist, at least as a member of the guild. In addition, he had more detailed obligations to his clients, who for the most part were noblemen and rich merchants and bankers. These men gave him commissions. Every such commission was a contract, which specified in some detail what the artist (or his shop) was to turn out. Since every work was intended for a particular purpose and place, the contract might specify such things as the thematic content, medium, colors to be used, and size of the finished work. Any large piece of work was likely to be a joint product. The master in the shop, as part of his role, might make a sketch of the grand design; his assistants, the better-trained ones, might execute some difficult parts under his direction; and his apprentices, according to their experience, might do easy parts or merely wash brushes and sweep the floor. The master would probably give the final touches to an important work. This division of labor was common for both painting and sculpture (Hauser, 1951, v. 1, pp. 266-353).

A fifteenth-century master artist had a status as well as a role. His status included the authority to direct the work of assistants and apprentices; the right to receive fees for completed commissions; the right to make use of a shop or studio, with all its tools and materials; and a certain amount of prestige. (The term "status" is sometimes used to mean prestige alone: "So-and-so wants more status.") Artists in the early Renaissance were on a footing with tradesmen (petty bourgeoisie). Indeed, they were not known as "artists," with all the connotations that term has for us; they were craftsmen—goldsmiths, painters, stonemasons—and they worked not only on great projects but also on small commissions, such as designs for carpet weavers and even shop signs. Since these craftsmen were under strict guild regulation and worked according to the minute specifications of their clients, they had no exalted status, and almost all were men of humble origin.

The prestige of a social position may change in time. The prestige of artists gradually changed in the course of the fifteenth century. Leonardo da Vinci helped to establish the idea that art is based on unusual talent and on science as well: to be an artist, one had to know perspective and anatomy. Artists began to sign their works. They often included self-portraits in their paintings. The idea of intellectual property had arisen, with its emphasis on originality. Instead of commissioning a specific work, art patrons became collectors and bought whatever the artist of their choice turned out. They even saved sketches and unfinished works, since it was supposed that such works gave a more intimate glimpse of the artist's personality. By the time

of Michelangelo's death, in 1564, the great artists, at least, were regarded as geniuses, divinely inspired.

As our brief description of the activities of fifteenth-century artists illustrates, an occupant of a particular social position ordinarily, by virtue of his position, interacts not only with many other persons but with persons occupying many different positions. In other words, it is an important aspect of social structure that social positions are interrelated. The term "role-set" has been coined to refer either to the total complex of other social positions with which any particular social position is characteristically connected or, when a particular occupant of a particular position is taken as the point of reference, to the total number of occupants of the correlative social positions with whom he must ordinarily interact (Merton, 1957, pp. 368-70). A fifteenth-century artist interacted with fellow artists, with shop assistants, some of whom were apprentices, with guild officials, and with clients. Ignoring the fact that this list is no doubt incomplete, we can say that the positions of fellow artist, apprentice, other shop assistant, guild official, and client constituted the role-set for the position of master artist. For any particular artist, the persons who occupied these positions constituted his role-set in the more concrete sense. His role in relation to the various positions in his role-set involved, of course, somewhat different patterns of behavior for each—as some writers would say, different routine performances or, simply, different routines. At the same time, his own position was undoubtedly not perceived in the same way by the occupants of all the various positions in his role-set. Some of these other persons, for example, were his status equals, some were inferiors, and some were superiors. The status of artist was a different object of regard according to the role and status of the beholder. Later in this chapter we shall consider briefly some of the consequences of the fact that members of a role-set, occupying varying positions, may make conflicting demands and exert pressure in different ways.

For the moment, note that the varying "routines" that a person performs by virtue of occupying a particular position and interacting with his role-set are technically not different roles; they are different "faces," so to speak, of the same role. As we have noted, every person occupies many roles, and for *each* of them he has a particular role-set.

Our master artists afford us an especially good opportunity to call attention to an important distinction: the distinction between a *role* and the *role performance* of a particular occupant of that role. The role is much the same for all artists at any given time, but the achievement of all artists is, of course, not the same. Closely related to these facts is the distinction between the prestige aspect of the artist's status and the prestige of any particular artist. By Michelangelo's time, artists in general had greater prestige than the artists of the early Renaissance, but only the greatest artists, such as Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian, were able to associate intimately with kings and popes.

The enormous variety of activities required by all the roles in complex

social systems makes it difficult to specify role content (“obligations”) for roles in general. There is necessarily a corresponding variety in the content of statuses; yet we can say, in general, that a status often (but not always) includes the following: (1) some kinds and degrees of authority over others; (2) the right to remuneration (some reward for role performance); (3) certain privileges and immunities, such as the right to use certain premises, the services of a secretary, or other means necessary or convenient to the position occupants if they are to carry out their role obligations; and (4) some degree of prestige, symbolized in the privileges and immunities already mentioned, and in general expressed by certain marks of respect from those with whom the status occupants interact. Some appurtenances of a social position are part of both the status and the role. Thus, a military officer is obliged, on certain occasions, to wear a uniform and certain insignia of rank; at the same time, these things are marks of prestige, and it may be said that the officer has the privilege of displaying them.

We have been considering social positions in connection with social groups—e.g., the bank-wiring group, a guild of craftsmen, a master artist’s “shop” or studio. Often, however, we speak of a position independently of any particular organization. Thus a man may be called a lawyer whether or not we specify the law firm to which he belongs, or whether or not he is actively engaged in practicing law. All occupants of the same social position, regardless of the particular groups to which they may belong, are said to belong to the same “status group.” Clearly, a status group, such as “domestic servants,” “employed domestic servants,” or “unmarried adult men,” is not the same thing as an interaction group; it is not a social system but a social category, including all those of whom certain things are objectively true.

Finally, such are the vagaries of sociological terms, “status” is sometimes used to refer to an individual’s total standing in society. In that sense, it embraces all his particular statuses and all the prestige he may have for his personal qualities and attainments. The apprentice sociologist must learn to expect some inconsistency in the use of sociological terms, especially from one writer to another. The context usually helps to make it clear what sense is intended.

### *Institutionalization*<sup>3</sup>

Now that we understand the concept of social position, we can see a little more clearly how social norms operate in a group. A social norm operative in one social system may not be operative in another. Thus, Mohammedan societies permit polygyny, but Christian ones do not. A social

<sup>3</sup> The concept of institutionalization, which is basic in sociological theory, has been most elaborately explained and consistently used in the work of Talcott Parsons. One of his most recent formulations is in *The Social System* (1951), Chap. 2, a rather difficult work for a beginner in sociology to follow.

norm is said to be *institutionalized* in a particular social system when three conditions are met:

1. A large number of the members of the social system accept the norm.
2. Many of those who accept the norm take it seriously. In psychological terms, they have *internalized* it.
3. The norm is sanctioned. This means that certain members of the system are expected to be guided by the norm in appropriate circumstances.

Certain other aspects of institutionalization should be clearly understood. First, institutionalized norms apply to members of the social system according to their social positions within the system. As we have seen, the wiremen, solderers, and inspectors in the bank-wiring room were not expected to do exactly the same things—although some norms did apply to all, regardless of social position. Yet all the members knew and supported the entire normative pattern; even though some of the norms that applied to wiremen did not apply to solderers, still the solderers knew and sanctioned the norms for wiremen, and the wiremen knew and sanctioned the norms for solderers. In other words, the entire normative pattern of the group was part of their *common* culture. This was possible in the bank-wiring group because the group was small. We shall see that institutionalization does not always go so far in a group.

Secondly, the internalization of a norm by the “average” members of a social system is a matter of degree. The obligation of parents to protect their child is deeply internalized—taken very seriously indeed. So is the responsibility of a government official to keep official secrets, especially to keep them out of the hands of foreign agents. In American marriage, the expectation of mutual sexual fidelity is more binding than the expectation that the wife will get the husband’s breakfast.

Thirdly, “widespread” acceptance of a norm in a social system is also a matter of degree. What proportion of the members of a social system must know about and accept a norm before the norm can be said to be institutionalized? This question cannot be answered precisely. The necessary proportion varies from case to case, depending upon the norm and the size and complexity of the social system. In a large-scale social system, it is not necessary for everyone to know about, let alone accept, all the norms operative in the system. For example, the functioning of the stock market in the United States requires institutionalization, but many people have only a vague conception of the norms that govern participation in it. What is necessary is that most of those who participate in the stock market in any way know and accept that part of the total pattern of rights and obligations that affects, or is relevant to, their actual interaction with one another. Beyond that, a more generalized acceptance of the rule of law and the authority of the courts ensures that the wider public will support the norms at a distance, so to speak. Thus, a stock-market scandal will reduce the prestige of a broker even among people who do not understand precisely what his offense has been.

Finally, note that beliefs as well as patterns of overt behavior may be institutionalized. A dogma, for example, is a religious belief that members of a particular religious group “must” accept.

#### SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS<sup>4</sup>

Norms may be institutionalized in a group of any size and complexity. Particularly when speaking of a total society or other territorial group of considerable size, sociologists sometimes refer to a *complex* of institutionalized norms as a “social institution.” Marriage, for example, is a social institution to the extent that there exists a body of widely known and supported expectations (operative norms) governing the relationship between “husband” and “wife” (two recognized status-roles).

An institutional pattern may exist even though it does not have a name. For example, there is a recognized set of norms governing the relationship between a medical doctor and his colleagues. An obstetrician has given us a glimpse into this pattern:

A ticklish problem arises when a doctor has left the city for a while and turned his practice over to other doctors temporarily. Recently, a young woman came to me whose chosen obstetrician was out of the city. I took care of her confinement and everything went smoothly. The next time she became pregnant she came to me and said that she had been so pleased with her former treatment at my hands that she wanted me to take her on as a patient. I had to tell her that she could go to any other obstetrician in town in preference to her old one, but that she couldn't have me. A person just can't be too meticulous in such cases [O. Hall, 1948, p. 333].

Wherever we look in history or in the contemporary world, whether at civilized peoples or the most primitive, we find that social life is molded to a large extent by social institutions. Another example, taken from a study of certain English villages of the thirteenth century, is the rule of primogeniture. The boundaries of a village were often the same, or nearly the same, as the boundaries of a manor (a lord's estate). A villein (a tenant of a certain kind) held his land according to a pattern that was supported by common sentiments and upheld in the manorial courts, presided over by the lord of the manor or by one of his stewards. The rule by which the heir to a parcel of land was determined varied from manor to manor, but in each case the rule tended to be generally known and accepted. This is shown by extant “customals” (manorial records of land holdings and rents) and by “court rolls” (records of the cases brought before the manorial courts).

The most familiar [of these rules] . . . was primogeniture: According to primogeniture, a tenement descended to the eldest son of the last holder. He was the son and heir. If there were no sons, the custom of some manors

<sup>4</sup> The discussion of social institutions given in this chapter seems to be in rough agreement with Sumner's rather brief treatment (1906, section 61). However, we follow Talcott Parsons more closely.



was that it descended to the eldest daughter, but more commonly, it went to all the daughters as coheireses; only in this case was the tenement divided. If there were no children to inherit, then the tenement descended to the eldest brother of the last holder, and so on, according to well known canons [Homans, 1942, p. 123].

If the rightful heir paid various fines, swore fealty to the lord, and thereafter paid his customary rent and performed his customary services, he could keep the land and ensure the title to it for his own heir.

A social institution is thus a recognized normative pattern. As such, it applies to a particular category of relationships. Thus the institution of marriage is a complex normative pattern that applies to all marriages in a particular social system or a particular segment of a social system. These marriages (relationships) conform to the pattern in varying degrees, of course; but married partners all *know* the pattern itself, if it is truly institutional, and they regard it as morally valid and binding.

In this book we shall continue to use the term "social institution" for a complex normative pattern that is widely accepted as binding in a particular society or part of a society. We must recognize, however, that some sociologists and many laymen use the term "social institutions" to refer to particular groups. A good reason for distinguishing between the normative pattern and the social systems to which it applies has already been given: namely, that particular social systems may not conform to the pattern in all respects. Indeed, one important kind of sociological problem is to account for behavior that deviates from the accepted norms. There is another reason for making the distinction between pattern and group: a particular social institution seldom exhausts the normative patterning of any relationship. Primogeniture was not the only pattern binding upon a villein's descendants in thirteenth-century England. The interaction between a particular husband and wife may conform perfectly to the institution of marriage, but they will always develop some additional private norms for their relationship.

Despite these facts, both laymen and sociologists often speak of schools, churches, business organizations, prisons, and the like as "the institutions of the community." This usage is so frequent that we should be foolish to condemn it. It is an easy extension of the technical meaning, for all these organizations, in a particular community, have in common the fact that they are subject to fairly well-recognized patterns of norms: in other words, to social institutions.

#### INSTITUTIONALIZATION, CONFORMITY, AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Conformity to institutionalized norms is, of course, "normal." The actor, having internalized the norms, feels something like a need to conform. His conscience would bother him if he did not. Further, regardless of his own attitude, other people stand ready to disapprove of him if he violates the established pattern. Consider the remarks of the obstetrician quoted earlier. A doctor's career depends not only upon his knowledge and skill but also

upon his relations with other doctors. This is especially true of specialists. There is a well-established convention (part of an institutional pattern) against "stealing" patients. If a doctor should ignore it, he would run the risk of destroying the network of cooperation upon which he depends. His personal relations with his colleagues would suffer; so would his prestige and, ultimately, his income.

The fact that both internalized "need" and external sanctions are effective in bringing about conformity was shown in an exploratory experiment conducted at Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges (Stouffer, 1949). The "subjects," 196 students, were asked to assume, in imagination, the role of a proctor:

Imagine that you are proctoring an examination. . . . About half way through the exam you see a fellow student openly cheating. The student is copying his answers from previously prepared notes. When he sees that you have seen the notes as you walked down the aisle and stopped near his seat, he whispers quietly to you, "O.K., I'm caught. That's all there is to it."

*You do not know the student. . . .*

If you knew that, *except for your action*, there could be very little chance that either the authorities or your student friends would hear about your part in the incident, which of the following actions . . . would you as proctor be most likely to take? Next most likely? Least likely? Next least likely?

\* \* \*

- A. Take away his notes and exam book, dismiss him and report him for cheating.
- B. Take away his notes, let him finish the exam, but report him for cheating.
- C. If he can be led to withdraw from the exam on some excuse, *not* report him for cheating; otherwise, report him.
- D. Take away his notes, but let him finish the exam, and *not* report him for cheating.
- E. Act as if nothing had happened and *not* report him for cheating.

After making this decision, the students were asked to choose among the same alternatives but assuming different conditions, as follows:

Now, assume that *except for your action*, there could be very little chance that your student friends would hear about your part in the incident. But assume that, for some reason, there is a good chance, whatever you do, of the authorities finding out about it.

After making their choices for these two situations, the respondents were asked to make new choices assuming somewhat different conditions:

Now suppose the facts in the case . . . are exactly the same as in the first case, except for one difference. The student you as proctor see cheating is *your own roommate and close friend*. You know that your roommate is a hard working, though not a brilliant, student and desperately needs a good grade in this course.

The respondents were then asked which of the five courses of action they would choose—first, when the choice was to be "private" ("If you knew that, *except for your action*, there could be very little chance that either the

authorities or your student friends would hear about your part in the incident") and then when the choice was to be "public" ("If you knew that, *except for your action*, there could be very little chance that your student friends would hear about your part in the incident, but that there is a good chance, whatever you do, of the authorities finding out about it"). The respondents' choices for all four situations are summarized (in part) in Table 1.

In all four situations, the respondents were faced with a possible conflict between duty to the "authorities" and loyalty to a fellow student or, worse, a roommate-friend. This conflict helps to account for the considerable deviation from proctoral duty, especially when the culprit was the roommate-friend, and for the wide range of variability among the respondents. Table 1 shows, among other things, that at least some of the respondents, although willing to deviate from their proctoral duty when they ran no risk of external sanctions, said that they would conform more closely when there was such a risk.

We have already noted, however, that sanctions are not equally effective for all violators of the norm. They always have some effect but not always the same degree of effect. In the bank-wiring group, the "inferior" clique, which we called Clique B, did not conform so scrupulously to some of the group norms as Clique A, and the members of Clique B had less prestige than the members of Clique A. But this loss of prestige did not cause Clique B members to strive to conform more strictly. They had adjusted themselves to their lower prestige and, for the pleasure of annoying the members of Clique A, they were willing to forego the pleasure of higher prestige. Their level of conformity had become stabilized below perfection. Their only concern was not to lose any more prestige. In general, failure to conform, when it is known, brings a penalty, but the effectiveness of the penalty varies

TABLE 1

*Hypothetical actions which the respondents say  
they would be most likely to take as proctor (N = 196) \**

Action	In case of ordinary student		In case of roommate-friend	
	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC
A	21%	30%	4%	6%
B	47	48	12	34
C	16	13	18	31
D	15	7	38	18
E	1	2	28	11
	100%	100%	100%	100%

\* Adapted from S. A. Stouffer, "An Analysis of Conflicting Social Norms," *Amer. sociol. Rev.*, 1949, v. 14, p. 713, Table 2.

according to the social rank of those on whom it is imposed. Those of low rank can lose prestige on account of a drop from their established standard of conformity, and the same is true of higher-ranking persons; but the higher-ranking start from a higher level of conformity and consequently suffer more from a relatively slight departure from full conformity.<sup>5</sup>

The same idea can be expressed a little differently. The members of a group evaluate one another's conduct and performances, using the norms of the group as standards. In the course of long association, every member becomes the object of more or less stable sentiments on the part of all those with whom he interacts. In addition, he acquires a more or less stable reputation and a degree of popularity or unpopularity, even with people whom he may never have seen. Once these sentiments have become established, the norms of the group are to some extent modified for each person to whom they apply. That is to say, a man with a reputation for being incompetent is no longer expected to be perfectly competent; he is only expected to be no less competent than he has ordinarily been. Consequently, those with whom he interacts will not impose heavy penalties or sanctions for his every lapse from perfection; they will simply treat him as usual—with somewhat less deference than they give to people with a better reputation. For this reason, sanctions should not be thought of necessarily as definite rewards and punishments meted out for particular acts; a certain level of sanctioning is continuously operative in the form of "frozen" reputations.<sup>6</sup> This means that the group is not so much expecting conformity to a normative pattern as it is expecting and maintaining a particular and unique degree of conformity from each member of the group. Perfect conformity remains an ideal, attainment of which brings a higher level of prestige. But fear of lowered prestige is, for most people, a stronger motive than desire for higher prestige.<sup>7</sup>

To the extent that an institutional pattern has become part of the moral consensus of the members of a group, it is a relatively disinterested element in their motivation. That is to say, they will tend to conform, or try to conform, regardless of immediate advantage or disadvantage. This non-expedient element in their motivation does not preclude their having "selfish" or expedient motives as well; the institutional pattern is simply a moral framework within which the elements of calculated expediency are normally confined. (As in all cases of orientation to norms, a particular actor may, of course, violate the pattern at times.) The two elements, self-interest and

<sup>5</sup> This point is very well made by Homans (1950, pp. 140ff.). Homans mentions a qualification of this general rule: very well-established members of a group may depart slightly from group norms with impunity, because they no longer have to prove their basic loyalty to the group.

<sup>6</sup> Parsons treats the distribution of "rewards" as analytically distinct from the distribution of "possessions" and as an aspect of the structure of social systems. (See Parsons, 1951, pp. 127ff. *et passim*.)

<sup>7</sup> Both Homans (1950) and Barnard (1946) have made the point that the "average" person fears a lowering of prestige more than he desires to gain more prestige. Barnard points out that this fact is important for the maintenance of authority

disinterestedness, are well illustrated in contractual relations. Ordinarily, a person makes a contract only when he has something to gain from it, and he presumably tries to make the terms of the contract as advantageous to himself as possible; yet the *institution* of contract is, in itself, a perfectly neutral or disinterested framework to which he subscribes.

The institution of contract, of course, is not the same thing as a particular agreement. For example, the institutionalized rules for industrial relations—rules established by “collective bargaining”—exist independently of any particular agreement between a company and a worker or group of workers. The institution does not specify detailed terms (although it may set precise limits within which detailed terms must fall if they are to be valid). Yet, in another way, the institution may be more detailed than any particular contract: for example, it is a guide to what must be done in case of contingencies unforeseen by either party.

The rules of the institution of contract, as Émile Durkheim showed in detail (1893, trans. 1933), are various. Parsons (1937) explains them as follows:

They regulate, in the first place, what contracts are and what are not recognized as valid. A man cannot, for instance, sell himself or others into slavery. They regulate the means by which the other party's assent to a contract may be obtained; an agreement secured by fraud or under duress is void. They regulate various consequences of a contract once made, both to the parties themselves and to third persons. Under certain circumstances a party may be enjoined from enforcing a contract quite legally made, as when the holder of a mortgage is sometimes prohibited from foreclosing when interest payments are not made. Similarly one party may be forced to assume obligations which were not in his contract. They regulate, finally, the procedures by which enforcement in the courts is obtainable. In a society like our own this nexus of regulations is exceedingly complex.

For convenience Durkheim lays the principal stress on the body of rules which are formulated in law and enforceable in the courts. But this must not be allowed to lead to misunderstanding of his position. . . . Durkheim's main stress is on the existence of a body of rules which have not been the object of any agreement among the contracting parties themselves but are socially “given.” . . . Of course if the rules were not to some degree enforced, they would be unimportant, but it is on their independence of the process of *ad hoc* agreement that Durkheim lays his emphasis. Secondly, while he discusses mainly legal rules, he is careful to point out that these stand by no means alone, but are supplemented by a vast body of customary rules, trade conventions and the like which are, in effect, obligatory equally with the law, although not enforceable in the courts [pp. 312-13].<sup>8</sup>

When circumstances make conformity to an ideal pattern difficult, there are often second-best patterns to follow. For example, in China, a family of good reputation ordinarily expects to have to pay a fairly large sum, in

<sup>8</sup> In footnotes, Parsons remarks, “There may also be rules enforced on themselves by occupational groups such as the professions.” He quotes Durkheim's “most succinct formula”: “Tout n'est pas contractuel dans le contrat” (Not everything in contract is contractual).

the form of gifts and expensive wedding arrangements, for a bride for one of its sons. But a poor family may avoid some of these expenses by taking in a very young girl as a foster-child and marrying her to one of the sons when she grows up. During the depression that followed the T'ai P'ing Rebellion (1848-65), many families resorted to this pattern. But the prestige attached to matchmaking, marriage gifts, and "the sending of the meeting-boat and sedan chair"—not to speak of the satisfaction to be derived from conformity for its own sake—restored the traditional form of marriage when the depression was over (Fei Hsiao-T'ung, 1939, pp. 53ff.).

However well-institutionalized a norm may be, many persons who are subject to it are tempted on occasion to depart from it. This is shown by the existence of sanctions. Sanctions are involved in all forms of social control—that is, mechanisms by which tendencies to deviate from institutionalized norms are held in check. We must not suppose, however, that sanctions derive their effectiveness mainly from being applied. One of the most important aspects of social interaction is that each actor is able to foresee in imagination the probable response of others to alternative courses of action on his part. We may infer, therefore, that many persons who are tempted to deviate from expected behavior patterns check themselves. They do not try to find out experimentally how others would react to a violation; they can imagine vividly enough. This inner check is no less a form of social control than the direct application of sanctions.

### *Conformity and Specificity of the Norm*

Let us return for a moment to the experiment discussed above, concerning students' hypothetical actions in the role of proctor, assumed in imagination. We noted that more students would conform to the norms for proctors when they were sure that their actions would be known to the university authorities than when they could act without fear of any sanctions except their own conscience. But we must now take into account another influence on their action. For many norms, there may not be complete agreement about the range or "band" within which an act can be regarded as conforming. Yet widespread objective conformity to a norm depends, of course, upon agreement as to just what the norm demands. Without that agreement, we should expect a wide range of behavior, regardless of whether sanctions are feared or not. In the proctor-student situation, there was, as a matter of fact, considerable disagreement among the respondents as to what courses of action the university authorities would approve of—that is, what courses of action could be regarded as modes of conformity to the role obligations of a proctor. The harshest actions, it will be remembered, were A ("Take away his exam book, dismiss him and report him for cheating") and B ("Take away his notes, let him finish the exam, but report him for cheating"). In the case of the ordinary student, as distinguished from that of the roommate-friend, thirteen of the 196 respondents thought that the authorities would

approve of A only; five thought that the authorities would approve of B only; and 134 thought that the authorities would approve of either A or B. But forty-four had a different interpretation of the norm; three even professed to believe that the authorities would approve of any one of the five courses, including E ("Act as if nothing had happened and *not* report him for cheating"). Such lack of agreement is perhaps unusual: the respondents were students and presumably knew and accepted the norm "Don't cheat," but they had had no indoctrination as proctors.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, one of the ways in which social norms may vary, certainly, is in the degree of agreement among those who are subject to them concerning the exact range of permissible behavior. It is conceivable that "cheating" might be variously defined. Using prepared notes is presumably cheating, but suppose that a student has been studying desperately right up to the examination and, anxious lest he forget some key points, writes them down, without consulting friends or books, while he is waiting for the examination questions to be handed out. If he uses those notes during the examination, is he cheating? Opinions might differ.

In considering the problem of agreement or disagreement about the range of acceptable conforming behavior, there is another source of difficulty. The students were not asked to state the norms for proctors; they were asked to state which of several particular actions would be approved of in concrete circumstances. This form of the question permitted the respondents to assume that the authorities, in passing judgment, might regard the circumstances as extenuating, or might even regard the proctor's "obligations" as a friend as decisive. Thus while thirteen of the respondents thought that the authorities would approve of nothing but the most drastic action (A) in the case of an "ordinary student" caught cheating, only four said that the authorities would approve only of A when the cheater was a roommate-friend of the proctor.

### *Role Conflict and Deviation*

It will be remembered that the student respondents in all the hypothetical situations, but especially in the ones involving a roommate-friend, were placed in a potential role conflict. As proctor, responsible to the university and to the impersonal norm of fair play, the respondent presumably had to report a case of cheating, no matter who might be involved. According to this view, only actions A and B could be regarded as modes of conformity. But as a roommate and a close friend, the respondent might have felt an

<sup>9</sup> There was a slight fault in the design of the experiment. Before being asked what their own action would be in the hypothetical situations, the respondents should have been asked, in general, which of the alternative actions the authorities would approve of on the part of a proctor who had caught a student using prepared notes during an examination. After making a difficult choice of a course of action, some of the respondents may have rationalized it by pretending to themselves that their choice was actually in line with their duty.

obligation to be lenient, especially in the "private" situation, when to refrain from reporting the friend would actually have kept the friend out of trouble with the authorities.

In order to see how the respondents interpreted their obligation as a roommate-friend, the investigator asked them to say which of the possible courses of action their friends in the student body would approve of. As one might expect, there was even less agreement for this norm than for the norm of proper conduct from the point of view imputed to the university authorities. Of the 196 respondents, 120 said they thought that the university authorities would approve of either A or B but of no other course of action for a proctor. These 120 students, however, had widely varying opinions about what course or courses friends in the student body would approve of.

As one might expect, the respondents on the whole thought that their student friends would expect leniency (Stouffer, 1949, p. 715, Table 5). Only one respondent thought that students would be more harsh than the university authorities; he thought that the students would approve of A only. Only eleven respondents thought that the students would agree exactly with the authorities. The rest of the respondents thought that the students would, to varying extents, be more tolerant. In their hypothetical actions, the 120 respondents tended to decide the conflict of expectations in favor of the students. Only twenty-four chose A or B in the private situation; only fifty-eight chose these courses in the public situation.

There is evidence, moreover, that the role conflict went beyond a conflict in normative expectations. Seventy-five respondents believed that the range of decisions of which the students would approve overlapped with the range of actions of which the authorities would approve. For example, thirteen of the respondents thought that the students would approve of either B, C, or D, and that the authorities would approve of either A or B. These respondents, by choosing B, could have satisfied both groups. Of the seventy-five who perceived some overlap, however, only twenty-two in the private situation and forty-seven in the public situation decided in such a way as to satisfy both the authorities and the students. Of the seventeen respondents who decided in such a way as to conform to the normative expectations of neither the authorities nor fellow students, every one in the private situation decided on a course less harsh than those of which he thought his student friends would approve. It is not likely that these respondents had very different moral attitudes from those of their fellow students. We must conclude, therefore, that a large number of respondents deviated from the normative expectations of both roles as they perceived them. Presumably they experienced a role conflict not only in the technical sense of normative conflict but in the sense of conflict between duty and feeling.

The power of negative sanctions is also revealed in this part of Stouffer's results. In the private situation, only twenty-four respondents conformed to the expectations imputed to the authorities—that is, they chose one of the more drastic acts, A or B. But in the public situation fifty-eight chose



either A or B. Of the seventeen who decided to conform to neither authorities nor students in the private situation, only eight kept to this course in the public situation. Here is an interesting detail: whereas the seventeen "absolute" deviants in the private situation—those who chose outside both approved ranges—all chose to act more leniently than they thought the students would approve, in the public situation two of the remaining eight sentimentalists, though still refusing to choose A or B as the authorities would wish, did choose a more drastic course of action than they thought the students would approve. Fear of sanctions caused them to totter perceptibly in their convictions, but they did not topple over.

Objection might be made to the student-proctor study on the ground that the respondents were only saying what they would do in a hypothetical situation. The same objection could not be made, however, to a study conducted at the Air Command and Staff School of Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base (Getzels and Guba, 1954); but the Air School study showed a similar result: that role conflict tends to produce deviation.

Air University trains Air Force officers. The instructors are all officers in uniform. A sample of these officer-instructors were interviewed to see what role conflicts, if any, they felt in their assignments. Four problem areas were revealed in these interviews:

1. *Procedure.* Some of the officer-instructors interviewed seemed to think that there was some conflict between the typical military interaction between officers and the type of interaction that ought to prevail between colleagues in teaching, or between teacher and pupil. In military life, a subordinate in rank must defer to a higher-ranking officer, but in teaching the ideal is more "democratic." Note that this difference is one of norms or standards.

2. *Rank.* Some of those interviewed felt that it was unjust to give the same pay and rating to instructors who were high-ranking officers but had no teaching experience as to instructors who were lower-ranking officers but had a great deal of teaching experience or academic training. And yet this could happen because high rank in the Air Force depends mainly on flying duty, especially in combat, not on teaching.

3. *Career.* Some of those interviewed were troubled because their assignment to teaching would not advance their career in the Air Force. Only "field" experience could do that.

4. *Assignment.* Some were troubled because they had been assigned to teach courses that they did not feel qualified to teach. Some wished that they had not been assigned to teaching at all.

Using material drawn from these interviews, the investigators composed two "inventories," which were later given, as questionnaires, to a larger number of officer-instructors at Air University. The inventories took account of the fact that the University was divided into nine courses, known as "schools." Inventory I consisted of a number of statements, each followed by a list of possible opinions about the statement. For example:

37. Compared with a tour of duty in a field command, a tour at Air University is a gap in the career of a professional Air Force Officer.

The statement as made would be agreed to at my school by:

- 0—practically none of the instructors
- 1—a small proportion of the instructors
- 2—some of the instructors
- 3—a considerable number of the instructors
- 4—many of the instructors
- 5—very many of the instructors

Inventory I as a whole was designed to show, first, the extent to which officer-instructors at Air University thought that role conflict of certain types existed at the University; and, secondly, the extent to which the nine “schools” differed from one another in their appraisal of the amount of role conflict.

Inventory II was designed to find out how many officer-instructors, and which ones, actually felt role conflicts themselves, and which role conflicts. Thus the same statements or items contained in the first inventory were included in the second, but each item was followed by this list of alternatives to choose from:

The situation described in the statement troubles me:

- 0—not at all
- 1—to a small degree
- 2—to some degree
- 3—to a considerable degree
- 4—to a great degree
- 5—to a very great degree

In addition to Inventory I and Inventory II, a Personal Questionnaire was composed, designed to elicit descriptive information, such as age, rank, educational training, and current duties; attitudinal information, such as interest in the goals of Air University, feelings of adequacy or inadequacy in their work, and sentiments toward the educational procedures; and ratings of fellow-instructors as either below average or above average in teaching effectiveness. The investigators recognized that the ratings of fellow-instructors might not be the most valid possible index of teaching effectiveness, but on this point they have this to say: “. . . because of the policy at Air University that all instructors systematically visit each other’s classes and try out all their lectures before their colleagues, the instructors were in particularly favored positions to make valid judgments of their fellows.”

The over-all purposes of these three instruments were, among others, to find out which officer-instructors were most subject to role conflict, and whether these officers were also the least effective instructors. The results showed that two of the nine “schools” at Air University were distinguished by the fact that the officer-instructors, on the average, thought that there was little role conflict in their schools, while the instructors in two other schools thought that there was a great deal of role conflict in their schools. This result, obtained from Inventory I (“The statement as made would be agreed

to at my school by: . . .”), is compatible with two facts: First, the schools in which little role conflict was perceived were primarily for military subjects, while the two schools in which much role conflict was perceived were primarily for nonmilitary subjects, such as bookkeeping and law. Secondly, a higher proportion of instructors in the “much conflict” schools were men who identified themselves with nonmilitary professional roles, such as accountant and lawyer. From these two facts, one might have expected that the officer-instructors in the second pair of schools would be more subject to role conflict in a military academy. They were compelled to play a “civilian” role and a “military” role at the same time, under circumstances in which the norms for neither role could be fully operative or fully met. This result and diagnosis was confirmed by the data on officer-instructors who most often reported (Inventory II and Personal Questionnaire) that they personally felt role conflict (Getzels and Guba, 1954, p. 172).

From these data on schools and on individual officer-instructors, it is clear that the basic conflict was between the role of officer and the role of teacher. For some this basic conflict was intensified by the fact that in their civilian roles they had internalized norms that were not quite in harmony with the norms operative in the officer-instructor role combination.

That the officer-instructors most subject to role conflict were also the least effective teachers is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
*High- and low-conflict scores compared with role-ineffectiveness ratings \**

		<i>High-conflict group</i>	<i>Low-conflict group</i>
INVENTORY I	Ineffective	15(20%)	4(13%)
	All others	60(80%)	26(87%)
INVENTORY II	Ineffective	12(34%)	8(12%)
	All others	23(66%)	60(88%)

\* Adapted from J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba, “Role, Role Conflict, and Effectiveness: An Empirical Study,” *Amer. sociol. Rev.*, April 1954, v. 19, p. 173.

### *Relations Between Groups*

These studies of role conflict illustrate the fact that institutionalization of norms may not result automatically in conformity. We can pursue the variable results of institutionalization by considering in some detail a series of possible relations between groups, of which role conflict is only one. Our purpose here is not to analyze all aspects of the relations between groups but, rather, to emphasize the fact that the attitude toward norms in any particular group is affected by the relations between that group and other

groups. We begin by summarizing briefly what we have already shown about the relation between role conflict and deviation from norms.

#### ROLE CONFLICT

In role conflict, two groups (or two subgroups of a single group) are brought into a kind of relation with each other through the fact that the same person occupies a role in one of the groups that to some extent is incompatible with a role he occupies in the other. In the hypothetical case studied at Harvard and Radcliffe, the proctor, as an agent and representative of the administration of the university, had a kind of membership in that group; but he was also in fact a member of the student body. (The student body may be regarded as either an interaction group or a status group.)

The role conflict at Air University was of two kinds. Some of the officer-instructors had not yet acquired field experience and were eager to do so in order to further their careers in the Air Force. This ambition, which it might be regarded as virtually a duty for them to have, came in conflict with their obligation to devote themselves to teaching. Other officer-instructors (or possibly the same ones, in some cases) were involved in another role conflict. They had to observe the hierarchical distinctions among military officers, but they felt that these distinctions were sometimes incompatible with good teaching and with their status as teachers well qualified in their "civilian" subjects. Here they were identifying themselves with a different status group—that of lawyers or accountants. The officer-instructors who were teaching courses in "weapons" or "tactics" felt this conflict much less keenly because they were more likely to be high-ranking officers with field experience.

The result of role conflict in all these cases was deviation—some departure from ideal conformity to some of the expectations of one or both of the roles. (Even compromise involves *some* deviation.)

There are, of course, many other examples of role conflict. As Americans imbued with the ideal of equality of opportunity regardless of color and with the ideal of fair play in competition, many "white" Southerners feel a conflict with their role as Southerners, loyal to the ideals of the Confederacy, which fought to maintain a social order in which Negroes and whites were not to be treated as equals in opportunity (Parsons, 1951, p. 281). (Role conflict is, of course, only one factor in the relations between Negroes and whites in the United States, but it is often neglected in discussion.)

#### REINFORCEMENT OF ROLES

If a person occupies two roles, the second of which reinforces his motivation to conform to the first, we have the opposite of role conflict. One of the best examples of this in contemporary society is the mutual reinforcement of occupational role and familial role, if both are occupied by an adult man. Indeed, most husbands-and-fathers cannot fulfill their obligations in the family unless they also perform adequately in an occupational

role outside the family. Some writers (e.g., Parsons, 1955, p. 13) go so far as to assert that having an occupational role is *part* of the role of husband-and-father. The point, of course, is that a husband-and-father is expected to support his family. The obligation and wish to support a family presumably are strong incentives for a man to do well in his occupation.

One point needs to be added to the present discussion. We must remember that every role has more than one obligation. It is possible to fulfill one obligation—e.g., supporting a family—while neglecting others—e.g., spending some time with one's children. Any two roles occupied by the same person, although they may reinforce each other, may also conflict in practice if the incumbent fails to allot his time and energy properly between them. Such failure, however, is due not to role conflict but to deviation in role performance, which is always possible. Role conflict, properly speaking, is inherent in the normative patterns of the roles themselves, and this is more rare.

#### INTERACTION BETWEEN GROUPS

Perhaps the most common kind of relation between two groups is interaction. This, of course, must take the form of interaction between individuals in their capacity as members of the groups. For example, in the Deep South especially, but elsewhere in the United States as well to some degree, a Negro can hardly ever interact with a white person merely as one worker, let us say, with another; it is almost always pertinent to the interaction that the Negro and the white belong to two different ethnic groups, one socially superior to the other.

One of the most important kinds of interaction between two groups takes the form of a transaction between two or more *representatives* of the groups. A representative of a group is not an ordinary member; he has the right and obligation to act *for* the group, to commit the group to an agreement or otherwise to look after its common interests in some sphere of action. Political offices are an example of this kind of role.

#### *Role-sets*

Our present interest in the interaction between groups, as we have said, is limited to the effects of such interaction upon conformity to institutionalized norms. We can best approach this problem through the concept of role-set. For convenience, let us designate as "ego" any person who is taken as the point of reference in a discussion. (This is a fairly common practice in anthropology, clinical psychology, and sociology.) We shall here use "ego" to refer to a person in his capacity as occupant of a particular social position.

It will be remembered that a role-set consists of those social positions which are structurally related to ego's position, or of the persons who occupy those positions; ego's position together with its role-set, or ego together with his role-set, compose a complex whole. The institutionalization of norms ensures that, to some extent at least, the persons composing ego's role-set

will agree on what ego's role obligations are. Nevertheless, this agreement is seldom if ever perfect. The persons composing ego's role-set occupy somewhat different positions from ego's and from one another's. Consequently their perspectives and their interests are not quite the same. While they may agree in principle on ego's role obligations, they are likely to stress different things and make different interpretations.

The fact, for example, that the members of a school board are often in social and economic strata quite different from that of the public school teacher will mean that, in certain respects, their values and expectations differ from those of the teacher. The individual teacher may thus be readily subject to conflicting role-expectations among his professional colleagues and among the influential members of the school board and, at times, derivatively, of the superintendent of schools. What is an educational frill for the one may be judged as an essential of education by the other. These disparate and inconsistent evaluations complicate the task of coming to terms with them all. What holds conspicuously for the [position] of the teacher holds, in varying degree, for the occupants of other [positions] who are structurally related, in their role-set, to others who themselves occupy diverse [positions] [Merton, 1957, pp. 370-71].

To some extent the kind of disharmony illustrated in this quotation is virtually inevitable. We could say either that the obligations of ego's role are imperfectly institutionalized or (a somewhat better formulation in some cases) that the existence of institutionalized patterns, although it mitigates conflict within the role-set, does not prevent it entirely. Note that a poorly articulated or inharmonious role-set is not the same thing as a role conflict. A role conflict occurs when ego occupies two roles with incompatible role obligations. The kind of conflict we are discussing here—imperfectly articulated role-sets—also puts incompatible demands upon ego, but these come not from different positions that he occupies but from different "members" of the role-set connected with *one* of his positions. Both kinds of conflict, role conflict and imperfectly articulated role-sets, are relevant to our present subject in that both lead to deviation from institutionalized norms or at least to compromise, which is a kind of mild double deviation.

We may assume that disharmony varies in degree from one role-set to another. Where it exists to any significant extent, the members of ego's role-set are seeking to influence him in incompatible directions; we may think of them as engaged in a struggle for control of his role performance, whether or not they are aware that a struggle is going on. Some of the factors affecting the outcome of the struggle have been identified (Merton, 1957, pp. 370-80) and are worth describing briefly here. The first three factors are similar in that they require no special activity on ego's part; the last three factors are similar in that they do require such activity.

1. In some cases, ego's position is potentially so vulnerable to conflicting pressures from his role-set that an institutional pattern exists to protect his autonomy to some extent. A notable example of this is the position of university teacher. The role obligation of the teacher, recognized in principle

by “everybody,” is to teach the truth to the best of his knowledge and belief. An important aspect of his status is known as “academic freedom”—a kind of privileged immunity from the cruder forms of retaliation, such as removal from office, to which he might otherwise be subject from persons in his role-set who disapprove of his opinions. Academic freedom, however, is notoriously hard to maintain. Patriotic groups, university boards of trustees, university administrators—even ego’s colleagues—are sometimes tempted to violate his academic freedom by interpreting it narrowly or by asserting that some other value is more important. To some extent, such pressures are forestalled, however, by the mechanism of preventing some “members” of ego’s role-set from being able to observe his activities readily.

The norm which holds that what is said in the classrooms of universities is privileged, in the sense of being restricted to the professor and his students, has this function of maintaining a degree of autonomy for the teacher. . . .

More broadly, the concept of privileged information and confidential communication in the professions—law and medicine, teaching and the ministry—has the same function of insulating clients from ready observability of their behavior and beliefs by others in their role-set [Merton, 1957, p. 375].

Here we see that the institutional pattern itself is such as it might be if it had been planned by someone who was determined to prevent role-sets from having too much influence. (We are not asserting that it *was* planned by anyone who had this in mind.) For short, we may call this the pattern of insulation. Its operation requires no activity on ego’s part except routine assertion of the rights of his status and no activity on the part of the members of his role-set except routine refraining from intrusion; protection of ego’s role performance is built-in.

2. The various members of ego’s role-set usually have varying degrees of interest in his activity. Other things being equal, those with less interest can be relatively ignored.

3. One of the “other things” that are seldom equal, however, is the distribution of power in ego’s role-set. This factor, unlike the first two, involves not so much the relation between ego and his role-set as the relations within the role-set itself. Ego is often allowed a certain degree of role autonomy by the fact that the members of his role-set to some extent neutralize one another. The weaker ones are often able to counteract the stronger by forming coalitions.

4. Another factor affecting the outcome of the struggle for control of ego’s role performance—one that involves special activity on ego’s part—is the common strategy of making known to the various members of the role-set that conflict exists among them, and playing one member off against another.

5. The fifth factor, ego’s power to withstand pressure, is in a way complementary to the third (the distribution of power among the members of ego’s role-set—power to control one another and to affect ego’s role

performance). Just as the members of ego's role-set can combine in various ways, some against others and all against ego's role autonomy, so ego can join in combinations to protect that autonomy. The most likely kind of combination, in many cases, is an organization composed of all or some of those in ego's position (i.e., in his status group). Organizations such as this rarely or never confine themselves to protecting the common status of their members against the corresponding role-set; they also normally seek to improve their members' common status and to win acceptance for "progressive" redefinition of the members' common role. (See, e.g., Merton, 1958, 1958a.) An example of this mode of dealing with the role-set is the activity of the American Association of University Professors. This organization performs numerous services for its members as individuals, for the profession of teaching, and for the society as a whole, but most observers would probably agree that one of its most important services is the investigation of cases of alleged violation of academic freedom. If private correspondence does not succeed in rectifying the abuses discovered, the Association provides publicity, which is seldom ineffective. Indeed, we may safely assume that fear of such publicity deters many persons in the professor's role-set from seeking to destroy his academic freedom. (We are here conceiving of the Association's activity, which ego presumably supports, as a kind of countervailing power to the power of ego's role-set. It is only fair to remark, however, that the Association, true to the standard of impersonal truth which it professes to defend, also affords protection to certain members of the role-set who may be unjustly accused of violating academic freedom.)

6. The last in our list of factors affecting the outcome of the struggle for control of ego's role performance is ego's ability to eliminate "offensive" (or too aggressive) members from his role-set. This ability varies depending upon ego's position and also, to some extent, upon his personality. Ego can seldom eliminate a *position* from his role-set; he will sometimes be able to eliminate a particular individual from his role-set in the concrete sense; but, perhaps most often, if ego cannot bear the pressures directed toward him from his role-set, he will have to give up his social position if he can and leave the role-set to others to cope with.

Contemplating these six factors, we cannot say in general what the outcome will be for ego's conformity to the norms of his role. We shall be unable to say *anything* intelligent, however, unless we clearly distinguish between two levels of analysis. At the more abstract level, we analyze the relations between social positions or between types of group, disregarding the particular individuals who occupy the positions and disregarding particular groups. For example, we might ask what the position of university professor typically involves in the United States, how much agreement there is about its rights and duties, and to what extent professors in general conform to the norms of their role. At the more concrete level of analysis, we might analyze the position of Professor Jones in a specific university. At either level, we apply the concept of role-set and investigate the interplay



of the six factors we have discussed. The general framework of the analysis would be the same, but the content would be different.

At the more abstract level, perhaps the first thing to note is that the power factors—especially the distribution and alignment of power in the role-set and the existence and relative power of organizations based on ego's status group—help to determine what the institutionalized norms of ego's role *are*, not only the degree of conformity to them. Social institutions are to some extent the relatively stabilized resultants of past power struggles. In that sense, the interplay of the six factors—with others, no doubt—will in general operate to establish institutional patterns and to maintain conformity to them. Stability, however, is always relative and always a matter of degree. Any marked change in any one of the six factors will, unless it is counteracted, bring about, first, a change in ego's degree of conformity to his role and, secondly, more gradually, a change in the institutionalized definition of that role. There is necessarily a close relation between *operative* norm and actual practice: if average practice departs too far from the norm, then mechanisms of social control tend to restore the original level of practice; if they do not so tend, then the operative norm has obviously changed.

The second thing to note at the more abstract level of analysis is that if there is very serious difference between ego and his role-set about ego's role (what he is normatively expected to do), then the role cannot be said, strictly speaking, to be institutionalized. But if we consider that institutional patterns are partly the resultant of past power struggles and, further, that it must be rare for all the factors involved to be in a perfectly stabilized inter-relationship for any great length of time, then we must realize anew that the institutionalization of norms is a matter of variable degree. In the more unstable situations, the persons composing ego's role-set, who themselves occupy varying social positions, will have such widely different conceptions of what ego ought to do—different from one another's and different from ego's—that no matter what ego actually does do he will be violating someone's norms for him. We may repeat that compromise is also a form of deviation, a kind of violation, in that it necessarily falls short of the ideal expectations between which it is a compromise.

Before leaving this somewhat abstract discussion of role-sets, we must make one more observation, lest we unwittingly create a false impression. In discussing six of the factors that will affect the outcome of any struggle for control of ego's role performance, we recurred to the same example as a focus for the discussion: we took the role of university professor, and we paid especial attention to academic freedom. Academic freedom is an aspect of the professor's *status*, not of his role, although if academic freedom is violated the professor will not be able to perform his role. The point here is that academic freedom is more likely to be violated by members of the professor's role-set than by the professor himself; consequently, in our discussion we tended to think in terms of a struggle between the professor-hero

and his role-set.<sup>4</sup> The suspenseful question was, Will the factors operate in such a way as to allow the professor to maintain his integrity and conform to his role? It would be a gross error, however, to think, in general, that ego's conformity depends simply upon the degree of autonomy he is able to keep intact against his role-set. On the contrary, more often than not, ego's conformity to his role obligations depends in part upon the pressures from his role-set. The norms for ego's role are not determined by ego alone. Both he and the "members" of his role-set are involved in a complex normative pattern, and to some extent they press one another to conform to the pattern.

#### REFERENCE GROUPS

The reference-group kind of relation between groups has always been very common, but it has been neglected in sociological theory until rather recently. The concept of "reference group" arises essentially from the fact that any person acting in any situation may be influenced, not only by the positions he occupies in one or more interaction groups or status groups and by his conceptions and expectations of the group or groups with which he may be interacting, but also by his conception of still other groups of which he is not a member and apart from any interaction he may be having with them. These groups—they may be interaction groups or status groups—exert their influence as reference groups in a purely passive way, simply by being thought of. (They do not exist solely as reference groups, of course, but we are speaking of their influence in this capacity.) Any group may be a reference group for a given person—a group to which he belongs or one to which he does not belong; an interaction group, a status group, or a statistical category; a group whose members are aware of their influence or one whose members are not; an actual group or even an imaginary one. Any group is a reference group for someone if his conception of it, which may or may not be realistic, is part of his frame of reference for appraisal of himself or of his situation, aspirations for himself, or appraisal of or aspirations for one of the groups to which he belongs. We take it for granted that the groups to which a person belongs will serve as reference groups for him; if they did not, he could hardly be said to be truly a member of them. Therefore, the concept of reference group is perhaps most useful in that it calls attention to the fact that groups to which one does not belong ("non-membership groups") also serve as reference groups.

For members of a particular group, another group is a reference group if any of the following circumstances prevail:

1. Some or all of the members of the first group aspire to membership in the second group (the reference group).
2. The members of the first group strive to be like the members of the reference group in some respect, or to make their group like the reference group in some respect.
3. The members of the first group derive some satisfaction from being

unlike the members of the reference group in some respect, and strive to maintain the difference between the groups or between themselves and the members of the reference group.

4. Without necessarily striving to be like or unlike the reference group or its members, the members of the first group appraise their own group or themselves using the reference group or its members as a standard for comparison.

These four types will become clearer with some examples.

#### *Striving for admission*

One study (Stouffer *et al.*, 1949) found that Army privates who accepted the formal rules were more likely to be promoted than those who did not. Among privates generally, acceptance of formal rules was by no means complete and usual; in fact, the ambitious privates who were "bucking" for promotion by displaying their cooperativeness with superior officers were known as "brown noses." Their reference group was the status group of officers, in which they aspired to membership. This ambition helped to account for their deviation from the informal rules of the status group of privates as a whole, for whom "bucking" was wrong. That the privates in general had informal rules was shown in the unpleasant sanctions they applied to the ambitious. The epithet "brown nose" was one of the milder sanctions (Merton and Kitt, 1950).

Another study (Greenblum and Pearlin, 1953) showed that persons whose occupational position was either higher or lower than that of their fathers were more prejudiced against Negroes, Jews, and the foreign-born than were persons whose occupational position was at the same level as that of their fathers. In this study, a change from a manual to a nonmanual occupation in successive generations was treated as "upward mobility." Two manual occupations, or two nonmanual, were treated as being on the same level.

"Prejudice" was indicated in several ways. All respondents were asked the question, "Suppose a family from any of these American groups were about to move next door. Are there any of them you would prefer not to have as neighbors?" The list of American groups included Jews and Negroes, among others. Of the "upward mobile," 15 per cent would keep out Jews and 71 per cent would keep out Negroes. Of the "downward mobile," the corresponding percentages were 13 and 63. The "stationary" respondents (those whose occupation was at the same level as their fathers') were against Jews and Negroes by somewhat smaller percentages, 11 and 59, respectively. These differences are perhaps not striking by themselves, but they become more significant when we find that the "mobile" respondents gave more prejudiced answers to other questions as well. A higher proportion of the "mobile" than of the "stationary" thought that Jews, Negroes, and foreign-born persons are "getting too much power . . . in the U. S. than is good for

the country." A higher proportion agreed that "although some Jews are honest, in general Jews are dishonest in their business dealings" and that "generally speaking, Negroes are ignorant and lazy."

We can see these responses more clearly as behavior in reference to a reference group if we realize that the relevant groups are probably social classes, of which the occupational categories "manual" and "nonmanual" are only rough indices. Many of the "upward mobile" were striving to gain admission into the middle class (a status group), of which they were at best marginal or insecure members. The "downward mobile" were still oriented to the middle class as a reference group to which they had once belonged (perhaps insecurely). Both mobile groups rejected Negroes, Jews, and the foreign-born in order to distinguish themselves more sharply from the class they were striving to leave, in the case of the "upward mobile," or the class to which they had reluctantly fallen, in the case of the "downward mobile," and from the less secure members of the middle class.

A similar finding was made in a study conducted in Israel (Eisenstadt, 1954). New immigrants who were socially ambitious—that is, eager to gain admission into high-ranking groups—were also the most prejudiced and aggressive toward low-ranking groups.

#### *Emulation*

Many examples of striving to be like a reference group are to be found in the study of "minority" problems.<sup>10</sup> The "dominant" group in the United States consists of white Protestants of Anglo-Saxon ancestry, with a fringe of white Protestants whose ancestors came from northern European countries other than England. Some members of ethnic and religious minorities are, of course, trying to gain admission to the dominant group, but this is not true of all those who are trying to be like the members of the dominant group. For example, Negroes who have their hair straightened are not necessarily trying to pass as whites; Jews who change their names or have plastic surgery done are not necessarily trying to pass as Protestants. The motivation, no doubt, varies from one individual to another. Some minority-group members, having internalized dominant-group standards, have become ambivalent or downright hostile toward the minority culture and now strive to be like the members of the dominant group. Other minority members strive to pass. Still others, although not striving to pass into the dominant group as such, are striving to be more acceptable to it so that they may be admitted into nonethnic and nonreligious groups in which dominant-group members participate and have power. Of this last category of minority members, some have also internalized dominant-group standards: they have a double motive for striving to be like members of the dominant group.

<sup>10</sup> The literature on minority problems is vast. For one guide to it, see G. W. Allport, 1954.

*Conferral of superiority*

The third kind of relation to a reference group requires little explanation. If whites as a status group are a reference group for Negroes, so, especially in the South, are Negroes a reference group for whites—with this difference, that the whites strive to remain *unlike* the Negroes. For some whites, there is a satisfaction just in being “white,” but this satisfaction is possible only with reference to the nonwhite group. This kind of relation to a reference group merges into the next kind (simple comparison). The difference is that in the South, and in the North to some extent, whites not only compare their status with that of Negroes but also strive to preserve the difference. The status of being a “white” is not merely a matter of possessing “white” skin; it involves superiority in prestige ranking. In this sense, the whites could lose their status without losing their white skin. Consequently, they strive to distinguish themselves from Negroes by retaining privileges.

Although it is reinforced by interaction between Negroes and whites, the “conferral of superiority” upon whites as a result of their taking Negroes as a reference group is analytically independent of interaction. A Negro in a small Southern town won a big new automobile in a radio contest. When he drove around town in it, many whites, including some with equally big cars, with old cars, or with no car at all, were indignant. The satisfaction they derived from merely *knowing* that Negroes are “inferior” was being threatened. Southern whites derive satisfaction from the flowery names that some Negroes give their children: this satisfaction is based on the mere knowledge that so “naïve” a group as the Negroes exists in the same society. If a white happened to like one of these names, he would avoid giving it to one of his own children: he would not wish to be like a Negro.

In the Coast Guard Academy, which trains officers in a four-year course, the “swabs” are warned against looking like “reserves.” For Academy men, the reserve officers (“ninety-day wonders”) are a reference group. (See Dornbusch, 1955, p. 33.)

*Simple comparison*

Even when there is no striving to be like or unlike a reference group, or to be admitted into it, contemplation of the reference group may have important consequences for the morale of the group whose action is being analyzed. For example, privates in units whose officers shared hardship with them were found to be less critical of officers in general than were men in units whose officers avoided hardship as much as possible (Stouffer *et al.*, 1949, v. 1, p. 181).

More noncombat troops still in the United States said they were “usually in good spirits” than did noncombat troops overseas. More noncombat troops still in the United States thought that “the Army is run pretty well” or “very well.” The differences in response between the two groups, however, were slight, because both groups took as a reference group combat

troops, in comparison with whom their own situation was good. Here we have an example of two reference groups with *conflicting* influences: with reference to noncombat troops at home, the noncombat troops overseas felt "worse off," but with reference to combat troops they felt "better off."<sup>11</sup>

One might expect Negro troops stationed in the North to have higher morale than Negro troops stationed in the South, where Negroes are generally treated as inferior. But the reverse was found to be true (Merton and Kitt, 1950, pp. 43-45). With reference to Negro civilians in the South, the Negro troops stationed there felt that they "had a position of comparative wealth and dignity" (Stouffer *et al.*, 1949, v. 1, p. 563). The corresponding reference group for Negro troops stationed in the North consisted of Negro civilians in the North, many of whom had relatively high-paying jobs in war industries, along with freedom from regimentation and combat risk. Since objectively the Negro troops stationed in the North were probably better off than those stationed in the South, we must conclude that the influence of reference groups was stronger than the influence of "objective" conditions.

#### *A combination of types*

One of the studies made by the Research Branch of the War Department during World War II, on certain aspects of morale, obtained results that at first seemed difficult to interpret. Three groups were asked the same questions. One group consisted of "green" troops in green outfits; the second, of green replacements in divisions with combat veterans; and the third, of the veterans in the latter divisions. In answer to a question, 45 per cent of the green troops in green outfits expressed willingness to go on combat duty. Only 15 per cent of the veterans, in answer to the same question, expressed a willingness for combat, as did 28 per cent of the green replacements in the divisions with these veterans. The replacements were no greener than the green troops in green outfits: why were fewer of them willing to go into combat?

Asked about their willingness to take charge of an outfit in combat, the veterans were most willing, the green troops in green outfits were next, and the green replacements were least willing. Why the reversal of position between the green troops and the combat veterans?

In answer to a third question—whether the men thought that they were in good physical condition—the green replacements and the green troops in green outfits showed no difference: a higher percentage of both groups than of the veterans' group said that they were in good physical condition. Was this result at variance with the results of the two previous questions?

The results on the third question were probably due in large part to an objective difference between the veterans and the green troops. After com-

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of *conflicting* reference groups is taken from Merton and Kitt, 1950. They also discuss *mutually sustaining* reference groups, with examples.

bat experience, it is probable that fewer of the veterans *were* in good physical condition. But objective differences hardly account for the results on the first two questions: the replacements and the troops in green outfits were equally green, and yet they answered differently from each other and differently for the two questions.

By this time, the reader can probably apply the concept of reference group for himself. If we assume that the green troops wanted to be like combat veterans (an assumption for which the Research Branch studies as a whole provide ample support), then we can explain the results on the first question (willingness for combat) without difficulty. The combat veterans, having proved their manhood and lost any romantic conceptions they may have had, were not eager to go into combat again. But the green troops in green outfits imagined that a "real soldier" would express willingness to go into combat. The green replacements, having had a better chance to learn the true attitude of combat veterans, answered more nearly like them than did the green troops in green outfits. It is also possible that the replacements had learned from the veterans what combat is like and had become less enthusiastic about it. This example illustrates the fact that conception of the reference group may or may not be realistic.

The results of the second question (willingness to take charge) can be interpreted as an example of two different kinds of behavior in relation to reference groups. The green replacements were influenced by a *simple comparison* between themselves and the combat veterans in their own divisions: in comparison with these seasoned men, the replacements felt themselves less capable of taking charge. Indeed, in so far as the replacements wished to gain acceptance by the combat veterans—whose prestige was relatively high—they had to be careful. In expressing a willingness to take charge when there were combat veterans in their own divisions, they would have been claiming, or seeming to claim, not merely equality with combat veterans but, worse still, superiority over them. Therefore, of the three groups, the replacements were the most modest about expressing willingness to take charge in combat.

For the combat veterans, in turn, the reference group was the group of green replacements in their own divisions. In comparison with these green troops, the combat veterans were conscious of their greater experience. They were also, perhaps, ready to claim superiority by emphasizing implicitly their dissimilarity to the green troops. The combat veterans, therefore, were the most willing of the three groups to take charge in combat.

The green troops in green outfits were in a different position. Their reference group was probably the general status group of combat veterans—seasoned men, "real" soldiers—whom, presumably, they wished to be like. At the same time, they were not inhibited by having combat veterans in their own outfits. The green troops in green outfits, therefore, emulating their conception of "real" soldiers but also conscious of their own lack of experi-

ence, were willing to take charge, but somewhat less so than the combat veterans.

The motive of showing appropriate modesty in relation to the reference group may have been involved in their answers to the question about physical condition. As we remarked, the green troops probably *were* in better physical condition on the average. But if so, the reason was that they had not been worn down in combat. These soldiers, then, might have regarded poor physical condition as a badge of honor. Green troops, both those in all-green outfits and those among veterans, might have been reluctant to claim that they were *not* in good physical condition lest they appear to minimize or deny the greater hardships of the veterans' experience (Merton and Kitt, 1950, pp. 70-78).

In all these examples of the influence of reference groups, the general hypothesis is borne out that "some similarity in status attributes between the individual and the reference group must be perceived or imagined in order for the comparison to occur at all" (Merton and Kitt, 1950, p. 61). The social structure itself largely determines which groups will have influence as reference groups in a particular situation. But this "determination" is not so obvious that an observer can in all cases predict, for a particular group, what other groups its members will take as reference groups. Indeed, a good deal of research remains to be done to find out what factors determine which of a person's *membership* groups serve as reference groups, and in what situations. The studies reported have not gone so far as one might wish, but they do open up problems that are not incapable of solution by known methods (Merton, 1957, Chap. 9).

In the present context, reference groups are interesting chiefly for their effects on the conformity and morale of groups. The study of reference groups shows how institutionalized patterns impinge differently upon different groups and how, in turn, these groups affect one another's attitudes toward their own group and its norms.

It will perhaps be helpful to compare the concept of reference group with the pair of concepts "in-group" and "out-group." As we have noted, a reference group may be either a membership group or a nonmembership group. Obviously there is some resemblance between the pair of concepts "membership reference group" and "nonmembership reference group," on one hand, and the pair of concepts "in-group" and "out-group," on the other. From the point of view of Negro troops, Negro civilians are a nonmembership reference group, and yet both groups belong to the status group "Negroes." In general terms, the members of one group and the members of one of its nonmembership reference groups may all belong to a third group. Similarly, Negroes and whites in an army division belong to the same in-group when they are fighting shoulder to shoulder against a common enemy; yet in many interactions between a white and a Negro in the United States, each is a member of the out-group from the point of view of the other.



There are also *differences* between the pair of concepts "membership reference group"/"nonmembership reference group" and the pair "in-group"/"out-group."

First, the members of an in-group are always relatively hostile, or at any rate less friendly, toward the members of the out-group. The term "in-group" stresses the "we-ness" or solidarity of the group as against outsiders. But, as we have seen, the members of one group may not be at all hostile toward their nonmembership reference group or groups. The green troops were probably not hostile toward combat veterans, whom they admired and tried to be like. In another example, we found that minority-group members are sometimes hostile toward their *own* group. The two pairs of concepts focus attention on different aspects of the relations between groups.

Secondly, a reference group is always a clearly defined interaction group or status group, but an out-group is frequently just a residual category. In relation to Christians (as in-group), *all* non-Christians belong to the out-group.

Finally, the terms "in-group" and "out-group" stress the fact that members of the first treat fellow members better than they treat "members" of the out-group, whereas there is not necessarily any interaction at all between a group and the members of one of its nonmembership reference groups.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

The best treatment of institutionalization and social institutions is to be found in the works of Talcott Parsons, especially *The Social System*, Free Press, 1951, pp. 36-45, and *Essays in Sociological Theory*, rev. ed., Free Press, 1954, *passim* (see the index). G. C. Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century*, Harvard University Press, 1942, esp. Chaps. 8 and 9, is valuable because it gives details of concrete situations in which institutionalized patterns of inheritance were used as guides.

On role conflict, see the two articles referred to in the text: S. A. Stouffer, "An Analysis of Conflicting Social Norms," *Amer. sociol. Rev.*, Dec. 1949, v. 14, pp. 707-17 (on the proctor-student role conflict); and J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba, "Role, Role Conflict, and Effectiveness: An Empirical Study," *Amer. sociol. Rev.*, April 1954, v. 19, pp. 164-75 (on Air University). These studies are also examples of good research design.

Our discussion of role-sets is based, with little change, on R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, rev. ed., Free Press, 1957, pp. 370-80. For a good research report using the concept of role-set, see M. J. Huntington, "The Development of a Professional Self-Image," in R. K. Merton, G. G. Reader, M. D., and P. L. Kendall, eds., *The Student-Physician: Introductory Studies in the Sociology of Medical Education*, Harvard University Press, 1957, pp. 179-87.

On reference groups, see R. K. Merton and A. S. Kitt, "Contributions to the Theory of Reference Group Behavior," in R. K. Merton and P. F. Lazarsfeld, eds., *Continuities in Social Research: Studies in the Scope and Method of "The American Soldier"*, Free Press, 1950, pp. 40-105 (reprinted as Chap. 8 in Merton, 1957). For a concise account of the activities of the Research Branch of the War Department during World War II, with summaries of several important

studies, see S. A. Stouffer, "A Study of Attitudes," *Scientific American*, May 1949, v. 180, pp. 11-15, reprinted in R. Freedman *et al.*, 1952, pp. 33-43. Merton and Kitt, 1950, is an analysis of parts of the Research Branch work.

The most detailed discussion of reference groups is Merton, 1957, Chap. 9. An excellent paper, somewhat abstract but clear, is R. H. Turner, "Role-Taking, Role Standpoint, and Reference-Group Behavior," *Amer. J. Sociol.*, Jan. 1956, v. 61, pp. 316-28. For an account of the effects of bilingualism among some minority-group members, describing attempts to conceal a foreign accent and become more like the dominant group in speech, see J. H. S. Bossard, *The Sociology of Child Development*, rev. ed., Harper, 1954, pp. 204-17. E. V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man*, Scribner's, 1957, gives many examples of striving for admission into the dominant group as a reference group. (A "marginal man" is one who is not fully at home in either of two groups to which he belongs—partly because of his own ambivalence, partly because his membership in one or both of the groups is very insecure. Many minority-group members are marginal men). G. Myrdal, with the assistance of R. Sterner and A. Rose, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Harper, 1944, v. 1, pp. 683-88, shows that "racial" traits are not the only barriers to "passing." For estimates of the number of Negroes who pass as whites in the United States, see J. H. Burma, "The Measurement of Negro 'Passing,'" *Amer. J. Sociol.*, July 1946, v. 52, pp. 18-22; and E. W. Eckard, "How Many Negroes 'Pass'?" *Amer. J. Sociol.*, May 1947, v. 52, 498-500.

### 3. *Structure and Function*

The social interaction of all the people of the United States during one minute would be impossible to describe and difficult to imagine. The welter of facts would be overwhelming. There are, however, various ways of simplifying without distorting very much. One way is to deal with *samples* of facts rather than with all the relevant facts. There is no escape from the necessity of using samples; we can only seek to become more aware of possible distortion and try to forestall it by making our samples as representative as possible. In this chapter, however, we shall be concerned with another way of simplifying the study of social interaction—namely, by using concepts that help to determine which facts are more relevant than others.

Two such concepts are “structure” and “function.” Structure and function are complementary concepts: full understanding of either depends upon an understanding of the other. We shall begin with structure, which we have already considered to some extent.

#### *Structural Aspects of Social Systems*

The “structure” of anything consists of the relatively stable interrelationships among its parts; moreover, the term “part” itself implies a certain degree of stability. Since a social system is composed of the interrelated acts of people, its structure must be sought in some degree of regularity or recurrence in these acts. As we have seen, the participants in a social system can be thought of as occupants of roles. Note that in “permanent” groups roles persist beyond the occupancy of any particular person; that is, roles are more “stable” than the role occupants themselves. Moreover, role occupants are organized in subgroups within the larger system, and some of these subgroups persist longer than any particular members. Many other subgroups persist as *types* longer than any particular example of the type. This is true, for example, of families.

As we have pointed out, roles, and also subgroups to some extent, are normatively defined. It would be manifestly untrue to say that all the stability, regularity, and recurrence that can be observed in social interaction are due

to normative patterning; nevertheless, we shall say that roles and subgroups of various types are the "parts" of social structure to the extent that stability, regularity, and recurrence in social interaction are due to the social norms that define roles and the obligations of subgroups.

This is a first approximation. We shall later consider certain quasi-structural aspects of social systems. But first we have to say a little more about the structural interrelations of roles and subgroups. As we have noted, the very concepts of role and subgroup imply interrelationship. Any role occupant is expected to fulfill obligations to other people (who are also role occupants), and the interrelations of subgroups are also subject to social norms. Social structure, however, includes more than the norms we have mentioned thus far.

The norms of a social system may be divided roughly into two classes. Some norms specify positive obligations. These norms usually differentiate among roles and among subgroups. Thus the positive obligations of a family are not the same as those of a business concern; the positive obligations of a father are not the same as those of a son. Norms of the other class specify the limits of *permissible* rather than obligatory action. A role occupant or subgroup "must" do certain things, "may" do certain others, and "must not" do still others.

Norms of the first class (obligatory) may be called "relational," since they specify the positive content of relations between role occupants and between subgroups. Norms of the second class (permissive) may be called "regulative." Regulative norms do not differentiate between roles and between subgroups to the same extent as do relational norms. In the United States, for example, more or less regardless of one's role, one "must not" seek to influence another by threats of violence, still less by violence itself. At least, use of these possible means of influence is normatively regulated rather strictly.

In addition to relational and regulative norms, we must include cultural values in social structure. Few concepts have been more diversely treated than the concept of value.<sup>1</sup> "Value" may be defined as a conception or standard, cultural or merely personal, by which things are compared and approved or disapproved relative to one another—held to be relatively desirable or undesirable, more meritorious or less, more or less correct. All kinds of "things" may be evaluated: feelings, ideas, actions, qualities, objects, persons, groups, goals, means.

All values are "cathected"; that is, the individual (or group, if the value is a cultural one) is emotionally committed to the relevant standards—i.e., accepts them and uses them, to some extent, in making choices and in judging things. In particular cases, however, there may be a conflict between values and other, more specific desires: "Disvalued activities are cathected

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<sup>1</sup> For a survey of discussions, see Kluckhohn *et al.*, 1951; and Parsons and Shils, eds., 1951, pp. 159-89.

(despite values). People are strongly attracted to adulterous relationships. Conversely, a man goes to church on Sunday when (apart from the value element) he would strongly prefer to start his golf game early" (Kluckhohn *et al.*, 1951, p. 399). For conflict to take place, there must be cathexis of the value as well as of the activity with which the value is in conflict. Values help to integrate a personality or a system of social interaction. They provide a means by which conflicts tend to be forestalled or resolved, but some conflicts of course persist: probably no system of action is perfectly integrated.

There are different kinds of value, corresponding to different spheres of activity, different aspects of life. The Greeks distinguished the good, the true, and the beautiful; most classifications are similar to theirs. Without cognitive standards, we should not be able to decide between conflicting ideas, and we should be unable to agree on what is true. The "beautiful" is the aesthetic sphere in a broad sense: the sphere of the expression of feeling, of "feeling and form."<sup>2</sup> The "good" has to do with morality, with harmonizing the rights of others with one's own wishes.

All values imply a cognitive element, however, in that one's conception of what is desirable depends upon one's conception of what *is* and of what is possible.

To take an almost absurd but clear example: In their conceptions of a desirable state of affairs people do not postulate conditions under which the law of gravity ceases to operate, the threats and irritations of climatic variations disappear completely, or food and drink appear spontaneously ready for consumption [Kluckhohn *et al.*, 1951, p. 392].

Obviously values are closely related to norms—so closely that one might ask what the difference is. A sufficiently broad sense of "norm" would eliminate any difference. In general, however, we shall use the term "norm" for a relatively specific pattern of expected behavior. Unusual intelligence, for example, is valued in the occupants of almost any social role, but obviously it can be required in relatively few. Women in our society are not expected to be very brave physically, but a brave woman is admired. Values are general standards and may be regarded as higher-order norms. Norms themselves may be evaluated; so may behavior conforming to two different norms, both of which are accepted. Being a foreman is "better" than being an ordinary worker, yet both jobs are respectable. "[A man] may turn down promotion to foreman because the job has too many 'headaches,' but he will concede that this job is somehow, on an absolute scale, better than his own" (Homans, 1950, p. 128).

In addition to social structure, there are cultural patterns of knowledge, belief, cathexis, evaluation, and overt action that may not be clearly normative but still are more or less standardized and stable and contribute to the regularity of social interaction. Some religious beliefs, for example, are

<sup>2</sup> The title of a book by Susanne Langer, 1953.

clearly institutionalized within subgroups such as the Roman Catholic Church, but the same or similar beliefs affect the behavior of many people who are not members of any organized religious group, and there are other beliefs that are not sanctioned at all and yet are influential.

The structure of a social system, then, includes the following:

1. Subgroups of various types, interconnected by relational norms.
2. Roles of various types, within the larger system and within the subgroups. Each role system is also connected with others, of course, through relational norms.
3. Regulative norms governing subgroups and roles.
4. Cultural values.

Any one of these elements—a type of subgroup, a role, a social norm, or a value—may be called a “partial structure.”

In order to prevent misunderstanding, we must emphasize the relative nature of social structure. Norms are never perfectly institutionalized, as we have pointed out. Moreover, even if a norm is accepted, it may not be followed on every possible occasion. Thus any description of social structure is likely to be a simplification of reality to some extent. To *what* extent will depend upon the care with which the description takes account of the quantitative aspects of institutionalization and the amount of deviation from institutionalized patterns. Not only is there deviation in role performance, but any large social system is likely to have within it some subgroups that are actually organized according to norms that violate the regulative norms of the larger social system. If we are describing the structure of the larger system, such criminal subgroups will be treated as deviant. (Criminality is not the only form of social deviation, but there is no need to distinguish other forms here.) All forms of deviation obviously have to be defined and analyzed in relation to some standard. The social structure, as we have defined it, is the standard by which we define social deviation.<sup>3</sup>

### *Functional Problems of Social Systems*

In a famous passage in his *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes wrote of the scarcity of some things relative to the number of people who would like to have them; although men are unequal in natural endowments and learning, he said, they are equal in hope. Hobbes meant that almost all men strive to gain possession of the scarce valuable things around them. In a “state of nature” (that is, in a hypothetical state of social life without regulative norms), the struggle for power, with individuals and coalitions pitted against one another to gain supremacy, would be rather bitter; as Hobbes said, the life of man would be “poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” No one could feel secure in his possession of anything.

If organization and stability are to characterize social life at all, there

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of social structure, see Parsons, 1951, pp. 114-50.

is a "need," we might say, for some mitigation of this inherent struggle for power. We do in fact find in all societies some norms defining property rights, limiting the means men may use to influence one another, and regulating the settlement of disputes. Just as *scarcity* and the *struggle for power* are universal, so are *property* rights and *authority*.

The "need" we are discussing as an example is a *social* need. It arises, not in the nature of the individual organism, but in social interaction. This point, although obvious, is sometimes overlooked; people speak as if property and government arose somehow from an inborn "drive" to power. It is no doubt true that some men seek power, and that some of them seek to enter (or become) the government; in that sense, a drive to power, whether inborn or not, is indeed related to the existence of government. But government, in the sense of a certain kind of organization, established and functioning to some extent according to norms, is not only an expression of a drive to power and a field for the exercise of power; it also serves to some extent to regulate the struggle for power, of governed and governors *both*.

The social "need" to regulate the struggle for power does not necessarily produce cultural patterns of property and authority. There are many cases of social interaction—between nations, for example—in which commonly accepted property norms and authority hardly figure at all. These cases of social interaction are not striking, however, for cooperation and stability.

The concept of "social need" is definitely not intended to explain the existence of cultural patterns. But if there were no scarcity there would be no property rights. In that sense, scarcity *is* a partial explanation of the existence of property rights. Moreover, if there were no recognized property rights, there would be no cooperative, organized, and stable social interaction. Only in that sense is there a "social need" for property norms. No scarcity, no property; no property, no society. The concept of social need does not necessarily imply a value judgment. To speak of the social need for recognized property rights is merely one way of asserting that *if* a society is to exist, there must be recognized property rights. The concept does not imply that any *particular* property norms are desirable or indispensable.

There are some needs that every group, whatever its type, must fulfill, and some that every group of a particular type—for example, the personnel of a library—must fulfill. The circumstances of any particular society present problems that to some extent are peculiar to that society, although they may be particularized examples of needs that every society must meet. Thus Israel cannot survive without help from other countries, whereas the United States conceivably could; yet the United States, like any other society, also has the general problem of adjusting itself to its environment, social and nonsocial.

Broadly speaking, every social system must solve four functional problems. They have been given the following names: (1) pattern maintenance and tension management, (2) adaptation, (3) goal attainment, and (4) in-