Groups are the essence of life in society. We become who we are because of our membership in human groups. As we saw in Chapter 3, even our minds are a product of society, or, more specifically phrased, of the groups to which we belong.

In this chapter, we'll consider how groups influence our lives—and even the power that groups wield over us. Although none of us wants to think that we could participate in killings such as those recounted in our opening vignette, don't bet on it. You are going to read some surprising things about groups in this chapter.

Societies and Their Transformation

To better understand **groups**—people who interact with one another and who think of themselves as belonging together—let's first look at the big picture. The largest and most complex group that sociologists study is **society,** which consists of people who share a culture and a territory. Society, which surrounds us, sets the stage for our life experiences. Not only does it lay the broad framework for our behavior but also it influences the ways we think and feel. Since our society is so significant in our lives, let's look at how it developed. In Figure 6.1, you can see that technology is the key for understanding the broad, sweeping changes that have produced our society. As we summarize these changes, picture yourself as a member of each society. Consider how your life—even your thoughts and values—would be different in each society.

As society—the largest and most complex type of group—changes, so, too, do the groups, activities, and, ultimately, the type of people who form that society. This photo of Trish Stratus of World Wrestling Entertainment captures some of the changes that U.S. society has been undergoing in recent years. What social changes can you identify from this photo?
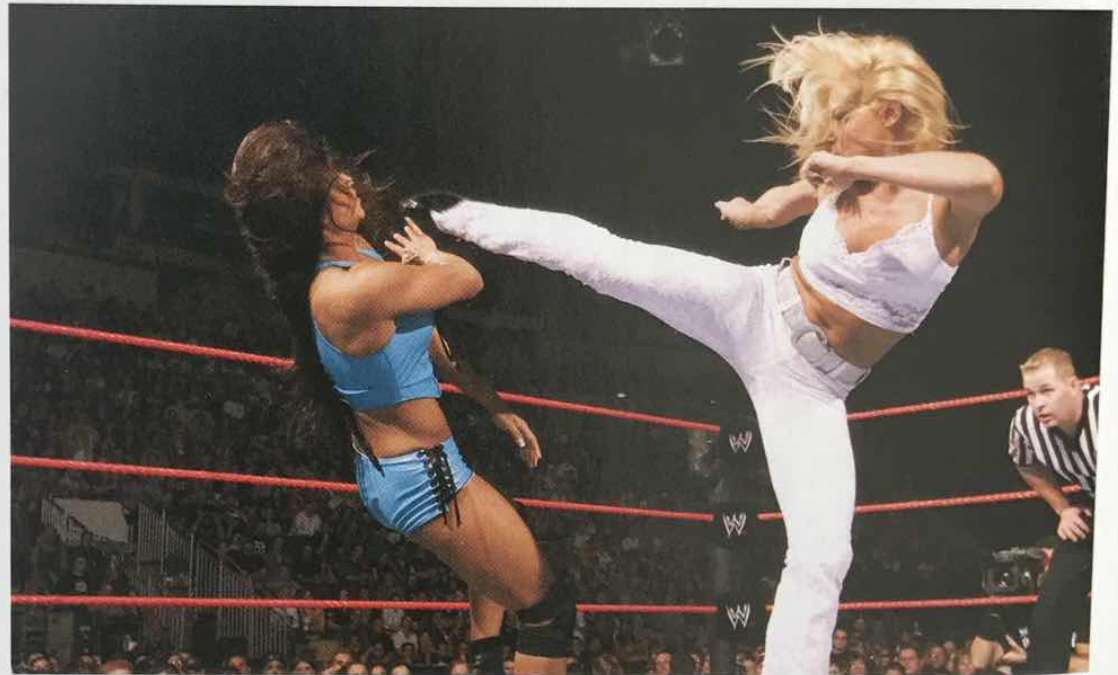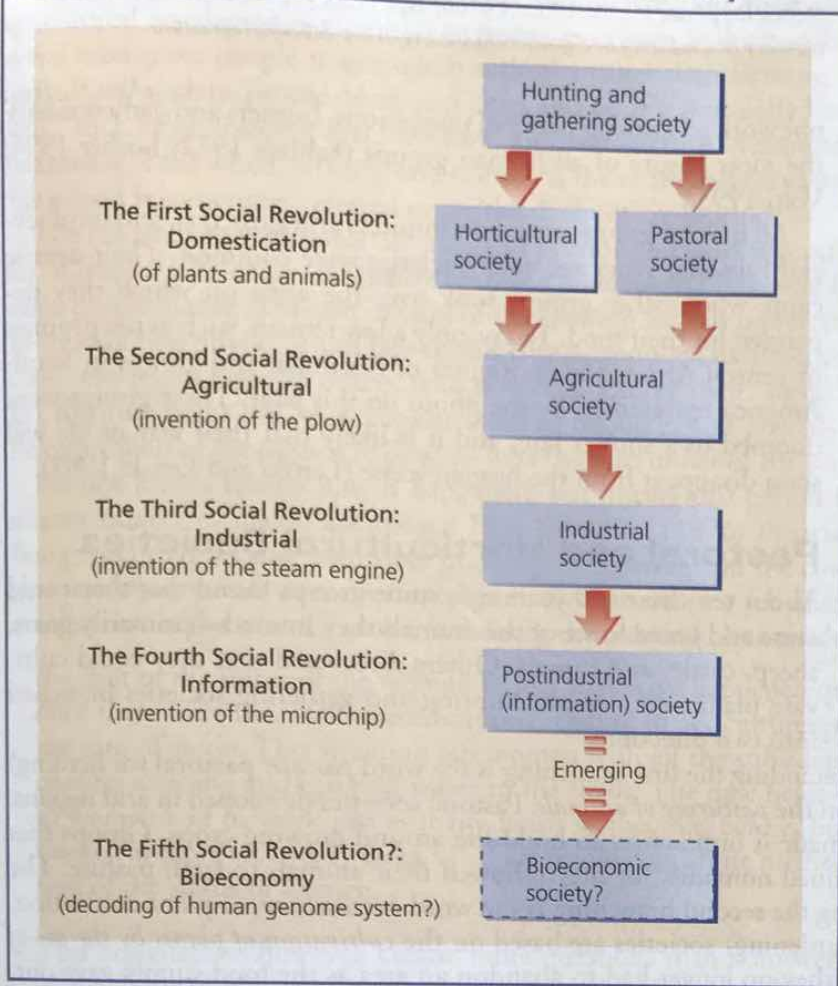
Figure 6.1 The Social Transformations of Society

Hunting and gathering society

The First Social Revolution:
Domestication
(of plants and animals)
→ Horticultural society / Pastoral society

The Second Social Revolution:
Agricultural
(invention of the plow)
→ Agricultural society

The Third Social Revolution:
Industrial
(invention of the steam engine)
→ Industrial society

The Fourth Social Revolution:
Information
(invention of the microchip)
→ Postindustrial (information) society

Emerging

The Fifth Social Revolution?:
Bioeconomy
(decoding of human genome system?)
→ Bioeconomic society?

Hunting and Gathering Societies

Societies with the fewest social divisions are called **hunting and gathering societies**. As the name implies, these groups depend on hunting animals and gathering plants for their survival. In some, the men do the hunting, and the women the gathering. In others, both men and women (and children) gather plants, the men hunt large animals, and both men and women hunt small animals. Beyond this basic division of labor by sex, there are few social divisions. The groups usually have a **shaman**, an individual thought to be able to influence spiritual forces, but shamans, too, must help obtain food. Although these groups give greater prestige to the men hunters, the women gatherers contribute more food to the group, perhaps even four-fifths of their total food supply (Bernard 1992).

In addition to gender, the major unit of organization is the family. Most group members are related by ancestry or marriage. Because the family is the only distinct social institution in these societies, it fulfills functions that are divided among modern society's many specialized institutions. The family distributes food to its members, educates its children (especially in survival skills), nurses its sick, and provides for virtually all other needs.

Because an area cannot support a large number of people who hunt animals and gather plants (they do not plant—they only gather what is already there), hunting and gathering societies are small. They usually consist of only twenty-five to forty people. These groups are nomadic, moving from one place to another as the food supply of an area gives out. They place high value on sharing food, which is essential to their survival. Because of disease, drought, and pestilence, children have only about a fifty-fifty chance of surviving childhood (Lenski and Lenski 1987).

Of all societies, hunters and gatherers are the most egalitarian. Because what they hunt and gather is perishable and they have no money, the people accumulate few personal possessions. Consequently, no one becomes wealthier than anyone else. There are no rulers, and most decisions are arrived at through discussion. Because their needs are basic and they do

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

society people who share a culture and a territory

hunting and gathering society a human group dependent on hunting and gathering for its survival

shaman the healing specialist of tribal groups who attempts to control the spirits thought to cause a disease or injury; commonly called a witch doctor
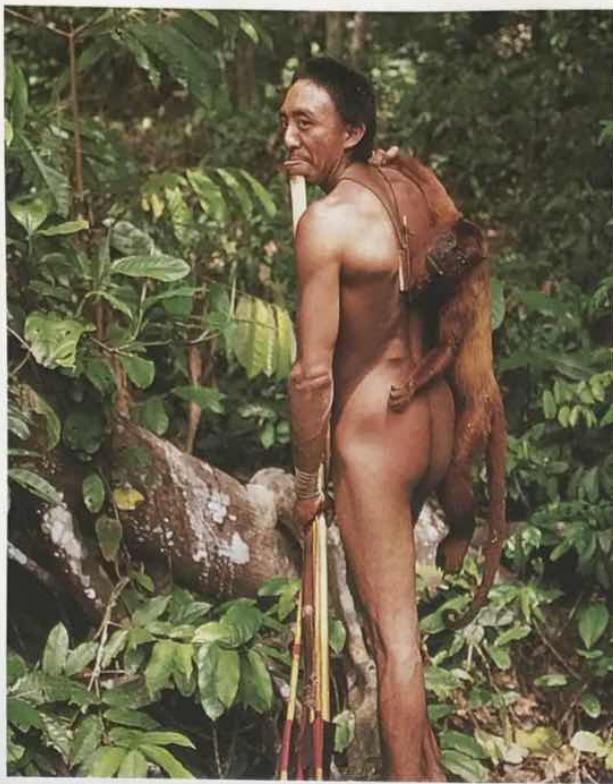
The simplest forms of societies are called hunting and gathering societies. Members of these societies face severe hardships but have adapted well to their environments. They have the most leisure of any type of society. The man shown here is a member of a hunting and gathering society in the Brazilian Amazon.

not work to store up material possessions, hunters and gatherers have the most leisure of all human groups (Sahlins 1972; Lorber 1994; Volti 1995).

All human groups were once hunters and gatherers, and until several hundred years ago such societies were common. Their demise came when other groups took over the areas on which they depended for their food. Today, only a few remain, such as the pygmies of central Africa, the aborigines of Australia, and groups in South America represented by the photo on this page. These groups seem doomed to a similar fate, and it is likely that their way of life will soon disappear from the human scene (Lenski and Lenski 1987).

Pastoral and Horticultural Societies

About ten thousand years ago, some groups found that they could tame and breed some of the animals they hunted—primarily goats, sheep, cattle, and camels. Others discovered that they could cultivate plants. As a result, hunting and gathering societies branched into two directions.

The key to understanding the first branching is the word *pasture;* **pastoral** (or herding) **societies** are based on the *pasturing of animals.* Pastoral societies developed in arid regions, where low rainfall made it impractical to build life around growing crops. Groups that took this turn remained nomadic, for they followed their animals to fresh pasture. The key to understanding the second branching is the word *horticulture,* or plant cultivation. **Horticultural** (or gardening) **societies** are based on the *cultivation of plants by the use of hand tools.* Because they no longer had to abandon an area as the food supply gave out, these groups developed permanent settlements.

We can call the domestication of animals and plants the *first social revolution.* As shown in Figure 6.1, it transformed human society. Although the **domestication revolution** was gradual, occurring over thousands of years, it represented a fundamental break with the past and changed human history. The more dependable food supply ushered in changes that touched almost every aspect of human life. Groups became larger because the more dependable food supply supported more people. With more food than was essential for survival, no longer was it necessary for everyone to produce food. This allowed groups to develop a division of labor, and some people began to specialize in making jewelry, tools, weapons, and so on. This led to a surplus of objects, which, in turn, stimulated trade. With trading, groups began to accumulate objects they prized, such as gold, jewelry, and utensils.

As Figure 6.2 illustrates, these changes set the stage for *social inequality.* Some families (or clans) acquired more goods than others. This led to feuds and war, for groups now possessed animals, pastures, croplands, jewelry, and other material goods to fight about. War, in turn, opened the door to slavery, for people found it convenient to let their captives do their drudge work. Social inequality remained limited, however, for the surplus itself was limited. As individuals passed on their possessions to their descendants, wealth grew more concentrated. So did power. At some point during this period, some individuals became chiefs, leaders of groups.

Note the primary pattern that runs through this transformation of group life: the change *from fewer to more possessions and from greater to lesser equality.* Where people were located *within* a society became vital for determining what happened to them in life. Again, Figure 6.2 summarizes how these changes led to social inequality.

Agricultural Societies

When the plow was invented about five or six thousand years ago, social life was once again changed forever. Compared with hoes and digging sticks, the use of animals to pull

pastoral society a society based on the pasturing of animals

horticultural society a society based on cultivating plants by the use of hand tools

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

agricultural revolution the second social revolution, based on the invention of the plow, which led to agricultural society

agricultural society a society based on large-scale agriculture, dependent on plows drawn by animals

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

industrial society a society based on the harnessing of machines powered by fuels

plows was immensely efficient. As the earth was plowed, more nutrients were re-turned to the soil, making the land more productive. The food surplus of the **agricultural revolution** was unlike anything ever seen in human history. It al-lowed even more people to engage in activities other than farming. In this new **agricultural society**, people developed cities and what is popularly known as "cul-ture," such as philosophy, art, literature, and architecture. Accompanied by the inventions of the wheel, writing, and numbers, the changes were so profound that this period is sometimes referred to as "the dawn of civilization."

The tendency toward social inequality of previous societies was only a forerun-ner of what was to come. *Inequality became a fundamental feature of life in society.* Some people managed to gain control of the growing surplus resources. To protect their expanding privileges and power, this elite surrounded itself with armed men. They even levied taxes on others, who now had become their "subjects." As con-flict theorists point out, this concentration of resources and power—along with the oppression of people not in power—was the forerunner of the state.

No one knows exactly how it happened, but during this period females also became subject to males. Sociologist Elise Boulding (1976) theorizes that this change occurred because men were in charge of plowing and the cows. She sug-gests that when metals were developed, men took on the new job of attaching the metal as tips to the wooden plows and doing the plowing. As a result,

> the shift of the status of the woman farmer may have happened quite rapidly, once there were two male specializations relating to agriculture: plowing and the care of cattle. This situation left women with all the subsidiary tasks, in-cluding weeding and carrying water to the fields. The new fields were larger, so women had to work just as many hours as they did before, but now they worked at more secondary tasks. . . . This would contribute further to the ero-sion of the status of women.

This explanation, however, creates more questions than it answers. Why, for example, did men take over metal work and plowing? Why didn't women? It also does not account for why men control societies in which women are in charge of the cattle. In short, we are left in the dark as to why and how men became dom-inant, a reason likely to remain lost in human history.
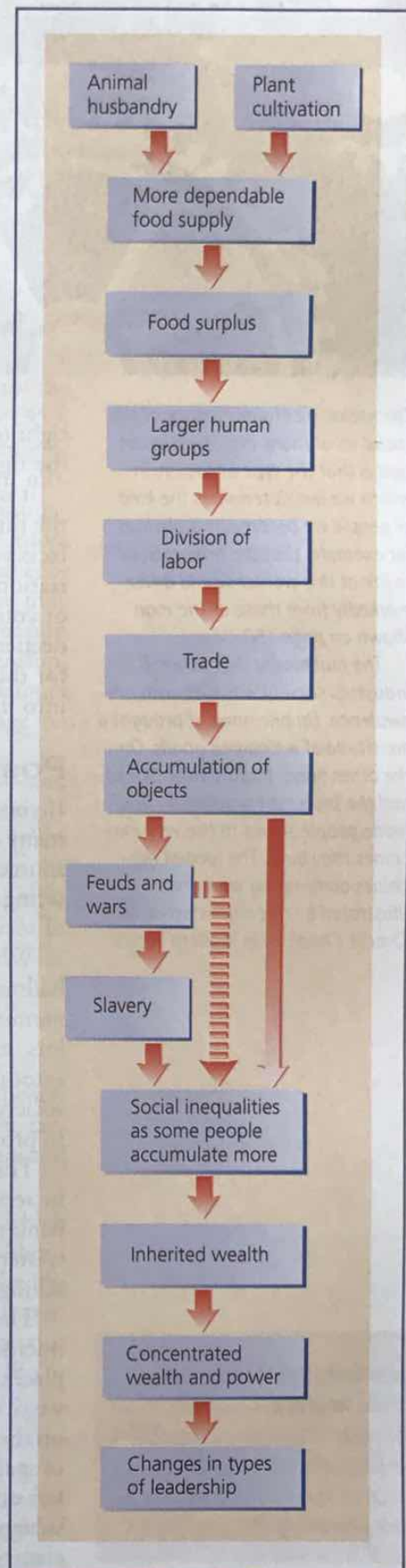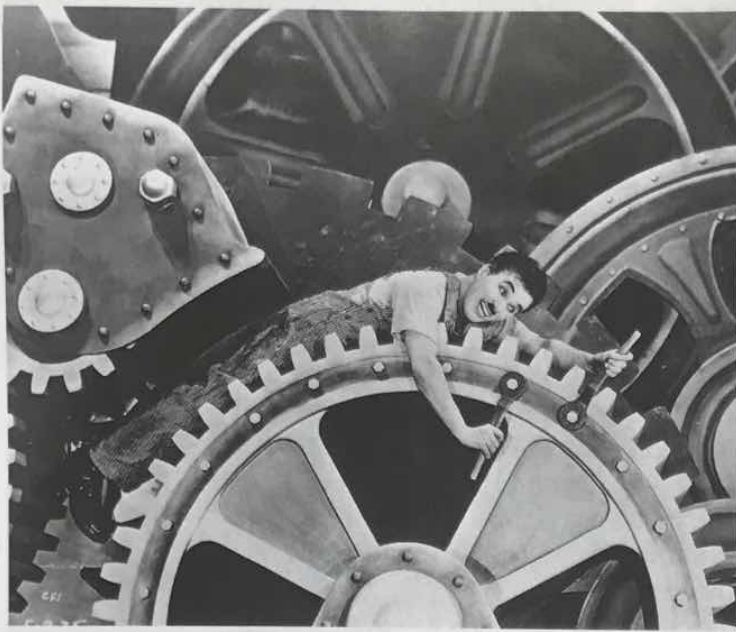
Industrial Societies

In the 1700s, another invention turned society upside down. The **Industrial Revolution** began in 1765 when the steam engine was first used to run machin-ery in Great Britain. Before this, people used a few machines (such as wind and water mills) to harness nature, but most machines depended on human and ani-mal power. The resulting **industrial society** is defined by sociologist Herbert Blumer (1990) as a society in which goods are produced by machines powered by fuels, instead of by the brute force of humans or animals.

With the steam engine, social inequality took another leap. This new technol-ogy was far more efficient than anything before it. Just as its surplus was greater, so were its effects on social life. Those who first used the steam engine accumu-lated such wealth that in many instances their riches outran the imagination of royalty. Gaining an early position in the markets, they were able not only to con-trol the means of production (factories, machinery, tools), but also to dictate peo-ple's working conditions. The breakdown of feudal society helped them to control the workers. Masses of people were thrown off the lands that they and their an-cestors had farmed as tenants for centuries. Having become homeless, these land-less peasants moved to the cities. There they faced the choice of stealing, starving, or working for starvation wages (Chambliss 1964; Michalowski 1985).

Workers had no legal right to safe working conditions, nor the right to union-ize. Employment was a private contract between the employer and the individual worker. If workers banded together to protest or to ask for higher wages, they were fired. If they returned to the factory, they were arrested for trespassing on

Figure 6.2 Fundamental Consequences of Animal Husbandry and Plant Cultivation

Animal husbandry • Plant cultivation
↓
More dependable food supply
↓
Food surplus
↓
Larger human groups
↓
Division of labor
↓
Trade
↓
Accumulation of objects
↓
Feuds and wars
↓
Slavery
↓
Social inequalities as some people accumulate more
↓
Inherited wealth
↓
Concentrated wealth and power
↓
Changes in types of leadership

The sociological significance of the social revolutions discussed in the text is that the type of society in which we live determines the kind of people we become. It is obvious, for example, that the orientations to life of this worker would differ markedly from those of the man shown on page 150.

The machinery that ushered in industrial society was met with ambivalence. On one hand, it brought a multitude of welcomed goods. On the other hand, factory time clocks and the incessant production line made people slaves to the very machines they built. The idea of machines dominating workers is illustrated by this classic scene of Charlie Chaplin's in Modern Times.

private property. Strikes were illegal, and strikers were savagely beaten by the employer's private security force. On some occasions during the early 1900s, U.S. strikers were shot by private police, and even by the National Guard.

Against these odds, workers gradually won their fight for better working conditions. Wealth then spread to larger segments of society. Eventually, home ownership became common, as did the ownership of automobiles and an incredible variety of consumer goods. Today's typical worker in advanced industrial societies enjoys a high standard of living in terms of material conditions, health care, longevity, and access to libraries and education. Such gains go far beyond what early social reformers could have imagined.

As industrialization progressed, it reversed the pattern set earlier, and equality increased. Indicators of greater equality include better housing and a vast increase in consumer goods, the abolition of slavery, the shift from monarchies to more representative political systems, the right to be tried by a jury of one's peers and to cross-examine witnesses, the right to vote, the right to travel, and greater rights for women and minorities.

It is difficult to overstate the sociological principle that the type of society we live in is the fundamental reason for why we become who we are. To see how industrial society affects your life, note that you would not be taking this course if it were not for industrialization. Clearly you would not have a computer, car, telephone, DVD player, television, or your type of clothing or home. You wouldn't even have electric lights. And on a much deeper level, you would not feel the same about life, or have your particular aspirations for the future. Actually, no aspect of your life would be the same; you would be locked into the attitudes and views that come with an agricultural or horticultural way of life.

Postindustrial (Information) Societies

If you were to choose one word that characterizes our society, what would it be? Of the many candidates, the word *change* would have to rank high among them. The primary source of the sweeping changes that are transforming our lives is the new technology centering around the microchip. The change is so vast that sociologists say that a new type of society has emerged. They call it the **postindustrial** (or **information**) **society**.

What are the main characteristics of this new society? Unlike the industrial society, its hallmark is not raw materials and manufacturing. Rather, its basic component is *information*. Teachers pass on knowledge to students, while lawyers, physicians, bankers, pilots, and interior decorators sell their specialized knowledge of law, the body, money, aerodynamics, and color schemes to clients. Unlike the factory workers of an industrial society, these individuals don't *produce* anything. Rather, they transmit or use information to provide services that others are willing to pay for.

The United States was the first country to have more than 50 percent of its work force in service industries such as education, health, research, the government, counseling, banking, investments, insurance, sales, law, and the mass media. Australia, New Zealand, western Europe, and Japan soon followed. This basic trend away from manufacturing to selling information and services shows no sign of letting up.

The changes have been so profound that they have led to a *fourth social revolution*. The microchip is transforming established ways of life, uprooting old perspectives and replacing them with new ones. This new technology allows us to work at home, and while we ride in cars, trucks, and airplanes, to talk to others in distant cities and even to people on the other side of the globe. This tiny device lets us peer farther into the remote recesses of space than ever before. It is changing our shopping patterns as we spend billions of dollars on Internet purchases. And because of it, millions of children spend countless hours struggling against video enemies, at home and in the arcades. For a review of other changes, see the section on the computer in Chapter 22 (pages 652–657).

postindustrial (information) society a society based on information, services, and high technology, rather than on raw materials and manufacturing

Bioeconomic Societies: Is a New Type of Society Emerging?

The coming products are incredible (Elias 2001). Tobacco that fights cancer. ("Yes, smoke your way to health!") Corn that fights herpes and is a contraceptive. (You can make up your own jingle for that one.) Already we have goats whose milk contains spider silk (to make fishing lines and body armor), and animals that are part human (human genes have been inserted into their genes) so they produce medicines—and creamier mozzarella cheese (Kristoff 2002; Osborne 2002).

The changes are so revolutionary that a new type of society may be emerging already (Davis and Meyer 2000; Holloway 2002). If so, the chief distinguishing characteristic of the **bioeconomic society** will be an economy that centers around the application of genetic structures—both plant and animal—for the production of food and medicine. The natural sciences will be reconstituted. Already we see biotechnology replacing botany, and biochemistry replacing chemistry (Manavalan 2001). No longer will the transmission of information be limited to numbers, words, sounds, and images, but it will also include smell, taste, and touch (Davis 2001).

If we are witnessing the birth of a new type of society, just when did it begin? There are no firm edges on such momentous changes, and each type of new society overlaps the one it is replacing. We could trace the starting point of the bioeconomic society to 1953, however, when Francis Crick and James Watson identified the double-helix structure of DNA. Certainly the decoding of the human genome in 2001 also was a significant moment in the emergence of this new society—and perhaps may even mark its beginning.

Projecting a new type of society so soon after the arrival of the postindustrial or information society is risky and abounds in controversy. The wedding of genetics and economics may turn out to be simply another part of our information society. But we may be witnessing the birth of a new type of society, one destined to replace the information society. In either case, we can anticipate revolutionary changes in health care (prevention, instead of treating disease), and, with cloning and bioengineering, perhaps even changes in the human species. The Sociology and the New Technology box on the next page examines implications of cloning.

Although the full implications of the changes swirling around us are unknown—and whether they are part of a new type of society is not the main point. *The sociological significance of these changes is that just as the larger group called society always profoundly affects people's thinking and behavior, so, too, these recent developments will do the same for us.* As society is transformed, we will be swept along with it. The changes will be so extensive that they will transform even the ways we think about the self and life.

IN SUM

Our society sets boundaries around our lives. It establishes the values and beliefs that prevail and also determines the type and extent of social inequality. These factors, in turn, set the stage for relationships between men and women, the young and the elderly, racial and ethnic groups, the rich and the poor, and so on.

It is difficult to overstate the sociological principle that the type of society in which we live is the fundamental reason why we become who we are—why we feel about things the way we do, and even why we think our particular thoughts. On the obvious level, if you lived in a hunting and gathering society you would not be listening to your favorite music, watching your favorite TV programs, or playing your favorite video games. On a deeper level, you would not feel the same about life or hold your particular aspirations for the future.

Finally, we should note that not all the world's societies will go through the transformations shown in Figure 6.1 (page 149). Whether any hunting and gathering societies survive, however, remains to be seen. Perhaps a few will be allowed to survive, kept on "small reserves" that will be off limits to developers—but open to guided ecotours at a hefty fee.

bioeconomic society an economy that centers around the application of genetics— human genetics for medicine, and plant and animal genetics for the production of food.

"So, You Want to Be Yourself?" Cloning in the Coming Bioeconomy

No type of society ends abruptly. Instead, one always overlaps the other. As the information society matures in the years ahead, it may gradually be overtaken by a bioeconomy. Let's try to peer over the edge of our current society to glimpse the one that may be coming. What would life be like? There are too many issues to deal with in this limited space, so let's consider just one: cloning.

Consider this scenario:

Your four-year-old daughter has drowned, and you can't get over your sorrow. You go to Cleta's Cloning Clinic, where you have stored DNA for all members of your family. You pay the fee, and the technicians use a salaried surrogate mother to bring your daughter back as a newborn.

Will cloning humans become a reality? It seems inevitable, and it already is being attempted in clandestine labs ("Couple Plan . . . " 2002). Currently, scientists are plagued by the problem that clones are often deformed. Let's suppose that this problem has been solved, and

the cloning of humans becomes routine. Consider these scenarios:

Suppose that a couple can't have children. Testing shows that the husband is sterile. The couple talk about their dilemma, and the wife agrees to have her husband's genetic material implanted. Would this woman, in effect, be rearing her husband as a little boy?

Or suppose that you love your mother dearly, and she is dying. With her permission, you decide to clone her. Who is the clone? Would you be rearing your own mother?

What if a woman gave birth to her own clone? Would the clone be her daughter or her sister?

When genetic duplicates appear, the questions of what humans are, what their relationship is to their "parents," and indeed what parents and children are, will be brought up at every kitchen table.

For Your CONSIDERATION

As these scenarios show, cloning leads to profound issues, perhaps the most

weighty being the future of society itself. Let's suppose that mass cloning becomes possible.

Many object that cloning is immoral, but some will argue the opposite. They will ask why we should leave human reproduction to people who have inferior traits—genetic diseases, low IQs, perhaps even the propensity for crime and violence. They will suggest that we select people with the finer characteristics—high creative ability, high intelligence, compassion, and a propensity for peace.

Let's assume that scientists have traced these characteristics—as well as the ability and appreciation for poetry, music, mathematics, architecture, and love—to genetics. Do you think that it should be our moral obligation to populate society with people like this? To try to build a society that is better for all—one without terrorism, war, violence, and greed? Could this perhaps even be our evolutionary destiny?

Source: Based on Davis and Meyer 2000; Kaebnick 2000; McGee 2000; Bjerklie et al. 2001; Davis 2001.

■ ■ ■

Now that we have reviewed the major historical shifts in societies, let's turn to groups within society. Just how do they affect our lives?

Groups Within Society

Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1933) wondered what could be done to prevent *anomie* (AN-uh-mee), that bewildering sense of not belonging. Durkheim found the answer in small groups. He said that small groups stand as a buffer between the individual and the larger society. If it weren't for these groups, we would feel oppressed by that huge, amorphous entity known as society. By

providing intimate relationships, small groups give us a sense of meaning and purpose, helping to prevent anomie.

Before we examine groups in more detail, we should distinguish some terms. Two terms sometimes confused with "group" are *aggregate* and *category*. An **aggregate** consists of individuals who temporarily share the same physical space but who do not see themselves as belonging together. People waiting in a checkout line or drivers parked at a red light are an aggregate. A **category** is a statistic. It consists of people who share similar characteristics, such as all college women who wear glasses or all men over 6 feet tall. Unlike groups, the individuals who make up a category neither interact with one another nor take one another into account. The members of a *group*, in contrast, think of themselves as belonging together, and they interact with one another.

Groups affect your life so extensively that they determine just who you are. If you think this an exaggeration, read on. Let's begin by looking at the types of groups that make up our society.

Primary Groups

Our first group, the family, gives us our basic orientation to life. Later, among friends, we find more intimacy and an additional sense of belonging. These groups are what sociologist Charles Cooley called **primary groups**. By providing intimate, face-to-face interaction, they give us an identity, a feeling of who we are. As Cooley (1909) put it,

> By primary groups I mean those characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation. They are primary in several senses, but chiefly in that they are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual.
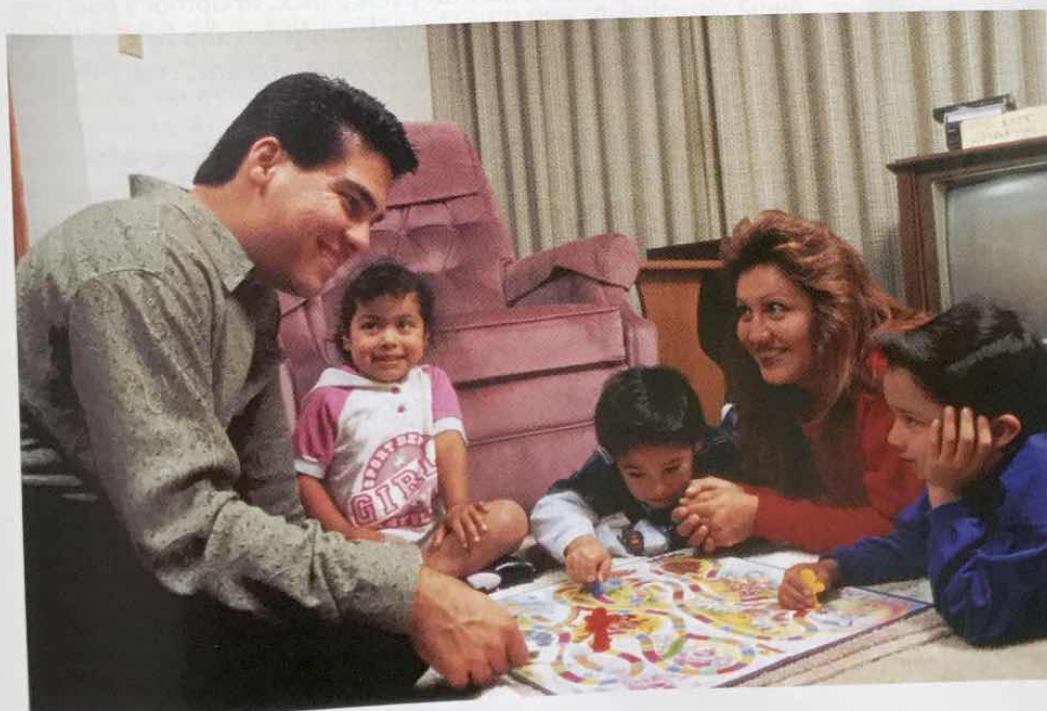
Producing a Mirror Within
It is significant that Cooley calls primary groups the "springs of life." By this, he means that primary groups are essential to our emotional well-being. You can see this in your own life with your family and friends. As humans, we have an intense need for face-to-face interaction that generates feelings of self-esteem. By offering a sense of belonging and a feeling of being appreciated—and sometimes even loved—primary groups are uniquely equipped to meet this basic human need. From our opening vignette, you can see that gangs are also primary groups.

Primary groups are also "springs of life" because their values and attitudes become fused into our identity. We internalize their views, which become the lenses through

Primary groups *such as the family play a key role in the development of the self. As a small group, the family also serves as a buffer from the often-threatening larger group known as society. The family has been of primary significance in forming the basic orientations of this Latino couple, as it will be for their children.*

which we view life. Even as adults—no matter how far we may have come from our childhood roots—early primary groups remain "inside" us, where they continue to form part of the perspective from which we look out onto the world. Ultimately, then, it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to separate the self from our primary groups, for the self and our groups merge into a "we."

Secondary Groups

Compared with primary groups, **secondary groups** are larger, more anonymous, formal, and impersonal. Secondary groups are based on some interest or activity, and their members are likely to interact on the basis of specific roles, such as president, manager, worker, or student. Examples are a college class, the American Sociological Association, and the Democratic Party.

In hunting and gathering and horticultural societies, the entire society forms a primary group. In industrial and postindustrial societies, secondary groups have become essential to our welfare. They are part of the way we get our education, make our living, and spend our money and leisure time.

As necessary as secondary groups are for contemporary life, they often fail to satisfy our deep needs for intimate association. Consequently, *secondary groups tend to break down into primary groups.* At school and work, we form friendship cliques. Our interaction with them is so important that we sometimes feel that if it weren't for our friends, school or work "would drive us crazy." The primary groups we form within secondary groups, then, serve as a buffer between us and the demands that secondary groups place on us.

In-Groups and Out-Groups

Groups toward which we feel loyalty are called **in-groups**; those toward which we feel antagonism, **out-groups**. For Monster Cody in our opening vignette, the gang was an in-group, while the Bloods and all other "enemies" were out-groups. That they—and we—make such a fundamental division of the world has far-reaching consequences for our lives.

How our participation in social groups shapes our self-concept is a focus of symbolic interactionists. In this process, knowing who we are not is as significant as knowing who we are.

Producing Loyalty, a Sense of Superiority, and Rivalries Identification with a group can generate not only a sense of belonging, but also loyalty and feelings of superiority. These, in turn, often produce rivalries. Usually the rivalries are mild, such as sports rivalries between neighboring towns, where the most extreme act is likely to be the furtive invasion of the out-group's territory in order to steal a mascot, paint a rock, or uproot a goal post. The consequences of in-group membership can also be discrimination, hatred, and, as we saw in our opening vignette, even participation in murder.

Implications for a Socially Diverse Society It is not surprising that in-group membership leads to discrimination, for, with our strong identifications and loyalties, we all favor members of our in-groups. This aspect of in- and out-groups is, of course, the basis of many problems in society. It underlies many gender and racial-ethnic divisions. As sociologist Robert Merton (1968) observed, this leads to a fascinating double standard. We view the traits of our in-group as virtues, while we see those *same* traits in out-groups as vices. Men may perceive an aggressive man as assertive, but an aggressive woman as pushy. They may think of a male employee who doesn't speak up as "knowing when to keep his mouth shut," but perceive a quiet woman as too timid to make it in the business world.

To divide the world into "we" and "them" poses a danger for a pluralistic society. As the Jews did for the Nazis, an out-group can come to symbolize evil, arousing fear, contempt, and hatred. After the terrorist bombings of New York and Washington, for some,

"So long, Bill. This is my club. You can't come in."

Arabs became this type of out-group. They saw Arabs as a sinister "them," as untrustworthy, bloodthirsty villains—certainly the opposite of how we evaluate "our" group (no matter what group that may be). Such extreme views often seem to justify attacking the out-group. Many Germans defended the Holocaust as necessary "dirty work." Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, some Americans defended the sporadic attacks on Arab Americans—and even people who looked like them. The refusal of some airline pilots to leave the ground until "Arab looking" passengers had been forced to get off the plane also fits this pattern. Economic downturns also help to produce out-groups. Immigrants, for example, may be seen as people who "steal" jobs from friends and family. There may be attacks on immigrants, a national anti-immigration policy, or a resurgence of neo-Nazi groups or the Ku Klux Klan.

In short, to divide the world into in-groups and out-groups is a natural part of social life. But in addition to bringing functional consequences, it can also bring dysfunctional ones.

All of us have reference groups—the groups we use as standards to evaluate ourselves. How do you think the reference groups of these members of the KKK who are demonstrating in Jaspar, Texas, differ from those of the police officer who is protecting their right of free speech? Although the KKK and this police officer use different groups to evaluate their attitudes and behaviors, the process is the same.

Reference Groups

Suppose you have just been offered a good job. It pays double what you hope to make even after you graduate from college. You have just two days to make up your mind. If you accept it, you will have to drop out of college. As you consider the matter, thoughts like this may go through your mind: "My friends will say I'm a fool if I don't take the job . . . but Dad and Mom will practically go crazy. They've made sacrifices for me, and they'll be crushed if I don't finish college. They've always said I've got to get my education first, that good jobs will always be there. . . . But, then, I'd like to see the look on the faces of those neighbors who said I'd never amount to much!"

This is an example of how people use **reference groups**, the groups we use as standards to evaluate ourselves. Your reference groups may include your family, neighbors, teachers, classmates, co-workers, and the Scouts or the members of a church, synagogue, or mosque. If you were like Monster Cody in our opening vignette, the "set" would be your main reference group. Even a group you don't belong to can be a reference group. For example, if you are thinking about going to graduate school, graduate students or members of the profession you want to join may form a reference group. You would consider their standards as you evaluate your grades or writing skills.

Providing a Yardstick   Reference groups exert tremendous influence over our lives. For example, if you want to become a corporate executive, you might start to dress more formally, try to improve your vocabulary, read the *Wall Street Journal,* and change your major to business or law. In contrast, if you want to become a rock musician, you might wear jewelry in several places where you have pierced your body, including your tongue, have many tattoos, dress in ways your parents and many of your peers consider extreme, read *Rolling Stone,* drop out of college, and hang around clubs and rock groups.

Exposure to Contradictory Standards in a Socially Diverse Society   From these examples, you can see that the yardsticks provided by reference groups operate as a form of social control. When we see ourselves as measuring up to the yardstick, we feel no conflict. If our behavior, or even aspirations, do not match the standards held by a reference group, however, the mismatch can lead to inner turmoil. For example, to want to become a corporate executive would create no inner turmoil for most

reference group Herbert Hyman's term for the groups we use as standards to evaluate ourselves

We all use reference groups *to evaluate our accomplishments, failures, values, and attitudes. We compare what we see in ourselves with what we perceive as normative in our reference groups. As is evident in these two photos, the reference groups these youths are using are not likely to lead them to the same social destination.*

of us, but it would if we had grown up in an Amish home, for the Amish strongly disapprove of such aspirations for their children. They ban high school and college education, three-piece suits, and corporate employment. Similarly, if you wanted to become a soldier and your parents were dedicated pacifists, you likely would feel deep conflict, as your parents would hold quite different aspirations for you.

Given the social diversity of our society as well as our social mobility, many of us are exposed to contradictory ideas and standards from the many groups that become significant to us. The "internal recordings" that play contradictory messages from these reference groups, then, are one cost of social mobility.

Social Networks

If you are a member of a large group, you probably regularly associate with a few people within that group. In a sociology class I was teaching at a commuter campus, six women who didn't know one another chose to work together on a project. They got along well, and they began to sit together. Eventually they planned a Christmas party at one of their homes. These clusters, or internal factions, are called **cliques.** The links between people—their cliques, as well as their family, friends, acquaintances, and even "friends of friends"—are called **social networks.** Think of a social network as lines that extend outward from yourself, gradually encompassing more and more people.

The Small World Phenomenon
Although we live in a huge society, we don't experience social life as a sea of nameless, strange faces. Instead, we interact within social networks that connect us to the larger society. Social scientists have wondered just how extensive the connections are between social networks (Watts 2003). If you list everyone you know, and each of those individuals lists everyone he or she knows, and you keep doing this, would almost everyone in the United States eventually be included on those lists?

It would be too cumbersome to test this hypothesis by drawing up such lists, but psychologist Stanley Milgram (1933–1984) came up with an interesting idea. In a classic study known as "the small world phenomenon," Milgram (1967) addressed a letter to "targets," the wife of a divinity student in Cambridge and a stockbroker in Boston. He sent the letter to "starters," who did not know these people. He asked them to send the letter to someone they knew on a first-name basis, someone they thought might know the "target." They, in turn, were asked to mail the letter to someone they knew who might

clique a cluster of people within a larger group who choose to interact with one another; an internal faction

social network the social ties radiating outward from the self that link people together

sity of Maryland

know the "target," and so on. The question was, Would the letters ever reach the "target"? If so, how long would the chain be?

Think of yourself as part of this study. What would you do if you were a "starter," but the "target" lived in a state in which you know no one? You would send the letter to someone you knew who you think might know someone in that state. And this, Milgram reported, is just what happened. None of the senders knew the receivers, and the letters reached the designated individual in an average of just six jumps.

Milgam's study caught the public's fancy, leading to the phrase, "six degrees of separation." This means that, on average, everyone in the United States is separated by just six individuals. Milgram's conclusions have become so popular that even an Internet game, "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon," is built around it.

Is the Small World Phenomenon an Academic Myth?   But things are not this simple. There is a problem with Milgram's research, as psychologist Judith Kleinfeld (2002a, b) discovered when she decided to replicate Milgram's study. When she went to the archives at Yale University Library to get more details, she found that Milgram had stacked the deck in favor of finding a small world. He had used mailing lists to recruit the "starters," who in 1967 were likely to have higher incomes, and, therefore, were not representative of common people. In addition, he had made one of the "targets" a stockbroker and that person's "starters" investors in Blue Chip stocks. Kleinfeld also unearthed another huge discrepancy—on average, only 30 percent of the letters reached their "target." In one of Milgram's studies, it was just 5 percent.

Since most letters did *not* reach their targets, even with the deck stacked in favor of success, we can draw the *opposite* conclusion from the one that Milgram reported. People who don't know one another are dramatically separated by social barriers. From other studies, we know that besides geography, these barriers are primarily those of social class and race-ethnicity. As Kleinfeld says, "Rather than living in a small world, we may live in a world that looks a lot like a bowl of lumpy oatmeal, with many small worlds loosely connected and perhaps some small worlds not connected at all."

Implications for a Socially Diverse Society   Unlike Milgram's conclusions, then, his study may actually be another indication of the barriers that separate us into distinct small worlds. One reason that overcoming the divisions that separate us is

so difficult is that even our own social networks contribute to social inequality, a topic we explore in the Cultural Diversity box below.

Implications for Science Kleinfeld's revelations of Milgram's research reinforce the need of replication, a topic discussed in the previous chapter. For our knowledge of social life, we cannot depend on single studies, for there may be problems of generalizability on the one hand, or those of negligence or even fraud on the other. Replication by objective researchers is essential to build and advance solid social knowledge.

A New Group: Electronic Communities

In the 1990s, a new type of human group, the **electronic community**, made its appearance. On the Internet hundreds of thousands of people meet online in chat rooms and "news groups" to communicate about almost any conceivable topic, from donkey racing and bird-watching to sociology and quantum physics. Most news groups are simply an

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

in the UNITED STATES

How Our Own Social Networks Perpetuate Social Inequality

Consider some of the principles we have reviewed. People tend to form in-groups with which they identify; they use reference groups to evaluate their attitudes and behavior; and they interact in social networks. Our in-groups, reference groups, and social networks are likely to consist of people whose backgrounds are similar to our own. This means that, for most of us, just as social inequality is built into society, so it is built into our own relationships. One consequence is that we tend to perpetuate social inequality.

To see why, suppose that an outstanding job—great pay, interesting work, with opportunity for advancement—has just opened up where you work. Who are you going to tell? Most likely it will be someone you know, someone you like, or someone to whom you owe a favor. And most likely your social network is made up of people who look much like yourself—especially their race-ethnicity, age, social class, and probably also, gender. This tends to keep good jobs moving in the direction of people whose characteristics are similar to those of the people already in an organization. You can

see how our social networks both reflect the inequality that characterizes our society and help to perpetuate it.

Consider a network of white men who are established in an organization. As they learn of opportunities (jobs, investments, real estate, and so on), they share this information with their networks. Opportunities and good jobs flow to people who have characteristics similar to their own. Those who benefit from this information, in turn, reciprocate with similar information when they learn of it. This bypasses people who have different characteristics, such as women and minorities, while it perpetuates the "good old boys'" network. No intentional discrimination need be involved.

To overcome this barrier, women and minorities do **networking.** They try to meet people who can help advance their careers. Like the "good old boys," they, too, go to parties, join clubs, churches, synagogues, mosques, and political parties. Women cultivate a network of women, and African American leaders cultivate a network of African American leaders. As a result, the network of African American leaders is so tight that

one-fifth of the entire national African American leadership are personal acquaintances. Add some "friends of a friend," and *three-fourths* of the entire leadership belong to the same network (Taylor 1992). Women who reach top positions end up in a circle so tight that the term "new girl" network is being used, especially in the field of law. Remembering those who helped them and sympathetic to those who are trying to get ahead, these women tend to steer their business to other women. Like the "good old boys" who preceded them, the new insiders also justify their exclusionary practice (Jacobs 1997).

For Your CONSIDERATION

The perpetuation of social inequality does not require purposeful discrimination. Just as social inequality is built into society, so it is built into our personal relationships. How do you think your own social network helps to perpetuate social inequality? How do you think we can break this cycle? (The key must center on creating diversity in social networks.)

interesting way of communicating. Some, however, meet our definition of *group,* people who interact with one another and who think of themselves as belonging together.

Some of these groups pride themselves on the distinctive nature of their interest and knowledge—factors that give them a common identity and bind them together. This new form of group is explored in the Sociology and the New Technology box on the next page.

Group Dynamics

As you know from personal experience, the lively interaction *within* groups—who does what with whom—has profound consequences for how you adjust to life. Sociologists use the term **group dynamics** to refer to how groups influence us and how we affect groups. Let's consider how the size of a group makes a difference, and then examine leadership, conformity, and decision making.

Before doing this, we should see how sociologists define the term *small group.* In a **small group,** there are few enough members that each one can interact directly with all the other members. Small groups can be either primary or secondary. A wife, husband, and children, as well as workers who take their breaks together, are primary small groups, while bidders at an auction and guests at a cocktail party are secondary small groups.

Effects of Group Size on Stability and Intimacy

Writing in the early 1900s, sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) noted the significance of group size. He used the term **dyad** for the smallest possible group, which consists of two people. Dyads, which include marriages, love affairs, and close friendships, show two distinct qualities. First, they are the most intense or intimate of human groups. Because only two people are involved, the interaction is focused on them. Second, because dyads require that both members participate and be committed, they are the most unstable of social groups. If one member loses interest, the dyad collapses. In larger groups, in contrast, even if one member withdraws, the group can continue, for its existence does not depend on any single member (Simmel 1950).

A **triad** is a group of three people. As Simmel noted, the addition of a third person fundamentally changes the group. With three people, interaction between the first two decreases. This can create strain. For example, with the birth of a child, hardly any aspect of a couple's relationship goes untouched. Attention focuses on the baby, and interaction

Japanese who work for the same firm think of themselves more as a group or team, Americans more as individuals. Japanese corporations use many techniques to encourage group identity, such as making group exercise a part of the work day. Similarity of appearance and activity helps to fuse group identity and company loyalty.

sociology and the NEWtechnology

## Electronic Communities and Online Posses

Jason Smith, a 21-year-old sophomore, had been supporting himself by selling computers on eBay. Jason made just enough to pay the rent and have a little left over. His online business went smoothly until he sold an Apple Powerbook to Steve Matthews of Chicago, who said he was buying the computer for his son in college.

Matthews sent a cashier's check for $3,052, and Jason shipped the computer. After paying his rent and buying a space heater, Jason went on Christmas break, where he spent more of the money. On his return to school, he got the bad news: a message from his bank that the cashier's check was a phony.

Jason was besides himself. He was out the computer, and his checking account was overdrawn. He called the Chicago police department, but they told him they were so busy they couldn't even talk to him about such a small matter for another week or so.

Jason turned to other Mac users. He posted his story at MacRumors, and people he didn't know began to help. They found Matthews' real address, took photos of his street, his

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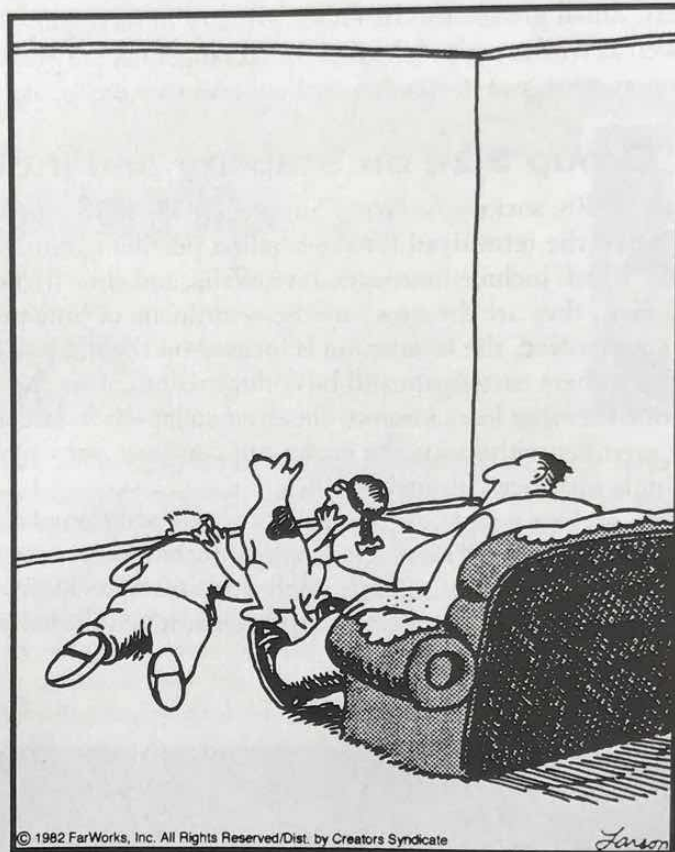
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In the days before television

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between the husband and wife diminishes. Despite the difficulty that this presents—including in many instances the husband's jealousy that he is getting less attention from his wife—the marriage usually becomes stronger. Although the intensity of interaction is less in triads, they are inherently stronger and give greater stability to a relationship.

Yet, as Simmel noted, triads, too, are inherently unstable. For example, two members may feel stronger bonds with one another and form a **coalition**. A coalition occurs when some group members align themselves against others. In the case of the triad, two members act as a dyad, leaving the third member feeling hurt and excluded. Another characteristic of triads is that they often produce an arbitrator or mediator, someone who tries

coalition the alignment of some members of a group against others

house, and even his car—with the license number visible.

Matthews actually lived in a town outside Chicago, and this police department turned out to be eager to solve the crime. Jason posted another ad on e-Bay, and Matthews took the bait. Jason shipped him a package, but this time the man in the FedEx uniform was a detective. He arrested Matthews when he signed for the package.

Jason was able to keep his apartment and stay in school—a bit wiser, and greatly encouraged by the help given by his online buddies (Hafner 2002).

In the past few years, a type of group unknown in human history has come into existence. *Electronic* (or *online*) *communities* consist of people who regularly "meet" on the Internet. They focus on some shared interest, whether it be antique cars, radical politics, or deviant sex. Some communities offer support. When people who suffer from cancer share their experiences with fear, pain, surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy, they break the depressing isolation that hems them in. Those who suffer from other debilitating diseases do the same. In Jason's case, the online posse came

from Macintosh users, who already think of themselves as different, and as somehow belonging together because they share a passion for this particular kind of computer.

This form of communication has even led to the creation of *electronic* (or *online*) *primary groups*, people who regularly share and care although they have never met one another. As people communicate online, they come to identify with one another, develop a sense of intimacy, and share personal information. For some, online friends become so significant that they build their lives around each other. The first thing in the morning, they rush to their computer, where they eagerly read e-mail from their Net friends, and visit "chat rooms," where they discuss the latest development in their "real" (not online) relationships. Only then do they dress and go to work. After work, they rush back to their virtual world. For them, their Net friends are as real as their family—and sometimes have a greater impact on their lives.

With online social intimacy, people who never physically meet forge social bonds (Chayko 2002). They experience closeness without permanence, and depth without commitment (Cerulo et al. 1992). As this form of social intimacy

becomes more common, it may affect not only our social interactions, but also our culture, and even our sense of self.

For Your CONSIDERATION

Social researchers first reported that the longer people were online, the more their relationships with family and friends declined. More recent studies indicate that gregarious people remain outgoing in both their virtual and real worlds. Eighty-five percent of Net users report no change in the time they spend with family and friends (Guernsey 2001). And it seems that teenagers are using the Net to explore their identities (Turkle 1995; Goldsborough 2001). Have you experienced Internet intimacy?

to settle disagreements between the other two. In one-child families, you can often observe both of these characteristics of triads—coalitions and arbitration.

The general principle is this: *As a small group grows larger, it becomes more stable, but its intensity, or intimacy, decreases.* To see why, look at Figure 6.3. As each new person comes into a group, the connections among people multiply. In a dyad, there is only 1 relationship; in a triad, 3; in a group of four, 6; in a group of five, 10. If we expand the group to six, we have 15 relationships, while a group of seven yields 21 relationships. If we continue adding members, we soon are unable to follow the connections: A group of eight has 28 possible relationships; a group of nine, 36 relationships; a group of ten, 45; and so on.

It is not only the number of relationships that makes larger groups more stable. As groups grow, they also tend to develop a more formal structure to accomplish their goals. For example, leaders emerge and more specialized roles come into play. This often results in such familiar offices as president, secretary, and treasurer. This structure provides a framework that helps the group survive over time.
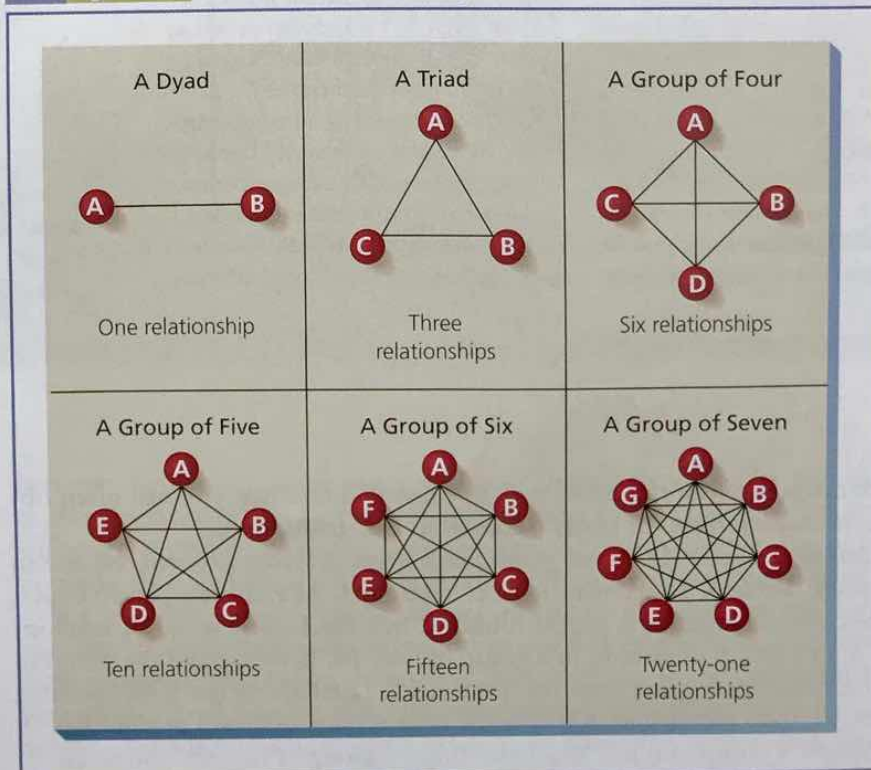
Effects of Group Size on Attitudes and Behavior

Imagine that your social psychology professors have asked you to join a few students to discuss your adjustment to college life. When you arrive, they tell you that to make the discussion anonymous they want you to sit unseen in a booth. You will participate in the discussion over an intercom, talking when your microphone comes on. The professors say they will not listen to the conversation, and they leave.

You find the format somewhat strange, to say the least, but you go along with it. You have not seen the other students in their booths, but when they talk about their experiences, you find yourself becoming wrapped up in the problems they begin to share. One student even mentions how frightening he has found college because of his history of epileptic seizures. Later, you hear this individual breathe heavily into the microphone. Then he stammers and cries for help. A crashing noise follows, and you imagine him lying helpless on the floor.

Nothing but an eerie silence follows. What do you do?

Your professors, John Darley and Bibb Latané (1968), staged the whole thing, but you don't know this. No one had a seizure. In fact, no one was even in the other booths. Everything, except your comments, was on tape.

Some participants were told they would be discussing the topic with just one other student, others with two, others with three, and so on. Darley and Latané found that all students who thought they were part of a dyad rushed out to help. If they thought they were part of a triad, only 80 percent went to help—and they were slower in leaving the booth. In six-person groups, only 60 percent went to see what was wrong—and they were even slower.

Figure 6.3 The Effects of Group Size on Relationships

A Dyad
One relationship

A Triad
Three relationships

A Group of Four
Six relationships

A Group of Five
Ten relationships

A Group of Six
Fifteen relationships

A Group of Seven
Twenty-one relationships

This experiment demonstrates how deeply group size influences our attitudes and behavior—it even affects our willingness to help one another. Students in the dyad knew it was up to them to help the other student. The professor was gone, and if they didn't help there was no one else. In the larger groups, including the triad, students felt *a diffusion of responsibility:* Giving help was no more their responsibility than anyone else's.

You probably have observed the second consequence of group size firsthand. When a group is small, its members are informal, but as the group grows, they lose their sense of intimacy and become more formal. No longer can the members assume that the others are "insiders" in sympathy with what they say. Now they must take a "larger audience" into consideration, and instead of merely "talking," they begin to "address" the group. Their speech becomes more formal, and their body language stiffens.

You probably have observed a third aspect of group dynamics, too. In the early stages of a party, when only a few people are present, almost everyone talks with everyone else. But as others arrive, the guests break into several smaller groups. Some hosts, who want their guests to mix together, make a nuisance of themselves trying to achieve *their* idea of what a group should be like. The division into small groups is inevitable, however, for it follows the basic sociological principles we have just reviewed. Because the addition of each person rapidly increases connections (in this case, "talk lines"), conversation becomes more difficult. The guests break into smaller groups where they can see each other and comfortably interact directly with one another.

Leadership

All of us are influenced by leaders, so it is important to understand leadership. Let's look at how people become leaders, the types of leaders there are, and their different styles of leadership. Before we do this, though, we need to understand that leaders don't necessarily hold formal positions in a group. **Leaders** are simply people who influence the behaviors, opinions, or attitudes of others. Even a group of friends has leaders.

Who Becomes a Leader?
Are leaders born with characteristics that propel them to the forefront of a group? No sociologist would agree with such an idea. In general, people who become leaders are perceived by group members as strongly representing their values, or as able to lead a group out of a crisis (Trice and Beyer 1991). Leaders also tend to be more talkative and to express determination and self-confidence.

leader someone who influences other people

Adolf Hitler was voted the most influential person of the twentieth century. He also was among the most evil. Why did so many people follow Hitler? That question stimulated the research by Stanley Milgram. Shown here is Hitler in Nuremberg, Germany; 1934. (Because this city was so closely connected with Nazism, to symbolize the defeat of the Nazis and to publicize the evil of their tyranny, the Allies chose it as the site of their war trials.)

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

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

leadership styles ways in which people express their leadership

authoritarian leader a leader who leads by giving orders

democratic leader a leader who leads by trying to reach a consensus

laissez-faire leaders an individual who leads by being highly permissive

These findings may not be surprising, as such traits appear related to leadership. Researchers, however, have also discovered traits that seem to have no bearing on the ability to lead. For example, taller people and those judged better looking are more likely to become leaders (Stodgill 1974; Crosbie 1975). The taller and more attractive are also likely to earn more, but that is another story (Deck 1968; Feldman 1972; Katz 2003).

Many other factors underlie people's choice of leaders, most of which are quite subtle. A simple experiment performed by social psychologists Lloyd Howells and Selwyn Becker (1962) uncovered one of these factors. They formed groups of five people who did not know one another, seating them at a rectangular table, three on one side and two on the other. Each group discussed a topic for a set period of time, and then chose a leader. The findings are startling: Although only 40 percent of the people sat on the two-person side, 70 percent of the leaders emerged from that side. The explanation is that we tend to direct more interactions to people facing us than to people to the side of us.

Types of Leaders   Groups have two types of leaders (Bales 1950, 1953; Cartwright and Zander 1968). The first is easy to recognize. This person, called an **instrumental leader** (or *task-oriented leader*), tries to keep the group moving toward its goals. These leaders try to keep group members from getting sidetracked, reminding them of what they are trying to accomplish. The **expressive leader** (or *socioemotional leader*), in contrast, usually is not recognized as a leader, but he or she certainly is. This person is likely to crack jokes, to offer sympathy, or to do other things that help lift the group's morale. Both types of leadership are essential: the one to keep the group on track, the other to increase harmony and minimize conflicts.

It is difficult for the same person to be both an instrumental and an expressive leader, for these roles contradict one another. Because instrumental leaders are task oriented, they sometimes create friction as they prod the group to get on with the job. Their actions often cost them popularity. Expressive leaders, in contrast, who stimulate personal bonds and reduce friction, are usually more popular (Olmsted and Hare 1978).

Leadership Styles   Let's suppose that the president of your college has asked you to head a task force to determine how the college can improve race relations on campus. Although this position requires you to be an instrumental leader, you can adopt a number of **leadership styles**, or ways of expressing yourself as a leader. The three basic styles are those of **authoritarian leader**, one who gives orders; **democratic leader**, one who tries to gain a consensus; and **laissez-faire leader**, one who is highly permissive. Which should you choose?

Social psychologists Ronald Lippitt and Ralph White (1958) carried out a classic study of these leadership styles. Boys matched for IQ, popularity, physical energy, and leadership were assigned to "craft clubs" made up of five boys each. The experimenters trained adult men in the three leadership styles. As the researchers peered through peepholes, taking notes and making movies, each adult rotated among the clubs, playing all three styles to control possible effects of their individual personalities.

The *authoritarian* leaders assigned tasks to the boys and told them exactly what to do. They also praised or condemned their work arbitrarily, giving no explanation for why it was good or bad. The *democratic* leaders held discussions with the boys, outlining the steps that would help them reach their goals. They also suggested alternative approaches and let the boys work at their own pace. When they evaluated the projects, they gave "facts" as the bases for their decisions. The *laissez-faire* leaders were passive. They gave the boys almost total freedom to do as they wished. They offered help when asked, but made few suggestions. They did not evaluate the boys' projects, either positively or negatively.

The results? The boys who had authoritarian leaders grew dependent on their leader and showed a high degree of internal solidarity. They also became either aggressive or apathetic, with the aggressive boys growing hostile toward their leader. In contrast, the boys who had democratic leaders were friendlier, and looked to one another for mutual approval. They did less scapegoating, and when the leader left the room they continued to work at a steadier pace. The boys with laissez-faire leaders asked more questions, but they made fewer decisions. They were notable for their lack of achievement. The researchers concluded that the democratic style of leadership works best. Their conclusion, however, may have been biased, as the researchers favored a democratic style of leadership in the first place, and they did the research during a highly charged political period (Olmsted and Hare 1978). Apparently, this same bias in studies of leadership continues (Cassel 1999).

You may have noted that only boys and men were involved in this experiment. It is interesting to speculate how the results might differ if we were to repeat the experiment with all-girl groups and with mixed groups of girls and boys—and if we used both men and women as leaders. Perhaps you will become the sociologist to study such variations of this classic experiment.

Leadership Styles in Changing Situations   Different situations require different styles of leadership. Suppose, for example, that you are leading a dozen backpackers in California's Sierra Madre mountains, and it is time to make dinner. A laissez-faire style would be appropriate if the backpackers had brought their own food—or perhaps a democratic style if everyone were supposed to pitch in. Authoritarian leadership—you telling all the hikers how to prepare their meals—would create resentment. This, in turn, would likely interfere with meeting the primary goal of the group, which in this case is to have a good time while enjoying nature.

Now assume the same group but a different situation: One of your party is lost, and a blizzard is on its way. This situation calls for you to take charge and be authoritarian. To simply shrug your shoulders and say, "You figure it out," would invite disaster—and probably a lawsuit.

The Power of Peer Pressure: The Asch Experiment

How influential are groups in our lives? To answer this, let's look first at *conformity* in the sense of going along with our peers. Our peers have no authority over us, only the influence that we allow.

Imagine that you are taking a course in social psychology with Dr. Solomon Asch and you have agreed to participate in an experiment. As you enter his laboratory, you see seven chairs, five of them already filled by other students. You are given the sixth. Soon the seventh person arrives. Dr. Asch stands at the front of the room next to a covered easel. He explains that he will first show a large card with a vertical line on it, then another card with three vertical lines. Each of you is to tell him which of the three lines matches the line on the first card (see Figure 6.4).

Dr. Asch then uncovers the first card with the single line and the comparison card with the three lines. The correct answer is easy, for two of the lines are obviously

Figure 6.4 **Asch's Cards**

Card 1

Card 2

The cards used by Solomon Asch in his classic experiment on group conformity
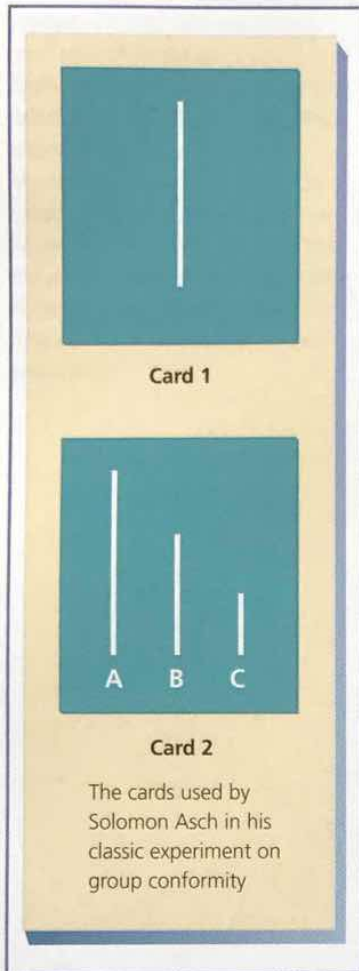
Source: Asch 1952:452–453.

wrong, and one exactly right. Each person, in order, states his or her answer aloud. You all answer correctly. The second trial is just as easy, and you begin to wonder why you are there.

Then on the third trial something unexpected happens. Just as before, it is easy to tell which lines match. The first student, however, gives a wrong answer. The second gives the same incorrect answer. So do the third and the fourth. By now you are wondering what is wrong. How will the person next to you answer? You can hardly believe it when he, too, gives the same wrong answer. Then it is your turn, and you give what you know is the right answer. The seventh person also gives the same wrong answer.

On the next trial, the same thing happens. You know the choice of the other six is wrong. They are giving what to you are obviously wrong answers. You don't know what to think. Why aren't they seeing things the same way you are? Sometimes they do, but in twelve trials they don't. Something is seriously wrong, and you are no longer sure what to do.

When the eighteenth card is finished, you heave a sigh of relief. The experiment is finally over, and you are ready to bolt for the door. Dr. Asch walks over to you with a big smile on his face, and thanks you for participating in the experiment. He explains that you were the only real subject in the experiment! "The other six were stooges. I paid them to give those answers," he says. Now you feel real relief. Your eyes weren't playing tricks on you after all.

What were the results? Asch (1952) tested fifty people. One-third (33 percent) gave in to the group half the time, giving what they knew to be wrong answers. Another two of five (40 percent) gave wrong answers, but not as often. One of four (25 percent) stuck to their guns and always gave the right answer. I don't know how I would do on this test (if I knew nothing about it in advance), but I like to think that I would be part of the 25 percent. You probably feel the same way about yourself. But why should we feel that we wouldn't be like *most* people?

The results are disturbing, and more researchers have replicated Asch's experiment than any other study (Levine 1999). In our "land of individualism," the group is so powerful that most people are willing to say things that they know are not true. And this was a group of strangers! How much more conformity can we expect when our group consists of friends, people we value highly and depend on for getting along in life? Again, maybe you will become the sociologist to run that variation of Asch's experiment, perhaps using female subjects.

The Power of Authority: The Milgram Experiment

Even more disturbing are the results of the experiment described in the following Thinking Critically section.

THINKING
Critically

If Hitler Asked You to Execute a Stranger, Would You? The Milgram Experiment

Imagine that you are taking a course with Dr. Stanley Milgram (1963, 1965), a former student of Dr. Asch. Assume that you do not know about the Asch experiment and have no reason to be wary. You arrive at the laboratory to participate in a study on punishment and learning. You and a second student draw lots for the roles of "teacher" and "learner." You are to be the teacher. When you see that the learner's chair has protruding electrodes, you are glad that you are the teacher. Dr. Milgram shows you the machine you will run. You see that one side of the control panel is marked "Mild Shock, 15 volts," while the center says "Intense Shock, 350 Volts," and the far right side reads "DANGER: SEVERE SHOCK."

"As the teacher, you will read aloud a pair of words," explains Dr. Milgram. "Then you will repeat the first word, and the learner will reply with the second

word. If the learner can't remember the word, you press this lever on the shock generator. The shock will serve as punishment, and we can then determine if punishment improves memory." You nod, now very relieved that you haven't been designated the learner.

"Every time the learner makes an error, increase the punishment by 15 volts," instructs Dr. Milgram. Then, seeing the look on your face, he adds, "The shocks can be extremely painful, but they won't cause any permanent tissue damage." He pauses, and then says, "I want you to see." You then follow him to the "electric chair," and Dr. Milgram gives you a shock of 45 volts. "There. That wasn't too bad, was it?" "No," you mumble.

The experiment begins. You hope for the learner's sake that he is bright, but unfortunately he turns out to be rather dull. He gets some answers right, but you have to keep turning up the dial. Each turn makes you more and more uncomfortable. You find yourself hoping that the learner won't miss another answer. But he does. When he received the first shocks, he let out some moans and groans, but now he is screaming in agony. He even protests that he suffers from a heart condition.

How far do you turn that dial?

By now, you probably have guessed that there was no electricity attached to the electrodes and the "learner" was a stooge who only pretended to feel pain. The purpose of the experiment was to find out at what point people refuse to participate. Does anyone actually turn the lever all the way to "DANGER: SEVERE SHOCK"?

Milgram wanted the answer because of the Nazi slaughter of Jews, gypsies, Slavs, homosexuals, people with disabilities, and others whom they designated as "inferior." That millions of ordinary people did nothing to stop the deaths seemed bizarre, and Milgram wanted to see how ordinary, intelligent Americans might react in an analogous situation.

Milgram was upset by what he found. Many "teachers" broke into a sweat and protested to the experimenter that this was inhuman and should be stopped. But when the experimenter calmly replied that the experiment must go on, this assurance from an "authority" ("scientist, white coat, university laboratory") was enough for most "teachers" to continue, even though the "learner" screamed in agony. Even "teachers" who were "reduced to twitching, stuttering wrecks" continued to follow orders.

Milgram varied the experiments (Miller 1986). He used both men and women and put some "teachers" and "learners" in the same room, where the "teacher" could clearly see the suffering. He had some "learners" pound and kick the wall during the first shocks and then go silent. The results varied. When there was no verbal feedback from the "learner," 65 percent of the "teachers" pushed the lever all the way to 450 volts. Of those who could see the "learner," 40 percent turned the lever all the way. When Milgram added a second "teacher," a

In the 1960s, U.S. social psychologists ran a series of creative but controversial experiments. Among these were Stanley Milgram's experiments, described in these pages. From this photo of the "learner" being prepared for the experiment, you can get an idea of how convincing the situation would be for the "teacher."

stooge who refused to go along with the experiment, only 5 percent of the "teachers" turned the lever all the way, a result that bears out some of Asch's findings.

A stormy discussion about research ethics erupted. Not only were researchers surprised and disturbed by what Milgram found, but also they were alarmed at his methods. Universities began to require that subjects be informed of the nature and purpose of social research. Researchers agreed that to reduce subjects to "twitching, stuttering wrecks" was unethical, and almost all deception was banned.

Global Consequences of Group Dynamics: Groupthink

Suppose you are a member of the President's inner circle. It is midnight, and the President has just called an emergency meeting to deal with a terrorist attack. At first, various options are presented. Eventually, these are narrowed to only a few choices, and at some point everyone seems to agree on what now appears to be "the only possible course of action." To express doubts at that juncture will bring you into conflict with *all* the other important people in the room. To criticize will mark you as not being a "team player." So you keep your mouth shut, with the result that each step commits you—and them—more and more to the "only" course of action.

What happened is called **groupthink**. Sociologist Irving Janis (1972, 1982) coined this term to refer to the collective tunnel vision that group members sometimes develop. As they begin to think alike, they become convinced that there is only one "right" viewpoint and course of action. They take any suggestion of alternatives as a sign of disloyalty. With their view so narrowed, they tend to show overconfidence and a disregard for risk. Becoming so convinced of their position, they may even put aside moral judgments (Hart 1991; Flippen 1999). The Asch and Milgram experiments help us see how groupthink can develop.

To better understand groupthink, consider two events.

The first occurred in 1986. The night before NASA was to launch the *Challenger*, subtropical Florida was hit by freezing weather. Ice covered the launch pad, and icicles hung like stalactites from the pad's service structure. Should they launch? NASA officials needed a stunning success because congressional support for the space program had weakened. Public interest was also running high because the first civilian, Christa McAuliffe, was to be on the *Challenger*. She would perform little experiments in space for schoolchildren to watch in their classrooms. Delaying the launch would bring a public relations nightmare. In the face of these pressures, NASA officials determined that the ice did not pose a risk. Disregarding all contrary evidence, they stuck to this conclusion. The *Challenger* exploded within seconds of being launched.

Unfortunately, this didn't teach NASA to avoid groupthink. During *Columbia's* launch in 2003, foam broke loose on takeoff. Engineers were concerned that the foam had damaged tiles on the left wing, presenting a danger for reentry. They warned officials, sending them e-mails about the risk. One engineer even suggested that the crew do a "space walk" to examine the tiles (Vartabedian and Gold 2003). The team disregarded the warnings. Convinced that a piece of foam weighing less than two pounds could not seriously harm the shuttle, they refused to even consider

groupthink Irving Janis' term for a narrowing of thought by a group of people, leading to the perception that there is only one correct answer, in which to even suggest alternatives becomes a sign of disloyalty

the possibility (Wald and Schwartz 2003). The fiery results of their mental closure in this second instance were also transmitted around the globe.

As the space shuttle tragedies indicate, groupthink can bring serious consequences. Sometimes there are even greater consequences. In 1941, despite evidence that the Japanese were preparing to attack Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his chiefs of staff refused to believe that the Japanese posed a danger. Their decision to continue naval operations as usual allowed the destruction of the U.S. naval fleet, ushering the United States into World War II. United States involvement in Vietnam and the resulting huge loss of life also involved groupthink, with U.S. officials steadfastly denying the strength of the North Vietnamese military, despite ample evidence to the contrary. Watergate is another noteworthy example, for it, too, plunged the United States into political crisis, for the first time in history forcing a U.S. president to resign.

In each of these cases, options closed as officials committed themselves to a single course of action. Questioning the decisions would have indicated disloyalty and disregard for "team playing." Those in power plunged ahead, no longer able to see alternative perspectives. No longer did they try to objectively weigh evidence as it came in, but, instead, interpreted everything as supporting their one "correct" decision.

Groupthink can also lead to a reevaluation of morals. Consider targeted killings. Until recently, U.S. officials had defined targeted killings as morally reprehensible. Now the CIA uses an approved, official "hit list," naming individuals their agents are authorized to hunt down and kill (Risen and Johnston 2002). Another example occurred after 9/11, when journalists and politicians openly discussed the option of torturing Arab suspects who wouldn't talk. They even defended torture as moral—"the lesser of two evils." Fortunately, there was open discussion and groupthink didn't win out.

Preventing Groupthink Groupthink is a danger that faces government leaders, who tend to surround themselves with an inner circle that closely reflects their own views. Isolated at the top, they can become cut off from information that does not support their own opinions. It is obvious that the extreme emotions that follow a terrorist attack can provide fertile ground for groupthink. Perhaps the key to preventing the mental captivity and intellectual paralysis known as groupthink is the widest possible circulation—especially among a nation's top government officials—of research that has been freely conducted by social scientists and information that has been freely gathered by media reporters.

If this conclusion comes across as an unabashed plug for sociological research and the free exchange of ideas, it is. Giving free rein to diverse opinions can effectively curb groupthink, which—if not prevented—can lead to the destruction of a society and, in today's world of sophisticated nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, the obliteration of the earth's inhabitants.