

"Sociology Around Me"

For this project, you will submit **FIVE – ONE to TWO PAGE (DOUBLE SPACED) TYPED ENTRIES** about sociology around you; I would prefer that these be naturally occurring examples, not sought out (except for the journal article). The project is due in class as listed on your tentative course outline. You might also share in class during the semester.

As I mention on the first or second day of class, one of the main things I hope you gain from this class is a sociological imagination. I hope that you will look at the same ol' things in a new light - "with sociological eyes". If you look, you will see examples of sociology all around you. You will see it in the media, in your interactions, and in your understanding of social institutions. Each "SAM" will have one entry **from media and the world around you of the material we cover in the chapters. For your 5 entries, use at least 3 different sources:**

Possible sources include:

1. Newspapers -- the O'Colly or any other
2. Magazines -- Time, Newsweek, Glamour, Readers Digest, Rolling Stone, etc
3. A professional journal -- the librarian can help here or ask me
4. A movie or television show or even a commercial
5. A song
6. An internet site
7. Something happening on campus or in our community
8. An interaction with a friend, family member ...and yes, even a stranger!

SAM 1 should be relevant to something in Chapters 1 – 3

SAMs 2 and 3 should be relevant to something in Chapters 4 – 7

SAMS 4 and 5 should be relevant to something in Chapters 8 - 11

For each entry:

1. Include your **name**, the **chapter** and the **term/concept** that relates to this observation.
2. IF POSSIBLE, include the "**source/medium**" (the newspaper clipping, print of the internet site, song lyrics, cd, etc.) (this does not count as part of the 1pg minimum)

If you cannot include the item, first state what it was – book, movie, interaction, etc. and then write a brief paragraph summary of the content/event/ item (**you will write the summary even if you provide the source**)

3. **Define the term or concept** (be sure to cite the source – probably your text). Provide an explanation – your critical thinking - of how it is an example of something we covered in the text. **Tell me specifically to which chapter and term or concept you are relating your entry.** Correct use of sociological terminology/concepts will be very important. **Each entry should pertain to a different chapter.**

I hope you enjoy this project. If at any time you wish to share of your own volition, something you have found (for 5 pts extra credit toward the next exam)... by all means just let me know and you may "have the floor" for a few minutes (especially if you have missed class activity).



0.75x 1x 2x

Alex



From Groups to Networks

Dyads, triads, and groups are the components of social networks. A **social network** is a set of relations—a set of dyads, essentially—held together by *ties* between individuals. A **tie** is the content of a particular relationship. One way to think about “the ties that bind” is as a set of stories we tell each other that explain a particular relationship. If I ask you how you know a specific person, and you explain that she was your brother’s girlfriend in the eighth grade, and the two of you remained close even after her relationship with your brother ended, that story is your tie to that person. For every person in your life, you have a story. To explain some ties, the story is very simple: “That’s the guy I buy my coffee from each morning.” This is a uniplex tie. Other ties have many layers. They are multiplex: “She’s my girlfriend. We have a romantic relationship. We also are tennis and bridge partners. And now that you mention it, we are classmates at school and also fiercely competitive opponents in Trivial Pursuit.”

A **narrative** is the sum of stories contained in a set of ties. Your university or college is a narrative, for example. Every person with whom you have a relationship at your university forms part of that network. For all your college-based relationships—those



me
cor.

0.75x 1x 2x

Alex



ly

A **narrative** is the sum of stories contained in a set of ties. Your university or college is a narrative, for example. Every person with whom you have a relationship at your university forms part of that network. For all your college-based relationships—those shared with a professor, your teaching assistant, or classmates—your school is a large part of the story, of the tie. Without the school, in fact, you probably wouldn't share a tie at all. When you add up the stories of all the actors involved in the social network of your school—between you and your classmates, between the professors and their colleagues, between the school and the vendors with whom it contracts—the result is a narrative of what your college is. Of course, you may have other friends, from high school or elsewhere, who have no relationship to your school, so your college is a more minor aspect of those relationships.

In Chapter 4 we talked about the power of symbols. What would you need to do if you wanted to change the name of your school? You and your friends could just start calling it something else. But you'd probably have to hire a legal team to alter the contracts (a form of tie that is spelled out explicitly in a written "story") that the school maintains with all its vendors. You would need to alert alumni and advise the departments and staff at school to change their stationery, websites, and any marketing materials. You would have to advise faculty to use the new name when citing their





What would you need to do if you wanted to change the name of your school? You and your friends could just start calling it something else. But you'd probably have to hire a legal team to alter the contracts (a form of tie that is spelled out explicitly in a written "story") that the school maintains with all its vendors. You would need to alert alumni and advise the departments and staff at school to change their stationery, websites, and any marketing materials. You would have to advise faculty to use the new name when citing their professional affiliation. You would need to contact legacy families (let's say a family whose last seven generations have attended this college) and inform them of the name change. Do you now have a sense of how complicated it would be to change this narrative? If you try to make a change that involves a large network, the social structure becomes very powerful. Ironically, something abstract like a name can be more robust than most of the physical infrastructure around us.

EMBEDDEDNESS: THE STRENGTH OF WEAK TIES

One important dimension of social networks is the extent to which they are embedded. **Embeddedness** refers to the degree to which a social relationship is reinforced through indirect paths (i.e., friends of friends) within a network. The more embedded a tie is, the



mo

0.75x 1x 2x

Alex



EMBEDDEDNESS: THE STRENGTH OF WEAK TIES

One important dimension of social networks is the extent to which they are embedded. **Embeddedness** refers to the degree to which a social relationship is reinforced through indirect paths (i.e., friends of friends) within a network. The more embedded a tie is, the stronger it is. That is, compared to a relationship with someone whom only you yourself know, a tie to someone who also knows your mother, your best friend, and your teacher's daughter is more likely to last. It may feel less dramatic and intimate, but it's robust and more likely to endure simply by virtue of the fact that it's difficult to escape. You will always be connected to that person—if not directly, then through your “mutual” friends. However, the counterpoint to this dynamic lies in what sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973) calls the **strength of weak ties**, referring to the fact that relatively weak ties—those not reinforced through indirect paths—often turn out to be quite valuable because they bring novel information. Let's say you're on the track team and that's your primary social group. Occasionally you now see an old classmate from high school whom you didn't really know (or run in the same circles with) back then, because he also attends your college, but he's on the volleyball team. If the track team



rel:
ind0.75x 1x 2x

Alex



because they bring novel information. Let's say you're on the track team and that's your primary social group. Occasionally you now see an old classmate from high school whom you didn't really know (or run in the same circles with) back then, because he also attends your college, but he's on the volleyball team. If the track team isn't doing anything on Friday night but the volleyball team is having a party, you've got an "in" through this relationship that's much weaker than the ones you've got with the other members of the track team. That in is the strength of the weak tie you maintain with the classmate from home. If you end up taking your friends from the track team to the volleyball party and they become friends with your old friend, the tie between you and your old classmate is no longer weak because it is now reinforced by the ties between your old friend and your new track friends—regardless of whether you are actually more intimate with him or not. This example helps explain why the structure of the network is more complicated than the tie from one individual to another. Even though your friendships did not change at the volleyball party, the fact that people in your social network befriended others in your social network strengthens the ties between you and both of the individuals.

The strength of weak ties has been found especially useful in job searches (Granovetter, 1974). In a highly



em net. work ties, more than half saw their contact person “occasionally” (less than once a week but more than once a year). Perhaps even more surprising was the fact that the runners-up in this category were not people whom the respondents saw “often” (once a week or more); it was those they saw “rarely” (once a year or less), by a factor of almost two to one. Additional research finds that weak ties offer the greatest benefits to job seekers who already have high-status jobs, suggesting that social networks combine with credentials to sort job applicants and that strong ties may be more useful in low-status, low-credential job markets (Wegener, 1991).

As seen in Figure 5.4, by linking two otherwise separate social networks, the weak tie between Natalie and Emily provides new opportunities for dating—not only for them but for their friends as well. Their tie bridges what we call a **structural hole** between the two cliques, a gap between network clusters, where a possible tie could become an actual tie or where an intermediary could control the communication between the two groups on either side of the hole. In the figure, Jenny is a social entrepreneur bridging a structural hole because the people on the left side of the network diagram (Emily and Jason) have no direct ties with the people on the right (Michael, Doug, and Jeff). Their ties are only indirect, through Jenny. Assuming that the two sides have resources (romantic or otherwise) that would



not



0.75x 1x 2x

Alex



When sociologist Ronald Burt (1992) studied managers in a large corporation, he found that those with the most structural holes in their social networks were the ones who rose through the company ranks the fastest and farthest. This notion can be expanded to explain how a great deal of profit making occurs in today's economy. At one extreme is the totally free market, in which there are no structural holes; no restriction on information exists, and all buyers and sellers can reach one another—think eBay. At the other extreme is the monopoly, in which one firm provides necessary information or resources to a multitude of people (i.e., maintains and profits from a gaping structural hole). And then there is everything in between these extremes: everyone from shipping magnates to spice traders to mortgage brokers to multilevel marketers (see later in the chapter). Take real estate agents as an example. They earn their money by contractually maintaining (or creating) a structural hole. By signing up sellers, the real estate agents prevent the sellers from directly engaging in a transaction with potential buyers. Recently, the social network possibilities facilitated by the internet (discussed later in the chapter) have done much to erode the power of brokers—for example, by driving once-powerful travel agents into near extinction (ditto for stockbrokers).

At the same time, corporations have leveraged people's existing social networks through multilevel



ma
age

0.75x

1x

2x

Alex



contractually maintaining (or creating) a structural hole. By signing up sellers, the real estate agents prevent the sellers from directly engaging in a transaction with potential buyers. Recently, the social network possibilities facilitated by the internet (discussed later in the chapter) have done much to erode the power of brokers—for example, by driving once-powerful travel agents into near extinction (ditto for stockbrokers).

At the same time, corporations have leveraged people's existing social networks through multilevel marketing, whereby they enlist one person to hock merchandise to their social network, such as by hosting a Tupperware party or offering Mary Kay cosmetics makeovers to their friends. Sometimes these sellers even enlist friends to sell the product to their networks in exchange for a cut of the profits—a sort of pyramid scheme. This strategy relies on (and perhaps strains) the sense of trust and obligation that resides in informal friendship networks. I buy the newest weight-loss shake from my friend out of loyalty; that loyalty, in turn, partly comes from the fact that our network is somewhat separated by structural holes from the wider economy/society. But by enlisting me to further sell the products, the corporation closes any structural hole (i.e., nonoverlap) between my friend's network and my own, thereby expanding its market. Sneaky.

SIX DEGREES

