

# 6 Groups and Organization



**Figure 6.1** The national tour of the Tea Party Express visited Minnesota and held a rally outside the state capitol building. (Photo courtesy of Fibonacci Blue/flickr)

## Learning Objectives

### 6.1. Types of Groups

- Understand primary and secondary groups as the two sociological groups
- Recognize in-groups and out-groups as subtypes of primary and secondary groups
- Define reference groups

### 6.2. Group Size and Structure

- How size influences group dynamics
- Different styles of leadership
- How conformity is impacted by groups

### 6.3. Formal Organizations

- Understand the different types of formal organizations
- Recognize the characteristics of bureaucracies
- Identify the concepts of the McJob and the McDonaldization of society

## Introduction to Groups and Organizations

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Over the past decade, a grassroots effort to raise awareness of certain political issues has gained in popularity. As a result, Tea Party groups have popped up in nearly every community across the country. The followers of the Tea Party have charged themselves with calling “awareness to any issue which challenges the security, sovereignty, or domestic tranquility of our beloved nation, the United States of America” (Tea Party, Inc. 2014). The group takes its name from the famous so-called Tea Party that occurred in Boston Harbor in 1773. Its membership includes people from all walks of life who are taking a stand to protect their values and beliefs. Their beliefs tend to be anti-tax, anti-big government, pro-gun, and generally politically conservative.

Their political stance is supported by what they refer to as their “15 Non-Negotiable Core Beliefs.”

1. Illegal aliens are here illegally.
2. Pro-domestic employment is indispensable.
3. A strong military is essential.
4. Special interests must be eliminated.
5. Gun ownership is sacred.
6. Government must be downsized.
7. The national budget must be balanced.
8. Deficit spending must end.
9. Bailout and stimulus plans are illegal.
10. Reducing personal income taxes is a must.
11. Reducing business income taxes is mandatory.
12. Political office must be available to average citizens.
13. Intrusive government must be stopped.
14. English as our core language is required.
15. Traditional family values are encouraged.

Tea Party politicians have been elected to several offices at the national, state, and local levels. In fact, Alabama, California, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Ohio, and Texas all had pro-Tea Party members win seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate. On the national stage, Tea Partiers are actively seeking the impeachment of President Barack Obama for what they refer to “flagrant violations,” including forcing national healthcare (Obamacare) on the country, gun grabbing, and failing to protect victims of the terror attack on U.S. diplomatic offices in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012.

At the local level, Tea Party supporters have taken roles as mayors, county commissioners, city council members, and the like. In a small, rural, Midwestern county with a population of roughly 160,000, the three county commissioners who oversee the operation and administration of county government were two Republicans and a Democrat for years. During the 2012 election, the Democrat lost his seat to an outspoken Tea Party Republican who campaigned as pro-gun and fiscally conservative. He vowed to reduce government spending and shrink the size of county government.

Groups like political parties are prevalent in our lives and provide a significant way we understand and define ourselves—both groups we feel a connection to and those we don’t. Groups also play an important role in society. As enduring social units, they help foster shared value systems and are key to the structure of society as we know it. There are three primary sociological perspectives for studying groups: Functionalist, Conflict, and Interactionist. We can look at the Tea Party movement through the lenses of these methods to better understand the roles and challenges that groups offer.

The Functionalist perspective is a big-picture, macro-level view that looks at how different aspects of society are intertwined. This perspective is based on the idea that society is a well-balanced system with all parts necessary to the whole, and it studies the roles these parts play in relation to the whole. In the case of the Tea Party Movement, a Functionalist might look at what macro-level needs the movement serves. For example, a Structural Functionalist might ask how the party forces people to pay attention to the economy.

The Conflict perspective is another macroanalytical view, one that focuses on the genesis and growth of inequality. A conflict theorist studying the Tea Party Movement might look at how business interests

have manipulated the system over the last 30 years, leading to the gross inequality we see today. Or this perspective might explore how the massive redistribution of wealth from the middle class to the upper class could lead to a two-class system reminiscent of Marxist ideas.

A third perspective is the Symbolic Interaction or Interactionist perspective. This method of analyzing groups takes a micro-level view. Instead of studying the big picture, these researchers look at the day-to-day interactions of groups. Studying these details, the Interactionist looks at issues like leadership style and group dynamics. In the case of the Tea Party Movement, Interactionists might ask, “How does the group dynamic in New York differ from that in Atlanta?” Or, “What dictates who becomes the *de facto* leader in different cities—geography, social dynamics, economic circumstances?”

## 6.1 Types of Groups

Most of us feel comfortable using the word “group” without giving it much thought. In everyday use, it can be a generic term, although it carries important clinical and scientific meanings. Moreover, the concept of a group is central to much of how we think about society and human interaction. Often, we might mean different things by using that word. We might say that a group of kids all saw the dog, and it could mean 250 students in a lecture hall or four siblings playing on a front lawn. In everyday conversation, there isn’t a clear distinguishing use. So how can we hone the meaning more precisely for sociological purposes?

### Defining a Group

The term **group** is an amorphous one and can refer to a wide variety of gatherings, from just two people (think about a “group project” in school when you partner with another student), a club, a regular gathering of friends, or people who work together or share a hobby. In short, the term refers to any collection of at least two people who interact with some frequency and who share a sense that their identity is somehow aligned with the group. Of course, every time people are gathered it is not necessarily a group. A rally is usually a one-time event, for instance, and belonging to a political party doesn’t imply interaction with others. People who exist in the same place at the same time but who do not interact or share a sense of identity—such as a bunch of people standing in line at Starbucks—are considered an **aggregate**, or a crowd. Another example of a nongroup is people who share similar characteristics but are not tied to one another in any way. These people are considered a **category**, and as an example all children born from approximately 1980–2000 are referred to as “Millennials.” Why are Millennials a category and not a group? Because while some of them may share a sense of identity, they do not, as a whole, interact frequently with each other.

Interestingly, people within an aggregate or category can become a group. During disasters, people in a neighborhood (an aggregate) who did not know each other might become friendly and depend on each other at the local shelter. After the disaster ends and the people go back to simply living near each other, the feeling of cohesiveness may last since they have all shared an experience. They might remain a group, practicing emergency readiness, coordinating supplies for next time, or taking turns caring for neighbors who need extra help. Similarly, there may be many groups within a single category. Consider teachers, for example. Within this category, groups may exist like teachers’ unions, teachers who coach, or staff members who are involved with the PTA.

### Types of Groups

Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) suggested that groups can broadly be divided into two categories: **primary groups** and **secondary groups** (Cooley 1909). According to Cooley, primary groups play the most critical role in our lives. The primary group is usually fairly small and is made up of individuals who generally engage face-to-face in long-term emotional ways. This group serves emotional needs: **expressive functions** rather than pragmatic ones. The primary group is usually made up of significant others, those individuals who have the most impact on our socialization. The best example of a primary group is the family.

Secondary groups are often larger and impersonal. They may also be task-focused and time-limited. These groups serve an **instrumental function** rather than an expressive one, meaning that their role is more goal- or task-oriented than emotional. A classroom or office can be an example of a secondary group. Neither primary nor secondary groups are bound by strict definitions or set limits. In fact, people can move from one group to another. A graduate seminar, for example, can start as a secondary group focused on the class at hand, but as the students work together throughout their program, they may find common interests and strong ties that transform them into a primary group.

## Making Connections:

## Sociology in the Real World



## Best Friends She's Never Met

Writer Allison Levy worked alone. While she liked the freedom and flexibility of working from home, she sometimes missed having a community of coworkers, both for the practical purpose of brainstorming and the more social “water cooler” aspect. Levy did what many do in the Internet age: she found a group of other writers online through a web forum. Over time, a group of approximately twenty writers, who all wrote for a similar audience, broke off from the larger forum and started a private invitation-only forum. While writers in general represent all genders, ages, and interests, it ended up being a collection of twenty- and thirty-something women who comprised the new forum; they all wrote fiction for children and young adults.

At first, the writers’ forum was clearly a secondary group united by the members’ professions and work situations. As Levy explained, “On the Internet, you can be present or absent as often as you want. No one is expecting you to show up.” It was a useful place to research information about different publishers and about who had recently sold what and to track industry trends. But as time passed, Levy found it served a different purpose. Since the group shared other characteristics beyond their writing (such as age and gender), the online conversation naturally turned to matters such as child-rearing, aging parents, health, and exercise. Levy found it was a sympathetic place to talk about any number of subjects, not just writing. Further, when people didn’t post for several days, others expressed concern, asking whether anyone had heard from the missing writers. It reached a point where most members would tell the group if they were traveling or needed to be offline for awhile.

The group continued to share. One member on the site who was going through a difficult family illness wrote, “I don’t know where I’d be without you women. It is so great to have a place to vent that I know isn’t hurting anyone.” Others shared similar sentiments.

So is this a primary group? Most of these people have never met each other. They live in Hawaii, Australia, Minnesota, and across the world. They may never meet. Levy wrote recently to the group, saying, “Most of my ‘real-life’ friends and even my husband don’t really get the writing thing. I don’t know what I’d do without you.” Despite the distance and the lack of physical contact, the group clearly fills an expressive need.




**Figure 6.2** Engineering and construction students gather around a job site. How do your academic interests define your in- and out-groups? (Photo courtesy of USACEpublicaffairs/flickr)

## In-Groups and Out-Groups

One of the ways that groups can be powerful is through inclusion, and its inverse, exclusion. The feeling that we belong in an elite or select group is a heady one, while the feeling of not being allowed in, or of being in competition with a group, can be motivating in a different way. Sociologist William Sumner (1840–1910) developed the concepts of **in-group** and **out-group** to explain this phenomenon (Sumner 1906). In short, an in-group is the group that an individual feels she belongs to, and she believes it to be an integral part of who she is. An out-group, conversely, is a group someone doesn’t belong to; often we may feel disdain or competition in relationship to an out-group. Sports teams, unions, and sororities are examples of in-groups and out-groups; people may belong to, or be an

outsider to, any of these. Primary groups consist of both in-groups and out-groups, as do secondary groups.

While group affiliations can be neutral or even positive, such as the case of a team sport competition, the concept of in-groups and out-groups can also explain some negative human behavior, such as white supremacist movements like the Ku Klux Klan, or the bullying of gay or lesbian students. By defining others as “not like us” and inferior, in-groups can end up practicing ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, ageism, and heterosexism—manners of judging others negatively based on their culture, race, sex, age, or sexuality. Often, in-groups can form within a secondary group. For instance, a workplace can have cliques of people, from senior executives who play golf together, to engineers who write code together, to young singles who socialize after hours. While these in-groups might show favoritism and affinity for other in-group members, the overall organization may be unable or unwilling to acknowledge it. Therefore, it pays to be wary of the politics of in-groups, since members may exclude others as a form of gaining status within the group.

Making Connections:

the
Big Picture

## Bullying and Cyberbullying: How Technology Has Changed the Game

Most of us know that the old rhyme “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is inaccurate. Words can hurt, and never is that more apparent than in instances of bullying. Bullying has always existed and has often reached extreme levels of cruelty in children and young adults. People at these stages of life are especially vulnerable to others’ opinions of them, and they’re deeply invested in their peer groups. Today, technology has ushered in a new era of this dynamic. Cyberbullying is the use of interactive media by one person to torment another, and it is on the rise. Cyberbullying can mean sending threatening texts, harassing someone in a public forum (such as Facebook), hacking someone’s account and pretending to be him or her, posting embarrassing images online, and so on. A study by the Cyberbullying Research Center found that 20 percent of middle school students admitted to “seriously thinking about committing suicide” as a result of online bullying (Hinduja and Patchin 2010). Whereas bullying face-to-face requires willingness to interact with your victim, cyberbullying allows bullies to harass others from the privacy of their homes without witnessing the damage firsthand. This form of bullying is particularly dangerous because it’s widely accessible and therefore easier to accomplish.

Cyberbullying, and bullying in general, made international headlines in 2010 when a fifteen-year-old girl, Phoebe Prince, in South Hadley, Massachusetts, committed suicide after being relentlessly bullied by girls at her school. In the aftermath of her death, the bullies were prosecuted in the legal system and the state passed anti-bullying legislation. This marked a significant change in how bullying, including cyberbullying, is viewed in the United States. Now there are numerous resources for schools, families, and communities to provide education and prevention on this issue. The White House hosted a Bullying Prevention summit in March 2011, and President and First Lady Obama have used Facebook and other social media sites to discuss the importance of the issue.

According to a report released in 2013 by the National Center for Educational Statistics, close to 1 in every 3 (27.8 percent) students report being bullied by their school peers. Seventeen percent of students reported being the victims of cyberbullying.

Will legislation change the behavior of would-be cyberbullies? That remains to be seen. But we can hope communities will work to protect victims before they feel they must resort to extreme measures.

## Reference Groups



**Figure 6.3** Athletes are often viewed as a reference group for young people. (Photo courtesy of Johnny Bivera/U.S. Navy/Wikimedia Commons)

A **reference group** is a group that people compare themselves to—it provides a standard of measurement. In U.S. society, peer groups are common reference groups. Kids and adults pay attention to what their peers wear, what music they like, what they do with their free time—and they compare themselves to what they see. Most people have more than one reference group, so a middle school boy might look not just at his classmates but also at his older brother’s friends and see a different set of norms. And he might observe the antics of his favorite athletes for yet another set of behaviors.

Some other examples of reference groups can be one’s cultural center, workplace, family gathering, and even parents. Often, reference groups convey competing messages. For instance, on television and in movies, young adults often have wonderful apartments and cars and lively social lives despite not holding a job. In music videos, young women might dance and sing in a sexually aggressive way that suggests experience beyond their years. At all ages, we use reference groups to help guide our behavior and show us social norms. So how important is it to surround yourself with positive reference groups? You may not recognize a reference group, but it still influences the way you act. Identifying your reference groups can help you understand the source of the social identities you aspire to or want to distance yourself from.

### Making Connections:

### Sociology in the Real World



## College: A World of In-Groups, Out-Groups, and Reference Groups



**Figure 6.4** Which fraternity or sorority would you fit into, if any? Sorority recruitment day offers students an opportunity to learn about these different groups. (Photo courtesy of Murray State/flickr)

For a student entering college, the sociological study of groups takes on an immediate and practical meaning. After all, when we arrive someplace new, most of us glance around to see how

well we fit in or stand out in the ways we want. This is a natural response to a reference group, and on a large campus, there can be many competing groups. Say you are a strong athlete who wants to play intramural sports, and your favorite musicians are a local punk band. You may find yourself engaged with two very different reference groups.

These reference groups can also become your in-groups or out-groups. For instance, different groups on campus might solicit you to join. Are there fraternities and sororities at your school? If so, chances are they will try to convince students—that is, students they deem worthy—to join them. And if you love playing soccer and want to play on a campus team, but you’re wearing shredded jeans, combat boots, and a local band T-shirt, you might have a hard time convincing the soccer team to give you a chance. While most campus groups refrain from insulting competing groups, there is a definite sense of an in-group versus an out-group. “Them?” a member might say. “They’re all right, but their parties are nowhere near as cool as ours.” Or, “Only serious engineering geeks join that group.” This immediate categorization into in-groups and out-groups means that students must choose carefully, since whatever group they associate with won’t just define their friends—it may also define their enemies.

## 6.2 Group Size and Structure



**Figure 6.5** Cadets illustrate how strongly conformity can define groups. (Photo courtesy David Spender/flickr)

### Dyads, Triads, and Large Groups

A small group is typically one where the collection of people is small enough that all members of the group know each other and share simultaneous interaction, such as a nuclear family, a dyad, or a triad. Georg Simmel (1858–1915) wrote extensively about the difference between a **dyad**, or two-member group, and a **triad**, which is a three-member group (Simmel 1902). In the former, if one person withdraws, the group can no longer exist. We can think of a divorce, which effectively ends the “group” of the married couple or of two best friends never speaking again. In a triad, however, the dynamic is quite different. If one person withdraws, the group lives on. A triad has a different set of relationships. If there are three in the group, two-against-one dynamics can develop, and there exists the potential for a majority opinion on any issue. Small groups generally have strong internal cohesiveness and a sense of connection. The challenge, however, is for small groups to achieve large goals. They can struggle to be heard or to be a force for change if they are pushing against larger groups. In short, they are easier to ignore.

It is difficult to define exactly when a small group becomes a large group. Perhaps it occurs when there are too many people to join in a simultaneous discussion. Or perhaps a group joins with other groups as part of a movement that unites them. These larger groups may share a geographic space, such as a fraternity or sorority on the same campus, or they might be spread out around the globe. The larger the group, the more attention it can garner, and the more pressure members can put toward whatever goal they wish to achieve. At the same time, the larger the group becomes, the more the risk grows for division and lack of cohesion.

### Group Leadership

Often, larger groups require some kind of leadership. In small, primary groups, leadership tends to be informal. After all, most families don’t take a vote on who will rule the group, nor do most groups of friends. This is not to say that *de facto* leaders don’t emerge, but formal leadership is rare. In secondary

groups, leadership is usually more overt. There are often clearly outlined roles and responsibilities, with a chain of command to follow. Some secondary groups, like the military, have highly structured and clearly understood chains of command, and many lives depend on those. After all, how well could soldiers function in a battle if they had no idea whom to listen to or if different people were calling out orders? Other secondary groups, like a workplace or a classroom, also have formal leaders, but the styles and functions of leadership can vary significantly.

**Leadership function** refers to the main focus or goal of the leader. An **instrumental leader** is one who is goal-oriented and largely concerned with accomplishing set tasks. We can imagine that an army general or a Fortune 500 CEO would be an instrumental leader. In contrast, **expressive leaders** are more concerned with promoting emotional strength and health, and ensuring that people feel supported. Social and religious leaders—rabbis, priests, imams, directors of youth homes and social service programs—are often perceived as expressive leaders. There is a longstanding stereotype that men are more instrumental leaders, and women are more expressive leaders. And although gender roles have changed, even today many women and men who exhibit the opposite-gender manner can be seen as deviants and can encounter resistance. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's experiences provide an example of the way society reacts to a high-profile woman who is an instrumental leader. Despite the stereotype, Boatwright and Forrest (2000) have found that both men and women prefer leaders who use a combination of expressive and instrumental leadership.

In addition to these leadership functions, there are three different **leadership styles**. **Democratic leaders** encourage group participation in all decision making. They work hard to build consensus before choosing a course of action and moving forward. This type of leader is particularly common, for example, in a club where the members vote on which activities or projects to pursue. Democratic leaders can be well liked, but there is often a danger that the danger will proceed slowly since consensus building is time-consuming. A further risk is that group members might pick sides and entrench themselves into opposing factions rather than reaching a solution. In contrast, a **laissez-faire leader** (French for “leave it alone”) is hands-off, allowing group members to self-manage and make their own decisions. An example of this kind of leader might be an art teacher who opens the art cupboard, leaves materials on the shelves, and tells students to help themselves and make some art. While this style can work well with highly motivated and mature participants who have clear goals and guidelines, it risks group dissolution and a lack of progress. As the name suggests, **authoritarian leaders** issue orders and assigns tasks. These leaders are clear instrumental leaders with a strong focus on meeting goals. Often, entrepreneurs fall into this mold, like Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. Not surprisingly, the authoritarian leader risks alienating the workers. There are times, however, when this style of leadership can be required. In different circumstances, each of these leadership styles can be effective and successful. Consider what leadership style you prefer. Why? Do you like the same style in different areas of your life, such as a classroom, a workplace, and a sports team?

the
Big Picture

Making Connections:

## Women Leaders and the Hillary Clinton/Sarah Palin Phenomenon



**Figure 6.6** Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton drew fire for her leadership style. (Photo courtesy marcnc/flickr)

The 2008 presidential election marked a dynamic change when two female politicians entered the race. Of the 200 people who have run for president during the country's history, fewer than thirty have been women. Democratic presidential candidate and former First Lady Hillary Clinton was both famously polarizing and popular. She had almost as many passionate supporters as she did people who reviled her.

On the other side of the aisle was Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin. The former governor of Alaska, Palin was, to some, the perfect example of the modern woman. She juggled her political career with raising a growing family and relied heavily on the use of social media to spread her message.

So what light did these candidates' campaigns shed on the possibilities of a female presidency? According to some political analysts, women candidates face a paradox: They must be as tough as their male opponents on issues such as foreign policy, or they risk appearing weak. However, the stereotypical expectation of women as expressive leaders is still prevalent. Consider that Hillary Clinton's popularity surged in her 2008 campaign after she cried on the campaign trail. It was enough for the *New York Times* to publish an editorial, "Can Hillary Cry Her Way Back to the White House?" (Dowd 2008). Harsh, but her approval ratings soared afterward. In fact, many compared it to how politically likable she was in the aftermath of President Clinton's Monica Lewinsky scandal. Sarah Palin's expressive qualities were promoted to a greater degree. While she has benefited from the efforts of feminists before her, she self-identified as a traditional woman with traditional values, a point she illustrated by frequently bringing her young children up on stage with her.

So what does this mean for women who would be president, and for those who would vote for them? On the positive side, a recent study of eighteen- to twenty-five-year-old women that asked whether female candidates in the 2008 election made them believe a woman would be president during their lifetime found that the majority thought they would (Weeks 2011). And the more that young women demand female candidates, the more commonplace female contenders will become. Women as presidential candidates may no longer be a novelty with the focus of their campaign, no matter how obliquely, on their gender. Some, however, remain skeptical. As one political analyst said bluntly, "Women don't succeed in politics—or other professions—unless they act like men. The standard for running for national office remains distinctly male" (Weeks 2011).



**Figure 6.7** This gag gift demonstrates how female leaders may be viewed if they violate social norms. (Photo courtesy of istoletv/flickr)

## Conformity

We all like to fit in to some degree. Likewise, when we want to stand out, we want to choose how we stand out and for what reasons. For example, a woman who loves cutting-edge fashion and wants to dress in thought-provoking new styles likely wants to be noticed, but most likely she will want to be noticed within a framework of high fashion. She wouldn't want people to think she was too poor to find proper clothes. **Conformity** is the extent to which an individual complies with group norms or expectations. As you might recall, we use reference groups to assess and understand how to act, to dress, and to behave. Not surprisingly, young people are particularly aware of who conforms and who does not. A high school boy whose mother makes him wear ironed button-down shirts might protest that he will look stupid—that everyone else wears T-shirts. Another high school boy might like wearing

those shirts as a way of standing out. How much do you enjoy being noticed? Do you consciously prefer to conform to group norms so as not to be singled out? Are there people in your class who immediately come to mind when you think about those who don't want to conform?

Psychologist Solomon Asch (1907–1996) conducted experiments that illustrated how great the pressure to conform is, specifically within a small group (1956). After reading about his work in the Sociological Research feature, ask yourself what you would do in Asch's experiment. Would you speak up? What would help you speak up and what would discourage it?

## Making Connections: Sociological Research



### Conforming to Expectations

In 1951, psychologist Solomon Asch sat a small group of about eight people around a table. Only one of the people sitting there was the true subject; the rest were associates of the experimenter. However, the subject was led to believe that the others were all, like him, people brought in for an experiment in visual judgments. The group was shown two cards, the first card with a single vertical line, and the second card with three vertical lines differing in length. The experimenter polled the group and asked each participant one at a time which line on the second card matched up with the line on the first card.

However, this was not really a test of visual judgment. Rather, it was Asch's study on the pressures of conformity. He was curious to see what the effect of multiple wrong answers would be on the subject, who presumably was able to tell which lines matched. In order to test this, Asch had each planted respondent answer in a specific way. The subject was seated in such a way that he had to hear almost everyone else's answers before it was his turn. Sometimes the nonsubject members would unanimously choose an answer that was clearly wrong.

So what was the conclusion? Asch found that thirty-seven out of fifty test subjects responded with an "obviously erroneous" answer at least once. When faced by a unanimous wrong answer from the rest of the group, the subject conformed to a mean of four of the staged answers. Asch revised the study and repeated it, wherein the subject still heard the staged wrong answers, but was allowed to write down his answer rather than speak it aloud. In this version, the number of examples of conformity—giving an incorrect answer so as not to contradict the group—fell by two thirds. He also found that group size had an impact on how much pressure the subject felt to conform.

The results showed that speaking up when only one other person gave an erroneous answer was far more common than when five or six people defended the incorrect position. Finally, Asch discovered that people were far more likely to give the correct answer in the face of near-unanimous consent if they had a single ally. If even one person in the group also dissented, the subject conformed only a quarter as often. Clearly, it was easier to be a minority of two than a minority of one.

Asch concluded that there are two main causes for conformity: people want to be liked by the group or they believe the group is better informed than they are. He found his study results disturbing. To him, they revealed that intelligent, well-educated people would, with very little coaxing, go along with an untruth. He believed this result highlighted real problems with the education system and values in our society (Asch 1956).

Stanley Milgram, a Yale psychologist, had similar results in his experiment that is now known simply as the Milgram Experiment. In 1962, Milgram found that research subjects were overwhelmingly willing to perform acts that directly conflicted with their consciences when directed by a person of authority. In the experiment, subjects were willing to administer painful, even supposedly deadly, shocks to others who answered questions incorrectly.

To learn more about similar research, visit <http://www.prisonexp.org/> (<http://www.prisonexp.org/>) and read an account of Philip Zimbardo's prison experiment conducted at Stanford University in 1971.

## 6.3 Formal Organizations

A complaint of modern life is that society is dominated by large and impersonal secondary organizations. From schools to businesses to healthcare to government, these organizations, referred to as **formal organizations**, are highly bureaucratized. Indeed, all formal organizations are, or likely will become, **bureaucracies**. A bureaucracy is an ideal type of formal organization. Ideal doesn't mean "best" in its sociological usage; it refers to a general model that describes a collection of characteristics, or a type that could describe most examples of the item under discussion. For example, if your professor were to tell the class to picture a car in their minds, most students will picture a car that shares a set of characteristics: four wheels, a windshield, and so on. Everyone's car will be somewhat different, however. Some might picture a two-door sports car while others picture an SUV. The general idea of the car that everyone shares is the ideal type. We will discuss bureaucracies as an ideal type of organization.

### Types of Formal Organizations



**Figure 6.8** Girl Scout troops and correctional facilities are both formal organizations. (Photo (a) courtesy of moonlightbulb/flickr; Photo (b) courtesy of CxOxS/flickr)

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1975) posited that formal organizations fall into three categories. **Normative organizations**, also called **voluntary organizations**, are based on shared interests. As the name suggests, joining them is voluntary and typically done because people find membership rewarding in an intangible way. The Audubon Society and a ski club are examples of normative organizations. **Coercive organizations** are groups that we must be coerced, or pushed, to join. These may include prison or a rehabilitation center. Symbolic interactionist Erving Goffman states that most coercive organizations are **total institutions** (1961). A total institution is one in which inmates or military soldiers live a controlled lifestyle and in which total resocialization takes place. The third type is **utilitarian organizations**, which, as the name suggests, are joined because of the need for a specific material reward. High school and the workplace fall into this category—one joined in pursuit of a diploma, the other in order to make money.

**Table 6.1 Table of Formal Organizations** This table shows Etzioni's three types of formal organizations. (Table courtesy of Etzioni 1975)

	Normative or Voluntary	Coercive	Utilitarian
Benefit of Membership	Intangible benefit	Corrective benefit	Tangible benefit
Type of Membership	Volunteer basis	Required	Contractual basis
Feeling of Connectedness	Shared affinity	No affinity	Some affinity

### Bureaucracies

Bureaucracies are an ideal type of formal organization. Pioneer sociologist Max Weber popularly characterized a bureaucracy as having a hierarchy of authority, a clear division of labor, explicit rules, and impersonality (1922). People often complain about bureaucracies—declaring them slow, rule-bound, difficult to navigate, and unfriendly. Let's take a look at terms that define a bureaucracy to understand what they mean.

**Hierarchy of authority** refers to the aspect of bureaucracy that places one individual or office in charge of another, who in turn must answer to her own superiors. For example, as an employee at Walmart, your shift manager assigns you tasks. Your shift manager answers to his store manager, who must answer to her regional manager, and so on in a chain of command, up to the CEO who must answer to the board members, who in turn answer to the stockholders. Everyone in this bureaucracy follows the chain of command.

A **clear division of labor** refers to the fact that within a bureaucracy, each individual has a specialized task to perform. For example, psychology professors teach psychology, but they do not attempt to provide students with financial aid forms. In this case, it is a clear and commonsense division. But what about in a restaurant where food is backed up in the kitchen and a hostess is standing nearby texting on her phone? Her job is to seat customers, not to deliver food. Is this a smart division of labor?

The existence of **explicit rules** refers to the way in which rules are outlined, written down, and standardized. For example, at your college or university, the student guidelines are contained within the Student Handbook. As technology changes and campuses encounter new concerns like cyberbullying, identity theft, and other hot-button issues, organizations are scrambling to ensure their explicit rules cover these emerging topics.

Finally, bureaucracies are also characterized by **impersonality**, which takes personal feelings out of professional situations. This characteristic grew, to some extent, out of a desire to protect organizations from nepotism, backroom deals, and other types of favoritism, simultaneously protecting customers and others served by the organization. Impersonality is an attempt by large formal organizations to protect their members. Large business organizations like Walmart often situate themselves as bureaucracies. This allows them to effectively and efficiently serve volumes of customers quickly and with affordable products. This results in an impersonal organization. Customers frequently complain that stores like Walmart care little about individuals, other businesses, and the community at large.

Bureaucracies are, in theory at least, **meritocracies**, meaning that hiring and promotion is based on proven and documented skills, rather than on nepotism or random choice. In order to get into a prestigious college, you need to perform well on the SAT and have an impressive transcript. In order to become a lawyer and represent clients, you must graduate law school and pass the state bar exam. Of course, there are many well-documented examples of success by those who did not proceed through traditional meritocracies. Think about technology companies with founders who dropped out of college, or performers who became famous after a YouTube video went viral. How well do you think established meritocracies identify talent? Wealthy families hire tutors, interview coaches, test-prep services, and consultants to help their kids get into the best schools. This starts as early as kindergarten in New York City, where competition for the most highly-regarded schools is especially fierce. Are these schools, many of which have copious scholarship funds that are intended to make the school more democratic, really offering all applicants a fair shake?

There are several positive aspects of bureaucracies. They are intended to improve efficiency, ensure equal opportunities, and ensure that most people can be served. And there are times when rigid hierarchies are needed. But remember that many of our bureaucracies grew large at the same time that our school model was developed—during the Industrial Revolution. Young workers were trained, and organizations were built for mass production, assembly line work, and factory jobs. In these scenarios, a clear chain of command was critical. Now, in the information age, this kind of rigid training and adherence to protocol can actually decrease both productivity and efficiency.

Today's workplace requires a faster pace, more problem solving, and a flexible approach to work. Too much adherence to explicit rules and a division of labor can leave an organization behind. And unfortunately, once established, bureaucracies can take on a life of their own. Maybe you have heard the expression “trying to turn a tanker around mid-ocean,” which refers to the difficulties of changing direction with something large and set in its ways. State governments and current budget crises are examples of this challenge. It is almost impossible to make quick changes, leading states to continue, year after year, with increasingly unbalanced budgets. Finally, bureaucracies, as mentioned, grew as institutions at a time when privileged white males held all the power. While ostensibly based on meritocracy, bureaucracies can perpetuate the existing balance of power by only recognizing the merit in traditionally male and privileged paths.

Michels (1911) suggested that all large organizations are characterized by the **Iron Rule of Oligarchy**, wherein an entire organization is ruled by a few elites. Do you think this is true? Can a large organization be collaborative?



**Figure 6.9** This McDonald's storefront in Egypt shows the McDonaldization of society. (Photo courtesy of s\_w\_ellis/flickr)

## The McDonaldization of Society

The **McDonaldization of Society** (Ritzer 1993) refers to the increasing presence of the fast food business model in common social institutions. This business model includes efficiency (the division of labor), predictability, calculability, and control (monitoring). For example, in your average chain grocery store, people at the register check out customers while stockers keep the shelves full of goods and deli workers slice meats and cheese to order (efficiency). Whenever you enter a store within that grocery chain, you receive the same type of goods, see the same store organization, and find the same brands at the same prices (predictability). You will find that goods are sold by the pound, so that you can weigh your fruit and vegetable purchase rather than simply guessing at the price for that bag of onions, while the employees use a timecard to calculate their hours and receive overtime pay (calculability). Finally, you will notice that all store employees are wearing a uniform (and usually a name tag) so that they can be easily identified. There are security cameras to monitor the store, and some parts of the store, such as the stockroom, are generally considered off-limits to customers (control). While McDonaldization has resulted in improved profits and an increased availability of various goods and services to more people worldwide, it has also reduced the variety of goods available in the marketplace while rendering available products uniform, generic, and bland. Think of the difference between a mass-produced shoe and one made by a local cobbler, between a chicken from a family-owned farm and a corporate grower, or between a cup of coffee from the local diner and one from Starbucks.

### Making Connections:

### Sociology in the Real World



## Secrets of the McJob

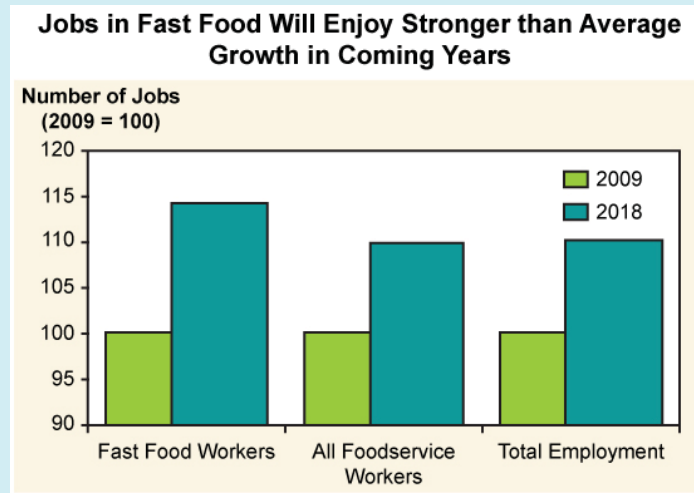
We often talk about bureaucracies disparagingly, and no organization takes more heat than fast food restaurants. Several books and movies, such as *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* by Eric Schossler, paint an ugly picture of what goes in, what goes on, and what comes out of fast food chains. From their environmental impact to their role in the U.S. obesity epidemic, fast food chains are connected to numerous societal ills. Furthermore, working at a fast food restaurant is often disparaged, and even referred to dismissively, as having a McJob rather than a real job.

But business school professor Jerry Newman went undercover and worked behind the counter at seven fast food restaurants to discover what really goes on there. His book, *My Secret Life on the McJob*, documents his experience. Unlike Schossler, Newman found that these restaurants offer much good alongside the bad. Specifically, he asserted that the employees were honest and hardworking, that management was often impressive, and that the jobs required a lot more skill and effort than most people imagined. In the book, Newman cites a pharmaceutical executive who says a fast-food service job on an applicant's résumé is a plus because it indicates the employee is reliable and can handle pressure.

Businesses like Chipotle, Panera, and Costco attempt to combat many of the effects of McDonaldization. In fact, Costco is known for paying its employees an average of \$20 per hour, or slightly more than \$40,000.00 per year. Nearly 90% of their employees receive health insurance from Costco, a number that is unheard of in the retail sector.

While Chipotle is not known for high wages of its employees, it is known for attempting to sell high-quality foods from responsibly sourced providers. This is a different approach from what Schossler describes among burger chains like McDonalds.

So what do you think? Are these McJobs and the organizations that offer them still serving a role in the economy and people's careers? Or are they dead-end jobs that typify all that is negative about large bureaucracies? Have you ever worked in one? Would you?



**Figure 6.10** Fast-food jobs are expected to grow more quickly than most industries. (Graph courtesy of U.S. BLS)

## Chapter Review

### Key Terms

**aggregate:** a collection of people who exist in the same place at the same time, but who don't interact or share a sense of identity

**authoritarian leader:** a leader who issues orders and assigns tasks

**bureaucracies:** formal organizations characterized by a hierarchy of authority, a clear division of labor, explicit rules, and impersonality.

**category:** people who share similar characteristics but who are not connected in any way

**clear division of labor:** the fact that each individual in a bureaucracy has a specialized task to perform

**coercive organizations:** organizations that people do not voluntarily join, such as prison or a mental hospital

**conformity:** the extent to which an individual complies with group or societal norms

**democratic leader:** a leader who encourages group participation and consensus-building before moving into action

**dyad:** a two-member group

**explicit rules:** the types of rules in a bureaucracy; rules that are outlined, recorded, and standardized

**expressive function:** a group function that serves an emotional need

**expressive leader:** a leader who is concerned with process and with ensuring everyone's emotional wellbeing

**formal organizations:** large, impersonal organizations

**group:** any collection of at least two people who interact with some frequency and who share some sense of aligned identity

**hierarchy of authority:** a clear chain of command found in a bureaucracy

**impersonality:** the removal of personal feelings from a professional situation

**in-group:** a group a person belongs to and feels is an integral part of his identity

**instrumental function:** being oriented toward a task or goal

**instrumental leader:** a leader who is goal oriented with a primary focus on accomplishing tasks

**Iron Rule of Oligarchy:** the theory that an organization is ruled by a few elites rather than through collaboration

**laissez-faire leader:** a hands-off leader who allows members of the group to make their own decisions

**leadership function:** the main focus or goal of a leader

**leadership style:** the style a leader uses to achieve goals or elicit action from group members

**McDonaldization of Society:** the increasing presence of the fast food business model in common social institutions

**meritocracy:** a bureaucracy where membership and advancement is based on merit—proven and documented skills

**normative or voluntary organizations:** organizations that people join to pursue shared interests or because they provide some intangible rewards

**out-group:** a group that an individual is not a member of, and may even compete with

**primary groups:** small, informal groups of people who are closest to us

**reference groups:** groups to which an individual compares herself

**secondary groups:** larger and more impersonal groups that are task-focused and time limited

**total institution:** an organization in which participants live a controlled lifestyle and in which total resocialization occurs

**triad:** a three-member group

**utilitarian organizations:** organizations that are joined to fill a specific material need

## Section Summary

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### 6.1 Types of Groups

Groups largely define how we think of ourselves. There are two main types of groups: primary and secondary. As the names suggest, the primary group is the long-term, complex one. People use groups as standards of comparison to define themselves—both who they are and who they are not. Sometimes groups can be used to exclude people or as a tool that strengthens prejudice.

### 6.2 Group Size and Structure

The size and dynamic of a group greatly affects how members act. Primary groups rarely have formal leaders, although there can be informal leadership. Groups generally are considered large when there are too many members for a simultaneous discussion. In secondary groups there are two types of leadership functions, with expressive leaders focused on emotional health and wellness, and instrumental leaders more focused on results. Further, there are different leadership styles: democratic leaders, authoritarian leaders, and laissez-faire leaders.

Within a group, conformity is the extent to which people want to go along with the norm. A number of experiments have illustrated how strong the drive to conform can be. It is worth considering real-life examples of how conformity and obedience can lead people to ethically and morally suspect acts.

### 6.3 Formal Organizations

Large organizations fall into three main categories: normative/voluntary, coercive, and utilitarian. We live in a time of contradiction: while the pace of change and technology are requiring people to be more nimble and less bureaucratic in their thinking, large bureaucracies like hospitals, schools, and governments are more hampered than ever by their organizational format. At the same time, the past few decades have seen the development of a trend to bureaucratize and conventionalize local institutions. Increasingly, Main Streets across the country resemble each other; instead of a Bob's Coffee Shop and Jane's Hair Salon there is a Dunkin Donuts and a Supercuts. This trend has been referred to as the McDonaldization of society.

## Section Quiz

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### 6.1 Types of Groups

1. What does a Functionalist consider when studying a phenomenon like the Occupy Wall Street movement?
  - a. The minute functions that every person at the protests plays in the whole
  - b. The internal conflicts that play out within such a diverse and leaderless group
  - c. How the movement contributes to the stability of society by offering the discontented a safe, controlled outlet for dissension
  - d. The factions and divisions that form within the movement
2. What is the largest difference between the Functionalist and Conflict perspectives and the Interactionist perspective?
  - a. The former two consider long-term repercussions of the group or situation, while the latter focuses on the present.
  - b. The first two are the more common sociological perspective, while the latter is a newer sociological model.
  - c. The first two focus on hierarchical roles within an organization, while the last takes a more holistic view.
  - d. The first two perspectives address large-scale issues facing groups, while the last examines more detailed aspects.
3. What role do secondary groups play in society?
  - a. They are transactional, task-based, and short-term, filling practical needs.
  - b. They provide a social network that allows people to compare themselves to others.
  - c. The members give and receive emotional support.
  - d. They allow individuals to challenge their beliefs and prejudices.
4. When a high school student gets teased by her basketball team for receiving an academic award, she is dealing with competing \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. primary groups
  - b. out-groups
  - c. reference groups
  - d. secondary groups
5. Which of the following is *not* an example of an in-group?
  - a. The Ku Klux Klan
  - b. A fraternity
  - c. A synagogue
  - d. A high school
6. What is a group whose values, norms, and beliefs come to serve as a standard for one's own behavior?
  - a. Secondary group
  - b. Formal organization
  - c. Reference group
  - d. Primary group
7. A parent who is worrying over her teenager's dangerous and self-destructive behavior and low self-esteem may wish to look at her child's:
  - a. reference group

- b. in-group
- c. out-group
- d. All of the above

## 6.2 Group Size and Structure

8. Two people who have just had a baby have turned from a \_\_\_\_\_ to a \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. primary group; secondary group
  - b. dyad; triad
  - c. couple; family
  - d. de facto group; nuclear family
9. Who is more likely to be an expressive leader?
- a. The sales manager of a fast-growing cosmetics company
  - b. A high school teacher at a reform school
  - c. The director of a summer camp for chronically ill children
  - d. A manager at a fast-food restaurant
10. Which of the following is *not* an appropriate group for democratic leadership?
- a. A fire station
  - b. A college classroom
  - c. A high school prom committee
  - d. A homeless shelter
11. In Asch's study on conformity, what contributed to the ability of subjects to resist conforming?
- a. A very small group of witnesses
  - b. The presence of an ally
  - c. The ability to keep one's answer private
  - d. All of the above
12. Which type of group leadership has a communication pattern that flows from the top down?
- a. Authoritarian
  - b. Democratic
  - c. Laissez-faire
  - d. Expressive

## 6.3 Formal Organizations

13. Which is *not* an example of a normative organization?
- a. A book club
  - b. A church youth group
  - c. A People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) protest group
  - d. A study hall
14. Which of these is an example of a total institution?
- a. Jail
  - b. High school
  - c. Political party
  - d. A gym
15. Why do people join utilitarian organizations?
- a. Because they feel an affinity with others there
  - b. Because they receive a tangible benefit from joining
  - c. Because they have no choice
  - d. Because they feel pressured to do so
16. Which of the following is *not* a characteristic of bureaucracies?
- a. Coercion to join
  - b. Hierarchy of authority
  - c. Explicit rules
  - d. Division of labor
17. What are some of the intended positive aspects of bureaucracies?
- a. Increased productivity
  - b. Increased efficiency
  - c. Equal treatment for all
  - d. All of the above
18. What is an advantage of the McDonaldization of society?

- a. There is more variety of goods.
  - b. There is less theft.
  - c. There is more worldwide availability of goods.
  - d. There is more opportunity for businesses.
19. What is a disadvantage of the McDonaldization of society?
- a. There is less variety of goods.
  - b. There is an increased need for employees with postgraduate degrees.
  - c. There is less competition so prices are higher.
  - d. There are fewer jobs so unemployment increases.

## Short Answer

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### 6.1 Types of Groups

1. How has technology changed your primary groups and secondary groups? Do you have more (and separate) primary groups due to online connectivity? Do you believe that someone, like Levy, can have a true primary group made up of people she has never met? Why, or why not?
2. Compare and contrast two different political groups or organizations, such as the Occupy and Tea Party movements, or one of the Arab Spring uprisings. How do the groups differ in terms of leadership, membership, and activities? How do the group's goals influence participants? Are any of them in-groups (and have they created out-groups)? Explain your answer.
3. The concept of hate crimes has been linked to in-groups and out-groups. Can you think of an example where people have been excluded or tormented due to this kind of group dynamic?

### 6.2 Group Size and Structure

4. Think of a scenario where an authoritarian leadership style would be beneficial. Explain. What are the reasons it would work well? What are the risks?
5. Describe a time you were led by a leader using, in your opinion, a leadership style that didn't suit the situation. When and where was it? What could she or he have done better?
6. Imagine you are in Asch's study. Would you find it difficult to give the correct answer in that scenario? Why or why not? How would you change the study now to improve it?
7. What kind of leader do you tend to be? Do you embrace different leadership styles and functions as the situation changes? Give an example of a time you were in a position of leadership and what function and style you expressed.

### 6.3 Formal Organizations

8. What do you think about the recent spotlight on fast food restaurants? Do you think they contribute to society's ills? Do you believe they provide a needed service? Have you ever worked a job like this? What did you learn?
9. Do you consider today's large companies like General Motors, Amazon, or Facebook to be bureaucracies? Why, or why not? Which of the main characteristics of bureaucracies do you see in them? Which are absent?
10. Where do you prefer to shop, eat out, or grab a cup of coffee? Large chains like Walmart or smaller retailers? Starbucks or a local restaurant? What do you base your decisions on? Does this section change how you think about these choices? Why, or why not?

## Further Research

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### 6.1 Types of Groups

For more information about cyberbullying causes and statistics, check out this website: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cyberbullying> (<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cyberbullying>)

### 6.2 Group Size and Structure

What is your leadership style? The website <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Leadership> (<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Leadership>) offers a quiz to help you find out!

Explore other experiments on conformity at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford-Prison> (<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford-Prison>)

### 6.3 Formal Organizations

As mentioned above, the concept of McDonaldization is a growing one. The following link discusses this phenomenon further: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/McDonaldization> (<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/McDonaldization>)

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