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CLIQUE, GANGS, AND NETWORKS

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Sociologists have placed much emphasis upon the secondary nature of social contacts in the city. They have contrasted the large number of rather casual, impersonal, and specialized social relationships of the modern city dweller with the smaller number of more stable and intimate relationships which characterized the neighborhood of an earlier day and of a rural setting and which still characterize the family and the children's play group.

The general contrast so pictured will probably be challenged by no student of modern social developments, but during the last twenty years a growing list of careful research projects in various fields of social relationships has suggested that within the secondary society certain types of at least quasi-primary groupings tend to appear and to become for their members very important devices for adaptation to their social milieu. The clique, the gang, and the network are three concepts, drawn from the studies, which appear to provide adequate terminology for identifying these essentially primary groupings.

The following discussion of these developments falls naturally into four parts, the purposes of which are (1) to define the three concepts mentioned, (2) to survey some of the literature in order to show the widespread appearance of these types of groupings, (3) to indicate some of the functions of these groupings which make them vital to the persons concerned, and (4) to suggest a hypothesis to serve as a basis for possible future research.

Some few items of data are drawn from the writer's field observations, which have resulted in information of varying degrees of completeness upon some twenty cliques or networks.

I. DEFINITIONS

The clique is a small, informal, intimate, non-kin, face-to-face group usually demonstrating a considerable degree of "we-feeling," some fairly well-defined customary rules of conduct, and a well-developed internal structure. It may or may not be tied to a geographic location. Warner and Lunt¹ have suggested that the membership may range from two to thirty

¹ W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), pp. 110-11.

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or more and that when the upper limit is approximated it ordinarily breaks up into several smaller cliques. In an earlier discussion the present writer noted the tendency of the clique to limit its membership when the growth of numbers threatened the intimacy of the group.²

Warner and Lunt³ have also noted that the life span of the clique tends to be short as compared with the association. This is no doubt true, but cliques should not be thought of as being casual groupings. Some cliques may last only a few months, but many continue for years, sometimes with changes of personnel. For instance, among those studied by the writer one informal group of couples has had a continuous history of twenty years and another of at least twelve years.

The term *gang* appears to be applied to a clique in which the sense of unity has been increased and the internal organization strengthened through conflict.⁴

The network is a set of relatively stable emotional linkages between persons which result in selective channels of communication through which intimate information and emotions may be rather freely transmitted to the members of a community so linked. This concept has been adopted from Moreno,⁵ and the definition is largely a restatement of his description. Moreno adds that these networks form a sort of "permanent structure, a container, a bed"⁶ which underlies many psychological movements in the community and that they bind groups of individuals together irrespective of geographical distinctions. "These networks are the kitchens of public opinion."⁷ The writer's field observations indicate that some of the connections in a network result from the fact that many persons belong to several cliques. As they move from clique to clique they carry news and emotional states with them.

² "The Development of Organization and Disorganization in the Social Life of a Rapidly Growing Working-Class Suburb Within a Metropolitan District," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California, 1939), p. 233. Here the term *coterie* was used, and the present article was first announced under that title in *Sociology and Social Research*; but I have concluded that the terms now used, *clique*, *gang*, and *network*, describe the phenomena under consideration and that they have acquired some standing as sociological concepts.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁴ Frederic M. Thrasher, *The Gang* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 57.

⁵ J. L. Moreno, *Who Shall Survive?* (Washington: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co., 1934), pp. 256-65.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

II. DISPERSION OF TYPICAL GROUPINGS

As far as this paper is concerned, the essential point of interest in the above definitions is that they identify certain primary, or at least quasi-primary, groupings which have been discovered in a considerable array of different social situations. Many of these situations are certainly not those which have been thought to be principally characterized by primary contacts.

Among the most famous of the research findings concerning cliques is the body of materials collected by various students under the direction or stimulation of Elton Mayo. The studies of the "bank wiring" operators clearly revealed the presence and importance of these groups in the large factory⁸ and gave the lie to what Mayo has called the "rabble hypothesis," which looked upon workers as competitive individuals and assumed that their social organization was coequal with the administrative plan.⁹ Mayo feels that the validity of these original findings has been amply demonstrated by successive studies in other industrial enterprises—a notable illustration being his studies of absenteeism in a West Coast, wartime aircraft operation.¹⁰

The above studies applied principally to nonsupervisory personnel, but Gardner¹¹ indicates that these informal types of social organization are known to extend into all branches of the administrative structure of business.

A variety of reports indicates the existence of cliques and networks in schools of widely different types. In a very careful study of a high school in a small rural town, A. B. Hollingshead¹² noted that clique behavior was characteristic of the members of the student body. The present writer has located some such groups in the student body of a metropolitan junior college¹³ and in that of a small college of some six hundred students. The various works of Moreno¹⁴ and Helen Hall Jennings¹⁴ also reveal numer-

⁸ F. J. Roethlisberger and William J. Dickson, *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1947), especially Chap. XXI.

⁹ Elton Mayo, *The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (Boston: Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, 1945), especially Chap. II.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-10.

¹¹ Burleigh B. Gardner, "The Factory as a Social System" in *Industry and Society*, William Foote Whyte, editor (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1946), p. 6.

¹² Lecture at the University of Southern California, July 1946.

¹³ "A Study of Contemporary Student Leaders in Long Beach Junior College" (unpublished master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1933), pp. 69-73.

¹⁴ Moreno, *op. cit.*, p. 17, *et passim*; Helen Hall Jennings, *Leadership and Isolation* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1943) and "Sociometric Differentiation of the Psychogroup and the Sociogroup," *Sociometry*, 10:71-79, February 1947.

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ous small intimate groups and networks in a Brooklyn public school, in a private preparatory school for boys, and in the New York State Training School for Girls, Hudson, New York.

The methods used by Moreno, Jennings, Lundberg, and others in their sociometric studies are somewhat different from those of Warner and Lunt or of the Western Electric studies. However, if one analyzes their sociograms¹⁵ and reads the accompanying texts with their details of the relationships of runaways¹⁶ or riots¹⁷ to changes in sociometric configurations, one becomes convinced that these are but alternative methods for locating cliques and networks. Moreno has pointed out that the sociometric test was actually only one of three methods used,¹⁸ and the other methods appear to correspond closely to those used by Mayo and Warner.

That cliques and gangs are to be found in many communities as structures in themselves outside the bounds of any specific institutional setting is attested to by a series of research findings. Perhaps the most notable example of such data is the first two volumes of the Yankee City series.¹⁹ In these works several thousand cliques were located in a population of some seventeen thousand persons. Warner and Lunt²⁰ note that "overlapping in clique membership spreads out into a network of interrelationships which integrate almost the entire population of the community into a single vast system of clique relations." This tying of cliques together by means of personal affiliations appears to be essentially what Moreno²¹ means by the network and seems to be what he is talking about when he says, "an emotional continuum of relations lies below all the patterns of community life, families, clubs, labor, political, or religious units." Lundberg and Steele's²² sociometric analysis of a somewhat smaller community appears to reveal the same general pattern of informal relationships. The present writer has located a few cliques in each of two other communities of approximately seven thousand and forty thousand population.

¹⁵ See, for instance, the "Map of a School Community" in Moreno, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49; or George A. Lundberg and Mary Steele, "Social Attraction Patterns in a Village," *Sociometry*, 1:375-419, January-April 1938.

¹⁶ Moreno, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-27.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁹ Warner and Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (1941) and *The Status System of a Modern Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942).

²⁰ *The Social Life of a Modern Community*, p. 111.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 339.

²² "Social Attraction Patterns in a Village." See, for instance, the discussion at the bottom of p. 389.

Of course, these small communities were not typical modern metropolises, but even within the modern metropolis cliques have been found by several investigators, especially among the working classes. Whyte has made a very detailed study of a few cliques among the Italian people of Eastern City²³ and clearly implies that his few selected groupings are typical of others.²⁴ Allison Davis,²⁵ in analyzing the motivation of the underprivileged worker on the basis of studies made at the University of Chicago, points out and illustrates the same phenomena among white and Negro workers in Chicago; and Whyte,²⁶ in his studies of the restaurant industry, appears to have come upon these phenomena among waitresses, for he stresses the need of these women to be integrated into some group both on and off the job. The gangs studied by Thrasher²⁷ drew their membership largely from the working class.

An anonymous article in a recent issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*²⁸ recounts the experiences of the writer with informal groupings in the armed forces.

The materials already cited seem to show clearly the typical existence of cliques or gangs in factories and at least some other work places, in schools of various types, in cities and other communities of relatively small size, and among the working classes of metropolitan communities.²⁹ They also indicate that these cliques or gangs are integrated into networks of relatively intimate relationships which constitute altogether a basic social continuum. Before citing the somewhat more fragmentary data which suggest the existence of comparable groupings in other segments of American society, a brief analysis of the functions of these groupings will be made.

III. FUNCTIONS

Membership in the clique or gang is profoundly important and deeply satisfying to a great many persons. Thus, Mayo points out that whenever these groups do not have an opportunity to form, labor turnover and absenteeism develop. He says, "Man's desire to be continuously associated

²³ William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1943), especially Chap. I.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Chaps. XVIII and XX.

²⁵ "The Motivation of the Underprivileged Worker" in *Industry and Society* (William Foote Whyte, editor), pp. 92-93, *et passim*.

²⁶ "When Workers and Customers Meet," *Industry and Society*, Chap. VII, especially p. 143.

²⁷ *The Gang*.

²⁸ "Informal Social Organization in the Army," 51:265-370, March 1946.

²⁹ In a recent article Harry C. Harmsworth pointed out that some relatively primary contacts are associated with urban society and certain formal social structures within it. See "Primary Group Relationships in Modern Society," *Sociology and Social Research*, 31:291-96, March-April 1946.

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in work with his fellows is a strong, if not the strongest, human character-
istic."³⁰ Moreno's³¹ whole work seems to have grown out of an effort to
bring about a happier adjustment of persons to their society, and Helen
Jennings³² observes toward the end of one of her reports, "How important
the attaining of mutual relations is, we see in the persistent striving for
their attainment." The writer noted this characteristic several years
ago.³³ Additional evidence might be cited, but the point seems well estab-
lished. The wishes of the human being for response and security in the
emotional environment seem well met in the warm emotional climate of
the intimate "we-group" known as the clique or the gang. In this friendly
atmosphere the mask may be dropped and the tensions of emotional
restraint eased.³⁴ Conversely, the person who is not integrated into some
such group tends to be maladjusted and unhappy. At the New York State
Training School for Girls she is likely to run away.³⁵ All of the reports
of detailed researches reveal the presence of some isolated persons, but in
all cases except that of the aircraft industry these persons constituted only
a minority of the aggregates studied.

Not only are clique relationships satisfying in themselves, but they are
of immense aid to the person in dealing with many practical problems.
Among the working classes the members of such groups frequently provide
actual physical support for each other.³⁶ Factory workers may rid them-
selves of an unwanted associate by a little convenient manipulation of
prescribed reporting techniques,³⁷ and protect themselves from inter-
ference by supervisors.³⁸ The social climber makes use of the clique to
pull himself into desired associations,³⁹ and the leader extends his sway
through various cliques tied together in a network.⁴⁰ His clique and
network contacts supply the individual with information not readily
available to him through other channels.⁴¹ Those items of news about

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 111.

³¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

³² "Structure of Leadership Development and Sphere of Influence, *Sociometry*,
1:99-143, July-October 1937, p. 137.

³³ "The Development of Organization and Disorganization in the Social Life of
a Rapidly Growing Working-Class Suburb Within a Metropolitan District,"
p. 233.

³⁴ For illustration, see the conversation of two society leaders beginning on page
29 of *The Social Life of a Modern Community*.

³⁵ Moreno, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

³⁶ Davis, *loc. cit.*

³⁷ Roethlisberger and Dickson, *op. cit.*, p. 487.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

³⁹ Warner and Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community*, p. 351.

⁴⁰ Moreno, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 260-61.

people and events which are not publicly broadcast are available to most persons through what is usually termed the "grapevine" but is here entitled the network.

These interpersonal relations not only aid and satisfy a person, but they also rigorously control his behavior. As Mayo and his associates began interviewing individuals concerning working problems they soon discovered that individual working practices were controlled by groups,⁴² and after detailed investigation concluded that each clique had very definite rules which it enforced upon its members in a number of ways in order to protect the interests of its total membership.⁴³ Drake and Cayton⁴⁴ comment upon the powerful control exercised by cliques over those who would rise in the social scale of the Chicago Negro community, and Warner and Lunt⁴⁵ remark that, "Despite the apparent fluidity of its structure, the clique has a powerful control over individual behavior. A boy or girl will frequently defy his family for the approval of his cliquemates. A workman must be bold indeed to produce more than the customary day's work. But if he is a member of a group with well-developed "we-feeling," his attendance at work will tend to be more steady.⁴⁶ A good bowler may find his scoring affected by his clique relationships,⁴⁷ and children of foreign parents find the tempo of their Americanization increased by inclusion in cliques predominantly of native stock.⁴⁸ In several of the cliques he has studied, the author has noted that ideas tend to be sorted and reorganized in clique relationships. For instance, a member of a formal association gets an idea for action. Before speaking in a full meeting he will frequently ask one or two close friends or a small group what they think. If he wins approval from this group he seems to feel emboldened to press the matter further. Frequently in these rather intimate and direct discussions new ideas arise and existing ideas are modified. The clique thus seems to be important as a device for sifting and adjusting mental as well as overt behavior. Something of this character seems to have gone on with the girls at the New York State Training School who were considering running away,⁴⁹ although this was not the primary point to Moreno's

⁴² Roethlisberger and Dickson, *op. cit.*, Chap. XVII.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

⁴⁴ St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), p. 520.

⁴⁵ *The Social Life of a Modern Community*, p. 351.

⁴⁶ Mayo, *op. cit.*, Chap. V.

⁴⁷ Whyte, *Street Corner Society*, p. 14 ff.

⁴⁸ W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), p. 142.

⁴⁹ Moreno, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

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discussion of these events. Helen Jennings⁵⁰ has commented upon this phenomenon. She has suggested that freedom of expression is relatively greater in the group based on sheer personal liking than in one based on activities dictated by the structure of some established institution, such as the work relationship.

The sympathetic milieu of the clique, which provides a basis for the relatively free expression of ideas, appears to rest in part upon the fact that persons whose overt emotional or intellectual behavior is too variant are simply excluded. The Chicago Negro community illustrates well this selectivity of the clique,⁵¹ and Roethlisberger and Dickson⁵² have pointed out that those who will not subscribe to clique values are excluded.

The exclusiveness of cliques appears to be a partial explanation of the fact that clique relationships are significant in fixing one's status, especially one's class status, in the society. A person is known by the company he keeps. In the rather stable life of Yankee City the clique was "next in importance to the family in placing people socially,"⁵³ whereas in the social flux of the Chicago Negro community the clique was regarded by Drake and Cayton⁵⁴ to be far more important than the family in placing people.

IV. PRIMARY ASPECTS OF THE SECONDARY SOCIETY

The data cited indicate that the clique is found in many areas of modern life, that under certain circumstances it becomes further solidified into what may be called a gang, that cliques tend to be tied together by a network of personal social nearnesses which allow selected ideas and emotions to flow along differentiated channels, and that these groupings are fundamental devices by which persons adapt and are adapted to their societies.

The fact that these groupings characterized by essentially primary contacts are found within so many segments of metropolitan society suggests that they may be found in many other segments of the same type of society. In more detail this hypothesis may be stated as follows: Additional research may reveal that the whole typically secondary society of the city is shot through with a series of cliques, gangs, and networks which constitute a set of basic devices for the adaptation of persons to those societies, and that because of the profound satisfactions they offer and the results they produce, these relationships will be discovered to be power-

⁵⁰ "Sociometric Differentiation of the Psychegroup and the Sociogroup."

⁵¹ Drake and Cayton, *op. cit.*, p. 520.

⁵² *Op. cit.*, p. 523.

⁵³ Warner and Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community*, p. 110.

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 520.

ful directive and dynamic forces within the more formal framework of established institutions. The law, administrative structures, and the ecological and economic processes based on competition may provide much of the more obvious structure of the city, but the more significant values of the person will be developed within and supported by the clique or the gang and will be related to the wider society through the network.

A beautiful illustration of the way in which these informal groupings operate in relation to more obvious formal organization is afforded by the General Electric studies.⁵⁵ The formal standard of a day's work, set by the company and called a "bogey," seems to have had little influence upon the workers. The "real" standard was their own group conception that two banks constituted a day's work. This was the idea which affected their behavior.

In addition to the studies cited above, a considerable list of other materials points to the presence of the types of relationships here under consideration in other segments of urban society. In most of these instances the focus is less sharply upon these particular phenomena. A number of years ago Bessie A. McClenahan made a careful study of a particular small area in Los Angeles. In this study she noted the decline of the local community and the rise of what she called the communality.⁵⁶ Among the phenomena included in this concept were such things as informal bridge clubs and groups of friends.⁵⁷ Because her principal concern was with a specific area, the details of the communality were peripheral to her center of interest. Zorbaugh, in his study of the members of the Chicago upper class who inhabit the Gold Coast, remarked in passing that this society is now composed of "sets and cliques,"⁵⁸ and that the residents no longer know their neighbors. But this does not mean that the members of that society are not subject to social control. One must still belong to the right clubs and live in the right hotels.⁵⁹ Drake and Cayton⁶⁰ have noted that cliques are common to the upper and middle classes of the Negro community of Chicago. The writer has located several cliques of business

⁵⁵ Roethlisberger and Dickson, *op. cit.*, Chap. XXI.

⁵⁶ *The Changing Urban Neighborhood* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1929), p. 108. See also "The Communality: The Urban Substitute for the Traditional Community," *Sociology and Social Research*, 30:264-74, March-April 1946.

⁵⁷ *The Changing Urban Neighborhood*, pp. 99-100 and 109.

⁵⁸ Harvey W. Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1929), p. 65.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 520.

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leaders and also a number of small informal bridge, dinner, or dancing clubs in communities varying in size from seven thousand to several million population.⁶¹

Outside the realm of research numerous items of news and common knowledge suggest the truth of the hypothesis. Who has not belonged to an organization where policy was actually determined by a small intimate clique, the so-called insiders? In a biography of a business leader the following sentence receives no special emphasis but reveals a significant relationship: "Work was a leading broker, a comparative newcomer to the Vanderbilt crowd."⁶² Another interesting, if somewhat gaudy, illustration of the integration of personal relationships and business activities is contained in Parker Morrell's⁶³ treatise upon the life of Diamond Jim Brady. Current news magazines provide careful analyses of the men who are close to President Truman,⁶⁴ and the public understands that the average city boss operates through a network of personal relationships. In still another field, Philip Murray clings to Lee Pressman partly because of a strong sense of personal loyalty.⁶⁵

These last items are but hasty glimpses between the buildings, but along with the extended data already in hand they suggest the possibility of a more complete understanding of the urban world through isolating these less obvious but more intimate groupings for further analysis. Of course, the city is characterized by secondary contacts as compared to the rural community, but sociological knowledge of the urban society will hardly be complete until sociologists have analyzed the role of the clique, the gang, and the network in each great segment of metropolitan life.

⁶¹ Field studies.

⁶² Wheaton J. Lane, *Commodore Vanderbilt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), p. 239.

⁶³ *Diamond Jim* (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1934), p. 160, for instance.

⁶⁴ *The United States News*, October 16, 1946, p. 15.

⁶⁵ *Fortune*, October 1946, p. 258.