

PART III

The Group Experience



I've lived in the same house since 1976, and I don't even know my next-door neighbor. It's not that I can't remember his name (though I can't). It's that I don't even know what he looks like. Well, I didn't know, until the other day. I was standing alone in a train station in Boston, when a complete stranger walked up to me and said, "Aren't you Jack Levin?" I, of course, nodded my head and asked him politely how he knew me.

He told me his name and then informed me that he was my next-door neighbor. When I asked him how long he had lived next door, he responded, "For 5 years." Shocked and embarrassed, I welcomed him to the neighborhood. Well, what else was I to do? The amazing thing is that I live in a middle-class suburb—not in a city apartment but in a single-family house on a quiet residential street with other single-family houses. Another amazing thing is that I really like people, including my neighbors. But most of my friends and group memberships are somehow associated either with my job or with my family. There seems to be very little room left over in my everyday interaction for the people on my block.

And, then, there is the assumption—perhaps unwarranted—that most of my neighbors are not any different than I am. They have their own lives too—they are away during the day, probably belong to various organizations at work, and probably have a circle of friends and family with whom they share their leisure hours. What kind of an effort have they made to get to know me, I ask? (Boy, am I defensive!)

This section is about the experience of being in groups, ranging from families, roommates, neighbors, and peers, on the informal side of the continuum, to the largest organizations, companies, universities, and government agencies you might possibly envision, on the more formal side. A group provides the social context for interaction between people—two or more individuals who are aware of one another's presence and who adjust their behavior toward one another. They may talk, laugh, cry, work, play, scream, fight, debate, struggle, or cooperate but, always, together. This interaction is the essence of the group experience. It is also the essence of what sociologists study.

In our mass society, there are people who have little more than superficial contacts with other human beings. Some have no informal contacts at all. However, while the old, traditional forms of social interaction represented by family and neighborhood may have weakened, they have been replaced by new patterns of interaction. As suggested in "College Fraternities: A Counteracting Force on Campus," students may depend a good deal on fraternities and sororities to find others to date and to develop lasting friendships.

In addition to fraternities and sororities, there also seem to be growing numbers of unconventional groups called "cults." Sociologists have

always defined cults as loosely structured and unconventional forms of religious groups, whose members are held together by a charismatic leader who mobilizes their loyalty around some new religious cause—typically a cause that is at odds with that of more conventional religious institutions. Using this definition, almost any new religious group that hasn't yet become institutionalized—whether benign or dangerous—could be regarded as a cult. From a sociological perspective, then, early Christianity during Roman times was a cult, but so were the Branch Davidians under David Koresh. Of course, the term *cult* has recently been used much more broadly to include any group—whether religious or not—that may be dangerous or destructive.

Some people need an excuse just to gather together with others. In the temporary alliances known as coalitions, individuals put aside their differences to collaborate for the sake of achieving common objectives. In “The Consequences of Coalitions,” we see that many different groups of people have a stake in combating bigotry and hate. Their potential effectiveness in this regard becomes much greater when they form temporary alliances consisting of the range of such people who have been victimized.

In “Reunion, American Style,” we discover Robert Merton's term *latent function*. He recognized that many of our social arrangements have not only a formal purpose but also an unintended and unrecognized consequence. Professional conferences, for example, frequently held on an annual basis, provide an opportunity for practitioners to exchange information in formal sessions. But the latent and therefore unintended, unrecognized effect may be even more important. In bars, restaurants, and hotel lobbies, participants from around the country reunite to chat.

Their informal conversations often provide the basis for exchanging ideas and collaborating on projects. In the same article, we see the manner in which patterns of behavior can become institutionalized. That is, aspects of the social order become widely accepted and organized. In our society, class reunions have become big business, a commercial success.

Speaking of big business and big organizations, “Children of the Organization Men” takes a look at two generations: first, those men (there were very few women who did this) who came of age in the 1950s and worked for most of their careers in large organizations. What happened to their children? Did they become organization men and women? Or did they choose to follow a different career path for themselves? A recent study of organizational offspring indicates that their fathers' loyalty to corporations and conformity to social order were hardly passed on to the next generation. Instead, the sons and daughters of organization men turned their attention to the self and cherished raw individualism.

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“Thwarting the Bullies in Our Schools” offers a two-pronged strategy for reducing the prevalence of school murders committed by classmates against one another. First, we should take bullying seriously, viewing it as an abnormal practice that can and should be reduced rather than as part of the natural order of the school. Second, we should break the culture of silence so that students no longer feel it is socially unacceptable to inform on a peer who threatens to blow up the school or shoot students and teachers. Social influence can work either to damage the self-esteem of vulnerable children or to protect them from being harassed and humiliated.

College Fraternities: A Counteracting Force on Campus

Where Else Would Students Get to Know One Another?

Those who long for a return to a time of strong family ties, neighborliness, and a simpler life often invoke the term *mass society* to characterize a long-standing trend in American society that they deplore. The image of mass society is all too familiar to millions of Americans in the early 21st century—people who feel very much alone, city dwellers and suburbanites living in boxes, dissatisfied customers who talk on the phone to automated voices, rush-hour traffic that won't quit, and waiting in lines a mile long.

All of these forms of mass society are, indeed, a painful fact of life for millions of Americans. Yet at the same time that older types of social relations have diminished, they have been replaced by new, and sometimes deceptively effective, forms of intimacy and informality that compensate for the loss of traditional primary ties and counteract feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Technology has provided some degree of compensation. Even when friends and relatives are physically separated, they can still sustain primary contacts by telephone. Or as a postmodern form of social interaction, they can keep in touch by means of personal computer (Internet, e-mail, and electronic bulletin boards), even if they are thousands of miles apart.

Of course, such technological devices as long-distance telephones and computers hardly make up for the eclipse of community in America. Their essentially superficial forms of interaction cannot possibly compensate

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totally for the loss of profound friendship and family networks found in the neighborhoods or communities of another era.

This can be seen clearly in the case of millions of college students around the country who leave their families—perhaps for the first time ever—to take up residence on a campus, sometimes located thousands of miles from home. It should come as no surprise that these students, especially if they are on large and diverse campuses, often search for opportunities for intimacy and friendship. Some find the primary contacts they need in fraternities and sororities.

Membership in college fraternities and sororities seems to ebb and flow, depending on the social circumstances surrounding campus life at a particular point in time. In 1966, some 30% of all college students belonged to Greek-letter societies; by 1976, however, this figure had dropped to only 19% nationally. In fact, fully two thirds of these colleges had experienced declining fraternity enrollments. During the 1970s, on some campuses across the country, fraternities completely disappeared.

Apparently, the fraternity's ability to counteract mass society on campus was overruled, at least during this period of time, by a more powerful theme among the college-bound baby boomer generation. Many college students of the early 1970s regarded fraternity membership as thoroughly inconsistent with their interests in civil rights, student rights, antiwar activism, feminism, racial equality, and independence from institutional constraints.

James A. Fox and I conducted a study showing that the disappearance of college fraternities was short lived. By examining the fraternity and sorority membership figures around the country, we discovered a major resurgence of interest in campus fraternities. By 1981, almost one half of all colleges and universities had already reported seeing growth in fraternity enrollments. As more and more students sought structured opportunities to meet other students, date, and develop friendships, the fraternity began to make its big comeback. Especially on campuses where most of the students came from outside the immediate area, where there were few commuters, and where there was little else to attract students in the wider community, fraternity membership thrived and prospered. In some southern schools, fraternity membership reached 80%.

In a mass society, independence can be very lonely. For college students who miss the intimacy of family life, fraternities and sororities provide a new set of brothers and sisters and a home away from home.

The Appeal of Cults

If You Can't Get What You Need From Your Friends, You May Be Tempted to Join

What in the world is a cult, anyway? And how do you know it when you see one? Are we talking about Heaven's Gate and the dozens of people who in 1997 committed mass suicide so they could reunite on a spaceship? Or the more than 80 Branch Davidians who perished at Waco after their compound was stormed by federal agents? How about Jonestown, Guyana? In 1978, 912 people died there, because their leader Jim Jones urged them to sip cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. Should we include transcendental meditators? Members of the Divine Light Mission? The Unification Church and Scientology, even though these groups have millions of members around the world? How about the Charles Manson "family"? In 1969, several Manson members killed seven innocent people.

Of course, many people nowadays use the term *cult* to refer to any new group they dislike—whether its members are organized around religion, race, flying saucers, psychotherapy, politics, or self-improvement. The despised cults are typically accused of engaging in devious practices. It is suggested, for example, that some of their members recruit in a deceptive way—they might, for example, lure unsuspecting students by promising them a free-of-charge get-together at some retreat, while they fail to inform the students of their true intent. Other cults are said to use methods of mind control or thought reform (i.e., brainwashing) for transforming their recruits into totally obedient zealots. According to this view, members of cults become dependent on an authoritarian group leader who claims to have some special knowledge, gift, or talent. In extreme cases, recruits are no longer

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allowed to make any important personal decisions without consulting their leader and must give up all relationships with old friends and family. Finally, it is rumored that the most dangerous of such cults have coerced their members into committing suicide, murder, or both.

Every once in a while, the behavior of a cult confirms the worst suspicions of its detractors. On March 26, 1997, for example, 39 members of the Heaven's Gate cult committed mass suicide in their rented mansion in Rancho Santa Fe near San Diego. Marshall Applewhite, the cult's leader, had convinced his followers—20 women and 19 men ranging in age from 26 to 72—that a spaceship traveling behind the Hale-Bopp comet was coming to pick them all up, just as soon as they could shed their vehicles or containers (also known as bodies). They were totally convinced that civilization on Earth was about to end but that they could enter a higher life form by killing themselves and then boarding a spaceship from what they called the next level. So, as instructed by their leader, they took poison and—just in case—placed plastic bags over their heads to asphyxiate themselves.

Not only did the Heaven's Gate suicide victims represent both genders and a wide range of ages, but they also consisted of blacks, Latinos, and whites who had come from all over the country. And these were not stupid, crazy, or uneducated people—they were computer skilled, musically talented, and scholarly—but they were also needy, lonely, and depressed. Many had abandoned their families and friends months or years earlier.

It is right, of course, to be concerned for the lives of people who are down on their luck when they are recruited by dangerous or deceptive cults. When someone has suffered a profound loss or has no place to turn for guidance and support, he or she is particularly vulnerable to the attempts of groups, dangerous or not, to influence their decisions through conformity and obedience to authority.

At the same time, it is pure myth to suggest that recruits typically lack any power to resist while under the spell of a madman. Even vulnerable individuals possess an *active self*—they are typically not brainwashed into misbehaving but comply willingly with the requirements imposed on their membership. From this viewpoint, there is a definite limit to the power of a charismatic leader to mold or shape the behavior and beliefs of his disciples. Most cult leaders are not in the category of a Jim Jones or Marshall Applewhite, even if they are extremely persuasive.

Over the past 20 years, there may have been as many as 20 million Americans involved for varying periods of time in some kind of cult. The reason why such groups have widespread appeal is that they provide precisely what many Americans find lacking in their everyday lives—a sense of

belonging and friendship; a feeling of power, control, and importance; and a more general sense of structure and certainty.

Of course, individuals who are taken by force—especially children and teenagers—may be especially malleable and easy to manipulate by those who exercise total control and claim to have special powers. In a sense, 14-year-old Elizabeth Smart was the perfect victim. On June 5, 2002, Smart was abducted at gunpoint, in the middle of the night, from her family home in Salt Lake City. Some 10 months later, she turned up alive just a few miles away, in the presence of a drifter and self-styled prophet, who once did handyman work in the Smart home, and his female companion.

Why in the world did the 14-year-old girl not attempt to flee her kidnapers when she had the opportunity to do so? What made her use biblical language and give a false name—Augustine Marshall—to the police who finally rescued her from her abductors? After months of living with her captors in a tent and being forcibly isolated from any other influences, Smart apparently began to identify with her abductors. The reality of their total control over her life was gradually transformed into an illusion of control that almost any healthy and decent 14-year-old girl would have come to accept. At first, she probably complied out of fear in order to survive. But it appears that she eventually succumbed psychologically.

Years earlier, 19-year-old Patty Hearst was vilified after being abducted by members of the Symbionese Liberation Front, who kept her in a closet for long periods of time and made her completely dependent on them. She was certainly tortured and perhaps sexually assaulted. Yet, after collaborating with her kidnapers to rob a bank, Hearst served almost 2 years behind bars. Not only was she found guilty in a court of law, but she also looked guilty in the court of public opinion. The point is that the average person saw Patty Hearst more as a villain than a victim. If only they could have understood her as a prisoner of war, she might have gotten more sympathy.

Actually, studies of prisoners of war who collaborated with the enemy suggest that mind control can be achieved by exerting absolute power and control over a prisoner's day-to-day experiences, establishing a bond between the prisoner and his captors, and showing the inmate that his only road to salvation is to comply with the enemy's demands. Cultists have employed the same psychological methods of torture in persuading their members to commit mass murder or suicide, kidnap children, or amass an arsenal of weapons of destruction.

Yet most cultists are not like Elizabeth Smart or Patty Hearst—that is, they are full-fledged adults who join a group voluntarily, because they sincerely believe that their cult membership will give them everything that is missing in their miserable lives. At various times in our lives, all of us can fall

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into vulnerable states—we may be lonely, hurting, having a hard time socially, having academic problems, or feeling overwhelmed or confused. During such temporary periods of misery and loss—for whatever reason—another person can have more influence over us than during other periods of time. If the members of a cult come along and promise to show us the way out of our misery, we may very well be tempted to join them. If, however, we can instead count on a helping hand from our instructors, advisors, friends, clergy, resident assistants, family, and counselors, the most persuasive cult will seem totally irrelevant.

Reunion, American Style

The Ritual of Reconnecting

In her novel of the same name, Rona Jaffe suggests that a class reunion is more than a sentimental journey. It is also a way of answering the question that lies at the back of nearly all our minds: Did they do better than I? Jaffe's observation may be misplaced but not completely lost. According to a study conducted by social psychologist Jack Sparacino, the overwhelming majority who attend reunions aren't there invidiously to compare their recent accomplishments with those of their former classmates. Instead, they hope, primarily, to relive their earlier successes.

Certainly, a few return to show their former classmates how well they have done (See Vinitzky-Seroussi, 1998); some enjoy observing the changes that have occurred in their classmates (but not always in themselves, of course). But the majority who attend their class reunions do so to relive the good times they remember having when they were younger. In his study, Sparacino found that, as high school students, attendees had been more popular, more often regarded as attractive, and more involved in extracurricular activities than those classmates who chose not to attend. For those who turned up at their reunions, then, the old times were also the good times! It would appear that Americans have a special fondness for reunions, judging by their prevalence. Major league baseball players, fraternity members, veterans groups, high school and college graduates, and former Boy Scouts all hold reunions on a regular basis. In addition, family reunions frequently attract blood relatives from faraway places who spend considerable money and time to reunite.

Actually, in their affection for reuniting with friends, family, or colleagues, Americans are probably no different from any other people, except that Americans have created a mind-boggling number and variety of institutionalized forms of gatherings to facilitate the satisfaction of this desire.

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Indeed, reunions have increasingly become formal events that are organized on a regular basis, and in the process, they have also become big business.

Shell Norris of Class Reunion, Inc., says that Chicago alone has 1,500 high school reunions each year. A conservative estimate on the national level would be 10,000 annually. At one time, all high school reunions were organized by volunteers, usually female homemakers. In the last few years, however, as more and more women have entered the labor force, alumni reunions are increasingly being planned by specialized companies rather than by part-time volunteers.

The first college reunion was held by the alumni of Yale University in 1792. Graduates of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Stanford, and Brown followed suit. And by the end of the 19th century, most 4-year institutions were holding alumni reunions.

According to Paul Chewning, vice president for alumni administration at the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), the variety of college reunions is impressive. At Princeton, alumni parade through the town wearing their class uniforms and singing their alma mater. At Marietta College, they gather for a dinner-dance on a steamship cruising the Ohio River. At Dartmouth, alumni act as lecturers and panelists in continuing education courses for their former classmates.

Clearly, the thought of cruising on a steamship or marching through the streets is usually not, by itself, sufficient reason for large numbers of alumni to return to campus. Chewning contends that alumni who decide to attend their reunions share a common identity based on the years they spent together as undergraduates. For this reason, universities that somehow establish a common bond—for example, because they are relatively small or especially prestigious—tend to draw substantial numbers of their alumni to reunions. In an effort to enhance this common identity, larger colleges and universities frequently build their class reunions on participation in smaller units, such as departments or schools. Or they encourage affinity reunions for groups of former cheerleaders, editors, fraternity members, musicians, members of military organizations on campus, and the like.

Of course, not every alumnus is fond of his or her alma mater. Michelle Favreault, associate director of Alumni Affairs at Brandeis University, suggests that students who graduated during the late 1960s may be especially reluctant to get involved in alumni events. They were part of the generation that conducted sit-ins and teach-ins directed at university administrators, protested Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and military recruitment on campus, and marched against establishment politics. If this generation has a common identity, it may fall outside of their university ties or even be hostile to them. Even as they enter their middle years, alumni who

continue to harbor unpleasant memories of college during this period may not wish to attend class reunions.

Not all reunions are school affairs. People also reunite as an unintended consequence, a latent function of gatherings designed for other reasons. Hundreds of professional associations hold annual conferences or conventions to keep their members up-to-date with developments in their fields. Yet many of the professionals who attend pass up the formal sessions—the speeches and seminars—in favor of meeting informally in bars and hotel lobbies with colleagues from other cities and states.

Attendees are given an excuse to swap experiences with friends they haven't seen since the last meeting. Similarly, the manifest function—the intended and recognized purpose—of wedding ceremonies is to unite the bride and groom in matrimony. Yet weddings (as well as funerals, confirmations, and bar mitzvahs) also serve an important latent function: They provide occasions for scattered families and friends to reunite.

The poignancy of these meetings suggests a more general principle: If reunions make people cry, it is not, as Rona Jaffe proposes, because they have come out on the short end of things now. It is because they measured up so well 20 years ago, and they want to relive the good old days with tears of joy.

The Consequences of Coalitions

Responding to White Supremacist Leaflets

Several hundred residents of Sharon, Massachusetts, recently came together to participate in a candlelight vigil against hate, inspired by racist and anti-Semitic leaflets that were dumped, days earlier, on lawns across this Boston suburb. Local leaders held a daylong meeting to address the issue of bigotry and to find an appropriate long-term response. Many concerned Sharonites placed candles in their windows.

Why should so many people in a town like Sharon—a middle-class bedroom community—come together to protest such an apparently trivial event? After all, nobody was murdered, raped, or assaulted. There were no rocks thrown through the windows of synagogues; no crosses were burned. In fact, if any crime was committed at all, it was nothing more than littering. The answer is that hate thrives and prospers under conditions of silence and nonresponse.

The National Alliance, a West Virginia-based white supremacist organization, counted on its late-night distribution of flyers in Sharon to provoke widespread anxiety and division. But the hate group never counted on local residents to respond instead by coming together in a broad-based coalition—a temporary alliance of Muslims, Christians, and Jews—and by acquiring the strong backing of the Board of Selectmen, state representatives, School Committee, District Attorney's office, local police, recreation department, Sharon Clergy Council, Islamic Center of New England, Office of the Superintendent of Schools, Gay/Straight Student Alliance, Council on Aging, Sharon Community Youth Coalition, Anti-Defamation League, and many Christian clergy and congregations in town. The response of members of the

Sharon community could serve as a model for how to respond to hate incidents in general, even those that seem unimportant.

Where residents let the small incidents pass without response, hate can escalate into ever more serious offenses. Interpreting silence as support and encouragement, hatemongers are likely to take their tactics to a more dangerous level, stopping only when they have achieved their intended purpose.

Last month, for example, Donald Butler, a 29-year-old black resident of Pemberton Township, Pennsylvania, was targeted by two white supremacists who shouted racial slurs at him as he stood on the front lawn of his home. Perhaps seeing the verbal abuse against their neighbor as an isolated and trivial event, Butler's white neighbors did absolutely nothing to assure him of their support or indignation. Three weeks later, the same two hatemongers returned with baseball bats, this time invading Butler's home in the dead of night where they brutally beat him and his wife. The Butlers escaped with stitches and broken bones, but they also felt hurt and alone, as if no one really cared. They have since relocated to another community.

The National Alliance has been associated with more than just littering.

In the interest of establishing an all-white society, its members have distributed white-power rock music and recruited many racist skinheads to the cause. Moreover, its former leader, the late William Pierce, in his racist book *The Turner Diaries*, apparently provided the blueprint for Timothy McVeigh's 1995 murder of 168 innocent people in Oklahoma City.

Hate is more than just an individual offense. It can poison the relations between groups and escalate into large-scale ethnic conflict. When thinking of the consequences of hate, we are likely first to imagine the horrible violence in Bosnia, Israel, or Northern Ireland. Or we might recall the extraordinary murder of James Byrd, the black resident of Jasper, Texas, who was dragged to his death behind a pickup truck. But we should also never forget where hate begins—in the silence of ordinary people.

Children of the Organization Men

The New Individualists

For more than 30 years, William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) was the most widely read book about organizational life. Focusing on middle-class Americans at midcentury, Whyte argued that bureaucratic organizations actually shaped almost every aspect of our lives. They dictated that employees be group minded. That is, they were expected to be flexible to the demands of others, to be completely loyal to the corporation, and to remain uncommitted to a set of values. In this view, organizations rewarded only those individuals who were good team players. Nothing else really counted, from the corporate point of view.

In collecting data for his book, Whyte followed his organization men (this is not a sexist slight; there simply weren't any organization women) into their offices, but he also visited their suburban homes, schools, and neighborhoods. He interviewed their wives and observed their children.

Whyte's description of the social role of the corporate wife is particularly telling. Any employee who aspired to be promoted to an executive position needed a wife who obeyed the corporate rules. She had to be willing to make frequent moves from city to city for the sake of her husband's job, to assume exclusive responsibility for household chores and child rearing, and to stay away from her husband's workplace. She must never gossip about the office with other corporate wives, never get drunk at a company party, never be too friendly with the wives of other employees whom her husband might pass on his way up the corporate ladder, and never show up her husband by being superior to him in any way.

Whyte observed the rise of a pervasive *social ethic*—a widely held belief that the group was the essential source of creativity and that belongingness was the basic human need: thus, the demand for yes-men, happy homemakers, family togetherness, and team players; hence, the worship of the organization.

For their book *The New Individualists: The Generation After the Organization Man* (1991), Paul Leinberger (whose father was an organization man interviewed 30 years earlier by William Whyte) and Bruce Tucker interviewed the sons and daughters of the original organization men as well as hundreds of other organizational offspring. They focused on baby boomer Americans—those men and women born between 1946 and 1964 whose fathers had worked for most of their careers in large organizations.

Included in their study were the middle manager chafing at the slow progress up the promotional ladder, the forest ranger dreaming of writing novels, the aging hippie getting by on marginal jobs, the gypsy scholar in today's brutal academic job market, the entrepreneur starting a software company, the corporate star rising rapidly, and the freelance consultant seeking autonomy.

Leinberger and Tucker found that the organizational offspring were very different from their fathers in terms of outlook, values, and motives. Children of organization men resembled one another with respect to attitude toward organizations, style of interpersonal relations, and patterns of consumption. But unlike their fathers, all of them were strong individualists. Whereas organization men admired the salesman, their offspring admire the artist. Whereas organization men were conspicuous consumers, their children cherish creativity. Whereas organization men were dominated by sociability, their offspring pursue self-fulfillment.

Leinberger and Tucker suggest that social change is partially responsible for the new norms embraced by organizational offspring. During the past 30 years, we have seen major changes in the conditions of work, leisure, economics, family life, and politics. The huge number of acquisitions and mergers in the late 1980s makes a lie of the concept of corporate loyalty; many longtime executives were summarily dismissed without any cause other than a need to reduce corporate expenses. The dual-career family introduces competing sources of allegiance between work and home. Foreign competition and reduced profits put new strains on American business.

The resulting generational differences are often profound. As soon as they finished school, organization men married, went to work, and began having children. By their mid-30s, the last of their 2 or 3 children was born. By contrast, children of the organization men often remain in school through their 20s, marry even later, and are in their 30s when they have their 1.8 children.

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An obsession with the self can be observed as a major element in the individualism of the organizational offspring. At home, in schools, and through the mass media, the members of this generation were urged to enhance self-expression, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self-assertion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance. Just as surely as their parents accepted a social ethic, the children of the organization men developed a *self ethic*.

The organization men were severely criticized for their almost robotlike obedience to corporate aspirations. But their children's individualistic ideal has also come under attack. According to Leinberger and Tucker, the offspring have created the most radical version of the individual in American history—a thoroughly isolated individual who can't make commitments, can't communicate, and can't achieve community. The exclusive emphasis on the self has left many people feeling alone and anxious.

To the extent that organizational offspring remain committed to the self ethic, they are unlikely to provide the human resources for a competitive American workforce—not unless the corporation adjusts to them. This is no small problem. There are approximately 19 million adult children of the organization men. What is more, as the offspring of the managerial class, they represent the middle and upper-middle classes—the very people who have historically dominated American business. The management philosophy of the organization man generation survives.

Into the 1990s, corporate managers continued to revere professionalism, control, teamwork, and order. At the same time, they had little patience with the ideas of leadership, substance, or vision. At midcentury, when American companies had no real competition, the organization man's view of corporate reality was viable enough. In the contemporary world of global competition and economic uncertainty, however, vision and leadership may be essential for survival. In the long haul, quality becomes more important than quantity.

Leinberger and Tucker present the grounds for believing that for children of the organization men, the future holds a better fit between their personal style and structural demands. If they are to succeed in the long run, organizations will be required to adapt themselves to a new generation of individualists—men and women who will soon be replacing their fathers in leadership positions. But just in case they don't adapt, perhaps it is time that we study the next generation, the grandchildren of the organization men.

Thwarting the Bullies in Our Schools

A Two-Pronged Strategy for Reducing School Violence

The fatal stabbing of a student at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School is obviously a tragic event; it is also an opportunity to examine the phenomenon of student-on-student violence.

The essential problem with the public reaction to this horrific act of violence is that we can't seem to get past the details of this particular crime in this particular school as perpetrated by this particular student, when we should instead be focusing on the larger picture. Until we are able to get beyond our obsession with easy answers, such as suspect John Odgren's Asperger's disorder or the psychotropic medications he takes, we will learn little about how to prevent violence at school.

The occurrence of a teen with Asperger's disorder who kills a schoolmate is so extraordinary that it may not happen again for generations. What will definitely occur time and again are episodes of school violence in which one youngster who has been teased, bullied, or humiliated kills another for revenge.

This revenge is not aimed at the student whose life he has taken but at students in general. It is almost never a single event that inspires an act of extreme violence. Instead, the young killer has typically spent months, if not years, being terrorized. He may reach the point where even an innocuous gesture from an innocent classmate is misunderstood as a threatening response.

Some students at Lincoln-Sudbury reported that Odgren had been teased for the way he dressed. But his parents suggested that he had been

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thoroughly miserable at his previous school, causing him to spend his evenings at home wrapped in a blanket and in tears.

There is an important lesson here—bullying in the schools should be totally unacceptable to students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. Let us see bullying for what it is: not a normal part of growing up but a potentially devastating series of events for any youngster who is different for a variety of reasons, including being overweight, being of a different race, having an accent, or having a physical or mental disability.

Intervention by an adult is the key. Rather than turning their backs on occurrences of bullying in the hallway, lunchroom, or playground, teachers, counselors, and school psychologists must intervene.

The easy response is to do nothing; the effective reaction is to become sensitive to what happens between students outside the classroom and to put a stop to anyone who is harassing another person with words or fists. Many schools have adopted antibullying programs in which students are taught to empathize with the victims of bullying rather than contribute to their victimization.

The second lesson to learn from the Lincoln-Sudbury tragedy is that we must break the culture of silence that so often exists among students in a middle or high school setting. In Boston, fear of physical retaliation has apparently caused many who witness violent criminal activities to ignore their responsibility to cooperate with police in identifying killers.

But in middle-class suburbs, students who overhear a threat in the hallway fear the social consequences. Snitching is not viewed as being cool, and students do not want to be rejected by their peers. Youngsters who prefer not to be labeled as a snitch will talk themselves into believing that someone else is bound to inform, so why should they get involved?

The establishment of a tip hotline in Lincoln-Sudbury makes sense but only if informing on schoolmates is positively sanctioned in the student culture.

Across the country, there have been fewer school shootings committed by disgruntled students thanks in part to the willingness of youngsters to put aside their social anxieties and inform a parent, a teacher, or a resource officer.

In such communities as Massachusetts's Marshfield and New Bedford, the culture of silence was reduced to the point where students cooperated with police to turn in threatening schoolmates before they carried out their murderous intentions.

By reducing bullying and breaking the culture of silence, we will dramatically improve the quality of life not only for those students who are victims of violence but also for all of our children. In the process, we may also prevent a slaying or two.

FOCUS

✧ Suggestions for Further Reading ✧

Concerning “College Fraternities: A Counteracting Force on Campus,” the original idea of counteracting forces in mass society can be found in Arnold Rose’s article “Reactions Against the Mass Society” in the *Sociological Quarterly* (1962.) For a recent treatment of the individual in modern, postmodern, or hypermodern society (depending on your personal view), read the fascinating account by George Ritzer in *The McDonaldization of Society* (2000). The eclipse of community is examined intelligently in Robert D. Putnam’s *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Culture* (2000).

Opposing viewpoints concerning the efficacy of cults are represented in two recent treatments of the topic. On one side, there is the very interesting book *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America*, in which James Tabor and Eugene Gallagher (1995) present a compelling argument in favor of seeing cult recruits as possessing an active self that can be manipulated only so much. On the other side, Margaret Thaler Singer’s (1995) *Cults in Our Midst: The Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives* takes the position that cultists are the victims of powerful mind control techniques. For a detailed examination of the details of the Heaven’s Gate cult suicide in San Diego, read *Heaven’s Gate* by Bill Hoffman and Cathy Burke (1997). In *Cults, Religion and Violence* (Bromley and Melton, 2002), a number of social scientists discuss the violence perpetrated by and against new religious cults. They also explore whether such dramatic conflicts can be foreseen, managed, and averted.

I collected information for “Reunion, American Style” by interviewing alumni personnel in a number of colleges and universities. I also relied on data gathered by the Alumni Administration Division of CASE. If you are interested in learning more about class reunions, I suggest getting in touch with CASE in Washington, DC. Concerning the functional argument used in this snapshot, Robert K. Merton’s *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1957) is an important work in which he discusses, among many other things, the distinction between manifest and latent functions. He also discusses the role of serendipity in science, a topic that will be raised later in this book when we consider social change.

Coalitions are temporary alliances. As illustrated by the collaboration discussed in “The Consequences of Coalitions,” the ordinary people in a coalition put aside their differences in order to pursue the goals and objectives that they have in common. At the turn of the 20th century, for example,

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labor unions developed out of a temporary alliance of newcomers from Ireland, Italy, and Poland who put aside their vast differences to join together for the sake of a common objective—higher pay and better working conditions. In the 1940s and 1950s, the civil rights movement began as a coalition of blacks and whites who regarded bigotry as a common enemy deserving of a united response. In the 1960s, a coalition of women and Americans of color successfully lobbied for affirmative action legislation at the federal level, a goal that neither group would in all likelihood have achieved by itself. And coalitions against bigotry, violence, and hatred can have a basis in initiating positive actions, rather than merely responding to negative actions, on their own behalf. See Todorov's *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust* (1999).

Concerning "Children of the Organization Men," the classic treatment of the midcentury lifestyle of the loyal and obedient corporate employee can be found in William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956). Conclusions in this snapshot regarding the children of organization men were drawn from *The New Individualists: The Generation After the Organization Man* (1991), by Paul Leinberger and Bruce Tucker. For an enlightening account of how bureaucratic organizations systematically hinder the careers of women, read Rosabeth M. Kanter's *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1993).

In the aftermath of a school shooting, there is a predictable tendency to do considerable "finger pointing." We want to place the blame on the killer's parents, medications, and illnesses rather than on situational factors that might reduce the likelihood of a similar occurrence of violence in the future. In "Thwarting the Bullies in Our Schools," there is no finger-pointing to be seen. Instead, a two-pronged strategy is offered, one that aims at changing important aspects of the student culture in which school shootings find encouragement and support.

DEVELOPING IDEAS

✧ About the Group Experience ✧

1. Writing topic: Choose any book that focuses on a dangerous cult (e.g., Heaven's Gate, Jonestown, or Waco). Based on your reading, write an essay in which you discuss the aspects of the cult that were so influential in making members engage in dangerous behavior. In particular, focus on characteristics of both the leader and followers.