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# Enduring Issues in Sociology

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lation to other statuses. When he puts the rights and duties which constitute the status into effect, he is performing a role. Role and status are quite inseparable, and the distinction between them is of only academic interest. There are no roles without statuses or statuses without roles. Just as in the case of *status*, the term *role* is used with a double significance. Every individual has a series of roles deriving from the various patterns in which he participates and at the same time a *role*, general, which represents the sum total of these roles and determines what he does for his society and what he can expect from it.

Although all statuses and roles derive from social patterns and are integral parts of patterns, they have an independent function with relation to the individuals who occupy particular statuses and exercise their roles. To such individuals the combined status and role represent the minimum of attitudes and behavior which he must assume if he is to participate in the overt expression of the pattern. Status and role serve to reduce the ideal patterns for social life to individual terms. They become models for organizing the attitudes and behavior of the individuals so that these will be congruous with those of the other individuals participating in the expression of the pattern. Thus if we are studying football teams in the abstract, the position of quarter-back is meaningless except in relation to the other positions. From the point of view of the quarter-back himself it is a distinct and important entity. It determines where he shall take his place in the line-up and what he shall do in various plays. His assignment to this position at once limits and defines his activities and establishes a minimum of things which he must learn. Similarly, in a social pattern such as that for the employer-employee relationship the statuses of employer and employee define what each has to know and do to put the pattern into operation. The employer does not need to know the techniques involved in the employee's labor, and the employee does not need to know the techniques for marketing or accounting.

It is obvious that, as long as there is no interference from external sources, the more perfectly the members of any society are adjusted to their statuses and roles the more smoothly the society will function. In its attempts to bring about such adjustments every society finds itself caught on the horns of a

dilemma. The individual's formation of habits and attitudes begins at birth, and, other things being equal, the earlier his training for a status can begin the more successful it is likely to be. At the same time, no two individuals are alike, and a status which will be congenial to one may be quite uncongenial to another. Also, there are in all social systems certain roles which require more than training for their successful performance. Perfect technique does not make a great violinist, nor a thorough book knowledge of tactics an efficient general. The utilization of the special gifts of individuals may be highly important to society, as in the case of the general, yet these gifts usually show themselves rather late, and to wait upon their manifestation for the assignment of statuses would be to forfeit the advantages to be derived from commencing training early.

## Ascribed and Achieved Statuses

Fortunately, human beings are so mutable that almost any normal individual can be trained to the adequate performance of almost any role. Most of the business of living can be conducted on a basis of habit, with little need for intelligence and none for special gifts. Societies have met the dilemma by developing two types of statuses, the *ascribed* and the *achieved*. *Ascribed* statuses are those which are assigned to individuals without reference to their innate differences or abilities. They can be predicted and trained for from the moment of birth. The *achieved* statuses are, as a minimum, those requiring special qualities, although they are not necessarily limited to these. They are not assigned to individuals from birth but are left open to be filled through competition and individual effort. The majority of the statuses in all social systems are of the ascribed type and those which take care of the ordinary day-to-day business of living are practically always of this type.

In all societies certain things are selected as reference points for the ascription of status. The things chosen for this purpose are always of such a nature that they are ascertainable at birth, making it possible to begin the training of the individual for his potential statuses and roles at once. The simplest and most universally used of these reference points is sex. Age is used with nearly equal frequency, since all individuals pass

through the same cycle of growth, maturity, and decline, and the statuses whose occupation will be determined by age can be forecast and trained for with accuracy. Family relationships, the simplest and most obvious being that of the child to its mother, are also used in all societies as reference points for the establishment of a whole series of statuses. Lastly, there is the matter of birth into a particular socially established group, such as a class or caste. The use of this type of reference is common but not universal. In all societies the actual ascription of statuses to the individual is controlled by a series of these reference points which together serve to delimit the field of his future participation in the life of the group.

### **Sex as an Ascribed Status**

The division and ascription of statuses with relation to sex seems to be basic in all social systems. All societies prescribe different attitudes and activities to men and to women. Most of them try to rationalize these prescriptions in terms of the physiological differences between the sexes or their different roles in reproduction. However, a comparative study of the statuses ascribed to women and men in different cultures seems to show that while such factors may have served as a starting point for the development of a division the actual ascriptions are almost entirely determined by culture. Even the psychological characteristics ascribed to men and women in different societies vary so much that they can have little physiological basis. Our own idea of women as ministering angels contrasts sharply with the ingenuity of women as torturers among the Iroquois and the sadistic delight they took in the process. Even the last two generations have seen a sharp change in the psychological patterns for women in our own society. The delicate, fainting lady of the middle eighteen-hundreds is as extinct as the dodo.

When it comes to the ascription of occupations, which is after all an integral part of status, we find the differences in various societies even more marked. Arapesh women regularly carry heavier loads than men "because their heads are so much harder and stronger." In some societies women do most of the manual labor; in others, as in the Marquesas, even cook-

ing, housekeeping, and baby-tending are proper male occupations, and women spend most of their time primping. Even the general rule that women's handicap through pregnancy and nursing indicates the more active occupations as male and the less active ones as female has many exceptions. Thus among the Tasmanians seal-hunting was women's work. They swam out to the seal rocks, stalked the animals, and clubbed them. Tasmanian women also hunted opossums, which required the climbing of large trees.

Although the actual ascription of occupations along sex lines is highly variable, the pattern of sex division is constant. There are very few societies in which every important activity has not been definitely assigned to men or to women. Even when the two sexes coöperate in a particular occupation, the field of each is usually clearly delimited. Thus in Madagascar rice culture the men make the seed beds and terraces and prepare the fields for transplanting. The women do the work of transplanting, which is hard and back-breaking. The women weed the crop, but the men harvest it. The women then carry it to the threshing floors, where the men thresh it while the women winnow it. Lastly, the women pound the grain in mortars and cook it.

When a society takes over a new industry, there is often a period of uncertainty during which the work may be done by either sex, but it soon falls into the province of one or the other. In Madagascar, pottery is made by men in some tribes and by women in others. The only tribe in which it is made by both men and women is one into which the art has been introduced within the last sixty years. I was told that during the fifteen years preceding my visit there had been a marked decrease in the number of male potters, many men who had once practised the art having given it up. The factor of lowered wages, usually advanced as the reason for men leaving one of our own occupations when women enter it in force, certainly was not operative here. The field was not overcrowded, and the prices for men's and women's products were the same. Most of the men who had given up the trade were vague as to their reasons, but a few said frankly that they did not like to compete with women. Apparently the entry of women into the occupation had robbed it of a certain amount of prestige. It was no longer quite the thing for a man to be a potter, even though he was a very good one. . . .

## Achieved Statuses Compared with Ascribed Statuses

Ascribed statuses, whether assigned according to biological or to social factors, compose the bulk of all social systems. However, all these systems also include a varying number of statuses which are open to individual achievement. It seems as though many statuses of this type were primarily designed to serve as baits for socially acceptable behavior or as escapes for the individual. All societies rely mainly on their ascribed statuses to take care of the ordinary business of living. Most of the statuses which are thrown open to achievement do not touch this business very deeply. The honored ones are extremely satisfying to the individuals who achieve them, but many of them are no more vital to the ordinary functioning of the society than are honorary degrees or inclusions in "Who's Who" among ourselves.

Most societies make only a grudging admission of the fact that a limited number of statuses do require special gifts for their successful performance. Since such gifts rarely manifest themselves in early childhood, these statuses are, of necessity, thrown open to competition. At the same time, the pattern of ascribing all vital statuses is so strong that all societies limit this competition with reference to sex, age, and social affiliations. Even in our own society, where the field open to individual achievement is theoretically unlimited, it is strictly limited in fact. No woman can become President of the United States. Neither could a Negro nor an Indian, although there is no formal rule on this point, while a Jew or even a Catholic entering the presidential race would be very seriously handicapped from the outset. Even with regard to achievable statuses which are of much less social importance and which, perhaps, require more specific gifts, the same sort of limited competition is evident. It would be nearly if not quite impossible for either a woman or a Negro to become conductor of our best symphony orchestra, even if better able to perform the duties involved than any one else in America. At the same time, no man could become president of the D. A. R. [Daughters of the American Revolution], and it is doubtful whether any man, unless he adopted a feminine *nom de plume* [pen name], could even conduct a syndicated column on advice to the lovelorn, a



field in which our society assumes, *a priori*, that women have greater skill.

These limitations upon the competition for achieved statuses no doubt entail a certain loss to society. Persons with special talents appear to be mutants and as such are likely to appear in either sex and in any social class. At the same time, the actual loss to societies through this failure to use their members' gifts to the full is probably a good deal less than persons reared in the American tradition would like to believe. Individual talent is too sporadic and too unpredictable to be allowed any important part in the organization of society. Social systems have to be built upon the potentialities of the average individual, the person who has no special gifts or disabilities. Such individuals can be trained to occupy almost any status and to perform the associated role adequately if not brilliantly. The social ascription of a particular status, with the intensive training that such ascription makes possible, is a guarantee that the role will be performed even if the performance is mediocre. If a society waited to have its statuses filled by individuals with special gifts, certain statuses might not be filled at all. The ascription of status sacrifices the possibility of having certain roles performed superlatively well to the certainty of having them performed passably well.

When a social system has achieved a good adjustment to the other sectors of the group's culture and, through these, to the group's environment, it can get along very well without utilizing special gifts. However, as soon as changes within the culture or in the external environment produce maladjustments, it has to recognize and utilize these gifts. The development of new social patterns calls for the individual qualities of thought and initiative, and the freer the rein given to these the more quickly new adjustments can be arrived at. For this reason, societies living under new or changing conditions are usually characterized by a wealth of achievable statuses and by very broad delimitations of the competition for them. Our own now extinct frontier offered an excellent example of this. Here the class lines of the European societies from which the frontier population had been drawn were completely discarded and individuals were given an unprecedented opportunity to find their place in the new society by their own abilities.

As social systems achieve adjustment to their settings, the

social value of individual thought and initiative decreases. Thorough training of the component individuals becomes more necessary to the survival and successful functioning of society than the free expression of their individual abilities. Even leadership, which calls for marked ability under conditions of change, becomes largely a matter of routine activities. To ensure successful training, more and more statuses are transferred from the achieved to the ascribed group, and the competition for those which remain is more and more rigidly delimited. To put the same thing in different terms, individual opportunities decrease. There is not an absolute correlation between the degree of adjustment of a social system to its setting and the limitation of individual opportunity. Thus if the group attaches a high value to individual initiative and individual rights, certain statuses may be left open to competition when their ascription would result in greater social efficiency. However, well-adjusted societies are, in general, characterized by a high preponderance of ascribed over achieved statuses, and increasing perfection of adjustment usually goes hand in hand with increasing rigidity of the social system.



## *Social Structure Explains Social Behavior*

**BRUCE H. MAYHEW**

Bruce Mayhew, a widely published sociologist who followed the structuralist tradition of Georg Simmel, performed dozens of research projects that demonstrated the influence of social structure on social behavior. For example, Mayhew demonstrates mathematically in one article (1976) that power concentrates in a group of people as the group size increases. This finding supports Michels's concept of oligarchy, which you will read about in Chapter 4. Mayhew maintains that interaction patterns can and *should* be studied apart from their content. Patterned relationships, whether of individuals, groups, organizations, or institutions, can be mapped and the interaction networks studied.

In this viewpoint, Mayhew argues that patterned social relationships explain interpersonal interaction. For example, society specifies that professors and students communicate in expected ways regardless of which individuals the interaction involves: Professor Smith or Professor Gomez or student Jai Ling or student Chris Jones. Psychologists (or, in Mayhew's

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terms, "individualists") study individual behavior. Structuralists acknowledge that individuals behave, but study the ways social structure regulates interaction between individuals in various social positions. The same social principles that regulate interaction between individuals also apply to interaction between corporations or nations, depending on the positions they occupy in the social structure. Therefore, structuralists conclude that social structure determines social behavior.

## QUESTIONS

1. How does Mayhew support his claim that studying organizational forms is more productive than studying individual actions?
2. What does Mayhew say about network size?
3. According to Mayhew, what is the primary task of sociology?



Writing in 1847, Karl Marx formulated the view of society which I take to be fundamental: "Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations in which individuals stand with respect to one another". In this view, the individual is never the unit of analysis in either research or theory construction. Rather, in this *structuralist* conception of social life, sociologists are studying a communication network mapped on some human population. That network, the interaction which proceeds through it, and the social structures which emerge in it are the subject matter of sociology. Sociology is therefore the study of this network's *organization*. It is an attempt to construct and test explanations of variation in social organization.

Of course, structuralists conceive of their task in somewhat broader terms than "social organization" alone would suggest. They are also concerned with determining how social organization is related to other forms of organization. At a minimum, the latter include (1) the *organization of information* (symbols)—commonly called the cultural or ideological system—and (2) the *organization of materials* (tools)—commonly called the technological system. Most structuralists would also insist that ex-

plaining social organization presupposes a knowledge of the social network's underlying demographic structure as well as its ecological context (bio-physical and social environment).

In studying organization, structuralists are concerned with at least two kinds of phenomena: (1) aggregate properties of populations and (2) *emergent* (purely structural) properties of organization itself. An aggregate property is one which can be used to construct a variable by simple addition of bio-physical characteristics of individual population elements, e.g., population size. However, an emergent property can only be constructed from relations between population elements. In the case of social organization, an emergent property is one defined on the overall connectivity of the network, and is not, therefore, derived from characteristics of individual population elements. The division of labor and the degree of stratification are emergent properties of social organization.

## The Primary Task of Sociology

Structuralists do not study human behavior. The behavior they do study is that of the variables which define various aspects of social organization, its population, environment, ideological and technological subsystems. For structuralists, a general sociological theory is a set of theorems stated in terms of these variables, theorems which will predict and explain the structure and dynamics of societal phenomena. This is a rather large task—coextensive with sociology itself—and it has few workers in the United States.

Most American sociologists do not study sociology in the structuralist sense of the term indicated above. Rather, they merely assume the existence of social structures in order to study their impact on *individuals*, that is, in order to study *social psychology* (the study of the behavior and experience of individuals in social stimulus situations). In this subfield of psychology the objectives are expected to be aligned with those of general psychology, not necessarily with the objectives of sociology. In other words, most American sociologists adopt the *individualist* perspective in that the individual is their unit of analysis and so-called "human behavior" (in both its subjective and objective aspects) is the individual level phenomena they

seek to explain or interpret.

To a very large degree, this means that structuralists and individualists are asking different questions. They are attempting to explain different things. I would not say (as individualists often do) that structuralists and individualists are merely studying different aspects of the same phenomena. This may happen in a few instances, but generally their paths of inquiry diverge to such a marked degree that no shared language and no line of communication unites them in any common discourse. From my structuralist point of view, the psychological concerns of American sociologists do not bear on questions of social structure and organization, and at best would have only a secondary relevance to them. The reason for this is quite simple (say the structuralists). If one assumes the structure of society in order to examine its impact on the immediate acts, thoughts, and feelings of individuals, one has assumed most of what has to be explained (indeed, about 95 percent of the variation in human society) in order to study a small part of human activity and experience (about 5 percent—and as such, difficult to distinguish from random noise). Whereas, in the structuralist view, the primary task of sociology is not to assume the empirical conditions of social structure, but to explain its existence in the first place (the opposite of social psychology's concerns). The reason for this, of course, is that structural sociologists are interested in explaining most of what happens in human society, not some minute fraction of it.

## **Structuralists Study Relationships**

Individualists and structuralists, each within their respective domains of inquiry, can examine various relationships. However, I will select for illustration here only one for each. Out of all the types of relations between phenomena they may examine, the two shown in Figure 1 are exclusive to each approach. That is, as shown in Figure 1-A, structuralists may examine relations between one form of organization and another (at the same or different points in time), but individualists would never do this. Similarly, as shown in Figure 1-B, individualists may examine relations between one individual action and another (at the same or different points in time), but structuralists

would never do this. The two extreme cases shown in Figure 1 are intended to indicate just how far apart the two approaches can be (although Figure 1 does not exhaust the possibilities for either). To mention concrete cases, Figure 1-A is exemplified in Offe's treatment of the *relation* between the organization of occupational positions in a bureaucratic hierarchy (social organization) and the organization of ideas (information) about the way these positions are reputedly filled through rules of performance (ideological system). Figure 1-B is exemplified in Collins' discussion of the *relation* between what an individual talks about at one point in time (individual action) and what the same individual talks about at a later point in time (individual action).

Many individualists do not believe there is any difference between the phenomena distinguished in Figure 1. They would probably say that the organization in Figure 1-A is nothing more than the actions (behaviors) of individuals in Figure 1-B. Structuralists would reply that the individualists are wrong, or that any existing correspondence between the two is irrelevant. I will try to illustrate (very briefly) why structuralists see a difference between the two.

Figure 2 illustrates two forms of organization in social networks. Each is comprised of points and directed lines. Points may be interpreted as positions (not individuals) and directed lines as asymmetric social relations defining each network. The positions may be occupied by individuals, households, communities, associations, and the like. But—for the benefit of example—I will assume they are occupied by individual humans. The social relations may refer to any kind of communi-

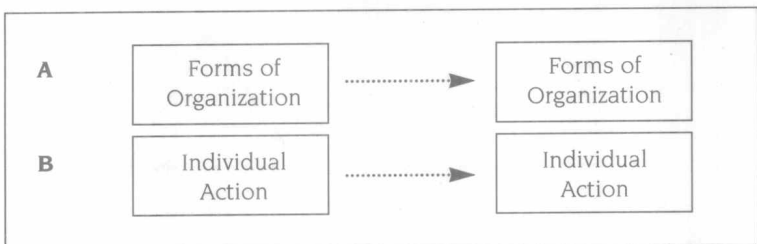


FIGURE 1. Structuralists relate forms of organization to one another (A), while individualists relate individual actions to one another (B).

cation link (direct or indirect) between positions (as long as their asymmetric quality is preserved). They could, for example, be interpreted to mean "has authority over." In this case, we would call the two forms of organization *dominance structures*, because they are defined by dominance relations, but also because they carry no identification of the concrete population elements occupying each of their positions.

The particular way concrete (identifiable) individuals are placed in the Figure 2 structures generates six *patterns* for the transitive form and two *patterns* for the cyclical form, as shown in Figure 3. The fact that these different patterns of individual arrangement can be identified means that individuals can change positions with respect to one another in a wide variety of ways *without altering the structure* at all. Not only can such form-preserving shifts in individual position occur, they have in fact been observed. And, since the shifts in position between concrete individuals can come about as a result of a wide variety of different actions (behaviors) of individuals, this indicates that *there can be a wide divergence between the actions of persons and the forms of organization they participate in*. In Figures 2 and 3, there is a much wider divergence between action and form in the transitive than in the cyclical configuration. Not only, therefore, may there be a disjunction between concrete behavior and organizational form, the degree of divergence is determined by the structure itself. And, the larger the set of population elements drawn together in such networks, the wider this divergence becomes.

Consider one more illustration of this difference. Figure 4

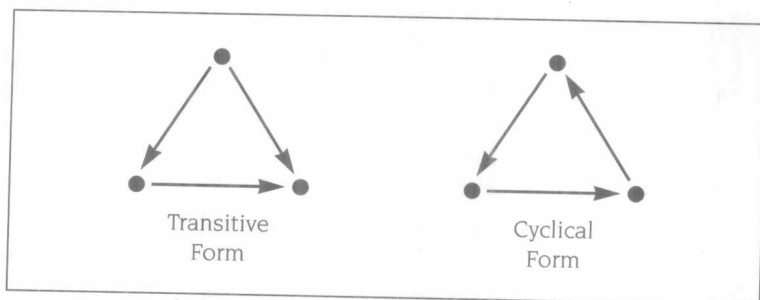


FIGURE 2. Two different forms of network organization.

shows six interaction networks drawn as points and lines. Points represent positions (or locations) and lines represent communication (and/or transportation) links between positions. For the moment, I will assume that the positions are occupied by individuals who communicate with one another along the indicated lines. The three networks on the left-hand side of Figure 4 all have the property that they can be disrupted by the removal of at least one point (position). That is, all three have at least one point which, if removed, will break off communication between other positions in the network. Points which can produce such disruption are called cut-points and networks containing cut-points are said to be point-vulnerable. The three networks on the right-hand side of Figure 4 have no cut-points and are, therefore, point-invulnerable. Regardless of which point we remove from them, the remaining positions are still in communication with one another.

Point-vulnerability and point-invulnerability are purely structural properties of social networks. They are derived from the organization of the network itself, not from the characteristics of individuals occupying various positions in them, nor from the characteristics of the positions themselves. A cut-point is a cut-point not by virtue of its own characteristics, but because of the way in which the network is organized. Whether a cut-point exists at all depends entirely on the struc-

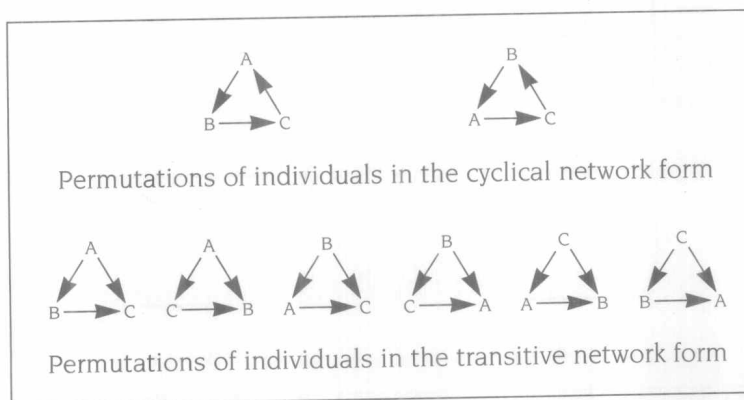


FIGURE 3. Concrete patterns of individual location in two different network forms.



ture of the network itself.

Social networks may vary a great deal in the number of cut-points they contain. The proportion of cut-points in a network is a measure of the a priori likelihood that it will be disrupted by a break in communication. It is also possible to assign a cutting-number to each cut-point. This cutting-number refers to the number of network pairs (of positions) which cease to communicate after the cut-point is removed (excluding pairs involving the cut-off point itself). The average cutting-number is a measure of the *magnitude* of a network's disruption potential, that is, of the degree of communicative disruption which is potentially contained in the *organization of the network*.

The amount of variability in all the above network properties depends primarily on the size of the network (the number of positions it defines). The larger the number of positions, the

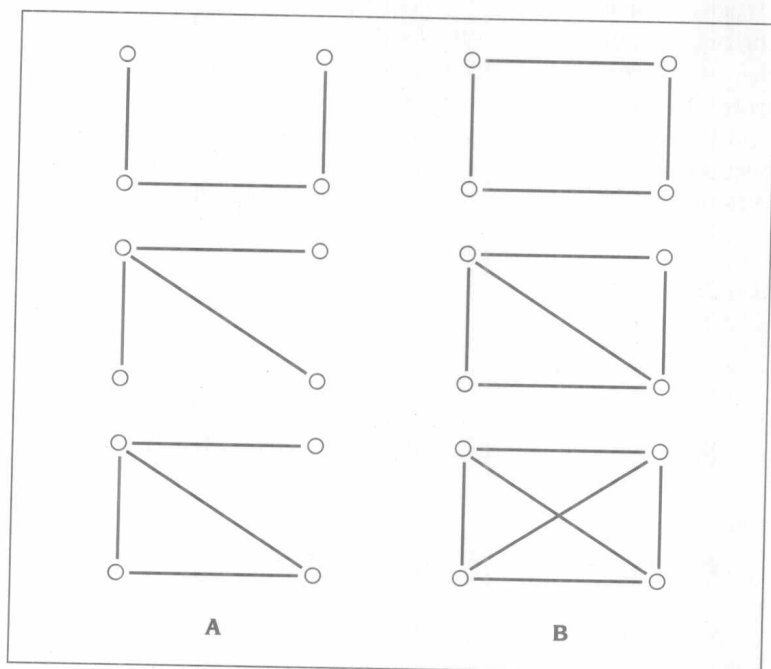


FIGURE 4. Point-vulnerable (A) and point-invulnerable (B) forms of organization in social networks.

greater the variability. In any case, all of these network properties depend directly on how the network is organized *and on nothing else*. The structuralist's concern with these properties involves relating them to other forms of organization, such as the division of labor and the degree of social stratification. That such concerns do not require paying attention to the concrete behaviors (actions) of individuals is easily discerned from Figure 4. Each of the networks in Figure 4 can channel wide varieties of individual action. These networks can map the flow of rumors, or business transactions, or moves in chess games, or any number of other concrete activities *without in any way altering the structural properties of each communication system*. In other words, there can be a wide divergence between activities of individuals and the structural relations through which these activities are expressed. It is for this reason (as well as for those mentioned in discussion of Figures 2 and 3) that structuralists consider the individualist equation of behavior = structure to be either false or irrelevant.

## A Projected Individualist Rebuttal

Dyed-in-the-wool individualists will have no trouble doubting everything I have just said about the illustrations in Figure 2 and 4. Perhaps they will want to reflect on the consequences of filling the network positions in Figures 2 and 4 with groups instead of individuals. In that case, the positions might be occupied by villages, factories, or battleships. Each position would then contain its own internal network of social relations. Under these circumstances, the connection between structure in the larger network and items of individual behavior within each position's micro-network admits an even wider divergence between network properties and individual action than anything I have mentioned before. The huge gap between the two indicates just how far individualists are from sociology.

The usual response of individualists to the kinds of differences I have been discussing here is to ignore them. Homans tells us that "the arbitrary lines we draw between the psychological and the social will disappear" if we are willing to adopt the psychological priority of studying individuals, while ignoring other considerations. If he had said "sociology will dis-