
Where the Action Is Small Groups and Recent Developments in Sociological Theory¹

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Although small group research has been somewhat marginalized within sociology during the past decades, the authors argue that a focus on interaction arenas can contribute to a more complete analysis of social life. Specifically the authors examine three central domains of sociological analysis—culture, organizations, and the economy—to demonstrate how a focus on the mesolevel of analysis allows for a merging of macrosociology and microsociology. The authors draw on the perspective of sociological miniaturism to provide a model for cross-level research.

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More than one-half century ago, the editors of the *American Sociological Review* devoted a special issue of the discipline's flagship journal to a set of articles exploring small group dynamics. The December 1954 issue was a defining event in what is now recognized as the golden age of group research, and it made a compelling case for the value of small group studies to sociology. Among the authors of these articles were a string of highly influential scholars within sociology and psychology, including Fred Strodbeck, Theodore Mills, Harold Kelley, Richard Emerson, George Homans, James March, Robert Freed Bales, and Muzafer Sherif. The focus of such an impressive collection of intellects on small groups can be read as an indication of how much the discipline has changed in the past 50 years;

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however, it also invites us to revisit an approach to sociological scholarship that takes small groups as its central concern—as the source and site of social processes in action, and as the lived connection between individuals and institutions.

We have reviewed the trajectory of this once-vibrant stream of research elsewhere (Harrington & Fine, 2000), tracing some of the factors that produced its marginalization. In this article, we assess present conditions and look toward the future, showing how small group research—although greatly diminished in visibility—is still where the action is, and will be, for sociological theory. We argue for the analysis of small groups as part of a larger project of sociological miniaturism—a microsociological approach that argues that core macro-structural issues of the discipline can be illuminated through the examination of small-scale phenomena (Stolte, Fine, & Cook, 2001).

A small groups perspective advances this agenda by contributing distinctive insights on the microinteractional processes from which institutions and other macro-social phenomena are created; that is, sociologists working in the miniaturist tradition use small group dynamics as the point of departure through which broader social forces, properties, and processes can be examined. In this view, interpersonal settings serve as “simulations” of microcosms of larger social units, in which basic processes can be observed in rich detail. For small group researchers, macro-sociology and microsociology are in a recursive relationship, mutually influencing and providing the foundations for each other’s existence.

Central topics of sociological inquiry, including change and stability, are embedded in the patterns of call and response between local and structural levels of analysis. To access these core research areas, we argue that sociology must reassert the centrality of performance and behavior, not just cognition and collective representations; that is, we propose a renewed focus on the sociology of action, which in turn leads to the analysis of small groups.

Understanding the action embedded in social contexts requires us to focus on the role of regular and routinized behaviors in the creation of social life (Collins, 1981, 2004). Interaction rituals provide not only the means of creating social networks but also the roles, routines, and traditions through which those networks become meaningful and consequential (Fine & Kleinman, 1979). In addition, small groups establish cultures that can be used to define past, present, and prospective futures for members; recognition of these temporal connections permits us to connect action to ongoing and sequential group affiliations.

Put simply, pursuing a sociology of action draws our attention to the crossroads of self and society: the small group. This position, exploring the

cartography of social life, has several analytical advantages. In contrast to a structural theory that downplays the role of the individual, or to a theory of agency that neglects the constraints imposed by social structure, a small groups perspective allows us to construct a localized theory of action that acknowledges structure and agency. Action always occurs in the here and now. This, in turn, generates theories that are able to address problems essential to the core project of social science—within and beyond sociology—including the challenges of understanding variation, conflict, and change.

To demonstrate the ways in which small group research is creating advances within contemporary sociology, we examine how research in the tradition of “sociological miniaturism” (Stolte et al., 2001) addresses core issues in three major research domains: cultural, organizational, and economic sociology. Scholars within each of these areas have acknowledged the limitations imposed by the lack of shared concepts and causal frameworks linking macro-social phenomena to local action. Within cultural sociology, for example, there is an ongoing debate as to whether to situate culture in the social structural level of analysis, connected to the work of Emile Durkheim (e.g., Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003), or the small group behavioral level, more closely linked to that of George Herbert Mead (e.g., Fine, 1979). This is related to the larger issue of defining *culture* itself: whereas one broad tradition in the field conceptualizes culture as a “toolkit” (Swidler, 1986) or as an action set that social agents can select and build through a process of bricolage, another tradition sees culture as habitus—a structural linkage to one’s position in a larger social system (Bourdieu, 1984).

Within organization theory, there have been increasing calls to reexamine a central concept: social networks. A growing body of research suggests that research in organizations may misspecify fundamental causal relationships by examining networks almost exclusively as a phenomenon of structural patterns among actors, rather than as a set of microinteractions with highly localized meaning and relational content (see Gulati & Westphal, 1999; Harrington, 2001, 2005; Podolny, 2001).

In the realm of economic sociology, the call to examine the effects of embeddedness has grown stronger in recent years, enlarging the scope of inquiry beyond the analysis of institutions and individuals. Small groups constitute the setting in which embeddedness is enacted in institutional domains such as the market; thus, a small group perspective permits a much more detailed, process-centered account of embeddedness. This, in turn, allows for two important contributions to the literature: greater operational specificity for the concept of *embeddedness*, and a clearer understanding of the aggregation processes (such as decision making or ritual activities) through which individual behaviors are connected to the macro-social level

of analysis. These recent developments suggest that an intensive focus on the mesolevel of analysis—the small group—can contribute to knowledge across core areas of sociological research. More broadly, our task is to demonstrate how an approach that uses small group research to examine locally constituted meaning and action can contribute to the ongoing social scientific project of linking individuals with the structures they create and inhabit.

Advancing Cultural Sociology

As early as 1917, Georg Simmel spoke of the sociology of culture as the study of action. Culture, Simmel (1950) wrote, is generated through the “simultaneity of interacting individuals which in each produces what cannot be explained on the basis of him alone” (p. 13); that is, culture is not merely a set of collective representations but an enactment based on social coordination. Simmel believed that in contrast to the conceptualization of culture as a product of the individual or the mystical—the creation of heroes or gods—culture is emergent through action.

Put another way, culture derives from the active creation of meaning and interpretations by social actors (Fine, 1979; Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). As Blumer (1969, p. 2) argued, people act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them; such meanings are created and modified through social interaction. In other words, social life is based on actions that include meaning making and interpretation within ongoing social relations.

Although an approach that emphasizes the collective representations that are linked to a Durkheimian model of social life proposes group and culture as a collective representation of society writ large, in practice groups are more than filters of collective representations: They are arenas of action. This explains why early group researchers labeled their approach *group dynamics*. Inherent in the study of groups are agency and change—concepts that are marginalized in a cognitivist approach that privileges collective representations. To suggest that “Culture . . . is a set of publicly shared codes or repertoires, building blocks that structure people’s ability to think and to share ideas” (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003, p. 735) is to ignore the actions by which groups commit themselves to participating in structures (perhaps accepting or rejecting these structures). Action allows for participation in social systems. To be sure, we do not assert that there is a fundamental division between talk and action: People do things in talk (Austin, 1975). However, making culture ideational diminishes its power as performance, embedded within a social structure. A tradition of research more than a century old

suggests that although persuasiveness of talk matters, copresence itself affects the course and meaning of action (Geen, 1991; Triplett, 1898; Zajonc, 1965).

We propose perspective on culture that recognizes the importance of locally situated meaning, embodied action, and the power of copresence. The background or known culture serves as a toolkit, from which participants draw to create meanings (Swidler, 1986). However, culture is not merely performed by active bodies but invented, negotiated, and contested. The small groups literature implies a feedback loop in which microlevels and macrolevels of culture mutually influence one another (Hallett, 2003).

The classic claim within the tradition of sociology—whether from Weber, Durkheim, Mead, or Simmel—asserts that society consists of people doing things together, in a structured environment that constrains and channels action. The theory of action has been central to sociology, including such dramatically different figures as Homans, Blumer, Parsons, and Goffman; the latter famously penned an essay titled “Where the Action Is” (Goffman, 1967). For Goffman, people are engaged in coordinating lines of action. Of course, Goffman played off the dual meanings of action—as risky excitement and as jointly constituted behavior. As such, “where the action is” is in a double sense sociology itself. As Goffman (1983) asserted, the interaction order has an existence *sui generis*; however, simultaneously it is the means through which things get done. The infrastructure of sociology is the omnipresence of collaborative social action. A sociology that lacks action depicts a world in which nothing is achieved, and movement is absent.

The analysis of group culture as a sphere of action has its roots in the 1930s with the influential experiments of Kurt Lewin (Lewin et al., 1939). Lewin and his colleagues demonstrated that the “climate” of a group, particularly its mode of solving problems and encouraging participation, shaped group outcomes. Although Lewin was a psychologist, the questions that he addressed became central to the sociology of culture.

The near-contemporaneous writings of William Foote Whyte (1943), observing the behavior of young men in an Italian-American corner of Boston, were more self-consciously sociological. Whyte discovered that the status that a man held in his peer group would, in time, affect behaviors as seemingly physical as his ability at bowling. Although bowling scores were initially uncorrelated with status, over time a young man’s sporting ability fell in line with his position in the group. Whyte’s ethnographic observations demonstrated the salience of a status structure on behaviors that shaped the culture of a group, which in turn affected personal identity.

Muzafer Sherif (1936), with his innovative experimental studies of the production of collective norms, demonstrated that norms were constructed

from and rooted in an emerging group culture. Sherif's psychological work on the autokinetic effect revealed that what one imagined one saw in ambiguous situations was shaped by the presence and response of others. Sherif sparked experimental research into group cultures, and this early research led to his influential and more sociological Robber's Cave study, uncovering the impact of group culture in creating (and resolving) intergroup conflict through the presence of superordinate goals (Sherif et al., 1961).

More explicitly sociological in intent, Fine's (1979) effort to merge a sociology of culture with group dynamics, wrote of "idiocultures," meaning "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction" (p. 734). Fine argued that group culture results from the interaction of the previous knowledge of group members (their known culture), their values (their usable culture), the group goals (their functional culture), and the status hierarchy of the group (their appropriate culture). These background mechanisms of selection produced traditions in response to the presence of a triggering mechanism, which group members could then use as a hook to recall those events that they shared.

The goal in depicting a set of mechanisms that generated and sustained a group's idioculture was to provide a strategy to analyze and compare group cultures systematically. Such a strategy recognizes the importance of the display of collective memory within group life, providing a shared past that makes the interaction order concrete and provides directions for a collective future.

A small groups perspective helps clarify debates between top-down, Durkheimian visions of culture—which suggest that content develops without the intention of particular social actors—and bottom-up interpretations, which focus on local interaction settings and cultural entrepreneurs as the engines of culture creation. In reality, culture is a multidimensional phenomenon, simultaneously involving top-down, bottom-up, and even lateral movement in the transmission of rituals, routines, symbols, and roles. In particular, the lateral dimension is a powerful contribution of the small group perspective on culture because it emphasizes the transfer of culture between groups within a social network (Fine & Kleinman, 1979). To examine this process of cultural transfer one needs to specify the type of interlocks that exist between groups (multiple memberships, acquaintanceship ties, and structural roles that transcend group boundaries). This emphasis on the diffusion of culture is enabled by the complexity of interaction arenas through which groups are "cross-pollinated" by cultural elements borrowed from the range of groups in which people participate, including families, workgroups, and other interaction settings, past and present.

Advancing Organizational Sociology

The temporal dimension of social life—the acknowledgement of linkages between past and present—has been notable primarily for its absence within the study of networks in organizational sociology. Although it has been recognized that interpersonal ties are critical for understanding social structures, by and large the research literature has been characterized by a static bias. Within organizational analysis in particular, the study of social networks has overlooked the dynamic and multifaceted qualities of network ties in favor of structural approaches (Ibarra, 1992b).

One consequence has been what Mark Granovetter (1992) termed the problem of “temporal reductionism” (p. 34) in network analysis, in which interpersonal ties are treated as if they were unaffected by time and history. This omission is particularly striking because the impact of historical momentum and precedent on organizations has long been acknowledged at the macro-level (see, e.g., Stinchcombe, 1965). However, as Granovetter emphasized, “Built into human cognitive equipment is a remarkable capacity, depressingly little studied, to file away the details, and especially the emotional tone, of past relations” (p. 34). It is equally noteworthy that the static and ahistorical treatment of networks obscures agency and action—the forces that drive change, tone, and content of interpersonal relations over time.

This neglect of “emotional tone” or relational content in networks has led to growing speculation among scholars that the current structural approach may misspecify network effects in crucially important ways (Podolny & Baron, 1997). As a result, several recent studies have demanded research dedicated to “delineating the critical role of tie content” in organizational networks (Gulati & Westphal, 1999, p. 499; Mizuchi, 1996). According to these authors, studying the content of social ties means looking closely at the underlying relationships and behavioral processes among actors. Whereas a handful of recent studies have offered evidence that variations in relational content affect outcomes ranging from strategic alliances (Gulati & Westphal, 1999) to individual career advancement (Podolny & Baron, 1997), little subsequent work has emerged to take up this theoretical and empirical challenge.

One reason for this delayed development of network concepts has been the neglect of the small group level of analysis, where the interaction so essential to these new theoretical directions can be studied; that is, network research has lacked the tools necessary to access the phenomena of temporal change and emotional content in interpersonal ties. Those tools are available in small group research.

There are numerous ways that an action-centered perspective, focused on relational, interactional settings, could make immediate, significant contributions to the study of social networks. For example, network research could benefit from investigating how networks are constituted through linkages among members of small groups; among other benefits, this line of research would promote much-needed expansion of the conceptual vocabulary that defines *network characteristics*. It has become increasingly clear that the few constructs currently used to define the qualitative properties of networks—such as “weak” versus “strong” ties (Granovetter, 1973)—are insufficient to delineate the dimensions of social space in which interpersonal ties grow. Among other problems, the weak-strong terminology does not map consistently onto the resources and outcomes attributed to networks, suggesting that causal relationships are far more complex than previously suspected. For example, Hurlbert, Haines, and Beggs (2000) demonstrated that weak ties—the arms’ length connections among acquaintances that are usually associated with instrumental ends like job finding (Granovetter, 1973, 1985; Marsden & Hurlbert, 1988)—can also serve as crucial sources of social support: an outcome previously attributed to strong ties among friends and relatives (Campbell, Marsden, & Hurlbert, 1986; Lin, Woelfel, & Light, 1985). To untangle these complex relationships and develop a more fine-grained analysis of networks, we need to build theory through close attention to interaction in small group settings.

Research focused on localized action can also help extend knowledge of how structure operates. For instance, although the importance of groups and teams is a given within the organizations literature, questions about the impact of social networks within workgroups have been neglected. Instead, most network research in organizations looks either at interorganizational relationships (Uzzi, 1997) or at the uses of networks by individuals building careers within organizations (Ely, 1994; Ibarra, 1992a). This leaves a whole level of analysis within organizations unexamined—a level that is often of greatest managerial concern because outcomes such as performance and morale are commonly measured at the workgroup level.

Indeed, it is curious that although organizational research has long acknowledged the importance of groups such as top management teams, committees, and boards of directors, the tools of small group research have been little used to study these phenomena. Given that workgroups are rarely constructed *tabula rasa*—composed of members who have no history together or prior ties to one another—organizational researchers need a perspective that will allow them to examine the impact of the shared pasts and intricate webs of connection that individuals bring into organizations. That these prior ties can be crosscutting or in conflict with one another—even con-

stituting “competing commitments” (Harrington, 2005) that undermine the objectives of the organization—is a subject deserving of far more attention than it has received to date.

Harrington’s (2001) research on small groups of investors in the stock market suggests a fruitful strategy for addressing these challenges to organizational sociology. Extending beyond the structural approach, her work focuses on the interpersonal core of social networks: the kinds of relations they represent, and the consequences of those relationships for group performance. Her findings suggest that the vocabulary of organizational sociology should be expanded to include not only the distance or structural pattern of networks but also the affective or instrumental content of the relationships. In instrumental relationships, network ties serve organizational ends; in affective networks, by contrast, organization interests serve social ends. Her data show that groups’ financial performance (as measured by the returns on their stock portfolios) is positively correlated with the proportion of instrumental networks—defined as primarily utilitarian and goal oriented in nature—linking group members. In contrast, affective ties—defined as bonds of liking and socioemotional affiliation—represent “competing commitments” (Harrington, 2005) for workgroup members: Although such ties enhance morale, they are negatively associated with portfolio performance. This suggests that the kind of socioemotional bonds that have been found to have positive effects for individual careers and interorganizational relationships can have negative effects within organizations.

This has significant implications not only for network research but also for studies of social capital, which have tended to view socioemotional bonds as an asset with unmitigated benefits (Krackhardt, 1992). As recent scandals in the corporate world have attested, social ties in the workplace can cut both ways, as asset and liability. In a series of high-profile cases, investigations have focused on malfeasance among top management teams, boards of directors, and other groups in which bonds of friendship and loyalty have taken precedence over the interests of shareholders and of the organization as a whole. Such observations about the “dark side of social capital” have been incorporated into the recent literature on immigrant entrepreneurs and family businesses (e.g., Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993) but have rarely been extended outside that realm. Yet 50 years ago, classic works like Gouldner’s (1954) *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* and Selznick’s (1957) *Leadership in Administration* documented the ways in which socioemotional bonds could be destructive to industrial and public organizations.

We cannot untangle conceptual complexities in network research, such as the double-edged nature of affective bonds at work, without a continued exploration of action at the small group level in organizations. Harrington’s

research reminds us that by taking this perspective we cannot only achieve a better conceptual specification of network properties but also address the reality that instrumental and affective ties are alive and well in modern organizations. We need to build on the provocative (but sparse) findings suggesting that these competing forces in network relations may influence business, social life, politics, and the economy to a greater extent than current research suggests.

Advancing Economic Sociology

Economic sociology seeks to understand the social underpinnings of the economy, money, and markets. The core proposition animating this project is that social, cultural, and economic forces are inseparable. This is where the term *embeddedness* assumes its central role in theory and research, capturing a defining concept in economic sociology in a single word. However, what does it mean to say that economic behavior is embedded in social life? To continue advancing research in this field, we need a more concrete, closely specified answer to that question—an answer that small group research is well positioned to provide.

The contributions of small group research to developing better operational understandings of embeddedness is particularly clear in studies of trading floors. Beneath the apparent anarchy of traders yelling and gesturing at each other, researchers have uncovered highly organized miniature social systems, composed of small groups governed by microsociological processes such as network ties, identity, and status (Abolafia, 1984; Baker, 1984). This enhanced understanding of groups in economic life is essential theoretically and empirically because small groups are the settings in which many of the most important decisions affecting the U.S. economy (and thus the global economy) are made. This includes groups such as the Federal Open Markets Committee, which sets interest rates and fiscal policy for the country, and the numerous investment committees within corporations and mutual funds that allocate billions of dollars to securities markets.

This application of sociological miniaturism enriches economic sociology by specifying the interactional processes through which macro-level phenomena (such as the stock market) are constituted. In other words, the small groups perspective provides economic sociology with a means to evaluate claims about macro-level phenomena by examining the mesolevel behavior of agents within the system. The value added by taking this perspective includes the distinctive way that it directs scholars “from studying the institutions in which economic activity is embedded to analyze the actual

calculative practices of actors” (Buenza & Stark, 2004, p. 370). This reframes the definitional problems around *embeddedness* by posing the question at a different level: How do particular groups and practices embody and “perform” the economy?

One area in which the small groups perspective has been particularly helpful is in understanding the changes represented by a class of economic actors that recently emerged into unprecedented social and economic prominence: the so-called retail or amateur investors. If scholars are to take seriously the emerging claims of behavioral economists—a branch of economics that questions many of the classicists’ assumptions about individual rationality and autonomy—that “investing in speculative assets is a social activity” (Shiller, 1993, p. 167), a sociology of small groups is uniquely well situated to examine the ways in which investing is social; that is, in what ways is the stock market embedded within practices and performances in interactive settings? Research conducted 40 years ago by social psychologist George Katona (1975) established that correlations in the ownership of specific stocks are extremely high within neighborhoods, suggesting that small group settings—such as the block party or the carpool conversation—are crucial for understanding knowledge transfer, decision making, and other behaviors that subtend the stock market.

The small groups approach has provided insight into the sources and impact of the populist investment explosion of the 1990s, which resulted in unprecedented levels of stock market participation. These changes, through which more than one half of American adults became shareholders in less than a decade, were heralded as a new era of “shareholder democracy” (Weisberg, 1998, p. 30) and as “one of the great social movements” (Samuelson, 1999, p. 62). Yet these sweeping claims about socioeconomic change were not being evaluated by social scientists. One of the first studies to examine the phenomenon was Harrington’s (in press) research on investment clubs—small groups of 10 to 15 people who meet monthly to invest in a jointly held stock portfolio, much like do-it-yourself mutual funds. As the leading edge of the populist investment movement, an estimated 11% of American investors were involved in a club (National Association of Securities Dealers, 1997); these groups collectively own U.S. \$125 billion in stocks (comparable to the largest pension funds in the world) and pour an additional \$190 million each month into U.S. securities markets (National Association of Investors Corporation, 2002).

Small groups like investment clubs make an important contribution to economic sociology because their meetings allow the process of investment to be available for observation and analysis. For example, Harrington’s study (in press) included a year of observation of group dynamics within invest-

ment clubs, yielding insights into several key social psychological processes that operate among amateur investors. A particularly salient finding of this study was that, in addition to considerations of profit, investors also chose stocks based on social identity processes. In particular, investors expressed concern about the ways in which their stock purchases would reflect on them as men, women, and moral people. Men and women alike, from all socioeconomic strata, described their investments as a form of self-expression, sending messages about everything from their political commitments to their gender identity.

Such findings highlight a major contribution of small group studies: Whereas psychologists such as Katona (1975) could only study the outcomes of social interaction among investors, small group sociologists study the interactions and decision processes directly as they occur. In settings such as the monthly meetings of investment clubs, individuals look to each other for clues about normative and “rational” behavior. In fact, individuals constantly use interaction settings in this way, searching for indicators about how to behave, particularly under conditions of uncertainty or change.

The influence of the group setting is not limited to amateur investors but pervades the realm of finance professionals as well (Buenza & Stark, 2004; O’Barr & Conley, 1992). As one prominent economist put it, “apart from a few lonely Warren Buffetts, institutional investors exist in a community that is exceptionally closely knit by constant communication and mutual exposure” (Friedman, 1993, p. 215). If even professional investors do not fit well into the classical economic paradigm, one might wonder if anyone does. So the behavior of amateur investors, instead of being exceptional for its permeability to social influences, turns out to be the norm, with the capacity to shed light on investor behavior across economic and social domains.

Finally, small groups are of increasing importance to economic sociology as new information technologies permit an ever-growing range of transactions to be conducted in the absence of face-to-face interaction. This is part of a larger phenomenon known as Castells’ paradox, in which “as more information flows through networked connectivity, the more important become the kinds of interactions grounded in a physical locale” (Buenza & Stark, 2004, p. 370; Castells, 1996). Castells suggested that small group settings for economic transactions will be accorded increasing value by market participants as machine-mediated interaction becomes more common.

Implications: Where the Action in Small Groups Is Leading Sociology

We have just begun to suggest an understanding of action as localized in small groups. Too often sociologists have excised this mesolevel of analysis: the interactional arenas that link individual action to social structures. By ignoring what action means within ongoing social units, we are left with theories that depend on a black box of meaning. There is much that is within that box that deserves our close attention.

The examination of interaction is what we are calling for, yet with a proviso. We also propose a linkage between interaction and memory. By focusing on the group, we examine a space in which interaction has a past, present, and future. Interaction is meaningful, not merely in its structured immediacy, but because of its referential, temporal character. Put another way, a small groups perspective calls our attention to the ways in which collective action and collective memory belong to ongoing interaction spheres. In this, we do not deny the routine and implicitly scripted features of anonymous or role-based interaction but suggest that they are embedded in a nexus of shared pasts and prospective futures.

Recent developments in sociological theory suggest that miniaturism is necessary to achieve generalization. This is one implication of Merton's (1957) call for more "theories of the middle range." It is precisely through a careful examination of the mesolevel of analysis that we discover how social structure is constructed, and how conflict, change, and variation occur across social settings.

We do not suggest that sociologists should turn back the clock to the "good old days" of half a century ago. Rather, we assert that recognition of small group theories and processes can help us make significant conceptual advances in those core research domains of cultural, organizational and economic sociology. Small groups are still where the action is.

Note

Editor's Note: Two years ago, we published a special article from A. Paul Hare expressing his views on the state of certain areas of study within small groups. We recently received this article from Brooke Harrington and Gary Fine. Like the Hare article, it seems to have a special place in a discussion on the future of small group research. Coincidentally, the authors begin by talking about a special issue of *American Sociological Review* (ASR) from 1954. One of SGR's predecessor journals—*International Journal of Small Group Research* (IJSGR)—used to publish "Classic Reprints." Fred Strodbeck's introduction to that special issue of ASR was reprinted in Volume 1, Number 2 of IJSGR (September 1985) and the table of contents from that issue was reproduced as well. Twenty years later, we are once again looking at a call for revitalizing small group

research in the field of sociology. And so, we decided to publish this piece and invite comments and responses from our readers.

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