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Coming Together: New Taxonomies for the Analysis of Social Relations

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In previous work, we have noted a certain rigidity in sociology's approach to the topic of social relations (Cerulo 1997; Cerulo and Ruane 1997; Cerulo, Ruane, and Chayko 1992). With few exceptions, literature on the subject dichotomizes social relations with reference to the scope of the interaction (small group versus large group) and the mode by which social actors connect (direct connections versus mediated connections). Further, many researchers implicitly rank the social value of each relational form. Sociologists typically identify a society's primary and most valuable relations as the result of direct, physically copresent exchange, exchange involving relatively few interactants. In contrast, secondary relations often are characterized as faceless, impersonal, ingenuous, and fleeting—the result of large-group exchange established via mediated or mechanized connections. Cerulo (1997) suggested the need to reformulate any definition of social relations built upon the small group/large group or the direct/mediated dichotomies. She presented several critical elements upon which new definitions could be built. In this piece, we configure those elements, building six new analytic taxonomies—tools we hope will provoke a richer discussion of connecting, interacting, and resulting forms of social relations.

Imagine that you have just arrived home from the office. You log on to your personal e-mail account hoping to check the day's messages. But before printing the correspondence you have selected, your unit produces a letter earlier left in its memory. A steamy, sexual message, obviously part of an ongoing dialogue, flows off the printer's rollers. The letter is addressed to your spouse—and it is not from you.

John and Diane Goydan of Bridgewater, New Jersey, do not have to imagine this scenario; they have lived it. And in January of 1996, this unfortunate turn in the Goydans' relationship became national news. Indeed, Diane's Internet adventure may chart new legal terrain. For when John discovered that his wife was involved in an on-line love affair, he sued her for divorce—on grounds of adultery.

Note that Diane Goydan never met her on-line lover, "Weasel." The couple shared no fervent gazes, no soft strokes or soulful kisses. Their cries of sexual passion were typed not spoken, and their sighs and shudders were mediated by clicking keys and a flashing cursor. In the absence of "physical evidence," did Diane commit adultery? That is the question before a New Jersey court.

From a sociological perspective the court's dilemma extends well beyond adultery. Indeed, the Goydan case raises issues sure to be central within future sociological discourse. In evaluating Diane Goydan's behavior, the court will be forced to problematize the meanings of connection, interaction, and the very nature of social relations. In this way, the Goydan case, as well as other recent cyberspace phenomena, beckon sociologists' most serious attention. Such events encourage us to consider new definitions and analytic tools in evaluating the ways and means by which social actors come together.

In previous work Cerulo (1997) presented several critical dimensions upon which new definitions of social relations could be built. In this article we configure those elements, building six new analytic taxonomies—tools we hope will provoke a richer discussion of connecting, interacting, and resulting forms of social relations.

Current Perspectives on Social Connections and Relations

Elsewhere, we have noted a certain rigidity in sociology's approach to the topic of social relations (Cerulo 1997; Cerulo and Ruane 1997; Cerulo et al. 1992). With few exceptions literature on the subject dichotomizes relations with reference to the scope of the interaction (small group versus large group) and the mode by which social actors connect (direct connections versus mediated connections). Further, many researchers implicitly rank the social value of each relational form. Sociologists typically identify a society's primary and most valuable relations as the result of direct, physically copresent exchange, exchange involving relatively few interactants. In contrast, secondary relations often are characterized as faceless, impersonal, ingenuous, and fleeting—the result of large-group exchange established via mediated or mechanized connections.[1]

The small group/large group and direct/mediated dichotomies so often applied in the study of social relations emerge from a well-established tradition of sociological thought. In reviewing this tradition, one can identify a series of conceptual categories, categories that both created and currently sustain the bipolar vantage points from which sociologists consider the nature of social life. Toennies's definitions of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* initiated the tradition to which we refer:

> All intimate, private, and exclusive living together, so we discover, is understood as life in *Gemeinschaft*. *Gesellschaft* is public life—it is the world itself. . . . *Gemeinschaft* is the lasting and genuine form of living together. In contrast to *Gemeinschaft*, *Gesellschaft* is transitory and superficial. Accordingly, *Gemeinschaft* should be understood as a living organism, *Gesellschaft* as a mechanical aggregate and artifact. (1957 [1887], pp. 32, 34)

Toennies's categories not only differentiate the scope of interaction and ways of connecting, but the categories attach a value to the relations that emerge from

different types of bonds. Thus in Toennies's work, *Gemeinschaft* encompasses the face-to-face and the familiar, the intimate and the enduring—indeed the vital paste of social life. *Gesellschaft*, in contrast, suggests a modern, anonymous world; the category connotes impersonal, transitory, and segmented relations, the "mere coexistence of people independent of each other" (1957 [1887], p. 32).

Durkheim promoted a vision similar to Toennies's in specifying mechanical and organic solidarity:

> We shall recognize only two kinds of positive solidarity. The first (mechanical) binds the individual directly to society without any intermediary. In the second (organic), he depends upon society because he depends upon the parts of which it is composed. . . . the society in which we are solidary in the second instance is a system of different, special functions which definite relations unite. (1933 [1893], p. 129)

While Durkheim characterized both mechanical and organic solidarity as positive relational forms, the latter condition clearly embodies a more precarious existence. Organic solidarity is integral to modern existence. Yet the mediation that defines organic relations permits the potential for social severance. In this way, relations based on mediated exchange carry the greater risk of anomie.

Simmel, too, contributed to the bipolar conceptual tradition of which we write. In comparing rural and small-town relations with those of the metropolis, Simmel consistently assigned primacy and richness to the former. For Simmel, metropolitans reacted with head rather than heart, making them "insensitive and quite remote from the depth of personality" (1950 [1908], p. 411). The author viewed citizens of the metropolis as the victims of multifacity, their relations mediated by the means of exchange:

> The metropolitan man reckons with his merchants and customers, his domestic servants and often even with persons with whom he is obliged to have social intercourse. These features of intellectuality contrast with the nature of the small circle in which the inevitable knowledge of individuality as inevitably produces a warmer tone of behavior, a behavior which is beyond a mere objective balancing of service and return. (1950 (1908), p. 411)

For Simmel, metropolitans were individuals in the extreme, lacking expressive contact and a strong sense of *we-ness*.[2]

It is important to note that each of these concept pairs describes "before and after" states of social relations. Each author identifies modernization as the agent driving the shift from one relational form to another. In varying degrees the authors cast modernization as a villainous agent of change, for they imply that the movement from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from mechanical to organic solidarity, from the small town to the metropolis, is largely negative in its consequence. Modernization and the social relations it spurs can separate human from human; the move toward modernity enlarges the social stage and brings mediation to interpersonal exchange, often sterilizing the ties that bring social actors together.

Moving Forward

The conceptual dichotomies heretofore reviewed may well have captured the realities of their day. Yet we note that the continued presence of these categories in the literature[3] implies an essential or natural basis for the distinctions the concepts draw. Further, continued adherence to such "before and after" designations sustains a vision of modernization as inherently dangerous and alienating.[4] Recent events in the modernization stream—particularly advances in communication technologies—provide us with concrete observations that challenge such a premise. Fiber optics, the Internet, rapid satellite transmissions, virtual reality imaging, and other new communication technologies (hereafter called NCTs) have rescaled and revamped human exchange.[5] Consider just some of the amendments and alterations these NCTs have introduced to daily life.

Many note, for example, the bonding function of television, writing of the medium's growing success in focusing and integrating collectives. Television has successfully created environments in which communities of the mind can ensue. The medium now offers meaningful supplements and substitutions to traditional rituals of cohesion. Katz (forthcoming, p. 3) notes that this aspect of television

> can be dated to the coronation of Elizabeth, and includes the first presidential debates, the funerals of John Kennedy and Itzhak Rabin, the moon landing, the royal wedding, the Olympics, the pilgrimages of the Pope (especially his first visit to Poland), the mid-east peace ceremonies (beginning with Sadat's surprise visit to Jerusalem), Watergate, the Hill-Thomas affair, the O-J trial, and so on.

In the fall of 1997, we were reminded once again of television's ritualistic powers. The medium became central to the many who grieved the death of Princess Diana of Wales. ABC commentator Cynthia McFadden praised television's ability to unite, noting that "this phenomenon is about something bigger than Princess Diana. This phenomenon is about the connection people want to feel with one another." Commentator George Will also reflected on television's ability to bind the public in grief, albeit in more negative terms than his colleague. Addressing the medium's week-long coverage of Princess Diana's death, Will noted:

> The media is serving a felt need on the part of the public . . . This weepiness on the part of people for a stranger they never knew and who meant nothing in their lives requires some profound analysis, because it does seem to me that we are seeing behavior that may be a window on the future—a wired world caught up by television in these kinds of derivative ecstasies.[6]

Both McFadden's and Will's comments underscore a broader trend. Whether viewed in positive or negative terms, television's growing role as a catalyst of community appears uncontested.

Internet technology too has rescaled and revamped the nature of human exchange. Phenomena such as on-line discussion groups help to illustrate the

point. Within these technologically generated sites, one frequently observes highly intimate interpersonal exchange; many on-line discussion groups facilitate primary ties of friendship and love that rival those of copresent relationships. The Goydan adultery incident earlier discussed provides a case in point. But technological ties that bind are not restricted to the sexual domain. Consider the following disclosure:

> All of a sudden, this morning, I realized that I was old. That's just it. I never noticed it before, not really. But this morning, I realized that there is no longer any given week in which I don't have a doctor's appointment. I thought about my diminishing energy . . . about how much more difficult it is to hear, to see, to endure long walks, the cold, the heat; I thought about how much more difficult it is to walk my black lab on a leash. . . . My children are angry with me. They want me to be vital, helpful, present. They simply can't accept that I just can't do it.[7]

These are difficult words to read; they represent intimate, personal feelings. It is likely that most who review this testimony would identify it as a very private disclosure—a confidence shared between two close friends, or perhaps a sober exchange between a client and her/his therapist. Yet the testimony is neither. We know the narrator of this message only by a "pseudonym," and the message is addressed to scores of individuals that the narrator has never, and probably will never, meet—members of an on-line discussion group. This interaction, one that most would automatically assume to be the product of an intense, copresent encounter, is really the stuff of a strange new realm—a bodiless cyberspace of action.[8]

Beyond the basic discussion group, research documents the ways in which virtual reality technologies allow actors to traverse time and space. Consider computer-generated multi-user domains typically called MUDs. MUDs refer to networked softwares that allow individuals to join on-line virtual communities. In such communities individuals project one or multiple persona, controlling the actions of these persona within virtual space. In this way MUDs permit perceived face-to-face interaction with figments of the mind and entities of the past and future. Turkle (1997, p. 74) reflects on this phenomenon, giving voice to her own experiences with MUDs:

> I use the personal computer on my desk to access MUDs. Anonymously, I travel their rooms and public spaces (a bar, a lounge, a hot tub). I create several characters (some not of my biological gender), who are able to have social and sexual encounters with other characters (some of my virtual gender, others not of my virtual gender). My textual actions are my actions—my words make things happen. In different MUDs, I have different routines, different friends, different names.

Turkle's comments illustrate the broadened scope of present-day social relations. Indeed, her comments suggest that virtual reality technologies facilitate interactions and connections between the real and the imagined.[9]

The possibilities and complexities introduced by NCTs demand new analytic frames. Thus, this paper proposes six multidimensional taxonomies better suited to the study of social relations as they exist within the current social environment. In creating these taxonomies, we de-emphasize the traditional cues of social relational forms—the small group/large group and direct/mediated dichotomies so well entrenched in sociological thought. We build instead on a broader array of factors, factors that characterize social interaction and social connection. We readily acknowledge that the taxonomies to follow may not be exhaustive. Similarly, the components that comprise these analytic tools may require refinements, additions, or exclusions. Nevertheless, we offer these six relational forms as a starting point. We view them as vehicles—vehicles we hope will steer sociological discourse away from the bipolar categories traditionally applied in the analysis of social relations.

New Taxonomies of Social Relations

Social relations are the product of several factors, factors that encompass the *qualities of social interactants,* the *nature of interaction* itself, and the *characteristics of the connections that bind interactants to one another.*

With regard to interactants' qualities, for example, the *social overlap* of those involved in an exchange helps to define social relations. Relations that emerge from interactants with similar social profiles (e.g., income status, level of education, race, religion, etc.) may differ significantly from those that emerge from socially distinct interactants. The *role qualities of interactants* contribute to social relations as well. Different experiences ensue in interactions that unite individuals with particularistic versus universal role qualities;[10] the greater the degree of particularism embodied by interactants, the more unique their exchange.

In considering the nature of interaction, the *frequency of interaction* helps to define the nature of social relations. Regular and consistent exchange builds different relations than moderate, irregular or sporadic exchange. Social relations also are influenced by the *balance of the interaction.* Mutual disclosure and consideration builds relations that differ from those founded upon one-way disclosure or exploitation.

With regard to connections, the *strength of the connections* formed through interaction helps to define social relations, with strong ties leading to different relations than weak ties. The *duration of the connection* that binds interactants proves important to social relations as well. Permanent or long-term connections result in relations that differ from those built upon temporary or short-term ties. The *scope of the connection* is also relevant for study. Multiplex connections— those maintained across a variety of settings and life spheres—build different relations than uniplex connections—those confined to narrow, specific moments and sites. Finally, *connection maintenance* contributes to the resulting form of

social relations. Connections maintained by trust among participants differ from bonds maintained through formal surveillance mechanisms.[11]

We distinguish relational forms by attending to ways in which the dimensions of the eight factors here defined co-vary in social settings. We also attend to situations in which certain factors overpower the importance of others; we argue that certain relational forms demand an equal emphasis of all of the aforementioned factors; in other conditions certain factors necessarily drift to the background of attention. Table 1 details our design, displaying six distinct types of social relations.

In noting our definitions of relational forms, the factors we have excluded are as relevant as those included. Recall that most treatments of social relations rely on small group/large group and direct/mediated dichotomies. We argue that in the current social environment, these two dichotomies are no longer central to defining social relations. Indeed, each of the relational types proposed in this article can emerge from *both* small-group or large-group exchange, and can be built via direct *or* mediated connections. We underscore this point as we present and unfold six taxonomies of social relations.

I. Enduring Intimacy

Enduring intimacy represents the most intense and encompassing relational form. It is most often found among those with great social overlap, for such "common ground" maximizes the potential for meaningful exchange. Participants in enduring intimacy typically inhabit particularistic roles. In this way, interactants enjoy a unique exchange specific to the qualities of participants. Note that enduring intimacy is ignited and facilitated by frequent and regular interaction, and such relations demand fair and balanced exchange. On these bases, those involved in enduring intimacy build strong, long-lasting, and multiplex ties, ties sustained by mutual trust rather than formal surveillance.

Typically, sociologists consider enduring intimacy as the product of direct, copresent small-group exchange. To be sure, enduring intimacy often emerges from such conditions. The literature on mate selection, friendship, and family interactions suggests that the closest and most long-lasting of marriages, partnerships, friendships, and familial relations likely grow from frequent and balanced face-to-face interaction between individuals who enjoy broad social overlap and inhabit particularistic roles.[12] Such relations are characterized by strong, long-lasting bonds that are multiplex in nature and maintained by trust.[13]

In the current social environment, however, enduring intimacy can have new and different roots. NCTs have made it possible for individuals to establish enduring intimacy in large-group, mediated contexts—contexts in which physical copresence is absent. Consider, for example, the text to follow. These words comprise a farewell message sent by Rick, a member of an on-line discussion

Table 1
Six Taxonomies of Social Relations

Dimensions	Traditional intimacy	Situational intimacy	Target convergency	Collaboration	Public involvement	Formal affiliations
Social overlap	High	Variable	T→C: Low C→C: High	Variable	Low	High
Role qualities	Particular	Universal	T: Particular C: Universal	Particular	Universal	Universal
Frequency of interaction	High	Low	High	High	Moderate	Low
Balance of interaction	Balanced	Variable	Unbalanced	Variable	Balanced	Unbalanced
Bond strength	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak	Weak	Weak
Bond duration	Long-term	Short-term	Long-term	Long-term	Variable	Long-term
Bond scope	Multiplex	Uniplex	Multiplex	Uniplex	Uniplex	Uniplex
Bond maintenance	Trust	Surveillance	Trust	Surveillance	Trust	Surveillance

group for the terminally ill. Rick has never seen or directly interacted with the many on-line users to whom his message is addressed.[14] Yet his testimony highlights the enduring intimacy that links Rick to his fellow discussion group members.

> I don't feel clear much any more. Good luck to everybody. It was really great talking to all of you. I loved hearing about your lives and your work and your kids. I would have loved to have had some, but not in this world. Maybe the next. I loved hearing about your screwed up personal lives. In comparison, I felt almost normal for the first time in my life, which is weird considering I was dying. I felt like I had the best, most loving family in the world. Sorry when I got angry, but I couldn't stay angry here for long.[15]

Rick's message to his discussion group references all the criteria of enduring intimacy. Research shows, for example, that users of on-line discussion groups typically share demographic characteristics: socioeconomic status, levels of education, etc. (e.g., Henry 1997; Rushkoff 1997). Thus the social overlap of Rick and his fellow discussants is likely to be high. Similarly, Rick's familiarity with other members' histories—his references to the experiences and tribulations of other discussants ("I loved hearing about your screwed up personal lives")—indicates both the particularistic roles filled by these interactants and the high frequency with which their interaction occurs. Rick also makes clear that group members know of his problems just as he knows of theirs ("In comparison, I felt almost normal for the first time in my life, which is weird considering I was dying"), suggesting that the interaction occurring in this group is a balanced one. Note too that the sentiments conveyed in this on-line farewell emerge from strong bonds, bonds developed over time ("I felt like I had the most loving family in the world"). Further, the connections that bind Rick to other group members reach across various facets of the participants' lives (kids, work, personal lives, dying). This general sense of familiarity and closeness enables an environment of trust; group members feel free to share the very core of their being.

The enduring intimacy enjoyed by Rick and his fellow interactants can be found across the Internet. Indeed, many of the elements that characterize Rick's relations with the members of his group emerge in other on-line groups as well. The comments to follow represent excerpts from an on-line support group for cancer patients. The factors that comprise enduring intimacy clearly reside in this talk.

> Katy: Guess I have probably missed everyone. I don't know where time goes. . . . Hi Neda and Chicklets, know you are long gone but hello anyway. Josh is sick with a 102 fever, and aching and chilling, so probably no school for him tomorrow. Will try to get on tomorrow and check on everyone's news. Hugs and Blessings.

> Mousey: Good morning everyone. Missed everyone yesterday evening. Busy today, so probably won't get back on, but hope everyone has a wonderful day. Katy, hope your son is better today. Revat, hope you have a good day. Nedahug same to you. Bye for now.

Serena: Good morning friends. Just passing through . . . have a bunch of stuff to do today . . . I will try to get on tonight and catch some of you that I haven't talked to before. Our pal Joseph on here, cancer tests came back all right, but he's in a lot of pain with his neck, so we've got to keep him in our thoughts. Hey Revat, still no puppy!!! You might have to wait for it as an Xmas present. Rene is on vacation and Nedahug and Kaycee are at work. Crafty, we've missed you on here and Sparky, how are things going . . . I think we need a mini newspaper here posted so we can keep track of all that is happening and how treatments are going. Talk to you later.[16]

Katy, Mousey, and Serena are among the many individuals for whom this on-line site has become a haven—an emotional checkpoint. The familiarity, the history, the strong enduring bonds expressed in members' disclosures attest to the special relations emerging from this group. These examples and others like them confirm that enduring intimacy supersedes issues of group size and physical co-presence. Rather, such relations result from a more complex array of factors—factors that emerge among the few or the many and in both direct or mediated settings.

II. Situational Intimacy

Situational intimacy suggests significant yet fleeting relations. Such relations emerge from single, isolated interactions or from a sporadic series of exchanges. Yet for individuals in certain social locations (those less integrated due to age, occupation, life circumstance, etc.), such encounters as they occur one after another may collectively come to form one's dominant relational experience.

The transitory nature of situationally intimate relations can unite the socially similar or the socially distinct. Further, the interactional balance of such relations is difficult to specify; interactants may engage in balanced or unbalanced exchange. Ultimately, situational intimacy is contingent on circumstance rather than interactants' personalities, demographic profiles, or histories. Thus, the interactants involved in such relations typically occupy universal roles. Nevertheless, situational intimacy may be moving, comforting, or deeply emotional. Such relations can generate strong bonds among interactants. Yet, the connections established within situational intimacy are of short duration and they typically rest upon limited areas of shared experience. These factors give situational intimacy an ephemeral quality. Under such conditions, trust is not likely to emerge, as participants know they will revert to being strangers once the circumstance of their union is gone.

Situational intimacy can be witnessed across a variety of social settings and conditions. It can occur, for example, within dyads and small groups—contexts in which interactants enjoy physical copresence and direct communication. Consider the following scenarios. An individual confides in a bartender, detailing her/his spouse's recent affair. A person ventilates with a hairdresser, describing the

growing tensions of her/his job. While on a lengthy airplane flight, two strangers share the pain involved in the illness or death of a parent. A group of volunteers bond as they participate in an disaster rescue team. Each of these cases presents situational intimacy; each describes relations emerging from moving, emotional, perhaps memorable encounters. These encounters are not planned or predictable. Rather, they are spurred by setting or circumstance. Thus, the characteristics of the players involved in such relations are less important than each player's presence at a certain place or moment in time. Indeed, the interactants involved in each of the scenarios described here may never meet again. So while their encounters establish a strong bond, that connection is temporary and constantly surveyed.

Situational intimacy is not restricted to small-group encounters. Such relations can emerge from large-group exchange as well. An outdoor concert audience becomes synchronized by an emotional rendition of the national anthem; a group of moviegoers unite with fear as a tale of terror unfolds; racetrack spectators join in horror after witnessing a disastrous collision; a nation's citizens gather in the streets for the funeral procession of a fallen leader. In such settings previously unrelated individuals join for a single exchange. In the course of that exchange, however, such individuals can be collectively moved, simultaneously experiencing the heights of pride, the depths of terror, the devastation of destruction, or the pain of grief. These interactants, be they socially similar or distinct, share a moment. They are temporarily united by a deep and emotional bond, a bond triggered by their collective inhabitance of a significant social event.

It is important to note that situational intimacy does not require physical copresence. Such relations are often established in mediated contexts as well. The following exchange presents us with one such example. These excerpts are taken from an on-line chat group entitled "Married but Flirting."[17] A user named Ljones401 encounters Roadwarrior. Fifty-six other interactants, all with the ability to monitor or enter the conversation, are linked to the group as the two interactants build a relationship. The encounter begins with the simple exchange of some background information:

Roadwarrior: So tell me a little bit about yourself. Where are you from?

Ljones401: I'm from East Texas. How about yourself?

Roadwarrior: I'm from Florida.

Ljones401: How old are you?

Roadwarrior: 39

Ljones401: I'm 43. I hope you like older women!

Roadwarrior: Definitely.

Ljones401: I like your name. Are you a truck driver?

Roadwarrior: No. I work as a prison guard.

Ljones401: That sounds interesting.

Roadwarrior: It can be. Every day can be an adventure. How about you. What do you do?

Ljones401: I'm a housewife . . . which is good because it leaves me some free time.

After this initiating material, the two begin to chat with a greater degree of familiarity. For example, they speak quite candidly about their reasons for using the chat group:

Roadwarrior: So. It sounds like you have a nice life. You sound happy. But you must like to have fun. Is that why you're here?

Ljones401: Fun . . . uh I'm not sure what you mean by that. I don't do cybersex.

Roadwarrior: No, just fun I mean. Relaxing . . . a little spark in the day. The day gets so long otherwise, everything always the same.

Ljones401: Then, OK. I guess I do. I come on here and have some special time for me.

Roadwarrior: That's really cool. Just steppin' out a little bit. Just talking again to new people.

Ljones401: Getting back out into the world—into life. Meeting people like you makes me feel good, connected again sort of.

Roadwarrior: Tell me about those kids?

Ljones401: Yeh, I have two nice kids. Girl and a boy.

Roadwarrior: Do they wonder what you're doin'?

Ljones401: They're too young to read, so I'm safe for now.

Like most of those individuals looking for situational intimacy on-line, Roadwarrior and Ljones401 rarely repeat their on-line rendezvous. Instead, they move from chat room to chat room, reserving the ability to change their identities with each move. They carve out a string of on-line encounters and build unique harbors of intimacy—special spaces custom-tailored to their personal needs.[18]

Situational intimacy represents a distinct form of social relations—a unique mode by which social actors come together. As was true for enduring intimacy,

the relevant dimensions of situational intimacy are numerous; its defining criteria move well beyond small group/large group and direct/mediated dichotomies.

III. Target Convergency

Target convergency unites social actors in a common focus, a focus that rivets members of a collective to a special cultural icon or social figure. In target convergency, targets occupy a particularistic social role; they add a unique element to such relations. Convergers, in contrast, occupy universal social roles; they are virtually interchangeable. As such, little social overlap likely exists between target and convergers. However, the overlap among convergers may be significant. As target convergency forms, convergers "meet" or interact with their target on a frequent basis: they observe the target via the media, they join with the target at scheduled personal appearances, or they interact with the target in their fantasies. These mechanics constitute unbalanced interaction; under such circumstances, the scales of disclosure are tipped. In such many-to-one relations, convergers generally know more about their target than the target could possibly know about them. Yet target convergers typically develop strong, wide-reaching, and enduring bonds, bonds directed both toward the icon as well as other convergers. Within this context bond maintenance takes on a personal character as the aura of worship that breeds target convergency enables blind trust in the target.

Target convergency can be found in small-group, copresent settings; settings in which people become linked via a commonly shared center. Local fan clubs or small regional campaign groups provide a good example of the phenomenon. In such settings, individuals create target convergency based on their mutual enthusiasm and dedication to a celebrity, a political candidate—a "symbolic core." Together, these convergers come to "know" the target of their esteem via public relations material, media spots, correspondence, and personal appearances. Often, some convergers will acquire unique materials—letters, photos, interviews—that they will share with the broader group. As convergers revolve around their target, they come to know one another as well. This process creates strong, multiplex, and enduring bonds, bonds sustained by the aura of the target. A sense of faith and trust congeals the group as members work together for a common cause.

In certain settings, target convergency can become quite extreme. The ties that bind interactants to both their target and to one another can prove so overpowering as to beckon fanatical commitment. In recent years, we have witnessed this phenomenon as it occurred among members of the religious group, Heaven's Gate. In reading the testimony of Heaven's Gate members (documents posted on the group's web site), one immediately recognizes the cues of target convergency. Members speak of an obsessive commitment to "Do," the symbolic center of Heaven's Gate. Do provides group members with their purpose—the "bottom

line," as he calls it, of their existence. Do embodies a unique, charismatic per-sona—a persona that successfully ties others to him and through him connects followers to one another. The aura of Do creates a blind trust among his followers; these convergers live out their lives in the service of their target's goals. Note these qualities in "My Ode to Do," a posting from cult member Qstody:

> How can I express my testimony when human words could never be adequate to describe my infinite gratitude for the Next level and its Representative Do. Do rescued me from a nightmare of a dead existence. It seemed as though I was drowning in an ocean of the blind, lost, uncon-scious, walking dead. . . . I felt angry, alienated, hopeless, incomplete and utterly unsatisfied in this world no matter what I tried. . . . Do was a life preserver in this void of traps. . . . Now, I want to be considered as a possible candidate for viability in Do's world, the real Kingdom of Heaven, the headquarters of all creation. . . . My only desire is to be grafted to Do's unlimited mind, right on up to the Chief of Chiefs.[19]

Through Do, Qstody also bonds with others who share his devotion to this target. He writes, "Thank you, all of my classmates, each and ever one of you who make this journey with me for your help and encouragement." Qstody is not alone in such sentiments. Tddody, another member of Heaven's Gate, expresses similar ideas:

> The only true happiness I have ever known is when I am with my teacher Do . . . My classmates are the only ones on earth that understand me and what I've been through, as I understand them and know what they've gone through. Each and everyone of us has only one desire and that is to be like and to serve Do, to complete our task here and to return to the next level.

Target convergency is not confined to small-group settings. Such relations regularly emerge within large, media audiences. Many of our readers may witness this phenomenon firsthand as they watch significant children in their lives link to *Barney, Wishbone,* or later, *Beavis and Butthead.* At certain moments of every day, thousands of convergers become riveted to the broadcasts that bring these targets into their homes. Convergers often then join together to recount and relive the antics of their target. Convergers often correspond with their targets via fan letters, special phone lines, e-mail, and interactive web sites. Further, convergers will acquire books, stories, toys, games, etc., that make their affiliation with these characters tangible and constant. In essence, convergers join as members in a specially targeted group. In so doing, they develop a strong, long-term bond with both the target and other like-minded, like-hearted fans.

To be sure, target convergency in large-group mediated settings supersedes the fictional world of children. Earlier, we referenced the broad nature of this relational form in discussing the public's attachment to Princess Diana of Wales. Target convergency enabled thousands worldwide to experience Diana's death as if she were a member of one's family. Along similar lines, the relationship that

bonds media personality Oprah Winfrey and her fans exemplifies target convergency as well. Note that Oprah Winfrey views herself as a real and tangible presence within the space of her audience's lives. She confides in her fans; she discloses to them; she attempts to provide for them.[20] Indeed, her fans provide Winfrey with a *raison d'être* or a life purpose:

> Every day, my intention is to empower people and my intention is for other people to recognize by watching our show that you really are responsible for your life. . . . I think I can be a catalyst for people beginning to think more insightfully about themselves. (Taraborrelli 1997, p. 146)

Open and forthcoming, icons such as Oprah Winfrey encourage trust among target convergers. Social scientist Jennifer Hollet notes:

> A conversational style of speech, a direct gaze at the camera, or direct reference to the audience gives the viewers an apparent role in the interaction. This allows them to feel that they have a one-to-one relationship with her. It is this phenomenon that motivates TV viewers to mail Winfrey 5,000 letters each week and inspires fans to make comments such as the following: "Oprah is me. We're both black, we're both the same age, we treat people the same way. That could be me." (1997, p. 2)

Indeed, Winfrey's stance establishes strong and enduring bonds among convergers—bonds that convergers experience as meaningful and authentic. J. Randy Taraborrelli captures the phenomenon in the following account:

> By now, Oprah has developed such a strong connection with her viewers that watching her is rather like spending time with an old friend. In fact, some of them feel a little too connected. With great grace, Oprah merely chuckles about fans who send her their utility bills and department store invoices and expect her to pay them because they're a little short. A few have gone so far as to send her the late notices and complain "You didn't pay it." (Taraborrelli 1997, p. 146)

The "targets" of target convergency are not always human in form. Objects and products often prove capable of stimulating convergence. This process emerges quite clearly within the realm of marketing. Consider the relations that marketers build between a product and its potential consumers. Marketers bombard potential consumers with frequent representations of their product; they encourage frequent contact between product and consumers. Marketers also disclose the particular qualities and histories of their product, while consumers disclose little to those targeting them.[21] The marketer's goal is to develop a strong, long-term link between consumers and the product—what marketers typically refer to as "product loyalty." Indeed, marketers wish individuals to converge on a product-oriented identity. They wish consumers to become *"Tommy Hilfiger* people," members of a *"Sears Craftsman* home," frequenters of *"My McDonalds,"* or *"Chase* bankers." Further, marketers work to develop consumer trust toward their products, and they encourage consumers to include the product in all facets of their daily lives. These characteristics of the consumer-product relationship

mirror those of target convergency. The successful marketer establishes a long-term commitment that draws consumers together via product appeal and usage.

Whether located in small-group or large-group settings, whether established via direct or mediated exchange, target convergency represents a distinct relational form—a unique interplay of interaction and bonding that brings social actors together.

IV. Collaboration

Collaboration constitutes a fourth form of social relations. Like the other relational forms heretofore discussed, collaboration bears its own unique characteristics. The roles of those involved in collaboration, for example, are particularistic, and participants interact with high frequency. The bonds developed between collaborators are enduring and long-lasting. However, the connections which develop among collaborators tend to be weak rather than strong and uniplex rather than multiplex. These qualities deem surveillance the logical form of connection maintenance for those involved in collaborative relations. Note that the social overlap of interactants and the balance of the interactions themselves are not central to the nature of collaborative relations. Collaboration can relate the socially similar or the socially distinct; it can involve balanced or unbalanced exchange.

Examples of collaboration as it emerges in small-group and copresent settings abound. Doctor-patient or therapist-client relations offer good illustrations. In these contexts, professionals and clients engage in regular and frequent exchange. Further, the interactants are particular to the exchange. Clients choose a doctor or therapist on the basis of reputation or "chemistry"; doctors and therapists are trained to treat each client as a unique case. The connections established between doctor and patient or therapist and client can be quite long-lasting. However, these bonds are weak and targeted toward a specific task. Further, surveillance is invoked to maintain the tie. Clients, for example, rely on credentials and ethical codes to guarantee the practitioners' credibility. Similarly, practitioners rely on credit records and background checks to guarantee credibility. Note that the social overlap between participants in such interactions can vary; clients may or may not share the class, gender, or racial status of the professional. Similarly, collaborators' interactions may or may not be balanced; balance depends on the client's experience and expertise in the field at hand.

The relationships formed between colleagues and coworkers illustrate collaboration as well. Professors and graduate students, junior executives, bosses and secretaries, members of a sales team: all interact on a frequent, sometimes a daily basis. Within these exchanges coworkers become familiar with the unique qualities—both talents and flaws—that each individual brings to her/his position. Thus colleagues and coworkers occupy particularistic roles. Note also that the

connections that bind colleagues and coworkers are enduring ones. Such ties generally are maintained for one's history at a work site. However, such ties are weak rather than strong. Indeed, building strong connections in collaborative contexts is often discouraged or prohibited—i.e., professors are discouraged from dating their students; some firms prohibit dating or marriage between their employees. Connections among colleagues and coworkers are most often uniplex in nature; such ties are task-related and mobilized for highly focused purposes. Further, such ties are maintained via surveillance versus trust largely due to the formality and competitiveness that often characterizes the workplace. Indeed, coworkers are often socialized to "watch their backs" or "create a paper trail" in order to document actions resulting from the collaboration.

Collaborative relations can be established without face-to-face contact. Indeed, collaborators sometimes opt for a mediated link in the face of copresent conditions. Thus individuals who work in the same establishment may favor telephone, office memo, or e-mail communication. Despite the potential for direct, face-to-face exchange, such relationships may thrive on mechanized modes of connecting. These comments offered by a graduate student in a large state institution illustrate the phenomenon:

> Email has really improved my relations with "Professor X." I don't know . . . I just feel free to contact him much more often. I don't feel as if I'm bothering him because I know he can read my message at his convenience. I never felt that way when I had to contact him by visiting the office or telephoning, you know? I notice we have much more contact using email than we ever did before. In fact, we've had some of the most interesting exchanges of my graduate career using email as opposed to waiting for face-to-face meetings.

Often, face-to-face contact is not an option for social actors. Yet collaborative relations develop and thrive nevertheless. Consider, for example, the rising tide of long-distance brokering. Increasingly, broker-client relations develop on the basis of on-line or telephone exchange. A client may never meet her/his broker. Indeed, the broker may be located in a different state or region of the country. Yet the collaboration confined to such mediated connections proves identical in character to other examples heretofore reviewed. For example, broker-client contact is regular and frequent, with both brokers and clients occupying particularistic roles. Clients choose brokers on the basis of their personal performance, and brokers approach their clients as unique cases. The bonds that unite brokers and clients can be long-lasting, yet they are weak and strictly targeted. Further, both brokers and clients carefully monitor one another's moves; brokers survey their clients' ability to invest; clients survey their brokers' return.[22]

Collaboration also occurs within large groups, groups in which actors never engage in direct, face-to-face contact. To illustrate this point, we offer an on-line

discussion group—a newsgroup devoted to the topic of rape. Members of "talk.rape" engage a variety of issues. For example, victims of rape may enter the group seeking medical, legal, or therapeutic referrals. Others engage the group with concerns of false rape accusations. Still others log in to discuss rape-related news, laws, and politics. Discussion occurs on a regular basis, with many members checking in daily. As interaction ensues, group members develop unique identities and interact over lengthy periods. Yet the ties that connect these members are weak and uniplex; these individuals target their discussion within very narrow substantive terrain. Further, the formal tone of the site precludes total trust among members. Many individuals employ pseudonyms; most members closely survey the behavior of other interactants.

Excerpts from a recent talk.rape discussion help to illustrate the collaborative nature of this group. Note this exchange triggered by the message of first time user, Valerie. Valerie visits the site to report her recent rape:

> Please somebody help me. I was attacked yesterday and he raped me. I spent the whole night in the hospital, undergoing tests of all kinds. I haven't slept in two days. I need somebody to tell me that this is not always going to be like this.

Valerie's first response comes from Laurie, a longtime member of talk.rape. Laurie is thoughtful and supportive, yet professional in tone:

> First, I'm sorry to hear this happened to you. It's happened to a number of people in this group. Different stories, different pain, different ways of recovering from it. . . . There is probably some type of rape crisis center near you or perhaps someone in the hospital could put you in touch with an appropriate place. . . . I hope you have friends and/or family members you can talk with about this. It's OK to tell someone close to you that you feel like you're going crazy. And you can certainly talk about it here. . . . I think you'll be okay . . . its going to get better . . . in time, with the support of others and clear thoughts of your own, these feelings that are gripping you will smooth and soften.

Another group member offers a similar type of response:

> It will not always be as bad as it feels now. You will be able to sleep and peace will come to you. . . . but act as QUICKLY as you can in getting this guy put away, as much as you would like to just go away somewhere and heal in solitude. If you can just grit your teeth for a little while and put up with it, try to get the justice system involved.

Clearly a tie is being built here, but it is weak and uniplex in substance. Valerie is encouraged to "stick around" and establish a long-term link (you can always talk about it here). Yet, her tie to the group will always revolve around the limited terrain of her rape experience.

The emphasis on surveillance is apparent in talk.rape discussions as well. Sensitivity and diplomacy on the part of members is never assumed. Rather, all comments are carefully monitored. Social control is invoked when a member fails

to meet certain standards of etiquette. For example, note the following remark from Buzz, a frequent talk.rape user:

> What did you do to encourage this incident Valerie?

The formal surveillance mode that characterizes the group's collaborative relations encourages other group members to respond to Buzz in the name of group maintenance. Laurie writes,

> Wow. That has got to top the list of insensitive and tactless and just plain SHITTY things to say. Period. Buzz, if that was intended to further this argument we've been having about what constitutes "provocative behavior," then this was not the time.

In defense of his actions, Buzz suggests that Valerie is a fake, attempting to rationalize his insensitivity in the name of surveillance:

> She's a troll.[23] Whadda you people, blind?

Laurie responds,

> Uhh . . . a person comes to a newsgroup called talk.rape and posts something about being raped two days ago and having great difficulty dealing with it. Yeah, I guess that's pretty hard to believe, Buzz [sarcasm].

Indeed, using surveillance to maintain group ties encourages other members to engage in the sanctioning of Buzz. Anthony writes,

> Buzz, you are quite possibly the most twisted person I've heard from in any group in quite some time. Never mind the vague possibility that Valerie did something to encourage her rape. Never mind the equally irreverent and vague possibility that she's lying. Are you that off in the head enough to have total disregard for anyone's else's life?

Richard echoes the sentiment:

> We have someone who has been hurt, is looking for help, and you decide to make it worse? God almighty! What a maggot brain.

This exchange as well as all of the examples in this section illustrate the formality and goal-centeredness that define collaborative relations. Indeed, collaboration represents a unique relational form. And like the other typologies heretofore discussed, this relational form is contingent on a variety of factors—factors that move beyond issues of group size or interactants' mode of connecting.

V. Public Involvement

Public involvement refers to a focused sense of "we-ness"; such relations emerge from a specifically shared identity and a set of shared experiences. Participants in public involvement occupy universal roles, and the social overlap of these interactants is likely to be low. Those engaged in public involvement share

only a common commitment to an activity, a belief, or a cause. Yet, interactants gather with moderate regularity, and upon such meetings they share a balanced exchange—all interactants are givers and takers in the collective experience. The bonds that characterize public involvement are weak, with resulting relations being casual rather than intense. Such bonds may be short-term or may endure for many years. Yet they remain uniplex in nature, connected to a specific site or interest. Both the narrow, focused ground upon which participants meet and the presence of common commitment allow a sense of trust to develop among those engaged in public involvement.

Public involvement can occur in small-group, copresent settings. Certain sites of modern volunteerism illustrate the phenomenon. Consider, for example, the individual seeking to make a monthly commitment of time to some cause. Rather than joining a group with a formally structured schedule, the individual opts for a more flexible commitment. Being handy, the individual chooses "Habitat for Humanity" as her/his cause. Each month, the volunteer calls an 800 number and she/he is assigned to a local work site. Each month's work—a volunteer's repertoire of involvement—solidifies one's membership in the group and one's identity as a "Habitat worker." While volunteers do not necessarily share demographic characteristics, they develop an affinity based on their common commitment to the cause. Each volunteer contributes as a member of a team—one cog in a working apparatus. Ties between workers are weak and focused on the task at hand. People come and go from the organization, making the duration of bonds variable. Yet while "on the job" a certain mutual trust develops among participants. This trust arises from the mutual commitment that brings interactants together.

Larger social bodies such as churches and civic organizations are often the sites of public involvement. Robert Wuthnow (forthcoming) provides a number of illustrations in his analysis of civic involvement. Consider the case of Janet Stetson, age 38, whose main form of involvement is her son's elementary school PTA. Janet's reflections on her experience in the PTA underscore the characteristics of public involvement. For example, "building trust among the parents who take part in PTA activities is Janet's main reason for being involved" (p. 222). As she becomes more involved with other PTA parents, she feels gratified at working with others who share her school-related priorities. Janet notes,

> It's just been kinda nice to get to know other parents in the school who really care and to see what they're doing . . . and while I'm doing the work, it's not just me working, it's other people pitching in, and we're able to laugh and tell stories, or whatever. (p. 225)

Interactants such as Janet who are engaged in public involvement become bonded by the knowledge that they share a key focus. While participants may come to that focus from very different social locations, their mutual commitment creates

a space where they can express a shared concern and engage in like action. Wuthnow summarizes the phenomenon this way:

> People who experience this kind of trust and dependability in civic organizations sometimes express it simply as a sense of belonging. As a result of routine interaction over a period of time, members learn that the group has developed a culture or style of its own that supersedes changes in membership or the idiosyncrasies of specific individuals. . . . They start to share a common history and a common set of assumptions that helps them to anticipate how various members are likely to behave (p. 225–26).

Public involvement can emerge in leisure settings as well—settings that unite hundreds, perhaps thousands, of interactants. Consider the experiences of season ticket holders—regular attendees of professional or college sporting events. Such events merge individuals of different backgrounds, rebuilding them as a single collective motivated by common purpose. Note that while such participants are copresent, they are numerous. As such, embedded mass media can play a pivotal role in the creation of a shared cognitive framework. Purcell (1997, p. 103) reflects on the phenomenon, arguing that

> Mass media . . . provide a channel for, and a manifestation of, the collective focus of a group, bringing what formerly existed on a cognitive plane into physical reality. . . . Large video screens, electronic scoreboards, and public address systems focus the attention of thousands of participants on a single thought or image, usually a symbolic representation of the collectivity (i.e., a mascot, player, logo, or fight song). . . . Scoreboard airings confirm for each individual, and thus for the group as a whole, the purpose of the group's existence.

According to Purcell (1997, p. 103), embedded mass media create the opportunity for balanced interaction—even among thousands:

> Mass media rooted within stadiums and arenas allow group members to experience and *re-experience* an event or item as a totality. Replaying a close-up image of a winning goal or costly error allows group members to share that experience at the same exact moment in the same exact way, and often results in a *spontaneous collective response* from the fans (i.e., an audible gasp, a standing ovation, or loud booing). Both the image aired on the screen, and the manifest response from the stands, enhance shared identity by allowing individual group members to *share an experience simultaneously with those around them*. (Emphasis added.)

In large-group mediated settings, mass media can facilitate group trust; such media beckon members of a focused collective to release feelings and emotions:

> Embedded technology does more than enable collective thought; it facilitates collective action. When a particular musical arrangement is played over a public address system, or the words to a group chant or fight song appear on a scoreboard screen, it encourages each member of the collectivity to respond in a particular way. Thousands of people may break into a chorus of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," perform the "Chop" at an Atlanta Braves baseball game, or sing their team's fight song. These rituals reaffirm the collectivity's solidarity by providing a visible, physical display of the common feeling experienced in the collective conscience. (Purcell 1997, p. 104)

These examples illustrate a fifth distinct form of social relations. And like the typologies discussed heretofore, group size and mode of connection remain less than central to public involvement's definition.

VI. Formal Affiliations

Formal affiliations represent the final of our six relational forms. Such relations are casual, superficial, and generally goal-directed. Formal relations unite those who share credentials, professional expertise, or specialized practices. In many cases, these affiliations are restricted to members of a specific age category, income bracket, gender, or race. Given the nature of the commonalities that draw participants together, the social overlap of formal affiliators is high. However, the interactions that occur among formal affiliators are infrequent and unbalanced in character. This is because participants in formal affiliations typically view their involvement differently and feel varying levels of commitment and belonging. The ties that bond formal affiliators, while long-term in duration, are typically weak and uniplex in character. As such, surveillance is necessary to maintain a sense of attachment among participants.

Formal associations sometimes emerge from small-group, nonmediated settings. Consider, for example, the board of directors of a local bank or small corporation. Members of the board of directors likely share many demographic characteristics such as age and income; such boards also tend to be homogeneous with regard to gender and race. Further, board members are interchangeable, filling universalistic roles; members are selected by "type" rather than by particularistic qualities. The members of a board of directors meet relatively infrequently. Commitment to the board varies by member, with some members contributing to such interactions much more than others. While the members of such a board may remain seated for years, the ties they develop will be weak in nature and targeted solely to the organization they serve. Such weak and narrow ties will preclude the formation of trust among board members. Rather, members will survey one another's performance and contributions in negotiating their own behavior and in taking stock of the group overall.

Formal associations are not restricted to small-group settings. Such relations can emerge in large groups as well. Consider, for example, the professional association. Groups such as the American Medical Association (AMA), the American Sociological Association (ASA), or the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) unite a large number of individuals—individuals who share similar social characteristics. While such organizations provide for the interaction of members, members' exchanges are generally restricted to annual or semi-annual meetings. Different members attend such meetings in any given year, and members enjoy varied levels of involvement in such functions. Some members contribute more vocally, more enthusiastically than others; other members retain only the most

cursory interest in the association's *raison d'être* and goals. To be sure, individuals may remain tied to such groups for the full term of their careers. Yet, such ties remain weak and targeted solely toward one facet of a participant's life. Further, members are regularly surveyed via the organization and one another; such formal mechanisms supersede trust as a means of monitoring and tracking individuals.

Formal associations form around nonprofessional interests as well. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), Mensa, or the Democratic Party illustrate such relations. In such settings, individuals with many shared characteristics are joined by a unifying principle or interest. Yet the loose, uniplex connections that join such participants and the low, unbalanced interaction that emerges in such groups make these organizations a hallmark of the formal affiliations category.

Some of the formal affiliations heretofore discussed utilize direct modes of connecting. Others employ some combination of direct and mediated exchange. For example, the ASA or the AARP maintain web sites and other on-line services for the use of their members. However, formal affiliations also can be formed via purely mediated bonds. Consider the affiliation formed among members of a television home shopping club or a mail generated wine or meat club. Participants who enter such relations share certain demographic characteristics. (The majority of television home shopping club members are members of the working or lower middle class; most wine or meat club members are of the middle and upper middle class.) Members of such clubs also occupy universal roles; they come and go and are targeted by social type rather than personal characteristics. In formal relations such as those described here, members interact sporadically and infrequently; they are variably committed to the goals and activities of the group. Further, these individuals rarely develop strong, deep connections to such groups, despite the fact that their involvement in such relations may be long-lasting and enduring. As such, the bonds of these formal relations are clearly uniplex; individuals come to the group for one reason and take one thing away with them. Those engaged in formal relations are constantly surveyed. For example, participants are forced to periodically reaffirm their commitment to a group by rejoining or renewing their membership. Similarly, members' behavioral patterns are strictly monitored, with purchases (or lack of them) regularly recorded. These characteristics exemplify the flavor of formal relations. Such dimensions epitomize a unique relational form.

Conclusion

The six taxonomies forwarded in this article represent a first step toward reconceptualizing social relations. We readily acknowledge that our taxonomies may not be exhaustive. Similarly, the components that comprise the taxonomies may require refinements, additions, or exclusions. Nevertheless, we offer these

six relational forms as a starting point. We view them as vehicles—vehicles developed in an attempt to reroute sociological discourse. We hope to steer the field away from the bipolar categories traditionally applied to social relations, replacing that rigid perspective with a more flexible approach.

In reconceptualizing notions of social relations, we note the necessary deemphasis of previously forwarded analytic criteria: group size and mode of connection. We contend that the current technological environment has altered the relevance of these criteria, shifting them to the background of sociological considerations. As technology dramatically enhances the ways in which people can connect, it facilitates the formation of relations across different types of groups and gatherings.

In future work, we will consider the six relational forms in a broader social context. To be sure, these six modes of coming together co-exist in most social environments and during most historical periods. Yet, our future work will highlight several specific eras in which a single relational form comes to dominate and define the social milieu—a phenomenon to which we refer as *relational dominance*. In *Coming Together,* a book in progress, we will identify such eras as they occur in both the U.S. and non-U.S. contexts. Further, we will examine the ways in which particular cultural and structural conditions can lead to relational dominance. We also will explore the notion that eras of relational dominance follow a systematic sequence of occurrence—i.e., we will argue that the dominance of certain relational forms beckons specific relational successors. In uncovering such patterns, we contend that researchers gain the ability to predict and map the character of a society's future relations. This application of our taxonomies represents one of many ways in which these analytic tools can refresh the study of social relations. In presenting these taxonomies, we hope to encourage a dialogue, one that re-examines traditional approaches and concepts within the context of rapid social change.

ENDNOTES

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[1] For some thorough reviews of this literature, see Baran and Davis (1949), Beniger (1987), Cerulo, Ruane, and Chayko (1992), and Peters (1994).

[2] In comparing Durkheim's concepts to those of Toennies and Simmel, it is important to note a critical difference. Durkheim defined mechanical and organic solidarity as co-existing forms. He writes, "These two societies really make up one. They are two aspects of one and the same reality, but none the less they must be distinguished" (1933 [1893], p. 129). In contrast, Toennies framed *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as "either-or" concepts. Similarly, Simmel viewed the metropolis as an eventual replacement to small-town life.

[3]The dichotomies established in these nineteenth-century works remain powerful in twentieth-century theorizing. Louis Wirth (1938) continued the intellectual tradition of the masters in concep-tualizing the "mass society." Kingsley Davis (1949) maintained classic dichotomies as well in con-ceptualizing "secondary groups" relative to Cooley's "primary groups." Boldt (1978) preserved bipolar approaches to social relations in writing of "structural tightness" and "structural looseness." Bipolar frames also were implied by those who write of "parochial" versus "cosmopolitan" thinking (Gouldner 1957; Merton 1968). Elias (1978), Giddens (1991), Habermas (1991), Sennett (1978), and Shils (1966) honor the conceptual dichotomy as well, noting the growing distance between the public and private spheres.

[4]Coser (1991) elaborates on this important point.

[5]McLuhan (1964), of course, argued this point in assessing the introduction of any new tech-nology to society.

[6]Both the McFadden and Will quotes are taken from ABC's 7 September 1997 broadcast of *This Week*. For more on the bonding function of media, see Anderson (1983), Cardiff and Scannell (1987), Caughey (1984), Chayko (in progress), Dayan and Katz (1992), Fiske (1988), E. Katz (forth-coming), Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch (1997), Meyrowitz (1986; 1997), Morley (1992), and Tichi (1991).

[7]Taken from a *Compuserv* chat group and quoted in Katz, J. 1994. "The Tales They Tell In Cyberspace Are A Whole Other Story." *New York Times,* 23 January 1994, A 1; 30.

[8]For more on this phenomenon, see Cerulo (1997), Cerulo et al. (1992), Meyrowitz (1989; 1996), Steuer (1992), and Turkle (1996, 1997).

[9]For more on this phenomenon see, e.g., Cerulo and Ruane (1997), Nass (1997), and Turkle (1996, 1997).

[10]We borrow here, of course, from Parsons's (1951) notion of "role sets."

[11]We selected the eight factors reported in this paper only after an intensive review of literature addressing the nature of social relations. Thus, these typologies represent our attempt to synthesize a variety of conceptual offerings.

[12]See Ruane and Cerulo (1997, pp. 29–33) for a review of such literature.

[13]Enduring intimacy established in small-group, copresent contexts can be facilitated and main-tained via technology. Indeed, technology can ignite feelings of intimacy when physical copresence ceases to be possible. We speak here of the most extreme case—namely, the death of a key interactant. Consider the experience of jazz pianist Peter Duchin and his deceased father, Eddie Duchin. In the following quote, Peter reports his feelings when "encountering" his deceased father at *The Piano Exchange,* a player piano store/museum in Glen Cove New York: According to Duchin, "Rick, the owner of this shop, came and said, 'I want to play something for you on this piano.' And he played something. Now when he played, he said 'Who's playing this? Now look at this. Look at this. The— the keys are going down.' And suddenly I realized, it was my father. It's so weird. . . . That's Dad. There's no question. I mean, Dad actually recorded this, and they transferred it to this piano roll. I mean, I—I was speechless. I mean, I'm nearly speechless right now" (Duchin/Osgood interview: CBS *Sunday Morning,* 29 December 1996). Virtual reality technology allowed Peter Duchin to re-establish a relationship with his deceased father. Digital restoration and recording assured that the player piano's module executed the character—the touch and timbre—of Eddie Duchin. Son Peter, a person sufficiently familiar with Eddie's playing, immediately recognized it, reacted to it, and emoted to the music as if his father were present in the moment.

[14]Many of these discussion groups can have hundreds or thousands of members. Also note, that members' messages are catalogued and saved, giving the group a community memory.

[15]This text is quoted from Katz (1994).

[16]This support group is located at http://www.4-lane.com/cgi-bin/supportchat.pl. These particu-lar quotes appeared on 17 and 18 September 1997.

[17]This group is a *Yahoo*-sponsored chat group located at http://chat7.yahoo.com:4380. Unlike the discussion groups cited earlier, such chat rooms have no mechanism by which to save messages; chat is restricted to the moment.

[18]For more examples of situational intimacy on-line, see Baym (1995), Hornsby (1998, pp. 745), and Turkle (1996, 1997).

[19]Heaven's Gate documents are archived by the Washington Post and available at www.washingtonpost.com.

[20]Taraborrelli (1997, p. 144) writes of "Oprah's longstanding willingness—make that eagerness—to share her personal struggles with drugs and sexual abuse with the public."

[21]To be sure, marketers may collect or buy information on a particular taste public, but consumers are unaware of such surveillance. Such activity becomes even more extreme when it occurs online. Here, relations may be established without the knowledge of the consumer. For example, a vendor may "raid" a consumer's Internet trails in the hopes of discovering the consumer's tastes and preferences. Upon securing the information, the vendor can actively solicit the individual, tailoring the sales pitch according to the individual's preference profile. Note that a similar phenomenon has now become a regular dimension of supermarket shopping. With the installation of product scanners, shoppers are issued store coupons based on the type of items they purchase.

[22]Collaborative relations such as those described here often occur between an individual and an organization. Consider one's relations with organizations such as TIAA-CREF, Blue Cross-Blue Shield, or Fidelity Investments. During one's history with such companies, an individual will likely interact and connect with several organizational representatives. Indeed in contacting such organizations, one rarely expects to engage the same representative twice. The transient nature of organizational representatives carries few consequences for the character of the relations at hand. For in conditions such as those described here, organizational representatives are facilitators or channels. One develops a long-term connection with the particular organizational entity rather than its human representatives.

[23]In such groups, the term "troll" refers to an individual who misrepresents her/himself.

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