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ETHNICITY, FAMILY STRUCTURE, AND
PARTICIPATION IN VOLUNTARY
ASSOCIATIONS

by

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A THESIS

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Ethnicity, Family Structure, and Participation in
Voluntary Associations

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CHAPTER I

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Background and Problem

It is universally recognized that the family has been greatly affected by modern civilization. According to the traditional point of view the Industrial Revolution resulted in the weakening of the customary institutions of the local community, including the family.¹ Formerly the individual's life was centered around the extended family and the local community. The family performed many functions for the individual including religious, recreational, protective and educational functions; it was a closely knit unit in which relatives played a large part in the affairs of the conjugal unit. Furthermore, in rural areas it was an economically self-sustaining unit in which most of the family members were active. Role differentiations between male and female were often sharp. In most cases the family was patriarchal. The father was not only the authority figure, but was largely responsible for the well-being of the family members. The mother's responsibilities involved household maintenance and child care. Children were viewed

¹Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," American Journal of Sociology, 44, no. 1 (1938) p. 21. Kingsley Davis, Human Society, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949) pp. 422-427.

as economic necessities and were socialized toward the goal of making them productive members within the work-centered family unit. The community in this setting served as the "larger family." In a general way it was an extension of the family in terms of functions and member relations. These relationships were often primary in character. Associations outside of the family and community were limited in number and kind since the individual could adequately satisfy his needs and accomplish goals in the family and community settings.

With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the consequent growth of cities the family was no longer able to carry out many functions as well as it formerly did. The density of the city population and the heterogeneity of the city residents plus the need for people to work in settings outside the home required a different social structure. The family declined in stability and social significance.² Not only did family members work outside the home but the school took over a large part of the educational function. In addition the church became the center of religious expression; protection was delegated to law enforcement bodies, mutual benefit societies and fraternal orders; recreation groups composed of people with similar interests took a large part of

²Ibid.

the recreational function away from the family; etc.³ Furthermore, changes involving family member roles occurred. The father, and often the mother, were forced to hold jobs outside the home. This often affected the father's position as an authority figure and also tended to blur the once clearly defined roles of men and women. In addition children gained a measure of independence when they held jobs (which often paid higher wages than the father earned). Children were not necessarily viewed as necessities, but could be burdens in the crowded spaces of the city where wage earners had relatively fixed salaries. Socialization was now geared toward making children members of the larger social system. The neighborhood in this setting could not be characterized by homogeneity of members and primariness of relations.

Consequently, people were motivated to join various groups in order to satisfy affiliative needs, to achieve certain goals, and to develop special interests which they may have had. As Wirth states,

Being reduced to a stage of virtual impotence as an individual, the urbanite is bound to exert himself by joining with others of similar interests into organized groups to obtain his ends It is largely through the activities of the voluntary groups, be their objectives economic, political, educational, religious, recreational or cultural, that the urbanite expresses and develops his personality, acquires status, and is able to carry on the round of activities that constitutes his life career.⁴

³George A. Lundberg, Mirra Komarovsky, and Alice McNery, Leisure: A Suburban Study. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934) p. 126.

⁴Wirth, op. cit., p. 22.

However, the family and community in rural areas of the United States retained many characteristics of the pre-industrial family.⁵ Similarly, the rural family in some areas of Europe retained many characteristics of the pre-industrial family while the urban European family characteristically became more like the urban-American family in structure.⁶ The characteristics of the family in rural areas of the United States and parts of Europe may be important in understanding certain aspects of voluntary association participation in urban areas of the United States since many cities constantly renew their supply of people from rural areas.

Thus, if a group of people who initially have a family structure which resembles the rural, or pre-industrial family structure change their participation patterns as the family structure changes from one generation to another, (i.e. when this group migrates to the city), we may conclude that family structure and generational status are important variables in some differential participation in voluntary associations.

Many early observers of the American way of life have commented on the extensiveness of voluntary associations in urban areas. Bryce⁷ and Tocqueville⁸ were among those

⁵Ruth Cavan, The Family, First Edition (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1942) pp. 522-534.

⁶Paul Campisi, "The Italian Family in the United States," American Journal of Sociology, 53, (1948), pp. 443-449.

⁷James Bryce, The American Commonwealth, Vol. II (London and New York: MacMillan and Company, 1893).

⁸Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (New York: The Century Company, 1898) pp. 129-130.

who noted this phenomenon in the 1800's. Since that time voluntary associations have received some attention, and occasionally some serious study by sociologists. Louis Wirth stimulated a great deal of interest in voluntary associations when he suggested that the very structure of urban areas makes for an increase in voluntary associations.⁹ This statement and similar ones made by other sociologists led to the idea that a great majority of Americans in cities are affiliated with voluntary associations. However, recent studies have uncovered evidence which contradicts this notion. Researches by Axelrod, Scott and Wright and Hyman are examples of such studies.¹⁰ Most of the investigations of voluntary associations have involved efforts to determine the extent of participation of various groups of people. Wright and Hyman, for example, were concerned with determining the extent of participation in the United States.¹¹ Using a probability sample, their study was one of the few which attempted to generalize about voluntary association participation in the United States

⁹Wirth, op. cit., pp. 1-24.

¹⁰Morris Axelrod, "Urban Structure and Social Participation," American Sociological Review, 21, (1956) pp. 13-18. John C. Scott, Jr., "Membership and Participation in Voluntary Associations," American Sociological Review, 22, (1957) pp. 315-326. Charles R. Wright and Herbert H. Hyman, "Voluntary Association Memberships of American Adults: Evidence From Natural Sample Surveys," American Sociological Review, 23, (1958) pp. 284-294.

¹¹Ibid.

as a whole. Other investigators have limited themselves to studying communities of various sizes, and in various locations. Almost all these studies discuss attributes of people who belong to voluntary associations. However, very few studies set out to see how people with particular attributes participate in voluntary associations. Here, one possible area of study, and the one we are interested in, is ethnicity as a factor in voluntary association participation. Few investigators have examined the relationship between ethnicity and participation in detail.

Even less of the literature on voluntary associations is concerned with the relationship between various kinds of associations. Does participation in one type of association affect participation in other kinds of associations? If so, why? What can be discovered about one type of participation that will help us predict other kinds of participation patterns? These are unanswered questions.

Thus there are at least two **areas** which have been largely neglected in the study of voluntary associations, namely: 1) ethnicity as a factor in voluntary association participation, and 2) the relationship between family structure, kinship and friendship participation, and formal participation. These will be the main concern in our inquiry.

The few studies which have seriously considered ethnicity as a factor have had other primary interests. For instance, Scott considered differences in formal

participation between persons with native and foreign born parents.¹² However, he was mainly concerned with social class, age and sex differences in participation. Dotson studied urban working-class families including some ethnic families. However, he deliberately excluded the foreign born and in his study focused on the associational structure of the community and not ethnicity as such. Most of his sample was originally of Irish or English stock and would not now be considered ethnic.¹³

Lundberg, Komarovsky and McNery comment on the participation of lower-class Italian women in their study of leisure time activities and participation in a suburban community. Their comments on ethnicity, however, are incidental to their main interests, which are voluntary associations and leisure time activities.¹⁴

And finally, Warner and Srole devote an entire chapter of their "Yankee City" series to the associations of ethnic groups; theirs is perhaps the most complete coverage of ethnic participation in voluntary associations in a given setting. They discuss both formal and informal associations of different ethnic groups in detail.¹⁵

¹² Scott, op. cit., pp. 315-326.

¹³ Floyd Dotson, The Associations of Urban Workers in New Haven, (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1950).

¹⁴ Lundberg, Komarovsky and McNery, op. cit., p. 139.

¹⁵ W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945) Chapter IX.

Not only was our focus on our problem sharpened as a result of the study by Warner and Srole but several of the hypotheses that we will propose for study were generated from the Yankee City series.

Although there is little information relating ethnicity and voluntary associations, there is an even greater scarcity of material concerning the relationship between formal and informal association participation. One of the few references to this problem is a statement by Axelrod that participation in formal associations may vary directly with participation in informal associations.¹⁶ Brown, using a rural sample, compared active and non-active members of formal associations with the number of various informal activities these people engaged in.¹⁷ Other studies imply a relationship, but do not explicitly state one. Dotson found that in his sample of urban working-class families there were few memberships in formal organizations, but there were many close kinship relations.¹⁸

Babchuk and Thompson in their study of Negroes in Lincoln, Nebraska, found that lower-class Negroes belonged

¹⁶Axelrod, op. cit., pp. 13-18.

¹⁷Emory J. Brown, "Informal Participation of Active and Inactive Formal Participants," Rural Sociology, 19, (1954) pp. 365-370.

¹⁸Dotson, op. cit., pp. 220-230.

to more formal voluntary associations than other studies have shown whites to belong. Furthermore, these associations tend to be "expressive." They suggest that these findings may be partially a result of the lack of intensive interaction which Negroes have within the kinship unit.¹⁹

The authors also suggest that lower-class Negroes have more friends than whites do.²⁰ Warner and Srole imply that the function of ethnic associations may be affected by ethnic informal participation patterns.²¹

This research investigates whether there is a relationship between membership in the first or second generation and formal and informal association participation of lower-class Italian-Americans when age and sex are controlled. It furthermore tests whether there is a relationship between formal voluntary association participation and kinship and friendship participation of lower-class Italian-Americans when generation and sex are taken into account.

Hypotheses: Ethnicity and Participation

As noted, several of the studies already referred to have dealt with the relations between ethnicity and

¹⁹Nicholas Babchuk and Ralph Thompson, "The Voluntary Associations of Negroes," American Sociological Review, 27, (1962), pp. 653-654.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Warner and Srole, op. cit., p. 266.

participation. Warner and Srole, for example, noted that first generation ethnics in Yankee City had very few memberships in formal voluntary associations. However, formal voluntary association membership increased in the second and third generations.²² They attributed much of the lack of formal activity in the first generation to the ethnic's limited experiences with formal associations in Europe. The only formal organizations ethnics experienced in Europe had political or economic functions almost exclusively.²³ We will assume that this lack of affiliation with formal groups is especially characteristic of Southern Italians who come from *gemeinschaft*-type communities; but apparently as they become familiar with the American pattern of participation, and also as a result of their contacts with Americans, they too participate more in formal associations.

Scott, in his study of formal participation in Bennington, Vermont, noted that people with foreign born parents did not show a different pattern of participation than those with native born parents. His sample probably would not be considered representative of ethnics since his categories (of people with foreign or native born parents) are too gross.²⁴

²²Ibid., pp. 258, 259, 266, 282.

²³Ibid., pp. 266-267.

²⁴Scott, op. cit.

In a somewhat different, but related vein, other studies have also found differences in formal participation between men and women. Both Dotson²⁵ and Scott²⁶ noted that men generally belong to more formal voluntary associations than do women. Warner and Lunt reported that in the three lower classes there are more men than women in formal voluntary associations.²⁷ On the other hand, Chapin found that women of the lower class have higher participation scores in group activities than do men.²⁸ It is not clear whether he was referring entirely to formal or informal voluntary associations however, and his measure of participation included membership, attendance, contributions, membership on committees and position as an officer. Mather found that women have more memberships than men in organizations at all class levels.²⁹

With regard to ethnics, Warner and Srole reported that first generation women in their sample belonged to no formal voluntary associations while first generation men did. They found that in succeeding generations women did belong to formal associations.³⁰

²⁵Dotson, op. cit.

²⁶Scott, op. cit.

²⁷W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt, The Social Life of a Modern Community (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941) Chapter XVI.

²⁸F. Stuart Chapin, "Social Participation and Social Intelligence," American Sociological Review, 4 (1939) pp. 157-166.

²⁹William G. Mather, "Income and Social Participation," American Sociological Review, 6, (1941) pp. 380-384.

³⁰Warner and Srole, op. cit., p. 282.

Lundberg, Komarovsky and McNery indicated that lower-class Italian women of the first generation had few memberships in formal voluntary associations. They attributed this lack of participation to family patterns peculiar to Italians. They state:

The absence of organizations among the Italian women of B (the lower-class area) presents an interesting problem. The low socio-economic status of Italian women provides only a partial explanation More relevant to the problem are, perhaps the mores of family life and the position of women among foreign born Italians. The family pattern of first generation Italians tends to preserve many characteristics of the patriarchal family: the self-sufficiency of the family, the subordination of personalities of individual members to family solidarity and unity, the dominance of the male head of the family, the relatively subordinate position of women, and so on.³¹

Following the suggestions of Lundberg, Komarovsky and McNery we will characterize the "old world" Italian family so as to aid our understanding of the participation of Italian-Americans in formal and informal voluntary associations. We will also see how the family has changed in the first and second generations in the United States.

It is necessary to recognize that there can be great differences among Italian families from different regions of Italy, especially between northern and southern Italian families. However, we will concentrate upon the southern Italian peasant family since this is the type of family background we expect to find in the area we will study,

³¹Lundberg, Komarovsky and McNery, op. cit., p. 139.

and because it is the type of family background which the majority of Italian-Americans have today. It also has the ideal type of family structure for our purposes. The southern Italian immigrants came from small villages or large pre-industrial cities where the families sometimes were tightly knit.³² They earned their living in Italy as peasant farmers, peasant workers or simple artisans. The "old world" Italian peasant family characteristics are intimately tied in with the institutions and practices of religion, the planting and gathering of food, the celebration of feasts and holidays, the education of children, the protection of the person and all other aspects of small village folk culture.³³ The southern Italian family is a strongly knit unit, and is dominated by the father who is regarded as the source of authority, even though the mother may often be the actual agent of authority.³⁴ The father's authority over a child is so great that sometimes after the marriage of the child his authority is maintained to some degree. In this family the children live for the parents and are considered economic assets. When the children work for wages they

³²Gideon Sjoberg, "The Pre-Industrial City," American Journal of Sociology, 60 (1955) pp. 438-445.

³³Campisi, op. cit.

³⁴Irvin Child, Italian or American? The Second Generation in Conflict (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943) p. 27.

are expected to turn over their entire paycheck to the parents who put it into the family fund. Relatives such as aunts, uncles, godparents, cousins, are closely tied to the primary family unit and participate in many family activities. The emphasis of these family activities is upon the sacred and there are many family celebrations of feasts, holidays, etc. The family serves as an economic, recreational, religious, social, affectional and protective unit for its members. While the father is free to come and go as he pleases, the mother's place is confined largely to the home. She must not work for wages. The girl's education is oriented toward preparing her for marriage and after marriage she is subservient to the husband's family. Since marriage is viewed as sacred, divorce is forbidden and desertion is rare. All in all, the family fosters individual security and provides a specific way of life for the members. Therefore there is little personal disorganization.³⁵

The first generation southern Italian family in the United States shows many remnants of the above characteristics, but has already begun the process of change toward an American and urban way of life. To some degree the longer a family has been in the United States the more it is likely to have changed. There are many

³⁵Campisi, op. cit.

factors affecting the above relationship. One of these factors is the type of community the family is located in. If the community is a homogeneous Italian community, the rate of change for the family is likely to be slower. Other important factors are: the necessity for men, and sometimes women, to work outside the home for wages; the interaction of children with other nationalities in school, in peer groups and in other organizations; the recognition that the Italian way of life means low status; and increasing pressures by American legal, economic and political institutions for the Americanization of the immigrant.³⁶

Thus the individuals who make up the first generation family are subjected to a number of opposing forces; forces such as the ones just mentioned which push them toward assimilation, and other forces which pull them back into the "old world" culture. The latter consist of such things as religious and superstitious beliefs, ethnic identification, ties (both economic and familial) with the homeland, and old patterns of participation.

Women are affected differently by these opposing forces than are men. They are less likely to work outside of the home, to meet other people of different nationalities, etc., because of their family position. Thus, women are less likely to change their behavior patterns in the direction of assimilation than are men.

³⁶Ibid.

Other factors which can either aid assimilation or which can hinder it are age, marital status, etc. Young people are easier to mold and more eager to learn new ways. Married people are sometimes tied down to the family by children and on the other hand, forced to learn new ways by their children.

The important thing is that there are a number of forces interacting and influencing the individual at the same time. Nonetheless, the first generation Italian family is a highly integrated one, the father is still dominant while the mother's place is still in the home. The kin group is still the center of activities. While it is true that migration of Italian-Americans to the United States sometimes separates individuals from their family for long periods of time and separates these people from intimate friends left in Italy, it is also characteristic of Italians to send for their families after establishing a home in the United States. Thus in most cases large segments of a family migrate to the United States, but not at the same time.

The second generation is characterized by conflict, for the children and parents are torn between two ways of life; the first generation parents try to hold on to the "old world" ways of life and the second generation children strive to assimilate into the new ways of life. The result is the comparative loss of the father's dominance, the unheard of independence of women, the weakening of the