WILLIAM FOOTE WHYTE, *STREET CORNER SOCIETY* AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

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Social scientists have mostly taken it for granted that William Foote Whyte's sociological classic *Street Corner Society* (*SCS*, 1943) belongs to the Chicago school of sociology's research tradition or that it is a relatively independent study which cannot be placed in any specific research tradition. Social science research has usually overlooked the fact that William Foote Whyte was educated in social anthropology at Harvard University, and was mainly influenced by Conrad M. Arensberg and W. Lloyd Warner. What I want to show, based on archival research, is that *SCS* cannot easily be said either to belong to the Chicago school's urban sociology or to be an independent study in departmental and idea-historical terms. Instead, the work should be seen as part of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's and W. Lloyd Warner's comparative research projects in social anthropology. © 2013 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

Few ethnographic studies in American social science have been as highly praised as William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (*SCS*) (1943c). The book has been re-published in four editions (1943c, 1955, 1981, 1993b) and over 200,000 copies have been sold (Adler, Adler, & Johnson, 1992; Gans, 1997). John van Maanen (2011 [1988]) compares *SCS* with Bronislaw Malinowski's social anthropology classic *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1985 [1922]) and claims that "several generations of students in sociology have emulated Whyte's work by adopting his intimate, live-in, reportorial fieldwork style in a variety of community settings" (p. 39).[1] Rolf Lindner (1998) writes that even "one who does not share van Maanen's assessment cannot but see the two studies as monoliths in the research landscape of the time" (p. 278). To be sure, the Chicago school of sociology had published contemporary sociological classics, such as *The Hobo* (Anderson, 1961 [1923]), *The Gang* (Thrasher, 1963 [1927]), *The Ghetto* (Wirth, 1998 [1928]), and *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Zorbaugh, 1976 [1929]). But none of these empirical field studies were as deeply anchored in the discipline of social anthropology or had been, to use Clifford Geertz's (1973) somewhat worn expression, equally "thick descriptions" of informal groups in the urban space. Whyte's unique ability to describe concrete everyday details in intersubjective relations created a new model for investigations based on participant observations in a modern urban environment.

SCS is a study about social interaction, networking, and everyday life among young Italian-American men in Boston's North End (Cornerville) during the latter part of the Great

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1. Typical examples of this research tradition are Anderson (2003 [1976]), Gans (1982 [1962]), Kornblum (1974), Liebow (2003 [1967]), Suttles (1968), Vidich & Bensman (2000 [1958]).

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Depression. Part I of *SCS* describes the formation of local street gangs, the corner boys, and contrasts them with the college boys in terms of social organization and mobility. Part II outlines the social structure of politics and racketeering. Whyte spent three and a half years between 1936 and 1940 in the North End, which also gave him a unique opportunity to observe at close range how the social structure of the street corner gangs changed over time.

The study is still used as a valuable source of knowledge in concrete field studies of group processes, street gangs, organized crime, and political corruption (Homans, 1993 [1951]; Short & Strodtbeck, 1974 [1965]; Sherman, 1978). Today, *SCS* feels surprisingly topical even though the book first appeared 70 years ago. What seems to make the study timeless is that Whyte manages in a virtually unsurpassed way to describe people's social worlds in their particular daily contexts. Adler, Adler, & Johnson (1992, p. 3) argue in the same manner that

> *SCS* represents a foundational demonstration of participant observation methodology. With its detailed, insightful, and reflexive accounts, the methodological appendix, first published in the second edition, is still regarded as one of the premier statements of the genre. [. . .] *SCS* stands as an enduring work in the small groups literature, offering a rich analysis of the social structure and dynamics of "Cornerville" groups and their influence on individual members.

SCS has thereby come to have something of a symbolic significance for generations of field researchers in complex societies. As Jennifer Platt (1983) examines in her historical outline of participant observation methodology, this took place mainly after Appendix A was published as an additional part in the 1955 second edition (p. 385). Lindner (1998) also points to the importance of the Appendix, and thinks that "With the new edition the reading of *SCS* is stood on its head: now the reader begins as a rule with the appendix, and then turns to the actual study" (p. 280). As a consequence, *SCS* has come to be considered as "the key exemplar in the textbooks of 'participant observation'" (Platt, 1983, p. 385); furthermore, numerous studies have used it as a symbol of how participant observations ought to be done. After *SCS* gained its iconoclastic status, the knowledge of the historical development of the study seems to have lost its importance or even been forgotten.

For this reason, it might not be so surprising that researchers, as the introductory quote from van Maanen indicates, have often taken it for granted that *SCS* belongs to the Chicago school's research tradition (Klein, 1971; Jermier, 1991; Schwartz, 1991; Boelen, 1992; Thornton, 1997) or that it is a relatively independent study that cannot be placed in any specific research tradition (Ciacci, 1968; Vidich, 1992). There are at least four reasons for this. First, although Whyte was awarded a prestigious grant from the Society of Fellows at Harvard University in fall 1936, he was not a doctoral student at the university. Instead, he defended his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago in 1943. Second, *SCS* is about classical "Chicago" topics, such as street gangs, organized crime, police corps, and political machinery. Third, Whyte conducted fieldwork in an urban environment like many Chicago sociologists had previously done in the 1920s and 1930s. Finally, parts of *SCS* have, together with Chicago classics, been included in the Chicago school of sociology compilation volumes; a typical example is *The Social Fabric of the Metropolis: Contributions of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology* (1971). Given these facts, it is quite easy to take for granted that Whyte was part of the Chicago school's research tradition or was an independent researcher in a historical period before anthropology at home had been established as a research field.

However, by using archival documents from Cornell University and other historical texts, I have traced the *SCS* to a social-anthropological comparative tradition that was established by W. Lloyd Warner's *Yankee City Series*, and later in Chicago with applied research in the

Committee on Human Relations in Industry during the period 1944–1948. The committee, led by Warner, had the aim of bridging the distance between academia and the world of practical professions. Whyte's anthropological schooling at Harvard University led him to A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's structural functional explanatory model in *SCS*.[2]

In the first two sections, I will describe Whyte's family background and the circumstances behind his admission to the prestigious Society of Fellows at Harvard University. In the following two sections, I will first examine how Whyte came to study corner boys' and college boys' informal structure in Boston's North End. I will then analyze why Conrad M. Arensberg's and Eliot D. Chapple's observational method was such a decisive tool for Whyte for discovering the importance of informal structure and leadership among street corner gangs. In the next section, I will outline the reasons that led Whyte to defend *SCS* as a doctoral dissertation in the sociological department at the University of Chicago and not Harvard University. Thereafter, I will examine why Whyte's conclusion that Cornerville had its own informal social organization was such a ground-breaking discovery in social science. In the two final sections, I will situate Whyte's position in the historical research landscape of social anthropology and sociology in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s and then, with the help of a diagram, set out which researchers exercised the most important direct and indirect influences on his thinking.

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

William Foote Whyte was born on June 27, 1914 in Springfield, Massachusetts. Whyte's grandparents had immigrated to the United States from England, the Netherlands, and Scotland. His parents were John Whyte (1887–1952) and Isabel van Sickle Whyte (1887–1975). John and Isabel met when they were in Germany, each on a university grant, and working on their theses—doctoral and masters, respectively—in German. After John received his doctorate and obtained employment as a lecturer at New York University, the family first settled in the Bronx district of New York City, but soon moved to the small town of Caldwell, New Jersey. Whyte, an only child, grew up in a Protestant middle-class family that appreciated literature, classical music, art, and education. During his earliest years, Whyte lived with different relatives, as his mother caught tuberculosis and his father was discharged by New York University when it abolished the German department at the outbreak of World War I. Due to his movements between families and since his parents brought him up to be a self-reliant boy, he often felt lonely and learned to keep his feelings to himself (Whyte, 1984, 1994, 1997; Gale Reference Team, 2002).[3]

Even though John Whyte himself had received a strict upbringing in the Presbyterian Sunday school, he held that it was his son Whyte's choice whether or not to go to church. John said that he had gotten so much church instruction while growing up that it would last a lifetime. Only after Whyte had acquired his own family did he begin regular visits to the Presbyterian congregation. The reason was that he looked up to clergymen who preached for social equality and justice. On the other hand, he was not so fond of priests who wanted to

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2. Robert M. Emerson (2001 [1983]) certainly places Whyte and *SCS* in Harvard University's social anthropology tradition, but does so only briefly regarding the issue of method. Instead, Howard S. Becker supports the assumption that social science research has usually overlooked the fact that Whyte was educated in social anthropology at Harvard University (Becker, 1999, 2003, e-mail correspondence with Oscar Andersson dated July 11, 2009).

3. According to the anthropologist Michael H. Agar (1980, p. 3), the experience of alienation from one's own culture is common to many anthropologists. Whyte describes himself as a social anthropologist rather than a sociologist when he came from Boston to Chicago in 1940. The sense of estrangement also makes it easier for anthropologists to connect with other cultures. In his autobiography, significantly titled *Participant Observer* (1994), Whyte tells repeatedly of his emotional difficulties in feeling involved in the middle class's social activities and club life.

save lost souls and gave superficial sermons about contemporary problems. Thus already from childhood, William Whyte learned to make independent decisions and to feel empathy for poor and vulnerable people (Whyte, 1984, 1994, 1997; Gale Reference Team, 2002).

In the autumn of 1932, aged 18, William Whyte was accepted at Swarthmore College, located in a suburb of Philadelphia, as one of five students granted a scholarship. Whyte devoted most of his time to studying for examinations and writing articles as well as plays that were performed in the college area. Already at age 10, he had been encouraged by his parents to write short stories, and while at Bronxville High School he published an article every Tuesday and Friday in a local newspaper, *The Bronxville Press* (Whyte, 1970, 1994).

As a second-year student at Swarthmore, Whyte got the opportunity to spend a weekend at a settlement house in a Philadelphia slum district. This experience proved decisive for his future career. In a letter to his parents dated March 10, 1934, he wrote

> It is foolish to think of helping these people individually. There are so many thousands of them, and we are so few. But we can get to know the situation thoroughly. And that we must do. I think every man owes it to society to see how society lives. He has no right to form political, social, and economic judgement, unless he has seen things like this and let it sink in deeply. (Whyte, 1994, p. 39)

It was after this experience that Whyte realized that he wanted to write about the situation of poor people and daily life in the American urban slums. His interest in writing about corrupt politicians and slum poverty was also aroused by the investigative journalist and social debater Lincoln Steffens' 884-page autobiography, which he had devoured during the family's journeys in Germany in 1931. Three chapters in Steffens' book dealt with the extensive political corruption in Boston (Steffens, 1931; Whyte, 1994).

THE SOCIETY OF FELLOWS

In 1936, a senior researcher recommended that William Whyte be admitted to the prestigious Society of Fellows at Harvard University. The background to this recommendation was a 106 page essay, written and published the year before, with the title "Financing New York City." It drew great attention from politicians and civil servants in New York City, and his teacher in economics—which was also Whyte's main subject—thought that it was better written than many doctoral dissertations he had read. After considering several proposals for further studies and career opportunities, including an invitation to work for the city of New York, Whyte decided to accept the offer from the Society of Fellows. The associated grant meant that the researcher had the same salary as a full-time employed assistant professor at Harvard University, and could do research for three to four years on any topic, with free choice among the university's rich range of courses. Thanks to the basic freedom in selecting a research subject, it was not unusual for grantees to change subject after being accepted. The only academic restriction with the generous research grant was that the resultant writings could not be presented as a doctoral dissertation. This did not strike Whyte as a drawback when he was accepted; on the contrary, he regarded academic middle-class existence as all too limited and boring. The grant at Harvard gave Whyte, at barely 22, the opportunity to pursue what he had wanted to do since his time at Swarthmore College– an ethnographic slum study. Ever since he had read Steffens' notable autobiography and visited a Philadelphia slum district, he had dreamt of studying at close quarters and writing about a social world that was mostly unknown to the American middle class (Whyte, 1994, 1997). Whyte tells in his autobiography:

Like many other liberal middle-class Americans, my sympathies were with the poor and un-employed, but I felt somewhat hypocritical for not truly understanding their lives. In writing *Street Corner Society*, I was beginning to put the two parts of my life together. (Whyte, 1994, p. 325)

The anthropologist and sociologist Arthur J. Vidich (1992) argues with insight that "Methods of research cannot be separated from the life and education of the researcher" (p. 84). In order to really emphasize what an exotic social world Boston's North End was for the rest of the population, Whyte—like an anthropologist who visits an aboriginal people for the first time—begins the first paragraph of the unpublished "Outline for Exploration in Cornerville" in July 1940 as follows:

This is a study of interactions of people in a slum community as observed at close range through $3\frac{1}{2}$ years of field work. I call it an exploration, because when I came into Cornerville, its social organization was unknown to me as if I had been entering an African jungle. In this sense, the field work was a continual exploration—of social groupings, of patterns of action.[4]

Whyte moved to Harvard University for the start of the autumn semester in 1936. He wanted to get there when the university was celebrating its 300th anniversary and was hailed in that regard as the oldest university in the United States. The Society of Fellows provided him with comfortable student quarters in Winthrop House on the university campus. The only formal requirement for a younger member was to attend dinners on Monday evenings. These served as a ritual uniting young and old members of the Society, and Whyte took part in them even after, at the beginning of 1937, he moved in above the Martini family's Capri restaurant in the North End.

The Society was led, during the period 1933–1942, by the rather conservative biochemist Lawrence J. Henderson. It consisted of fellow students, such as Conrad M. Arensberg, Henry Guerlac, George C. Homans, John B. Howard, Harry T. Levin, James G. Miller and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Although the young Whyte did not always feel comfortable with Henderson's authoritarian style of leadership, he looked up to him for his scientific carefulness. Another mentor was the industrial psychologist Elton Mayo, a colleague of Henderson and Warner, who led the Hawthorne study (1927–1932) at the Western Electric Company in Cicero outside Chicago. Mayo is known chiefly for having conducted social-scientific field studies of industries, which Whyte was also later to do during his time at Chicago and Cornell universities. The classmate who would come to have by far the greatest importance for Whyte was Arensberg; he became his close friend and mentor during the study of the Italian-American slum district in the North End (Whyte, 1970, 1984, 1994, 1997).[5]

THE NORTH END DISTRICT IN BOSTON

William F. Whyte began his field study in the North End during the fall of 1936. As previously mentioned, it was his visit to a Philadelphia slum and his reading of Steffens' work that gave him the idea of doing his own part in studying slum districts for the cause of progressive social change and political reform. During his first weeks at Harvard, he explored

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4. Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 4857 Box 2A, Folder 19.

5. Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 4857 Box 2A, Folder 11, 12, 15.

Boston's neighborhoods and sought advice at various social agencies. It was only after this initial survey that he settled on the North End as the place for his study. After a while, Whyte (1994, p. 62) decided to study the North End because this district best met his expectations of how a slum area looked

> I had developed a picture of rundown three- to five-story buildings crowded together. The dilapidated wooden-frame buildings of some other parts of the city did not look quite genuine to me. One other characteristic recommended the North End on a little more objective basis: It had more people per acre than any section of the city. If a slum was defined by its overcrowding, this was certainly it.

In an unpublished field study of the Nortons (street gang) from the autumn of 1938, Whyte gave a more neutral explanation with quantitative criteria for why he chose to study this city district:

> According to figures from the Massachusetts Census of Unemployment in 1934, the population of the North End was 23 411. These people were housed on 35 acres of land. With a density of about 670 persons per acre in 1934, the North End was reported to be the most congested district in the United States. The neighboring West End has 342 people per acre, just slightly over half of the density of the North End, and other sections of Boston are much less thickly populated.[6]

As Whyte writes in Appendix A, in *SCS*, the models for his study were the community studies by the social anthropologists Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown* (1957 [1929]) and *Middletown in Transition* (1937) about Muncie in Indiana, and W. Lloyd Warner's not yet published five volumes in the *Yankee City Series* (1941–1962) about Newburyport in Massachusetts.[7] This is indicated not least by the fact that Whyte introduced his case study of the Nortons with a short social overview of the city district, which he called "A Sketch of the Community Surroundings."[8] Whyte also wrote the project plans titled "Plan for the North End Community Study" and "Plan for a Community Study of the North End," respectively, at the end of 1936 and beginning of 1937, which show that he intended to investigate the inhabitants' and the district's history, cultural background, economics, leisure time activities, politics, educational system, religion, health, and social attitudes—in other words, to make a comprehensive community study.[9]

What characterizes these extensive American social studies is that they try to completely describe and chart the complex cultural and social life of a town or city district. As models they have anthropology's holistic field studies of the more limited cultures and settlements of aboriginal populations. For while neither the Lynds nor Warner specifically made studies of slum areas, they did social-anthropological field work in modern American cities. This was exactly what Whyte wanted to do in the North End, although with a special focus on the slums. The community studies were also models for more limited social-scientific field studies of industries, mental hospitals, and medical hospitals after World War II

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6. Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 14087 Box 2, Folder 32.

7. Whyte could also have taken part in the research project *Yankee City Series* during his stay in Chicago in the early 1940s, but he was persuaded by his supervisor Warner to finish his doctoral degree first (Whyte, 1994).

8. Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 14087 Box 2, Folder 32.

9. Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 4857 Box 2A, Folder 10.

(Whyte, 1967 [1964]; Kornblum, 1974; Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1977 [1961]; Burawoy, 1982 [1979]; Goffman, 1991 [1961]).[10]

Fairly soon, however, Whyte came to revise his original plan and, instead, confined his study to the street gangs' social, criminal, and political organization in the city district.[11] He (1993b) came to this crucial understanding by connecting his field observations of the Nortons (corner boys) and Italian Community Club (college boys) and "their positions in the social structure (p. 323)." The theoretical framework was

> ... first proposed by Eliot D. Chapple and Conrad M. Arensberg (1940), [where] I concentrated attention on observing and roughly quantifying frequencies and duration of interactions among members of street-corner gangs and upon observing the initiation of changes in group activities (Whyte, 1993b, p. 367).

Whyte (1967 [1964]) writes further that, after about 18 months of field research, he "came to realize that group studies were to be the heart of my research (p. 263)." In the autumn of 1938, his case study of the Nortons arrived at the conclusion that even though the study "may apply to other groups of corner boys, I will specifically limit their application to this group which I have studied and not attempt to generalize for other groups."[12] Whyte's conclusion is probably a concession to Lawrence J. Henderson's strictly positivistic view of science, since he cited the study in his application for an extension of the research grant from the Society of Fellows at Harvard University. Long afterward, he (1993a) explained that the prevailing view of science at Harvard University in the 1930s emphasized "a commitment to 'pure science,' without any involvement in social action (p. 291)." As a result of Whyte's not having studied the North End inhabitants' working conditions, housing standards, family relations, industries, school system, or correspondence with native countries, it is thus not obvious that one should regard *SCS* as a community study (Vidich, Bensman, & Stein, 1964; Ciacci, 1968; Bell & Newby, 1972 [1971], pp. 17–18; Gans, 1982 [1962]; Whyte, 1992, 1994, 1997).

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARENSBERG'S AND CHAPPLE'S OBSERVATIONAL METHOD

William Whyte's introduction to social anthropology occurred through a course—"The Organization of the Modern Communities"—which was taught by Conrad M. Arensberg and Eliot D. Chapple. He (1994, p. 63) found the course rewarding, but more important was that he thereby got to know Arensberg:[13]

> He [Arensberg] took a personal interest as my slum study developed, and we had many long talks on research methods and social theory. He also volunteered to read my early notes and encouraged me with both compliments and helpful criticisms.

Archival documents from Cornell University show that Arensberg read and commented on *SCS* from its idea stage until the book was published in December 1943. The recurrent discussions and correspondence which Whyte had with Arensberg about the study's

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10. Almost 20 years later, Herbert J. Gans (1982 [1962]) would make a community study of the adjacent West End.

11. Whyte (1993b) writes in Appendix A: "As I read over these various research outlines, it seems to me that the most impressive thing about them is their remoteness from the actual study I carried on (p. 285)."

12. Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 14087 Box 2, Folder 32.

13. Arensberg was formally admitted by the Society of Fellows as an anthropologist during the period 1934–1938, and Whyte as a sociologist during 1936–1940.

disposition, field-work techniques, and group processes contributed greatly to problematizing and systematizing Whyte's observations of the street gangs.[14] Whyte (1993a) tells that "While I was in the field, 1936–1940, I thought of myself as a student of social anthropology. I had read widely in that field, under the guidance of Conrad M. Arensberg (p. 288)." During the period 1932–1934, under Warner's supervision, Arensberg had done field work in County Clare in Ireland. Arensberg's field study resulted in the books *The Irish Countryman* (1968 [1937]) and *Family and Community in Ireland* (1968 [1940]) together with Solon T. Kimball. It belonged to a still, in some ways, unequaled social-scientific research project that was led by Warner and based on the cross-cultural comparative sociology of Emile Durkheim and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. Radcliffe-Brown's and Warner's comparative social-anthropological field studies on different cultures and social types were path-breaking in several respects, and had the explicit aim of generating universal sociological theories about man as a cultural and social being (Warner, 1941a, 1941b, 1959, 1962 [1953], 1968 [1940]; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, 1976 [1958]; Whyte, 1991, 1994, 1997; Stocking, 1999 [1995]).

Arensberg wrote, together with Chapple, a social-anthropological method book about field observations which is almost forgotten today—*Measuring Human Relations*: *An Introduction to the Study of the Interaction of Individuals* (1940)—and which passed Henderson's critical inspection only after five revisions. Their interactionist method would be used by Whyte throughout *SCS* and during the rest of his academic career. It emphasized that the researcher, through systematic field observations of a specific group, such as Nortons, can objectively "measure" what underlies the group members' statements, thoughts, feelings, and actions. The systematic method can also give the researcher reliable knowledge about the group's internal organization and ranking, for instance who a street gang's leader and lieutenants are. Above all, emphasis is placed on the quite decisive difference between pair interactions of two people and group interactions of three or more people (Chapple & Arensberg, 1940; Whyte, 1941, 1955, 1967 [1964], 1993a).

Whyte (1994, pp. 63–64) develops these ideas in his autobiography:

> In determining patterns on informal leadership, the observation of pair events provided inadequate data. At the extremes, one could distinguish between an order and a request, but between those extremes it was difficult to determine objectively who was influencing whom. In contrast, the observation of set events provided infallible evidence of patterns of influence. The leader was not always the one to propose an activity, although he often did. In a group, where a stable informal structure has evolved, a follower may often propose an activity, but we do not observe that activity taking place unless the leader expresses agreement or makes some move to start the activity. [. . .] This proposition on the structure of set events seems ridiculously simple, yet I have never known it to fail in field observations. It gave me the theory and methodology I needed to discover the informal structure of street corner gangs in Boston's North End.

According to Whyte, only in observations of group interactions was it possible to learn who was the street gang's informal leader. This could be shown, for example, by the fact that two or three groups merged into a larger unit when the leader arrived. When the leader said what he thought the gang should do, the others followed. Certainly others in the group could make suggestions of what they should do, but these usually dried up if the leader disagreed. If there were more than one potential gang leader, usually the lieutenants, this was shown by the members splitting up and following their respective leaders. Whyte maintained that the

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14. Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 4857 Box 2A, Folder 10, 11, 15.

internal ranking in the group determines all types of social interactions. An example was that the group's leader basically never borrowed money from persons lower in the group hierarchy, but turned primarily to leaders in other gangs, and secondarily to the lieutenants. This was a recurrent pattern that Whyte could find among the five street gangs he observed. Another illustration of how the group members' ranking was connected with group interactions is the often-mentioned bowling contest in the first chapter of *SCS*. The results of the contest, which was held in the end of April 1938, reflected—with two exceptions—the group's internal ranking.[15] According to Whyte (1941, p. 664), the method requires

> . . . precise and detailed observation of spatial positions and of the origination of action in pair and set events between members of informal groups. Such observations provide data by means of which one may chart structures—a system of mutual obligations growing out of the interactions of the members over a long period of time.

William Whyte is known mainly as an unusually acute participant observer with a sensitivity to small, subtle everyday details (Adler, Adler, & Johnson, 1992; van Maanen, 2011 [1988]). But in fact the observational method that he acquired from Arensberg and Chapple advocates quantitative behavioral observations of group processes. Whyte (1991) maintains, perhaps a bit unexpectedly, that "although *SCS* contains very few numbers, major parts of the book are based on quantification, the measurement (albeit imprecise) of observed and reported behavior" (p. 237). The behavioral scientist Chris Argyris (1952), who was a doctoral student under Whyte at Cornell University during the first half of the 1950s, concluded "In other words, Chapple and Arensberg believe, and Whyte agrees, that all feelings of individuals can be inferred from changes in their basic interaction pattern" (p. 45). Thus, Whyte made use of both participant observations and behavioral observations of group interactions. The reason why he emphasizes the use of measurable observations is probably that behavioral observations, in the United States during the 1920s–1940s, were usually regarded as scientifically objective and reliable. In this respect, Arensberg, Chapple, and Whyte were palpably influenced by Henderson's positivistic view of science. Participant observation was supposed to be more colored by the researcher's subjective interpretations. Hence Whyte drew a clear distinction between observations and interpretations of observations (Chapple & Arensberg, 1940; Whyte, 1941, 1953 [1951], 1967 [1964], 1970, 1982, 1991, 1993a, 1994, 1997; Argyris, 1952).

Platt (1998 [1996], p. 251) writes

> There has been little or no commentary within sociology on its [*SCS*] connections with obviously behaviouristic and positivistic orientations to observation and to study small groups, despite some clues given in the text.

Whyte was to have great use of Arensberg's and Chapple's method for observations of the social, criminal, and political structure in the North End. When he (1993b, p. 362) asked the Nortons who their leader was, they answered that there was no formal or informal leader, and that all the members had equally much to say about decisions.

It was only after Whyte had become accepted by the street gangs in the North End that he could make systematic observations of everyday interactions between the groups' members at the street level, and thereby reach conclusions that often contradicted the group members' own

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15. Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 14087 Box 2, Folder 32.

notions about their internal ranking. Contrary to what several members of the Nortons said, he detected a very clear informal hierarchy in the group—even though the group's composition changed during the three and half years of his field work. Indeed, Whyte argues in *SCS* that the Nortons no longer existed in the early 1940s. One of Whyte's chief achievements in *SCS* was to make visible in detail the street gangs' unconscious everyday interactions and mutual obligations within and between groups. At the same time, it emerges in *SCS* that Whyte's main informant Doc, probably through his discussions with Whyte, increased his awareness of the Nortons' informal organization and interactions with other groups in the local community. To borrow a pair of concepts from the American sociologist Robert Merton, he thus arrived at a *latent* explanation that went against the street gang's *manifest* narratives (Whyte, 1941, 1993a, 1994, 1997; Homans, 1993 [1951], pp. 156–189; Merton, 1996, p. 89).

THE SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

As we have seen, an explicit condition of the Society of Fellows was that *SCS* could not be submitted as a doctoral dissertation at Harvard University. As Whyte (1994) noted, "the junior fellowship was supposed to carry such prestige that it would not be necessary to get a PhD" (p. 108). When he realized, after his intensive field work in the North End, that he would nevertheless need a doctoral degree, but that he could not obtain a doctoral position at Harvard, he was drawn to the possibility of going to Chicago. He (1994, p. 108) wrote about why he chose to go there

> The sociology department at the University of Chicago had an outstanding reputation, but that was not what attracted me. On the advice of Conrad Arensberg at Harvard, I chose Chicago so I could study with W. Lloyd Warner, who had left Harvard in 1935 after completing the fieldwork for several books that came to be known as the Yankee City series.

Since Warner was the professor in both anthropology and sociology—the only chair in both subjects after the department was divided in 1929—Whyte did not at first need to choose a main subject. But he wanted to finish his doctoral studies at Chicago as quickly as possible, and decided that it would take longer to study anthropological courses, such as archaeology and physical anthropology, than sociological ones, such as family studies and criminology. Before settling on South Dorchester Avenue in Chicago during the autumn of 1940, Whyte had been influenced at Harvard by leading researchers who were not primarily based in sociology, although Henderson lectured for the Society about Vilfredo Pareto's economically impregnated sociology. At Chicago, the only sociologist who really influenced him was Everett C. Hughes (Whyte, 1970, 1991, 1994, 1997).

THE ORGANIZED SLUM

When William F. Whyte researched and lectured at Chicago during the period 1940–1948,[16] a tense intradisciplinary antagonism existed there between Everett C. Hughes and W. Lloyd Warner, on the one hand, and Herbert Blumer and Louis Wirth, on the other. The background to this antagonism was that Blumer/Wirth did not think that Hughes/Warner maintained a high enough scientific level in their empirical studies, while the later thought that

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16. The exception was the academic year 1942–1943 when Whyte did research at the University of Oklahoma (Whyte, 1984, p. 15; Gale Reference Team, 2002).

Blumer/Wirth only talked without conducting any empirical research of their own (Abbott, 1999). Whyte eventually found himself in the Hughes/Warner camp. As a result of this conflict, and of Warner not being able to attend his doctoral disputation, Whyte felt uncertain how it would turn out. At the dissertation defense he received hard criticism from Wirth for not having defined the slum as disorganized, and for not having referred to previous slum studies in sociology such as Wirth's own sociological classic—*The Ghetto* (1998 [1928]). But Whyte argued that *SCS* would be published without bothersome footnotes containing references, and without an obligatory introduction surveying the literature of earlier slum studies. He also gradually perceived that *SCS* would have been a weaker and more biased study if he had read earlier sociological slum studies before beginning his field work, since they would have given him a distorted picture of the slum as disorganized from the viewpoint of middle-class values (Whyte, 1967 [1964], 1970, 1982, 1984, 1991, 1993a, 1994, 1997).

Whyte (1967 [1964], p. 258) described how he avoided this pitfall:

> The social anthropologists, and particularly Conrad M. Arensberg, taught me that one should approach an unfamiliar community such as Cornerville as if studying another society altogether. This meant withholding moral judgements and concentrating on observing and recording what went on in the community and how the people themselves explained events.

Whyte's social-anthropological schooling from Harvard made him a somewhat odd bird for certain sociologists at Chicago. Furthermore, it shows that an alternative preunderstanding can enable the researcher to view the studied phenomenon in an at least partly new light. After several fruitless attempts by Wirth to get Whyte to define the slum as disorganized, Hughes intervened, who also sat in the degree committee. He said that the department would approve *SCS* as a doctoral dissertation on the condition that Whyte wrote a survey of the literature of earlier slum studies. The survey would thereafter be bound together with the rest of the text and placed in the University of Chicago's library. Once Whyte had published two articles titled "Social Organization in the Slums" (1943b) and "Instruction and Research: A Challenge to Political Scientists" (1943a), Hughes persuaded the sociology department that these did not need to be bound with *SCS* (Whyte, 1984, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1997).

The concept of disorganization was fundamental to the Chicago school's urban sociology, for its view of the group's adaptation to city life and the individual's role in the group. This concept had first been introduced by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in the book that became their milestone, *The Polish Peasant* (1958 [1918–1920]). It subsequently became an accepted perspective on migrants' process of integration into urban social life in the Chicago school's studies during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. When Whyte argued in his study that the slum was organized for the people who resided and lived there, he touched a sore spot in the Chicago school's urban sociology, which had held for decades that the slum lacked organization. Whyte made an important empirical discovery when, with great insight and precision, he described the internal social organizations of the Nortons and Italian Community Club, whereas the Chicago school had unreflectively presupposed such groups' lack of internal social structure. According to Whyte (1993b), the North End's problem was not "lack of organization but failure of its own social organization to mesh with the structure of the society around it" (p. 273).[17]

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17. See also Edwin H. Sutherland's (1944) review of *SCS* in *American Journal of Sociology* and R. Lincoln Keiser (1979 [1969]) for a similar critique of how certain sociologists regarded Afro-American street gangs in economically impoverished areas during the 1960s.

The Chicago school came to use the concept of disorganization mainly in two ways. The first, based on Thomas and Znaniecki's definition, was an explanation for how the Polish peasants, and other groups in the transnational migration from the European countryside to the metropolis of Chicago, went through three phases of integration: organized, disorganized, and finally reorganized. The second way of using the concept was a later modification of the first. Chicago sociologists such as Roderick D. McKenzie and Harvey W. Zorbaugh described the groups who lived in the slum as permanently disorganized. The difference between the two viewpoints was that Thomas and Znaniecki emphasized that the great majority of the Polish peasants would gradually adapt to their new homeland, while McKenzie and Zorbaugh—who were strongly influenced by the human-ecological urban theory of Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess—considered the slum as disorganized regardless of which group was involved or how long it had lived in Chicago. Thomas was also to write about young female prostitutes in *The Unadjusted Girl* (1969 [1923]) where he alternated between the two viewpoints. McKenzie and Zorbaugh proceeded more faithfully from Burgess' division of the city into five concentric zones, and their manner of using the concept of disorganization became the accepted one in this school (Whyte, 1943b, 1967 [1964]); Ciacci, 1968; Andersson, 2007).[18]

It was only Thomas and Znaniecki who made a full transnational migration study in Chicago. The other studies mostly took their starting point in the slum after the migrant had arrived in Chicago. The sociologist Michael Burawoy (2000) maintains, somewhat simplistically, that "the Chicago School shrank this global ethnography into local ethnography, and from there it disappeared into the interiors of organizations" (p. 33).

An excellent example of a local monograph during the school's later period was the quantitative study *Mental Disorders in Urban Areas* (1965 [1939]) by Robert E. L. Faris and H. Warren Dunham, which concluded that the highest concentration of schizophrenia occurred in disorganized slum areas. Thus, the use of the concept in the Chicago school had gone from explaining migrants' transnational transition, from countryside to big city, to solely defining the slum and its inhabitants as disorganized.

In his article "Social Organization in the Slums" (1943b), Whyte criticized the Chicago researchers McKenzie, Zorbaugh, Thomas, and Znaniecki for being too orthodox when they see the slum as disorganized and do not realize that there can be other agents of socialization than the family, such as the street gang and organized crime. In contrast, Whyte thinks that other Chicago sociologists—like John Landesco, Clifford R. Shaw, and Frederic M. Thrasher—have found in their research that the slum is organized for its inhabitants. Whyte emphasized in his article that it is a matter of an outsider versus an insider perspective. Some Chicago researchers have an outsider perspective nourished by American middle-class values, while others show greater knowledge about the slum population's social worlds. Whyte (1967 [1964], p. 257) developed this idea in the mid-1960s:

> The middle-class normative view gives us part of the explanation for the long neglect of social organization in the slums, but it is hardly the whole story. Some sociologists saw slums in this way because they were always in the position of outsiders.

Rather surprisingly, Whyte in the above-cited article (1943b) argued that the Chicago sociologists had different views of disorganization even though all of the sociologists he named, besides Thomas and Znaniecki, had shared Park and Burgess as supervisors and mentors. Moreover, he does not mention that Chicago researchers during the 1920s, 1930s,

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18. Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 14087 Box 2, Folder 8.

and 1940s used the concept of disorganization in an at least partly different way than the original one of Thomas and Znaniecki.

It is also worth noting that Whyte's article did not examine the Chicago monograph which perhaps most closely resembles his own: Nels Anderson's *The Hobo* (1961 [1923]). Anderson too, in his intensive field study of Chicago's homeless men in the natural area Hobohemia, concluded that the slum was organized. Both Anderson and Whyte made use of participant observation to illuminate groups' complex social worlds. Although Anderson does not give a concrete description of a few groups of homeless men corresponding to what Whyte gives for the street gangs in the North End, they both find that an insider perspective has a decisive importance for understanding the slum residents' multifaceted social worlds.

When Whyte compared his own study with Thrasher's (1963 [1927]), which deals with child and teenage gangs in Chicago's slum districts, there emerge some of the most important differences between his approach and that of the Chicago school. While Whyte (1941, pp. 648–649) gave a dense description of five street gangs, the Chicago school strove—with natural science as a model—to draw generally valid conclusions about groups, institutions, life styles, and city districts:

> It [*SCS*] differs from Thrasher's gang studies in several respects. He was dealing with young boys, few of them beyond their early teens. While my subjects called themselves corner boys, they were all grown men, most of them in their twenties, and some in their thirties. He studied the gang from the standpoint of juvenile delinquency and crime. While some of the men I observed were engaged in illegal activities, I was not interested in crime as such; instead, I was interested in studying the nature of clique behavior, regardless of whether or not the clique was connected with criminal activity. While Thrasher gathered extensive material upon 1,313 gangs, I made an intensive and detailed study of 5 gangs on the basis of personal observation, intimate acquaintance, and participation in their activities for an extended period of time.

What chiefly emerges in the quotation is that, whereas Whyte's main aim was to describe precisely the daily interactions in and between five street gangs and the surrounding local community, Thrasher's general objective was to make a social survey of all the street gangs in Chicago, even though the study does not show how well he succeeded with his grand ambition. Of course, the Chicago school's research projects during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s differed as regards their efforts to use sociological categories. For instance, Anderson's *The Hobo* is not as permeated by the urban sociological perspective of Park and Burgess as is Zorbaugh's *The Gold Coast and the Slum*.

Neither the Chicago researchers nor Whyte seem to be fully aware that they used the concept of disorganization in different ways. Thus, they mixed together an ethnic group's transnational migration process and internally organized urban communities, on the one hand, with abiding social problems, such as homelessness, criminality, prostitution, schizophrenia, suicide, and youth gangs, in slum areas, on the other hand. A complementary explanation could be that Chicago concepts were sometimes betrayed by Chicago observations (Hannerz, 1980, p. 40). Whyte adopted a more relativistic cultural attitude toward people who lived in the slum, and thinks that the middle class's formal organizations and societies should not be considered "better" than the street gangs' and organized crime's informal organizations and networks inside and outside the slums. While the Chicago school, aided by the research results from its monographs, tried to find general patterns in migrant groups' adaptation to the new living conditions in the metropolis, Whyte's purpose was to expose in detail the street gangs' social, criminal, and political organization. These constituted alternative career paths for the

slum inhabitants, and were connected not least with the formal and informal political structure on both the municipal and national levels.

> If we can get to know these people intimately and understand the relations between little guy and little guy, big shot and little guy, and big shot and big shot, then we know how Cornerville society is organized. On the basis of that knowledge it becomes possible to explain people's loyalties and the significance of political and racket activities. (Whyte, 1993b, p. xx)

That Whyte employed a structural-functional explanatory model for how the different parts of the North End cohere in a larger unity is not a coincidence, as I will clarify later. At the same time, it is essential to notice that when Whyte made his study, the earlier optimism that characterized most of the Chicago school's studies had given way to a more pessimistic outlook on the future as a result of the Depression that pervaded American society in the 1930s.

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITIES OF CHICAGO AND HARVARD

It was a historical fluke that William Whyte became a grantee at the Society of Fellows two years after Arensberg gained admittance. Due to the social-anthropological schooling that Whyte acquired at Harvard University, he was able throughout his 86-year life to argue against researchers who wanted to place him in the Chicago school's realm of thought. Besides criticizing certain Chicago sociologists' description of the slum as socially disorganized, he came to be included, through his mentors Arensberg and Warner, in Radcliffe-Brown's research ambitions of a worldwide comparative sociology.[19] In 1944, Radcliffe-Brown (1976 [1958], p. 100) wrote about this grand research project:

> Ethnographical field studies are generally confined to the pre-literate peoples. In the last ten years, field studies by social anthropologists have been carried out on a town in Massachusetts, a town in Mississippi, a French Canadian community, County Clare in Ireland, villages in Japan and China. Such studies of communities in "civilized" countries, carried out by trained investigators, will play an increasingly large part in the social anthropology of the future.

While it is highly probable that Radcliffe-Brown refers to Newburyport rather than to Boston as the town in Massachusetts where social anthropologists had conducted extensive field studies, my argument is that *SCS* can also be placed in this tradition. Warner (1941a) also wrote in line with Radcliffe-Brown in the early 1940s that social anthropology's field studies of modern society "must in time be fitted into a larger framework of all societies; they must become a part of a general comparative sociology (p. 786)." Warner, who had also been taught by Robert H. Lowie at Berkeley, got to know Radcliffe-Brown in connection with his field work in Australia on the Murngin people during 1926–1929 (Warner, 1964 [1937]). When Whyte came to Chicago in 1940, the departments of anthropology and sociology had conducted cross-cultural comparative sociology with social-anthropological field methods since at least the end of the 1920s. It can certainly be argued that Thomas and Znaniecki's as well as Anderson's sociological field studies, *The Polish Peasant* and *The Hobo*, respectively, constitute the real origin of this research tradition—but it is perhaps more correct to point out Robert Redfield's

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19. Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 4857 Box 2A, Folder 10.

Tepoztlan (1930), and the now almost totally forgotten Charlotte Gower Chapman's *Milocca* (1971 [1935]), as the first two anthropological studies in the tradition. At the same time as these two studies of Mexico and Sicily, respectively, belonged to an incipient social-anthropological tradition with strong sociological influences, they were remarkable exceptions since most of the anthropological field studies in the 1920s and 1930s were conducted within the borders of the United States (Warner, 1968 [1940]; Eggan, 1971; Peace, 2004, p. 68).

When the departments of sociology and anthropology at the University of Chicago were divided in 1929, the previously close collaboration between the two disciplines took a partly new form and orientation. Before the division, the idea was that the sociologists would take care of anthropology at home, while the anthropologists would investigate immigrants' cultural background in their native countries. Fay-Cooper Cole, the head of the anthropology department, wrote in a grant application in 1928:

> It is our desire to continue such studies but we believe that there is also a field of immediate practical value in which ethnological technique can be of special service – that is in the study of our alien peoples. Most of our attempts to absorb or Americanize these alien groups have been carried on without adequate knowledge of their backgrounds, of their social, economic, or mental life in the homelands. It is our hope to prepare high grade students for these background studies, and to make their results available to all social workers. We have recently made such a study of one district in Mexico, as a contribution to the study of the Mexican in Chicago. We have a similar study in prospect of the Sicilian. However these investigations are of such importance that we should have ten investigators at work where we now have one.[20]

The researchers in this comparative project would learn how the native countries' cultures were related to the immigrant groups' capacity for adaptation in Chicago and other American cities. For example, Redfield made a field study in Chicago of how the Mexican immigrants had managed to adapt from rural to urban life, before he began his field work on Tepoztlan.[21] The Chicago researchers thought that adaptive dilemmas of ethnic migrant groups could be mitigated if the city's welfare organizations and facilities had better and deeper background knowledge about the migrant's cultural patterns. The obvious social utility of such a cross-cultural research project would be that the United States and Chicago could make social efforts specifically adjusted to each newly arrived ethnic group. The field studies of Mexicans and Sicilians, referred to by Cole in the quotation above, were the first two anthropological studies in the almost symbiotic collaborative project between anthropology and sociology. It was crowned in the mid-1940s with Horace R. Cayton's and St. Clair Drake's unsurpassed work *Black Metropolis* (1993 [1945]). Cayton and Drake, whose supervisor had been Warner, dedicated their book to Park.

A historically decisive watershed for the anthropology department at Chicago in the early 1930s was the employment of Radcliffe-Brown. As George W. Stocking (1976) noted in regard to the department's development "the more important functionalist influence, however, was that of Radcliffe-Brown, who came to Chicago on the fall of 1931, fresh from his comparative synthesis of the types of Australian social organization" (p. 26). Radcliffe-Brown was employed as a professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago during 1931–1937 and succeeded Edward Sapir, who in the autumn of 1931 took over an advantageous

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20. University of Chicago, Special Collections Research Center of Joseph Regenstein Library, Presidents' Papers 1925–1945, Box 108, Folder 9.

21. University of Chicago, Special Collections Research Center of Joseph Regenstein Library, Robert Redfield Papers 1925–1958, Box 59, Folder 2.

professorship in the new anthropology department at Yale University (Darnell, 1986, p. 167; Stocking, 1999 [1995]). Besides in regard to the importance of conducting intensive field studies, Radcliffe-Brown and Sapir had different views in several respects about the subject area and orientation of anthropology. While Sapir was a linguist, and schooled in historicism by the father of American anthropology, Franz Boas, it was Durkheim's comparative sociology that inspired Radcliffe-Brown's theories. Boas and his students were mainly occupied with historical and contemporary documentation of disappearing Indian cultures in the United States (Boas, 1982 [1940]; Stocking, 1999 [1995], pp. 298–366). Radcliffe-Brown (1976 [1958]) defined social anthropology as a natural science whose primary task "lies in actual (experimental) observation of existing social systems" (p. 102). In other words, he was more eager to document the present than salvage the past.

When Warner was employed in 1935 by both the anthropological and sociological departments at Chicago, Radcliffe-Brown's cross-cultural comparative sociology could be implemented in various research projects. But Warner had already begun, in collaboration with Mayo, the *Yankee City Series* at Harvard University in the early 1930s. Redfield was also to have great importance for a deeper cooperation between anthropology and sociology at Chicago. Strongly influenced by his father-in-law Robert E. Park's sociology, he had emphasized in his doctoral dissertation that anthropologists should devote themselves less to pre-Columbian archaeology and folklore, and focus more on contemporary comparative scientific cultural studies. Moreover, Park described Radcliffe-Brown as a sociologist who primarily happened to be interested in aboriginal peoples (Stocking, 1979, p. 21). In addition to Warner and Redfield, Hughes also contributed in a crucial way to deepening and enlivening the cooperation between the anthropology and sociology departments even after their division in 1929. It is in this research landscape that I want to place Whyte's *SCS*.

Paradoxically, the employment of Radcliffe-Brown in 1931 and Warner 1935 meant that the anthropology department became more sociologically oriented than before the division in 1929. The reason was partly that Radcliffe-Brown replaced Sapir, and partly that Redfield and Warner had ever more to say while Cole had less influence after Sapir left Chicago. Furthermore, Redfield and Warner mostly shared Radcliffe-Brown's view of the subject's future development. Already from the start, as Park (1961 [1923], p. xxvi) wrote in the "Editor's Preface" to *The Hobo*, sociology in Chicago had the general aim of giving not as much emphasis to

> . . . the particular and local as the generic and universal aspects of the city and its life, and so make these studies not merely a contribution to our information but to our permanent scientific knowledge of the city as a communal type.

Against the background of this reasoning, it may be worth observing that social anthropologists and sociologists in Chicago, after the arrival of Radcliffe-Brown and Warner, developed what the Chicago school had already initiated about the diversity of urban life, although with the entire world as a field of ethnographic work. While the Chicago school's dominance in American sociology began to taper off in the mid-1930s, since Park left the department in 1934 and the sociology departments at Columbia and Harvard universities were improved, social anthropology gained in prominence.

Although Chicago sociologists, such as W. I. Thomas, could be critical of some aspects of Durkheim's comparative sociology, one can find a common historical link in Herbert Spencer's social evolutionism. Spencer, who was a notably controversial person in some academic circles, is perhaps best known for having sided with big industry against advocates of reform, as well

as for having coined the expression *survival of the fittest*. However, certain sociologists and social anthropologists were attracted to his idea of a comparative sociology. In contrast, the anthropology based on historicism with Boas in its front line was a consistent opponent of Spencer's social evolutionism as a whole (Warner, 1968 [1940]; Voget, 1975, pp. 480–538; Radcliffe-Brown, 1976 [1958], pp. 178–189; Boas, 1982 [1940]; Perrin, 1995; Stocking, 1999 [1995], pp. 305–306; Andersson, 2007).

How Radcliffe-Brown's and Warner's Structural-Functional Model of Thought Influenced Whyte

In order to realize their grand plans for a cross-cultural comparative sociology, Radcliffe-Brown (1964 [1939], p. xv) and Warner had a great need of systematic comparisons between different cultural forms, grounded in intensive field studies of particular societies:

> What is required for social anthropology is a knowledge of how individual men, women, and children live within a given social structure. It is only in the everyday life of individuals and their behavior in relation to one another that the functioning of social institutions can be directly observed. Hence the kind of research that is most important is the close study for many months of a community which is sufficiently limited in size to permit all the details of its life to be examined.

SCS met Radcliffe-Brown's and Warner's high requirements for a long-term intensive social-anthropological field study of the structural function of social institutions (street gangs, organized crime, police corps, and political machinery) in a particular community. As in the above-mentioned community studies, the concrete research results of *SCS* were essential empirical facts that could make Radcliffe-Brown's and Warner's cross-cultural comparative sociology more than just groundless speculation about similarities and differences between the world's cultural forms. Earlier "armchair researchers," such as Edward B. Tylor, Lewis H. Morgan, William Sumner, and Herbert Spencer, had been sharply criticized by anthropologists and sociologists like Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Thomas for not having enough empirical data to verify their evolutionary theories about distinct cultures' universal origin and progress (Stocking, 1992; McGee & Warms, 2004 [1996]; Andersson, 2007).

There are more points of contact than the historical connection between *SCS* and Radcliffe-Brown's and Warner's research ambitions for a cross-cultural comparative sociology. Whyte (1993b, p. 272) draws a structural-functional conclusion in *SCS*:

> The corner gang, the racket and police organization, the political organization, and now the social structure have all been described and analyzed in terms of a hierarchy of personal relations based upon a system of reciprocal obligations. These are the fundamental elements out of which all Cornerville institutions are constructed.[22]

Whyte's explanation, for how the concrete social structure in the North End is functionally and hierarchically linked together in a larger social system, lies completely in line with Radcliffe-Brown's 1952, p. 181) explanation of the same process on a more general level:

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22. Whyte also emphasizes in the manuscript "Outline for Exploration in Cornerville" from July 17, 1940 that "the main purpose is to examine the functioning of various groups in the community in order to gain an understanding of human interactions which may be applied in other communities, in other studies" (Whyte, William Foote. Papers. #/4087. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 4857 Box 2A, Folder 19).

By the definition here offered 'function' is the contribution which a partial activity makes to the total activity of which it is a part. The function of a particular social usage is the contribution it makes to the total social life as the functioning of the total social system. Such a view implies that a social system (the total social structure of a society together with the totality of social usages in which that structure appears and on which it depends for its continued existence) has a certain kind of unity, which we may speak of as a functional unity. We may define it as a condition in which all parts of the social system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony or internal consistency, i.e. without producing persistent conflicts which can neither be resolved nor regulated.

Warner (1941a, p. 790), too, explains on a general level how the social structure functionally, and not least hierarchically, coheres in a larger social system:

Once the system of rank has been determined, it becomes important to know the social mechanisms which contributed to its maintenance. There arise concomitant problems of how the different social structures fit into the total system.

Whyte (1955, p. 358) explains on the basis of similar structural-functional ideas how the different institutions or organizations and leaders in the North End are functionally and hierarchically connected in a larger social system:

Although I could not cover all Cornerville, I was building up the structure and functioning of the community through intensive examination of some of its parts–*in action*. I was relating the parts together through observing events between groups and between group leaders and the members of the larger institutional structures (of politics and the rackets). I was seeking to build a sociology based upon observed interpersonal events. That, to me, is the chief methodological and theoretical meaning of *Street Corner Society*.

Although I argue consistently that *SCS* was part of Radcliffe-Brown's and Warner's cross-cultural research project, it is equally important to stress that Whyte demonstrated both norm conflicts between groups in the North End (such as corner boys and college boys) and a different social organization than what existed in the surrounding majority society (Whyte, 1967 [1964], p. 257; Lindner, 1998). Nevertheless, Whyte (1993b, p. 138) maintains through a structural-functional explanatory model that emphasizes consensus between groups that the main function of the police in Boston was not to intervene against crime, but to regulate the street gangs' criminal activities in relation to the surrounding society's predominant norm system:

On the one side are the "good people" of Eastern City [Boston], who have written their moral judgments into the law and demand through their newspapers that the law be enforced. On the other side are the people of Cornerville, who have different standards and have built up an organization whose perpetuation depends upon freedom to violate the law.

Vidich (1992), however, holds that "There is no evidence in Whyte's report that he used anyone else's conceptual apparatus as a framework for his descriptive analysis of Cornerville" (p. 87). A plausible explanation for his interpretation is that the study is primarily a detailed and particularly concrete description of the street gangs' organization. It is necessary to have comprehensive knowledge about the history of the subjects of anthropology and sociology in order to trace the connection in the history of ideas between *SCS* and Radcliffe-Brown's structural functionalism (Argyris, 1952, p. 66). Further direct support for my claim is that Whyte (1967 [1964] wrote in the mid-1960s that in *SCS* he made use of "what is now often
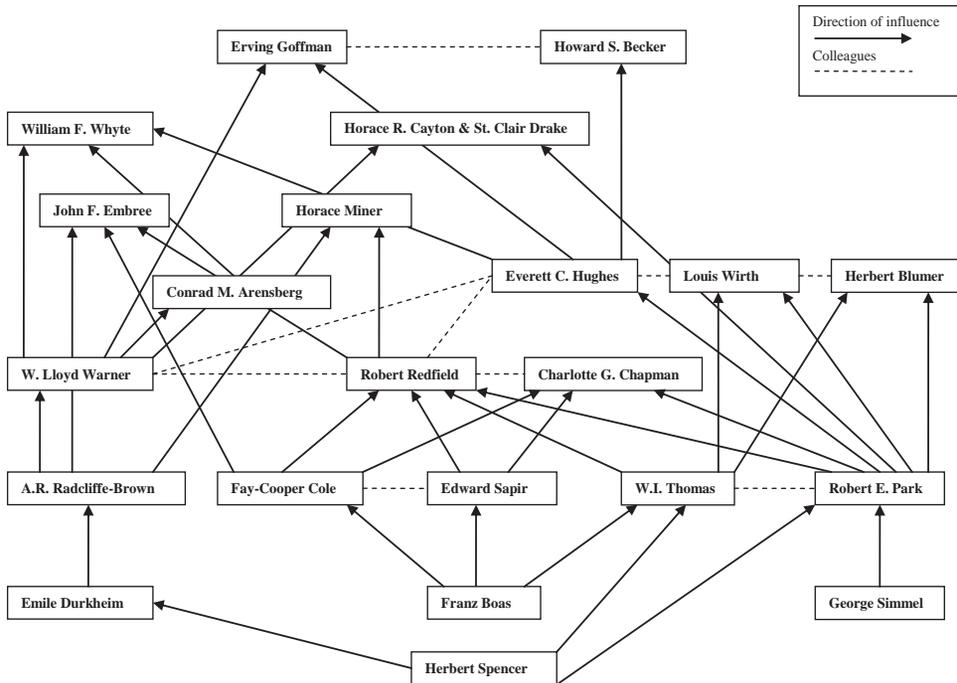
DIAGRAM
Lines of descent in social anthropology and sociology at the universities of Chicago and Harvard.

called a structural-functional approach. It argues that you cannot properly understand structure unless you observe the functioning of the organization" (p. 265).

WHYTE'S POSITION IN THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

The purpose of the accompanying diagram is to chart Whyte's position in social anthropology and sociology at the universities of Chicago and Harvard. As I have argued, the Diagram shows that Whyte did not have his disciplinary home among the Chicago sociologists, even though he ascribes some importance to Hughes. At the same time, I would emphasize that the diagram primarily includes the intellectual influences and lines of thought that were embodied in social anthropologists and sociologists who were active at those universities when Whyte wrote *SCS* during the 1930s and 1940s. Whyte was very probably influenced by other research colleagues and thinkers, mainly after he left Chicago in 1948. Certain influential thinkers, such as Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown, and Park, had an indirect impact on Whyte, while other researchers like Warner, Arensberg, and Hughes exerted direct personal influences. My inclusion of researchers who did not influence Whyte is intended to give the reader a wider picture of the intellectual atmosphere and research landscape that prevailed at this time.

The reason why no line has been drawn from Radcliffe-Brown to Whyte is that this influence went chiefly via Arensberg and Warner. Like all diagrams, mine builds upon various necessary simplifications; for instance, I have excluded a number of influential persons, such as Burgess, Chapple, Henderson, and Mayo. Although I show only one-way directions of influence, apart from the case of colleagues where no clear direction existed, there was naturally a

mutual influence between several of the researchers. The influence between some researchers, such as Warner, Arensberg, and Whyte, was, however, stronger than that among others, for example, Hughes and Whyte. Moreover, I have chosen to include Spencer in the diagram, despite the strong criticism by researchers like Durkheim and Thomas in certain respects of his evolutionary laissez-faire and speculative racial doctrine. Neither should Spencer be perceived as a social-scientific forefather to the research traditions in the diagram. On the other hand, I would maintain that an idea-historical line of thought—largely originating in Spencer's evolutionism—united the scientific ambitions of Durkheim/Radcliffe-Brown/Warner as well as of Thomas/Park to make comparisons between different cultures and social types based on empirical research (Voget, 1975, pp. 480–538; Perrin, 1995; Stocking, 1999 [1995], pp. 305–306). Warner (1968 [1940], p. xii) therefore claims:

> Some modern anthropologists have come to realize that the diverse communities of the world can be classified in a range of varying degrees of simplicity and complexity, much as animal organisms have been classified, and that our understanding of each group will be greatly enhanced by our knowledge of its comparative position among the social systems of the world.

In spite of its unavoidable limitations, the diagram contains a wealth of names to display the idea-historical relationship between Radcliffe-Brown's and Warner's cross-cultural research project and leading Chicago sociologists, such as Thomas and Park. The social-anthropological education that Whyte got from Arensberg and Warner at the universities of Chicago and Harvard had its historical origins in Durkheim's and Radcliffe-Brown's comparative and structural-functional sociology. As in the case of the Chicago school, Radcliffe-Brown's and Warner's research project did not last long enough to make it possible to reach any scientifically verifiable conclusions about similarities and differences between cultures. Nonetheless, Warner in the study *Yankee City Series* achieved path-breaking research results about American society, such as the crucial importance of social class affiliation, for the ability to pursue a formal professional career (Warner, 1962 [1953], 1968 [1940]).

CONCLUSION

Social scientists, such as Martin Bulmer (1986 [1984], Anthony Oberschall (1972), and George W. Stocking (1982 [1968]) have shown the importance of placing the researchers and their ideas in a historical context. In textbooks and historical overviews, there is often a tendency to include researchers and ideas within anachronistic themes that do not take sufficient consideration of the colleagues and the departments where the researchers were educated. However, Whyte and *SCS* have often been placed into an anachronistic context or there has been a tendency to take insufficient consideration of his colleagues and the department where the primary research was carried out. All of these studies assume that the *SCS* is part of the tradition that is today called the Chicago school of sociology (Klein, 1971; Jermier, 1991; Schwartz, 1991; Boelen, 1992; Thornton, 1997).

Instead, there are other social-anthropological studies that belong to the same comparative research tradition as *SCS*. For example, Horace Miner's *St. Denis* (1963 [1939]); John F. Embree's *Suye Mura* (1964 [1939]); Conrad M. Arensberg's and Solon T. Kimball's *Family and Community in Ireland*; Edward H. Spicer's *Pascua* (1984 [1940]); and Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner's *Deep South* (1965 [1941]). Even Everett C. Hughes' *French Canada in Transition* (1963 [1943]) might be argued to lie in the research field's margin. With the exception of Arensberg and Hughes, the reason that none of the other

researchers are included in the diagram above is that Whyte did not, according to my findings from archival studies, correspond with them, know them personally, or was directly influenced by any of them while doing research at Harvard or Chicago. During this same time period, that is, late 1930s and early 1940s, these researchers were doing fieldwork at such different geographical locations as Canada, Japan, Ireland, and United States.

Not only did Whyte come to the ground-breaking conclusion that the slum is informally organized, he also conducted participant observations for a longer period of time than any one before him had done in an urban context. An equally important discovery was the understanding of street gang's internal structure and informal leadership. It was not until Whyte dropped the idea, after 18 months of intensive field work, that he would conduct a comprehensive community study, where the *Middletown* studies and *Yankee City Series* served as models, that the group structure of street gangs became the main focus of his study. Whyte came to this conclusion by interconnecting Arensberg's and Chapple's observation method with participant observations of several bowling matches in the fall of 1937 and spring of 1938. In the often-mentioned bowling match in April 1938, where most of the Nortons (corner boys) came to settle who was the greatest bowler, the results of the match coincides with a few exceptions, with the group's hierarchical structure. George C. Homans came to use Whyte's meticulous observations during 18 months of Nortons' everyday practices as a case in *The Human Group* (1993 [1951]). Using five ethnographic case studies, Homans aimed to reach universal hypotheses about norms, rank, and leadership in primary groups. He (1993 [1951]) claims that after a number of detailed field studies of primary groups during the interwar period, 1919–1938, there was a need for sociological generalization of "the small group" (p. 3). The book, therefore, had a twofold purpose; specifically, "to study the small group as an interesting subject in itself, but also, in so doing, to reach a new sociological synthesis" (Homans, 1993 [1951], p. 6). Whyte and Homans had been research colleagues at the Society of Fellows. Consequently, it is probably no coincidence that both, however at different times, became interested in primary groups' formal and informal organization. When Homans (1993 [1951]) generalizes Whyte's ethnographic observations of the corner boys' internal structure, he also at the same time changes the concept of status to rank because he "wants a word that refers to one kind only" (p. 179). With "one kind," Homans (1993 [1951]) means that status has a sociologically multifaceted meaning that refers to the person's social practice and position in a social network; while the concept of rank more clearly refers to larger organizations, such as companies or the military with a "pyramid of command" (p. 186). Because of this, Whyte's complex ethnographic discoveries of street gangs' social organization and mutual obligations to organized crime, police corps, and political machinery became reduced, in Homans theoretical study, to a question regarding the internal chain of command among the Nortons. Despite this shortcomings, Homans (1993 [1951]) argued that the intention was to develop "a theory neither more nor less complex than the facts it subsumes" (p. 16). At the same time, it is difficult to disregard the fact that both Homans' *The Human Group* and *SCS* in various ways were pioneering contributions in the creation of the research field "the small group." However, it is worth noting that in *The Human Group*, there is an incipient conceptual change from the concept of the primary group to the small group, which from Homans' point of view probably marks a generational shift in sociological research, although it is basically about the same social phenomenon.

Finally, I have argued that William Foote Whyte's social-anthropological schooling at Harvard was crucial to his, at the time, path-breaking conclusion that the North End had an informal well-functioning social organization. If Whyte instead had been educated in sociology at the University of Chicago, he would also have had a preunderstanding of the

slum as being socially disorganized. Social anthropologists Radcliffe-Brown, Warner, and Arensberg passed on to Whyte the "paradigm" to view the slums (North End) as socially organized, and not socially disorganized as the majority of American sociologists claimed (Warner, 1941a; Gibbs, 1964). The fact that this debate is still relevant, at least in the United States, is shown by researchers, such as Philippe Bourgois (2003 [1995]) and especially Loïc Wacquant (2008), who are very critical of those who define poor urban neighborhoods as disorganized, while researchers like Robert J. Sampson (2012) argue that the perspective continues to have relevance (pp. 36–39).

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