Everyday experiences show the specific character that a relationship attains by the fact that only two elements participate in it. A common fate or enterprise, an agreement or secret between two persons, ties each of them in a very different manner than if even only three have a part in it. This is perhaps most characteristic of the secret. General experience seems to indicate that this minimum of two, with which the secret ceases to be the property of the one individual, is at the same time the maximum at which its preservation is relatively secure. A secret religious-political society ... formed in the beginning of the nineteenth century in France and Italy, had different degrees among its members. The real secrets of the society were known only to the higher degrees; but a discussion of these secrets could take place only between any two members of the high degrees. The limit of two was felt to be so decisive that, where it could not be preserved in regard to knowledge, it was kept.... More generally speaking, the difference between the dyad and larger groups consists in the fact that the dyad has a different relation to each of its two elements than have larger groups to their members. Although, for the outsider, the group consisting of two may function as an autonomous, super-individual unit, it usually does not do so for its participants. Rather, each of the two feels himself confronted only by the other, not by a collectivity above him. The social structure here rests immediately on the one and on the other of the two, and the secession of either would destroy the whole. The dyad, therefore, does not attain that super-personal life which the individual feels to be independent of himself. As soon, however, as there is a sociation of three, a group continues to exist even in case one of the members drops out.

In the dyad, the sociological process remains, in principle, within personal interdependence and does not result in a structure that grows beyond its elements. This also is the basis of “intimacy.” The “intimate” character of certain relations seems to me to derive from the individual’s inclination to consider that which distinguishes him from others, that which is individual in a qualitative sense, as the core, value, and chief matter of his existence. The inclination is by no means always justifiable; in many people, the very opposite—that which is typical, which they share with many—is the essence and the substantial value of their personality. The same phenomenon can be noted in regard to groups. They, too, easily make their specific content, that is shared only by the members, not by outsiders, their center and real fulfillment. Here we have the form of intimacy.

It is obvious that the intimacy of the dyad is closely tied up with its sociological specialty, not to form a unit transcending the two members. For, in spite of the fact that the two individuals would be its only participants, this unit would nevertheless constitute a third element which might interpose itself between them. The larger the group is, the more easily does it form an objective unit up and above its members, and the less intimate does it become: the two characteristics are intrinsically connected. The condition of intimacy consists in the fact that the participants in a given relationship see only one another, and do not see, at the same time, an objective, super-individual structure which they feel exists and operates on its own. Yet in all its purity, this condition is met only rarely even in groups of as few as three. Likewise, the third element in a relation between two individuals—the unit which has grown out of the interaction among the two—interferes with the most intimate nature of the dyad; and this is highly characteristic of its subtler structure. Indeed, it is so fundamental that even marriages occasionally succumb to it, namely, when the first child is born.

Neither of the two members can hide what he has done behind the group, nor hold the group responsible for what he has failed to do. Here the...
forces with which the group surpasses the individual—indeinitely and partially, to be sure, but yet quite perceptibly—cannot compensate for individual inadequacies, as they can in larger groups. There are many respects in which two united individuals accomplish more than two isolated individuals. Nevertheless, the decisive characteristic of the dyad is that each of the two must actually accomplish something, and that in case of failure only the other remains—not a super-individual force, as prevails in a group even of three. The significance of this characteristic, however, is by no means only negative (referring, that is, to what it excludes). On the contrary, it also makes for a close and highly specific coloration of the dyadic relationship. Precisely the fact that each of the two knows that he can depend only upon the other and on nobody else, gives the dyad a special consecration—as is seen in marriage and friendship, but also in more external associations, including political ones, that consist of two groups. In respect to its sociological destiny and in regard to any other destiny that depends on it, the dyadic element is much more frequently confronted with All or Nothing than is the member of the larger group.

**The Triad vs. the Dyad**

This peculiar closeness between two is most clearly revealed if the dyad is contrasted with the triad. For among three elements, each one operates as an intermediary between the other two, exhibiting the twofold function of such an organ, which is to unite and to separate. Where three elements, A, B, C, constitute a group, there is, in addition to the direct relationship between A and B, for instance, their indirect one, which is derived from their common relation to C. The fact that two elements are each connected not only by a straight line—the shortest—but also by a broken line, as it were, is an enrichment from a formal-sociological standpoint. Points that cannot be contacted by the straight line are connected by the third element, which offers a different side to each of the other two, and yet fuses these different sides in the unity of its own personality. Discords between two parties which they themselves cannot remedy, are accommodated by the third or by absorption in a comprehensive whole.

Yet the indirect relation does not only strengthen the direct one. It may also disturb it. No matter how close a triad may be, there is always the occasion on which two of the three members regard the third as an intruder. The reason may be the mere fact that he shares in certain moods which can unfold in all their intensity and tenderness only when two can meet without distraction: the sensitive union of two is always irritated by the spectator. It may also be noted how extraordinarily difficult and rare it is for three people to attain a really uniform mood—when visiting a museum, for instance, or looking at a landscape—and how much more easily such a mood emerges between two. A and B may stress and harmoniously feel their m, because the n which A does not share with B, and the x which B does not share with A, are at once spontaneously conceded to be individual prerogatives located, as it were, on another plane. If, however, C joins the company, who shares n with A and x with B, the result is that (even under this scheme, which is the one most favorable to the unity of the whole) harmony of feeling is made completely impossible. Two may actually be one party, or may stand entirely beyond any question of party. But it is usual for just such finely tuned combinations of three at once to result in three parties of two persons each, and thus to destroy the unequivocal character of the relations between each two of them.

The sociological structure of the dyad is characterized by two phenomena that are absent from it. One is the intensification of relation by a third element, or by a social framework that transcends both members of the dyad. The other is any disturbance and distraction of pure and immediate reciprocity. In some cases it is precisely this absence which makes the dyadic relationship more intensive and strong. For, many otherwise underdeveloped, unifying forces that derive from more remote psychical reservoirs come to life in the feeling of exclusive dependence upon one another and of hopelessness that cohesion might come from anywhere but immediate interaction. Likewise, they carefully avoid many disturbances and dangers into which confidence in a third party and in the triad itself might lead the two. This intimacy, which is the tendency of relations between two persons, is the reason why the dyad constitutes the chief seat of jealousy.

**Dyads, Triads, and Larger Groups**

Dyads thus have very specific features. This is shown not only by the fact that the addition of a third person completely changes them, but also, and
even more so, by the common observation that the further expansion to four or more by no means correspondingly modifies the group any further. For instance, a marriage with one child has a character which is completely different from that of a childless marriage, but it is not significantly different from a marriage with two or more children. To be sure, the difference resulting from the advent of the second child is again much more considerable than is that which results from the third. But this really follows from the norm mentioned: in many respects, the marriage with one child is a relation consisting of two elements—on the one hand, the parental unit, and on the other, the child. The second child is not only a fourth member of a relation but, sociologically speaking, also a third, with the peculiar effects of the third member.

In short, the sociological situation between the superordinate and the subordinate is completely changed as soon as a third element is added. Party formation is suggested instead of solidarity…. It is seen in all these cases that the triad is a structure completely different from the dyad but not, on the other hand, specifically distinguished from four or more members.