GROUP DYNAMICS

fourth edition

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Group Dynamics, Fourth Edition
Donelson R. Forsyth

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INTRODUCTION TO GROUP DYNAMICS

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Group dynamics are the influential interpersonal processes that take place in groups. The tendency to join with others in groups is perhaps the most important single characteristic of humans, and these groups leave an indelible imprint on their members and on society. To understand people, we must understand their groups.

❖ What is a group?

❖ What are some common characteristics of groups?

❖ What assumptions guide researchers in their studies of groups and their processes?

❖ What fields and what topics are included in the scientific study of group dynamics?

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The lone individual—the single man or woman who has no connection to other men and women—is an extraordinarily rare human being. *Homo sapiens* is capable of surviving alone, and the recluse, ascetic, and prisoner in solitary confinement can forge a life on their own. But few humans seek or enjoy the challenges of solitude. Most people prefer to live in groups. Virtually all the activities of our lives—working, learning, worshiping, relaxing, playing, and even sleeping—occur in groups rather than isolated from others. Most people belong to many different groups, so the number of groups in the world probably reaches well beyond six billion. The world is literally teeming with groups.

For centuries, sages and scholars have been fascinated by groups—by the way they form, change over time, dissipate unexpectedly, achieve great goals, and sometimes commit great wrongs. Yet groups remain something of a mystery—unstudied at best, misunderstood at worst. Here we unravel some of their mysteries by examining their basic nature, their processes, and their impact on their members. We begin our task by asking some questions: What is a *group?* What are the characteristics of groups that most interest us? What kinds of group processes do we want to study? What do we mean by *group dynamics?* What assumptions do we embrace as we describe, analyze, and compare the various groups that populate the planet? What approach do we take to the study of groups?

What Is a Group?

Hundreds of fish swimming together are called a *school*. A pack of foraging baboons is a *troupe*. A half dozen crows on a telephone wire is a *murder*. A *gam* is a group of whales. But what is a collection of human beings called? A *group*.

Defining Groups

What would you include if you were asked to name all the groups in which you are a member? Would you list your family? Your neighborhood association? People who regularly log into a chat room on the Internet with you? Your political party? The handful of fellow students who often take the same classes you do? Coworkers who go out for drinks after work once in a while? The people standing in line with you at the checkout counter of the supermarket?

Each of these collections of people may seem unique, but each possesses that one critical element that defines a group: connections linking the individual members. We understand intuitively that three persons seated in separate rooms working on unrelated tasks can hardly be considered a group, for they are not connected in any way to each other. If, however, we create a connection among them, then these three individuals can be considered a rudimentary group. The members of a family who live in the same house, for example, are linked to one another by joint tasks, a shared living space, strong emotional bonds, and genetic similarities. People who work together are linked by the collaborative tasks that they must complete together, but in many cases they also become connected through a network of friendships and antagonisms. Even the people who are

standing in a queue in a checkout counter are a group, for they are briefly connected in a situation that demands cooperation, communication, and patience. In all these examples, the members are linked together in a web of interpersonal relationships. Thus, a **group** is defined as *two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships.*

TWO OR MORE INDIVIDUALS A group can range in size from two members to thousands of members. Very small collectives, such as dyads (two members) and triads (three members) are groups, but so are very large collections of people, such as mobs, crowds, and congregations (Simmel, 1902). On average, however, most groups tend to be relatively small in size, ranging from two to seven members. One researcher (J. James, 1953), after counting the number of people in 7405 informal, spontaneously formed groups found in public settings, reported an average group size of only 2.4. He also found that deliberately formed groups, such as those created in government or work settings, included an average of 2.3 members (J. James, 1951). In many cases, larger groups are also sets of interlocked smaller groups. Although groups come in all shapes and sizes, they tend to "gravitate to the smallest size, two" (Hare, 1976, p. 215).

The size of a group influences its nature in many ways, for a group with only two or three members possesses many unique characteristics simply because it includes so few members. The dyad is, by definition, the only group that dissolves when one member leaves and the only group that can never be broken down into subgroups (J. M. Levine & Moreland, 1995). Very large collectives, such as mobs, crowds, or congregations, also have unique qualities. In a very large group, for example, the chances for each member to be connected to all other members becomes very small. As groups increase in size, they tend to become more complex and more formally structured (Hare, 1976). By definition, however, all are considered groups.

WHO ARE CONNECTED TO ONE ANOTHER Like a series of interconnected computers, the individuals in any given group are *networked:* They are connected one to another. These connections, or ties, may be strong emotional bonds, like the links between the members of a family or a clique of close friends. The links may also be relatively weak ones that are easily broken with the passage of time or the occurrence of relationship-damaging events. Even weak links, however, can create robust outcomes across an entire group of networked individuals. Nor do these relationships need to link every person directly to every other person in the group. It takes, for example, 6 one-to-one links to connect every member of a 4-person group to every other member of that group (A/B, A/C, A/D, B/C, B/D, and C/D), but a 12-person group would need 66 links to join every member to every other member. Hence, many ties between members in groups are indirect ones. Person A might, for example, talk directly to B, B may talk to C, so A is linked to C through B. But even in large groups, members often feel

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group Two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships.

TABLE 1-1 Some Definitions of the Word *Group*

Central Feature	Definition
Categorization	A group is "two or more individuals . . . [who] perceive themselves to be members of the same social category" (J. C. Turner, 1982, p. 15).
Communication	"We mean by a group a number of persons who communicate with one another, often over a span of time, and who are few enough so that each person is able to communicate with all the others, not at second hand, through other people, but face-to-face" (Homans, 1950, p. 1).
Influence	"Two or more persons who are interacting with one another in such a manner that each person influences and is influenced by each other person" (M. E. Shaw, 1981, p. 454).
Interaction	"A group is a social system involving regular interaction among members and a common group identity. This means that groups have a sense of 'weness' that enables members to identify themselves as belonging to a distinct entity" (A. G. Johnson, 1995, p. 125).
Interdependence	"A group is a collection of individuals who have relations to one another that make them interdependent to some significant degree" (Cartwright & Zander, 1968, p. 46).
Interrelation	"A group is an aggregation of two or more people who are to some degree in dynamic interrelation with one another" (McGrath, 1984, p. 8).
Psychological significance	"A *psychological group* is any number of people who interact with each other, are psychologically aware of each other, and perceive themselves to be in a group" (D. C. Pennington, 2002, p. 3).
Shared identification	"A group . . . is two or more people possessing a common social identification and whose existence as a group is recognized by a third party" (R. Brown, 2000, p. 19).
Shared tasks and goals	"A group is defined as three or more people who work together interdependently on an agreed-upon activity or goal" (Keyton, 2002, p. 5).
Structure	"A group is a social unit which consists of a number of individuals who stand in (more or less) definite status and role relationships to one another and which possesses a set of values or norms of its own regulating the behavior of individual members, at least in matters of consequence to the group" (Sherif & Sherif, 1956, p. 144).
Systems	"Groups are open and complex systems . . . a complex, adaptive, dynamic, coordinated, and bounded set of patterned relations among members, tasks, and tools" (Arrow, McGrath, & Berdahl, 2000, p. 34).

connected to the majority of the group's members and to the group as a whole (Granovetter, 1973).

BY SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS Table 1-1 samples theorists' definitions of the word *group*. Some of these definitions do not specify the nature of the connection between group members, but others require members be linked in a particular way before an aggregation of individuals can be considered a group. Some,

for example, emphasize the importance of interdependence; they suggest that members depend on one another to achieve their goals and secure positive outcomes. Others insist that the group must be organized in some way; otherwise, it is just a haphazard, accidental gathering of individuals. Still others propose that the connection should be based on mutual influence—the capacity of each group member to influence and be influenced by another. But no matter what the nature of the linkage—whether communication among members, mutual influence, or some type of organization—the group members must be connected at a social level.

The relationship among group members is described as a *social* one to distinguish groups from *categories*. A **category** is an aggregation of individuals who share certain qualities, such as personality traits, physical features, or behavioral regularities. For example, individuals who are quiet and shy are often labeled *introverts,* the residents of New York City are *New Yorkers,* and individuals who routinely wager sums of money on games of chance are *gamblers.* If these categories create an interpersonal connection among the category members, then a category may be transformed into a group. But if the categorization has no social or psychological implications, then the category only describes individuals who are similar in some way, rather than a meaningful social group (Wilder & Simon, 1998).

Classifying Groups

Researchers often begin their analyses of group processes by drawing distinctions between the different types of groups they study. Typologists, no matter what their scientific field, bring order to their individual observations by identifying shared similarities and significant differences among the individual cases they examine. The group typologist asks, "What type of group is this?" and answers by classifying groups into meaningful clusters or categories.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY GROUPS Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1909), in his early studies of groups, distinguished between *primary groups* and *secondary groups.* **Primary groups,** such as family and friends, are small, long-term groups characterized by face-to-face interaction and high levels of cohesiveness, solidarity, and member identification. In many cases, individuals become part of primary groups involuntarily: Most are born into a family, which provides for their well-being until they can join other social groups. Other primary groups form when people interact in significant, meaningful ways for a prolonged period of time. Cooley (1909, p. 23) thought that primary groups protect members from harm, care for them when they are ill, and provide them with

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category An aggregation of people or things that share some common attribute or are related in some way.

primary group A small, long-term group characterized by face-to-face interaction, solidarity, and high levels of member-to-group interdependence and identification (e.g., families or friendship cliques). Such a group serves as the primary source of socialization for members by shaping their attitudes, values, and social orientation.

shelter and sustenance. But he believed that their most important function was in creating a bridge between the individual and society at large:

> Primary groups are primary in the sense that they give the individual his earliest and completest experience of social unity, and also in the sense that they do not change in the same degree as more elaborate relations, but form a comparatively permanent source out of which the latter are ever springing. (Cooley, 1909, pp. 26–27)

In earlier times, individuals belonged only to primary groups. They could live out their entire lives without leaving their small, close-knit families, tribes, or communities. As societies became more complex, however, so did their groups (Toennies, 1887/1963). Cooley called these more complex social structures **secondary groups.** Such groups are larger and more formally organized than primary groups, and they tend to be shorter in duration and less emotionally involving. However, secondary groups continue to define the individual's place in the social structure of society (T. Parsons, Bales, & Shils, 1953).

PLANNED AND EMERGENT GROUPS Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander (1960) were reluctant to classify groups, because any typology is bound to underestimate the variety and complexity of all groups and may prompt people to feel that they completely understand a group once they have slotted it into a particular category. But they did note that groups tend to fall naturally into two categories: **planned groups,** which are deliberately formed by their members or by an external authority for some purpose, and **emergent groups,** which come into existence spontaneously when individuals join together in the same physical location or form gradually over time as individuals find themselves repeatedly interacting with the same subset of individuals. People *found* planned groups, but they often *find* emergent groups.

Arbitration boards, civil rights groups, commissions, committees, expeditions, juries, legislative bodies, military units, musical groups, research teams, self-help groups, social agencies, sports teams, study groups, task forces, therapy groups, trade associations, veterans organizations, and work groups are all examples of planned groups. Planned groups tend to be organized, task focused, and formal. Such groups generally define their membership criteria clearly and so at all times know who is and who is not in the group. They often operate under a set of bylaws, contracts, or similar regulations that describe the group's acceptable procedures and practices. The group's structure may even be formalized in an organizational chart that defines who has more authority than others, who reports

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secondary group A relatively large, often formally organized, social group common in more complex societies (e.g., work groups, clubs, congregations). Such a group influences members' attitudes, beliefs, and actions, but as a supplement to the influence of smaller primary groups.

planned group A group deliberately formed by its members or an external authority.

emergent group A group that comes into existence gradually as individuals repeatedly interact with the same subset of individuals.

to whom, and how subgroups within the overall group are connected. Such groups, despite their overall level of organization and definition, may also lack emotional substance. They may be characterized by considerable routines, ceremonies, and procedures, but they may also be devoid of any warmth or emotional depth.

Emergent groups, such as audiences at events, bystanders at a crime scene, crowds, customers at a club, gangs, families, friendship networks in work settings, mobs, people waiting to board an airplane, and all manner of queues and lines, arise over time through repeated association of the eventual members. These groups are not explicitly organized, but they often develop elements of structure as their members determine what kinds of behaviors are expected of members, who is more or less liked, who leads and who follows, and so on. Such groups often have unclear boundaries, for they allow members to come and go rather than requiring them to join in a formal way. They have no written rules, but they likely develop unwritten norms that define what behaviors are appropriate and what behaviors are inappropriate within the group. Unlike planned groups, membership in an emergent group is sought as an end in and of itself: People do not join to gain some goal but because they find satisfaction in associating with the other group members.

Holly Arrow, Joseph E. McGrath, and Jennifer L. Berdahl (2000) extended this distinction between planned and emergent groups by asking another question: Is the group created by forces within the group (*internal origins*) or forces outside of the group (*external origins*)? Arrow and her colleagues combined both the planned–emergent dimension and the internal–external dimension to generate the following fourfold taxonomy of groups:

- *Concocted groups* are planned by individuals or authorities outside the group. A team of laborers digging a trench, the flight crew of an airplane, and a military squad would all be concocted groups, as those who created them are not actually members of the group.
- *Founded groups* are planned by one or more individuals who remain members of the group. A small Internet start-up company, a study group, an expeditionary team, or a grass-roots community action group would all be founded groups.
- *Circumstantial groups* are emergent, unplanned groups that arise when external, situational forces set the stage for people to join together—often temporarily—in a unified group. A group of travelers stranded together when their bus breaks down, a mob breaking shop windows and setting parked cars on fire, and a crowd of patrons at a movie theater would be circumstantial groups.
- *Self-organizing groups* emerge when interacting individuals gradually align their activities in a cooperative system of interdependence. Parties, gatherings of surfers waiting for waves just offshore, drivers leaving a crowded parking lot through a single exit, and a half-dozen adolescents who hang out together are all organized groups, but their organization is generated by implicit adjustments of each member to each other member.

GROUPS, TASK GROUPS, ASSOCIATIONS, AND CATEGORIES Brian Lickel and his colleagues (Lickel et al., 2000), rather than basing their analysis of group types on theoretically prominent dimensions, instead chose to study the way ordinary people intuitively classify the groups they encounter in their daily lives. In a series of studies, they asked college students in the United States and Poland to compare different collectives and rate them in terms of their size, duration, permeability, interaction, importance, and so on. When they examined these data using a statistical procedure called *cluster analysis,* they identified the following basic types of groups:

- *Intimacy groups,* such as families, romantic couples, close friends, and street gangs, were judged to be the most group-like by perceivers. These groups were small in size and moderate in duration and permeability, but characterized by substantial levels of interaction among the members, who considered these groups to be very important to them personally.

- *Task groups* included work groups in employment settings and goal-focused groups in a variety of nonemployment situations. Many of these groups, such as employees at a restaurant, people who worked in a factory, or company committees, were work groups in a business or commercial setting. Task groups outside the employment arena included student service groups, support groups, jury members, and study groups. Members of these groups were thought to be united in pursuing common goals and outcomes.

- *Weak associations* were aggregations of individuals that formed spontaneously, lasted only a brief period of time, and had boundaries that were very permeable. Some of these associations were very transitory, such as people gathered at a bus stop waiting for the next bus, or an audience in a movie theater. Others lasted longer but were marked by very weak relationships or very limited interactions among their members. Examples of these weak social relationship associations were residents of a large neighborhood and students in a college class.

- *Social categories,* as noted earlier, were aggregations of individuals who were similar in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. Such collectives as "women," "Jews," "doctors," and "citizens of Poland" clustered together in this category.

Lickel et al. (2000) also asked the perceivers if they considered all these kinds of aggregations of individuals to be true groups. They did not force people to make an either–or decision about each one, however. Recognizing that the boundary between what is and what is not a group is perceptually fuzzy, they instead asked participants to rate the aggregations on a scale from 1 (*not at all a group*) to 9 (*very much a group*). As they expected, intimacy groups and task groups received high average ratings (6.8 and 6.3), whereas categories and associations were rated lower (4.5 and 4.2, respectively). These findings suggest that people are more likely to consider aggregations marked by strong bonds between members, frequent interactions among members, and clear boundaries to be groups, but that they are less certain that such aggregations as crowds, waiting lines, or categories qualify as groups (see Table 1-2).

TABLE 1-2 Characteristics of Basic Types of Groups

Type of Group	Characteristics	Examples
Primary groups	Small, long-term groups characterized by face-to-face interaction and high levels of cohesiveness, solidarity, and member identification	Families, close friends, tight-knit peer groups, gangs, elite military squads
Secondary groups	Larger, less intimate, more goal-focused groups typical of more complex societies	Congregations, work groups, unions, professional associations
Planned groups	Deliberately formed by the members themselves or by an external authority, usually for some specific purpose or purposes	
Concocted	Planned by individuals or authorities outside the group	Production lines, military units, task forces, crews, professional sports teams
Founded	Planned by one or more individuals who remain within the group	Study groups, small businesses, expeditions, clubs, associations
Emergent groups	Groups that form spontaneously as individuals find themselves repeatedly interacting with the same subset of individuals over time and settings	
Circumstantial	Emergent, unplanned groups that arise when external, situational forces set the stage for people to join together, often only temporarily, in a unified group	Waiting lines (queues), crowds, mobs, audiences, bystanders
Self-organizing	Emerge when interacting individuals gradually align their activities in a cooperative system of interdependence	Study groups, friendship cliques in a workplace, regular patrons at a bar
Intimacy groups	Small groups of moderate duration and permeability characterized by substantial levels of interaction among the members, who value membership in the group	Families, romantic couples, close friends, street gangs
Task groups	Work groups in employment settings and goal-focused groups in a variety of nonemployment situations	Teams, neighborhood associations
Weak associations	Aggregations of individuals that form spontaneously, last only a brief period of time, and have very permeable boundaries	Crowds, audiences, clusters of bystanders
Social categories	Aggregations of individuals who are similar to one another in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, or nationality	Women, Asian Americans, physicians, U.S. citizens, New Yorkers

Describing Groups

Each one of the billions of groups that exist at this moment is a unique configuration of individuals, processes, and relationships. The family living at 103 Main Street is different in dozens of ways from the family that lives just next door to them. The team of workers building automobiles in Anytown, U.S.A., is unlike any other team of workers in any other factory in the world. The group of five students in a university library reviewing material for an upcoming test displays tendencies and qualities that are unlike any other study group that has ever existed or ever will exist. But all groups, despite their distinctive characteristics, also possess common properties and dynamics. When we study a group, we must go beyond its unique qualities to consider characteristics that appear with consistency in most groups, no matter what their origin, purpose, or membership—qualities such as interaction, interdependence, structure, cohesiveness, and goals.

INTERACTION Groups are systems that create, organize, and sustain **interaction** among the members. Group members get into arguments, talk over issues, and make decisions. They upset each other, give one another help and support, and take advantage of each other's weaknesses. They rally together to accomplish difficult tasks, but they sometimes slack off when they think others will not notice. Group members teach one another new things; they communicate with one another verbally and nonverbally, and they touch each other literally and emotionally. Groups members *do* things to and with each other.

Group interaction is as varied as human behavior itself, for any behavior that an individual can perform alone can also be performed in a group context. Robert Freed Bales (1950, 1999), after observing groups interacting in all types of situations, identified two classes of interaction that are most common in group situations. **Task interaction** includes all group behavior that is focused principally on the group's work, projects, plans, and goals. In most groups, members must coordinate their various skills, resources, and motivations so that the group can make a decision, generate a product, or achieve a victory. When a jury reviews each bit of testimony, a committee argues over the best course of action to take, or a family plans its summer vacation, the group's interaction is task focused.

Relationship interaction (or *socioemotional interaction*), in contrast, is focused on the interpersonal, social side of group life. If group members falter and need support, others will buoy them up with kind words, suggestions, and other forms of help. When group members disagree with the others, they are often

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interaction The social actions of individuals in a group, particularly those that are influenced either directly or indirectly by the group.

task interaction Actions performed by group members that pertain to the group's projects, tasks, and goals.

relationship interaction Actions performed by group members that relate to or influence the emotional and interpersonal bonds within the group, including both positive actions (social support, consideration) and negative actions (criticism, conflict).

roundly criticized and made to feel foolish. When a coworker wears a new suit or outfit, others in his or her work unit notice it and offer compliments or criticisms. Such actions do not help the group accomplish its designated task, but they do sustain the emotional bonds linking the members to one another and to the group. Bales based his *Interaction Process Analysis* (*IPA*) on this distinction between task and relationship interaction forms. This model is reviewed in Chapter 2.

INTERDEPENDENCE Most groups create a state of **interdependence,** for members' outcomes, actions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences are determined in part by other members of the group (Wageman, 2001). The acrobat on the trapeze will drop to the net unless her teammate catches her outstretched arms. The assembly line worker is unable to complete his work until he receives the unfinished product from a worker further up the line. The business executive's success (and salary) is determined by how well her staff completes its work. She can fulfill her personal tasks skillfully, but if her staff fails, then she fails as well. In such situations, members are obligated or responsible to other group members, for they provide each other with support and assistance.

Interdependence also results when members are able to influence and be influenced by others in the group. In a business, for example, the boss may determine how employees spend their time, what kind of rewards they experience, and even the duration of their membership in the group. These employees can influence their boss to a degree, but the boss's influence is nearly unilateral: The boss influences them to a greater degree than they influence the boss (see Figure 1-1). In other groups, in contrast, influence is more mutual: One member may influence the next member, who in turn influences the next (*sequential interdependence*) or two or more members may influence each other (*reciprocal* or *mutual interdependence*). Interdependence can also occur because groups are often nested in larger groups, and the outcomes of the larger groups depend on the activities and outcomes of the smaller groups (*multilevel interdependence*).

STRUCTURE Group members are not connected to one another at random, but in organized and predictable patterns. In all but the most ephemeral groups, patterns and regularities emerge that determine the kinds of actions that are permitted or condemned: who talks to whom, who likes whom and who dislikes whom, who can be counted on to perform particular tasks, and whom others look to for guidance and help. These regularities combine to generate **group structure**—the complex of roles, norms, and intermember relations that organizes the group. **Roles,** for example, specify the general behaviors expected of

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interdependence Mutual dependence or influence, as when one's outcomes, actions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences are determined in whole or in part by others.

group structure Norms, roles, and stable patterns of relations among the members of a group.

role A coherent set of behaviors expected of people who occupy specific positions within a group.

Unilateral interdependence

Sequential interdependence

Mutual, reciprocal interdependence

Multilevel interdependence
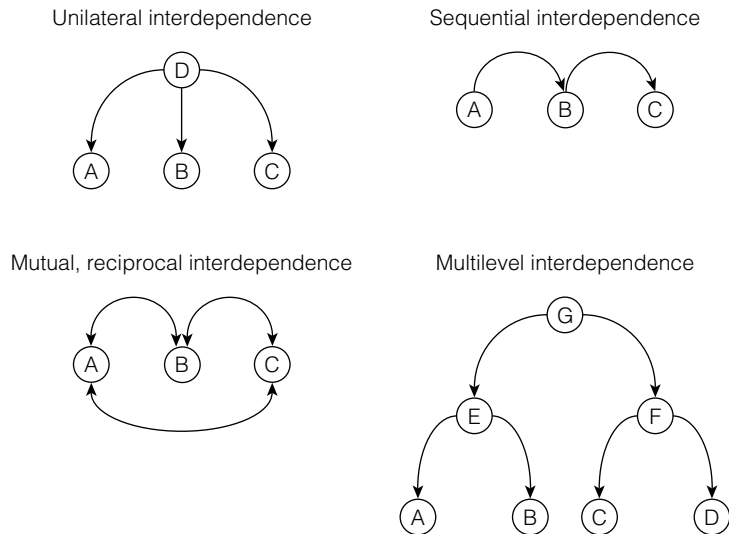
FIGURE 1-1

How do groups create interdependence among members? In some cases, interdependence results from dependence, as when a member's outcomes and experiences are determined by others. In other cases, interdependence is created by patterns of influence in the group and by the group's structure. A leader may, for example, influence others but not be influenced. In other cases, influence is chain-like and hierarchical, as Person A influences B who in turn influences C. Influence is often mutual and reciprocal: All members influence one another.

people who occupy different positions within the group. The roles of *leader* and *follower* are fundamental ones in many groups, but other roles—information seeker, information giver, elaborator, procedural technician, encourager, compromiser, harmonizer—may emerge in any group (Benne & Sheats, 1948). Group members' actions and interactions are also shaped by their group's **norms**—consensual standards that describe what behaviors should and should not be performed in a given context.

Roles, norms, and other structural aspects of groups, although unseen and often unnoticed, lie at the heart of their most dynamic processes. When people join a group, they initially spend much of their time trying to come to terms with the requirements of their role. If they cannot meet the role's demand, they might not remain a member for long. Norms within a group are defined and renegotiated

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norm A consensual and often implicit standard that describes what behaviors should and should not be performed in a given context.

over time, and conflicts often emerge as members violate norms. In group meetings, the opinions of members with higher status carry more weight than those of the rank-and-file members. When several members form a *subgroup* within the larger group, they exert more influence on the rest of the group than they would individually. When people manage to place themselves at the hub of the group's information exchange patterns, their influence over others also increases. If you had to choose only one aspect of a group to study, you would probably learn the most by studying its structure.

GOALS Groups usually exist for a reason. A team strives to outperform other teams in competitions. A study group wants to raise the grades of all of the students who are members. A jury must make decisions about guilt or innocence. The members of a congregation seek religious and spiritual enlightenment. In each case, the members of the group are united in their pursuit of common **goals.** In groups, people solve problems, create products, create standards, communicate knowledge, have fun, perform arts, create institutions, and even ensure their safety from attacks by other groups. Put simply, groups make it easier to attain our goals. For this reason, much of the world's work is done by groups rather than by individuals.

Groups do so many things that their activities can be classified in a variety of ways. Joseph E. McGrath's **circumplex model of group tasks,** for example, distinguishes among four basic group goals: generating, choosing, negotiating, and executing. As Figure 1-2 indicates, each of these basic categories can be further subdivided, yielding a total of eight basic tasks. When groups work at *generating* tasks, they strive to concoct the strategies they will use to accomplish their goals (*planning tasks*) or to create altogether new ideas and approaches to their problems (*creativity tasks*). When *choosing,* groups make decisions about issues that have correct solutions (*intellective tasks*) or questions that can be answered in many ways (*decision-making tasks*). When groups are *negotiating,* they must resolve differences of opinion among members regarding their goals or decisions (*cognitive conflict tasks*) or resolve competitive disputes among members (*mixed-motive tasks*). The most behaviorally oriented groups actually do things: *Executing* groups compete against other groups (*contests/battles*) or perform (*performances*). Some groups perform tasks from nearly all of McGrath's categories, whereas others concentrate on only one subset of goals (Arrow & McGrath, 1995; McGrath, 1984).

COHESIVENESS Groups are not merely sets of aggregated, independent individuals; instead, they are unified social entities. Groups cannot be reduced down to the level of the individual without losing information about the group as a unit, as a whole. Whenever a group comes into existence, it becomes a system

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goal The aim or outcome sought by the group and its members.

circumplex model of group tasks A conceptual taxonomy developed by Joseph McGrath that orders group tasks in a circular pattern based on two continua: cooperative–competitive and conceptual–behavioral.
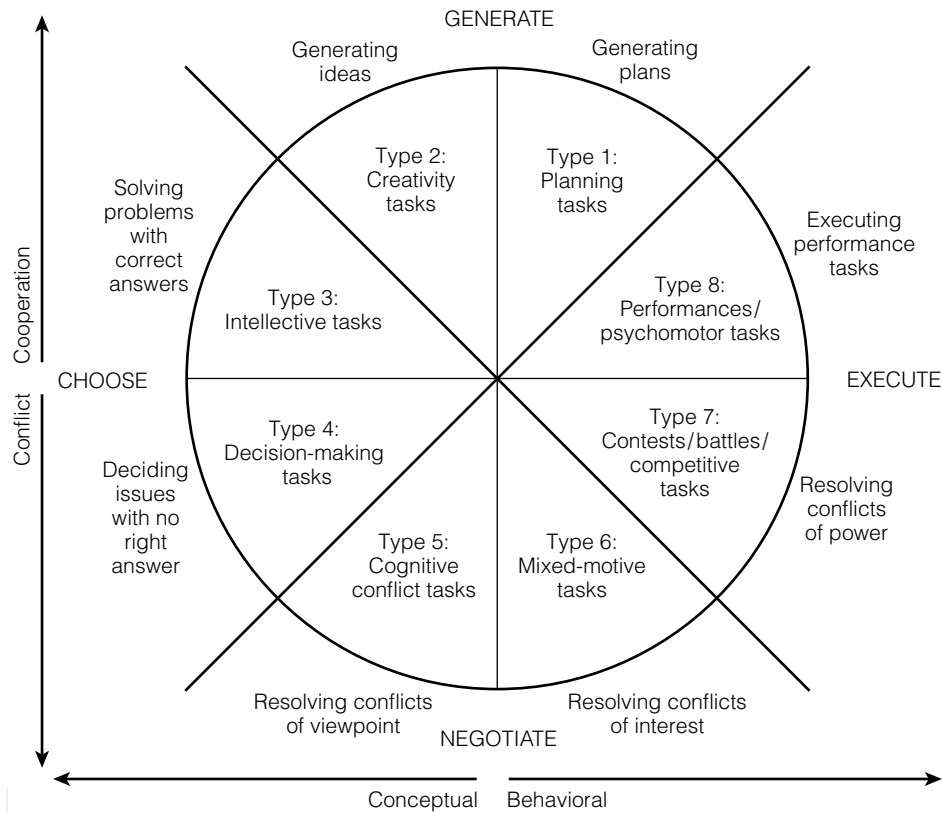
FIGURE 1-2

What do groups *do?* Joseph E. McGrath's task circumplex identifies eight basic activities undertaken by groups: planning, creating, solving problems, making decisions, forming judgments, resolving conflicts, competing, and performing.

with *emergent properties* that cannot be fully understood by piecemeal examination. The Gestalt dictum, "The whole is greater than the sum of the parts," suggests that a group is more than the sum of the individual members.

This quality of "groupness" or unity is determined, in part, by **group cohesion**—the strength of the bonds linking members to one another. A group of executives squabbling among themselves each time the group must reach a decision is clearly less cohesive than a sports team whose members train together

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group cohesion The strength of the bonds linking individuals to the group, feelings of attraction for specific group members and the group itself, the unity of a group, and the degree to which the group members coordinate their efforts to achieve goals.

FOCUS 1-1   When Does a Group *Look* Like a Group?

I wandered lonely as a cloud . . .
When all at once I saw a crowd
–William Wordsworth

Some collections of people seem to be more like groups than others. Six people playing a game of poker may seem to be a clear case of a group, as would a family of five on a picnic. But what about the audience at a movie? Two lovers walking hand in hand? Thousands of spectators watching a soccer match? Are some groups "groupier" than others?

Donald T. Campbell's (1958a) analysis of *entitativity* suggests that some groups seem more real than other groups. Campbell drew on the work of Gestalt psychologists, who studied how the human mind decides whether something is perceived as a unified entity (a *Gestalt*) or a random collection of unrelated elements. For Campbell, a group's **entitativity** depends on certain perceptual cues that perceivers rely on intuitively to decide if an aggregation of individuals is a true group or just a collection of people. For example, the spectators at a football game may seem to be a disorganized mass of individuals who happen to be in the same place at the same time, but the tendency of the spectators to shout the same cheer, express similar emotions, and move together to create a "wave" gives them entitativity. Entitativity, according to Campbell, is substantially influenced by

- *Common fate:* Do the individuals experience the same or interrelated outcomes?
- *Similarity:* Do the individuals perform similar behaviors or resemble one another?
- *Proximity:* How close together are the individuals in the aggregation?

Consider, for example, four people seated at a table in a library. Is this a group? They could be four friends studying together, or just four independent individuals. To answer the question, you must consider their common fate, similarity, and proximity. The principle of common fate predicts that the degree of "groupness" you attribute to the cluster would increase if, for example, all the members began laughing together or moved closer to one another. Your confidence that this cluster was a real group would also be bolstered if you noticed that all four were reading from the same textbook or were wearing the same fraternity shirt. Finally, if the members got up and left the room together, you would become even more certain that you were watching a group.

Campbell's analysis of entitativity argues that individuals are intuitively sensitive to information that signals the unity of a group (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998; Lickel et al., 2000). People identify more with their group when all the members share a common fate—for example, if they all fail together or succeed together (Deutsch, 1949a). People recruited for newly formed groups, if told that their group members share many similarities, are more likely to respond as a unified group than people who believe that their group includes dissimilar individuals (Knowles & Brickner, 1981; Schachter, Ellertson, McBride, & Gregory, 1951). When researchers repeatedly told women working in isolation that they were nonetheless members of a group, the women accepted this label and later rated themselves more negatively after their "group" failed (Zander, Stotland, & Wolfe, 1960). Proximity also influences entitativity, for people display more group-level reactions when they meet face to face in a single location than when they meet across long distances in telephone conference calls or through computer-mediated discussions (Kraut, Egido, & Galegher, 1990; Lea & Spears, 1991). Moreover, once a group is judged to be real, this classification leads to a host of perceptual and interpersonal consequences. People who think they are part of a group respond differently than

entitativity As described by Donald Campbell, the extent to which an assemblage of individuals is perceived to be a group rather than an aggregation of independent, unrelated individuals; the quality of being an entity.

FOCUS 1-1   (*continued*)

people who do not think they are in a group, and observers' impressions of people differ when they think that the people they are watching are members of a unified group. Labeling an aggregation a *group* is not just a matter of semantics. Desig-nating a group as real makes it real in its consequences (W. I. Thomas, 1928). Even if groups are not real, they may nonetheless have important interpersonal consequences if people define them to be real.

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daily to perfect their coordination and efficiency. However, all groups require a modicum of cohesiveness; else the group would disintegrate and cease to exist as a group (Dion, 2000). A group's unity may also be more perceptual than interpersonal. Even though an aggregation of individuals may not be very cohesive, those who observe the group—and even the members themselves—may believe that the group is a single, unified whole. As Focus 1-1 explains, such groups *look* like groups because they seem to possess the qualities of a real entity.

Groups Are Dynamic

If you were limited to a single word, how would you describe the activities, processes, operations, and changes that transpire in social groups? What word illuminates the interdependence of people in groups? And what word adequately summarizes a group's capacity to promote social interaction, to create patterned interrelationships among its members, to bind members together to form a single unit, and to accomplish its goals?

Kurt Lewin (1943, 1948, 1951), who many have argued is the founder of the movement to study groups scientifically, chose the word *dynamic*. Groups tend to be powerful rather than weak, active rather than passive, fluid rather than static, and catalyzing rather than reifying. Lewin used the term *group dynamics* to stress the powerful impact of these complex social processes on group members. Although Lewin died unexpectedly of a heart attack just as group dynamics was beginning to develop more fully, his students and colleagues have carried on the Lewinian tradition in their theory, research, and applications (Back, 1992; Bargal, Gold, & Lewin, 1992; Marrow, 1969; R. K. White, 1990, 1992).

The Nature of Group Dynamics

When Kurt Lewin (1951) described the way groups and individuals act and react to changing circumstances, he named these processes **group dynamics.** But Lewin also used the phrase to describe the scientific discipline devoted to the study of these dynamics. Later, Cartwright and Zander, two of the most prolific

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group dynamics The scientific study of groups; also the actions, processes, and changes that occur in social groups.

researchers in the field, supplied a formal definition, calling group dynamics a "field of inquiry dedicated to advancing knowledge about the nature of groups, the laws of their development, and their interrelations with individuals, other groups, and larger institutions" (1968, p. 7).

Cartwright and Zander also pointed out what group dynamics is *not*. It is not, for example, a therapeutic perspective holding that psychological well-being can be ensured through participation in small groups guided by a skilled therapist. Nor is it the communication of certain rules or guidelines that enable individuals to develop the skills needed for smooth and satisfying social interactions. Finally, group dynamics does not refer to a loose collection of maxims concerning how groups *should* be organized—emphasizing, for example, such niceties as equal participation by all group members, democratic leadership, and high levels of member satisfaction. Rather, group dynamics is an attempt to subject the many aspects of groups to scientific analysis through the construction of theories and the rigorous testing of these theories through empirical research.

Orienting Assumptions

Sociologists and psychologists "discovered" groups almost simultaneously at the beginning of the 20th century (Steiner, 1974). Sociologists, trying to explain how religious, political, economic, and educational systems function to sustain society, highlighted the role played by groups in maintaining social order (Shotola, 1992). Émile Durkheim (1897/1966), for example, argued that individuals who are not members of friendship, family, or religious groups can lose their sense of identity and, as a result, are more likely to commit suicide. Similarly, Cooley suggested that primary groups, such as families, children's play groups, and emotionally close peers, "are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideas of the individual" (1909, p. 23).

At the same time, psychologists were also studying the impact of groups on individuals. In 1895, the French psychologist Gustave Le Bon published his book *Psychologie des Foules* (Psychology of Crowds), which describes how individuals are transformed when they join a group: "Under certain circumstances, and only under those circumstances, an agglomeration of men presents new characteristics very different from those of the individuals composing" the group (1895/1960, p. 23). Although Le Bon's work was speculative, Norman Triplett's (1898) laboratory study of competition confirmed that other people, by their mere presence, can change group members. Triplett arranged for 40 children to play a game that involved turning a small reel as quickly as possible. He found that children who played the game in pairs turned the reel faster than those who were alone, experimentally verifying the shift that occurs when a person moves from a wholly individual circumstance to a social one.

All sciences are based on **paradigms,** which are sets of guiding assumptions or principles shared by researchers in the field (Kuhn, 1970). These early studies

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paradigm Scientists' shared assumptions about the phenomena they study; also, a set of research procedures.

laid the foundation for the field's paradigm by suggesting that if sociologists and psychologists are to understand society and the individuals in that society, they must understand groups. They also provided examples of the way in which questions about groups could be answered through scientific analysis. Although the group dynamics paradigm continues to evolve and change as theoretical and methodological issues are debated and resolved, several of its core assumptions are considered hereafter (see Gouran, 1999; Harrington & Fine, 2000; J. M. Levine & Moreland, 1990, 1998; McGrath, 1997; Pepitone, 1981; and Steiner, 1986 for more details on the development of group dynamics.)

GROUPS ARE REAL The roots of group dynamics in both sociology and psychology produced a difference in the **levels of analysis** used when studying groups. A *group-level analysis* assumes that each person is "an element in a larger system, a group, organization, or society. And what he does is presumed to reflect the state of the larger system and the events occurring in it" (Steiner, 1974, p. 96). An *individual-level analysis,* in contrast, focuses on the individual in the group. Researchers who took this approach sought to explain the behavior of each group member, and they ultimately wanted to know if such psychological processes as attitudes, motivations, or personality were the true determinants of social behavior. Sociological researchers tended to undertake group-level analyses, and psychological researchers favored the individual-level analysis (Steiner, 1974, 1983, 1986).

Both group–oriented and individualistic researchers asked the question, "Are groups important?" but they often settled on very different answers. Group-level researchers believed that groups and the processes that occurred within them were scientifically authentic. Durkheim (1897/1966) argued that his studies of suicide provided clear evidence of the reality of groups, for it revealed that a very personal act—ending one's life—can be predicted by considering an individual's links to social groups. Durkheim was also impressed by the work of Le Bon and other crowd psychologists and went so far as to suggest that large groups of people sometimes acted with a single mind. He believed that such groups, rather than being mere collections of individuals in a fixed pattern of relationships with one another, were linked by a unifying **groupmind,** or **collective conscious.** Durkheim believed that this force was sometimes so strong that the will of the group could dominate the will of the individual.

Many psychologists who were interested in group phenomena rejected the reality of such concepts as groupmind or collective conscious. Floyd H. Allport,

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level of analysis The specific focus of study chosen from a graded or nested sequence of possible foci. An individual level analysis examines specific individuals in the group, a group level analysis focuses on the group as a unit, and a multi–level analysis considers both individual- and group-level processes.

groupmind (or **collective conscious**) A hypothetical unifying mental force linking group members together; the fusion of individual consciousness or mind into a transcendent consciousness, suggested by early psychologist Gustave Le Bon.

the foremost representative of this perspective, argued that such terms were unscientific, as they referred to phenomena that simply did not exist. In his 1924 work *Social Psychology,* Allport wrote that "nervous systems are possessed by individuals; but there is no nervous system of the crowd" (p. 5). He added, "Only through social psychology as a science of the individual can we avoid the superficialities of the crowdmind and collective mind theories" (p. 8). Taking the individualistic perspective to its extreme, Allport concluded that groups should never be studied by psychologists, because they did not exist as scientifically valid phenomena. Because Allport believed that "the actions of all are nothing more than the sum of the actions of each taken separately" (p. 5), he thought that a full understanding of the behavior of individuals in groups could be achieved by studying the psychology of the individual group members. Groups, according to Allport, were not real entities.

Allport's reluctance to accept such dubious concepts as groupmind into social psychology helped ensure the field's scientific status. His hard-nosed attitude forced researchers to back up their claims about groups. Many group-level theorists believed in the reality of groups, and they were certain that a group could not be understood by only studying its individual members. Allport's skepticism, however, spurred them to identify the characteristics of groups that set them apart from mere aggregations of individuals.

GROUP PROCESSES ARE REAL Allport was correct in rejecting the concept of groupmind—researchers have never found any evidence that group members are linked by a psychic, telepathic connection that creates a single groupmind. However, the finding that this particular group-level concept has little foundation in fact does not imply that other group-level processes, phenomena, and concepts are equally unreasonable. Consider, for example, the concept of a group norm. As noted earlier, a *norm* is a standard that describes what behaviors should and should not be performed in a group. Norms are not just individual members' personal standards, however, for they are shared among group members. Only when members agree on a particular standard does it function as a norm, so this concept is embedded at the level of the group rather than at the level of the individual.

The idea that a norm is more than just the sum of the individual beliefs of all the members of a group was verified by Muzafer Sherif in 1936. Sherif literally created norms by asking groups of men to state aloud their estimates of the distance that a dot of light had moved. He found that the men gradually accepted a standard estimate in place of their own idiosyncratic judgments. He also found, however, that even when the men were later given the opportunity to make judgments alone, they still based their estimates on the group's norm. Moreover, once the group's norm had developed, the original members of the group could be removed and replaced with fresh members, and the group norm would remain intact. If the individuals in the group are completely replaceable, then where does the group norm "exist"? At the group level rather than the individual level (MacNeil & Sherif, 1976).

The rift between individual-level and group-level researchers closed as the unique contributions of each perspective were integrated in a *multilevel analysis* of
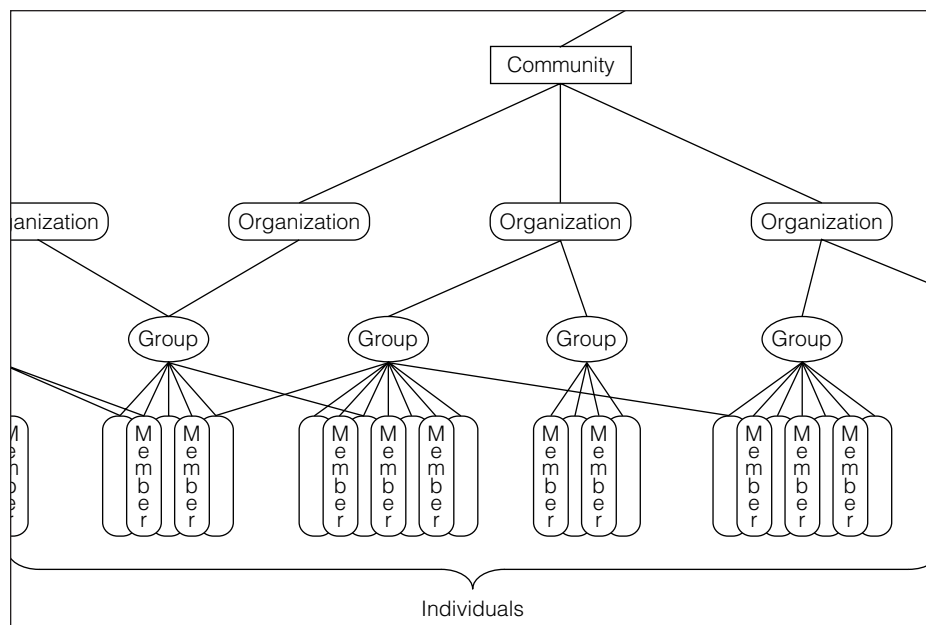
FIGURE 1-3

What is the multilevel view of groups? When researchers study groups, they recognize that individuals are nested in groups, but that these groups are themselves nested in larger social units, such as organizations, communities, tribes, and nations. Thus, the *unit of analysis*—the source of the data the researcher seeks—can be individuals in groups, groups themselves, or groups that are part of organizations, communities, tribes, and societies. Researchers may focus on one level in this multilevel system, such as the group itself, but they must be aware that these groups are embedded in a complex of other relationships.

groups (Hackman, 2003). This perspective, illustrated in Figure 1-3, recognizes that individuals' thoughts, actions, and emotions are shaped by individual-level processes, but that each individual is also shaped by the groups to which he or she belongs. These groups are shaped by their individual members, but they are also nested in larger groups themselves, including communities and organizations. Any analysis that focused only on one level would overlook forces operating at other levels and across levels. Allport, by the way, eventually amended his position and himself conducted extensive studies of such group phenomena as rumors and morale during wartime (F. H. Allport & Lepkin, 1943) and the way norms influence behaviors (the J-curve hypothesis; F. H. Allport, 1934, 1961).

GROUPS ARE MORE THAN THE SUM OF THEIR PARTS Allport initially believed that group behavior was completely predictable by considering the characteristics and qualities of the individual members. But Kurt Lewin's (1951) *field*

theory of group dynamics assumed that groups are more than the sum of their parts. Field theory is premised on the principle of *interactionism,* which assumes that the behavior of people in groups is determined by the interaction of the person and the environment. The formula **B** $=$ f**(P,E)** summarizes this assumption. In a group context, this formula implies that the behavior (*B*) of group members is a function (f) of the interaction of their personal characteristics (*P*) with environmental factors (*E*), which include features of the group, the group members, and the situation. According to Lewin, whenever a group comes into existence, it becomes a unified system with emergent properties that cannot be fully understood by piecemeal examination. Lewin applied the Gestalt dictum, "The whole is greater than the sum of the parts," to groups.

Many group phenomena lend support to Lewin's belief that a group is more than the sum of the individual members. A group's cohesiveness, for example, goes beyond the mere attraction of each individual member to another (Hogg, 1992). Individuals may not like each other a great deal, and yet, when they join together, they experience powerful feelings of unity and esprit de corps. Groups sometimes perform tasks far better—or far worse—than might be expected given the talents of their individual members. When individuals combine synergistically in a group, they sometimes accomplish incredible feats or make horrible decisions that no single individual could ever conceive (Hackman, 1987; Janis, 1983). Such groups seem to possess supervening qualities "that cannot be reduced to or described as qualities of its participants" (Sandelands & St. Clair, 1993, p. 443).

GROUPS ARE LIVING SYSTEMS   A holistic perspective on groups prompted researchers to examine how a group, as a unit, changes over time. Some groups are so stable that their basic processes and structures remain unchanged for days, weeks, or even years, but such groups are rare. Bruce W. Tuckman's theory of **group development,** for example, assumes that most groups move through the five stages summarized in Figure 1-4 (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). In the *forming* stage, the group members become oriented toward one another. In the *storming* stage, conflicts surface in the group as members vie for status and the group sets its goals. These conflicts subside when the group becomes more structured and standards emerge in the *norming* stage. In the *performing* stage, the group moves beyond disagreement and organizational matters to concentrate on the work to be done. The group continues to function at this level until it reaches the *adjourning* stage, when it disbands. Groups also tend to cycle repeatedly through some of these stages, as group members strive to maintain a balance

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B $=$ f**(P,E)** The interactionism formula proposed by Kurt Lewin that assumes each person's behavior (*B*) is a function of his or her personal qualities (*P*), the social environment (*E*), and the interaction of these personal qualities with factors present in the social setting.

group development Patterns of growth and change that emerge across the group's life span.
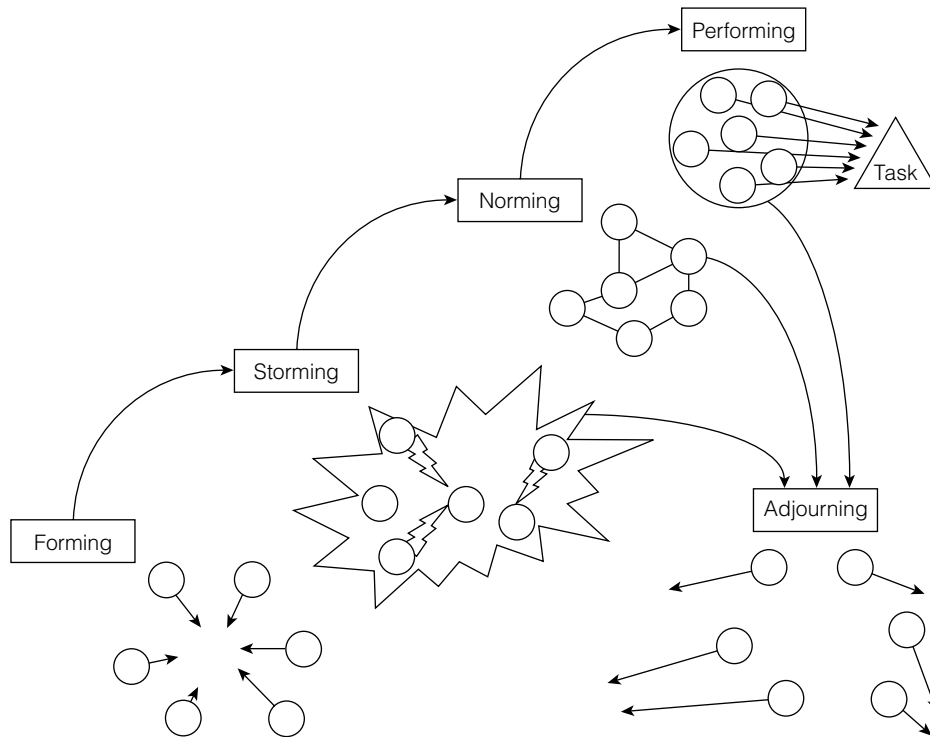
FIGURE 1-4

How do groups change over time? Tuckman's theory of group development argues that nearly all groups pass through the following stages during their development: formation (*forming*), conflict (*storming*), structure development (*norming*), productivity (*performing*), and dissolution (*adjourning*).

between task-oriented actions and emotionally expressive behaviors (Bales, 1965). A group, in a real sense, is alive: It acquires energy and resources from its environment, maintains its structure, and evolves over time.

GROUPS ARE INFLUENTIAL Researchers who study groups are convinced that if one wishes to understand individuals, one must understand groups. Human behavior is, more often than not, group behavior, so people cannot be understood when studied apart from their groups. Groups have a profound impact on individuals; they shape actions, thoughts, and feelings. Some of these changes are subtle ones. Moving from isolation to a group context can reduce our sense of uniqueness, but at the same time it can enhance our ability to perform simple tasks rapidly. Triplett (1898) verified the discontinuity between people's responses when they are isolated rather than integrated, and this shift has been documented time and again in studies of motivation, emotion, and performance. Groups can also change their members by prompting them to change their attitudes and val-

ues as they come to agree with the overall consensus of the group (T. M. New-comb, 1943). In primary groups, individuals acquire their attitudes, values, and identities, learn the skills needed to contribute to the group, discover and inter-nalize the rules that govern social behavior, and become practiced at modifying their behavior in response to social norms and others' requirements. Peers are an-other influential group. Children willingly amend their actions and preferences to match the norms of their play groups (Berndt, 1992, 1996). Even very young children imitate the way their playmates dress, talk, and act (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992). Children who do not like broccoli will eat it if they are having lunch with a group of broccoli-loving children (Birch, 1987). When anti-achievement norms develop in classrooms, students soon learn to disrupt class and fail tests (Ball, 1981), but teenagers who are part of the "brainy" clique value high academic achievement (B. B. Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993). As children grow older, the peer group becomes the primary source of social values, replac-ing the influence of the family (Harris, 1995). Twins who have the same friends are more similar to one another in terms of personality and academic achievement than twins who are treated similarly by their parents (Loehlin, 1997).

Groups also change people more dramatically. The earliest group psycholo-gists were struck by the apparent madness of people when immersed in crowds, and many concluded that the behavior of a person in a group may have no connection to that person's behavior when alone. Stanley Milgram's (1963) clas-sic studies of obedience offered further confirmation of the dramatic power of groups over their members, for Milgram found that most people placed in a powerful group would obey the orders of a malevolent authority to harm another person. Individuals who join religious or political groups that stress secrecy, obe-dience to leaders, and dogmatic acceptance of unusual or atypical beliefs (*cults*) of-ten display fundamental and unusual changes in belief and behavior. Groups may just be collections of individuals, but these collections change their members.

GROUPS SHAPE SOCIETY At the same time psychologists began studying how individuals react in group settings, sociologists began studying the role that groups played in maintaining religious, political, economic, and educational systems in society (Shotola, 1992). After the industrial revolution, legal and po-litical systems developed to coordinate actions and make community-level deci-sions. Organized religions provided answers to questions of values, morality, and meaning. Educational systems took over some of the teaching duties previously assigned to the family. Economic systems developed to regulate production and the attainment of financial goals. All these social systems were based, at their core, on small groups and subgroups of connected individuals. Religious groups pro-vide a prime example. Individuals often endorse a specific religion, such as Chris-tianity or Islam, but their connection to their religion occurs in smaller groups known as *congregations*. These groups are formally structured and led by a religious authority, yet they provide members with a sense of belonging, reaffirm the val-ues and norms of the group, and strengthen bonds among members (Finke & Stark, 1992). Groups may just be collections of individuals, but these collections change society (see Focus 1–2).

FOCUS 1-2   Are Groups Good or Bad?

Humans would do better without groups.
–Christian J. Buys (1978a, p. 123)

For centuries, philosophers and scholars have debated the relative value of groups. Some have pointed out that membership in groups is highly rewarding, for it combines the pleasures of interpersonal relations with goal strivings. Groups create relationships between people, and in many cases these connections are more intimate, more enduring, and more sustaining than connections formed between friends or lovers. Groups provide their members with a sense of identity, for the self is not based only on personal traits and qualities (e.g., "I am outgoing") but also on group memberships (e.g., "I am an American"). Groups also provide their members with the means to accomplish goals that they could never achieve alone; they provide their members with support and guidance, and they are often the means of acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities.

However, the more problematic aspects of groups cannot be ignored. Groups are often the arena for profound interpersonal conflicts that end in violence and aggression. Even though group members may cooperate with one another, they may also engage in competition as they strive to outdo one another. When individuals are members of very large groups, such as crowds, they sometimes engage in behaviors that they would never undertake if they were acting individually. Many of the most misguided decisions have not been made by lone, misguided individuals but by groups of people who, despite working together, still managed to make a disastrous decision. Even though people tend to work together in groups, in many cases, these groups are far less productive than they should be, given the talents and energies of the individuals in them. Some dysfunctional groups are best avoided—they set the stage for interpersonal conflict while wasting time, turning out poor products, and yielding few benefits. Given these problems, researcher Christian J. Buys whimsically suggested that all groups be eliminated because "humans would do better without groups" (1978a, p.123).

Although Buys's suggestion is a satirical one, it does make the point that groups are neither all good nor all bad. Groups are so "beneficial, if not essential, to humans" that "it seems nonsensical to search for alternatives to human groups" (Buys, 1978b, p. 568), but groups can generate negative outcomes for their members. Researchers, however, are more often drawn to studying negative rather than positive processes, with the result that theory and research in the field tend to stress conflict, rejection, dysfunction, and obedience to malevolent authorities and to neglect cooperation, acceptance, well-being, and collaboration. This negative bias, Buys suggested, has led to an unfair underestimation of the positive impact of groups on people.

Buys's comments, by the way, have prompted a number of rejoinders by other group researchers. One group-authored response (Kravitz et al., 1978) suggested that Buys misassigned responsibility for the problems; its authors argued that humans would do better without other humans rather than without any groups. Another proposed that groups would do better without humans (L. R. Anderson, 1978), whereas a third simply argued that groups would do better without social psychologists (R. B. Green & Mack, 1978).

Contemporary Group Dynamics

The work of early researchers set the foundation for the emerging field of group dynamics. In time, most psychologists abandoned their prejudices against groups as objects of scientific analysis, and Allport himself amended his initial position on the issue by eventually acknowledging the reality of groups (F. H. Allport, 1961, 1962).

By the 1950s, the field was ready to move from its childhood into its adulthood. Armed with new theories of group behavior and a set of increasingly sophisticated research methods, investigators began to examine many more aspects of groups and their dynamics. The field also grew beyond its roots in psychology and sociology to become more interdisciplinary, and many new researchers studied more practical aspects of groups. These developments shaped the content, assumptions, and methods of contemporary group dynamics.

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH Group dynamics was founded by sociologists and psychologists, but it has spread to many other branches of the social sciences. The relevance of groups to topics studied in many academic and applied disciplines gives group dynamics an interdisciplinary character. For example, researchers who prefer to study individuals may find themselves wondering what impact group participation will have on individuals' cognitions, attitudes, and behavior. Those who study organizations may find that these larger social entities actually depend on the dynamics of small subgroups within the organization. Social scientists examining such global issues as the development and maintenance of culture may find themselves turning their attention toward small groups as the unit of cultural transmission.

Table 1–3 summarizes the interdisciplinary breadth of group dynamics. The overall aims of these disciplines may be quite different, but groups are relevant to nearly all the social sciences. Psychologists tend to focus on the behavior of individuals in groups; sociologists, in contrast, focus more on the group and its

TABLE 1-3 Group Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Field

Discipline	Topics
Anthropology	Groups in cross–cultural contexts; societal change; social and collective identities
Business and Industry	Work motivation; productivity; team building; goal setting; focus groups
Clinical/Counseling Psychology	Therapeutic change through groups; sensitivity training; training groups; self-help groups; group psychotherapy
Communication	Information transmission in groups; discussion; decision making; problems in communication; networks
Criminal Justice	Organization of law enforcement agencies; gangs; jury deliberations
Education	Classroom groups; team teaching; class composition and educational outcomes
Political Science	Leadership; intergroup and international relations; political influence; power
Psychology	Personality and group behavior; problem solving; perceptions of other people; motivation; conflict
Social Work	Team approaches to treatment; family counseling; groups and adjustment
Sociology	Self and society; influence of norms on behavior; role relations; deviance
Sports and Recreation	Team performance; effects of victory and failure; cohesion and performance

relation to society. Anthropologists find that group processes are relevant to understanding many of the common features of various societies; political scientists examine the principles of group relations and leadership; and communication researchers focus more specifically on the communicative relations in groups. Although this listing of disciplines is far from comprehensive, it does convey the idea that the study of groups is not limited to any one field. As A. Paul Hare and his colleagues once noted, "This field of research does not 'belong' to any one of the recognized social sciences alone. It is the common property of all" (Hare, Borgatta, & Bales, 1955, p. vi).

APPLICATIONS Groups are also relevant to many applied areas, as Table 1–3 shows. The study of groups in the work setting has long occupied business-oriented researchers who are concerned with the effective organization of people. Although early discussions of business administration and personnel management tended to overlook the importance of groups, the 1930s witnessed a tremendous growth in management-oriented group research (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Mayo, 1933). People in organizations ranging from businesses to hospitals to the armed forces began to take notice of the critical role that interpersonal relations played in their own organizations, and soon principles of group behavior became an integral part of most philosophies of effective administrative practices. This interest in groups in organizational settings continues to this day, and many group psychologists are also organizational psychologists (N. Anderson, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2004; Sanna & Parks, 1997).

Social workers frequently found themselves dealing with such groups as social clubs, gangs, neighborhoods, and family clusters, and an awareness of group processes helped crystallize their understanding of group life. Educators were also influenced by group research, as were many of the medical fields that dealt with patients on a group basis. Many methods of helping people to change rely on group principles (A. E. Stewart, Stewart, & Gazda, 1997).

The application of group dynamics to practical problems is consistent with Lewin's call for **action research.** Lewin argued in favor of the intertwining of basic and applied research, for he firmly believed that there "is no hope of creating a better world without a deeper scientific insight into the function of leadership and culture, and of other essentials of group life" (1943, p. 113). To achieve this goal, he assured practitioners that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (1951, p. 169) and charged researchers with the task of developing theories that can be applied to important social problems (Cartwright, 1978; Lewin, 1946, 1947).

TOPICS Throughout the history of group dynamics, some approaches that initially seemed promising have been abandoned after they contributed relatively little or failed to stimulate consistent lines of research. The idea of groupmind,

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action research The term used by Kurt Lewin to describe scientific inquiry that both expands basic theoretical knowledge and identifies solutions to significant social problems.

for example, was discarded when researchers identified more likely causes of crowd behavior. Similarly, such concepts as syntality (Cattell, 1948), groupality (Bogardus, 1954), and lifespace (Lewin, 1951) initially attracted considerable interest but stimulated little research. In contrast, researchers have studied other topics continuously since they were first broached (Forsyth & Burnette, in press; Hare, Blumberg, Davies, & Kent, 1994; J. M. Levine & Moreland, 1990, 1995, 1998; McGrath, 1997).

Table 1-4 samples the topics that currently interest group experts, and it foreshadows the topics considered in the remainder of this book. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 explore the foundations of the field by reviewing the group dynamics perspective (Chapter 1) and the methods and theories of the field (Chapter 2). This introductory section ends with an analysis of what Allport (F. H. Allport, 1961, 1962) called social psychology's "master problem": What is the connection between the individual and the group (Chapter 3)?

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on group development—how groups change and evolve over time. Chapter 4 probes group formation by considering the personal and situational forces that prompt people to join groups or remain apart from them. Chapter 5 focuses more fully on group development by considering the factors that increase the unity of a group and the way those factors wax and wane as the group changes over time. Chapter 6 turns to the topic of group structure—how groups develop systems of roles and intermember relationships—with a particular focus on how structure emerges as groups mature.

A group is a complex social system—a microcosm of powerful interpersonal forces that significantly shape members' actions—and Chapters 7 and 8 examine the flow of influence and interaction in that microcosm. Chapter 7 looks at the way group members sometimes change their opinions, judgments, or actions so that they match the opinions, judgments, or actions of the rest of the group (*conformity*). Chapter 8 extends this topic by considering how group members make use of social power to influence others and how people respond to such influence.

The following chapters turn to questions of group performance. Much of the world's work is done by people working together rather than by individuals working alone. Investigators have identified a host of factors that influence a group's productivity (Chapter 9), and their studies suggest ways to minimize inefficiency and errors when working in groups. We study processes and problems in decision making in Chapter 10 and leadership in Chapter 11.

Chapters 12 and 13 examine conflict and cooperation in groups. Groups are sources of stability and support for members, but in some cases conflicts erupt within groups (Chapter 12) and between groups (Chapter 13).

The final chapters deal with groups in specific settings. All groups are embedded in a social and environmental context, and Chapter 14 considers how the context in which groups exist affects their dynamics. Chapter 15 reviews groups in therapeutic contexts—helping, supportive, and change-promoting groups. Chapter 16 concludes our analysis by considering groups in public, societal contexts, including such relatively large groups as mobs, crowds, and social movements.

TABLE 1-4 Major Topics in the Field of Group Dynamics

Chapter and Topic	Issues
Foundations	
1. Introduction to group dynamics	What are groups and what are their key features? What do we want to know about groups and their dynamics? What assumptions guide researchers in their studies of groups and the processes within groups?
2. Studying groups	How do researchers measure the way groups, and the individuals in those groups, feel, think, and behave? How do researchers search for and test their hypotheses about groups? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the various research strategies used to study groups? What general theoretical perspectives guide researcher's studies of groups and the people in them?
3. The individual and the group	Do humans, as a species, prefer inclusion to exclusion, group membership to isolation? How do groups combine individuals collectively? How do group experiences shape individuals' selves?
Development	
4. Formation	Who joins groups and who remains apart? When and why do people seek out others? Why do people deliberately create groups or join existing groups? What factors influence feelings of liking for others?
5. Cohesion and development	What are the components of group cohesion? How does cohesion develop over time? What are the positive and negative consequences of cohesion and commitment? Does team building enhance group productivity?
6. Structure	What are norms, and how do they structure interactions in groups? What are roles? Which roles occur most frequently in groups? How and why do status networks develop in groups? What factors influence the group's social structure? What are the interpersonal consequences of communication networks in groups?
Influence and Interaction	
7. Influence	When will people conform to a group's standards, and when will they remain independent? How do norms develop, and why do people obey them? Do nonconformists ever succeed in influencing the rest of the group?

Group Dynamics Is Dynamic

The field of group dynamics emerged in the 1940s as theorists and researchers concluded that groups are real and that they should be subjected to scientific analysis. In the 1950s and 1960s, the field grew rapidly as theorists and researchers

TABLE 1-4 (*continued*)

Chapter and Topic	Issues
8. Power	Why are some members of groups more powerful than others? What types of power tactics are most effective in influencing others? Does power corrupt? Why do people obey authorities?
Performance	
9. Performance	Do people perform tasks more effectively in groups or when they are alone? Why do people sometimes expend so little effort when they are in groups? When does a group outperform an individual? Are groups creative?
10. Decision making	What steps do groups take when making decisions? Why do some highly cohesive groups make disastrous decisions? Why do groups sometimes make riskier decisions than individuals?
11. Leadership	What is leadership? If a group without a leader forms, which person will eventually step forward to become the leader? Should a leader be task focused or relationship focused? Is democratic leadership superior to autocratic leadership?
Conflict	
12. Conflict	What causes disputes between group members? When will a small disagreement escalate into a conflict? Why do groups sometimes splinter into subgroups? How can disputes in groups be resolved?
13. Intergroup relations	What causes disputes between groups? What changes take place as a consequence of intergroup conflict? What factors exacerbate conflict? How can intergroup conflict be resolved?
Contexts and Applications	
14. Groups in context	What impact does the social and physical setting have on an interacting group? Are groups territorial? What happens when groups are overcrowded? How do groups cope with severe environments?
15. Groups and change	How can groups be used to improve personal adjustment and health? What is the difference between a therapy group and a self-help group? Are group approaches to treatment effective? Why do they work?
16. Crowds and collective behavior	What types of crowds are common? Why do crowds and collectives form? Do people lose their sense of self when they join crowds? When is a crowd likely to become unruly?

studied more and more topics, the field became more interdisciplinary, and the accumulated knowledge was applied to practical problems.

This rapid expansion slowed once the study of groups gained acceptance in both sociology and psychology, but even today the field remains vibrant. Groups are studied by a range of investigators from a host of different disciplines.

Although these researchers have very different goals, pursuits, and paradigms, they all recognize that groups are essential to human life. Through membership in groups, we define and confirm our values and beliefs and take on or refine our social identity. When we face uncertain situations, we join groups to gain reassurance about our problems and security in companionship. Even though we must sometimes bend to the will of a group and its leaders, through groups we can reach goals that would elude us if we pursued them as individuals. Our groups are sometimes filled with conflict; but by resolving this conflict, we learn how to relate with others more effectively. Groups are fundamental to our social lives, and we must accept the charge of understanding them.

SUMMARY IN OUTLINE

❖ What is a group?

1. No two groups are identical to one another, but a *group,* by definition, is two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships.

2. Groups vary in size from dyads and triads to very large aggregations, such as mobs and audiences.

3. Unlike the members of a *category,* group members are linked together by such interpersonal processes as communication, influence, and identification.

4. Groups come in many varieties.
   - *Primary groups* are smaller and more psychologically influential than are *secondary groups.*
   - *Planned groups* (e.g., concocted groups and founded groups) are deliberately formed, but *emergent groups* (e.g., circumstantial groups and self-organizing groups) come into existence gradually over time.

5. Research suggests that people spontaneously draw distinctions among intimate groups, task-focused groups, loose associations, and more general social categories.

❖ What are some common characteristics of groups?

1. People in groups interact with one another. This *interaction* includes activities that focus on the task at hand (*task interaction*) and activities that concern the interpersonal relations linking group members (*relationship interaction*).

2. Groups create *interdependence* among the group members (unilateral, reciprocal, etc.).

3. Interaction is patterned by *group structure,* including *roles, norms,* and interpersonal relations.

4. Groups seek goals, such as those specified in the *circumplex model of group tasks* (generating, choosing, negotiating, and executing).

5. *Group cohesion,* or cohesiveness, determines the unity of the group. *Entitativity* is the extent to which individuals perceive an aggregation to be a unified group. Entitativity, according to Campbell, is substantially influenced by common fate, similarity, and proximity cues.

❖ What assumptions guide researchers in their studies of groups and the processes within groups?

1. Lewin first used the phrase *group dynamics* to describe the powerful processes that take place in groups, but group dynamics also refers to the scientific study of groups.

2. This relatively young science has roots in both sociology and psychology. Sociolo-

gists have long recognized that groups link individuals to society, and psychologists have studied how people act when they are in groups rather than alone.

3. The field's conceptual *paradigm* includes a number of assumptions:
   - *Groups are real.* Early psychologists tended to focus on the psychological processes; they used an *individual level of analysis* in their studies of groups by rejecting such group-level concepts as the *groupmind* and *collective conscious.* In time, researchers recognized that groups are as real as individuals, adopting a multilevel orientation to groups.
   - *Group processes are real.* Research studies, such as Sherif's (1936) study of norm formation, suggested that group-level processes were influential determinants of behavior and so supported a multilevel approach to studying individuals and groups.
   - *Groups are more than the sum of their parts.* Groups often possess characteristics that cannot be deduced from the individual members' characteristics. This conclusion is consistent with Lewin's (1951) field theory, which maintains that behavior is a function of the person and the environment, or $B = f (P, E)$.
   - *Groups are living systems.* Tuckman's (1965) theory of *group development,* for example, assumes that most groups move through the five stages of forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning over time.
   - *Groups are influential.* Groups alter their members' attitudes, values, and perceptions and in some cases cause radical alterations in personality and actions.
   - *Groups shape society.* Groups, although sometimes characterized in negative rather than positive ways, influence many aspects of human society.

❖ **What fields and what topics are included in the scientific study of group dynamics?**

1. The field of group dynamics is an interdisciplinary one, including many researchers outside of sociology and psychology.

2. Many researchers carry out *action research* by using scientific methods to identify solutions to practical problems.

3. Researchers have examined a wide variety of group processes, including group development, structure, influence, power, performance, and conflict.

4. Group dynamics is itself dynamic, for it is the "field of inquiry dedicated to advancing knowledge about the nature of groups" (Cartwright & Zander, 1968, p. 7).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Introduction to Groups

■ *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes,* edited by Michael A. Hogg and Scott Tindale (2001), includes 26 chapters dealing with all aspects of small group behavior.

■ *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory,* edited by Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander (1968), is a classic in the scientific field of groups, with chapters dealing with such topics as group membership, conformity, power, leadership, and motivation.

■ "Small Groups," by John M. Levine and Richard L. Moreland (1998), provides a serious but compact introduction to the study of groups, with specific sections pertaining to group composition, structure, conflict, and performance.

Group Dynamics: History and Issues

■ "Communication in Groups: The Emergence and Evolution of a Field of Study," by Dennis S. Gouran (1999), reviews the recent history of group research in the field of small group communication.

■ "The Heritage of Kurt Lewin: Theory, Research, and Practice," edited by David Bargal, Martin Gold, and Miriam Lewin (1992), is an issue of the *Journal of Social Issues* devoted to the contributions of group dynamics' founder, Kurt Lewin.

Groups and the 21st Century

■ "Opening the 'Black Box': Small Groups and Twenty-First Century Sociology," by Brooke Harrington and Gary Alan Fine (2000), re-examines the controlling, contesting, organizing, representing, and allocating features of small groups and their relevance to understanding social behavior.

■ "The Study of Groups: Past, Present, and Future," by Joseph E. McGrath, Holly Arrow, and Jennifer L. Berdahl (2000) reviews the history of research into groups and predicts future trends.

MEDIA RESOURCES

Visit the Group Dynamics companion website at http://psychology.wadsworth.com/forsyth4e to access online resources for your book, including quizzes, flash cards, web links, and more!