

Life Groups Research

Group: People who have something in common and who believe that what they have in common is significant; also called a social group

Group Dynamics: The ways in which individuals affect groups and the ways in which groups influence individuals

Small Group: A group small enough for everyone to interact directly with all the other members

Effects of Group Size on Stability and Intimacy

Writing in the early 1900s, sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) noted the significance of group size.

1. He used the term dyad for the smallest possible group, which consists of two people.
2. Dyads, which include:
 - 1) Marriages
 - 2) Love Affairs
 - 3) Close Friendships
3. Show two distinct qualities:
 - 1) First, they are the most intense or intimate of human groups.
 - Because only two people are involved, the interaction is focused on them.
 - 2) Second, dyads tend to be unstable.
 - Because dyads require that both members participate, if one member loses interest, the dyad collapses.
 - In larger groups, by contrast, even if one person withdraws, the group can continue, for its existence does not depend on any single member (Simmel 1950).
4. A triad is a group of three people.
 - 1) As Simmel noted, the addition of a third member fundamentally changes the group.
 - 2) With three people, interaction between the first two decreases.
 - This can create strain.

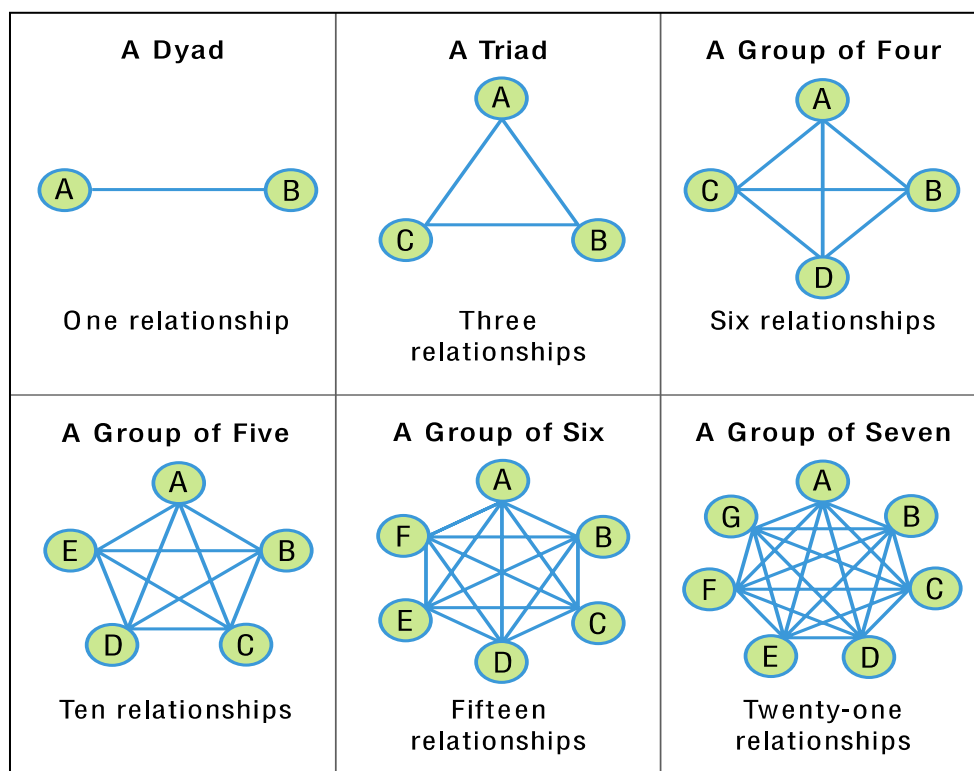
- For example, with the birth of a child, hardly any aspect of a couple's relationship goes untouched.
- Attention focuses on the baby, and interaction between the husband and wife diminishes.
- Despite this, the marriage usually becomes stronger.
- Although the intensity of interaction is less in triads, they are inherently stronger and give greater stability to a relationship.

3) Yet, as Simmel noted, triads, too, are unstable.

- They tend to produce coalitions— two group members aligning themselves against one.
- This common tendency for two people to develop stronger bonds and prefer one another leaves the third person feeling hurt and excluded.
- Another characteristic of triads is that they often produce an arbitrator or mediator, someone who tries to settle disagreements between the other two.
- In one-child families, you can often observe both of these characteristics of triads— coalitions and arbitration.

The general principle is this:

As a small group grows larger, it becomes more stable, but its intensity, or intimacy, decreases. To see why, look at Figure 6.3 below.



- 1) As each new person comes into a group, the connections among people multiply.
 - In a dyad, there is only 1 relationship
 - In a triad, there are 3.
 - In a group of four, 6.
 - In a group of five, 10.
 - If we expand the group to six, we have 15 relationships.
 - While a group of seven yields 21 relationships.

- 2) If we continue adding members, we soon are unable to follow the connections:
 - A group of eight has 28 possible relationships.
 - A group of nine, 36 relationships.
 - A group of ten, 45; and so on.

- 4) It is not only the number of relationships that makes larger groups more stable.
 - As groups grow, they also tend to develop a more formal structure.
 - For example, leaders emerge and more specialized roles come into play.
 - This often results in such familiar offices as president, secretary, and treasurer.
 - This structure provides a framework that helps the group survive over time.

Leadership:

All of us are influenced by leaders, so it is important to understand leadership.

Let's look at types of leaders, how people become leaders, and different styles of leadership.

- 1) Before we do this, though, it is important to clarify that leaders don't necessarily hold formal positions in a group.
- 2) Leaders are people who influence the behaviors, opinions, or attitudes of others.
- 3) Even a group of friends has leaders.

Types of Leaders:

- 1) Groups have two types of leaders (Bales 1950, 1953; Cartwright and Zander 1968).
 - a. **The instrumental leader** (or task-oriented leader)
 - is someone who tries to keep the group moving toward its goals.
 - They try to keep group members from getting sidetracked, reminding them of what they are supposed to accomplish.
 - b. **The expressive leader** (or socioemotional leader)
 - In contrast, usually is not recognized as a leader, but he or she certainly is one.
 - This person is likely to do things that lift the group's morale, to crack jokes or to offer sympathy.

Both types of leaders are essential:

The one keeps the group on track, while the other increases harmony and minimizes conflicts.

- 1) It is difficult for the same person to be both an instrumental and an expressive leader, for these roles tend to contradict one another.
 - a. Instrumental leaders are task oriented, so they sometimes create friction as they prod the group to get on with the job.
 - b. Their actions often cost them popularity.
- 2) Expressive leaders, in contrast, who stimulate personal bonds and reduce friction, are usually more popular (Olmsted and Hare 1978).

Who Becomes a Leader?

- 1) Are leaders born with characteristics that propel them to the forefront of a group?
 - a. No sociologist would agree with such an idea.
 - b. In general, people who become leaders are perceived by group members as strongly representing their values, as able to lead a group out of a crisis (Trice and Beyer 1991), or as having a talent for economic success.

- 2) Leaders tend to be more talkative, outgoing, determined, and self-confident (Ward et al. 2010).
 - a. These findings may not be surprising, since such traits are related to what we expect of leaders.
 - b. Researchers, however, have also discovered traits that seem to have no bearing on the ability to lead.
 - c. For example, taller people and those judged better looking are more likely to become leaders (Stodgill 1974; Judge and Cable 2004).
 - d. Some of the factors that go into our choice of leaders are quite subtle, as social psychologists Lloyd Howells and Selwyn Becker (1962) found in a simple experiment.
 - They had groups of five people who did not know one another sit at a rectangular table.
 - Three, of course, sat on one side, and two on the other.
 - After discussing a topic for a set period of time, each group chose a leader.
 - The findings are startling: Although only 40 percent of the people sat on the two-person side, 70 percent of the leaders emerged from there.
 - The explanation is that we tend to interact more with people facing us than with people to our side.

Henslin, James M. (2012). *Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach* (11th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.