

Small Group Research

<http://sgr.sagepub.com/>

Are Dyads Really Groups?

Richard L. Moreland

Small Group Research 2010 41: 251 originally published online 17 February 2010

DOI: 10.1177/1046496409358618

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://sgr.sagepub.com/content/41/2/251>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Small Group Research* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://sgr.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://sgr.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://sgr.sagepub.com/content/41/2/251.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Mar 31, 2010

[OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Feb 17, 2010

[What is This?](#)

Are Dyads Really Groups?

Small Group Research

41(2) 251-267

© The Author(s) 2010

Reprints and permission: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

DOI: 10.1177/1046496409358618

<http://sgr.sagepub.com>



Richard L. Moreland¹

Abstract

Social scientists who study groups disagree about whether (and to what extent) dyads ought to be included in their work. In this article, I argue that dyads are not really groups because (a) dyads are more ephemeral than groups, forming and dissolving more quickly; (b) people feel stronger (and often different) emotions in dyads than in groups; (c) dyads are simpler than groups—some group phenomena cannot occur in dyads, and those that do may operate differently there; and (d) research on dyads is carried out almost independently (by different people, applying different theories and methods, and publishing their work in different outlets) from research on groups. I also review some of the conceptual and methodological problems that can arise when dyads are mistakenly viewed as groups.

Keywords

dyads, size, emotions

Dyadic relationships, such as friendships and romances, may be the most important relationships in our lives. Such relationships are very common; observational studies of people in everyday settings (e.g., Bakeman & Beck, 1974; Burgess, 1984; James, 1951) show that when people are not alone, they are far more likely to be in a dyad than in a group. And dyadic relationships can be extremely involving, engaging our thoughts and feelings more intensely than do groups. For these reasons, many social scientists have devoted their careers to studying dyadic relationships, publishing their work in books about such relationships (e.g., *Handbook of Personal Relationships*:

¹University of Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Richard L. Moreland, University of Pittsburgh, 3103 Sennott Square, Pittsburgh, PA 15260

Email: cslewis@pitt.edu

Theory, Research, and Interventions) and in several journals devoted to relevant research (e.g., *Personal Relationships*, the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*). Someone with an interest in dyadic relationships can also join several professional associations of like-minded researchers (e.g., International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships).

So, the purpose of my essay is not to deny that dyadic relationships are important or to cast doubt on the value of research that explores such relationships. And I would not disagree that studying dyadic relationships can sometimes reveal important things about groups (and vice versa). My purpose, instead, is to suggest that dyads are qualitatively different than groups, which means that people who study dyads are not really studying groups, as some of them claim (and more of them may believe). I will begin my essay by presenting several reasons to believe that dyads are different than groups. Then, at the end, I will explain briefly why this issue is important.

Differences Between Dyads and Groups

There are several reasons to believe that dyads are not really groups. In particular, I believe that (a) dyads are more ephemeral than groups—forming and dissolving more quickly; (b) people experience stronger (and often different) emotions in dyads than in groups; (c) dyads are simpler than groups—some group phenomena cannot occur in dyads, and those that do may operate differently there; and (d) research on dyads is carried out almost independently from research on groups—each type of research is performed by different people, applying different theories and methods, and publishing their work in different outlets.

Dyads Are More Ephemeral Than Groups

One difference between dyads and groups is that dyads are likely to both form and dissolve more quickly. Relatively little is known, unfortunately, about the formation or dissolution of social entities, but elsewhere (Moreland, 1987) I have argued that both these phenomena are best viewed as *processes*, not *events*. Neither phenomenon is likely to occur at a single point in time. Instead, both phenomena generally unfold over some period of time. Formation involves increasing levels of social integration, whereas dissolution involves decreasing levels. Social integration is a continuous variable that reflects the extent to which different people feel, think, and act like a single person (see Cattell, 1948; McGrath, 1984; Meneses, Ortega, Navarro, & deQuijano, 2008; Moreland & McMinn, 2004).

Changes in levels of social integration are likely to occur more quickly in a dyad than in a group, a point that was first made as early as 1908 by the sociologist Georg Simmel (see Wolff, 1964). For a dyad to form, only one relationship is needed. For a group to form, however, relationships among three or more persons are needed. These include relationships between each pair of persons in the group, relationships between each person and the subgroup(s) to which he or she does not belong, and relationships between each individual and the group as a whole (Moreland & Levine, 1982). Similarly, damage to a single relationship is enough to make a dyad dissolve. But if only one relationship in a group is damaged, then the group can still survive. In a three-person group, for example, the damaged relationship might involve one of the three constituent dyads, leaving the other two dyads intact. Even when there is damage to someone's relationship with the group as a whole, that person might still want to participate in relationships with the other group members, leaving the group intact to some extent. Groups that contain more than three members are even harder, capable of surviving damage to more relationships without dissolving.

Note that I am not claiming that damage to dyadic relationships is more likely. In fact, as I will discuss later, dyadic relationships are generally more enjoyable than are group relationships, so people try harder to form and preserve dyads. Group relationships are thus more likely to be lost. The point is that groups can usually survive such losses, but dyads cannot.

How quickly are different kinds of relationships gained or lost? A closer analysis of social integration might help answer that question. Moreland (1987) suggested that social integration has four aspects: environmental, behavioral, affective, and cognitive. Environmental integration involves the resources that relationships often require, such as time, participants, money, equipment, and so on. Relationships are more likely to form when a social environment provides such resources and more likely to dissolve when it does not. Behavioral integration involves the satisfaction of personal needs. When such needs can only be satisfied (or are satisfied more easily) with help from others, relationships are more likely to form. Relationships are more likely to dissolve when people cannot help one another to satisfy personal needs or such needs are satisfied more easily by people on their own. Affective integration involves shared emotions (positive or negative) within relationships. The more often such sharing occurs, and the more powerful those shared emotions are, the more likely it is that relationships will form. Relationships are less likely to form when few emotions are shared or shared emotions are weak. Finally, cognitive integration involves shared thoughts within relationships. The most important thought that people can share in a relationship is that they belong together (see Bar-Tal, 1990; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Relationships are thus more likely to

form when people believe that they belong together and more likely to dissolve when people lack that belief or even believe that they belong apart.

If more were known about how long it actually takes for different aspects of social integration to change, then firmer conclusions could be drawn about how quickly dyads and groups form or dissolve. Nevertheless, some conclusions are possible. I think that when it comes to both environmental and behavioral integration, dyads must form and dissolve more quickly than do groups. In terms of environmental integration, the fact that groups contain more members probably makes it more difficult for them to obtain the resources needed for relationship formation and to keep the resources needed to prevent relationship dissolution. And in terms of behavioral integration, the fact that groups contain more members probably makes conflicts related to the needs of those members more likely to occur and more difficult to resolve.

Affective and cognitive integration present a murkier picture. There is some evidence that people can fall in "love at first sight" (e.g., Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007; Knee, 1998), suggesting that at least one kind of dyad can form very rapidly. No comparable evidence exists for the rapid formation of groups, although Freud and others (see Redl, 1942) have described group crystallization as a formative process that occurs when people come to share feelings (and realize that their feelings are shared) toward some target person, such as a group's leader or a scapegoat. In principle, crystallization could occur quite rapidly. Some analysts (e.g., Lofland, 1981) have also discussed the role of shared emotions in crowd behavior. Again, I imagine that such effects could be rapid, given how contagious emotions can be (see Kelly & Barsade, 2001). I know of no theory or research, however, on how quickly affective (dis)integration causes dyads or groups to dissolve.

What about cognitive integration? Self-categorization theorists (e.g., Turner, 1985) regard it as the critical factor in group formation, more important than environmental, behavioral, or affective integration. There is some support for their claim, given that in-group/out-group biases (which can be taken as evidence that a group has formed) can be produced simply by leading people to view themselves and others as members of different groups. Group formation of this sort can be very rapid. Much less is known about whether and how social categorization affects the formation of dyads, but there is no reason to doubt that such effects can occur (see Lewis, 1973) or to believe that they are slower for dyads than for groups. As for group dissolution, I know of no work on how cognitive (dis)integration might cause dyads or groups to dissolve. In fact, if one takes seriously the claim by self-categorization theorists that a group exists whenever people simultaneously think about themselves as group members, then group dissolution might be a slow process indeed, one that could continue long after the members of a group have lost all contact with one another (see Moreland & McMinn, 1999). That may also be true for dyads, of course.

In summary, the formation and dissolution of both dyads and groups are best viewed as processes that unfold over time rather than events that occur at some specific point in time. Both processes involve changes in levels of social integration, a variable with environmental, behavioral, affective, and cognitive aspects. A logical analysis, based on the fact that there are more (and more kinds of) relationships within groups than there are within dyads, suggests to me that groups should form and dissolve more slowly than dyads. Social integration can have environmental, behavioral, affective, and cognitive aspects. I argued, again on a logical basis, that levels of environmental and behavioral integration probably change more slowly in groups than in dyads. As for affective and cognitive integration, there is some evidence that affective integration can cause dyads to form rapidly and some evidence that cognitive integration can cause groups to form rapidly. Less is known about affective integration and the formation of groups or about cognitive integration and the formation of dyads, and neither aspect of social integration has been studied as a factor in the dissolution of groups or dyads.

People Experience Stronger (and Often Different) Emotions in Dyads Than in Groups

Emotions are clearly an important part of any relationship, and people in both dyads and groups often experience strong emotions. But emotions seem to play a larger role in dyads than they do in groups. There has certainly been more research on emotions in dyads (e.g., Fitness & Fletcher, 1993; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987) than there has been on group emotions. In fact, the latter have only recently begun to be analyzed (see Kelly & Barsade, 2001).

Romantic love and sex are obvious examples of how different the emotional lives of dyads and groups can be. Both phenomena are common in dyads, but rare among the members of groups. In fact, positive emotions of all kinds seem to be more powerful in dyads than they are in groups. People enjoy smaller groups more than larger ones anyway (see Moreland, Levine, & Wingert, 1996), in part because larger groups often suffer from more deviance, interpersonal conflict, and social loafing. Of course, such problems can sometimes be controlled by altering group structure (e.g., developing clearer status systems, stricter norms, narrower roles, more directive leadership), but this can alienate members and make larger groups even less enjoyable. Even among smaller groups, however, dyads seem to be especially enjoyable, almost unique in that regard (see Hackman & Vidmar, 1970; O'Dell, 1968). And what about other emotions? There is evidence (Scherer, Wallbott, Matsumoto, & Kudoh, 1988) that even negative emotions, such as fear and sadness, are stronger when they occur in dyads than when they occur in groups.

Why *should* emotions be stronger in dyads? Two reasons can be offered, both of which reflect the simple fact that dyads contain fewer people. First, the closeness of a relationship depends on factors such as how often the people involved interact with each other, how varied the activities are in which they participate together, and how strong the impact of each person is on the other. In all these ways, dyadic relationships tend to be closer than group relationships. In a dyad, compared with a group, people generally interact more often, participate in a broader range of activities, and have greater impact on each other, if only because there are just two people involved. Second, each person in a dyad must relate *directly* to the other—there is only one relationship through which social emotions can flow. In a group, however, such emotions can flow through a variety of relationships, which may weaken those emotions or change them altogether. Also, many groups develop norms that regulate the emotional experiences of members, often in ways that can weaken such experiences (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). Many families, for example, have norms regarding anger and conflict, and many work groups have norms regarding love and sex. In fact, a general theme of group life may be that all members should relate to one another in similar ways—special relationships among particular members, relationships involving stronger and/or different emotions, can be disruptive to the group and thus are suppressed (see Kanter, 1968).

Dyads Are Simpler Than Groups

Many phenomena occur in *both* dyads and groups. Consider, for example, Levine and Moreland (1990, 1998), who reviewed work on group phenomena and categorized it into five broad topic areas, namely, group composition, group structure, group dynamics (conflicts among group members), group performance, and the ecology of groups. In all these areas, work on dyads can also be found.

However, there are several phenomena that can occur in groups, but cannot occur in dyads, simply because dyads are too small. Consider relational demography, something of interest to group researchers who study composition phenomena (e.g., Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). Relational demography goes beyond simple homogeneity/heterogeneity in a group to evaluate how similar or different each group member's characteristics are to those of the group as a whole. Thus, a male employee in a group of mostly female workers may experience work differently than a female employee in that same group. (Consider also related work on the experiences of token group members.) It would make little sense to study relational demography in a dyad—a

husband, for example, is no more different from his wife than she is from her husband, because there is no larger social unit to which each person can be compared.

Socialization, a special interest of mine, is another phenomenon that can occur in groups, but not in dyads. John Levine and I developed a theory of group socialization (Moreland & Levine, 1982), analyzed the role of socialization processes in various other group phenomena, and carried out studies of socialization processes (see Moreland & Levine, 2000). Group socialization, we believe, involves changes across time in the relationship between a particular member and the group as a whole. Thus, people begin as prospective members of a group and end as ex-members of the group, experiencing a series of role transitions along the way. These transitions depend on how committed the member is to the group and how committed the group is to that person. Feelings of commitment depend in turn on evaluations of the group by the member and evaluations of that member by the group. Group socialization cannot occur in a dyad because there is only one relationship there that can change as time passes, namely, the relationship between the dyad's two members. There is no larger group to which each person can relate separately. In a dyad, socialization thus devolves to development. Dyads *and* groups can develop, in the sense that systematic changes may occur over time in the relationships among all members. But socialization only occurs in groups, where the relationship between each member and the group as a whole can change separately from changes in the relationships among group members. The complex connections between group socialization and group development were analyzed by Moreland and Levine (1988).

Two other phenomena that occur in groups, but not in dyads, are coalition formation and majority/minority influence. Coalition formation occurs when several members of a group are seeking to control that group, but none of them has enough power to achieve that goal alone. In such situations, some group members may form alliances with one another. The collective power that an alliance represents may be enough to control the group. Several different theories of coalition formation have been proposed (Miller & Komorita, 1986). These theories predict which coalitions are likely to form among group members and how the people in those coalitions are likely to divide (among themselves) whatever resources are gained by controlling the group. All of this is intriguing, yet none of it can happen in a dyad, because a dyad is too small. The members of a dyad can certainly struggle for control, but if their power is comparable, then stalemate ensues. One person could, of course, go outside the dyad's boundary and try to build a coalition with outsiders (e.g., a wife might ask her parents for help with a stubborn husband

who will not accede to her wishes), but then the original dyad would no longer be the focus of analysis; a group (the family in which the dyad is embedded) would be the focus instead.

Majority/minority influence involves efforts by two factions within a group, one smaller than the other, to change the group as a whole. Theories about both forms of influence can be found, and much attention has been given to the issue of whether majority and minority influence operate in the same or different ways (see Maass, West, & Cialdini, 1987). Again, none of this is relevant to dyads. In a dyad, there can be no majority or minority, only occasional disagreements in which each opposing position is taken by a single person. One or both persons could certainly seek support from outside the dyad's boundary (e.g., friends or relatives), but the focus of analysis would then shift again from the dyad to the group.

There are probably other group phenomena that cannot occur in dyads. There might also be phenomena that can only occur in dyads, not in groups. I suspect that most of the phenomena that occur in dyads or groups are shared rather than unique. But the fact that several phenomena unique to groups can be identified suggests that dyads are indeed different from groups.

Discontinuities in Shared Phenomena

Even when a phenomenon appears to occur in both dyads and groups, there is no guarantee that it operates exactly the same way in both places. At the very least, many phenomena that occur in dyads and groups are probably more complicated in groups.

Consider, for example, negotiation, which often occurs in dyads (e.g., when a buyer and a seller bargain over the price of a used automobile), but can also occur in groups (e.g., when several tenants in an apartment house bargain over whether and how their building's lobby should be decorated for the holidays). Nearly all work on negotiation focuses on dyads (see DeDreu, Beersma, Steinel, & Van Kleef, 2007). Less is known about negotiation in groups (see Weingart, Brett, Olekalns, & Smith, 2007, for a recent exception). Bazerman, Mannix, and Thompson (1987) have argued that negotiation is more complicated in groups than it is in dyads. The complications (at the group level) include greater demands on information processing, a need for social decision rules, and more complex social processes.

Another phenomenon that is more complicated when it occurs in groups rather than dyads is ostracism (Williams, 2002). Within a dyad, someone who ostracizes a partner must make decisions about whether to exclude the target from every activity or only a few activities (partial ostracism), whether and

how to explain to the target why ostracism is occurring, and so on. But in a group, matters are more complex. Should the source ask (or expect) other group members to “help” by ostracizing the target themselves? What might they request in return? If they refuse to help or the source does not want to grant what they request, then will the source still carry out the ostracism, or alter the ostracism somehow, or abandon the ostracism effort altogether? If others agree to help, then how will their efforts be coordinated? Will everyone ostracize the target in similar ways or will they do so in different ways? If people are supposed to ostracize the target differently, then how will the decision be made about who should display each kind of ostracism? What if some group members refuse to ostracize the target, even though everyone else agrees to do so? And what if some group members who agree to ostracize the target do so in ineffective ways (e.g., carry out the ostracism inconsistently or too gently)?

There may also be phenomena that appear to occur in both dyads and groups but operate in fundamentally different ways in groups. That is, discontinuities may exist in some phenomena across the two social settings. I occasionally run across examples of such phenomena. Consider, for example, self-disclosure (Jourard, 1971; Omarzu, 2000)—the act of opening the self to others by revealing one’s thoughts and feelings, many of which could be sensitive in nature. Self-disclosure often occurs in dyads, where it can be both a cause and an effect of relationship development. But self-disclosure can also occur in groups. In therapy groups, for example, self-disclosure by patients can prove to be therapeutic for everyone involved (speakers and listeners). But is self-disclosure the same phenomenon in groups as it is in dyads? Researchers who have observed self-disclosure in both places are doubtful. Solano and Dunham (1985), for example, found that the frequency of self-disclosure, and the intimacy of what was disclosed, decreased with group size. But the greatest difference was found between dyads and triads; triads did not differ much from four-person groups. This suggests that adding one person to a dyad changes self-disclosure in a fundamental way (see also Taylor, DeSoto, & Lieb, 1979). Such results have led several analysts (e.g., Hackman & Vidmar, 1970; O’Dell, 1968) to conclude that the dyad is a unique social entity, distinct from a group.

The Two Cultures: Dyads and Groups Researchers

People who do research on dyads and people who do research on groups seem to represent two different cultures (with apologies to C. P. Snow), suggesting yet again that dyads are not groups. If dyads *were* groups, then one

would expect that only one culture would exist—the people who do research on dyads should also do research on groups (and vice versa); the theories and methods used in research on dyads would be the same as those used in research on groups; and research on dyads and on groups would appear in the same journals. But (with a few exceptions) none of these things is true.

Among the researchers who study dyads, for example, few people can be found who also study groups, and among the researchers who study groups, few people can be found who also study dyads. There are exceptions, of course, including Michael Ross, Wolfgang Stroebe, and Kip Williams. But these exceptions prove the rule, at least for me. I know only a few people who study dyads, so I am less certain about which ones might also study groups. But the simple fact that I know so few people who study dyads, after years of reading books and articles about groups, attending group conferences, and so on, seems to support my claim.

One reason why so few people who study dyads also study groups (and vice versa) may be that the theories and methods required for each type of research are different, making it difficult to master both domains. Each set of researchers operates more or less independently from the other. In terms of theories, for example, I can think of only a few examples (e.g., Smith, Murphy, & Coats, 1999) in which some theory developed for the analysis of dyadic behavior was applied to groups instead. Examples in which some theory developed for the analysis of group behavior was applied to dyads do not come to mind at all for me. Several years ago, John Levine and I were asked to organize a small conference for group researchers. This annual conference has a long history, making it difficult to come up with a new theme each year. John and I thought it might be interesting to invite speakers known for their research on dyads rather than groups. The premise was that work on dyads might generate insights into groups. Attendance at the conference was good, indicating that group researchers are at least willing to learn something about dyadic theories and research, and the speakers presented their work well. But as the conference proceeded, it became clear that we were trying to mix oil and water. After the conference ended, I saw few signs that the group researchers had adopted (or planned to adopt) any of the theories or methods they heard about for their own work.

Finally, it seems noteworthy that people who do research on dyads, and people who do research on groups, often belong to different professional associations and publish their work in different journals. There are certainly some journals in which research of both kinds appears. Consider, for example, the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, which is arguably the premier journal in social psychology. That journal is divided into

three separate sections, one on attitudes and social cognition, another on interpersonal relations and group processes, and the third on personality processes and individual differences. The middle section of the journal publishes articles on both dyads and on groups, but those articles tend to focus on either dyads *or* groups, not both. And the associate editors for that section are typically chosen for their expertise on dyads *or* groups, not both. Because I have been involved at times in the process of selecting a new editor for that section of the journal, I happen to know there are political pressures to rotate the kind of person (dyads vs. groups) chosen as editor, so that neither dyads nor groups researchers are forced to cope for too long with someone who might not favor the kind of work that they do. If dyads were really groups, then such tensions would not arise, or would at least be weaker.

What Is the Problem?

Suppose I am correct, and dyads are not really groups . . . so what? Is this a problem that ought to worry us, and if so, then why?

There are probably some advantages to squinting a bit when we examine dyads and groups, making them seem more or less the same. Many phenomena *can* occur in both dyads and groups, and although such phenomena might be more complicated in groups, they are basically the same phenomena in both settings. As a result, research on dyads can sometimes help us understand groups better, and research on groups can sometimes help us understand dyads better. An example of this happy synergy can be found in research on transactive memory (Wegner, 1987), yet another special interest of mine.

But the belief that dyads are groups can also have some disadvantages. These are numerous and serious enough to convince me that a problem exists. When researchers believe that dyads are groups, they are more likely to make methodological choices that (at the risk of seeming judgmental) I would classify as mistakes.

The first of these mistakes is to do research on dyads, but draw conclusions about groups (as well). As noted earlier, there are some group phenomena (e.g., relational demography, group socialization, coalition formation, majority/minority influence) that cannot occur in dyads, so researchers who only study dyads are unlikely to ever learn much about those phenomena. That would be a shame, because in my opinion, those are all interesting and potentially important aspects of groups.

Moreover, some phenomena may not operate the same way in groups as they do in dyads. Studying only dyads, therefore, could produce misleading

information about how those phenomena operate in groups. Researchers should take this risk more seriously and not only think carefully how a phenomenon could change when it occurs in groups versus dyads, but also consider studying the phenomenon in *both* dyads *and* groups, so that statistical tests can be made of (a) the main effects of group size and (b) possible interactions between group size and other variables of theoretical interest. A failure to perform such tests, when both dyads and groups are studied, is thus a second mistake that some researchers make.

A third mistake is to study dyads *in* groups, without considering the possibility that other group members are interested in a dyad's behavior and might react in ways that can affect both the dyad and the group. The potential impact of this mistake is clear from the work of several researchers who have avoided it. Consider, for example, work by Vuchinich and his colleagues on family conflicts (e.g., Vuchinich, Emery, & Cassidy, 1988). They recorded and analyzed arguments between family members that occurred around the dinner table as everyone sat together. The researchers found that when two people began to argue, other family members often reacted to the argument, sometimes in ways that made it worse, but usually in ways that resolved the argument, or ended it in some other way (e.g., by forbidding the participants to continue arguing or by distracting the participants). Apparently, one cannot fully understand conflicts between two group members without considering how that conflict is viewed by the rest of the group and what other group members will do about it. In a similar vein, consider work by Ridgeway and her colleagues on dominance contests in groups (e.g., Ridgeway & Diekema, 1989). These contests occur when a lower-status member challenges a higher-status one (e.g., by interrupting the person) to achieve greater status. Some theorists (see Mazur, 1985) have described such contests as though they were private affairs in which other group members play little or no role. Ridgeway and her colleagues argued, however, that the group as a whole wants and needs optimal status assignments to be made, assignments that offer greater status to members whose contributions to the group are more valuable. And their research revealed, in fact, that other group members are *not* passive when a dominance contest occurs. Insofar as the challenger seems undeserving, because his or her value to the group does not warrant greater status, other members are likely to intervene in ways that make the challenger less likely to win.

A final mistake, one that is less common but sometimes occurs, is analyzing groups as if they were nothing *but* collections of dyads. Researchers who make this mistake first decompose groups into all the dyads that they contain and then consider those dyads separately from one another. Consider, for

example, the classic analysis of cohesion in groups by Lott and Lott (1965), who analyzed it solely in terms of interpersonal attraction between pairs of group members. Some research on leadership, such as the work on leader-member exchange theory (see Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999), also seems to exemplify this mistake. In that theory, the basic unit of analysis is the dyadic relationship between the leader and a follower. The underlying assumption is that leaders are more effective when their relationships with followers are more satisfying (according to the general principles of social exchange). An issue of special interest to researchers has been whether a leader will have the same exchange relationship with every follower, a unique exchange relationship with each follower, or different exchange relationships with separate subsets of followers. Research suggests that the last of these options is closest to the truth. Many leaders have a more favorable exchange relationship with one subset of followers (the *in-group*) than they have with the rest of their followers (the *out-group*). Followers who are lucky enough to be in the in-group can benefit in many ways, including higher salaries, better career opportunities, and faster promotions. This raises several related issues, such as how a leader chooses which followers should be part of the in-group versus the out-group, whether and how followers in the out-group can move into the in-group, and so on. But my point here is that analyzing a group one dyad at a time ignores the possibility that important things are happening at other levels of analysis. We know, for example, that reducing a group phenomenon to the level of individual behavior can sometimes be misleading. Is reductionism to the level of dyads any better? Maybe larger subsets of group members (e.g., triads) are more important, or maybe the relationships *among* dyads in the group should be considered. I know of no work by leadership researchers, for example, on how people from a leader's in-group interact with people from that person's out-group, yet such interactions surely have an impact on the group as a whole.

Concluding Remarks

Kip Williams and I used to attend a week-long summer conference on small groups every year, along with a dozen or more colleagues from various universities. One year, for reasons I can no longer recall, we began to discuss whether dyads are groups. I was surprised to discover that nearly everyone at the conference had strong opinions about this issue. Most of the people in my field (social psychology) probably think that dyads *are* groups, but my opinion to the contrary was actually shared by several of the people at the conference. So, when conference participants planned a commemorative

T-shirt that would remind us all of our week together, we chose to print the colorful phrase “We Don’t Need No Stinkin’ Dyads” on the shirt. I still wear that shirt occasionally (although it seems to have shrunk a lot over the years), and it attracts considerable attention, not just from other social scientists, but from the general public as well.

Writing this essay was thus a trip down memory lane in a way, one that I enjoyed and found intriguing. I still believe the issue of whether dyads are groups is important, and I suspect that many readers will have strong opinions of their own about it. I did my best to muster persuasive arguments for my position, but who can say whether I succeeded or not? I undoubtedly indulged in some motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). Because I have devoted my entire career to studying groups, it is important for me to believe that there is something special about them. That is indeed what I believe.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

References

- Bakeman, R., & Beck, S. (1974). The size of informal groups in public. *Environment & Behavior*, 6, 378-390.
- Bar-Tal, D. (1990). *Group beliefs: A conception for analyzing group structure, processes, and behavior*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Barelds, D. P. H., & Barelds-Dijkstra, P. (2007). Love at first sight or friends first? Ties among partner personality, trait similarity, relationship onset, relationship quality, and love. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 24, 479-496.
- Bazerman, M. H., Mannix, E. A., & Thompson, L. L. (1987). Groups as mixed-motive negotiations. In E. J. Lawler & B. Markovsky (Eds.), *Advances in group processes* (Vol. 5, pp. 195-216). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Burgess, J. W. (1984). Do humans show a “species-typical” group size? Age, sex, and environmental differences in the size and composition of naturally-occurring causal groups. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 5, 1-57.
- Cattell, R. B. (1948). Concepts and methods in the measurement of group syntality. *Psychological Review*, 55, 48-63.
- DeDreu, C. K. W., Beersma, B., Steinel, W., & Van Kleef, G. A. (2007). The psychology of negotiation: Principles and basic processes. In A. E. Kruglanski & E. T. Higgins

- (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (2nd ed., pp. 608-629). New York: Guilford Press.
- Fitness, J., & Fletcher, G. J. O. (1993). Love, hate, anger, and jealousy: A prototype and cognitive appraisal analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65, 942-958.
- Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory over 25 years. *Leadership Quarterly*, 6, 219-247.
- Hackman, J. R., & Vidmar, N. (1970). Effects of size and task type on group performance and member reactions. *Sociometry*, 33, 37-54.
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 511-524.
- James, J. (1951). A preliminary study of the size determinant in small group interaction. *American Sociological Review*, 16, 474-477.
- Jourard, S. M. (1971). *The transparent self*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Kanter, R. M. (1968). Commitment and social organization: A study of commitment mechanisms in utopian communities. *American Sociological Review*, 33, 419-517.
- Kelly, J. R., & Barsade, S. G. (2001). Mood and emotions in small groups and work teams. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 86, 99-130.
- Knee, C. R. (1998). Implicit theories of relationships: Assessment and prediction of romantic relationship initiation, coping, and longevity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 360-370.
- Kunda, Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 490-498.
- Levine, J. M., & Moreland, R. L. (1990). Progress in small group research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 41, 585-634.
- Levine, J. M., & Moreland, R. L. (1998). Small groups. In D. Gilbert, S. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 2, pp. 415-469). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Lewis, R. A. (1973). Social reaction and the formation of dyads: An interactionist approach to mate selection. *Sociometry*, 36, 409-418.
- Lofland, J. L. (1981). Collective behavior: The elementary forms. In M. Rosenberg & R. Turner (Eds.), *Social psychology: Sociological perspectives* (pp. 413-446). New York: Basic Books.
- Lott, A. J., & Lott, B. E. (1965). Group cohesiveness as interpersonal attraction: A review of relationships with antecedent and consequent variables. *Psychological Bulletin*, 64, 259-309.
- Maass, A., West, S. G., & Cialdini, R. B. (1987). Minority influence and conversion. *Review of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8, 55-79.
- Mazur, A. (1985). A biosocial model of status in face-to-face primate groups. *Social Forces*, 64, 377-402.

- McGrath, J. E. (1984). *Groups: Interaction and performance*. Inglewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Meneses, R., Ortega, R., Navarro, J., & de Quijano, S. D. (2008). Criteria for assessing the level of group development (LGD) of work groups. *Small Group Research*, 39, 492-514.
- Miller, C. E., & Komorita, S. S. (1986). Coalition formation in organizations: What laboratory studies do and do not tell us. In R. J. Lewicki, M. H. Bazerman, & B. Sheppard (Eds.), *Research on negotiation in organizations* (Vol. 1, pp. 117-137). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Moreland, R. L. (1987). The formation of small groups. In C. Hendrick (Ed.), *Review of personality and social psychology* (Vol. 8, pp. 80-110). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Moreland, R. L., & Levine, J. M. (1982). Socialization in small groups: Temporal changes in individual-group relations. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 15, pp. 137-192). New York: Academic Press.
- Moreland, R. L., & Levine, J. M. (1988). Group dynamics over time: Development and socialization in small groups. In J. McGrath (Ed.), *The social psychology of time: New perspectives* (pp. 151-181). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Moreland, R. L., & Levine, J. M. (2000). Socialization in organizations and work groups. In M. Turner (Ed.), *Groups at work: Theory and research* (pp. 69-112). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Moreland, R. L., Levine, J. M., & Wingert, M. L. (1996). Creating the ideal group: Composition effects at work. In J. Davis & E. Witte (Eds.), *Understanding group behavior* (Vol. 2, pp. 11-35). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Moreland, R. L., & McMinn, J. G. (1999). Gone, but not forgotten: Loyalty and betrayal among ex-members of small groups. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25, 1476-1486.
- Moreland, R. L., & McMinn, J. G. (2004). Entitativity and social integration: Managing beliefs about the reality of groups. In V. Yzerbyt, C. Judd, & O. Corneille (Eds.), *The psychology of group perception: Perceived variability, entitativity, and essentialism* (pp. 419-437). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- O'Dell, J. W. (1968). Group size and emotional interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8, 75-78.
- Omarzu, J. (2000). A disclosure decision model: Determining how and when individuals will self-disclose. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4, 174-185.
- Ridgeway, C., & Diekema, D. (1989). Dominance and collective hierarchy formation in male and female task groups. *American Sociological Review*, 54, 79-93.
- Scherer, K. R., Wallbott, H. G., Matsumoto, D., & Kudoh, T. (1988). Emotional experience in cultural context: A comparison between Europe, Japan, and the United States. In K. R. Scherer (Ed.), *Facets of emotion: Recent research* (pp. 5-30). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- Schriesheim, C. A., Castro, S. L., & Cogliser, C. C. (1999). Leader-member exchange (LMX) research: A comprehensive review of theory, measurement, and data-analytic practices. *Leadership Quarterly*, 10, 63-113.
- Smith, E. R., Murphy, J., & Coats, S. (1999). Attachment to groups: Theory and measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 94-110.
- Solano, C. H., & Dunham, M. (1985). Two's company: Self-disclosure and reciprocity in triads versus dyads. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 48, 183-187.
- Stroebe, W., & Stroebe, M. S. (1987). *Bereavement and health: The psychological and physical consequences of partner loss*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, R. B., DeSoto, C. B., & Lieb, R. (1979). Sharing secrets: Disclosure and discretion in dyads and triads. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 7, 1196-1203.
- Tsui, A. S., Egan, T. D., & O'Reilly, C. A. (1992). Being different: Relational demography and organizational attachment. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 37, 549-579.
- Turner, J. C. (1985). Social categorization and the self-concept: A social-cognitive theory of group behavior. In E. Lawler (Ed.), *Advances in group processes* (Vol. 2, pp. 77-122). Greenwich, CN: JAI Press.
- Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Vuchinich, S., Emery, R. E., & Cassidy, J. (1988). Family members as third parties in dyadic family conflict: Strategies, alliances, and outcomes. *Child Development*, 59, 1293-1302.
- Wegner, D. M. (1987). Transactive memory: A contemporary analysis of the group mind. In B. Mullen & G. R. Goethals (Eds.), *Theories of group behavior* (pp. 185-205). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Weingart, L. R., Brett, J. M., Olekalns, M., & Smith, P. L. (2007). Conflicting social motives in negotiating groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93, 994-1010.
- Williams, K. D. (2002). *Ostracism: The power of silence*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Wolff, K. (1964). *The sociology of Georg Simmel*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Bio

Richard L. Moreland is a social psychologist in the Psychology Department (with a secondary appointment in the Katz Business School) at the University of Pittsburgh. He is interested in many group phenomena, including transactive memory, reflexivity, entitativity, and temporal changes in group.