

Jan Remmerswaal

Group Dynamics

An introduction

uitgeverij boom/nelissen

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Preface

Every group is in some ways similar to all other groups, in some ways similar to some other groups, and in some ways completely different from any other group. This book focuses on the characteristics that a group shares with other groups: either with all other groups or with just a few of them. Here and there, I will also talk about what makes every group unique. An important tool for this investigation is the four main themes of group dynamics:

- Group development
- Leadership
- Level of group functioning
- Group context

Every group represents a specific and unique mix of these four ingredients. It is in a certain stage of its development or in a transitional phase, it is subject to a given form of leadership, it communicates in a certain way and on a certain level, and it functions within a specific context. This book focuses extensively on each of these four ingredients. The phases of group development are covered in Chapter 5, leadership in Chapters 12 and 13, and the levels of group functioning in Chapter 4, while the context is primarily discussed in Chapters 14 and 15. The focus on these four core themes forms the heart of a specific approach to coaching groups and teams. This approach is set out in Chapter 14.

Over the past fifteen years, this book has grown into a classic in the field of group dynamics in the Netherlands and in Belgium. We are delighted that we are able now to present its English translation, thus making the text available to a much wider audience. This book offers basic knowledge of group dynamics regarding the themes that this discipline has developed in the past eighty years, in particular in the field of

communication and leadership. We discuss in detail the system and communication theory and behavioural model of Leary as applied to the functioning of groups. We also pay extensive attention to the functioning of teams (Chapter 14) and large groups (Chapter 15). Where possible, connections are made with personal dynamics, i.e. with what happens on an experiential level in the inner world of group participants. We discuss the significance of the group for the identity of its members. In addition, our extensive focus on the existential level also introduces the interaction between group and personal dynamics.

These additions not only make the text richer, they also ensure that this book matches the practical experience of many readers. Our aim is to reach a broad target group, including professionals who work with groups or are training to do so, as well as managers who work with teams in an organisational context.

This preface is also the place to thank two close friends of mine who have provided me with continuous support in writing this book (and in many other things): my partner Myra Remmerswaal and my friend and colleague Wim Goossens. They have been my support through thick and thin.

I would like to conclude this preface on a personal note, as is my wont. I was born and raised in The Hague. My school years were marked by the oppressive atmosphere of the 1950s and my student years by the turbulent and swinging 1960s. I studied Cultural Psychology in Nijmegen, under Professor Fortmann, and I supplemented my study programme with Social Psychology and Clinical Psychology. Later, I followed training programmes in Gestalt therapy and psychosynthesis. In the last few years, I have developed a growing interest in personal dynamics, particularly in how to deal with emotions in a professional context. This topic formed the theme of my last book. My musical preferences in this period of my life lie primarily in world music, with performers such as Ali Farka Touré, Toumani Diabaté and Habib Koité from Mali, Bombino with his Touaregblues from Niger, Anouar Brahem from Tunisia, Jan Garbarek from Norway and Violeta Parra from Chile, to name just a few. I also have a penchant for old Spanish music, in particular as performed by Jordi Savall and Montserrat Figueras. And I love children's literature and novels for young people.

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Jan Remmerswaal

Nijmegen, summer 2015

jan.remmerswaal@mac.com

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- I.1 Introduction
- I.2 Some reservations about thinking in terms of group dynamics
- I.3 The possible bridging function of group dynamics
- I.4 The individual
- I.5 The group
- I.6 The society
- I.7 Summary

1.1 Introduction

Group dynamics is the study of human behaviour in small groups. A clearer understanding of human behaviour can often be obtained by observing the groups in which that behaviour occurs. Each person is socially determined to a considerable extent by the groups to which they have belonged in the past, especially the family or alternative childrearing environment, and by the groups to which they currently belong. These past and present group memberships are important determinants of each person's identity. It is highly improbable that personality development can occur without primary groups.

In a certain sense, the primary group (and particularly the family) is the intermediary between the culture and society on the one hand, and the individual on the other. Or to put it another way: it is through groups that the individual is connected to society and culture. And vice versa: it is mainly via groups that cultural transfer takes place, the individual learns language and ways of speaking, thinking and perceiving, and acquires an extensive system of values. The way in which emotions and feelings are experienced and integrated in the total personality structure is also largely determined by the family

group, which permits certain emotions and forbids others. Our own personal way of thinking, perceiving, feeling and responding, and our own personal values and norms, are not as individual and unique as we would all like to imagine. We are ‘group animals, heart and soul’, I would almost say. The social influences on each individual are in turn greatly determined and coloured by conditions in society. A very basic representation of this (much too basic, of course) is given in Figure 1.1.



Figure 1.1 A very basic representation of an influence line

Psychology is indebted to the study of group dynamics for many insights into how societal and social factors affect individuals and are internalised by individuals. We are all formed (and unfortunately often also malformed) to a great extent by our societal environment. We are not only a ‘child of our time’ but also a ‘child of our society’.

It is certainly too simple and inaccurate to portray individuals as passive victims of the circumstances under which they must live in groups. Because each individual is not only influenced by his social environment but also exerts an active influence on that environment, the influence line in Figure 1.1 can be equally applied in the reverse direction as well. The fact that individuals can influence the functioning of groups will be obvious, but the step from individual to society is much greater. Only a few individuals have such a privileged position that they can directly influence and determine societal conditions. Perhaps one or two of the most important political or economic figures, but even then ... What is much more common, however, is that individuals can exert an influence on societal conditions via the groups to which they belong. Think of interest groups, action groups, pressure groups, political groups, and so on. A very basic representation of this (again much too basic, of course) is given in Figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2 A second very basic representation of an influence line

Although both of these illustrations are greatly over-simplified, they clearly show that groups form a connecting link between individual and society (see Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.3 Reciprocal influences

Since the Renaissance, and in fact since classical antiquity, much has been written in Western philosophy about the antithesis between individual and society. Thinking in terms of groups, however, has always been far less evident, and that is still the case today. It is therefore not surprising that when the social sciences emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was a much earlier blossoming of psychology (with its emphasis on the individual) and sociology (with its emphasis on the society) than of group dynamics. Group dynamics is still a young discipline: it has only developed since the 1930s. Figure 1.4 shows the position of group dynamics, following on from Figures 1.1 to 1.3.

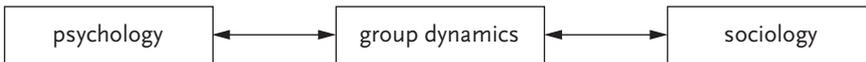


Figure 1.4 Group dynamics as a connecting link between psychology and sociology

1.2 Some reservations about thinking in terms of group dynamics

Nevertheless, some people still have reservations about the idea that group dynamics is a separate discipline. Even today, there are many who think that what happens in groups is mainly determined by individuals, especially by their good or bad attributes. They find it difficult to see themselves as a group member, and also fail to recognise that group phenomena have their own highly distinct characteristics.

Do groups actually exist?

The psychological literature of the 1920s contains an ongoing discussion of the question 'Are groups real?'. Allport (1924), for instance, argued that only individuals are 'real and tangible' and that groups are nothing more than sets of values, ideas, notions, habits and

so on, which are found simultaneously in the thoughts of individuals in collectives; in short, that groups are a kind of 'fantasy' and exist only in people's minds.

Others argued against this view, saying that group phenomena are not explicable in psychological terms, so therefore any valid theory of group processes must be located at the level of the group. This position is clearly summarised by Warriner (1956) in an article entitled: 'Groups are real'.

Individualistic notions of leadership

An example of these two approaches can be seen in the study of 'leadership'. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 12, one of the first perspectives in leadership research focused on discovering the attributes of effective leaders, entirely within the tradition of individualistic Western philosophy. The traces of this approach are still evident in recent literature on organisations, such as Stephen R. Covey's 1989 bestseller *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (revised edition 2010), to which he later added an eighth habit (Covey, 2004). These books are extremely popular, which shows just how prevalent this individualistic perspective can still be today. However, by the 1940s the attributes perspective was no longer flourishing in the study of group dynamics. It was replaced by the 'functional approach', which defines leadership as a group phenomenon, i.e. as engaging in behaviours that help the group to achieve its desired goals.

Tendency to narcissism

Thinking in terms of group phenomena requires a new frame of reference, in which we relinquish the tendency to focus on ourselves as individuals (see also Anzieu, 1968). Using other terms, Freud had also suggested that human narcissism was one of the greatest obstacles to the advancement of knowledge. We can see this in the development of astronomy, biology and psychoanalysis, all of which had to contend with narcissistic prejudices such as 'the earth as the centre of the universe', 'humans as the king of the animals' and 'the conscious ego as the centre of the personality'. These are forms of anthropocentrism. This tendency to focus on ourselves and our own position can also form an obstacle to understanding group processes.

Worldviews

Over the centuries, our worldview has changed many times. People used to think that the sun orbited the earth. During the Renaissance, they discovered that the opposite was true, and the earth orbits the sun. This is known as a heliocentric worldview: the sun is at the centre. Heliocentrism became anthropocentrism: the tendency to see humans as the centre of everything. Humans as the keepers and rulers of nature, bending nature to their will. Just think of how the earth is being exploited. The modern heliocentrism also gave humans a feeling of marginalisation: the growing realisation that our solar system is just one of an infinite number of solar systems. Nihilism and existential angst were thus inevitable by-products of modernity.

Since the 1970s a new worldview has been growing, which Peter Westbroek (2012) calls the 'symbiotic worldview'. This term expresses the idea that it is more meaningful to see the whole earth as a single, symbiotic organism. During this time, there has been increasing interest (especially in geology) in the major interrelationships, the most important of which is symbiosis: the earth as a single organism, as a self-regulating system with its own memory, in which the human species is just a small link or intersection. Although Westbroek himself is a geologist, he is also interested in the human sciences and their relationship to the physical sciences. He notes that in the second half of the twentieth century, the human sciences are still suffering from the maladies of modernism: existential angst and too much ideological commitment. This can be seen in the aversion to 'big theories'; instead of these, science mainly consists of innumerable small-scale research studies, making it very difficult to see the wood for the trees. Westbroek, however, presents a 'big story', which offers enough space to include the interplay between genetic and social factors. In this, he builds on the work of four great Dutch (or Netherlands-based) scientists: Frans de Waal (who is famous for his primate research), Anton Pannekoek (who researched anthropogenesis), Norbert Elias (the Jewish-German-British sociologist who was a guest lecturer in Amsterdam for many years) and Joop Goudsblom (the sociologist who continues Elias's very fruitful work). The position of Elias is especially prominent in this list. He formulated his theory of civilisation back in the 1930s, and his work will be discussed in several places in this book.

I am greatly tempted to discuss Westbroek's work in more detail, but I will restrict myself to his view (derived from the French philosopher Morin) on the relationship between the physical and human sciences. This view sees the relationship as being both antagonistic and complementary: although the physical and human sciences are in conflict, the one cannot exist without the other. We are both biological and social beings. Nature engenders culture, and culture changes nature. Cause and effect are each other's opposites and at the same time are closely connected. Chaos creates order and vice versa. This is paradoxical, and when we realise this paradoxical character, our view of reality changes.

Insufficient attention to the context

The wish to see ourselves as autonomous individuals can result in a lack of attention being paid to the context in which this self-perception has arisen, especially the groups to which we belonged in the past and currently belong. An increasing focus on the reciprocity between individual and group is needed to provide the study of group dynamics with a fertile breeding ground. This gives rise to a different frame of reference. Using the terms of the Gestalt psychology of the Berlin School, you could say that the individual is no longer the 'figure' standing out from the 'ground', but that the individual and the group can be seen interchangeably as figure and ground. This change of focus and the reciprocity between individual and group are central themes in the study of group dynamics. The importance of the context is also clearly described in a recent book on 'identity' by Paul Verhaeghe (*Identiteit*, 2012). In this, he examines the effects of thirty years of neoliberalism, operation of the free market and privatisation, and the relationship between 'social engineering' and our identity. Social changes have brought about changes in our sense of identity. He shows that who we are is greatly dependent on the context in which we live.

The importance of the context for the development of our own identity is also emphasised in other studies (Abubakar, 2012; Phinney et al., 1992; Schachter, 2005). For Abubakar, identity formation involves not only the values and life goals that are mentioned in many studies, but also the socio-economic status of the family. For instance, poverty is often accompanied by a life structure with very few opportunities for development, a high level of stress and more negative feedback from parents, carers and others in the environment. The self-image that is promoted by these factors is very different from the one promoted by growing up in an affluent family. Phinney et al. (1992) describe the development of ethnic identity during adolescence. Here too, the context is an important factor. Another example of the importance of context is given by Schachter (2005), who discusses the differences in identity development of Palestinian and Israeli adolescents. The context level also plays a part in groups (I will describe this in section 4.8).

Tension between individual and group

The same people who rationally understand that groups are useful and necessary, and that working in groups can be more effective than working individually, can also be afraid – often at a less rational level – of injury to their narcissism. They show this by saying, for instance, that individuals become alienated from themselves in groups, because their unique individuality is impaired and because interaction in groups is mainly characterised by manipulation. And indeed it is true that groups can form a threat to

individual freedom and autonomy; just think of the various kinds of pressure to conform to group norms. This tension between autonomy and conformity can be interpreted as a tension between the individual and the group. As I mentioned earlier, this is one of the central themes in group dynamics.

The danger of small groups

Other reservations about thinking in terms of group dynamics come from the opposite angle: from people who emphasise the importance of large collective organisations, such as the state, church and army. Small groups can be a potential hazard, both for these collectives and for society in general. Each small group that becomes isolated can form a conspiracy against the greater whole. This is why many countries are suspicious of separatist and liberation movements, why churches are suspicious of sects, political parties of factions, and so on. Groups that are too autonomous can endanger the social order.

The fishmonger's trolley

Finally, another reason why thinking in terms of groups took so long to develop lies more at the level of cultural history. Throughout much of human history, groups were such an obvious fact that people were unable to take enough distance to study them. Certain types of group living were taken so much for granted that people were not even aware of what 'a group' was. Compare what Fortmann (1959) said about this:

'If a fish could make discoveries, its last one would be the existence of water. It would only be when it was lying on the fishmonger's trolley that it would know what it means to be an aquatic animal. ... We never notice what is always present and therefore we take it for granted.'

In the same way, for a long time people never asked questions about the group: they lived in and for the group. Such groups were, for instance, the family in which they were born, and the social and working groups that functioned around this, such as the extended family, the tribe, the clan or the village. Isolated from such groups, the individual would usually not survive. As long as individuals were so strongly attached to these groups, they could not distance themselves enough to be objective.

When this objectification began to emerge during the Renaissance, and science started to determine our way of thinking, the first questions that people asked were about their enviroing nature. The physical sciences were the first to break free from the magical medieval way of thinking and to develop into true sciences in the current meaning of the term. The human sciences followed this example of the physical sciences much later

(in the nineteenth century), and the first of these to blossom were psychology and sociology. With the transition from the Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment, humans increasingly freed themselves from their old social ties, and hence also from dependencies and oppression, and set out on the trail of developmental progress towards ever greater individuality and awareness of irreplaceable uniqueness (cf. Fromm, 1952). At the level of the sciences, this was manifested in the rapid rise of psychology. Because the opposite of the individual was usually considered to be society, this was accompanied by a rapidly growing interest in sociology: the study of societal phenomena. As I mentioned above, the study of group dynamics can serve as a bridge between these two sciences (see Figure 1.4).

1.3 The possible bridging function of group dynamics

I will discuss this bridging function of group dynamics in further detail, because I use the term to mean more than might appear at first sight. The idea that ‘individual’ and ‘society’ are two separate entities that must then be linked is associated with a very specific view of humankind. I became more aware of this while reading the excellent book *The Civilizing Process* by the sociologist Norbert Elias (1939), who characterises this view of humankind as ‘homo clausus’ (the ‘closed personality’): the image of the autonomous individual, acting and ‘existing’ independently of all others. This individualistic image conceives of the human being as a closed personality, as a small world in itself, which is ultimately seen as separate from the surrounding world. The person’s own self, or ‘true identity’, appears to be something that is separated by an invisible wall from everything existing outside him, including all other people (Elias, 1939/1994, p. 322). The ‘individual’ thus appears to be something that exists outside of society. And the concept ‘society’ appears to relate to something that exists outside and ‘beyond’ the individual. Viewed against this background, it is clear that the rise of psychology could only have happened in a culture that had come to be dominated by an individualistic view of humankind. And this also applies to, *mutatis mutandis*, sociology as a separate science.

Greater individualisation

The development of this view of humankind in the sciences was greatly encouraged by the rapid and increasing individualisation in Europe since the Renaissance. Not only in the sciences, but also in people’s self-perception and in literature, we see this growing detachment from others and from themselves, in which individuals perceive their own ‘ego’ as locked away from others. Many twentieth century novelists write about indi-

viduals who, solitary and alienated, are unable to communicate with others about fundamental life experiences. I especially appreciate the way that Elias (1939/1994, p. 327) shows, with numerous examples and in a nuanced way, that this ‘closed personality’ view of humankind is an artificial product that is characteristic of a certain stage in their self-perception. It is a kind of self-perception that typifies a specific step in the historic development of the social ‘figurations’ created by people.

This can also be clearly seen when we compare our Western individual-oriented cultures with group-oriented cultures, such as those in the Mediterranean region (see e.g. Eppink, 1982; Hofstede et al., 2010). In our familiar cultures of the ‘self’, the ‘I’ cultures, the emphasis is on the individual and his development and growth. While this may seem completely natural to us, this emphasis and these values are not universal, but are historically and culturally determined. It is instructive to compare these with the collective ‘we’ cultures, in which childrearing is highly group-oriented and children learn to behave in accordance with the social situations and roles that they must fulfil in their group. Instead of personal happiness, self-development and success, these ‘we’ cultures emphasise values such as respect, duty, honour and politeness. They are thus dominated by a different view of humankind and a different view of the connections between individual and society.

Cultures and organisations: software of the mind

Culture is an essential part of who we are and how we relate to the world as people. I spoke briefly above about group-oriented cultures. Although this term is correct, it does not entirely do justice to reality. There are many other ways in which cultures can differ from one another, and this is the main focus in the work of the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede. He is particularly well-known for his theory of culture, based on six dimensions that he has identified: determining features that are found to a greater or lesser extent within each culture. These dimensions can be used to compare cultures, giving us a clear insight into cultural differences. Hofstede’s six dimensions are:

1. *Power distance*: the extent to which people within a culture expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Latin American and Arabian countries have a high score on this, the Netherlands a low score.
2. *Individualism versus collectivism*: a society is individualist when the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to only take care of himself; a society is collective when its members from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive groups that give them protection in exchange for loyalty. The group is then the dominant factor and

3. individuals derive their identity from the group. I referred to these above as 'group-oriented cultures'. The level of individualism is high in the United States and the Netherlands, and low in (for example) Indonesia.
4. *Masculinity versus femininity*: a masculine society attaches great value to traditional masculine and feminine attributes. Masculine values include competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition and acquisition of material wealth. Contrasted with these are feminine values such as modesty, helpfulness, tenderness and orientation on the quality of life. Masculine countries show clearly distinct gender roles. A society is feminine if the emotional gender roles overlap. An example of a highly masculine society is Japan, while Sweden and the Netherlands are highly feminine societies.
5. *Uncertainty avoidance*: the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. Societies with strong uncertainty avoidance try to reduce this uncertainty with rules, formal procedures and rituals aimed at making life more predictable. Countries with a high score on this dimension tend to want everything kept under control, while those with a low score are more inclined to just let things happen. Mediterranean countries, Japan and Belgium have a high score, and England has a low score. The Netherlands and Germany show a medium score on this dimension.
6. *Long-term versus short-term orientation*: long-term orientation is associated with a focus on virtues that will be rewarded (sometime) in the future, especially virtues such as perseverance, tenacity, thrift and adaptation to changing circumstances. The opposite of this is the preference for immediate results. China and Japan show a long-term orientation, while the United States and most Muslim countries show a short-term orientation. The Netherlands and Germany show a fairly long-term orientation.
7. *Indulgence versus restraint*: this sixth dimension was only recently added by Hofstede (in conjunction with a colleague from Bulgaria, Michael Minkov). Indulgence stands for a society in which people are exuberant, happy and have fun, and are allowed free gratification of human drives. This is contrasted with cultures in which people are restrained and sober; they repress their human drives and have a serious attitude. Life is not fun, but is more a 'vale of tears'. Indulgent countries can be found in parts of Africa, South America and North-Western Europe; restraint can be found in Asia, Eastern Europe and Muslim countries.

Sources: Hofstede et al. (2010); Beenhakker (2011); www.wikipedia.com.

Bridging function

After this detour via Elias and non-Western cultures, it is now easier to explain the bridging function of group dynamics. As long as we maintain the assumed view of humankind as 'homo clausus', and continue to see individual and society as separate phenomena, group dynamics can only have a very minor bridging function. Moreover, another problem can easily follow from this: namely, that we conceive the individual and society as separate phenomena, which must then be re-united.

My view of the bridging function of group dynamics is broader. By showing how the individual and group, and the individual and society, are interdependent and reliant on each other, the study of group dynamics can contribute to greater understanding of the closely interwoven nature of aspects that are regarded as 'individual' and 'societal'.

View of humankind as open

In this way, group dynamics can also help to increase familiarity with the other view of humankind for which Elias (1939/1994, p. 335) so fervently argues: that of humans as an 'open personality' which is fundamentally oriented towards and dependent on other people throughout one's life, and which has only a certain degree of *relative autonomy* in relation to other people. It is this network of interdependencies that binds people together. People are always – more or less – mutually oriented and dependent. This interdependency is also a central theme in the work of the social psychologist Kurt Lewin (who may be regarded as the founder of group dynamics as an area of study). Just as the sociologist Elias regards society as a figuration formed by individuals, and as a complex network of interdependencies, Lewin regards the group as a dynamic 'Gestalt', based on mutual involvement and interdependencies.

The affective life of groups

A second example of a theory of group dynamics that concurs with Elias's ideas is offered by Pagès in his study of the 'affective life of groups' (1968). In line with philosophers such as Heidegger (phenomenologist) and Sartre (existentialist), Pagès suggests that the experience of self and the experience of the other cannot be separated. After all, the human *dasein* is from the very start a *mitsein*. For Pagès, the affective relationship between people is a primary fact of human existence and is the foundation of the group affiliation. Pagès criticises the usual conceptions of the group, which assume too readily that we should start from the individual, so that 'the group' becomes a concept for which we then need to give a theoretical explanation. However, if we see the group as the primary location of relationships and their corresponding emotions, it is not the group that needs to be explained, but the individual!

In this view, Pagès follows a line of thought that was first formulated by Gestalt psychology: we must start from the whole in order to understand more about the component parts. He too argues that we should start from the group, and from there should use reverse reasoning to arrive at the individual group members. Pagès also consistently applies this line of thought in his theory of group formation (see Chapter 5). His ideas about how groups develop therefore do not begin with the individuals and their motivations, but emphasise the broad social and societal groupings, of which concrete groups are viewed as ‘subgroups’. The fact that he sees his group theory as a bridge between individual and society can actually be deduced from his description of himself: not as a group dynamicist, but preferably as a ‘socio-psychologist’ or ‘psycho-sociologist’.

A third example of theories of group dynamics that link the individual and society in a very specific way is the psychoanalytic approach (which I will discuss in Chapter 2).

1.4 The individual

The links that I described in section 1.1 are much too simple, of course. I would therefore like to nuance them by considering the three elements in more depth: the individual, the group and the society. In general terms, one of the most important polarities in people is the tension between our rational and irrational sides, sometimes called the tension between rationality and emotionality, or between reason and feeling. Unfortunately, we often perceive this tension as an irreconcilable opposition. Over the past few centuries, the rationality pole has mainly been overdeveloped in our Western culture, partly as a result of the influence of rational philosophers (such as Descartes, with his assertion: ‘I think, therefore I am’, and not: ‘I feel, therefore I am’). The dominant role of thinking is strongly sustained by the form and content of all the education that each of us has ‘enjoyed’.

Rationality versus emotionality is of course not the only polarity, but other polarities are often coupled with this dichotomy. For instance, the polarity between masculinity and femininity (at both the societal and the personal level) is still too easily reduced by many people to the preconceptions that men are mainly reasoning and rational, and women are more feeling and irrational, and that consequently men should be the breadwinners and women should take care of the family (on this, see my latest book on ‘person dynamics’ (*Persoonsdynamica*, 2012)).

Therefore I am

What we are is not, of course, determined only by what we think. In their book *Dus ik ben. Een zoektocht naar identiteit* (Therefore I Am: A search for identity), Stine Jensen and Rob Wijnberg (2010) discussed the various foundations for our malleable identity. A sample of these include: I feel, therefore I am; I work, therefore I am; I am named, therefore I am; I belong, therefore I am; I love, therefore I am; I consume, therefore I am. Their philosophical study is intended to make us think about what actually determines our identity, and also what we use to determine our identity. Two years later, Stine Jensen wrote a sequel: *Dus ik ben weer. Een nieuwe zoektocht naar identiteit* (Therefore I Am Again: A new search for identity; 2012). This book is rather less cheerful and optimistic. Some of the topics covered are: I am a person, therefore I am; I travel, therefore I am; I have power, therefore I am; I am seen, therefore I am; I communicate, therefore I am; I die, therefore I am. Jensen raises many questions about our malleable identity, which gives very interesting food for thought.

If you would like to learn more about how we think about ourselves, I highly recommend *Sources of the self* by Charles Taylor (1989), in which he describes 'the making of the modern identity'.

1.5 The group

There are many different kinds of groups (see also Chapter 3), which can roughly be divided into two categories: groups that mainly satisfy our socio-emotional needs, such as the family and friendship-based groups, and groups that mainly satisfy our interests and our rational needs, such as task groups, study groups and groups in the work situation. I make this dichotomy here from the perspective of the individual's needs, but I could arrive at the same dichotomy from the perspective of the society. In that case, the groups in the same dichotomy are called primary groups and secondary groups.

This distinction was made by the sociologist Charles Cooley back in 1902. He said that primary groups are mainly characterised by personal and intimate relationships in face-to-face situations, and secondary groups mainly by cool, impersonal, rational and formal relationships. Similar dichotomies were also formulated around the same time by the sociologists Tönnies (1887), who uses the terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* ('community' and 'society'), and Durkheim (1895), who uses the terms *solidarité organique* and *solidarité mécanique*.

Other classifications into group types often correspond with this dichotomy, such as the distinction between informal and formal groups, and between *psychogroups* and

sociogroups (see Chapter 3 for more detailed descriptions of these types). I summarise the above in Figure 1.5.

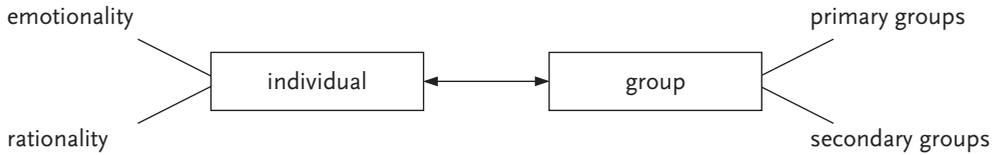


Figure 1.5 Different types of groups

1.6 The society

Our society is not just an amorphous lump, but appears to us in the form of numerous organisations and institutions in the areas of politics, education, business, healthcare, welfare and so on. Many groups operate within the context of these organisations, especially formal groups, such as those in the work situation, political groups, all kinds of workgroups, and also school classes, study groups, therapy groups and so on. Moreover, many groups that operate with relative autonomy, such as action groups and pressure groups, also make direct reference to institutions within our society.

Primary groups or informal groups, such as the family or friendship groups, may appear at first sight to escape from this direct societal positioning, but even they reflect the influence of society. This becomes clear when you realise that each family belongs to a specific social class, and that the form taken by the interaction among friends is related to class differences and gender differences within our society. These ideas are shown in Figure 1.6, which can be placed alongside Figure 1.5.



Figure 1.6 More nuanced representation of the concept 'society', linked to different types of groups

1.7 Summary

In this chapter I have shown that the study of group dynamics operates at the interface between various major disciplines within the social sciences, especially between psychology and sociology. In this discussion, I have explained a number of connecting lines between these disciplines, because the three main themes that are studied (individual – group – society) are closely interwoven. On this basis, I assign to group dynamics an important bridging function between psychology and sociology.

There are two other subject areas within the social sciences that make a link between different disciplines, namely cultural psychology and cultural anthropology. I would personally like to see more integration between group dynamics and these two cultural sciences. In this chapter I have taken the first steps in this direction, by touching on a few cultural historical theories, such as those of Fromm and Elias, which describe how Western societies have evolved over the past few centuries towards an increasing emphasis on the individual. I have identified this orientation towards the individual as one of the reasons for the late development of our interest in group processes, and have suggested that the individualism within our ‘I-oriented’ culture, and the relatively slow blossoming of an interest in groups, are the outcome of historical and societal developments.

We should not forget, however, that some societies are still very group-oriented. Nor should we forget that within our Western societies there are many cultural and ethnic minorities whose lives are based on a group-oriented image of society and of humans. That is why I think that a stronger focus on these cultural and ethnic minorities could speed up an integration between group dynamics and cultural anthropology. A good example in this respect is Rinsampessy’s (1992) study on ethnic identity developments within the last four generations of the Moluccan subculture in Dutch society. If group dynamics accepts this challenge, it might discover an important stimulus for further expanding its theories.

I know that in this introductory chapter I have made some over-generalised statements. For instance, I have almost entirely made generalised references to group dynamics, psychology and sociology, as if there were just one kind of group dynamics, one psychology and one sociology. It was, in fact, a deliberate choice to offer very few nuances with regard to perspectives and theories within these three disciplines. In the next chapter, however, I will give a brief but more specific overview of several perspectives within group dynamics, and I will also refer to perspectives within psychology and sociology.