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*Published in:*

Studies of Groups and Change. Proceedings from a conference on group and social psychology, Lund University, May 2000

2001

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Jern, S. (2001). The pair in the group: Boundaries for destruction and creativity. In S. Jern, & E. Olsson (Eds.), *Studies of Groups and Change. Proceedings from a conference on group and social psychology, Lund University, May 2000* (pp. 134-157). School of Social Work, Lund University.

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1

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# **THE PAIR IN THE GROUP: BOUNDARIES FOR DESTRUCTION AND CREATIVITY**

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**May 19 2000**

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The pair in the group does not seem to have attracted much interest in group research. In practice, as demonstrated in reports of practitioners and in the media, the institutional role of the pair in the workplace seems to have been met with a rather moralistic stance, and its destructive potential is often stressed (Lönnroth, 2000a, 2000b; Stenius, 1999). Mainiero (1986, p. 750) in a review and analysis of power dynamics in organizational romances, pointed out that “Much controversy reigns over whether or not organizations should support, ignore or punish participants in such relationships...”. In group theory, a pessimistic, or even moralistic, stance can be traced in the treatment of the pair phenomenon. Wilfred Bion’s conceptualisations of the Basic Assumption Group as a primitive, defensive and rarely productive working mode of a group may serve as an illustrative example (Bion, 1961). Thus “the pair in the group” has often been noted as a problematic phenomenon but has rarely been subjected to systematic analysis and research. During preliminary discussions, the author has met with examples of tabooing of the subject in the form of researchers who deliberately abstained from reporting observed consequences of pairs in institutions. The general aim of this study is to call this rather dim view of the phenomenon in question and three cases will be presented in order to explore different experiences, functions and effects of pairs in small working groups.

## **THEORY**

Much group research traditionally focuses on the group as a whole, inter-group relations or on the individual in the group (Wheelan, 1994). However, much time in groups, and on behalf of groups, is spent working with another person within a pair relationship. It may be a colleague working with a colleague, a consultant working with a client, a psychotherapist meeting a patient or two life partners working as business or study associates. It may also be two joint managers leading a project, a tutor instructing a student, physician and nurse co-operating, professional and managerial couples working together on a team or a romantic pair at the work place. Thus the pair can be a free-standing dyadic working unit to itself or form a subgroup within a larger whole and the unit may be described as productive, maybe efficient and at times even creative.

The dynamics of pair relationships have to be managed irrespective of whether the pair is the nucleus of a working unit, a dyad, or forms a subgroup of a larger group or system. In the latter case, the relationship with the surrounding system

has to be managed as well. This is especially true as a pair working within the frames of a group or organisation often may, consciously or unconsciously, become the focus of close attention and intense feelings from other group members. These may experience hope and expectations, envy and jealousy, trust or suspicion in relation to the couple.

In this exploratory and concept generating study, the pair is to be defined as a dyad whose boundaries are established inside the group's boundaries and it will be regarded as a special case of subgrouping. A subgroup is formed whenever two or more members enter an alliance as the result of shared beliefs (e.g. values), shared feelings and / or shared needs. A subgroup will use expressions like "we", "you", "us" or "them" inside the group (Luft, 1984). However there are characteristics differentiating it from subgroups in general and these will later be defined with the help of findings from early small group research and psychoanalytic thinking about the significance of pairs.

In the following, the internal dynamics of the pair will be referred to only insofar as they relate to the interplay with the surrounding group. The focus will be on the relationship between the group and the pair with a certain emphasis on the effects of the pair on work group behaviour. An attempt will also be made to describe varying functions of the pair in relation to the group and the boundaries within the group affected by the pair and to elucidate how these conditions affect group establishment and development in regard to efficiency, satisfaction and cohesion.

The theory sets that have been applied to pairs in groups can be sub-divided into (i) general small group theory, (ii) psychoanalytic group theory, and (iii) sociological and administrative theory. Here we shall add (iv) open systems theory in order to elucidate boundary issues raised by pairs.

In general small group theory, relying on experimental studies, the pair is considered, not as a unit in the group, but rather as a system in itself with certain defined properties, a dyad (Hare, 1962). In later small group research attention has been paid to the role of subgroups in various stages of group development (Wheelan, 1994).

The model of choice to explain the functions of the pair in the group for the dynamically oriented researcher has for a long time been Wilfred Bion's (1961) formulation of the Basic Assumption Pairing. This model assumes that the pair serves a defensive function for the system and will be presented below in conjunction with the related theorising of Otto Kernberg (1995) regarding the sexual couple and its origins in the (adolescent) group.

A more sociologically and empirically coloured social psychology has focused on the power relationships created by pairs in groups, with a special emphasis on the romantic couple (Mainiero, 1986).

Lastly, open systems theory may add some understanding regarding what boundaries pairs influence within the group and what effects these may have.

### **General small group theory and the pair**

#### *Classic small group theory*

Classic small group theory regards pairs mainly as free-standing dyads. Among the unique characteristics of these Hare (1962) mentions

- high rates of showing tension,
- consistently avoiding disagreement and antagonism,
- high rates of asking for opinion,
- avoiding giving information and
- concentrating on exchange of information and agreement.

Hare makes the interpretation that “a delicate balance of power exists when, as in ad hoc experimental groups, there are few group norms regarded as binding”, when “there is no public ‘opinion’, no majority to which either can appeal”, either member has a veto on task completion, disagreement and withdrawal. Furthermore that building a set of common norms is anxiety provoking and avoided or glossed over and that there is a strong tendency for asymmetric roles to develop (active initiator / passive vetoing) (Hare, 1962).

Referring to Mills, Hare (1963) also notes that data from research on laboratory discussion groups “suggest that the problem of deadlock is most severe in the two-person group” (p. 242). Besides Hare compares the dyad to the triad and stresses the relative instability of the latter (p. 242). This is as most obvious when two high status persons seek support from a low status person. In this case Mills (Hare, 1963) found experimental evidence that exclusion from the triad of the low member was the most likely result. It was also clear from laboratory research that “any pattern, once clearly formed, tends to be preserved with minimal alteration when a fourth member (a newcomer) is added to the group.” (p. 242). In this area, reference should be made to Simmel’s (1902-03) classic studies of different group sizes and coalitions, where the pair was identified as the strongest of all possible coalitions. From this short overview, it may be concluded that the dyad as a part of a larger system was not a central issue in early theorising about small groups. Rather the “context-free”, laboratory dyad was of interest. The specific characteristics of the dyad in contrast to other subgroups may be illuminated by some of the ideas in psychoanalytic group

theory but also by modern developments in the thinking around group development.

### *Group development and sub-systems*

In a critique of linearly progressive group development models such as those of Bennis and Shepard (1956), Tuckman (1965) and Wheelan (1990), this author (Jern, 1998 and 1999) has pointed to the relativity these bring to the concepts of “structure” and “process”. This becomes obvious if one looks at the structural concept of subgroup. Wheelan (1994, p. 78) phrases this as follows: “Subgroups and membership in subgroups are subject to change over the course of the group. The basis for their formation will vary depending on the prevailing conditions and phase of group development. The interactions among different subgroups are thought by many to be an indicator of group development. “

The functions of subgroups and coalitions (defined as sub-systems associated with conflict, with the aim of influencing the-group-as-a-whole decisions and composed of more than two persons) are treated in overview by Wheelan (1994). She argues that the group’s response to and tolerance of these vary during its life. In the early stage (Dependency and Inclusion) coalitions and subgroups are “minimal to non-existent” whereas they are, “very prevalent” during stage two (Counterdependency and Fight) when the group turns towards identification and resolution of conflict. They continue to emerge, function, and dissolve at the third stage (Trust and Structure) as well, although their prevalence seems to be less at later stages.

As to subgroups of two or more, thus including the pair, Wheelan (op.cit.) considers them as non-existent, just like coalitions, during the early stage as members focus their attention on the leader for safety and reward. Trust has not developed enough to let members, who also do not know each other well enough, align themselves with some members before others in subgroups. During stage two, anxiety over inclusion lessens somewhat and the formation of subgroups starts. This however threatens the existing conformity and subgroup members are often challenged by other members. Accusations of disloyalty may be voiced and the threat to unity is often experienced as strong. Although threatening to the whole group, Wheelan argues with Mills (1967) that, subgrouping is essential for the necessary differentiation of the group. During stage two relations between subgroups and the surrounding system frequently are tense and strained as they threaten the often fragile unity that has just been established.

In stage four (Work) subgroups - and coalitions – continue to emerge, but are viewed differently than before, with more tolerance and less negativity. The formation of such systems continues into the work stages four and five and is now often based on a conception of the-group-as-a-whole and its needs in

respect to work and relations. The group's tolerance and holding capacity concerning differences have increased and are functional.

### **Psychoanalytic group models and the pair**

Psychoanalytic models may add significantly to the understanding of the specific properties of pairs as special cases of subgroups. Important issues here are the origin of pairs, the interpreted meaning of pairs in social systems and the dynamics between pairs and other group members. These models may also shed some light on the origins of the generally pessimistic stance towards pairs and couples in groups and organisations.

#### *Wilfred Bion*

Bion's (1961) conceptualisation of the Work Group and the Basic Assumption Group is well known and includes the phenomenon of Pairing in groups. Bion's model states that while the work group is getting on with the realistic task at hand, an unconscious group is working to satisfy the unconscious needs of its members, usually anxiety reduction. This group, serving defensive purposes, was named the Basic Assumption Group as Bion believed the members in it were acting on and motivated by intense, primitive and basic emotions. These would drive the group to act on unconscious assumptions about dependency, fight/flight or pairing. This is achieved "as if" the goal of the group were respectively to survive by creating an omniscient and omnipotent leader, by creating an enemy who must be attacked or avoided or by producing out of a pair a future saviour in the form of a person or an idea.

Influenced by the thinking of Melanie Klein, Bion revised his early conceptions of adult forms of dependency, fight/flight and pairing to infantile forms as expressed in the infant's relationship, and separation from, its mother and her body. The group then could be viewed as holding and containing in ways reminiscing of the mother's function. This conceptualisation stresses the importance of the group's boundaries as they will decide what is inside and what is outside. The flexibility of these boundaries becomes crucial to the group's survival. They also hold and keep safe in such a way that conflicts and anxieties, at best, can be resolved or "detoxified" within the group. When the phenomenon of pairing appears, it will be viewed as an inability to contain and handle anxieties in mature ways. "Pairs" produced by the Basic Assumption Pairing may be viewed as a threat to the realistic goals of the group and thus to its survival (Bion, 1961).

#### *Otto Kernberg*

Otto Kernberg (1995) centres his discussion of the pair and the group on the sexual pair and its relation to the group in a life cycle perspective. His starting

point is, that sexual pairs are formed in adolescence through a revolt against the group and, that they establish their identity and their freedom from conventions through this break away. It begins in adolescence, but continues through a continuous idealisation of the romantic pair. Kernberg (op.cit.) sees a built in, complex and ominous relation between the pair and the group. This is because if the creativity of the individuals in the couple depends on how they manage to establish their autonomy inside the group they cannot wholly escape from the group, who needs the pair in order to maintain their hopes for sexual union and love.

However, the pair cannot avoid evoking the group's hostility and envy. These feelings are interpreted as having their origin in oedipal envy and unconscious guilt over oedipal strivings. In order to establish a stable male/female pair the individuals have to distance themselves from the collective myths that infiltrate the group out of which they emerged.

Furthermore, even though group processes around sexuality and love, are at their highest intensity in adolescent groups according to Kernberg they continue to play an active role in more subtle forms in groups of grown ups. So, in informal groups there is a continuous excitation around the private lives of pairs in the group. This leads to a need for the members to find an optimal balance between the pair(s) and the group. A pair that manages to hold on to its internal cohesion and at the same time exercise a crucial influence on the group will become a visible target for oedipal idealisation, anxiety and envy. This is most marked in organisational structures. Kernberg (op.cit) notes that the group's hatred towards the strong pair can protect the pair so that it forces the partners to unite against the group and thus mask their internal, not recognised, aggressive impulses through projection. Consequently, a pair leaving a group may encounter serious aggression between the partners.

Although Kernberg's analysis centres on the sexual pair, his ideas may, in certain respects, be relevant to libidinally bounded pairs such as e.g. friends, especially concerning what specific emotional responses they may evoke in a group.

### **Sociological and administrative views on organisational romances**

In a review and analysis of power dynamics in organisational romances Mainiero (1986) identified 19 studies ranging from single anecdotally reported cases to larger survey designs, many of which lacking in methodological rigor. Her main objective was however to determine general themes across the surveyed literature to provide a conceptual base for more rigorous further study. The interest was focused on (i) antecedent conditions, (ii) decision factors involved, (iii) the internal dynamics of such relationships, (iv) the impact of the



romance on the work group and (iv) implications for management intervention. The author's definition of organisational romances included "those relationships that occur between men and women working together that are: (a) characterised by mutual sexual attraction, and (b) made known to others through the participants actions" (Mainiero, 1986).

Both negative and positive impacts on the work group were documented in the reviewed literature. Still the negative effects dominated both in case histories and anecdotal reports and even more convincingly so in the survey studies although sampling procedures may have biased somewhat towards negative outcomes (see: Quinn, 1977 and Anderson & Hunsacker, 1985). These included hostility in the work group, distorted communications, lowered output and productivity, slower decision making, threatened image or reputation of the unit, redistributed work, lowered morale, gossip and acts of sabotage and retaliation. The less frequent positive outcomes included increased teamwork, improved communication flow, lowered tensions, and increased work group productivity.

In a derived model, Mainiero (1986) suggests three hypotheses based on the balancing of power in relationships and risks for exploitation. As regards impact on the group, she suggests the following general questions for research:

- How are communication and information channels affected as a function of the romance?
- Which power behaviour changes have the greatest effects on the work group?
- What are the conditions that cause group members to favour the romance?
- What impact can the level differences of involved members have on the perceptions of work group members?

### **Open systems theory and the pair**

General systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968) stresses the importance of a system's boundaries for its survival. In a biological metaphor, the system is viewed as depending on the exchange of energy with its environment. In the Tavistock approach, Miller and Rice (1967) introduce the idea of open systems theory applied to social systems such as enterprises, organisations and groups.

They stress the importance of the system's task and describe how any system in order to work on its primary task has to exchange materials with the surrounding world. What happens on the boundaries becomes crucial to the achievement of the primary task and thus to the system's ability to maintain its dynamic equilibrium and to survive. The boundary is seen not as a dividing line, but as a joining area, which is governed by, or identical to, the leadership. Boundaries ideally are viewed as managed and flexible and can be studied in regard to their capacity to protect and feed the system without risking to isolate the system. In

the following attempts will be made to determine the firmness and permeability of the pairs.

A boundary typology model of groups has been presented by Sundstrom and Altman (1989). These authors state that boundaries define the relation of a work team and its organisation and thereby help define what constitutes effectiveness for the team. “Besides doing its task, a work team has to satisfy requirements of the larger system and maintain enough independence to perform specialised functions“ (Sundstrom, De Meuse and Futrell., 1990, p. 124). The crucial boundaries are defined as those regulated “through *integration* into the larger system through co-ordination and synchronisation with suppliers, managers, peers and customers“ (ibid, p. 124). The second boundary aspect is created by *differentiation*, i.e. “the degree of specialisation, independence and autonomy of a work team in relation to other work units“ (ibid, p. 124). By combining these two boundary variables, which define different conditions for effectiveness, a simplified picture of this model can be construed (Figure 1).

<b>Integration</b>	High	Type I <b>Action / negotiation</b>	Type II <b>Production / service</b>
	Low	Type III <b>Project / development</b>	Type IV <b>Advice / involvement</b>
		High	Low
		<b>Differentiation</b>	

Figure 1. Simplified model of the Sundstrom et al. (1990) “boundary typology of work teams“ (from Jern, 1998).

This model has been developed further and applied by this author and co-worker (Jern, 1998, 1999; Jern & Hempel, 1999) and an attempt to apply it to pairs in systems will be made here.

## METHOD

In an extensive exploratory study of group establishment and group development in Problem Based Learning groups of students, some occurrences of pairs in groups were noted (Jern & Hempel, 1999). Data were collected from 12 groups working over one semester. The groups supplied collectively produced group diaries in raw text format, processed reports based on these and rating scales covering on average 20 sessions each. In a first analysis, the diaries were read through for signs of group processes of a negative or complicating nature for learning. A preliminary analysis showed that leadership problems were the most frequent (9 of 12 groups), followed by conflict avoidance (6 out

of 12), conflicting or unclear goals (5 of 12) and influence by contextual factors (5 of 12). Three groups reported pairs as problematic and these diaries were chosen for further study here. The diaries contains in all 9 pairs and 3 triads. The reports of the three groups will be presented and analysed in the form of case reports.

## RESULTS

Results will be reported first as cases with their respective group history, the group dynamics and relations in overview. Materials for this presentation are the texts of diaries and raw texts. A summary and analysis for each case will then be given, where (i) experienced satisfaction and efficiency, (ii) the formation of pairs, (iii) experiences of pairs (and triads), (iv) cohesion, (v) development and (vi) boundaries of pairs and between pairs and groups are examined and interpreted. In a second section a summary analysis for all three cases will be presented regarding (i) experiences, (ii) functions and (iii) effects of pairs in the groups under study.

### **Case 1: Pairs that strive for power ("Two pairs in the pack")**

This group contains three female pairs (Figure 2), of which two (1 and 2) seemingly are formed inside the group based on existing outside relationships. A third pair (3) is later formed with a prominent minority person (F) as nucleus. The group is characterised by being the only wholly female in the sample, structurally rather stable, with no changes in membership. At the end, it consists of three recognised pairs plus two "singleton" members.

#### *Short group history*

The group held 28 meetings beginning with 8 women, out of which 7 remained together all through the group. At the start of the group 2 pairs quickly formed (1 and 2) out of relationships based on friendship and former common studies. The remaining 4 women (E, F, G, H) did not know anyone in the class when they took up studies (Figure 2).

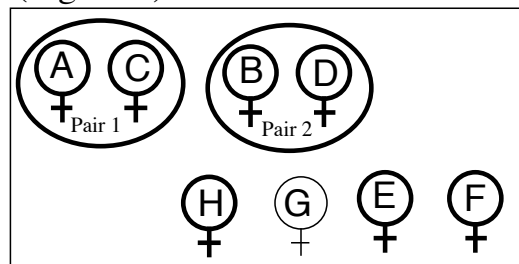
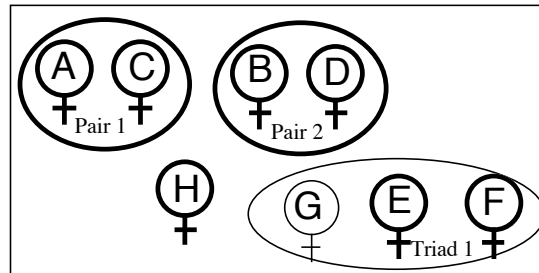


Figure 2. Members and pairs of group in Case 1 at the beginning of the group.

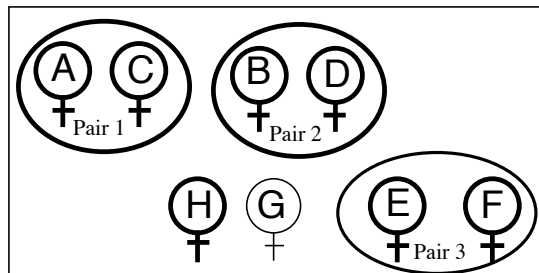
*Explanation:* Symbol drawn with a thinner line represents a member who left the group on a later stage.

Later during the term, a subgroup of 3 (Triad 1) was formed but as G left the constellation, and the group, a pair was formed by E and F (Pair 3). G and H did not consider themselves as part of any pair. F experienced herself, and was experienced by others, as “a foreigner” (ethnically deviating from the majority) (Figures 3 and 4).



*Figure 3.* Members and pairs of group in Case 1 at mid-stage of the group.

*Explanation:* Symbol drawn with a thinner line represents a system to be dissolved and one member who left group at a later stage. (meeting 19).



*Figure 4.* Members and pairs of group in Case 1 at the end of the group.

*Explanation:* Symbol drawn with a thinner line represents a member who left the group before the end.

### *Group dynamics and relations in overview*

In their diary, the members of this group describe the two initial pairs as rather different and advocating opposing values and in conflict over these. Pair 1 favoured a relationship-oriented work style and was perceived as threatening by many. Pair 2, with B as the dominant member, proposed a task-oriented mode. The shared beliefs of Pair 1 provoked negative feelings in the group and fears of being dominated by these two members. This was particularly the case with members E and F who later formed a pair of their own, Pair 3. F was the ethnically deviant member, who in the dominant pair (1) saw the “white elite” of her country of origin.

From the beginning, an imbalance regarding inclusion was noted, as members belonging to pairs enjoyed a feeling of security that the two singletons (H, G) lacked. Three out of four (H,G,E) who entered the group as single persons claimed they had not been affected at all by the pairs, whereas the fourth (F) experienced strong feelings of being an outsider, which do not subside until

she forms a pair with E, balancing the other two pairs. H remains an individualist.

### *Summary and analysis of group 1*

This case demonstrates the highest expressed satisfaction and efficiency of the three cases presented here. They write in their diary: *“Towards the end of the term we were able to form constructive sub-groups that furthered work and efficiency...Positions over time became less locked, which has furthered both work and relations...In summary we can conclude that the members of the group entered under different conditions and leave with different experiences.”*

In Group 1 two pairs are formed initially inside the group and based on relationships established outside the group. Later another pair is formed as a reaction to this.

In this group the experience of pairs changes from an initial feeling of threat towards inclusion and cohesion and fear of being dominated, to a balanced situation where the pairs are experienced as essential to the group's good functioning. The emerging third pair is perceived as useful in balancing the other two pairs as regards values, but also between these pairs and the rest of the group concerning belongingness. At the end the pairs exercise less influence, leave locked positions increase the efficiency, flexibility and maturity of the group.

It is also obvious that the pairs in this case successively strengthened the cohesion of the group.

The developmental aspects of this group are rather straightforward both according to the written up report and on analysis of the diary. The sequence comes over as a stright-forward linear development of a Tuckman/Wheelan type and can be summarized as: (i) a first period of ambivalence between work and relations, (ii) a turbulent period of internal fights, (iii) a period of order and stability, (iv) a “positive” period and (v) work and conflict.

The boundaries of the two main pairs in this group were marked by a rather high stability in relation to the group, whereas the triad, appearing in the mid-phase, has got a looser boundary and functions as a matrix for the emergent third pair.

### **Case 2: Pairs that split and transform**

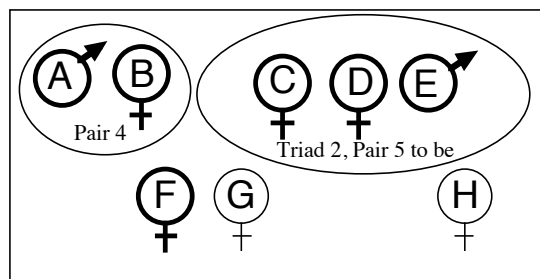
**(“We are so yeah, yeah, wow, wow – from despair to confidence”)**

This group experiences itself from the outset as the most heterogeneous as to background, norms, ambitions, personalities and previous study experiences in

the class. This is considered an asset, whereas the great number of individuals aspiring for leadership from the beginning is seen as a problem from the beginning. In general the group develops a pattern where fragmentation of work alongside an emphasis on social interaction changes with periods of intensive work and little social exchange. A friendship pair (4) and a strong leadership triad (2) that exist at the start of the group (Figure 5), are affected by a second group (6), which evolves as a reaction to these (Figure 6) and are eventually transformed into second triad (3) containing one person from all three pairs (Figure 7).

### *Short group history*

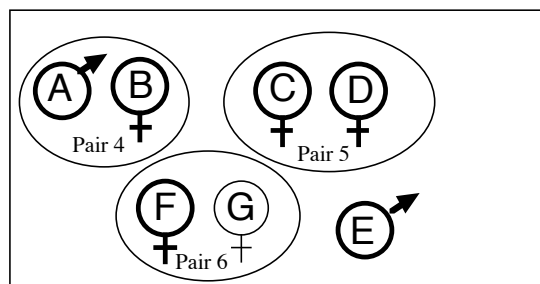
This group at the beginning contained one mixed pair (4) and a triad (2) of two women and one man (Figure 5). The mixed pair and the triad were formed out of long standing relationships established before the group formed (a love relation between A and B and a common idealistic commitment between C, D and E, who were all leaders on equal level in the student community).



*Figure 5.* Members and pairs of group in Case 2 at the beginning of the group.

*Explanation:* Symbols drawn with thinner lines represent dissolved systems and individuals who left group at a later stage.

After one female member (H) left the group in the early phase, a second pair (5) of two women was formed as a counter-weight to the established subgroups (Figure 6), only to be dissolved quite soon, when another one of the members (G) left the group.



*Figure 6.* Members and pairs of group in Case 2 at mid-phase of the group.

*Explanation:* Symbols drawn with thinner lines represent dissolved systems and the individual who left group at a later stage.

At this, stage two new secondary pairs formed (7 and 8) (Figure 7). They were described as rather informal, with weak boundaries, and seem to have formed because of shared work values and gender (7) and out of the “left-overs” (8) of the initial leadership triad (2). This pair now withdrew from initiative, which made space for A and F to take leading roles in the working Triad (3) which contained one member from each of the three dissolved pairs (4,5 and 6).

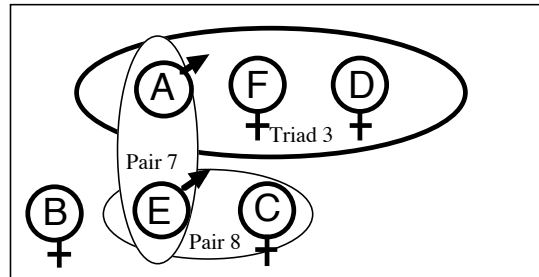


Figure 7. Members and subgroups of group in Case 2 at the end of the group.

*Explanation:* Symbols drawn with thinner lines represent secondary pairs.

### *Group dynamics and relations in overview*

In their diary, the members of this heterogeneous group describe the group's development as running “*from despair to confidence*”. Differences were quickly noted and acknowledged as resources for the group. It was also a group with many persons of strong will and ambition, experiences of leadership were common and it turned out that leadership would become a central issue to this group.

Initially the members experienced an intense idealisation of the group with strong emphasis on social issues rather than on work. The group fragmented into several working subgroups with a strong individualistic value system, which prevented the development of a common ground for task performance. Typical was the strong swings, back and forth, that occurred: from relational orientation to tasks, from individualistic to collective work, from work overload to inactivity et c. The group concludes that it encountered difficulties in balancing task and relational work with a typical cycle of omnipotent over-evaluation and optimism substituted with apathy and conflict inhibition.

### *Summary and analysis of group 2*

Concerning the experience of satisfaction and efficiency, this case constitutes an intermediary between 1 and 3. On analysing a rating, performed at the end of the group the members state: “ *Only for shorter periods the group has been productive and effective. As to the question if the group has been attractive to its members and supplied satisfaction of work, it is only possible to conclude that no one of the members experience this criterion as fulfilled*”. Looking back at notes in their diary however, they find “*a more positive image of the work process and a smoother curve*” than the one produced by ratings. The group

speculates in a process of mutual reinforcement and amplification towards extremes during the rating procedure.

In this case, one pair firmly established outside the group and an established triad enters the group. Later one pair is formed as a reaction to this and at the end, all pairs are dissolved and a new triad emerges in the process.

The group experiences the heterosexual pair as non-threatening because its members were perceived as different among themselves and of low internal cohesion. The Triad becomes the landmark towards which most members orient themselves but it is also experienced as taking advantage of members for handling of conflicts within the triad. When it is dissolved the internal competition is exported to the group as a whole. The third triad is perceived as filling the vacuum that emerges when Triad 2 dissolves and is, as in Group 1, greeted with some relief as a balancing factor.

In contrast to Case 1 in this group the pairs (and triads) weakens the cohesion of the group through the individualistic value systems. The subgroups Pair 4 and Triad 2 were obvious to all from the beginning, and the group of leaders (Triad 2) was considered to “be the group” and all other members were forced to take a stance towards the subgroup and the values they expressed – mainly high ambitions and a strong work ethos. However, *“a shortcoming in the group’s communication and work was that we from the beginning did not ventilate and analyse the internal constitution and relations of the subgroups, so obvious to all”* (Group 4 and Triad 1). Probably the group refrained from this *“out of fear of strengthening the subgroups”*. Paradoxically that led to a strengthening of the boundaries of these systems. The group notes that this came about through *“the cultivation of myths around them from the persons who were outside the subgroups”*. Generally, the not uncovered relationships and relatednesses to the subgroups weakened the will to belong to the group as a whole, as subgroups became more highly valued.

As to development this group demonstrates a pattern of a long period of chaotic function that, after a short period of transformation, turns into effective work. The resemblance to Gersick’s (1988) model of a punctuated equilibrium is striking.

The boundaries between the pairs and the group, and between pairs, seem to be rather firm although at times changing and the situation may be termed as a state of “stable instability”.



### Case 3: A pair tries to manage conflicts ("From love to indifference")

This group contains one stabile female pair (9), which seemingly is formed inside the group as a reaction to the arrival of a new and problematic male member, who would turn out to be a "passing stranger". This group is characterised by being the smallest in the sample, unstable and with recurring arrivals and leavings of members. At the end, it consists of the pair plus one member.

#### *Short group history*

The group held 24 meetings and started out with 3 women (A,B,F) and 1 man (D) to end up with 3 remaining women (A,B,E) (Figure 8).

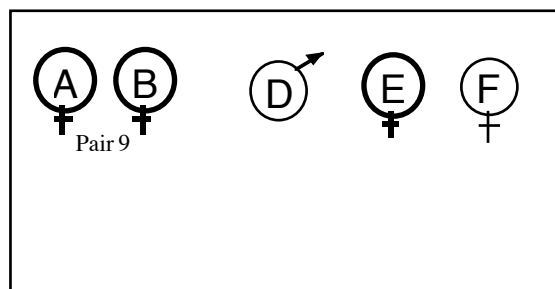


Figure 8. Members and pairs of group in Case 3, session 1 - 4.

*Explanation:* Symbols drawn with thinner lines represent individuals who left group.

During the fifth session a fifth, male member (C) was added to the group and shortly afterwards the pair (9) was formed and remained active for the rest of the group's life (Figure 9). In the diary, the formation is described as a result of C's entrance. C was mostly absent from group meetings and eventually "disappeared". A few sessions later the male member (D) joined the group and stayed on until the 19th meeting after which he left. One of the women (F) became pregnant and left the group after the 8th meeting.

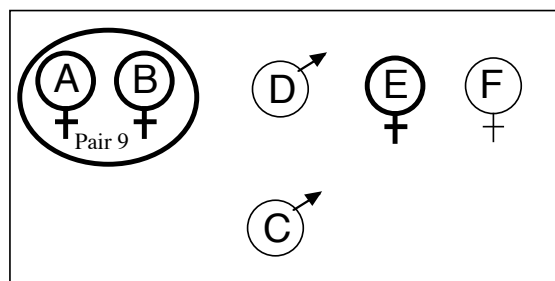


Figure 9. Members and pairs of group in Case 3 from session 6.

*Explanation:* Symbols drawn with thinner lines represent individuals who left group.

The group describes its beginnings as coloured by a shared strong feeling of similarity, openness and a general liking of each other, which however ended up in resignation, apathy and a non-productive situation where members only waited for the end of the group.

### *Group dynamics and relations in overview*

In their diary, the members of this group interpret the group generally as a flight group that never functioned satisfactorily. On reading the materials, however, it is obvious that a certain pattern pervaded most meetings between meeting 6 and 23. The meetings began with long discussions without agreement except for the fact that the previous meeting was usually looked upon as “*useless*”. A feeling of seriosity spread and vows of increased commitment were given. At the end of each session, plans were made for future work and members enjoyed feelings of satisfaction and hope and promised to better themselves. “*Everything will be all right the next time!*”

Relations were centred around Pair 9, which often was in conflict over leadership with D on a level that was obvious to all (except to D) but never openly discussed. B seemed to be the driving person in this fight. The pair regularly expressed wishes to take responsibility for the work, which was just as often opposed by the rest of the group. During meeting 18 the pair took over and tried to do the work without the rest of the group, and failed. The member F is described as a fight leader who appointed in order, the responsible teacher, member C and D as main enemies. Pair 9 was experienced as “*disturbing*” by other members and seemed to create confusion. D made some, unsuccessful, attempts to break up the pair by entering as a third person.

The members’ own interpretation of the pair’s emergence and function is that it came about in order to control the conflict with D and C. When work was delegated to the pair this was usually done as an attempt to manage this conflict when it was becoming too obvious and disturbing to the group.

### *Summary and analysis of group 3*

In group 3 a pair is formed inside the group after some time, as a reaction to the entrance of a stranger. Here the stable pair (9) is experienced as “*worrying*” and causing confusion when it tries to lead work and keep passing strangers at bay.

Efficiency and cohesion are described in very pessimistic terms and is the lowest among the three groups under study: “*At the end of the group, stillness and apathy reigns. The group is held together by the hope of the approaching end, concludes that members never succeeded to agree on anything and that life in the group has been extremely taxing and also has influenced the private lives of members*”.

During its development, this group experiences an intense threat to its strong feelings of unity during the end of the formation phase when a new male member arrives. Obviously, this damaged processes in phase 2 when the other male member leaves the group, which then becomes unable to abandon the

formation phase and remains in “pairing”. The group defines itself as fight group, but evidence is abundant that the fight is left to a pair under a strong Basic Pairing assumption with a never fulfilled hope of changing the group into harmony.

The boundaries around the pair are rather strong but these two members find difficulties in differentiating themselves. Group boundaries as such are extremely weak and may have contributed to the low cohesion.

## **Experiences**

### *Experiences of pairs (and triads)*

Between the three groups, there are wide differences as to how the subgroups are viewed by other members. In Group 1 the experience changes from an initial feeling of threat against inclusion and cohesion and fear of being dominated, to a balanced situation where the pairs are experienced as essential to the group's good functioning. The emerging third pair (3) is viewed as useful in balancing the other two pairs as to what regards their widely different work values. It also serves as a balancing factor concerning inclusion for all other members. With such a balance successfully established towards the end phase, the pairs lose in influence, leave locked positions and increase efficiency, flexibility and maturity in the group.

Group 2 describes the initial heterosexual pair (4) as non-threatening. This is because its members were perceived as quite heterogeneous with low internal cohesion. The Triad (2) becomes the landmark towards which most members orient themselves and it is perceived as taking advantage of members for its handling of conflicts. When it is dissolved its internal competition is seen as exported to the group as a whole. The emerging Triad (3) is perceived as filling the vacuum that emerges when Triad 2 dissolves and is, as in Group 1, greeted with some relief as a balancing factor.

In Group 3 the only pair (9) is viewed as “worrying” and causing confusion when it tries to lead work and keep passing strangers at bay. It appears that this pair is difficult for other group members to focus as it is attributed with unrealistic hopes for salvation.

### *Experienced satisfaction and efficiency of the groups.*

As has been shown in the previous summaries and analyses of respective groups they can be ordered according to their expressed satisfaction and efficiency in falling order from Group 1 to Group 3.

## Functions

### *When and on what grounds are pairs formed?*

In the original sample of 12 groups, 3 spontaneously reported problems concerning pairs. This does not imply that pairs did not exist in the other 9 groups. Rather the choice in this exploratory study was made to concentrate on groups where the phenomenon was observed and discussed by the groups themselves. Wheelan (1994) assumes that the formation of sub-groups belongs to later stages than the group formation process. In our three groups, to the contrary, we find that out of 9 pairs 3 are present at the beginning and that out of 3 triads 1 is present at the start. At the end of the groups 6 pairs (1,2,4,5,6,9) and 1 triad (3), still exist. One may note that the three initial pairs and the pair (5) formed out of the initial triad (2) are among the “survivors”.

The three initial pairs (1,2,4) and triad (2) are formed out of friendship, common studies, love and similar leadership roles. Two pairs (3,6) and 2 triads (1,3) are formed on a reactive basis. For pair 3 it is a reaction to the exclusion by the two pairs (1,2) and for pair 6 a reaction against the dominant leadership triad (2). Two secondary pairs (7 and 8) form out of shared work values and gender late in group life.

In conclusion it seems obvious that (i) pairs do form and exist during the formation period and can be formed on the basis of “imported” relations, (ii) that such pairs withstand strong pressures and “survive”, (iii) that they provoke the emergence of other pairs, “reactive” pairs who may challenge e.g. feelings of exclusion and fear of dominance, and (iv) that triads seem to play an important role either as temporary matrices for pairs or as results of pairs especially in mid- or late phases of groups.

### *Pairs and boundaries*

#### *Boundaries between pairs and groups*

In Group 1 the boundaries of the two main pairs are highly stable whereas the triad has weaker boundaries and functions as a temporary matrix for the emergent pair. The boundaries between the pairs and the group, and between pairs in Group 2, seem to be rather firm although at times weakening and the situation may be characterised as a state of “stable instability”. The boundaries around the pair in Group 3 are rather strong, but these two members find difficulties in differentiating themselves. Group boundaries as such are extremely weak and may have contributed to the low cohesion.

#### *Boundaries between pairs and groups and between members of pairs*

The model of Sundstrom et al. (1990) for boundary management in teams (referred to on page 8) is phrased in the language of systems theory. Therefore the model can be applied to any system level and here an attempt will be made to fit it to the pair in the group. The two variables can be transformed as follows for a pair (or any sub-group) in a system (Figure 10): Integration, or external boundaries, covers the degree of co-ordination with the context of the surrounding system. Differentiation, or internal boundaries, points to the degree of specialisation among members of the pair as to personalities, functions, competencies and roles that has been achieved.

<b>Integration</b>	High	Type I <b>Efficient work pair</b>	Type II <b>Inefficient work pair</b>
	Low	Type III <b>Efficient reactive pair</b>	Type IV <b>Inefficient reactive pair</b>
		High	Low
		<b>Differentiation</b>	

Figure 10. Typological model for pairs in groups based on boundary functions.

For the typology written into the model the assumptions are made that high external integration presupposes rather strong boundaries around the sub-system. This is because the members of the system will need to withstand the strong emotions their existence may evoke in the group. If boundaries are weaker the probability decreases that the group will be able to act semi-autonomously and pro-actively on behalf of the-group-as-a-whole. Rather weak boundaries will probably bring about a dependent and reactive position for the pair. As to differentiation, amongst others in respect to personality, individuality and roles, a high level is presupposed for efficient functioning of the pair in the group context (Jern, 1998). In order to test this model all sub-systems of the groups were classified according to their degree of integration and differentiation based on a close reading of the texts (Table 1).

Table 1. Pairs and triads according to estimated levels

System	Integration	Differentiation	Type
<hr/>			
Group 1			
Pair 1	High	High	I
Pair 2	High	Low	II
Pair 3	Low	High	III
Triad 1	Low	High	III
Group 2			
Pair 4	Low	High	III
Pair 5	Low	Low	IV
Pair 6	Low	Low	IV
Pair 7	Low	Low	IV
Pair 8	Low	Low	IV
Triad 2	High	Low	II
Triad 3	Low	High	III
Group 3			
Pair 9	Low	Low	IV
<hr/>			

From Table 1 above it is obvious that boundary management of type I and II is most prevalent in Group 1 for pairs and in Group 2 for triads, but wholly absent in Group 3. The meaning of this will be interpreted under “Discussion”.

Here it could also be noted that the sub-systems that has been expressively experienced as non-threatening are the ones of type II[or III]. These are systems either viewed as being integrated but having low cohesion (Pair 2, Triad 2) or as highly differentiated but not integrated (Pairs 3, 4 and Triad 1). When both integration and differentiation are low (Pair 9) and no compensation is available from other sub-systems or members confusion may result.

## Effects

### *On cohesion*

The differences between the groups regarding the effects of pairs on cohesion are quite striking. In Group 1 cohesion increases by the interplay between the two vale competing pairs (1,2) and the balancing force of pair 3. In Group 2 the three groups that are formed during the middle phase (4,5,6) form separated working units that weakens the cohesion of the group which is to some degree counteracted by the triad 3 which forms during the end phase. In Group 3 half of the members leave before the end and cohesion is virtually absent except for bonds between the two persons in the pair (9).

### *On group development*

As it turns out the three groups under study exhibit developmental patterns that vary strongly between them. The group in Case 1 demonstrates a straight-forward linear development through 5 stages, which in the main is consistent with a Tuckman/Wheeler model. In contrast Group 2, goes through a long chaotic period, transforms and turns into effective work towards the second half of its existence. The resemblance to Gersick's (1988) model of a punctuated equilibrium is obvious. Group 3 virtually does not develop at all after an initial formation period that is seriously disturbed by the entrance of a new member. As he aspires to leadership he threatens the strong feelings of unity and the pair emerges as a defence. The group never manages to leave the formation period and describes itself as a fight group in the Bionic sense but appears to be quite close to the Basic Assumption Pairing.

## DISCUSSION

On a tentative basis the study has shown possibilities other than those proposed by Bion (1961) and Wheeler (1994), still without invalidating the main ideas of these influential group theorists and researchers.

Pairs are often experienced as threatening if they are viewed as having a high cohesion (high internal differentiation). This feeling may diminish if the pair is poorly integrated into the group's work or relations. The reason for this may be that cohesion affects visibility and that this in turn influences the conscious and unconscious meanings that will be ascribed to the pair.

The functions of pairs varies widely, but a main distinction can be made between those that form (i) out of earlier relationships (ii) and/or to pursue work (or to propose a value system) and those that form (iii) as a reaction to the former types

Pairs *can* serve other purposes than defence and pairs *can and do* exist in early phases of group development. Pairs can establish themselves early in group life on the basis of "outside" relations ("active" pairs) and pairs can form later, often as a response to reactions to other pairs ("reactive" pairs).

Pairs can contribute to work and development in constructive ways, but pairs can also destroy work and hinder progress. Partly the outcome may depend on how the pair is viewed by the rest of the group, what meaning is ascribed to the pair and certainly on to what degree the pair is organised and integrated into the group. (Cf Kernberg). As to the first condition it is suggested that a reaction of "threat" may occur when a pair is integrated but less differentiated (or cohesive) or when it is highly differentiated but poorly integrated. Behind the rather broad term "threat" may hide a series of affects like envy, jealousy, fear of domination,

With the material at hand it is possible to see the outlines of a Weberian ideal-typical model of pairs in groups where the main dimensions would be integration, differentiation, active formation, re-active formation. This exploratory study suggests as hypotheses for further research that the most effective pairs in groups could be the ones that are highly integrated and highly differentiated irrespective of their position on the variable active – reactive. Low integration and low differentiation may contribute to lowering of cohesion and even cause confusion. Last, the effects of different types, or patterns of types of pairs, on group development can be further explored. Data in this study suggests that active pairs may contribute to linear development, whereas inefficient reactive pairs can move a group towards non-sequential transformation and to total stand stills in growth of a type close to what Bion (1961) defined as the result of a pervading Basic Assumption Pairing.

So, in essence the pair in the group may be neither creative nor destructive per se. The outcome will among other things depend on boundary questions,

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