

## Introduction

No clear definition of what a 'group' is - despite collectives being central to human experience. Can be as small as a few people doing an experiment or as wide as a nation such as 'the Chinese'.

Five SP group types commonly identified (but other typologies exist too!):

1. Reference groups - friends, families, colleagues, nationalities, communities. Based on identification - used as a frame of reference for understanding identity.

2. Membership groups - juries, work groups, clubs. Task oriented - there may be minimal interaction outside of the task context.

3. Social category groups - gender, religion, ethnicity. They are groups with social meaning but are so large that most members will not meet each other.

4. Cultural groups - common beliefs, values, language, origins. Also large.

5. Crowds - football, political demonstrators. Come together to pursue a common purpose.

**Stangor (2004)** - despite the huge variety, argues can define a group as 'a collection of individuals who are seen as being entitative'.

These group types are not mutually exclusive - e.g. a reference group could belong to another group type as well and there are overlaps between social category and cultural groups ... but different types of group have raised different issues in SP.

Groups can produce contrary effects - e.g. provide support, make achievements through collective action and allow opportunities for development (**Kelly and Breinlinger**). Group membership helps us understand who we are and who we are different from (**Tajfel**)

Tim Holyoake 2011, <http://www.tenpencepiece.net/>

## CRiSP Chapter 5 - Intragroup processes: entitativity

But:

Concern is often expressed about groups too - e.g. football crowds = dangerous mobs; religious groups = danger of extremism. These concerns reflect the idea that individuals lose their identity and ability to think critically to the group. SP identifies a number of -ve aspects of group membership - de-individualisation, groupmind, outgroup hostility, groupthink ... 'Humans would do better without groups - **Buys**, 1978.

Negative focus raises ontological questions - e.g. do individual characteristics become submerged in groups?

**Allport** - no psychology of groups is separate from the psychology of individuals - groups do not have an independent mind of their own. **Asch**, **Sherif** both take a similar stance - but argue that group processes are important and their study helps in understanding the individual.

Focus of chapter is on two concerns:

- The impact of intragroup processes on group behaviour and outcomes
- The complexity of defining some groups - i.e. ontological issues of group entitativity.

### Janis - Theory of Groupthink

US SP. Research focus was on issues that had practical relevance - e.g. stress, decision making. Part of the 'action research' tradition of **Lewin** and others. **Smith** - **Janis**' work was 'theory guided positivist research'.

Applied multiple methods - experimentation, field work, was trained in research-oriented psychoanalysis.

Groupthink - where a group makes a catastrophic decision because it wants to maintain itself as a

cohesive ingroup, while trying to make an important decision.

Argued that in a groupthink situation, each group member conforms to group consensus and does not consider all available alternative courses of action. The group therefore makes a decision that potentially none of the individuals in it might make alone.

e.g. "Bay of Pigs" decision made by JFK and his policy team - despite the same team having made a good decision on the Cuban missile crisis the year before.

From: "Victims of Groupthink" (1972)

**Janis** notes that many different types of group can exhibit groupthink. Example of the "smokers group" where one member had given up by 'willpower alone' but this contravened the group consensus that this was not possible. The lone 'deviant' fell back into line with group consensus and started smoking again, even though the aim of the group was to help people give up smoking rapidly. Janis argues other patterns that imply groupthink were also present - e.g:

- Concurrence seeking behaviour and avoidance of bickering, maintained at the expense of ignoring realistic challenges - such as, did everyone really suffer from the same degree of addiction as the group norm demanded?
- The high cohesiveness demonstrated in the group interfered with its members' ability to think critically.
- Study of 'fiascos' (Bay of Pigs, Korean War escalation ...) - selected on the basis that they showed symptoms of groupthink - policy makers in a small, cohesive group making a defective decision resulting from very poor quality decision making practices.

Argues there are six major defects:

1. Discussion limited to a very few alternative courses of action.
2. Failure to re-examine course of action selected by the majority - for non-obvious risks.
3. Neglect of courses of action originally evaluated as unsatisfactory by the majority.
4. Little/no attempt made to consult expert opinion
5. Selective bias demonstrated - facts/opinions that back up the original course of action favoured over those that do not.
6. Little time spent thinking about how a policy may be inhibited by bureaucratic inertia, sabotaged by opponents, accidents - therefore, no contingency plans laid.

However - not every bad decision is a result of groupthink - it may be that other causes of 'human stupidity' are present. And not every defective decision produces a fiasco. However, **Janis** argues that even if the Bay of Pigs plan had been successful, it would still have supported the groupthink hypothesis.

Other features of groupthink:

Loyalty to the group is considered to be the highest form of morality - controversial issues are not raised.

Softheaded groups take hardhearted action towards outgroups and enemies - affable government officials find it easy to sanction dehumanising solutions. This aspect is argued to be unique to groupthink by **Janis**.

**Janis** 'law' of groupthink is therefore:

*The more amiability and esprit de corps among the members of a policy-making in-group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink, which is likely to result in irrational and dehumanising actions directed against out-groups.*

Who is susceptible - individual personality traits:

- CEXs who become dependent on an inner circle of advisors
- Those who fear disapproval and rejection - conformers
- People with strong affiliative needs, overriding the need to get the task done properly

plus he suggests research is also required into the impact of particular group characteristics, such as:

- Social class
- Ethnic origin
- Occupational training
- Prior experience of group decision making

His general observation is that no-one is completely immune from groupthink.

Argues groupthink is widespread across the world, and cites:

- Aberfan slag heap disaster, Wales, 1966
- Thalidomide decision, Germany, 1961

But excludes examples of where he believes the explanation is situated in a "powerful leader", rather than a poor group decision - e.g.:

- Mussolini's decision to enter WWII, 1940
- Stalin failing to predict German invasion, 1941

When it occurs - situationally, when:

- Group cohesiveness is high
- Decision making group is insulated from outsiders when the decision is being made
- More active leaders promoting their own solution => greater chance of groupthink

Review of major symptoms:

Operationalisation of the symptoms - leading to testable generalisations:

1. An illusion of invulnerability => excessive optimism, extreme risk taking.
2. Collective efforts to rationalise the discounting of warnings.
3. Unquestioned belief in the group's superior morality.
4. Stereotyped views of opposition leaders as too stupid, too weak, too evil.
5. Direct pressure on those who deviate from group norms.
6. Self-censorship of deviations from group consensus.
7. Shared illusion of the unanimity of judgements conforming to the majority view.
8. Self-appointed 'mindguards' emerge.

The more frequently a group displays these symptoms, the worse the decisions made.

**Janis** argues 'a well-substantiated theory should have valuable practical applications'.

Commentary notes:

'Groupthink' coined to invoke the negative connotations associated with 'Newspeak' in Orwell's 1984.

Use of 'symptoms' => groupthink is an illness

Not deterministic => the same group can make good decisions too - e.g. Cuban missile crisis vs Bay of Pigs

Foregrounds **group dynamics** - group behaviour is equated to being a system of reciprocal interactions between group and its members - and so depends on the ways in which members perceive each other and the group.

Effect of entitativity (cohesiveness & concurrence seeking) on group decision making processes has been tested - findings from highly entitative groups are:

- Entitativity is seen as a +ve feature of the group
- They hold stereotypic beliefs about group norms; emphasise contrasts between the group and others
- Assume group has a psychological essence; encourages common feature seeking between members
- Hostile to outgroups
- Have a group social identity

But, evidence supporting **Janis** 'groupthink' theory is mixed:

(i) **Rydell and McConnell, 2005** - evidence that entitative groups do more information processing, not less, as **Janis** claimed.

(ii) The idea that groups make poorer judgments than individuals because of conformity pressures implies individuals are more rational than groups.

Groupthink research is qualitative, but supported by experimental studies of 'group polarisation', which find that like-minded individuals reinforce extreme opinions in the group, leading to greater or lesser risk taking afterwards - a 'risky shift' or 'cautious shift' (**Stoner**).

Research on group polarisation from SIT and SCT stance is more nuanced - the social context also has an impact of any risk shift patterns (**Abrams; Wetherell**).

The only crucial factor appears to be directive leadership - which can lead to poor decisions of the type **Janis** describes. Not even cohesiveness predicts - as members may become more confident that they will not be expunged from the group if they dissent - **Brown, 2000**.

**Ryan et al** - evidence from longitudinal study - group socialisation processes may explain why Bay of Pigs was a fiasco but Cuban Missile decisions much better a year later in the (largely) same group.

**Janis'** work raises the question if people actually perceive group as entitative - or perhaps recognise differences between members but feel pressure to conform - as **Asch** would have argued.

#### Potter and Reicher: Discursive view of St. Paul's riot

Demonstrates difference people can have very different ideas about what constitutes a group - 'the community' in this instance.

Does not focus on group processes, but on how insiders and outsiders view and construct group boundaries.

Entitativity is not treated as a fixed background factor, but it varies over time and over place.

Groups studied are much larger than Janis groups - and not clearly bounded.

**Janis vs Potter and Reicher** - dealing with different objects of study / units of analysis.

The study builds on **Reicher's** earlier work on crowd behaviour during the riot - which challenged **Le Bon's** work as desocialising and depoliticising collective action - so relying on an explanation that held there was an individual-social dualism.

Instead, approaches crowd behaviour in terms of social relationships. SCT suggests group characteristics are foregrounded when individuals say they belong to a particular group - identity is not lost in a crowd, but shifts from the personal to the social.

A riot is therefore not mindless violence, but a motivated form of social action - norms and limits come from the shared identity, reflecting clear, rational, political/social meanings.

Discourse analysis used as argued it is not possible to analytically separate the nature of events from the nature of the discourse used to describe them.

'Community' is a 'linguistic (interpretative) repertoire'

Aim is to look at the different ways community is constructed and used as a social category - argues that this is a necessary step before any statistical investigation.

The accounts given by different people experiencing the same events are inconsistent about the existence, scope and make-up of 'community'.

Their analysis suggests:

(a) The existence of community has a temporal aspect

e.g. 'Billington's began trading 22 years ago; after the riot, they said that 'this community is finished'

and:

e.g. 'at the end of the day we own what we have'

So community:

Used to exist but no longer does  
It might exist at some time in the future  
The community exists now

(b) There is a racial dimension to community

23 / 32 instances of the use of community coded it against its racial basis - but perhaps not surprising, as media and parliament had suggested the riot had racial aspects immediately after it had happened.

'multi-racial community' - is produced organically, not by the intervention of money from outside - failures of state intervention used to justify this stance.

'black community' - is there only a black community

specifically selected for comment or are there others too?

(c) Positivity and harmony

Broad agreement between all constructions that a community is a 'good thing'.

'Community relations' as a way of explaining conflict.

Police are seen as being set 'against' the community in some contexts - in others, they are seen as 'part' of the community.

If in the community - it is an intragroup conflict - if against the community, it must be an intergroup conflict!

Using 'community relations' as a linguistic device allows the characterisation of the police using the community repertoire.

Can have relations between 'the police' and 'the black community' - which were poor before the riot, not disrupted by it. May be being used as a way of saying relations between blacks and whites were poor before the riot - as a way of softening that implication.

Community is characterised in spatial ways (close-knit, integrated, tight); organic ways (mature, grows, evolves) and as having agency (acts, knows, feels). Words like friendly, warm, happy are also used to describe community.

Introducing 'community policing' - the perfect solution to 'community relations' problems.

But both types of possible conflict are described in terms of the community repertoire - just deployed in different ways to justify different political/social positions.

Conclusion

Commonalties:

Both studies politically relevant  
Both use natural research methods - ecologically valid

Differences:

Methodology - **Potter and Reicher** use a novel method, but are very specific about the details. **Janis** is not specific at all!

**Janis** - as he is using events already defined as fiascos, he has little evidence that it was the processes used that turned them into failures. **Kramer** argues Janis overstated the importance of cohesiveness and understated political considerations.

**Janis** - group processes are conflictual vs **Potter and Reicher** - groups are in conflict => different theoretical starting points, different emphasises.

e.g. 'Groupthink' - caused by stress and anxiety - individual conflict focus.

and 'Community' - not a face to face group, less easy to individualise.

How successful are the accounts at understanding group dynamics?

Different objects of study, but:

**Janis** - interaction between individuals and groups is key to understanding; key role of the directive leader; role of mindguards and individual conflicts within a group. Not policy makers' personal deficiencies, but that they are magnified when put into a group context. Later work by **Abrams et al** supports the idea that 'deviants' are pressured to return to the group norms.

**Potter and Reicher** - no analysis of individuals, no claim made about individual goals. Only interested in the use of the 'community' repertoire. Has applicability to much larger social groups.

**Janis** - pessimistic in outlook, suggesting that if certain conditions exist, decisions will be sub-optimal.

**Potter and Reicher** - more distanced - neither optimistic nor pessimistic - identify discourses but do not advocate solutions.

**Janis** - situatedness of group behaviour is absent from his account - it is central to **Potter and Reicher's** - entitativity is situated. Their ontology of groups is more complex, but **Janis** provides more insight into group dynamics.

The two papers deal with different processes, groups, theories, epistemologies, ontological and political approaches, but:

both use naturalistic and qualitative methods to provide insight into groups.