



2025-26 FALL

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Faculty of Arts & Sciences

WEEK 12

GROUP PROCESSES

Core Questions

1. Why are groups so important to us?
2. Why are we more committed to certain groups?
3. How do groups help and hinder individual effort?
4. How do individuals influence groups?
5. What increases group creativity?
6. What causes intergroup conflict to emerge and to escalate?
7. What effect does intergroup conflict have on relationships among the members of each group?
8. How can intergroup conflict be de-escalated or resolved?

GROUPS

- Groups occur when **two or more** individuals interact with one another or are joined together by a common fate.
- some groups were based on **popularity** (the “cool,” rich, and/or beautiful kids)
- others depended on **common interests** (in band, athletics, theater, social rebels, etc.)
- some of group memberships—and friendships—are the **product of chance** events such as classroom seating assignment yet still endured for a lifetime
- some people form a group because they happen to be in the **same place** (bank queue, bus stop, etc.)

Why Are Groups So Important to Us?

- because they provide **evolutionary advantages**, such as sharing of food and shelter in times of scarcity
- humans have an **instinct to flock together** and form alliances (even in modern computer games with strangers)
- **cohesive groups** that share more of their resources enjoy many **advantages**:
 1. they allow individuals and subgroups to **specialize**,
 2. define **social roles**,
 3. develop an **identity**,
 4. share **critical information**, and
 5. provide a **safer environment** for everyone.

four benefits of belonging to groups

- 1. cohesiveness that supplies social support,**
- 2. a sense of identity,**
- 3. safety and security,**
- 4. meaningful information.**

Groups Provide Social Support

- **group cohesiveness:** the degree to which members of a group feel connected to one another
- **functional distance:** The tendency for people who are in close proximity due to the geographic and architectural design of an environment to be more likely to develop a cohesive group, such as a friendship or a romantic relationship.
- groups provide **social/emotional support** and practical **social support** (such as heat or shelter) that make it a little easier to get to tomorrow.

Groups Provide a Sense of Identity

- groups can also provide a sense of individual identity,
 - an **impression of how we uniquely fit** into a larger group,
 - on a larger scale, participating in groups can help us figure out what career path best matches our ambitions,
 - we look into the **social mirror** of our groups, make **social comparisons**, and conclude, “I’m good at this, but not so good at that”.
- **Sense of individual identity:** How individuals **perceive** themselves to uniquely fit into a larger group. Such social comparisons and group role development contribute to individuals’ **self-concept**.

Groups Make Us Feel Safe

- a third benefit of belonging to groups is feeling safe when threatened
- **the hypothesis:** “*misery loves company*”
- both fear and anxiety motivate us to affiliate with others, but:
 - ❖ when we’re ***afraid***, we like to be with people who ***feel the same way***; this could help us bond together against a common enemy
 - ❖ In contrast, when we’re ***anxious***, we like to be with people who ***are not anxious*** because they can calm us down.
- Both motivations appear to be driven by the need to feel safe and secure
- Misery does love company, but the ***kind of company we crave*** depends on the ***kind of misery we are experiencing***.

Groups Provide Meaningful Information

- Groups provide cognitive clarity by supplying ***meaningful information about future possible outcomes.***
- *What kind of roommate (A or B) would you want if you were waiting to receive heart surgery?*
- ❖ Roommate A is about to go in for heart surgery.
- ❖ Roommate B just came back.
- Roommate A can empathize with your anxiety, but Roommate B can provide meaningful information about your upcoming experience and can also be comforting (if the surgery went well).
- Patients preferred roommates already recovering from surgery (Roommate B). In that situation, information was more important than empathy.
- *What about patients with no roommate at all?*
- Patients with information-rich roommates (roommates who had already gone through the surgery) were also less anxious, began walking sooner after their heart surgeries, and were discharged sooner from the hospital compared with patients who had single rooms in the hospital (no roommates).
- ***Apparently, any companion in the midst of misery is better than no companion at all.***

Why are we more committed to certain groups?

- ***Difficult-to-Get-Into Groups Are More Appealing: The Initiation Effect (effort justification)***
- “If membership is exclusive, it must be a wonderful group.”
- Some groups are more prestigious and elite—and harder to get into.
- The harder it is to join, the more we want to join.
- The tendency for individuals to convince themselves that a group they belong to is wonderful if they have gone through embarrassing, difficult, or expensive efforts (cognitive dissonance) to gain membership in the group. (Freemasons, since the 14th century)

Why are we more committed to certain groups?

- ***Get Caught in the Escalation Trap: Sunken cost fallacy***
- When individuals increase their commitment to a failing situation to justify previous investments of time, effort, or resources.
- Poor poker players fall into this trap when they refuse to fold a losing hand and instead escalate their bets (especially on the last hand of the night).
- Car owners may keep throwing good money into a bad car because they have already spent so much money repairing it.
- Sometimes, even romantic partners will continue a harmful relationship simply because they already have invested so much in the relationship.

Why are we more committed to certain groups?

- ***The Hazing Effect:*** Whenever members of a group establish arbitrary rituals for new members that may cause physical or emotional harm, which can be a type of escalation trap for aspiring members.
 - ❖ Canadian Air Force- rituals of binge drinking, demeaning tasks, and painful activities.
 - ❖ “blood pinning” rituals among U.S. Marine paratroopers (soldiers reworked medals in uniforms so that when another soldier hits them, the pin pierces the skin until it bleeds)
- Why do people put up with hazing?
 1. ***Initiation rituals*** such as hazing also strengthen a particular group’s authority over the individual being hazed.
 2. ***Maltreatment effect:*** hazing elicits social dependency that promotes allegiance to the group. By the end of the process, the abused person starts to connect with or even love the people who hurt him/her.
(*Stockholm Syndrome*: hostages develop affection for their captors)
 3. ***Attachment theory:*** people are comforted by having a secure “home base” in other people, such as parents.

Why are we more committed to certain groups?

- ***Fear of Being Ostracized:*** Experiencing rejection can trigger *deep-seated fears*. Consequently, group norms become powerful influences because of ***rejection sensitivity***, the fear of social rejection and ostracism.
- At a more practical level, fear of rejection may be powerful in part due to the potential loss of all the advantages groups give us.
- All social animals likely developed rejection sensitivity because social exclusion threatens our survival.
- ***Rejection sensitivity:*** The fear of social rejection and ostracism

rejection threatens

1. ***need to belong*** by separating us from our group,
 2. ***self-esteem*** because it implies that we are unlikeable,
 3. ***need for control*** because we cannot influence the decision, and
 4. ***sense of existence***, both metaphorically and in reality.
- Merely observing someone else being ridiculed produced increased social conformity in observers.
 - We want to be accepted, and we're willing to be flexible in our behaviors to ensure that acceptance, sometimes through conformity.

Why are we more committed to certain groups?

- ***Optimal Distinctiveness Theory: Being Special Matters*** (How do we balance our need for attention and independence with our need to belong to a group?)
- The idea that individuals can simultaneously achieve the advantages of being seen as a unique and important individual and of being in a group by being an identifiable member of a small and elite group.
- We're not "too" distinct (which might mean social isolation or stigma) or "too" anonymous (losing our individuality). We want a level of distinctiveness that's right in the middle.

Small, elite groups

1. provide all the advantages of groups in general (social support, a sense of identity, information, and safety)
2. their elite status provides prestige and pride (and more commitment to the group, as we saw with hazing)
3. elite groups are small enough that we still maintain our individuality and sense of importance. (Like each player on a world-class sports team, each individual is identifiable and needed—but the entire team is needed to reach success.)

How Do Groups Help Individual Effort?

- “Two heads are better than one,”
- “Too many cooks spoil the broth.”
- ***The Presence of Others Can Help Performance:***
Social Facilitation- the mere presence of others enhances performance—even without the sense of competition.
- Humans (and other animals) tend to perform better or faster in the presence of others.
- The “others” don’t even really have to be there; people only have to believe or imagine that they are there. (For example, when participants are using virtual reality and the other people are simply computer avatars.)

Social Facilitation

1. ***Evaluation Apprehension:*** This hypothesis says that our anxiety about being judged by others is what causes physiological arousal and consequential changes in behavior, and that's why we can improve on simple/easy tasks, but we flounder on difficult or new tasks.
 - We worry about being judged if we do badly, so performance goes up because of our need to be accepted and liked.
2. ***Mere presence:*** This hypothesis argues that simply having other people in the room— even if they aren't watching you—will increase your physiological arousal and that this arousal will help performance on easy tasks and hinder performance on difficult tasks.

How Do Groups Hinder Individual Effort?

- ***The Presence of Others Can Hinder Performance: Social Loafing-*** It occurs when people working in a group reduce their individual level of effort.
 - ❖ If you're the "loafer" or slacker, you get to coast on the efforts of others.
 - ❖ if you're not the loafer, you have to work even harder to accomplish the work expected of two (or more!) people, which feels unfair as well as frustrating.
 - This is why so many students hate group projects—they are afraid they'll have to work even harder to make up for the loafing of others.

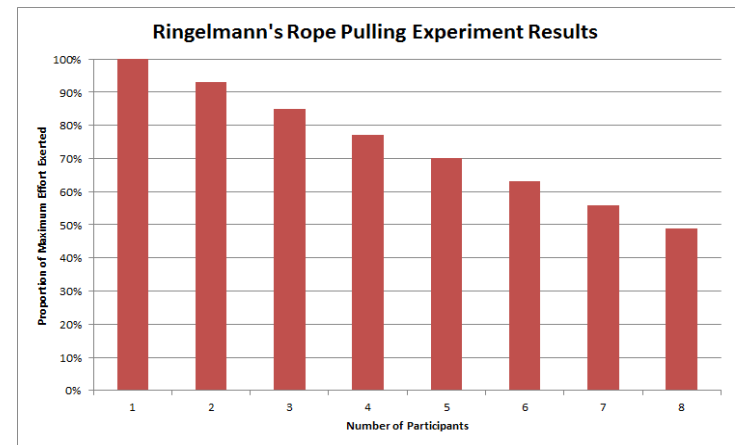
Social Loafing

- Ringelmann's (1913) experiments demonstrated that both individual people and oxen would pull less hard on a rope when working together than when working alone.
- Ringelmann also found that the larger the group size, the lower the individual effort.
- Today, we refer to social loafers as free riders or, more informally, as “slackers”—people who gain more benefits from the group than they contribute to the group.

Ringelmann Effect- Free Riders



<https://medium.com/distributed-economy/free-riders-on-trust-9d7c42695df3>



<https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-loafing.html>

Not Everyone Loafs: Situational, Personality, and Cultural Effects

- you are not likely to be a social loafer when
1. You are doing something difficult.
 2. Your contributions can be identified as coming from you.
 3. You believe that what you are doing is valuable.
 4. You are working with people you know.

Types of Group Tasks

1. **Planning tasks:** group's major goal is to generate an action-oriented plan to achieve some objectives on which the members have already agreed.
2. **Creativity tasks:** requires a group to generate new, original ideas.
3. **Intellective tasks:** requires a group to solve a problem for which there is—or is believed to be—a correct answer.
4. **Decision-making tasks:** requires a group to solve a problem for which there is no inherently right answer.
5. **Cognitive conflict tasks:** group members hold varying viewpoints and strive to resolve their differences.
6. **Mixed motive tasks:** group members face an underlying conflict of interest with respect to conditions for reward.
7. **Contests/battles:** group members compete as a unit against an external opponent or enemy.
8. **Performances/psychomotor tasks:** requires group members to exercise manual or psychomotor skills to bring about desired results.

Groupthink

- Groupthink refers to a **faulty mode of thinking** by group members in which their desire to realistically evaluate alternative courses of action is overwhelmed by pressures for unanimity within the group.
- That is, concerned that they not disrupt apparent group consensus, the group members neglect to appraise alternatives critically and to weigh the pros and cons carefully.
- Once groupthink sets in, the typical result is an ill-considered decision.

Symptoms of Groupthink

1. **Illusions of invulnerability:** Group members may think that they are invulnerable and cannot fail and, therefore, display excessive optimism and take excessive risks.
2. **Illusions of morality:** Members may display an unquestioned belief in the group's inherent superior morality, and this may incline them to ignore the ethical consequences of their decisions.
3. **Collective rationalization:** Members may discount warnings that, if heeded, would cause them to reconsider their assumptions.
4. **Stereotyping of the adversary:** Especially in the political sphere, the group may develop a stereotyped view of enemy leaders as too evil to warrant genuine attempts to negotiate or as too weak to mount effective counteractions.
5. **Self-censorship:** Members may engage in self-censorship of any deviation from the apparent group consensus, with each member inclined to minimize the importance of his or her own doubts.
6. **Pressure on dissenters:** The majority may exert direct pressure on any member who dissents or argues against any of the group's stereotypes, illusions, or commitments.
7. **Mindguarding:** There may emerge in the group some self-appointed "mind guards"—members who protect against information that might shatter the complacency about the effectiveness and morality of the group's decisions.
8. **Apparent unanimity:** Despite their personal doubts, members may share an illusion that unanimity regarding the decision exists within the group.

How Do Individuals Influence Groups?

- ***Group dynamics*** are the social roles, hierarchies, communication styles, and culture that naturally form when groups interact.
- Some people will emerge as leaders, while others prefer to stand back. The leaders may choose very different styles—and these choices will have an influence over how the group members perform and feel.
- **Contingency theory of leadership:** The idea that there is no one best leadership style; different types of people, environments, and situations call for different kinds of leaders.
- ***The Most Effective Leader Depends on the Situation***

Types of Leaders

1. **Task leader:** A type of leader who focuses on completing assignments, achieving goals, and meeting deadlines.
2. **Social leader:** A type of leader who focuses on the people involved and invests time in building teamwork, facilitating interactions, and providing support.
3. **Transactional leader:** A type of leader who uses rewards and punishments to motivate group members; these leaders help to maintain the status quo.
4. **Transformational leader:** A type of leader who uses inspiration and group cohesiveness to motivate group members; these leaders are useful for challenging established rules or procedures.

What Increases Group Creativity?

- **Wisdom of crowds:** Using the collective insights of many people to test, develop, and refine new ideas, products, and services; also called ***“crowdsourcing.”*** (The best modern example of the wisdom of crowds is probably the website Wikipedia. Originally, the site was meant to complement online encyclopedias written and maintained by experts for each entry, but the idea of Wikipedia was always that any person from the public could contribute information and edit the site.)
- **Brainstorming:** A group approach to problem solving that emphasizes nonevaluative creative thinking where members generate lots of ideas, encourage wild ideas, don't judge any idea, and actively modify or expand other people's ideas.

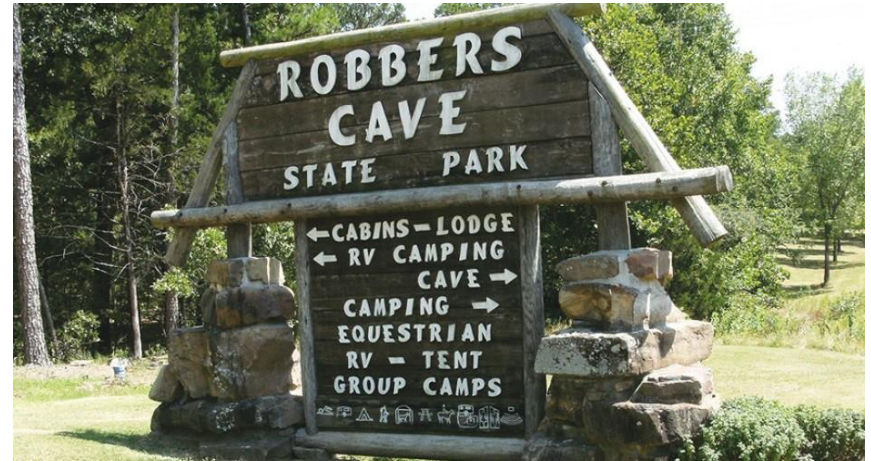
A real life: Lord of the Flies



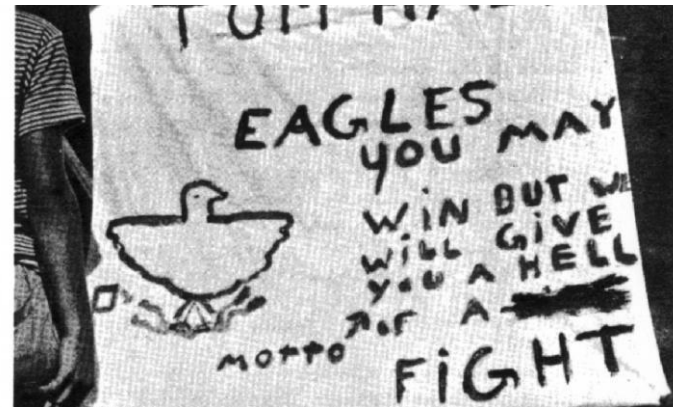
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/apr/16/a-real-life-lord-of-the-flies-the-troubling-legacy-of-the-robbers-cave-experiment>

Robbers Cave Experiment

- Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues (1954) conducted an important study of intergroup conflict at Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma.
- The participants were
 - well-adjusted,
 - Academically successful,
 - White, middle-class American boys,
 - aged 11 and 12.
- These boys attended a 2-week experimental summer camp and participated in camp activities, unaware that their behavior was under systematic observation.
- The research objective was to investigate how an underlying opposition of interest can lead to overt intergroup conflict.
- The boys were divided into two groups, named the **Eagles** and the **Rattlers**.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PRuxMprSDQ>



<https://medium.com/@leadyourteam/resolve-company-conflicts-with-two-lessons-from-robbers-cave-dcb40f72e50f>



<https://littlepsych101.tumblr.com/post/180492816351/to-divide-a-reunite-a-group-of-boys>

The first phase

- lasted about a week,
- designed to produce cohesion within each of the groups
- boys arrived at the camp on two separate buses and settled into cabins located a considerable distance apart
- By design, contact within each group was high, but contact between the two groups was minimal
- The boys within each group engaged in various activities, many of which required cooperative effort for achievement
- They camped out, cooked, worked on improving swimming holes, transported canoes over rough terrain to the water, and played various games.
- As they worked together, the boys in each group pooled their efforts, organized duties, and divided tasks of work and play.
- Eventually, the boys identified more and more with their own groups, and each unit developed a high degree of group cohesion and solidarity.

The second phase

- conflict was induced between the groups
- Specifically, the camp staff arranged a tournament of games, including baseball, touch football, tug-of-war, and a treasure hunt.
- In this tournament, prizes were awarded only to the victorious group.
- The tournament started in the spirit of good sportsmanship, but as it progressed, the positive feelings faded.
- The good sportsmanship cheer that customarily follows a game, “2-4-6-8, who do we appreciate,” turned into “2-4-6-8, who do we appreci-**HATE**.”
- Intergroup hostility intensified, and members of each group began to refer to their rivals as “sneaks” and “cheats.”
- After suffering a stinging defeat in one game, the Eagles burned a banner left behind by the Rattlers. When the Rattlers discovered this “desecration,” they confronted the Eagles, and a fistfight nearly broke out.

later stages

- Name-calling, threats, physical scuffling, and cabin raids by the opposing groups became increasingly frequent.
- When asked by the experimenters to rate each other's characters, a large proportion of the boys in each group gave negative ratings to all the boys in the other group.
- When the tournament was finally over, the two groups refused to have anything to do with each other.
- In later stages of the study, when the level of intergroup antagonism was high, the experimenters tried various strategies for reducing strife.
- Several of these techniques failed, but the experimenters did succeed in reducing conflict by introducing important goals that required cooperation between groups for attainment.

Social Identity Theory

- the self-concept has two components
 1. a personal identity and
 2. a social identity
- **The social identity** component depends primarily on the groups or social categories to which one belongs, and the evaluation of one's own group is determined in part by a comparison with other groups.
- Thus, **positive social identity** depends on whether the comparisons made between one's *in-group* and some relevant *out-groups* are favorable or not.

Resolution of Intergroup Conflict

1. **introduce superordinate goals into the conflict:** Because goals of this type can be achieved only through the joint efforts of opposing sides, they promote cooperative behavior and serve as a basis for restructuring the relationship between groups.
2. **increase intergroup contact:** This approach is more effective in reducing bias and conflict when contact is sustained, close, based on equal status, and supported institutionally.
3. **third parties as mediators in the dispute:** Mediators improve the communication between conflicting parties; they help analyze the dispute and develop possible resolutions. The use of mediators is most effective when the conflict is not extreme and when the mediator is trusted by all parties involved.