Groups

A couple of definitions

- Group – a collection of people who have direct interactions over an extended period of time and who share a common fate (e.g., your peer revision group)
- Collective – a collection of people engaging in a common activity but who have little interaction with each other (e.g., all OSU students)

Basic Group Characteristics

Roles

- Set of expected behaviors that certain individuals perform.
- Can be formal or informal.
- E.g., the mom, the enabler, the treasurer, the funny one, the follower, the leader.

Norms

- Rules of behavior for a group; prevailing beliefs/values/attitudes.
- Can be formal or informal.
- A large part of social behavior concerns figuring out the norms for any given group, and deciding when and when not to follow them.

Cohesiveness

- Forces exerted on a group that push its members closer together
- Can be positive (group rewards) or negative (punishments for leaving)
- Can range from weak bonds (a subway car defining a group) to strong bonds (immediate family ties)
- Important factors: commitment to group task, attractiveness of members, dangers of leaving the group, group pride, etc.
Why Do People Join Groups?

- Two basic perspectives on this issue...
  - Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1969)
  - Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991)

Social Identity Theory

- SIT posits that people derive benefits to self-esteem by virtue of their group memberships, whether the memberships are meaningful or not
- Evidence from the “minimal group paradigm”
  - Group memberships assigned on an arbitrary basis
  - Find that people favor their “ingroup” when allocating resources
  - Works even when participants realize and acknowledge that groups were assigned randomly

Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

- ODT posits that people satisfy two competing motives through group membership: belongingness and distinctiveness
- Large group size will satisfy need to belong, but will not satisfy need to be distinct from others
- Helps explain why subcultural groups exist (rather than everyone belonging to the same huge ingroup – e.g., “Americans” or “humans”)

Important Group Processes and Phenomena
Triplett (1898)
- The first social psychological experiments ever performed
- Had children do simple tasks (e.g., winding line on a fishing reel) either alone or in the presence of others
- Children were faster with others present

Zajonc et al. (1969)
- When running the simple maze, the presence of “spectator” roaches led to a faster completion time
- When running the complex maze, the presence of “spectator” roaches led to a slower completion time
- Seems unlikely that cockroaches are concerned with how they appear in the (compound) eyes of other cockroaches... What else is going on?

Social Facilitation Theory
- The presence of others does not facilitate performance per se
- Rather, the presence of others increases arousal
- This arousal facilitates the dominant task response
- For simple tasks, the dominant response usually leads to task success; for complex tasks, the dominant response usually leads to task failure

Why Do Others Elicit Arousal?
- Many explanations have been posed...
- Other people increase our alertness
- We have “evaluation apprehension”
- Other people cause us to be distracted
Social Facilitation Examples
- Pool Players
- Me vs. Michael Jordan
- Good “Test Takers”

Social Loafing
- Phrase coined by Bibb Latané in 1970s
- When individual contributions to group effort cannot be identified, we tend to do less well on simple tasks and better on complex tasks
- Evaluation apprehension elicits arousal, and facilitates dominant response

The KEY
- What determines whether others cause arousal or relaxation??
- The degree to which individual performance will be evaluated.
  - When it is \( \rightarrow \) Social Facilitation
    - Taking exams, shooting baskets
  - When it isn’t \( \rightarrow \) Social Loafing
    - Singing happy birthday, group projects

Groupthink (Janis, 1982)
- Being a member of a group can affect not only behavior, but also thought-processes and judgments.
- With groupthink, maintaining group solidarity and cohesiveness influences decision-making processes (many times for the worse).
Famous examples
- The Bay of Pigs (Kennedy)
- Cuban Missile Crisis
- Korean War
- Pearl Harbor
- Watergate
- The 1986 Challenger Explosion
  - Video

Why?
- Normative Conformity
- Dissonance Reduction
- Social Proof/Validation
- Group Polarization

Risk Factors
- Highly Cohesiveness
- Group Isolation
- High Stress
- Highly Similar Members

Symptoms
- Illusion of Invulnerability
- Self-Censorship
- Illusion of Unanimity

Consequences
- Poor information search
- Failure to examine risks of chosen alternatives
- Failures to develop contingency plans
- Bad decisions much more likely

Solutions
- Encourage/Force discrepant opinions
- Have individuals with a variety of different viewpoints
- Use systematic procedures for making decisions
Deindividuation

- The loss of a person’s sense of individuality.
- Groups create an atmosphere where deindividuation is likely.
- In many instances this can lead to deviant behaviors which which would not have occurred with individuals acting alone.

What group characteristics promote deindividuation?

- Similar appearances (e.g., uniforms).
- Members disguised (e.g., masks).
- Individual decision making discouraged (e.g., following orders).
- Appeals to cohesiveness (“team spirit”).

Example: The KKK

- All dressed in white gowns (uniforms).
- Identities totally hidden with masks.
- White-pride encouraged (team-spirit).
- Individual decision making can get you killed.

Why do these things promote deindividuation?

- More people = less accountability for any given member.
- Being in a group can reduce self-awareness (hence reducing the likelihood of self-regulation)

How does deindividuation work?

- Two mechanisms:
  - Accountability cues – when we are not personally accountable, we are more likely to engage in deviant behaviors
  - Attentional cues – when our attention is not focused on the self, we will not be as likely to act in line with our internal standards

Bottom Line

- The more people are deindividuated, the more the will go along with the group.
- If the group is engaging in positive behaviors this is a good thing.
- What you typically hear about on the news are situations in which groups produce deviant behaviors.