

Social Psychology

Lecture 9: Group Influence

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In our previous discussion, we examined the structured methods used to deliberately shape and alter core attitudes and behaviors. We explored the two routes to persuasion, analyzed the key elements that drive persuasion specifically the communicator, message, medium, and audience. We concluded by discussing why resisting persuasion is not always the optimal choice.

In this lesson, we will explore how groups function and how they influence individual behavior. We will also dive into group decision-making, what causes group conflicts, and how to resolve group conflict successfully.

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

1. Identify the functions of groups.
2. Explain how group influence individual behavior.
3. Evaluate the psychological and social factors that influence decision-making.
4. Deconstruct the root causes of conflict between different groups.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of various conflict resolution strategies within groups.

Social Group

- Two or more people who interact, influence each other, and share a common identity.
- Perceive themselves as "us" (not "them")
- They know each other personally and work together in order to achieve a common goal.

****Social aggregate** is a collection of people who are in the same place at the same time but who otherwise have nothing else in common.

Functions of Groups

1. Companionship
2. Security
3. Social identity
4. Goal achievement

HOW GROUP INFLUENCE INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR?

A. SOCIAL FACILITATION

- **Original Meaning:** The tendency of people to perform simple or well-learned tasks better when others are present.
- Norman Triplett (1898) noticed cyclists' race times were faster when they competed against others than when they just raced against the clock.
3 conditions:
 - o Race alone against clock
 - o With another cyclist, but not competing
 - o With another cyclist, in competition
- **Result:** Cyclists performed faster whenever another rider was on the track with them, regardless of whether they were explicitly competing or not.
- "The bodily presence of another contestant . . . serves to liberate latent energy"
- **Fishing Reel Experiment:**
2 conditions:
 - o **Alone:** The child turned the reel by themselves with only the researcher watching.
 - o **With a Peer:** The child was paired with another child, turning their reels side-by-side at the same time (co-acting).**Result:** The presence of the other child made them wind the reel much more rapidly.
- **Current Meaning:** The strengthening of dominant (prevalent, likely) responses in the presence of others.

- Later research found conflicting findings:
 - o The presence of others enhances performance
 - o The presence of others hinders performance
- A modern reanalysis of Triplett's data revealed that the difference did not reach statistical significance.
- Robert Zajonc reconciled apparently conflicting findings by proposing that:
 - o Presence of others increases general level of arousal, leading to:
 - Improved performance for easy, familiar tasks
 - Impaired performance for hard, unfamiliar tasks
 - o Arousal increases tendency to perform behaviors that are most dominant (the ones we know best)
 - **Dominant response** is the reaction or behavior that is most likely to occur in a specific situation because it is the most "pre-potent," well-learned, or habitual for that person.
 - Experts + Audience = Success
 - Novices + Audience = Failure

Why Are We Aroused in the Presence of Others?

- o **Evaluation Apprehension** – occurs when those others are seen as potential evaluators.
- o **Distraction conflict theory** – the conflict between paying attention to others and paying attention to the task.
- o **Mere Presence** - mere presence of others is sufficient to produce social facilitation effects.

B. SOCIAL LOAFING

- Formerly known as Ringelmann Effect
- The tendency of an individual in a group to exert less effort toward attaining a common goal than when tested individually
- Contributes to declines in the productivity of a group

Why it occurs?

- **Diffusion of responsibility** - a person does not feel as responsible for working on a task if several others are also present, since responsibility is distributed among all those present.
 - **Free riders** – the parasite effect; people who benefit from the group but give little in return; paradise for parasites.
 - **Sucker effect** – occurs when individuals reduce their effort in a group project to avoid being exploited by others who are free-riding. It is a self-protective reaction, where team members lower their performance to match the lower effort of others, ensuring they do not do all the work.
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- **Experiment:** In the famous 1979 study by Latané and colleagues, researchers put participants into a room, gave them headphones playing constant loud noise so they couldn't hear themselves or others, and told them to clap or shout as loud as they can. He then tested them in different group sizes to measure the exact sound pressure (decibels) they produced.
 - **Result:** The noise produced by six people shouting or clapping “as loud as you can” was less than three times that produced by one person alone.

When Social Loafing Occurs

1. When the group is large
2. When it is difficult to evaluate individual contributions to a task
3. When people expect their co-workers to pick up the slack

Social Loafing is less when:

1. Task is challenging
2. Other group members are unreliable
3. High effort will bring reward
4. Group members are friends rather than strangers
5. Group members believe that their individual work will be acknowledged by the assessor

Differences:

- Collectivists are less likely to engage in social loafing than Individualists
- Women are less likely to engage in social loafing than Men

C. DEINDIVIDUATION

- Coined by Leon Festinger, Albert Pepitone, and Theodore Newcomb (1952)
- The loss of self-awareness and self-restraint in group situations that foster arousal and anonymity.
- Explains rioting behaviors.

What elicits deindividuation?

A. Group Size

- A group has the power not only to arouse its members but also to render them unidentifiable.
- The bigger the mob, the more its members lose self-awareness and become willing to commit atrocities.

B. Anonymity

- Being anonymous makes one less conscious, more group conscious and more responsive to cues present in the situation, whether negative.
- **Experiments:**
 - **Philip Zimbardo** asked New York University women to deliver electric shocks to woman under one of these conditions:
 - **Group A** – researcher made them completely anonymous. They were given oversized laboratory coats and hoods that totally covered their faces.
 - **Group B** – the women wore their normal clothes and were given large name tags, making them highly visible and identifiable.

Result: Those in oversized laboratory coats and hoods pressed the shock button twice as long as did women who were visible and wearing large name tag.

- **Ed Diener** (1976) demonstrated the effect of both being in a group and of being physically anonymous. They observed 1,352 Seattle children trick-or-treating on Halloween.

As the children, either alone or in groups, approached 1 of 27 homes scattered throughout the city, an experimenter greeted them warmly, invited them to “take one of the candies,” and then left the candy unattended.

Result: Children in groups were more than twice as likely to take extra candy as were solo children. Children who had been asked their names and where they lived were less than half as likely to transgress as those who were left anonymous.

Does becoming physically anonymous always unleash our worst impulses?

- **Experiment:** Johnson & Downing (1979)
- Women put on nurses’ uniforms before deciding how much shock someone should receive.
- When those wearing the nurses’ uniforms were made anonymous, they became less aggressive in administering shocks.
- Meta- analysis of 60 deindividuation studies, Tom Postmes and Russell Spears (1998) concluded that being anonymous makes one less self-conscious, more group-conscious, and more responsive to situational cues, whether negative or positive.

SELF-AWARENESS

- A self-conscious state in which attention focuses on oneself.
- It makes people more sensitive to their own attitudes and dispositions.
- Deindividuation is less likely when self-awareness is high.
- Alcohol consumption decreases self-awareness and increases deindividuation (Hull et al., 1983).

GROUP DECISION-MAKING

A. Group Polarization

- The tendency for an attitude or belief to become magnified for individual group members after discussing an issue with the group as a whole.
 - o **Risky shift** – occurs when a group starts out with a dominant view that is relatively risky, the group is likely to come to a consensus that is even riskier.
 - o **Cautious shift** – occurs when an individual making a decision as part of a group adopts a more cautious approach than the same individual would have adopted had they made the decision alone.

Studies suggest that such shifts are:

1. rarer than the opposite risky shift
2. most likely to occur when the majority of the members of the group, prior to discussion, favor a cautious rather than a risky choice.

B. Groupthink

- The tendency for a close-knit group to emphasize consensus at the expense of critical thinking and rational decision-making.
- Examples:
 - o Attack on Pearl Harbor
 - o Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961

Conditions that Foster Groupthink

1. High cohesiveness
2. Isolation from outside influences
3. A strong leader

Symptoms of Groupthink

1. An illusion of invulnerability
2. Unquestioned belief in the group's morality

3. Stereotyped view of opponent
4. Direct pressure on dissenter
5. Illusion of unanimity

C. Minority Influence

- A committed minority viewpoint can change the majority opinion in a group.
- Group members are more likely to be influenced by a minority opinion when the minority holds the opinion firmly.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT AMONG GROUPS

A. Realistic Group Conflict Theory

- The theory that conflict stems from competition for limited resources such as money, land, power or other resources
- Experiment: Muzafer Sherif's Robber's Cave Experiment
- Real life example: Sierra Leone's "blood diamonds"

B. Communication Error

- The way we communicate with each other often leads to conflict since all of us have different ways of expressing ourselves.

C. Biased Perception

- The belief that we are justified in our own thoughts and actions but that others are biased in their beliefs and behaviors

D. Hostile Attribution Bias

- Occurs when people assume that the intentions of another person are hostile.

HOW TO RESOLVE GROUP CONFLICT?

- A. **Bargaining** – a means of resolving conflict that occurs when two disputing parties come together, either in person or through representatives, to discuss ideas for

resolving their disagreement. It typically involves each party making offers, counter offers and concessions.

- B. **GRIT (gradual reduction in tension)** – “graduated and reciprocated initiatives in tension reduction”; a step-by-step formula for de-escalating a conflict that involves unilateral concessions and quick reciprocation by the opposition.

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