Group socialization, ostracism, rejection

next week:
Deviance, dissent, criticism

Last week:
• Overview of course
• Discussion of assessment
• Introduction to groups:
  ▪ Group processes
  ▪ Intergroup Relations

Today:
• Group socialization (how do groups train newcomers; what can newcomers do to fit in?)
• Strategic behaviour from peripherals
• Initiation ceremonies
• Ostracism
• Links between aggression and rejection

Group socialization

According to Moreland and Levine (1982) the relationship between the individual and the group progresses through a number of stages:
• Investigation
• Socialization
• Maintenance
• Re-socialization
• Remembrance

Investigation

Individuals and groups check each other out.
Individuals scout for groups that are going to best suit their individual needs, and groups scout for recruits that are going to best suit the group's needs.

Socialization

If the individual wants to join the group, and the group is prepared to accept the individual, then "entry" occurs.

This point is often marked by some kind of ceremony — can be positive and welcoming or harsh and demeaning (more on this later).

Entry can be a stressful experience for a number of reasons:
• The “real” nature of the group becomes apparent
• Newcomers typically have low status
Socialization

During the process of socialization, the newcomer to the group tries to get the group to accommodate to their individual needs, while the group tries to get the newcomer to assimilate to the group norms.

Difficult for individual to exert too much influence, however, because their newcomer status means that they are less likely to be listened to.

Socialization

Gruenfeld and Fan (1999) had groups work on a variety of tasks for 10 weeks. At this point, a randomly selected member of each team was rotated into another team (creating newcomers and oldtimers). Throughout this process, members wrote essays in which they reflected on their performance. These essays were then coded according to the extent to which members showed sophisticated decision-making skills (termed "integrative complexity"). It was found that the process of changing groups generated cognitive growth in the member who migrated; in other words people who left one group and became newcomers in another group showed greater integrative complexity than did oldtimers. Despite this, when group essays were compiled, a disproportionately low number of the newcomers' ideas appeared.

Socialization

There are at least 4 strategies that newcomers might use to respond to this precarious position:

(1) Playing the role of a newcomer
(2) Seeking patrons within the group
(3) Collaborating with other newcomers
(4) Public displays of “groupy” behaviour

(1) Playing the role of the newcomer

Newcomers tend to behave in a certain way when they join groups, and there is evidence that other group members reward them for behaving like this. Newcomers are typically:

- Relatively anxious (behave in a nervous, wary, excited fashion)
- Relatively passive (quieter and less involved in group activities)
- Dependent on oldtimers (imitate oldtimers, ask them for advice and help, try to ingratiate themselves)
- Relatively conforming (less innovative, avoid disagreements)

A newcomer who plays this role is going to be accepted by the group more quickly ... but what's in it for the newcomer?

(2) Seeking patrons within the group

Patrons are oldtimers who help newcomers fit in. Patrons may be:

- Models (high status members that are observed by newcomers)
- Trainers (people formally given the job of assimilating newcomers)
- Sponsors (people who helped bring the person into the group and so take more personal responsibility for their fitting in)
- Mentors (oldtimers who develop a close professional relationship with the newcomer)

Ironically, playing the role of the newcomer can mean that the newcomer becomes more influential in the long-term.

According to Hollander (1958) the more people can prove, over time, their loyalty to group norms, the more they are given permission to stray from the group norms down the track ("idiosyncrasy credits"). This is why it is often the most loyal and normative members who might be given permission to criticize the group or to push it in new directions.
(3) Collaborating with other newcomers

Multiple newcomers can form a peer group and collaborate with one another to make their socialization easier.

Two benefits of newcomers banding together:
(1) They can learn from each other
(2) They can form a power bloc that allows them to make changes within the group.

(4) Public “groupy” acts

Newcomers (and other peripheral group members) tend to be quite strategic in terms of when and where they display “groupy” behaviours.

Whereas oldtimers (and other core members) tend to defend the group regardless of context, newcomers are more likely to do so when other ingroup members are watching … particularly high status ingroup members.

Noel et al. (1995)

Noel et al. (1995) had either active members (core members) or pledge members (peripheral members) of a sorority rate a rival sorority on a number of negative traits.

In some conditions they were told they would have to discuss their responses with other members of their sorority (public condition).
In other conditions they were led to believe that their responses were private and anonymous.

Peripheral members were relatively positive about the outgroup in private but negative about them in public.

Jetten, Hornsey et al. (2006)

Jetten, Hornsey et al. (2006) had 2nd-year psych students rate the extent to which they conformed to the norms of being a psychology student. They were led to believe that their responses were either public or private.

Intragroup status was manipulated by saying either:
"Your responses will be compared to the responses of professional psychologists. We are interested to find out more on the views of more junior psychologists". (junior condition)
or
"Your responses will be compared to the responses of college students who take psychology as a subject. We are interested to find out more on the views of more senior psychology students." (senior condition)
Jetten, Hornsey et al. (2006) showed newcomers and oldtimers in a women’s rugby team examples of non-normative behaviour from another player. They were asked to rate the extent to which they approved or disapproved of the behaviour. Furthermore, they were led to believe their responses were either going to be made public to a group of rugby coaches and officials in their club (high status audience) or to a group of women thinking of playing rugby (low status audience).

Initiation ceremonies

When new members join a group, this moment is typically marked by some kind of ceremony … often this involves physically stressful or embarrassing initiation rites.

Initiation ceremonies: beatings

14–year-old Michael Kalogris spent 3 weeks in hospital recovering from internal injuries suffered during an initiation ceremony at his high-school fraternity. He’d been administered the “atomic bomb” by his prospective brothers, who told him to hold his hands over his head and keep them there while they gathered around to slam fists into his stomach and back simultaneously and repeatedly.

Initiation ceremonies: exposure to cold

On a winter night, Frederick Bronner (a junior college student) was taken 3000 feet up and 10 miles into the hills of a national forest by his prospective fraternity brothers. Left to find his way home wearing only a thin shirt and slacks, Bronner shivered in a frigid wind until falling and tumbling down a ravine, where he died of exposure.
Initiation ceremonies: thirst

Two 1st-years in Ohio were locked in a dungeon in their fraternity house after breaking the rule requiring all pledges to crawl into the dining area prior to meals.

Once locked in the house storage closet, they were given only salty foods to eat for nearly two days. Nothing was provided for drinking purposes except a pair of plastic cups in which they could catch their own urine.

Initiation ceremonies: eating unsavoury food

Pledges in California were made to eat whole a quarter-pound slab of raw liver, thick cut and soaked in oil.

Gagging and choking repeatedly, Richard Swanson failed three times to down his piece.

He finally got the meat into his throat where it lodged and, despite all efforts to remove it, killed him.

Initiation ceremonies: punishment

A pledge who forgot one section of a ritual incantation to be memorized by all initiates was punished for his error.

He was required to keep his feet under the rear legs of a folding chair while the heaviest of his fraternity brothers sat down and drank a beer.

Although the pledge did not cry out during the punishment, a bone in each of his feet was broken.

Initiation ceremonies: threats of death

A pledge in a fraternity was taken to a beach area and told to “dig his own grave”. Seconds after he complied with orders to lie flat in the finished hole, the sides collapsed, suffocating him before he could be dug out.

Initiation ceremonies

Initiation ceremonies appear to be universal and difficult to extinguish.

Why do people do it?

Cognitive dissonance

The standard explanation for initiation ceremonies is that they serve to increase cohesiveness of the group, through the power of cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance refers to when your actions and thoughts are logically discrepant (e.g., “I’m joining a group even though they’re treating me badly”). This makes us anxious so we act to reduce the discrepancy. We can do this by either:

1. Changing our behaviours (e.g., leaving the group, thus weeding out the uncommitted) OR
2. Changing our attitudes (e.g., convince ourselves that we must really want to be in this group or else we wouldn’t accept the bad treatment).

Either way, the cohesiveness of the group is protected.
Cognitive dissonance

Aronson & Mills (1959) used the idea of cognitive dissonance to argue that people who go through a great deal of trouble or pain to attain membership in a group will value that group more than will those who attain membership without effort.

College women were invited to listen to a group discussion on sex. To gain permission to hear the group discussion, the women were told either (a) there was no entry criteria, (b) they had to undergo a mild electric shock, or (c) they had to undergo a strong electric shock.

To maximize dissonance, the subsequent discussion was designed to be boring.

Aronson & Mills (1959)

Both discussion and discussants were rated more positively when given severe shock.

Cognitive dissonance

Gerard & Mathewson (1966) later replicated this effect.

Women experienced either a mild or a painful electric shock prior to joining a group discussion. In some conditions the shock was described as a necessary pre-requisite to join the group, whereas in other conditions it was unrelated to the discussion group.

Gerard & Mathewson (1966)

Other explanations

We should be careful, though, that we don’t assume this is the only reason why initiations exist. Other explanations...

• Initiations are designed to socialize newcomers into their low power, low status roles
• Initiations are designed to reinforce the power and status of the oldtimers
• Initiations are socially acceptable ways to indulge in a primal need for aggression and domination
• Initiations are perpetuated through “schadenfreude”
• People enjoy the ceremony and tradition

In an analysis of 54 tribal cultures, Young (1965) found that those with the most dramatic and stringent initiation ceremonies were those with the greatest group solidarity.

Could be one reason why initiation ceremonies are often privately endorsed by leaders and officials even if they are publicly condemned.
Ostracism

One way of eliminating or punishing deviant group members is to simply ignore them.

Ostracism is an extremely powerful social tool ... arguably more powerful (and socially acceptable) than physical assault.

Ostracism

“A man’s social self is the recognition which he gets from his mates. No more fiendish punishment could be devised ... than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no-one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met cut us dead, and acted as if we were non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would well up in us, from which the cruelest bodily tortures would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all.”

(James, 1890)

Ostracism

“My second husband, who was an alcoholic, used to physically abuse me, but the bruises and scars healed very quickly, and I believe that mental cruelty is far more damaging than a black eye.”

Woman talking about being ostracized by her husband for 10 years

Ostracism everywhere

“Term "ostracism" comes from ostrakismos, a practice originating in Athens around 488BC used to remove those with dictatorial ambitions from the democratic state.

• Amish use meidung as their most severe form of punishment. Meidung requires that no-one (including family) talk or eat with the offender.
• Ostracism observed in most ethnic groups
• Ostracism used by adults to punish children (time-out)
• Ostracism used by children to punish adults
• Ostracism used by children to punish other children
• Ostracism used by group members to punish whistle-blowers and dissenters
• Social exclusion the primary form of punishment for criminals (jail, solitary confinement)
• Ostracism also observed among primates

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Ostracism used frequently

According to a recent poll, more than 75% of Americans indicated they’d received “the silent treatment” from their loved one, and 67% admitted that they used it on their loved ones.

Evidence for power of ostracism

During a brief recess in an experimental session, Pepitone & Wilpizeski (1960) had confederates conduct a conversation with one another but ignoring the target.

Compared to a control condition in which the target was included, the ignored target described themselves as relatively withdrawn, shy and alone.

Ball-tossing paradigm

During a brief recess in an experimental session, Williams & Sommer (1997) had confederates toss a ball to each other but ignore the target.

Sex differences emerged – men tried to look indifferent whereas women did less “face work”, looking crushed and depressed.

Men were more likely than women to attribute the ostracism to the personalities of the ostracizers (“It’s them, not me”).

On a subsequent collective task, women tried to work extra hard (social compensation) whereas men bludged (social loafing).

Ostracism

In a subsequent experiment, both men and women reported

- lower mood
- lower self-esteem
- reduced sense of control over their lives
- lower sense of belonging
- reduced sense that life is meaningful
- heightened awareness of death

Ostracism

- Amazingly, some of these effects occur even when the ostracisers aren’t known and can’t be seen (cyberostracism) and even when participants know that the computer has been instructed, for experimental purposes, to ostracize them!

Ostracism

Extracts from interviews with victims of long-term ostracism...

“This has ruined my life ... I have no chance for happiness now”

“You didn’t belong. You thought ‘I’m a mistake, I shouldn’t be here, I’m not wanted here”

“I felt helpless in so many areas of my life”

“It (the silent treatment) made me question ‘What’s it all for? Why am I still here?’ whereas before I never questioned that. I knew why I was there and I knew what it was all for”

“I often think to myself ‘when is this going to end?’ I’ve thought of suicide”
Ostracism

- Is the negative reaction to ostracism an evolutionary response that bypasses logic?
- In prehistoric times (and even now in some parts of the world) rejection from the group literally would mean death.
- Underscoring the evolutionary argument, Eisenberger et al. (2003) showed that cyber-ostracism causes electrical activity in the same part of the brain that “lights up” when people experience physical pain.
- Does ostracism unlock deep-seated existential fears?

Ostracizers

Ostracism clearly takes its toll on victims, but can also place a strain on the perpetrators.

Ciarocco et al. (2001) had participants either ignore other participants or talk with them freely.

Compared to people in the social inclusion condition, the ostracizers were later found to have more depressed mood and showed less persistence on problem-solving tasks and physical tasks.

"After 2 weeks I woke up one morning with a blinding flash of insight: ‘What are you doing to your son?’ In that short period of time my son had already become intimidated by this treatment – he did exactly what his mother said at all times and whenever he spoke it was in a quiet whisper.

To terminate the ostracism, however, was an extremely difficult process. I could only begin with grudging monosyllabic responses to his indirect overtures. I was only able to expand on these responses with the passing of time and it’s only now, 6 weeks since the ostracism began that our relationship appears to be getting back to pre-row normality."

Father talking about ostracizing his son.

"My father has given me the silent treatment whenever he’s been upset with me ever since I was 12 years old. Now I’m 40 years old and my father hasn’t talked to me for the last 6 months. Recently, he was in hospital and I was told he might die. I decided I had to go see him, even if he wasn’t talking to me. I walked up to him and held his hand and said ‘Oh daddy, please don’t leave me’. He looked at me, his eyes were welled-up with tears, then turned his head away from me. He still wouldn’t talk to me … his death would be the final silence.”


At the group level too....

Barlow, Louis, & Hewstone (2009) : White/European Australians’ perceptions that Indigenous Australians would reject them were associated with anxiety about interacting, avoiding Indigenous Australians, and avoiding sensitive issues.

And on the job ...

Penhaltgon, Louis, & Restubog (2009): Being treated badly by workgroup members was associated with depression and lower organisation-based self-esteem via perceived rejection.
Aggression and rejection
Williams and colleagues recently showed that ostracised individuals later display more aggression (interpersonally and in intergroup bias).

This backs up other research looking at the consequences of group rejection. Baumeister and colleagues (2001) told participants that they were not liked by other group members, and that they were likely to have troubles being accepted by others all their life.

The response was to display increased interpersonal aggression to strangers (e.g., giving them louder bursts of white noise).

Parallel to real-world incidents of mass murder?

Aggression and rejection
Leary et al. (2003) conducted case studies of 15 school shootings between 1995 and 2001 to examine the possible role of social rejection in school violence. Acute or chronic rejection—in the form of ostracism, bullying, and/or romantic rejection—was present in all but two of the incidents.

• Next week: Deviance, dissent, and criticism
• In the Tutes this week: The assignment!