**THE ROLES OF GROUPS IN SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF INDIVIDUALS**

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A group refers to two or more interdependent individuals who influence one another through social interactions that commonly include structures involving roles and norms, a degree of cohesiveness, and shared goals. Groups are everywhere, from political parties to families, friends, a missionary society, cults, and much, much more.

The moment we enter the world, we are part of a group. We have a family that we are dependent on, we interact with and are influenced by. Families are crucial for our survival and successful development. As we progress in life, we become part of other groups: school groups, friend groups, groups for our hobbies, sports teams, dance, etc. We enter the workforce and there are even more group opportunities. We are called social animals because of our need to associate with others. Throughout our lives, we use groups to get food, shelter, love and friendship. The importance of groups in and how they affect our lives means that we pay a lot of attention to our membership in them.

SOCIAL FACILITATION

Social facilitation is a phenomenon that occurs when the presence of people when an action is being performed by a lone individual improves the quality of that performance. This is best illustrated by one of the first experiments in social psychology, done by Norman Triplett in 1898. He observed that when competitive cyclists raced against others (compared to alone) they would have faster times. He believed that the presence of others would result in a better performance than when alone. So, he tested this prediction by timing children wind a fishing line apparatus in the presence of other children or winding the same apparatus without any children present. He found support for his prediction. In the presence of others, the children did wind the fishing line faster than when they were alone.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

People who get less social support from others are more likely to experience a poorer quality of life including being at risk of depression (George, Blazer, Hughes, & Fowler, 1989). Persons with more types of social relationships live longer and have less cognitive decline with aging, greater resistance to infectious disease, and better prognoses when facing chronic life-threatening illnesses.

A large body of work shows that people with more social group memberships have better psychological well-being, are healthier and live longer than those who belong to fewer social groups. Multiple important group memberships predict personal self-esteem over time. Membership in multiple important groups boosts personal self-esteem because people take pride in, and derive meaning from, important group memberships.

To also consider how belong in groups affects well-being, it's also useful to understand what happens when individuals are not in groups, that is, when they are socially isolated, or lonely. Loneliness is a major source of stress, which puts chronically lonely people at risk of chronic inflammation, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and stroke. Lonely people sleep more poorly, less often wake up rested, and have more trouble staying asleep. They are at risk for depression, poor executive function, accelerated cognitive decline, and impaired immune function ([Hawkley and Capitanio, 2015](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK513086/)). Loneliness is a candidate for an indicator of poor social health.

The beneficial effects of various forms of social connectedness such as interpersonal relationships, social networks, and social identities on our capacity to tackle and overcome adversity, and on our health and well-being more generally (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Indeed, because of their demonstrated potential to enhance health and well-being, group memberships have recently been characterized as “social cures” (see Jetten et al., 2011).

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