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COMMS 238

Professor Thompson

9 November 2021

Group Communication Theory

Intro to Group Communication

A group, as it relates to social structure, “is two or more humans who interact with one another, share similar characteristics, and have a collective sense of unity.” (Boundless Society.) We observe groups which exhibit these characteristics in many spheres of society. These groups range in both size and intensity, but remain cohesive so long as they continue sharing that sense of unity. That sense of unity is what initially causes the group to form, and is ultimately what keeps them together. Unity in group settings could be derived from a number of variables, namely values, opinions, or interests.

Communication is symbolic behavior that is used to relay a shared code that holds meaning to both operating parties. Communication forms vary, as it can have ties to culture and regional differences may disrupt the typical medium. Intentional sharing of information between multiple members is referred to as group communication. If an individual is sharing aspects of their personal life with a group, other members of that group may identify similarities between themselves and the speaker, and feel a sense of unity. This sense of unity when felt by two or more people can result in a social group.

In this group setting, communication of personal values, opinions, and interests links all of the members together. The effects of group communication occurring ranges in

impact from altering minor behaviors of members to seriously changing the way these people live their lives. We observe varying intensity of these groups in our society, and we all contribute to group communication as we live our own social lives.

Identification Theory

It is clear that people's individual identities are affected by their membership in social groups, the question is to what extent. Identification theory suggests that not only do social groups determine with whom an individual communicates, but that the membership defines that individual's identity. Dr Saul McLeod explains that "we [divide] the world into "them" and "us" based [on] a process of social categorization (i.e. we put people into social groups.)" (Simply Psychology.)

The main assumption of this theory is that people "adopt the identity of the group they have categorized themselves as belonging to." (Simply Psychology.) We recognize that our tendency as humans to exaggerate the extremes of a group, "whether positive traits within our own group, or negative traits amongst 'the others' - [exaggerates] the differences between 'us' and 'them' (ESRC.)" Therefore, past the primary assumptions, identification theory suggests that this group involvement increases prejudice and bias against others who are not a part of that same group.

Group's Effect on Members

We see that study of identity theory as it affects society shows development of an 'us vs them' mindset. This theory addresses knowledge about human nature exaggerating similarities within a group and differences between groups, combining that understanding with the fact that our perception of self depends on the social groups we are a part of.

The combination of these facts leads the identity theory to claim that normative beliefs amongst a group are strengthened as they over-perceive their unity, and that a group culture of 'us vs them' is facilitated as this strong unity works adversely against other social groups.

We derive from these explanations of shared beliefs and group culture the identity theory's claim about the effect on an individual's personal identification and self-concept. Identity theory recognizes that though the two sound like opposites, group membership plays a definitive role in personal identity. This theory asserts that because of strong unity and shared beliefs amongst social groups, individuals identify themselves by recognizing involvement in specific groups.

Groups' Effect on Social Movement

Identity theory brings one concerning issue to light, and it has to do with the claim of 'us vs them' mindsets amongst social group members. The issue is that as groups become more unified both together as members of the same group and more unified against members of other groups, reality and moderate views are lost.

We perceive potential negative consequences of this extreme mindset in society as we consider this applied to social differences such as political alignment, race, economic situation, and religion. If we continue this trend of alienating whatever groups we are not a part of, we will see a society fueled by complaints against these other groups - complaints that may be entirely illegitimate, but ingrained in our minds because if they are not with us, they must be against us.

Works Cited

Boundless Society

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-sociology/chapter/types-of-social-groups/#:~:text=In%20the%20social%20sciences%2C%20a%20collective%20sense%20of%20unity.&text=Ch,aracteristics%20shared%20by%20members%20of,social%20background%2C%20and%20kinship%20ties.>

Simply Psychology

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

ESRC

<https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/50-years-of-esrc/50-achievements/social-identity-us-and-them/>