

**How the Theories of Group Dynamics are Illustrated in the Films Primary  
(1960), Judgement at Nuremberg (1961), and The Manchurian Candidate (1962)**

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## **How the Theories of Group Dynamics are Illustrated in the Films Primary (1960), Judgement at Nuremberg (1961), and The Manchurian Candidate (1962)**

Three award-winning films from the 1960s that made a lasting impact on American cinema are Primary (1960), Judgement at Nuremberg (1961), and The Manchurian Candidate (1962). All three of these films feature groups: Primary (1960) features supporters of John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey, Judgement at Nuremberg (1961) features Nazis and American military court personnel, and The Manchurian Candidate (1962) features a Communist group. The groups in these three films illustrate various theories of group dynamics. The films Primary (1960), Judgement at Nuremberg (1961), and The Manchurian Candidate (1962) illustrate the group dynamics theories of groups joining together to achieve a common goal, taking more risks together than they would alone, and being living systems.

The films Primary (1960), Judgement at Nuremberg (1961), and The Manchurian Candidate (1962) illustrate the group dynamics theory of groups joining together to achieve a common goal. According to Pearson Education's textbook "Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills", a group is a number of individuals who join forces to achieve a common goal (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). The reason people join groups in the first place is so that they can achieve common goals that they would otherwise be unable to achieve on their own (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). It used to be up for debate whether or not a group could exist unless there was a common goal its members were seeking to achieve (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). But as early as 1936, Freeman defined a group as a group of people working to achieve a common goal

(Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Other social scientists have also applied this definition to groups, such as Mills and Deutsch (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). This concept of groups uniting to achieve a common goal is manifested in *Primary* (1960), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). For instance, in *Primary* (1960), the group of John F. Kennedy's supporters was working towards the common goal of making him the Democratic Party nominee and ultimately the President of the United States. Likewise, the group of Hubert Humphrey's supporters in *Primary* (1960) was working towards the common goal of making him the Democratic Party nominee and ultimately the President of the United States. In *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), the group of Nuremberg U.S. military court personnel was working towards the common goal of holding the German defendants accountable for their crimes against humanity in Nazi Germany. In *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), the group of Communists was working towards the common goal of murdering a presidential nominee to topple the American government and introduce a Communist regime. Thus, all three films show a group working towards a common goal. And so, in that way, the films *Primary* (1960), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) illustrate the group dynamics theory of groups joining together to achieve a common goal.

The films *Primary* (1960), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) illustrate the group dynamics theory of groups taking more risks together than they would alone. According to Pearson Education's textbook "Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills", one theory of group dynamics is that those in groups are more likely to take greater risks than they would alone (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Thus, those in groups adopt

more extreme positions and engage in more extreme behavior than they would on their own (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). In fact, when individuals join groups, they feel more anonymous and free to indulge in these extreme tendencies in the form of “rowdy, shocking, and illegal” behavior (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). The way this formulates is by one member engaging in “impulsive and antisocial behavior” and others following suit (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). This phenomenon of groups taking greater risks than they would alone is found in *Primary* (1960), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). In *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), the Communist group takes extreme positions and engages in extreme behavior that is shocking, impulsive, and antisocial. For starters, the Communist group decided to abduct a platoon from the U.S. army and take them to China. There, they hypnotized soldier Raymond Shaw into murdering two soldiers from his platoon. Then, the Communist group had Shaw murder his stepfather’s critic, Holborn Gaines. Shaw’s mother, who is part of the Communist group, has her son kill a Senator; Shaw then kills his own wife, Jocelyn. As if that wasn’t enough, the Communist group then hypnotizes Shaw to kill a presidential nominee so that his stepfather will become the nominee and establish a Communist regime. On their own, it’s unlikely that the Communist group members would have individually engaged in the extreme behaviors of abducting a platoon, hypnotizing the platoon members to kill each other, and plotting the killing of a presidential candidate to install a Communist regime. But in a large group, they felt empowered to participate in such extreme, shocking, and antisocial behavior. Likewise, in *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), the German defendants who were members of the Nazi Party engaged in extreme behavior that they probably would not have on their own. For

instance, defendant Ernst Janning sentenced a Jewish man to death. The Jewish man had supposedly had sex with a non-Jewish girl, making him guilty of “blood defilement”. There was clearly no evidence to support that the man had slept with the girl, but Judge Janning ordered his death regardless. Janning was a member of the Nazi group, and that group wholeheartedly endorsed and celebrated his actions. If Janning had not had universal support and encouragement from Nazi Germany in his decision to kill an innocent Jewish man, it’s unlikely that he would have engaged in this extreme and antisocial behavior on his own. Unlike the other two films, *Primary* (1960) does not depict any illegal, shocking, or antisocial behavior. However, the behavior the groups in the film exhibit can still be considered somewhat extreme. In *Primary* (1960), the John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey supporters turned out for rallies and sang songs for their respective candidates. Urban crowds gathered to cheer for John F. Kennedy and populist rural crowds gathered to cheer for Hubert Humphrey. In several scenes throughout the film, the crowds were filmed singing along to their respective candidate’s song. Hubert Humphrey’s campaign song was to the tune of “Davy Crockett” and John F. Kennedy’s song was to the tune of Frank Sinatra’s “High Hopes”. It is unlikely that the group’s members would have individually engaged in the semi-extreme behaviors of traveling to cheer on their preferred candidate and loudly singing campaign songs in public had they not been with a group.

Comment Explanation: Thus, all three films show people in a group taking more risks and engaging in more extreme behavior than they would on their own. And so, in that way, the films *Primary* (1960), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) illustrate the group dynamics theory of groups taking more risks together than they would alone.

The films *Primary* (1960), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) illustrate the group dynamics theory of groups being living systems. According to the textbook “The Nature of Group Dynamics”, one of the theories of group dynamics is that groups are living systems (Forsyth, 2009). After all, it is very rare - if not impossible - for groups to remain so stable that their structures and processes go unchanged for days, weeks, or years (Forsyth, 2009). As living systems, groups are theorized to move through five stages (Forsyth, 2009). In the “forming phase”, the group members “become oriented towards one another” (Forsyth, 2009). In the “storming phase”, conflicts arise in the group as its members “vie for status” and the group sets its goals (Forsyth, 2009). In the “norming phase”, these conflicts subside as the group becomes more structured and standards materialize (Forsyth, 2009). In the “performing phase”, the group moves beyond disagreement and “organizational matters” to focus on the work that needs to get done (Forsyth, 2009). Finally, at the “adjourning stage”, the group disbands (Forsyth, 2009). It is not uncommon for groups to cycle repeatedly through these different stages as group members try to maintain a balance between “task-oriented actions” and “emotionally expressive behaviors” (Forsyth, 2009). So, as evidenced by a group’s tendency to cycle through these stages, groups are indeed “living systems”: they acquire energy from their environment, maintain their structure, and grow over time (Forsyth, 2009). The films *Primary* (1960), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) all demonstrate that they are “living systems” by showing a group in one of the five stages described above. For instance, in the *Manchurian Candidate* (1962), the Communist group is shown moving through the “storming phase”. Conflict arises within the Communist group because Eleanor becomes

enraged that the group chose her own son to be their hypnotized assassin. In *Judgement at Nuremberg*, the Nazi group is in the “adjourning stage” because it has disbanded. The Nazis were now no longer in power and the German defendants who previously affiliated with the Nazi group did everything they could to disassociate themselves from that group. In *Primary* (1960), the John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey supporters were in the “performing phase”. They were showing up in droves for rallies and helping with the campaign full-force since the primary election was on the horizon. Because all three films show a group in one of the five stages, they illustrate the group dynamics theory that a group is a “living system”. And so, in that way, the films *Primary* (1960), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) illustrate the group dynamics theory of groups being living systems.

Thus, the films *Primary* (1960), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) illustrate the group dynamics theories of groups joining together to achieve a common goal, taking more risks together than they would alone, and being living systems. Understanding theories of group dynamics is crucial because group dynamics are central to education (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Now more than ever, students work together in groups to learn concepts (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Knowledge of group dynamics will also help us in the workforce, as it is crucial for effective businesses and industries (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Businesses rely on the high productivity generated by small groups to design/launch new products, conduct research/training, handle employee issues, etc (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Understanding group dynamics also helps us maintain a viable family, as families are small groups that face “diverse demands of modern life” (Johnson & Johnson,

2013). And finally, knowledge of group dynamics is crucial for long-term maintenance of psychological health (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). After all, supportive groups have been proven to reduce instances of psychological problems (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). So, to maximize our learning experience in education, thrive in the workforce, flourish in our family units, and maintain good mental health, it is a wise and valuable time investment to acquaint ourselves with theories of group dynamics. Fortunately, people are beginning to recognize the value of group dynamics and educational institutions across the world are including it in their curriculums. Surely, the study of group dynamics will continue to expand in the years to come.



### References

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