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Group Dynamics

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GROUP DYNAMICS

Many of the interpersonal relationships that link people to one another are initiated by and organized within groups. Cliques, teams, crews, families, gangs, peer groups, military squads, professional associations, clubs, congregations, and the like are all groups, for they are networks of interdependent individuals with relatively well-defined boundaries and stable memberships. Groups, in many cases, are the wellsprings of relationships, for by joining a group, one becomes linked interpersonally to the other members of that group. These relationships,

however, are rarely static. Just as the dynamic processes that occur in groups—communication among members, shifts in influence and power as members vie for social status, pressures put on individual members to adhere to the group's standards, the eruption of conflict and discord as members find that others do not share their beliefs or interests—change the group, so they also change the relationships among members that the group sustains. This entry examines the role groups play as a source of enduring and significant human relationships, as well as the significant impact of group dynamics on those relationships.

Memberships as Relationships

The basic unit of analysis in relationship research is the dyadic pairing—the one-to-one link of one person to another. Individuals in a dyadic relationship—a father and son, two lovers, a leader and a follower, a teacher and student, two best friends—are interdependent: Their actions, affect, and cognitions are causally interconnected. These causal connections, or ties, may be strong emotional bonds, such as the links between members of a family or a clique of close friends. The links may also be relatively weak ones that are easily broken with the passage of time or the occurrence of relationship-damaging events.

When two people join in a dyad, an elemental group comes into existence. Although many of the features of larger groups, such as coalition building, shifting exclusions, and hierarchy, are necessarily absent in such groups, the dyad nonetheless includes many defining features of a group: interaction between the members; interdependence as members influence other's thoughts, actions, and emotions; patterning of behaviors over time and situations; shared goals; and a sense of inclusiveness.

As groups grow in size, the number of relationships that sustain the group increases. The maximum number of relationships within a group, where everyone is linked to everyone else, is given by the equation $n(n - 1) / 2$, where n is the number of people in the group. Only one relationship is needed to create a dyad, but the number of links in a group increases exponentially with increases in group size. Ten links, for example, are needed to

join each member of a 5-person group to every other member, 45 for a 10-person group, and 190 relationships for a 20-person group. In consequence, many ties between members in groups are indirect. Persons A, B, and C might all be group members, but A's influence on C is always mediated by person B. In groups, too, members may feel as though they are tied to specific members, to smaller cliques of members, and to the group as a whole.

In many cases, groups are created deliberately when people realize that they must collaborate with others to accomplish desired goals. Groups also come into existence, sometimes unexpectedly, when formerly independent, unrelated individuals, prompted by their personal needs or the press of environmental and social circumstances, seek a connection to others. Groups may, for example, emerge gradually over time as individuals find themselves interacting with the same subset of individuals with greater and greater frequency. These repeated associations may foster feelings of attraction, as well as a sense of shared identity as the interactants come to think of themselves as a group and people outside the group begin to treat them as a group.

Groups also tend to grow in size and complexity over time, as more members are added through both deliberate and spontaneous elaboration. A dyad may remain a two-person group throughout its duration, but more typically, groups grow in size as the core seed group establishes relationships with other individuals. A clique of adolescents, for example, forms when two friends are joined by two other individuals and they begin to recruit other friends to join the group. Groups also form when otherwise unrelated individuals are drawn to a single individual who becomes the informal leader, or hub, for gradually developing bonds among the various members.

The same factors that influence the development of such personal relationships as friendships and romances also influence the formation of member-to-member relationships. Just as people form romantic relationships with those who are similar to them, they also join groups comprising others who are similar to them. These similarities include psychological qualities, such as attitudes, values, and beliefs, but also categorical and demographic characteristics, such as

race, ethnicity, sex, and age. Members also tend to have similar individual and group level goals; they are each seeking their own individual outcomes and accomplishments, but they are also unified in their pursuit of shared collective outcomes. Groups, therefore, tend to be homogenous rather than heterogeneous—birds of a feather flock together even in human groups. Diversity actually tends to reduce the overall cohesiveness of a group, even though it may increase a group's creativity and efficacy in dealing with complex problems that require a range of experiences and expertise.

Interdependence Theory's emphasis on the economics of membership—the rewards and the costs of membership in a particular group relative to membership in alternative groups—suggests that people join groups that provide them with the maximum level of valued rewards while incurring the lowest level of costs. Rewards include acceptance by others, camaraderie, assistance in reaching personal goals, developing new interests, social support, exposure to new ideas, and opportunities to interact with people who are interesting and attractive. But groups have costs as well: time, money, exclusion by other group members, forced association with individuals—both within the group and in other groups—who may not be particularly likable, and the occasional need to modify one's personal preferences to conform to the dictates of the group. As with other types of personal relationships, individuals are more satisfied with a group if the rewards outweigh the costs, but degree of investment in the group (commitment) and the value of alternative group memberships are also critical variables that must be considered when predicting one's willingness to continue as a group member. When members feel as though they have invested a great deal of themselves in their group, perhaps because they have been a member for a prolonged period or because they have expended considerable personal costs to gain membership, then they are loath to terminate their membership even when the value of the group (the rewards relative to costs) declines. Individuals are also likely to remain in the group when they have no alternative; in most cases, membership in a group of low worth is psychologically more satisfying than membership in no group at all.

Group Dynamics and Relationships

Groups create relationships between members and substantially influence the nature and duration of those relationships. Group dynamics are the influential actions, processes, and changes that occur within and between groups over time. These dynamic processes change the group in predictable ways, and these changes naturally affect the relationships among the members of the group.

Early in the life of the group, *formative processes* strengthen the relationships that link members to one another. Initially, individuals may be unwilling to disclose personal information to others and may feel little loyalty to the group and its members. As the group becomes more cohesive, however, members may shift from the superficial and banal to more personal or even provocative topics. As members become acquainted with each other, they form general impressions of each other, and as they interact, each one in turn strives to make a good impression. Over time, as intimacy increases, group members express their trust in and commitment to the group, with the result that the group becomes more cohesive. Group cohesion is the integrity, solidarity, or unity of the group and tends to be closely linked to the strength and durability of the relationships between the members. Members of cohesive groups express greater attraction toward one another, they are more satisfied with their membership, and they are likely to resist leaving the group. Members of cohesive groups also tend to categorize themselves as group members, and as a result identify strongly with the group and their fellow group members. These *social identity processes* result in changes in self-conception, as individuals increasingly think of themselves in ways that are consistent with their conception of the prototypical group member and less in terms of personal, idiosyncratic qualities.

Increases in the cohesiveness of the group generally go hand-in-hand with increased group structure, as members come to occupy specific roles within the group and norms emerge that provide standards for behavior. These *structural processes* organize the group's procedures, interaction patterns, and intermember relations. Distinctive networks of communication and interaction often develop in groups, as cliques or coalitions emerge within the group. This sociometric differentiation

means that some members of the group enjoy strong, positive interpersonal ties with others in the group, but others might become more isolated from others. Status differentiation in the group, in contrast, creates differences in power and influence. When first formed, group members may be equal in their capacity to influence other individuals and the group as a whole, but status-organizing processes tend to replace this egalitarian structure with a more hierarchical one. Particularly in larger groups, the role of leader develops as one or more individuals take on the responsibility for guiding other members, often by organizing, directing, coordinating, supporting, and motivating their efforts.

Social influence processes also significantly influence members' relation to each other and to the group. As interactions become patterned and members become more group centered, the pressure to conform becomes greater and individuals' resistance to these pressures becomes weaker. As a result, individuals often change when they join a group, as their attitudes and actions align to match those of their fellow group members. They are also more likely to conform to a group's judgment rather than risk ostracism or weakening their positive relations with others. In extreme cases, group members will perform behaviors that they would not otherwise undertake because they do not want to lose their group's approval.

Conflict processes are also omnipresent, both within the group and between groups. When conflict occurs in a group, the actions or beliefs of one or more members of the group are unacceptable to and resisted by one or more of the other members. These tensions tend to undermine the cohesiveness of the group as well as cause specific relationships within the group to weaken or break altogether. Many group and individual factors conspire to create conflict in a group, but the most common sources are competition, disagreements over the distribution of resources, power struggles, uncertainty and disagreement over a decision, and personal antipathies. As conflicts worsen, members shift from weak to strong tactics, and the group may break up into rival coalitions that embroil formerly neutral members in the conflict. Conflict also often generates strong emotions, with the result that members who were once friends may become partners in an escalating series of hostile verbal exchanges. If unresolved, the conflict may eventually result in

the dissolution of the group. Once the group disbands, all the relationship that the group created and sustained may be severed, but more likely, the members will manage to create a newly configured group that does not include those who are thought to be the primary sources of the tension.

Groups and Relationships

Membership in a group creates significant and far-ranging interpersonal consequences for members. Fleeting, impersonal associations do little to meet people's need for meaningful connections with others, but membership in groups that create stable, reliable alliances among members—neighborhoods, cliques of coworkers, athletic teams, social clubs, and the like—is associated with gains in well-being and resilience to stress. Moreover, even though group membership is not often considered as essential a type of interpersonal relationship as are friendship and love relationships, people in groups can, in time, become so intimately connected that these relationships become the psychological equivalent of intimate relationships. Groups can be the source of distress and disappointment for their members, but they also securely link individuals together in a complex web of social relationships. As social creatures, individuals are embedded in a rich network of mutual, collective, and reciprocal group relationships; thus, individuals' actions cannot be understood fully without considering the groups to which they belong.

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See also Cohesiveness in Groups; Conflict Patterns; Cooperation and Competition; Developing Relationships; Interdependence Theory

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GUILT AND SHAME

Shame and guilt are members of a family of self-conscious emotions evoked by self-reflection and self-evaluation. People feel shame, guilt, or both when they fail, sin, or cause harm to another person. As a result, shame and guilt are often referred to as “moral” emotions because of the presumed role they play in fostering moral behavior. Although both are negative emotions precipitated by failures and transgressions, shame and guilt are not synonymous. Research suggests guilt is the more adaptive emotion, benefiting relationships in a variety of ways. In contrast, shame brings with it hidden costs that may actually interfere with interpersonal relationships. This entry begins with an overview of the difference between shame and guilt, followed by a discussion of the adaptive nature of guilt, and the maladaptive nature of shame. We conclude with a discussion of group-based shame and guilt.

What Is the Difference Between Shame and Guilt?

People often use the terms *guilt* and *shame* interchangeably. But recent research indicates these are distinct emotions. Some theorists have suggested shame is a more “public” emotion, arising from public exposure and disapproval, whereas guilt is a more “private” experience arising from self-generated pangs of conscience. As it turns out, research has not supported this public-private distinction regarding the actual characteristics of emotion-eliciting situations. For example, when researchers analyze people's descriptions of personal shame and guilt experiences, shame-inducing behaviors are no more likely to occur in public than are guilt-inducing behaviors.

Where does this notion that shame is a more public emotion come from? Although shame- and guilt-inducing situations are equally public in the likelihood that others are present and aware of one's failure or transgression, people pay attention