

# Criticism of a social group



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The intergroup sensitivity effect occurs when people perceive criticism of a social group they belong to. Group members' evaluation of the criticism depends largely on the source of the message. According to social identity theory outgroup members are typically evaluated less positively than ingroup members because people are motivated to perceive their group (and themselves) as more favorable than a reference group. Applying this ingroup preference to intergroup criticisms; outgroup critics are evaluated less positively than ingroup critics, and their comments arouse greater sensitivity than do the same comments made by an ingroup member. Since ingroup members receive more positive appraisal, their criticisms are perceived as more constructive, provoke less sensitivity, and are agreed with more. Research by Hornsey and Imani (2003) supported the intergroup sensitivity effect by revealing that ingroup critics were met with less defensiveness than were outgroup critics, regardless of the amount of experience they had with the ingroup.

The black sheep effect is another phenomenon related to social identity. When ingroup member deviate from the defining norms of the group they threaten the image of the group. One goal of group membership is positive distinctiveness; to be distinct from a reference group in a more positive way. When ingroup members deviate from norms that define the group they threaten the positive distinctiveness of the group. These individuals are then negatively evaluated. The black sheep effect refers to more negative evaluations of ingroup deviants compared to outgroup members, deviant or otherwise. Outgroup deviants cannot threaten the positive distinctiveness of the group like an ingroup member can.

Groups may have a tendency to agree on more extreme positions than those held by individuals through a process called group polarization. Often this occurs following group discussion. Two theories may account for this phenomenon, social comparison theory (SCT) and persuasive arguments theory (PAT).

According to SCT, people are motivated to evaluate and present themselves positively, in order to do this an individual must be continually processing information about how other people present themselves and adjust their self-presentations accordingly. People also want to be perceived to be better than average so they present themselves in a more favorable light. When all members of a group engage in this comparing process the result is a shift in a direction of perceived greater value. To do this people engage in removal of pluralistic ignorance, where they present their views as compromises between the ideal and the desire to not be too deviant from the group. People then tend to shift towards the ideal position, leading to group polarization. The bandwagon effect, or one-upmanship, also occurs because people want to be different and distinct from other people in their group in a more favorable direction. This happens when people infer the norm of the group, then shift their response to a more ideal position.

The persuasive arguments theory (PAT) suggests that an individual's choice or position on an issue is a function of the number and persuasiveness of pro and con arguments that that person recalls from memory when formulating their position. Discussion causes polarization because it provides persuasive arguments to the individual. These arguments tend to be evaluated on their validity and novelty. A meta-analysis by Isenberg (1986) suggested that,

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while there is evidence for both SCT and PAT as mediators of group polarization, PAT tends to have a stronger effect. While both may occur simultaneously, there is evidence that they are two conceptually independent processes.

One of the primary ways that individuals maintain independence from norms associated with social groups is through social support. Allen (1975) proposed that social support serves to provide an assessment of physical and social reality. Under situations of conformity (experimentally manipulated by consensus on an incorrect answer) social support encourages individuals to express responses inconsistent with those of the group. Social support counteracts negative social factors related to dissent by reducing anxiety related to potential rejection, and reducing the perception that the group will make negative dispositional attributions about the dissenter. On a cognitive basis, social support helps nonconformity by simply breaking the expectation of group consensus, by cognitively restructuring the meaning of a given stimulus, and by reassuring the dissenting person that they have not lost touch with reality. Nonconformity aided by social support is enhanced by previous social contact with the supporter, and occur whether the supporter is an ingroup or outgroup member (as long as the conformity issue is not related to the salient social identity).

The effectiveness of minority influence relies on a number of factors. According to Moscovici & Faucheux (1972) one of the main factors is consistency of the message. People are motivated to seek consistency in their social world and it is easier to persuade individuals of the legitimacy of

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one's view on issues when the message is consistent, particularly when the answer is unknown (e. g. how to “ fix” ☹ the economy). Moscovici also suggests that rigid minorities tend to have a less direct influence than more flexible minorities, which may imply that Palin needs to portray her views as more moderate. Alvaro and Crano (1997) suggest that indirect minority influence may be effective at changing attitudes. In an effort to effect popular opinion about highly contested and core political issues (e. g. abortion rights) she ought to target an associated, less contentious issue (e. g. sex education in public schools). In order for her to have any success at indirect influence however, she needs to present herself as an ingroup member. She might focus on her identity as a woman, a mother, cite a long familial American heritage or any other potential cross-cutting categories. She will have more success if she portrays herself as more similar to the majority of Americans.

Old fashioned prejudice may be characterized as overt prejudice where discrimination is obvious and public. Modern prejudice can be conceptualized as aversive racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) which is characterized by ambivalence between feelings and beliefs associated with a egalitarian value system and unacknowledged negative feelings and beliefs about African Americans. For most Americans an egalitarian value system is important to the self-concept, demanding a nonprejudiced self-image. This is the result of sympathy for victims of past injustices leading to support of public policies that promote racial equality. However, negative attitudes toward African Americans are still pervasive. These feelings and beliefs may be derived from a historical and contemporary culturally racist contexts (creating

uneasiness or discomfort). They may be biases derived from cognitive mechanisms that contribute to the development of stereotypes. They may also develop from any combination of historical stereotypes, institutional racism, need for self-esteem, or economic competition.

As opposed to the direct link between old fashioned racism and acts of prejudice, aversive racism has more complex antecedents for expression of prejudice. When there is weak, ambiguous or conflicting normative structure defining appropriate interaction or if a prejudiced response can be rationalized or justified through attribution to some factor other than race, acts of prejudice are more likely to occur. When there is clearly appropriate normative structure and a prejudiced response cannot be rationalized acts of prejudice are less likely to occur.

Deindividuation effects have classically been described as anti-normative behavior stemming from decreased self-awareness and decreased self-evaluation, occurring when the presence and identity of a group supersede individual identity. Specific antecedents of deindividuation effects were proposed by Zimbardo (1969), which included anonymity, sensory overload, novel situations, loss of individual responsibility and substance abuse. Zimbardo proposed that deindividuation effects manifested as behaviors that were violations of norms and largely characterized as antisocial. Diener (1980) further elaborated on the effect as decreased self-awareness by an individual, making them responsive to external stimulus over internal monitoring and planning. It is important to note that these classical conceptions of deindividuation effects largely as an individual process, rather than a group process.

A more contemporary model that challenges classical conceptualizations of deindividuation is the social identity perspective on deindividuation effects (SIDE; Reicher et al., 1995). The SIDE model proposes that deindividuation effects fall into one of two categories; (a) cognitive effects and (b) strategic effects, depending on whether the self or other group members are anonymous. Cognitive effects are believed to occur in relation to others being anonymous or identifiable. When group members are anonymous the individual has a tendency to perceive indicators of group membership, making social identity and group norms salient, however when other group members are identifiable, individual identity becomes salient, decreasing the power of group norms. In contrast, strategic effects occur when the self is either anonymous or identifiable to the group. They are named as such because rather than being involved in perception of social identity, they are involved in displaying social identity. Studies suggested that when an individual was anonymous they expressed more punishable than unpunishable ingroup norms, when they were identifiable, they expressed more unpunishable than punishable ingroup norms. When identity is available to an ingroup, individuals express group norms in an effort to enhance social identity, but when identity is available to an outgroup, individuals are less expressive of group norms, possibly for fear of retribution. The SIDE model suggests that crowd behaviors related to anonymity rarely result from deindividuated states, rather that behaviors were context dependant and consistent with group norms.