

SO RIGHT IT'S WRONG: GROUPTHINK AND THE UBIQUITOUS NATURE OF POLARIZED GROUP DECISION MAKING

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A review of the research and debate regarding Janis's groupthink model leads to the conclusion that after some 30 years of investigation, the evidence has largely failed to support the formulation's more ambitious and controversial predictions, specifically those linking certain antecedent conditions with groupthink phenomena. Moreover, research in the years since the theory's inception indicates that most of the "groupthink" phenomena described by Janis occur in a far wider range of group settings than he originally envisioned. Collectively, these data strongly suggest that Janis erred when identifying the necessary and sufficient antecedent conditions for groupthink. A *ubiquity model* of groupthink is introduced that specifies a revised set of antecedent conditions to explain why groupthink-like behavior occurs in mundane, temporary, and even minimal groups and yet is not an invariant feature of group decision making.

"I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him."

—Marc Anthony, in *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare)

I. The History of a Fine Idea

Janis's model of groupthink is arguably the most widely publicized application of psychological principles to high-level military, political, and technical group decision making in the history of experimental psychology. This had to have pleased its author, who offered this formulation as a compelling

bridge between principles documented by laboratory research and “real-life” problems (e.g., [Janis, 1971](#)). As such the model “legitimized” the importance of decades of academic research on social influence and group process, much of which focused on perceptual and attitudinal judgments having little or no material consequence for participants.¹ The model has been widely cited (cf. [Fuller & Aldag, 1998](#)), and is still described as a valid model in most texts within social psychology (e.g., [Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2003](#); [Baron & Byrne, 2000](#); [Forsyth, 1999](#); [Lord, 1997](#)) and in many introductory psychology texts as well (e.g., [Myers, 2004](#)).

The longevity of this broad coverage both reflects and contributes to the common acceptance of groupthink as a valid and verified phenomenon not only by the lay public but by many academic psychologists as well ([Fuller & Aldag, 1998](#); [Turner & Pratkanis, 1998](#)). As a result, it is disconcerting to find that there is substantial skepticism regarding this model among those involved scholars who have offered detailed reviews of the groupthink and group decisionmaking literature (e.g., [Aldag & Fuller, 1993](#); [Esser, 1998](#); [Hogg, 1992](#); [Kerr & Tindale, 2004](#); [Kramer, 1998](#); [Longley & Pruitt, 1980](#); [McCauley, 1989](#); [Park, 1990](#); [Paulus, 1998](#); [Whyte, 1998](#)). This chapter examines a possible explanation for this paradoxical state of affairs, in which a model is widely accepted as valid despite the deep concerns of those most familiar with the research literature.

One particular strength of the original groupthink model was that it offered an array of testable assumptions regarding antecedent conditions, symptoms, deficient decision-making processes, and outcome variables. According to Janis, very strong group cohesion was the primary antecedent condition for groupthink, provided that it was complemented by several other group and situational antecedent conditions (see just below) ([Janis, 1982](#); [Janis & Mann, 1977](#); cf. [Hogg & Hains, 1998](#)). Janis felt that such intense cohesion was likely to be found in very high-echelon decision groups such as Kennedy’s cabinet or Nixon’s inner circle of advisors, where the perks of membership are at intoxicating levels and the credibility of fellow members is extremely high. The logic here is that in such group contexts, normative and informational social influence should both be very powerful forces.

As noted, however, Janis assumed that strong group cohesion was likely to evoke groupthink only when supported by certain secondary antecedent conditions. These conditions referred to the nature of the group and the situation. In terms of group characteristics the secondary antecedent

¹For example, [Baron et al. \(1996\)](#) found only three studies in the conformity literature manipulating judgment importance some 60 years after [Sherif’s \(1935\)](#) initial report of manipulated social influence.

conditions were the insulation of the group from outside influences, the lack of a tradition of impartial leadership (i.e., directive leadership), a lack of group norms favoring methodical search procedures, and homogeneity of member attitude or ideology. The secondary situational antecedent conditions included high stress from an external threat, group insulation from critics, and low situational member self-esteem either because of recent failure or the complexity of the current decision problem.

Collectively these antecedent conditions were thought to provoke a tendency for concurrence seeking among members. This concurrence seeking was presumed to provoke (or manifest itself as) a series of groupthink symptoms. These symptoms fell into three clusters; overestimation of the ingroup (as strong, smart, invulnerable, morally superior), with corresponding negative stereotyping regarding the outgroup (as weak, immoral, vulnerable, stupid, and wrong), close-mindedness (e.g. rationalization of doubt), and pressures for uniformity (via mindguards, self censorship, illusion of unanimity) (Janis & Mann, 1977). These symptoms in turn were thought to lead to a number of defective decision-making processes. This list included: inadequate contingency plans for failure; inadequate information search; biased assessment of risks, costs, benefits, and moral implications (e.g., inadequate consideration of worst-case scenarios); incomplete consideration of the full range of decision options; and failure to reconsider the extent to which original/fundamental objectives were served by the advocated action. These flawed decision-making processes were then hypothesized to lead to the type of grossly inadequate, polarized (i.e., extreme) and premature group solutions that often, in retrospect, astound us by their hubris, absence of insight, and lack of concern with the consequences and likelihood of failure. The classic example here, of course, was the Kennedy group's decision to support the Bay of Pigs invasion. A more recent example is the collective assumption of the Bush White House that the U.S. invasion and rebuilding of Iraq would be a relatively painless and rapid affair, with U.S. troops greeted with cheers and flowers, and the costs of nation building minimized by sales of Iraqi oil and the cooperation of a grateful nation.

Janis's careful dissection of the group decision process, particularly his insightful specification of defective decision procedures and dysfunctional group reactions (symptoms), revitalized discussion and consideration of group decision-making as a theoretical topic. As such, it undoubtedly contributed to continued interest on topics such as group polarization and minority influence among others. Moreover, given the careful specification of antecedents, symptoms, and consequences within this model, it seemed amenable to a variety of empirical tests. Unfortunately, on closer inspection, recreating many of the antecedent conditions described by Janis (e.g., intense

ingroup cohesion, meaningful threat, homogeneity of values, group insulation, etc.) proved difficult under laboratory conditions. As a result, controlled lab studies are relatively scarce in this literature (cf. Mullen, Anthony, Salas, & Driskell, 1994), with the majority of reports taking the form of group decision case studies (e.g., Esser & Lindoerfer, 1989) or historical sampling studies (e.g., Herek, Janis, & Huth, 1987; Tetlock, Peterson, McGuire, Chang, & Feld, 1992).

In short, as various writers have noted (e.g., Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Esser, 1998; Mullen et al., 1994) we have far fewer empirical tests of this formulation than one would expect given its widespread effect. For example, Mullen et al. (1994) conducted an exhaustive literature search for their meta-analytic review of groupthink-cohesion research and uncovered only nine independent empirical studies examining Janis's key prediction regarding the negative relation between group cohesion and decision quality. Likewise, Esser's more general review (1998) identified 11 laboratory "groupthink" studies and some 17 historically based reports. This stands in stark contrast to the number of studies on other group-related topics that became popular at roughly the same time. For example, some 10 years ago a meta-analysis of the minority group influence literature identified 97 relevant studies (Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, & Busceme, 1994), and a PsychINFO search by the current author identified 99 studies from 1974 until the present that listed group polarization or a related synonym (i.e., risky shift or choice shift) in the title.

What is even more disconcerting is that the results reported in the groupthink literature are not particularly encouraging. Certain variables (e.g., homogeneity of background, group member insecurity, threat) have been largely ignored by the laboratory literature. Only one or two studies manipulate factors such as threat level (Turner, Pratkanis, Probasco, & Leve, 1992) or time pressure (Courtright, 1978; Neck & Moorhead, 1995), and Moorhead and Montanari (1986) report the only lab study that examines the effect of in-group homogeneity on decision quality. In these particular cases, certain results are, in fact, congruent with the model. For example, Turner et al. found that threat of public scrutiny, coupled with high cohesion, did in fact lower decision quality. However, it seems premature to draw any confident conclusions regarding the effect of threat or time pressure on the basis of these isolated studies.

The variable of cohesion has drawn noticeably more research attention. The majority of the laboratory studies on this topic examine the key prediction that high group cohesion will impair group decision quality (assuming the other antecedent conditions are met). Sadly, the results regarding the effects of group cohesion are inconsistent and often contradictory to prediction (see Esser, 1998; Fuller & Aldag, 1998; Hogg & Hains, 1998;

McCauley, 1989; Mullen et al. 1994; Paulus, 1998).² The results of historical sampling studies are also disappointing. For example, Tetlock et al. (1992) found that neither degree of crisis nor cohesion was reliably related to decision quality of major national policy decisions.

The results remain just as disappointing when one considers alternative conceptions of cohesion. Hogg and Hains (1998) contrasted measures of cohesion based on group identification and “social attraction” (for the group as a whole) against a measure of cohesiveness based on individualized assessments of interpersonal attraction. In this laboratory study, groups role-played a group decision about closing a popular on-campus theater. Although cohesion based on group identification was positively correlated with five symptoms of groupthink at significant (or near significant) levels after covarying out other possible confounds, it was also negatively correlated with five other symptoms of groupthink at a significant level (23 symptoms were assessed in total; see Table I, p. 335). Very similar data patterns were observed on the social attraction and personal friendship measures of cohesion (see Table I, below). In short, regardless of measure, cohesion was positively related to only a few symptoms of groupthink as a rule and was negatively related to roughly the same or greater number of symptoms within the very same discussion groups. Given that Hogg and Hains did their best to create time pressure and directive leadership within these groups, this set of outcomes offers little support for the “cohesion hypothesis.”³

The historical case studies do suggest some support for the prediction that philosophical homogeneity and ingroup insulation will impair decision quality when one conducts comparisons across case history examples (McCauley, 1989). In addition, directive leadership has also been linked to poor decision-making in both laboratory groupthink research and historical reports (e.g. Esser, 1998; McCauley, 1989; but see Peterson, Owens, Tetlock, Fan, & Martorana, 1998). These results, however, do not represent

²In fairness, Mullen et al. (1994) does find some marginally significant meta-analytic support for the prediction that cohesion impairs decision quality among those three experimental tests (of 17) in which certain conditions specified by Janis (1972) were experimentally activated (directive leadership, weak exploration of alternatives). Note however, that the reported effect size was low $r = -.176$, as were the number of key tests. This perhaps explains the continued skepticism of various reviewers regarding this factor (e.g., Fuller & Aldag, 1998; Hogg & Hains, 1998; Paulus, 1998).

³Note that these data also do not provide much support for Hogg and Hains’s contention (1998, p. 323) that cohesion based on either social attraction or group identification is more predictive of groupthink than cohesion based on friendship or interpersonal attraction despite the statements made in their abstract (p. 323).

TABLE I
 NUMBER AND DIRECTION OF SIGNIFICANT AND MARGINALLY SIGNIFICANT CORRELATIONS
 BETWEEN THREE MEASURES OF COHESION AND 23 SYMPTOMS OF GROUPTHINK IN
 HOGG AND HAINS (1998)

Measure	Number of positive r 's	Number of negative r 's
Group identification	4 ^a [1] ^b	5
Mean r ^c	.34	.28
Social attraction	2 [1]	4 [1]
Mean r	.39	.31
Personal friendship	2 [6]	2 [5]
Mean r	.15	.21

Adapted from Table I, Hogg M.A. and Hains, S.C. (1998). Friendship and group identification: A new look at the role of cohesiveness in groupthink. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 28, 323–341. Copyright © 1998 by John Wiley & Sons Limited. Adapted with permission.

^aNumbers without brackets are the number of correlations reported with p values of .05 or lower. Maximum possible number of correlations = 23.

^bNumbers inside brackets are the number of marginally significant correlations (all reported with p values of .08 or lower, following the reporting convention adopted by Hogg & Haines, 1998).

^cMean r computed over significant and marginally significant correlations.

particularly strong support for the groupthink model given that such factors would seem likely to produce defective decision-making even in the total absence of “groupthink reactions.” A directive leader who offers a preferred solution and pushes for a rapid decision while also discouraging debate is also likely to increase the likelihood of a premature and incomplete group solution. In contrast, a leader who instead urges a group to follow a prescribed set of decision-making procedures that encourage debate and the free expression of ideas is likely to elevate decision quality and divergence of opinion (Peterson, 1997). Similar comments can be made about those studies, documenting the fact that variables such as ingroup insulation, or time pressure impair group decision quality (Courtright, 1978, Neck & Moorhead, 1995). In contrast, support for the more innovative predictions linking crisis, group member insecurity, and intense cohesion to groupthink outcomes are rare.

On the basis of this disappointing lack of support for these key predictions, the great majority of reviews cited above recommend revisions, replacement, or even outright rejection of the model (see Table II). Other reviewers share the concerns we express above regarding the uncritical acceptance of the model (e.g., Fuller & Aldag, 1998). For example, Turner

TABLE II
SAMPLE OF REVIEWERS' COMMENTS

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- Aldag and Fuller (1993):** "The groupthink model has served a valuable role in generating interest in group problem-solving . . . however, the model has not incorporated two decades of research and has received limited empirical support and is restrictive in scope" (p. 549).
- Brown (2000):** "It clearly is not the case, as Janis had surmised, that cohesion leads to poor decision making. Indeed, all the evidence suggests that it is unrelated to decision quality or may even be associated with better decision processes" (p. 219).
- Esser (1998):** "The small number laboratory tests of groupthink theory conducted in the 25 years since Janis first presented the theory has not been sufficient to provide an evaluation of each of the antecedents of groupthink let alone an overall evaluation of the complete theory" (p. 133).
- Fuller and Aldag (1998):** "In our view, groupthink is a compelling myth. Like other myths it tells of things that never were but always are. . . . How did we come to so widely and gladly accept it in the absence of compelling evidence?" (p. 177).
- Kramer (1998):** "New evidence including recently declassified documents, rich oral histories, and informative memoirs by key participants in these decisions have become available for scholars, casting new light on the decision-making process behind both the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam. Much of this new evidence does not support Janis's original characterization of these processes" (p. 236).
- McCauley (1989):** "There has been surprisingly little research aimed at Janis's hypotheses. . . . The results of manipulating cohesion are relatively weak and uncertain" (pp. 258-9).
- Paulus (1998):** "There's little evidence for the negative role of cohesion in group decision-making. There's fairly consistent evidence for the role of directive leadership. For most of the other elements of the research literature, the evidence is rather limited. There certainly is not compelling support for the full model. . . . The impact of the antecedent conditions in the existence of various symptoms of groupthink is likely to depend upon a variety of task and contextual features" (p. 366).
- Raven (1998):** "Even if most of us can identify some flaws in the groupthink analysis, we would still give Janis a lot of credit for his careful and scholarly analysis, his relating a broad body of literature and group processes and group dynamics to the understanding of the new series of very significant social political events" (p. 359).
- Turner and Pratkanis (1998):** "The unconditional acceptance of the groupthink phenomenon without due regard to the body of scientific evidence surrounding it leads to unthinking conformity to a theoretical standpoint that may be invalid for the majority of circumstances" (p. 112).
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and Pratkanis (1998) state, "The unconditional acceptance of the groupthink phenomenon without due regard to the body of scientific evidence surrounding it leads to unthinking conformity to a theoretical standpoint that may be invalid for the majority of circumstances" (p. 112).

Actually, this skepticism regarding the groupthink model surfaced as early as 1980 when Longley and Pruitt (1980) raised several sensible criticisms

of Janis's groupthink analysis. Among these were the dangers posed by selective historical analysis, the possibility that the groupthink symptoms in Janis's historical examples (particularly self censorship of dissent) might be more a result of group stage (early formation) than a function of Janis's antecedent conditions (crisis, cohesion, directive leadership, etc.), and the argument that suppression of dissent might be functional in certain group settings. Added to these concerns was the conceptual ambiguity regarding antecedents that could be viewed as symptoms (e.g., directive leadership, cohesion, pressure for consensus) and symptoms that could be viewed as antecedents (e.g., outgroup stereotypes, illusion of consensus).⁴ However, Longley and Pruitt's critical analysis did little to stem the excitement and attention directed at the groupthink model despite the lack of support reported from the earliest lab-simulation studies (e.g., [Flowers, 1977](#); [Fodor & Smith, 1982](#)).

Primary support for the groupthink model in these years stemmed from a number of sophisticated and ambitious historical sampling analyses (cf. [Esser, 1998](#)). Thus, for example, [Tetlock \(1979\)](#) conducted a content analysis of statements and speeches made by policy makers and verified that these statements were more simplistic and defensive (i.e., protective of the in-group) in cases that Janis had identified as instances of groupthink (see [Tetlock et al., 1992](#) for a related study employing Q sort procedures). In another historical sampling study, [Herek et al. \(1987\)](#) had historical experts rate the quality of 19 randomly chosen U.S. policy decisions while other trained raters scanned records for procedural symptoms of groupthink. As predicted, the results indicated a negative relationship between symptoms and decision quality (see also [Hensley & Griffin, 1986](#)).

The problem here is that there is not a lot of controversy regarding these specific predictions. It is not surprising that *symptoms* of groupthink (e.g., self censorship, rejection of criticism) or the *defective decision processes* these symptoms are thought to produce (e.g., poor information search, inadequate risk assessment) lead to low-quality decisions. Indeed, it would be remarkable if they did not. Rather, the excitement of the groupthink model lies in

⁴There is also some degree of ambiguity regarding the extent to which certain symptoms of groupthink (e.g., illusions of consensus) cause or are caused by various characteristics of defective decision making (e.g., failure to fully evaluate the likelihood and costs of failure). A related point is that the model depicted by [Janis and Mann \(1977\)](#) implies that the desire for concurrence seeking mediates most of the symptoms. However, an alternative view is that concurrence seeking itself may just serve as one of several of these symptoms. Finally, there is ambiguity regarding whether the term groupthink refers only to concurrence seeking tendencies, the set of symptoms originally specified by Janis, or the entire process of antecedent conditions, symptoms, defective decision processes, and polarized, defective decision-making. This chapter uses the last interpretation.

the prediction that the *antecedent conditions* (e.g., cohesion and crisis combined with directive leadership, insulation, a shared ideology, insecurity of members, etc.) would generally produce these symptoms and their consequences. Sadly, the historical studies, like their laboratory counterparts, did little to verify such relationships. As noted above, [Tetlock et al. \(1992\)](#) found that in the historical cases they examined, neither situational urgency (crisis) nor social cohesion, two of the major antecedent conditions, had much effect on decision quality, whereas the historical analysis offered by [Herek et al. \(1987\)](#) for some reason makes no mention of these antecedent conditions at all, leading the reader to suspect that in this study, findings regarding these antecedent variables were disappointing, null, or incoherent. In light of these results, the similar failure of the laboratory studies to verify the cohesion predictions is particularly troubling. Equally disconcerting is the fact that despite the chorus of criticism from reviewers, the groupthink model continues to be widely accepted as originally described, be it in textbooks, educational videos (e.g. [Timmons, 1991](#)), research articles, Web sites, or headlines (e.g. [Fuller & Aldag, 1998](#)).

How might we explain the resilience of this model in the face of sparse, uneven, and contradictory findings? One answer is that, despite the existence of discordant data as far back as Flowers's initial report in 1977, this model has a certain "ring of truth" that resonates with readers ([McCauley, 1998](#)). The symptoms and mechanisms described by the model seem familiar to us. They echo group processes we have experienced in our own social interactions. As a result, we are predisposed to accept the validity of such a formulation given only a modicum of supporting data. This tacit acceptance perhaps explains the rapid dissemination of the groupthink notion, at first within academic psychology and related decision sciences and soon beyond.

II. The Ubiquity of Groupthink

My contention is that we are familiar with "groupthink" symptoms and processes because the concurrence-seeking, illusion of consensus, self censorship, and ingroup defensiveness described by Janis are far more widespread phenomena than he envisioned. After all, few of us have been to lunch at Hyannisport or Camp David, but most of us, I suspect, have been in settings in which our private reservations regarding some group option have been assuaged by a seeming consensus of our group mates or where our concerns about having pleasant social interactions and our own social acceptance take precedence over any need to explore every last objection and nuance to a collective decision.

Put differently, the premise I offer in this chapter is that Janis's probing and insightful analysis of historical decision making was correct about the symptoms of groupthink and their relationship to such outcomes as the suppression of dissent, polarization of attitude, and poor decision quality and yet wrong about the antecedent conditions he specified. I contend that not only are these conditions not necessary to provoke the symptoms of groupthink but that they often will not even amplify such symptoms given the high likelihood that such symptoms will develop in the complete absence of intense cohesion, crisis, group insulation, and so on.

A. HAIL CAESAR

In short, I argue that the frequent failure to verify the more ambitious of Janis's predictions regarding the causal role played by the model's antecedent conditions stem from the general prevalence of consensus seeking, group polarization, outgroup stereotyping, and the suppression of dissent in a wide array of group settings (see [Levine & Thompson, 1996](#)). As a result, such phenomena will often be at close to ceiling levels even in the absence of intense cohesion, crisis, homogeneous values, and so forth. Although such ceiling effects may not be always present (see below), they may be common enough to blunt the effect of Janis's antecedent conditions, especially when relatively weak laboratory manipulations of threat and cohesion are employed. From this perspective, then, Janis was describing group processes that are likely to occur in "everyday," mundane group decision settings as well as in "rarified" high-status groups. In fairness, [Janis \(1971\)](#) did acknowledge that on occasion, groupthink processes might occur in "everyday" groups, but the clear implication was that such events would be rare. My contention is that the implications of Janis's model are far more sweeping than he envisioned.

B. CONFORMITY

What evidence is there in defense of these assertions? A variety of findings now exist that support the view that many of the group symptoms and defective decision characteristics associated with groupthink are often found in "ordinary" groups. First, there is the fact that strong conformity effects have been amply documented in laboratory experiments almost since the inception of modern experimental social psychology despite the fact that in almost all cases, the groups created in such studies operate in the absence of crisis, pronounced cohesion, philosophical homogeneity, and so on. As just

one example, in [Sherif's \(1935\)](#) classic report, social influence in the auto-kinetic paradigm was noted on 80% of recorded trials ([Baron & Kerr, 2003](#)). Although conformity is typically lower in the Asch paradigm (e.g., approximately 33% in [Asch, 1956](#)), several studies report stronger conformity effects over trials using the Asch line-matching paradigm, provided that the judgment is characterized by a moderate degree of ambiguity. Thus for example, [Deutsch and Gerard \(1955\)](#), using the Asch paradigm, reported conformity on 57% of the 12 critical trials (i.e., mean conformity score = 6.87) when participants had their group membership stressed and worked from memory (see [Fig. 1](#)). Indeed, even in nonambiguous conditions, [Asch \(1957\)](#) reported that 76% of his participants conformed on at least one critical trial.

Of course conformity in such studies is not completely analogous to the social influence effects characterizing groupthink. Simple conformity studies generally do not entail active discussion and provide no direct data regarding the private suppression of dissent or participants' degree of belief in the group norm. In addition, the judgments in question (light movement, line matching, etc.) do not have any "real-life" consequences or importance.

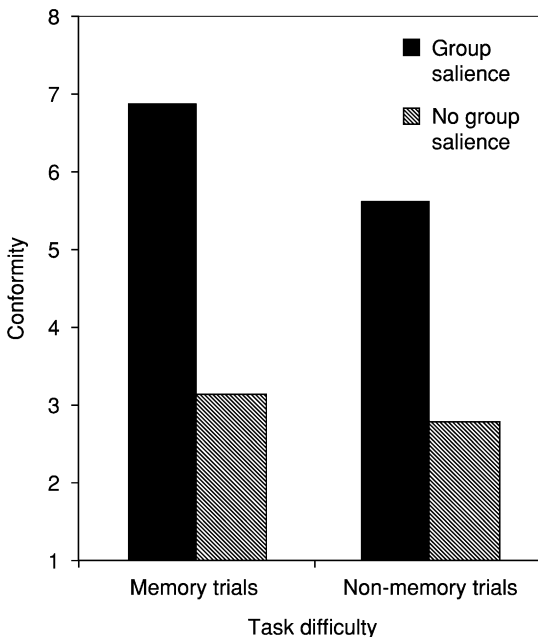


Fig. 1. Number of conforming responses in anonymous conditions as a function of task difficulty and group salience. Adapted from Table I, [Deutsch, M., and Gerard, H. \(1955\)](#). A study of normative and informational social influence upon individual judgment. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 51, 629–636. In the public domain.

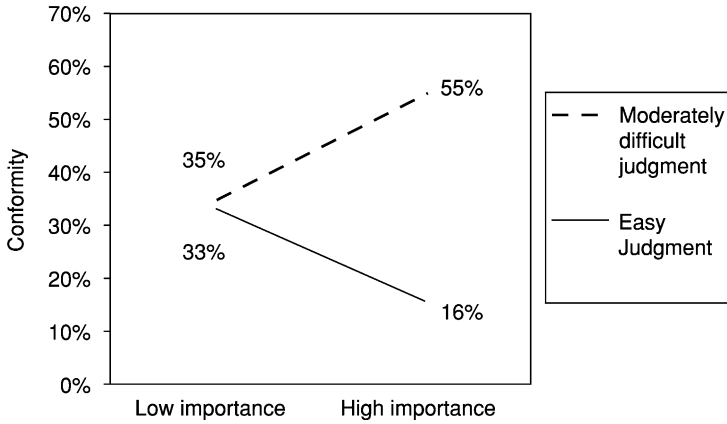


Fig. 2. Conformity as a percentage of critical trials. Adapted from Fig. 2, Baron, R. S., Vandello, J., and Brunzman, B. (1996). The forgotten variable in conformity research: The impact of task importance on social influence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 915–927. Copyright © 1996 by the American Psychological Association. Adapted with permission.

However, a study by [Baron, Vandello, and Brunzman \(1996\)](#) does examine conformity on consequential judgments. [Baron et al. \(1996\)](#) modified the Asch paradigm. They manipulated judgment importance by offering participants a \$20 reward for superior performance on an eyewitness identification (face-matching) task. This manipulation increased conformity from the standard 33% of trials ([Asch, 1956](#)) to 55% of trials provided that the judgment was modestly ambiguous (see [Fig. 2](#)).⁵ In addition, in a second study, when confederates appeared confident and united, the conformity they evoked was correlated with participants' feelings of confidence in this (incorrect) judgment as well. In short, exposure to a unified consensus provoked substantial and confident social influence on a consequential judgment despite the absence of many of the antecedent processes specified by

⁵Baron *et al.* viewed these results as an instance in which motivated participants were more likely to use social cues to reach a decision because of their inability to employ a more systematic individualistic process under conditions of moderate task difficulty. Note that under low task difficulty, the \$20 payment in this study should serve as an added inducement to resist group influence assuming that here, participants were relatively certain of their opinion. This is, in fact, what occurred in a low-ambiguity condition, where conformity occurred on only 16% of trials. This error rate, however, was still a significantly larger error score than obtained in the absence of confederates. Thus, even when participants were extremely confident of their initial judgment and offered a substantial reward to be accurate, there was still evidence of concurrence seeking described by Janis as a hallmark of groupthink.

the groupthink model (e.g., cohesion, homogeneity, crisis, etc.). Thus, these data provide good evidence that in the complete absence of groupthink antecedent conditions, individual (correct) opinions will often be verbally suppressed when a unified consensus voices an opposing point of view.

Complementing these data, Wood, Pool, and their associates found that when individuals report identification with a membership group (Texas Aggies) they show several related reactions if they learn that they disagree with that group. First, they are more likely to change their opinion than control participants. Second, they are more likely to selectively interpret key words in attitude statements endorsed by the group so that they can “explain away” or minimize any potential disagreement between themselves and the group or alternatively justify changing their own position (Wood, Pool, Leck, & Purvis, 1996). Finally, if this “reinterpretation” option is not made salient, such participants are likely to show lower levels of self-esteem than individuals in comparison conditions (Pool, Wood, & Leck, 1998). Note these reactions are congruent with the notion that individuals are uneasy disagreeing with groups that they identify with and that such tendencies exist in the absence of directive leadership, group insulation, time pressure, a sense of crisis, or even direct contact with a highly attractive working group.

C. SUPPRESSION OF DISSENT

Research as far back as Festinger and Thibaut’s (1951) classic study of written messaging within groups (re: a football and a delinquency problem) indicates that group members who express deviate opinions get initially pressured and then ignored and occasionally punished for failing to conform to salient group norms (e.g., Schachter, 1951; see Levine, 1989 for a review). Moreover, the recent literature on ostracism indicates that social rejection or even trivial exclusion within ad hoc groups or minimal groups is generally psychologically punishing for the targets of rejection (Williams & Sommer, 1997). For example, Williams, Cheung, and Choi (2000) had participants interact in “cyber-groups” where one participant was given the impression that they were being excluded during a game of Internet “ring toss.” This trivial form of rejection in unseen (minimal) Internet groups lowered mood and self-esteem while increasing the tendency of individuals to agree with the judgments of others. Thus, the research provides evidence of the social censorship described by Janis as well as ample documentation of the power of social rejection to deplete self-esteem and elevate conformity in the complete absence of the antecedent conditions outlined by the groupthink model.

D. GROUP DISCUSSION AND DECISION POLARIZATION

One caveat here is that the studies discussed above do not entail the active form of group discussion that Janis was referring to in his theoretical statements. However, there are now several lines of research on group discussion indicating that concurrence-seeking and intensification of attitude do occur reliably in groups despite the absence of the antecedent conditions specified by Janis. The literature on group polarization documents that discussion within like-minded groups reliably results in an intensification of attitude and judgment on a wide array of issues and decisions (see [Baron & Kerr, 2003](#); [Myers & Lamm, 1976](#) for reviews). The crucial antecedent condition for group polarization to occur is the presence of a like-minded group; that is, individuals who share a preference for one side of the issue. For example, [Myers and Bishop \(1970\)](#) found that groups of racial liberals became more liberal on race-related issues following discussion, whereas groups of racial conservatives polarized in the opposite direction. However, cohesion, crisis, threat, directive leadership, time pressure, and so on (i.e., Janis's antecedent conditions) are rarely present in this research and, when manipulated, have not been found to heighten group polarization ([Dion, Miller, & Magnan, 1971](#)).

Moreover, the explanations that have been offered to account for such polarization effects have referred to such processes as competitive social comparison (i.e., normative social influence) ([Goethals & Zanna, 1979](#); [Sanders & Baron, 1977](#)), a biased flow of information and arguments (i.e., informational social influence) ([Burnstein & Vinokur, 1977](#)), social corroboration ([Baron, Hoppe, Linneweh, & Rogers, 1996](#)), and social identity concerns ([Hogg, Turner, & Davidson, 1990](#)). These processes are all closely related to explanatory mechanisms alluded to by Janis in his general discussion of groupthink. As noted above, however, Janis's array of antecedent conditions, with the notable exception of group homogeneity, are not specified as necessary to provoke group polarization.

E. GROUP DISCUSSION AND SELF CENSORSHIP

Stasser and his associates' research on hidden profile effects (e.g., [Stasser, Vaughn, & Stewart, 2000](#)) is particularly relevant to groupthink phenomena given the focus within this work on concurrence seeking, judgment polarization, and heightened confidence. Stasser's research demonstrates that when members of a discussion group all share a number of positive bits of information regarding a decision alternative while simultaneously each holding an unshared (or unique) reservation regarding that alternative, a number

of effects emerge. Group members begin discussion favoring the decision option supported by the shared information. As discussion unfolds, the shared information gets disproportionately mentioned and reconsidered, whereas the unshared information tends to be ignored or given short shrift in the discussion. This results in the group becoming more positively (and confidently) disposed to the initially favored decision alternative following discussion. This occurs despite the fact that the full set of facts clearly favors the other (nonchosen) decision alternative.

This hidden profile paradigm seems to provide a precise demonstration of the concurrence-seeking tendency specified by Janis. Individual, uniquely held reservations are ignored, repressed or deemphasized during discussion, whereas the initially favored decision becomes more polarized during discussion. Several processes appear to contribute to this hidden profile effect. First, given that more people have access to the shared information, such information has a numerical advantage in terms of the probability that it gets mentioned by *someone*. Second, it appears that normative concerns are important as well. Thus, even when unshared information does get mentioned during discussion, it is less likely to provoke continued debate or to be repeated or reconsidered during discussion. Moreover, it appears that final attitudes and judgments of group members are more a function of the distribution of prediscussion individual member preferences than of the informational bits that surface in the group discussion (Gigone & Hastie, 1993). Gigone and Hastie conclude that in this research setting, group members appear to initially engage in some “averaging rule” to establish a consensual group position, which in turn affects discussion content as well as the final group position (Gigone & Hastie, 1993). Indeed Gigone and Hastie suggest that group discussion generally serves to justify this consensual group position rather than to establish it (see p. 973). One likely explanation for such a “controlled discussion” focusing disproportionately on shared information is that group members have greater concerns for establishing and maintaining harmonious relations with fellow group members than they do in fully exploring the various facets of the decision problem. In accord with this view, Wittenbaum, Hubbell, and Zuckerman (1999) find that individuals prefer to both offer and receive shared versus unshared information during discussion, and judge others to be more competent, knowledgeable, and credible when they endorse shared perspectives. A second reason group discussion may disproportionately favor shared information is that if there is pressure for rapid closure because of time urgency, a strong initial consensus driven by shared information can provide the justification for an attenuated and biased discussion (Kerr & Tindale, 2004).

It is noteworthy that the hidden profile effect is often a dramatic one. Thus, Stasser, and Titus (1985) reported that if participants' were given the

impression that they (as a group) might not have all the required information needed to solve a mystery, only 35% of the groups successfully unearthed the key (unshared) clues despite the fact that 100% of all groups had the complete set of clues. Indeed, even when groups were flatly told that they did have enough collective information to solve the mystery, only 67% managed to uncover the key bits of unshared information needed for solution. Similarly, [Stasser, Taylor, and Hanna \(1989\)](#) reported that, on average, discussion groups mentioned only 18% of the unshared information known to individual group members. In contrast, on average, some 46% of the shared information was discussed (i.e., at least a two-to-one ratio).

Moreover, this tendency for the group to disproportionately discuss and consider the material that they all agree on and share is not easy to eradicate. Providing participants with explicit instructions to explore fully all decision alternatives and to try to uncover as much information as possible does not moderate this tendency ([Stasser et al., 1989](#)). Nor is the “hidden profile effect” reduced by telling participants that they do not yet have all the information they will receive ([Stasser, Stewart, & Wittenbaum, 1995](#)) or that they will be held publicly accountable for the quality of their decisions ([Stewart, Billings, & Stasser, 1998](#)). Indeed, even privately informing participants that group member X has proportionally more information than the other members does not always lessen this effect ([Stasser et al., 2000](#) but see [Stasser et al., 1995](#)). In fairness, several manipulations have proven effective at weakening the hidden-profile effect (see [Kerr & Tindale, 2004](#) for a review). If participants are given the clear expectation that their decision problem (e.g., a murder mystery) has a verifiable correct answer, they are less prone to the bias favoring shared information ([Stasser & Stewart, 1992](#)). This manipulation is likely to have elevated participants’ confidence about their collective ability to solve the problem. If so, these data indicate that low participant confidence contributes to the concurrence seeking that tends to occur during group discussion. Some other means of weakening the hidden profile effect involve extending the time available for discussion ([Larson, Foster-Fishman, & Keys, 1994](#)) and giving one group member access to both shared and unshared information ([Stewart & Stasser, 1998](#)). Interestingly, [Brodbeck, Kerschreiter, Mojzisch, Frey, and Schulz-Hardt \(2002\)](#) found that assigning one group member the job of advocating the option supported by the unshared information (Janis’s “devil’s advocate strategy”) also increases discussion of unshared information. However, although there are some means of moderating the hidden profile effect, it is a pervasive and well-replicated phenomenon. Again, few of the antecedents specified by the Janis model, with the exception of homogeneity of group members’ initial attitudes (created by the initial distribution of shared/unshared information), appear necessary to provoke the hidden profile bias. Groups in this research

are not likely to be highly cohesive given their temporary and ad hoc nature; threat is not present given the hypothetical or trivial nature of the decision problems, and directive leadership is not encouraged.

McLeod, Baron, Marti, and Yoon (1997) report a hidden profile study that also supports the view that group cohesion in particular is not a necessary condition for substantial suppression of dissent to occur during group discussion. In this study, business students discussed a business decision problem (which of three firms to acquire) either in face-to-face ad hoc lab groups or over a computer network. As in Stewart and Stasser (1998), one group member was fully informed whereas other participants shared partial information that favored a suboptimal choice.

McLeod et al. (1997) found that the fully informed “expert” participants were likely to suppress their unshared information during discussion even in computer communication conditions in which they never saw each other face to face (and where, presumably, cohesion was minimal). In this study, the suppression effect was substantially and significantly lessened only in one condition in which participants were allowed to participate in computer groups anonymously. Under these conditions the informed expert not only mentioned more of their “unshared” facts than in other conditions but also was more likely to remention the facts during discussion as well (see Table III). This liberating effect of anonymity suggests, of course, that normative pressure (a presumed mediator of groupthink effects) was at least partially responsible for the suppression of unshared information in the remaining treatments. Thus, we have evidence of self censorship and selective group attention (i.e., groupthink characteristics) occurring despite the general absence of most of the antecedent conditions specified by the groupthink model.

TABLE III
EXPRESSION OF MINORITY VIEWS BY CONDITION IN McLEOD ET AL., 1996

	Number of minority facts expressed	Number of times minority facts repeated
Face to face	3.97	6.74
Nonanonymous computer groups	3.04	3.95
Anonymous computer groups	6.10	10.53

Adapted from Table II, McLeod, P., Baron, R. S., Marti, M. W., and Yoon, K. (1997). The eyes have it: Minority influence in face to face and computer mediated group discussion. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82, 706–718. Copyright © 1997 by the American Psychological Association. Adapted with permission.

F. PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE AND THE ILLUSION OF CONSENSUS

The studies reviewed above focus primarily on opinion polarization, concurrence seeking, the suppression of dissent, and selective group attention, all key characteristics of groupthink. Other work provides data regarding yet another characteristic mentioned by [Janis \(1972\)](#)—the illusion of consensus. The research on pluralistic ignorance is relevant here. This research indicates that individuals often publicly endorse decisions and attitude positions that they view as normative for their membership group despite having private reservations regarding such views or holding less extreme positions than those endorsed by the group. Moreover, in such settings, the individuals involved assume that similar (extreme) endorsement from other group members reflects their true feelings. Stated differently, pluralistic ignorance describes a situation in which each “member of a group or society privately rejects a belief, opinion, or practice, yet believes that virtually every other member privately accepts it” ([Prentice & Miller, 1996](#), p. 162; see also [Allport, 1924](#)). As a result, each individual assumes that the private group consensus is more united and extreme than it actually is (see [Miller & McFarland, 1991](#) for a review). For example, [Korte \(1972\)](#) completed a series of studies indicating that students felt that the dominant political climate on campus was decidedly more radical than it actually was (and more radical than their own). Similarly, [Prentice and Miller \(1993\)](#) reported that college students assumed that the other students on their campus and in their friendship network privately held far more tolerant attitudes regarding alcohol abuse than their own (see also [Suls & Green, 2003](#)). In addition, in public statements these students conformed to this illusion of consensus. Indeed, male students slowly relinquished their private reservations regarding excessive drinking over time. Prentice and Miller interpret these instances of public compliance and eventual agreement in terms of the participants’ desires to be accepted by groups with which they are affiliated.

In a second report, [Miller and Nelson \(2002\)](#) found evidence of pluralistic ignorance in voting decisions made in the 2000 presidential election. In this case the typical voter cast a ballot using a “lesser of two evils” strategy while believing that others who endorsed the same candidate did so out of sincere attraction for the candidate. Several follow-up studies in this report replicated this effect with respect to more prosaic choices regarding candies and soft drinks. In short, this research indicates that when group norms are salient, the public behavior of fellow members is attributed to an internal cause—their attitudinal endorsement of this norm. Stated differently, although one might acknowledge their own private reservations regarding a group norm, the group as a whole is viewed as privately agreeing with this

point of view. These results are consistent with the general theme that we have been emphasizing above; that is, we find characteristics of groupthink (here the illusion of consensus) affecting the decisions and attitudes of individuals despite the general absence of the key antecedent conditions specified by the groupthink model.

G. OUTGROUP VILIFICATION IN ORDINARY AND MINIMAL GROUPS

An additional symptom of groupthink entails ingroup/outgroup stereotyping that disparages the enemy as weak or unworthy and extols the invulnerability and moral virtues of the ingroup. Research on both prejudice and social identity theory have documented a good number of such effects in both ordinary and even minimal groups, and these have been noted by numerous commentators over the years (e.g., [Hogg & Abrams, 2001](#); [Murphy, 1953](#); [Tajfel & Turner, 1979](#)). Thus, Sherif and his team commented on such tendencies when observing the judgments and evaluations of preadolescent Rattlers and Eagles in the Robbers Cave Study ([Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961](#)). Similarly, [Long and Spears \(1998\)](#) reported ingroup/outgroup biases when members of brainstorming groups evaluated ingroup/outgroup solutions. In the same vein, [Wang and McKillip \(1978\)](#) reported that both Asian and American respondents made excessive judgments regarding the responsibility of outgroup members for traffic accidents (“they” are bad, and irresponsible drivers/pedestrians). As an added example, [Taylor and Jaggi \(1974\)](#) found distinct self-serving stereotypes between Hindus and Moslems in India and then documented that when Hindu participants read about vignettes describing admirable or reprehensible behavior, Moslem failings were consistently attributed to internal causes whereas Hindu failings were conveniently attributed to external causes (see also [Duncan, 1976](#)). The reverse pattern occurred when positive behaviors were described. These data were cited by [Pettigrew \(1978\)](#) as classic examples of the ultimate attributional error but, more to the point, are congruent with the notion that various membership and ethnic groups frequently generate disparaging stereotypes and conclusions regarding outgroups while generating positive stereotypes and defensive rationalizations for the actions of the ingroup.

Indeed, the existence of invidious stereotypes, at least between ethnic groups, is so pervasive that the process of activating them is thought by many to be automatic in its nature ([Bargh, 1990](#); [Devine, 1989](#)). Moreover, such differential evaluations and interpretations are even reported between minimal groups (e.g., [Brewer, 1979](#); [Brown, Tajfel, & Turner, 1980](#);

Sachdev & Bourhis, 1987). Thus for example, Sachdev and Bourhis (1987) assigned Canadian students to groups based presumably on the manner in which they completed a “creativity test” and found that ingroup members disparaged the creativity of outgroup members’ problem-solving solutions. Thus, again we have group effects that “mimic” standard groupthink characteristics in settings that, for the most part, lack the antecedent conditions specified by Janis (although we would agree that cases of ethnic/racial stereotyping are most likely to involve a good deal of social identification and at least a moderate degree of cohesion). These results are consistent with our contention that groupthink is a far more pervasive phenomenon than Janis’s model presumes.

III. Rethinking Groupthink: The Ubiquity Model

The one difficulty with the analysis offered above is that if it is true, one must wonder why groups ever reach rational informed decisions and why so many group discussions are marked by acrimony, divisiveness, vituperative debate, turf battles, and so forth. Where is the concurrence seeking and suppression of dissent in these situations (where we can only pray for it)? And how can we contend that “groupthink [like Chickenman] is everywhere” given the incontrovertible evidence of such divisive group behavior in a range of public settings. It is apparent that there must be some limiting (or “antecedent”) conditions affecting the symptoms (and consequent defective decision processes) that characterize groupthink. The challenge is to reconsider what they must be in light of the lack of support regarding such variables as crisis, cohesion, insulation from critics, and so on.

To this end I offer a *ubiquity model* of groupthink, suggesting that three key conditions may serve as antecedents. The first is that the individuals in question must feel a sense of social identification with the collection of individuals they are among. This of course requires the preliminary perception among members that this collection of individuals comprises a group. This perception of entitativity (Campbell, 1958) will depend on the extent to which the individuals in question are linked by some common purpose, history, or shared fate (cf. Campbell, 1958, Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). Deciding that one is part of a “group” is assumed to generally provoke feelings of allegiance and social identity (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which we feel is a key antecedent condition for groupthink-like phenomena. This stipulation is based on the assumption that normative and informational social influence mediate groupthink phenomena and that both processes are dramatically limited unless there is some “minimal” degree of social

identification (David & Turner, 1996, Hogg et al., 1990), even if this identification derives only from sharing a salient social designation or working collectively on some common if transient problem (say in a laboratory study).

A. SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION

In accord with the view that informational social influence requires a sense of social identification, a growing list of studies indicate that instances of indirect⁶ minority influence are limited to entreaties and messages from ingroup members and that such “ingroup messages” provoke closer scrutiny and elaboration than those attributed to outgroup members (e.g., Alvaro & Crano, 1996, 1997; David & Turner, 1996). Given that cases of indirect influence are not likely to be caused by compliance processes (i.e., normative social influence), such data support the view that informational influence has a more pronounced effect (i.e., is trusted and attended to more; Alvaro & Crano, 1996) when it stems from an ingroup source.

Indeed, Deutsch and Gerard (1955) in their classic replication of Asch (1957) reported that even when participants were responding anonymously (and normative social influence should be minimal), conformity rates were approximately doubled in those conditions in which group identity had been emphasized to participants (see Fig. 1). The group identity manipulation in this case involved recurrently mentioning the “group nature” of the research and offering a reward for group accuracy. Similarly, several studies (e.g., Mackie, 1986; Mackie & Cooper, 1984; Mackie, Gastardo-Conaco, & Skelly, 1992; McGarty, Haslam, Hutchinson, & Turner, 1994) find that group polarization effects are limited to cases in which individuals are exposed to the taped arguments of ingroup members. Moreover, in these ingroup conditions, participants are more affected by variations in message quality (Mackie et al., 1992; McGarty et al., 1994); a sign of greater message elaboration. These results are consistent with the proposed importance of social identification as a moderating variable in informational social influence.

Heightened ingroup informational social influence appears to be mediated by several processes. First, as just noted, several studies find that ingroup messages elicit more attention and elaboration. This is likely because of

⁶Indirect social influence refers to persuasion assessed on delayed measures or on those that assess persuasion on topics that are related to but separate from the focal topic of social influence. Thus, indirect social influence describes someone who after being urged to oppose sex education shows opposition to free distribution of condoms to sexually active students.

the audience's presumption that ingroup members share their vested interests, values, limitations, and frames of reference. If so, the views of these ingroup members should be more crucial for purposes of social comparison. Second, for this same reason, ingroup input may also be viewed as more trustworthy.

Social identification is also assumed to significantly amplify normative social influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Here one can adopt a social identity perspective as one avenue of explanation, arguing that self-definition and self-esteem are strongly affected by one's social allegiances. This social identity view provides a ready explanation for why social deviance might be punishing for the deviant individual. Such deviance may threaten one's self categorization as an ingroup member, thereby heightening uncertainty while also exposing the group member to expulsion from an admired group. As noted above, Wood et al. (1996) and Pool et al. (1998) provide good evidence that when people identify with a group, they will use cognitive distortion and semantic reinterpretation in an effort to minimize perceptions of social deviance and will show drops in self-esteem when such cognitive avoidance is difficult. These data are quite congruent with the notion that social deviance is aversive for individuals and has negative implications for self conceptions. Prentice and Miller (1996) offer a related view when discussing pluralistic influence phenomena. They suggest that such effects are caused at least in part by group identification—"that individuals often act out of a desire to be good group members."

A second explanation for why social identification may moderate the effects of normative social influence is based on conditioning principles. From our earliest moments, social acceptance and rejection from ingroup members are associated with a wide array of rewards and punishments be it food, freedom from discomfort, pleasing tactile stimulation, and so on. This contiguous pairing occurs with a wide range of exemplars (i.e., various forms of social acceptance/rejection), a multiplicity of primary reinforcers and punishments, in a variety of situations, and across a wide range of intimate individuals. This is the just the type of associative pattern that Skinner (1956) outlines when describing the development of generalized reinforcers and punishers; that is, conditioned stimuli paired with a varied array of primary reinforcers or punishers (respectively). According to Skinner, these conditioned stimuli come to be particularly potent sources of reinforcement and punishment, with the unique feature of being exceptionally resistant to extinction. Money is a common Skinnerean example of such a generalized reinforcer. Similarly, social rejection is a classic example of a generalized punishment.

Stated differently, aversive reactions to social rejection can be viewed as an extremely enduring classically conditioned response that occurs

reflexively⁷ even in situations in which actual, primary punishment is unlikely, inconsequential, or even impossible. In this view, deviation from ingroup standards should serve as a discriminatory stimulus that signals the possibility of such rejection. Moreover, given the reflexive nature of classically conditioned responses, the mere thought of deviating from ingroup members is likely to evoke this form of social anxiety. This conditioning view has the advantage of explaining the power of normative social influence in situations involving temporary and minimal groups. The social identity view becomes particularly plausible when considering more meaningful groups such as reference groups and groups with some shared history (e.g., Wood et al., 1996), because deviation here can affect self image and self-esteem. That is, deviation undermines entitativity and the social identity derived from it. In contrast, the conditioning view outlined above seems particularly applicable to minimal groups and *ad hoc* laboratory decision groups where even low levels of entitativity should be sufficient to trigger these conditioned concerns regarding one's deviation and potential social rejection even though the implications of such deviations for self image and self esteem are weak.

Marques and Abrams's recent work on the "blacksheep effect" (e.g., Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Dougill, 2002; Marques, Abrams, & Serodio, 2001) supports the view that individuals take comfort from ingroup unanimity (as suggested just above) and are likely to punish those who disrupt or prevent it. In a series of studies these investigators document that individuals who deviate from group norms are particularly likely to be derogated if they are ingroup members as opposed to outgroup members (Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000). Moreover, this derogation is more pronounced among those individuals who identify most with the group (Abrams et al., 2002) and when individuals have doubts about the superiority of their ingroup (Marques et al., 2001). This work complements the general line of reasoning discussed just above by indicating that when ingroup deviance does occur, it is likely to trigger distinct social sanctions, particularly in cases in which social identity is highly salient or problematic.

Although we feel a sense of group entitativity and social identification are crucial antecedent conditions for groupthink effects, it is important to note that such feelings can be superseded by subgroup or coalition formation in which case the subgroup is far more likely to be the most accessible social

⁷Although our discussion is primarily concerned with how generalized reinforcers and punishers contribute to the operant conditioning of conforming responses, the creation of such reinforcers (and the source of their "power") is a function of classical conditioning (i.e., pairing an initially neutral event with a variety of positive or negative unconditioned stimuli [UCSs]). As such, the aversive reaction to potential social rejection is thought to be evoked in a reflexive or "automatic" fashion, as is the case with any conditioned response.

category. The members of the U.S. Senate certainly have a basis for self-identification as “members of the Senate” given the club-like climate within this group, but this is often less salient to these individuals than their party affiliations or their social identity as Liberals, Conservatives, Presidential Loyalists, Southerners, Friends of Labor, or prolife/prochoice advocates. If so, any normative and informational social influence affecting such individuals will be subgroup specific and likely to generate intergroup debate and acrimony. Under these circumstances any symptoms of groupthink that emerge will also be subgroup specific. Thus, the concurrence seeking, illusions of consensus, and defensive rationalization that occur will not necessarily result in absence of debate between opposing subgroups but rather should fuel such debate as subgroups become more polarized and more confident of their own subgroup position. This, then, explains why group discussions will often be contentious and divisive in contrast to the prototypic groupthink pattern.

B. SALIENT NORMS

The second antecedent condition I suggest is that group interaction and discussion must produce or reveal an emerging or dominant group norm if the symptoms and defective decision processes of groupthink are to occur. The philosophical and attitudinal homogeneity cited by Janis as an antecedent condition will often create or influence such norms. Thus, for example, key members of the Bush Administration (among them Vice President Richard Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz) long shared a philosophy regarding the strategic wisdom of using unilateral, preemptive military interventions (or their threat) as a key aspect of U.S. foreign policy. This view (a.k.a. the Bush Doctrine) came to be normative within the Bush White House following the World Trade Center attack of 9/11 and precipitated several dramatic administrative decisions including the sequential invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq, despite protestations from many of our allies.

It is important to note in this regard that most of the experimental demonstrations mentioned above involve some form of attitudinal/normative homogeneity. Thus, the research on social influence as well as that regarding pluralistic ignorance document the effect of emergent or preexisting social norms. Similarly, group polarization occurs only among like-minded groups who tend to value one side of the issue or the other regardless of whether the issue involves risk taking during a football game, caution regarding the selection of a marriage partner, racial equality, or Parisian students' dislike of Americans.

Stasser's hidden profile paradigm has a related characteristic. Participants in this procedure receive shared information that suggests to all (or almost all) group members that one decision option is most sensible. This option almost always serves as the initial group norm. Moreover, research indicates that this initial norm plays a primary role in mediating the nature of the eventual group decision (e.g., [Gigone & Hastie, 1993](#)). Similarly, [Raven \(1998\)](#) cites an historical precursor to the hidden profile research (and the groupthink notion in general) that highlights the effect of initial norms on discussion outcome. In this early study, [Maier and Solem \(1952\)](#) reported that when groups discussed the Horse Trader problem to consensus, their performance on this eureka task exceeded the individual solver baseline provided that a majority of participants began the discussion favoring the correct solution. If, however, the majority favored an incorrect solution, group discussion lowered performance despite the presence of minority members having insight into the correct solution. This is quite congruent with the view that initial or emergent norms within the group serve to bias discussion and disenfranchise those who hold dissenting or minority views regardless of their correctness. Note that in this study too, one observes a groupthink-like process in the absence of the antecedent factors listed by Janis (e.g., cohesion, crisis, directive leadership, etc.). Finally, the one antecedent factor that has been linked to signs of groupthink in both laboratory and historical studies (e.g., [Baron, Crawley, & Paulina, 2003](#)), directive leadership, has a component that generally suggests a preferred solution to group members early in the discussion (e.g., [Hodson & Sorrentino, 1997](#)).

C. LOW SELF-EFFICACY

The third antecedent condition I propose for groupthink phenomena is low situational self-efficacy, in which group members generally lack confidence in their ability to reach satisfactory resolution of the conundrum facing them. The emphasis here is on situation-specific (i.e., state) conceptions of self-efficacy that might be affected by such things as decisional complexity, fatigue, priming, low self-confidence, or negative social feedback. Low situational self-efficacy actually was mentioned briefly by [Janis and Mann \(1977\)](#) as one means of lowering group member self-esteem, one of their specified antecedent conditions. I see it however as a more fundamental condition even in cases where self-esteem is unaffected. As pointed out above, several studies indicate that social influence, and suppression of dissent are either dramatically lessened or completely eliminated in conditions in which self-efficacy is likely to be high because of low task difficulty (e.g., [Deutsch & Gerard, 1955](#)), absence of time pressure ([Baron et al., 1996](#)),

or manipulations of perceived self-efficacy (Stasser & Stewart, 1992; Stasser et al., 2000).

In contrast, when situational self-efficacy is likely to be low whether because of impaired cognitive capacity, recent failure, task difficulty, time pressure, fear, or lack of confidence, social influence tends to be elevated particularly when such influence depends on flawed argumentation, normative pressure, or heuristic message processing (e.g., Baron, 2000). Thus, for example, Kelly, Jackson, and Hutson-Comeaux (1997) found that when group members were given the impression that a rank ordering task had a correct solution and were not pressured to work quickly (high self-efficacy), the group discussion was less likely to be characterized by attempts at normative social influence. Rather, under these conditions, the group discussions contained considerable reasoning, sharing of facts, and argumentation (i.e., informational social influence), which in turn was associated with greater solution accuracy. If we shift our focus to the effects of fear, Darley (1966) reported that fear of shock elevated standard conformity effects, whereas Baron, Inman, Kao, and Logan (1992) found that dental fear increased how persuaded participants were by heuristic cues such as audience approval of a flawed message.

One reason low self-efficacy has not been emphasized as a necessary antecedent condition in prior discussions of groupthink is because the overwhelming majority of studies on this topic hold this feature constant. That is, most research on groupthink focuses on decisions that entail a good deal of ambiguity and decisional conflict. Thus, the international crises examined in historical case studies as well as the complex decision problems examined in laboratory research are both likely to challenge feelings of self-efficacy in participants. However, once we begin to consider the likelihood that groupthink processes may occur in mundane group contexts we must acknowledge the obvious fact that many problems faced by such groups will often lack the complexity of (say) whether or not to underwrite the Bay of Pigs invasion. Here I would argue that past research on social influence, suppression of dissent, and group decision making (e.g., Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Kelly et al., 1997; Stasser & Stewart, 1992) strongly suggests that self-efficacy is likely to be an important antecedent condition for groupthink phenomena particularly with respect to the extent to which group members are willing to risk offering a dissenting view and likely to internally accept the validity of the group solution. The logic here is that group members often risk (or, at least, fear) serious sanctions when challenging group norms. They are unlikely to take such a risk unless they feel extremely confident regarding their own preferred solution. In contrast, a lack of confidence provides them with more reason to both suppress their (tentative) dissent and internally accept the solution favored by the group (“all those folks can’t be wrong”).

IV. Strong Versus Moderate Versions of the Ubiquity Model

It should be apparent by now that the ubiquity model represents more a revision of Janis's model than a repudiation. The social identification variable modifies Janis's emphasis on intense-high-status group cohesion as an antecedent condition for groupthink. Similarly, low self-efficacy amplifies Janis's prior consideration of this factor. The one major shift is that the ubiquity model assumes that when combined, social identification, salient norms, and low self-efficacy are both necessary and sufficient to evoke "groupthink reactions." Such reactions include Janis's array of defective decision processes as well as suppressed dissent, selective focus on shared viewpoints, polarization of attitude and action, and heightened confidence in such polarized views. Note that such elevated confidence will often evoke the feelings of ingroup moral superiority and invulnerability alluded to by Janis (1972, 1982). As this implies, the more restrictive (i.e., less common) conditions specified by Janis (e.g., crisis, intense cohesion, insulation, member insecurity, directive leadership) are not deemed to be necessary. As a result, one would expect groupthink reactions in a far wider array of group settings than those originally envisioned by Janis. As we have seen above, there is now ample evidence for the relative ubiquity of such defective decision processes even in temporary and trivial groups.

A "strong" version of the ubiquity model would hold that the three antecedent conditions specified above are not only necessary and sufficient but exhaustive as well, with other factors such as crisis or cohesion adding nothing as predictor variables. Although a case can be made for this strong position (especially given the conflicting data regarding cohesion) it seems more likely that a more moderate version is likely to be true. This "moderate" version of the ubiquity model leaves open the possibility that many of the antecedent conditions specified by Janis might still, under certain circumstances, heighten the likelihood or intensity of groupthink phenomena. Thus, if directive leadership heightens the salience and nature of group norms in a setting in which such norms may be otherwise vague, or not yet obvious, it is plausible that this might amplify groupthink reactions.

In the same vein there is reason to suspect that crisis may serve as a similar "amplifying condition" elevating the intensity of groupthink. Theorists in political sociology have long considered the likelihood that crisis situations created by intergroup conflict heightens the likelihood that directive "oligarchical" leadership will overshadow or replace more democratic processes of decision-making (Michels, 1962). The logic underlying this prediction is that during a crisis, the need for rapid and decisive action makes time-consuming democratic processes too costly or dangerous. An additional mechanism

that in all likelihood applies here is that the threat of a crisis may lower members' feelings of self-efficacy while simultaneously heightening their dependency needs. Such effects should increase members' susceptibility to both informational and normative social influence from directive leaders or dominant ruling coalitions.

One caveat to this analysis, however, is that threat/crisis level must be substantial to provoke such reactions. Thus, laboratory simulation studies that depend upon participants role-playing or recalling a crisis related setting seem poorly suited to testing the effects of threat and crisis. Similar criticisms could be made regarding prior lab manipulations of cohesion. These manipulations only rarely test participants in the presence of preexisting cohesive others (see as exceptions [Flowers, 1977](#); [Hogg & Hains, 1998](#); [Leana, 1985](#)) relying instead on less powerful manipulations based on such factors as bogus personality feedback or task importance. One of the few studies that does provide support for the role of threat ([Turner et al., 1992](#)) exposes participants to a manipulation (public scrutiny) that has a direct and immediate effect on actual outcomes experienced by these individuals. Interestingly, cohesion in this study was manipulated with a social identity manipulation (e.g., social categorization coupled with giving participants time to get to know each other).

Research on the effect of emotions on stereotyping is also congruent with the argument that meaningful threat and crisis should be capable of amplifying groupthink-related phenomena. This research quite consistently indicates that emotions associated with crisis (i.e., fear and anger), amplify various forms and measures of stereotyping (e.g., [Baron et al., 1992](#); [Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994](#); [Friedland, Keinan, & Tytiun, 1999](#); [Wilder & Shapiro, 1988](#)). Given that stereotyping is one of the classic symptoms of groupthink (at least when such stereotyping focuses upon ingroup/outgroup attributes), these data point to the potential importance of crisis and threat as amplifying variables. The relation between fear, anger, and stereotyping is thought to be mediated, in part, by a diminution of available attentional capacity under these particular emotions ([Baron, 1986, 2000](#); [Bodenhausen 1993](#), [Wilder & Shapiro, 1988](#)), an effect that should both lower self-efficacy and heighten participants' reliance on heuristic cues in problem solving. In accord with the admonition above, the emotional manipulations used in this research are substantial, involving such things as threat of electric shock, threat of public embarrassment ([Wilder & Shapiro, 1988](#)), dental surgery ([Baron et al. 1992](#)), or the stress of flight training ([Friedland et al., 1999](#)).

In short there is reason to think that crisis, like directive leadership, may be capable of amplifying groupthink effects provided that the manipulations are nontrivial. Similarly, it seems plausible that group member insecurity

and low self-esteem might amplify group think effects. Low self-esteem certainly is one pathway to low self-efficacy and moreover is often assumed to be related to heightened desires for social identification.⁸ As such, such feelings might well elevate susceptibility to normative as well as informational social influence. Certainly task difficulty could be construed as a manipulation of situational self-esteem, and as noted above, such difficulty manipulations have been found to increase conformity and concurrence seeking. Admittedly, however, research on groupthink per se has generally failed to manipulate or measure the effects of self-esteem (or member insecurity) or to assess how such feelings relate to symptoms and decisional characteristics of groupthink.

Future investigations will hopefully clarify such issues. Although ample research over the last 30 years indicates that the bulk of Janis's antecedent conditions are clearly not necessary to trigger such phenomena as polarized judgment, outgroup stereotyping, self-censorship, and the illusion of consensus (e.g., Tetlock et al., 1992), the empirical support for the antecedent conditions specified by the ubiquity model (i.e., social identification, salient norms, and low self-efficacy) is far from definitive. Similarly the assumptions outlined by the "moderate" form of the ubiquity model regarding the possible amplifying effects of crisis, directive leadership, cohesion, and so on need to be examined with more powerful manipulations than those used in prior laboratory research if we are to gain a fuller understanding of how such factors may contribute to flawed and biased decision-making in group contexts. Our expectation is that careful research may well document meaningful relations between such variables and "groupthink phenomena" given that the gist of the present critique is that the pervasiveness of such reactions has been underestimated by prior theoretical accounts.

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⁸We offer these predictions most cautiously given that the relation between low self-esteem and social identification is a matter of active debate (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1993; Long & Spears, 1998), with researchers offering distinctions between collective self-esteem, personal self-esteem, manipulated self-esteem, trait-based self-esteem, public self-esteem, and private self-esteem.

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