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PEER INFLUENCES AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS:
The Perils and the Potentials

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Abstract

Students' intellectual, social and personal development is highly influenced by peers during the college years.   These changes can be understood in terms of social comparison theory, which outlines the consequences for group dynamics of people's need to evaluate their opinions and abilities. Discussion aimed toward opinion consensus and competition aimed toward improving ability levels promote the development of intellectual capacities and a range of other abilities. Discussion and competition also promote the definition and polarization of values. An expanded account of social comparison processes considers the further group consequences of the need for self-esteem. The distinction between informational and normative social influence underlines the importance of people's standing in groups for their self-concepts and self-esteem. Social identity theory expands these accounts to consider the implications of self-esteem needs for intergroup competition, discrimination and hostility. Leadership within groups is critical in countering the destructive consequences of tendencies toward fragmentation of larger groups into smaller homogeneous groups which think and act in extreme ways and which enact ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination.

Peer Influences Among College Students: The Perils And The Potentials

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The college years are times of dramatic personal, social, and cognitive change. Erik Erikson (1963) referred to adolescence, the developmental stage of most college students in our society, as a psychosocial "moratorium" during which young people search "for the social values that define identity" (p. 263). Erikson also notes how eager adolescents are "to be affirmed by their peers" in their search for values (p. 263). This paper considers evidence from many years of social psychological research on peer influences and their relation to identity and the self-concept. What do we know about how peers in college affect the way students think and act, and the way social, intellectual, and ethical growth takes place during the college years? We begin reporting two studies that show dramatic peer influences.

I. The impact of peers: the entire student body and a single fellow-student

In the 1930's, social psychologist Theodore Newcomb took a teaching position at Bennington College, the newly founded progressive women's college in southwestern Vermont. Separated from the support systems typically available to a young scholar in a starting academic position -- a laboratory and graduate students -- Newcomb conducted extensive research on the attitudes of the students who attended Bennington. He found

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considerable change in their attitudes over their four years in college. Most of the students came from upper-middle or upper class circumstances and entered the college with generally conservative political and social attitudes. Over four years those attitudes became decidedly more liberal. One student wrote "We come from fine old Tory families who believe firmly in Higher Education--God knows why……We come home, some of us talking a new language, some cobwebs swept out, a new direction opening up ahead we were dying to travel." (Newcomb, 1943, pp. 11-12). However, the change was not universal. The students who changed the most were the ones who were most socially integrated. They were popular and involved, and they took leadership positions. The students who were unpopular and isolated remained conservative. They associated almost exclusively with a small number of fellow-conservative students.

The prevailing attitudes of students and faculty at Bennington were decidedly liberal. Those who integrated themselves into the dominant peer environment adopted those liberal attitudes. Those who remained apart did not. Although there are questions of the causal relation between attitudes and social integration, Newcomb believed that social integration led to attitude change. Those who joined the peer environment were strongly influenced by it. Their liberal peers became their reference group, the group that defined for those students appropriate attitudes and behaviors.

By and large, these women's attitudes remained liberal after graduation. As adults they were more likely than peers from comparable socio-economic strata to support John Kennedy over Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election. This was especially true if the reference groups they selected after college were liberal (Newcomb, 1963). These students' peers during and after college had lasting effects on their political attitudes.

These findings are consistent with other findings which show that changed attitudes do not simply revert back to their original position with the passage of time. They are likely to remain changed, unless other forces exert pressures on them to revert, or to change again in some new direction (McGuire, 1985).

In the 1970's, at Williams College in Massachusetts, a close neighbor of Bennington College, an experiment investigated the consequences of attitude change, rather than attitude change itself (Goethals & Reckman, 1973). It asked whether people who change their minds quickly forget their former attitudes. In order to best test this hypothesis, it was important that the amount of attitude change produced be as much as possible. Peer influence was chosen as the way to effect the change. Students who had just graduated from high school were the subjects. They met in small groups, of three to five, to discuss the issue of whether school busing should be widely used to achieve racial diversity in our nation's schools.

All the members of each group either supported or opposed busing, according to a survey of their attitudes taken about a week before the discussion. With a single exception. One member of the group was an accomplice of the experimenter. He was also a member of the graduating class, a well-known and highly liked and respected young man headed to an Ivy League university in the fall. He practiced, mostly on the basis of his own sense of how to be persuasive, arguments either for or against busing, and always took the position opposite all other members of the group. It was contrived to have him called on first to address the busing question. He spoke slowly, and somewhat haltingly, but in an unequivocal manner. He responded to disagreement with gentle persistence, acknowledging other people's arguments but repeating and elaborating his

own position. Often he anticipated counterarguments and deftly put them aside before they were voiced. Discussions typically lasted 15 to 20 minutes. Right after the discussion students were asked their opinion on the busing issue, and then they were asked to recall as accurately as they could their opinions on the survey taken days before. Our present interest is the attitude change produced by the talk of a single peer.

The peer accomplice was highly successful. Pro-busing students became as opposed to busing as the anti-busing students had been at the outset. Anti-busing students became slightly in favor of busing, although not as much so as the original pro-busing students. Thus there was a complete reversal. Pro-busing students ended up as markedly more opposed to busing than the anti-busing students. As noted above, the hypothesis of the study was that students would forget their old attitudes. They clearly did. When asked, they estimated that their prior attitudes were essentially the same as their new ones. In fact, they didn't think of their "new" attitudes as new at all. They didn't have any awareness of having changed their minds. Although we do not know, the students' lack of awareness of their earlier viewpoints probably mean that their new attitudes persisted, unless new pressure or influence came along to produce a different position, perhaps, but not necessarily, the same as their original position.

II. Understanding peer influence: social comparison theory

Both the Bennington and Williams studies show dramatic and at least potentially long-lasting peer influences on attitudes. These two illustrations scratch the surface of the wide range of peer influences that likely take place in the college years. The full range of these influences can probably best be understood in terms of theories concerned

with self-evaluation and identity formation, and theories concerned with people's standing in groups. We will first discuss social comparison theory and its implications for self-evaluation, group formation, and identity.

Leon Festinger's theory of social comparison processes has been a highly influential theoretical formulation for nearly fifty years (Festinger 1950, 1954). Social comparison theory argues that people have a need to evaluate their opinions and abilities and that they often do this by comparing their own views and performances with those of similar others. People check their opinions against those of peers whom they regard as similar in attitudes and compare their own performances to the performances of whom they regard as similar in ability. The theory argues that since people can only evaluate themselves accurately in comparison to similar others, there are strong pressures toward uniformity in groups. When opinions are at issue, the pressures toward uniformity are unalloyed, and there is discussion until talk has produced uniformity, or until those with deviant opinions are rejected from the group, usually with some degree of hostility. When abilities are being evaluated, pressures toward uniformity combine with pressures toward excelling and being better than others. Individuals compete until a ranking evolves, marked by differences with a narrow range. Those with highly different levels of ability become defined as non-comparable -- comparison with them ceases -- although they are not rejected in a hostile way, as is the case for opinions. They simply cease being a part of the individual's reference group, and they are largely ignored. In short, pressures toward uniformity produce talk and competition, and ultimately, marked homogeneity, if not uniformity. Let us consider the consequences of talk and

competition, the behavior that results from pressures toward uniformity in opinions and abilities, respectively.

   The cognitive consequences of talk. On the way to opinion uniformity, a great deal can happen that is of direct relevance to the concern with peer influence in college, or more broadly, peer education. While it is not always the case that people achieve consensus by talk--sometimes conformity pressures produce opinion and behavior change without any need for persuasion or rationale--there often is a great deal of discussion in groups. These discussions can affect the way people think in several ways.

   First, information is transmitted. This information can affect people's beliefs by affecting the knowledge that underlies those beliefs. In some cases the new knowledge may simply add to an individual's general way of thinking. In that case, the new information is simply assimilated into the person's general knowledge structures, or schemas. Their schemas may become relatively more detailed, and slightly more complex, but basic viewpoints do not change. They simply become more elaborate. Theories are confirmed, not challenged. In other cases, the new information cannot be assimilated to existing schemas. It doesn't fit and cannot be understood within existing categories, theories, or beliefs. Then the knowledge structures must change to fit the data. They actually accommodate to the information, and become entirely reshaped (Piaget, 1937). When new or highly revised schemas are produced by new information, the result is more than just an accumulation and cataloging of new information. The result is new theories and new conceptualizations which facilitate the absorbing of new information and further cognitive development.

The importance of talk among peers in producing new conceptualizations is argued powerfully in the work of developmental psychologist L.S. Vygotsky (1935). Vygotsky notes that "*human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them*" (1935, p. 88, italics in original). Furthermore, Vygotsky argues that learning specific points, ideas, facts, techniques, approaches etc. fosters increased cognitive development. He notes that "in making one step in learning, a child makes two steps in development" (1935, p. 84). Learning fosters development and "sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning" (1935, p. 90).

One implication for higher education is that the potentially highly educational impact of talk will be maximized to the extent that the talkers whom students hear are intelligent and well-informed, and use that intelligence in their discussion. One compelling line of research supporting this notion concerns the intellectual impact of an extremely important peer environment, that constituted by a child's siblings, and his or her parents (Zajonc, 1976; Zajonc & Mullally, 1997). This research, supporting what Robert Zajonc (1976) termed the confluence model, suggests that SAT and IQ scores in the adolescent and adult years are influenced by the quality of the intellectual environment of the family during the child's formative years. The quality of this environment is in turn affected by the number and ages of the children and adults in the household, and thus the average developmental or intellectual level of the individuals in the home.

Thus far we have considered just the potential benefits of listening to talk. There are also benefits to speaking rather than listening. Two highly divergent lines of research

by Zajonc support this position. First, in an important paper on "cognitive tuning",

Zajonc (1960) noted that people process information differently depending on whether

they are in transmission tuning or reception tuning. In reception tuning they simply

expect to receive more information. They remember the complex details of what they

receive. When they are in transmission tuning they expect to tell other people about what

they read or hear. In this case they develop a more coherent account of the information,

one that is perhaps simpler but more internally consistent. While it may omit all the

relevant information, it tells a better story. Explaining something to another person

induces a more active, organized cognitive integration that itself produces learning.

Second, in his research on the effects of childhood family configuration on adult

intelligence, Zajonc found that the last born child, whether that one is the only child or

the youngest of a set of siblings, shows lower SAT or IQ scores than would be predicted

by the simplest version of his confluence model. For example, only children score lower

than the elder child in a pair, and the third child who is last-born has lower scores than

the third of four children. Zajonc's explanation for these somewhat anomalous findings is

that the last child is deprived of the benefit of teaching younger siblings.   Children seem

to benefit from two things: one, being raised in an intellectually alive and sophisticated

social environment of older siblings and parents, and, two, having a younger sibling to

teach. For the most part children are in reception tuning in relation to parents and their

older siblings, and transmission tuning in relation to young siblings. Both tunings foster

intellectual growth.

In sum, talk produces intellectual growth in a variety of ways. At the same time,

it is important to remember the context in which we are discussing talk, that is,

conversations directed toward achieving consensus and uniformity of opinions in groups. In turn uniformity is sought, according to social comparison theory, to enable individuals to develop stable evaluations of their opinions. That is, talk can produce distinct cognitive development. It is also likely to produce uniformity of opinion through combinations of influence, conformity, and rejection of those who hold deviant opinions. In the case of rejection, opinion uniformity is achieved by defining group boundaries in a way that only those who agree are considered to be the group. We need to be vigilant about the consequences for colleges of the strong tendencies to evolve many small, highly homogeneous groups of like-minded individuals.

The performance consequences of competition. Social comparison theory addresses the evaluation of abilities as well as opinions. In fact, when originally published the theory was quite startling in focussing on these two human attributes, since the processes flowing from their evaluation produce some very different consequences. However, Festinger's attempt to highlight the similarities among the evaluation processes for opinions and abilities can be understood in terms of his interest in level of aspiration for performances, his first area of research, and his interest in social communication and conformity, the area he was working on just before developing social comparison theory.

Despite the similarities, the theory highlights two important differences between opinions and abilities. First, people consistently try to raise their performance level. Second, there are nonsocial constraints on changing abilities which do not apply to opinions. People can't change their ability to serve aces in tennis like they can their opinion of Chris Evert. That is, people want to improve but it may be very difficult. Social comparison research has shown that the drive to improve and pressures toward

uniformity combine to produce competition, at first, and then tendencies to define groups so that they are composed of people with similar ability levels. They can also produce efforts to prevent peers from performing significantly better than most others in the group. For example, people form coalitions to prevent their peers from excelling when important abilities are implicated by relative performance (Hoffman, Festinger, & Lawrence, 1954).

We noted above that Festinger's interest in ability comparison reflected a very long-standing interest in the way people set their level of aspiration for performance. In developing social comparison theory he discussed the effects of level of aspiration on the cessation of comparison on abilities. When people cease comparing with superior others, and define their own group as consisting only of those with more modest ability levels, their level of aspiration often drops. When they cease comparing with inferior others, their level of aspirations correspondingly rises.

As with the social comparison of opinions, the social comparison of abilities produces effects with both beneficial and worrisome consequences for learning and education. Competition may spur productive academic involvement. That depends on academic performance and ability being an important value in any particular reference group. However, competition may produce distinctly uncooperative behaviors designed to undermine superior performances by others. Also, when people cease comparing and competing, and define their reference groups as a more homogeneous set of individuals with similar ability levels, there can be increases or decreases in their levels of aspiration. These changes may help or hurt academic performance.

<u>Values, talk, competition, and group polarization</u>. Social comparison theory implies that in the case of opinion evaluation, pressures toward uniformity will produce simple conformity pressures that are likely to produce a consensus that lies at the midpoint of the initial range of opinions. People on the extremes compromise and the group rather efficiently finds an equilibrium point in the middle. In the case of ability evaluation, the final performance level that is reached may be somewhat higher than the average of the initial range of performance levels. Individuals' efforts to improve, spurred by what Festinger called the "unidirectional drive upward" for abilities, may raise the ability and performance level of the whole group. Balancing any move upward are the obvious constraints noted above on people's capacity to improve.

There is one kind of opinion comparison that seems to act more like ability comparison when one examines the relation between the initial distribution of individual opinions and the final group consensus. This is opinion comparison involving issues tied to important values. In these cases the final group consensus is polarized (Myers & Lamm, 1976). Rather than reaching a middle ground, groups move toward the extreme, accentuating and reinforcing their values. For example, in a classic experiment, high school students in France were asked to discuss Charles De Gaulle after they had indicated their individual attitudes towards this national hero. They were instructed to reach group consensus as to how he should be rated. The group consensus was polarized. That is, it was more extreme, more pro-De Gaulle, than the average individual attitude (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969). Hundreds of other experiments have shown similar examples of group polarization. For example, there have been numerous studies showing that groups make riskier decisions than would be predicted by the average level of risk

assumed by individual group members (Pruitt, 1971). Also, studies investigating racial

attitudes find that groups become more prejudiced or less prejudiced, accentuating

whatever position the individuals in the group begin with (Myers & Bishop, 1970).

There are several processes that underlie group polarization. First, there is some

genuine exchange of views, but the exchange is dominated by views supporting the

prevailing values. Because they are more available in the group, people hear more new

arguments supporting their values than arguments raising other perspectives. The group

is then swayed by the force of the arguments that they hear (Vinokur & Burnstein, 1974).

Second, there is a competitive social comparison process whereby people attempt to

maintain the view that they support the relevant value as much or more as others in the

group. People seem to think of supporting a value as similar to an ability-linked

performance (Jellison & Arkin, 1977). It is a measure of moral courage. As a result of

this jockeying for position, where people essentially compete for the moral high ground,

the group moves to a more extreme, or polarized, value position (Goethals & Zanna,

1979). These two processes likely work together, such that individuals' desire to perceive

that they stand positively on group values makes them likely to advance and willing to

accept arguments that support the value in a more pronounced way.

The group polarization phenomenon complicates our understanding of the effects

of talk. Not only are there pressures to conform to group values, there are pressures to

express them in extreme ways, and then to conform to those polarized expressions of the

values. The potential range of values that groups can adopt in a college setting is surely

quite wide. The institution will have its own set of values, articulated more or less clearly

and effectively. But student groups will have others. These group values will support

academic engagement, rowdy behavior, social service, expressions of tolerance or intolerance and a range of other values of interest to the institution to varying degrees. It might be best to think of a set of competing values at play in the college environment. Which ones each group adopts and expresses depends on how various groups are constituted and what values win favor in each one. These outcomes in turn depend on the persuasiveness of expressions of various values by various individuals both inside and outside the group. We will return to these issues shortly.

III.   Normative social influence: concerns about standing

Festinger's social comparison theory discusses a range of consequences of the human need to evaluate abilities and opinions. It imagines people quite open to finding out just how accurate or correct their opinions are, and how good their abilities are. Furthermore, it assumes that the pressures toward uniformity that operate on individuals are all in the service of objective self-evaluation. People conform so that there is opinion uniformity in the group to provide a basis for individuals to evaluate their opinions. As powerful as the theory is, it ignores a range of other issues that individuals face in groups, and that have other powerful consequences for the ways they function in a college environment. Recent versions of social comparison theory have incorporated these concerns, so that what follows below may reasonably be regarded as revising social comparison theory (Suls & Wills, 1991).

Let us begin with the important distinction in the social influence literature between informational and normative social influence. This distinction goes back to some of the earliest and most dramatic demonstrations in social psychology of peer

influence among college students. Informational social influence is the kind that Festinger thought characterized social comparison processes. It is influence based on the people's desire to be correct and their belief that peers have or might have information that will enable them to make a correct judgment. It was demonstrated clearly in research conducted in the 1930's by Muzafer Sherif (1936).

Sherif investigated the judgments that people in small groups made about the apparent movement of a light. Students at Columbia University looking at a fixed single point of light in a dark room, with no cues to locate the light, perceived the light to move even, though it was entirely stationary. This apparent movement is called the "autokinetic effect." Individuals typically make widely varying judgments about the amount the light moves, from just one or two inches to more than a foot. Over time, the judgments that individuals make settle down within a small range. If groups of people make their judgments together, announcing their judgments out loud, over time the judgments of all the individuals in the group likewise settle into a small range. A group norm develops in making judgments. When individuals are removed from groups that have established a norm, and then make judgments with other individuals or groups, the norm carries over to the new settings and influences judgments there. In these situations, the physical stimulus being judged is quite ambiguous, and members of a group depend on each other for information. At least some of the influence is derived from the fact that people take the judgments of others as giving them important information. This is shown in the fact that the group norms are internalized. When people leave a group they take the norm with them. There is no personal or interpersonal pressure from group members once an individual leaves the group.

But it is possible that some of the initial influence is based not entirely on people's desire to be correct but their desire to have good standing with other group members. This kind of influence is called normative social influence. Normative social influence takes place when people go along with other people's opinions or other people's behavior because they are concerned with how they will be viewed or treated by those people, not because they depend of them for information.

Is opinion or behavior change produced by normative social influence real change, or are people just doing or saying things to stay in others' good graces? Is it essentially compliance? Herbert Kelman (1961) makes useful distinctions between compliance, identification, and internalization. Compliance does not involve real opinion change. It is produced by powerful sources and lasts only as long as the source has the recipient of the influence attempt under surveillance. Internalization is genuine opinion change produce by a credible source. It produces an opinion that is integrated into the individual's other beliefs and values and lasts as long as it continues to fit. These two forms of social influence are familiar and widely discussed and researched.

Identification is often ignored. It is real opinion change produced by a recipient's liking for the source and efforts to be similar to the source. It is produced by people who are attractive to the recipient and lasts as long as the recipient still admires those people and wants to have a relationship with them. It should be noted that identification is not simply a process of opinion change. It is also a major process through which people form a self-concept or identity. People come to view themselves as similar to those with whom they identify, and this view is an important element in their overall self-concept.

Influence produced by normative social influence might be a mix of all three processes discussed by Kelman, but it typically has large components of compliance and identification. The nature of normative social influence can be seen clearly in some other seminal studies on social influence designed to show that the students in Sherif's were making rational, information based judgments. These were studies done by Solomon Asch at Swarthmore College (Asch, 1956). Subjects in small groups made judgments about which of three comparison lines was equal in length to a standard line. The judgments were quite easy to make. In a control condition where subjects made judgments individually, they were nearly no errors. What happens when other people in a group make the wrong judgment? Will the person exposed to this kind of social influence trust the data from his own senses and continue to make accurate judgments, uninfluenced by the group? If the individual does conform, should we think of normative or informational social influence?

Asch investigated these questions by exposing subjects to incorrect judgments unanimously reported by several other college students. These other students were accomplices of the experiment. Asch's studies showed a remarkable amount of conformity. While there were individual differences, there were high degrees of conformity. Asch was shocked.

How do we understand this conformity? Perhaps students are capable of making accurate judgments on their own, but don't know that they are. They may lack confidence and look to others for reliable information. In the past, others have been good sources of such information. Supporting this account, subsequent variations of the original study showed that when the judgments became easier, conformity to incorrect

answers decreases. However, it does not disappear. So there is some degree of informational social influence in Asch's studies.

On the other hand, some other variations make clear that there is normative influence as well. When students can make their judgments in private, anonymously, there is very little conformity. Clearly college students in a small group setting do not want to stick out and look different from their peers, or risk their ridicule. They will go along with the group.

The phenomenon of normative social influence underlines the fact that people have a concern with their standing in the group as well as with being correct (Tyler & Lind, 1992). They are reluctant to be different because they fear that being different will expose them to bad treatment from others. Is this fear justified? Recall that one of the major principles of social comparison theory is that groups strive toward uniformity of opinion and ability level. People who have different opinions are rejected from the group. The kinds of rejection that people face from a group from whom it deviates differ, but again, as social comparison theory states, that rejection is usually accompanied by hostility (Schachter, 1951). People are reluctant to risk it. The kinds of hostile rejection for deviation experienced in peer groups throughout development, among children and adults -- for example, among "rate-busters" in industrial settings -- exert powerful conformity pressures throughout the life span. Accounts of disastrous forms of "groupthink" among policy makers in government illustrate the reach of these concurrence seeking pressures (Janis, 1982).

IV. The Pragmatics of Human Communication

Closely related to the distinction between informational and normative social influence is the distinction in the communication literature between communication at the content level and the communication level (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). This perspective argues that all interpersonal behavior is communication and that it carries messages at both content and relationship levels. Content level communication is about external tasks, events, objects, people or problems that two individuals or a group face and must deal with. This kind of communication is usually done in words. Relationship level communication is typically done nonverbally and by implication. It conveys messages about how one views oneself, the other person or persons in the interaction, and their relationship. Disagreement about nearly anything potentially carries the implication of personal rejection and poor relationship. Thomas Jefferson made famous the phrase that "every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle." However, people worry that disagreement about specific people, events, facts, tasks, priorities, and problems is in fact rejection at the relationship level, and a signal of possible hostile exclusion. These concerns about relationship and standing in groups strengthen conformity pressures.

V. The Self-Concept, Social Identity, and Intergroup Relations

Group life has an important impact on people's self-concepts and their behavior. We have already seen three important aspects of interpersonal relations within groups that have a significant impact on the self-concept. First, people evaluate important personal qualities -- opinions and abilities, and likely many other key attributes as well -- through social comparison. Second, through interpersonal interaction and

communication, people learn what others think of them. Third, we noted that people often identify with others, in many instances members of their own group, and attempt to be like them in significant ways. All three of these processes -- social comparison, reflected appraisal, and identification -- affect people's sense of who they are, their identity, and their value. Importantly, not only is the self-concept affected by those processes, but so is self-esteem.

In addition, there is another process that has a significant influence on the self-concept and on self-esteem. This is an intergroup rather than within-group process, the formation of a social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to social identity theory people strive to maintain a positive self-image, or a high level of self-esteem. Their self-esteem is determined both by the value of their personal identity--that identity formed on the basis of reflected appraisal, social comparison, and identification--and their various social identities. Social identity is defined as "those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 16). People have a positive social identity if the groups to which they belong compare favorably on valued attributes. In addition to simply noting how well one's own group does in comparison to others, groups often compete with others so that they can perceive their standing on valued attributes as positive. This competition is, of course, similar to the competition in which individuals engage in order to make favorable social comparisons on an individual basis.

Because of people's wish to make their groups better than other groups and to perceive them as better than other groups, groups often demonstrate a great deal of ingroup favoritism, treating their own groups substantially better than other groups, not

so much as to benefit themselves absolutely, but to make themselves relatively better off. This is shown in some classic experiments by Tajfel and his colleagues (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). First, groups were created artificially in the laboratory. For example, in one study subjects were told that their preferences for abstract art slides showed that they were a member of a group that liked the painter Klee more than the painter Kandinsky, or vice-versa. Then subjects were asked to allocate rewards to members of the Klee group or the Kandinsky group. They did not know that their group membership was randomly determined.

In one study the payoff matrices were such that subjects could make allocations providing either maximum joint profit or maximum group difference. For example, a member of the Klee group could allocate a maximum of 19 pennies to another member of the Klee group if he or she allocated 25 pennies to a member of the Kandinsky group. This allowed maximum joint profit. Or, at the other extreme the Klee group member could assign 7 pennies to another member of the Klee group and 1 penny to a member of the Kandinsky group. This reward allocation lowered the absolute payoff for the member of the Klee group, but maximized the difference between the two rewards in favor of the Klee group member. Subjects were much more likely to choose the 7 vs. 1 allocation in favor of their fellow group member. They were much less interested in maximizing the amount of money paid to their fellow group members than in maximizing the difference between what the ingroup member received and what the outgroup member received. This result shows ingroup favoritism in unalloyed form.

These studies were done in what has come to be known as the "minimal group situation" and they show strong ingroup favoritism when there is in fact the most minimal

basis for group identification. Even when subjects know that they are randomly assigned to groups, for example, the A's or the B's, there is strong evidence of in-group favoritism.

The findings of these laboratory experiments are entirely consistent with those from important field experiments done by Sherif and his colleagues (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). Young boys at a summer camp were randomly divided into two groups, the Eagles and Rattlers. For the most part, they were kept separate but were brought together for a number of events -- baseball games, meals, movies, fireworks, etc. -- in which they could have behaved either competitively or cooperatively. The results showed that intergroup hostility was clearly the default setting for interaction between the two groups, or between individual members of the two groups. Conflict and competition ruled. The experimenters were clever enough to devise ways of inducing the two groups to cooperate, and to keep the hostility from getting out of hand, but they clearly were swimming against the tide.

In sum, these two bodies of research support many of the key points of social identity theory. People strongly favor members of the ingroup. We can see this in subjects' perceptions of ingroup and outgroup members, and in the attributions they make about their behavior. We see it as well in the way they treat members of different groups. Ingroup favoritism is favored over equitable treatment of outgroup members, even if the outcomes of ingroup members suffer as a result. The most important priority seems to be assuring that the ingroup is perceived and treated more favorably than the outgroup.

These results underline the idea that people base their self-esteem on both their personal identity and their social identities. On an individual basis they compete with others to compare as favorably as they can, within a limited ability range. On a group

basis they compete with other groups to compare as favorably as possible. Favorable

social comparison on both an individual and group basis boosts self-esteem.

There is one important and reassuring finding in the studies of the Eagles and

Rattlers summer camp groups. Sherif et al. created a number of situations where the two

groups could only achieve goals important to both groups by combining their efforts.

They worked together to find a leak in a water line, they pooled financial resources to

rent the film *Treasure Island*, and they pulled together on a rope formerly used for hostile

tugs-of-war to free a stuck truck. Where groups have a "superordinate goal," a goal that

is important to both groups, and which can only be achieved by the coordinated efforts of

both groups, "groups will tend to cooperate toward this *superordinate goal"* (Sherif et al.,

1961, p. 88, italics in original).   Cooperation induced by work toward the

accomplishment of a superordinate goal then engenders a reduction in intergroup

hostility, and even some movement toward the redefinition of group boundaries to

include the cooperating groups in a single larger group.

VI. Leadership in groups: the impact of inclusionary and exclusionary identity stories

On a college campus, managing groups' tendencies to become highly uniform on

opinions, abilities, and other important personal attributes, and to become hostile to other

groups, requires leadership. At the highest administrative level it requires leadership in

articulating a persuasive vision of the college, its mission, its values, and its people. At

the lower levels it requires convincing leadership within a range of college groups to

support college values of cooperation, mutual respect, and shared purpose. It will help us

understand how leadership among both administrators and peers might support such values if we look at recent theory and research on leadership.

For our purposes Howard Gardner's (1995) book <u>Leading Minds</u> provides a useful framework for understanding leadership. Gardner defines leaders as people "who, by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behavior, thoughts and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings" (Gardner, 1995, pp. 8-9). More pointedly, he quotes Harry Truman: "a leader is a man who has the ability to get other people to do what they don't want to do and like it" (Montgomery, 1958, p. 69). Gardner's particular approach emphasizes the "stories" that leaders relate in words or embody in their behavior, or both. For the most part, leaders' stories have been "about themselves and their groups, about where they were coming from and where they were headed, about what was to be feared, struggled against, and dreamed about" (Gardner, 1995, p. 14). In a word, these narratives are stories about identity. Leaders as diverse as Adolph Hitler, Margaret Mead, and Pope John XXIII related stories to a group of potential followers that in all three instances were persuasive to large numbers of them.

Like James MacGregor Burns (1978), Gardner highlights the idea that stories in groups, as related by potential leaders, conflict with one another. Burns argues that followers ultimately choose among "competing diagnoses, claims and values of would-be leaders" (Burns, 1978, p. 36). In Gardner's terms, there are stories and <u>counterstories</u>, that is, alternative perspectives on what a group's past, future, and present are, where they are going and what obstacles they face. Stories and counterstories are frequently illustrated in presidential elections in the United States, as well as in elections in other democratic societies. In 1960 John Kennedy told a story about a country that was in

increasingly grave danger because it had become stagnant and complacent. He embodied the vigorous leader who could get America moving again. Richard Nixon's counterstory about his capacity to oversee both a continuation of his predecessor's policies and to meet new challenges was, by a small amount, less persuasive.

Gardner also makes the highly relevant distinction between stories that are inclusionary and exclusionary. Inclusionary stories seek to draw people into the group and define groups broadly. Pope John XXIII's emphasis on ecumenism was a stunningly successful inclusionary story related both to the hierarchy of the Catholic church, which initially resisted the new pope's account, and to leaders of other religions. Exclusionary stories attempt to "denounce and exclude others" (Gardner, 1995, p. 13). Hitler is an obvious example of an exclusionary leader, while Margaret Thatcher and Patrick Buchanan provide more recent, if less extreme, illustrations.

It is relevant to point out that Gardner's definition of leadership can itself be called inclusionary. In defining leadership broadly, as influencing a significant number of human beings, and by including individuals such as Adolph Hitler as leaders, Gardner departs from definitions of leadership offered by scholars Burns (1978) and Ronald Heifetz (1994). Both Burns and Heifetz insist that real leadership exists only when followers are raised to a higher moral plain (Burns) or do adaptive work to solve real problems (Heifetz). Without getting into the question of what is and is not leadership, it is worth noting that leadership is often thought of as lifting groups to a higher moral level and as helping them solve real problems. Leadership of this general kind is needed in higher education.

Gardner's ideas alert us to the fact that there is a competition among views in many groups. Leaders addressing members of their own group, such as Hitler in Germany, or people outside their own group, such as Pope John XXIII in relation to non-Catholics, can and do attempt to be persuasive. Once a leader has successfully established a story of the group's identity and values, including who belongs and who does not belong, and which outgroups are threats, we would expect on the basis of the group polarization literature that that those views would become polarized, even without the benefit of further leadership. For a college community, it becomes critical, then, which leaders' accounts of the group's identity and values prevail. Is the group's story inclusionary or exclusionary, is it one that values intellectual achievement, social engagement, political activism, and respect among all members of the community, or does it value destructiveness, disrespect, and hostility toward difference?

Recent research suggests that one critical issue for leadership in an inclusionary group is finding ways of establishing and maintaining legitimacy within a larger group of heterogeneous subgroups. One well-established key to establishing legitimacy is procedural fairness, which gives people a sense of standing within groups (Tyler & Lind, 1992). However, fairness may recede as an important attribute of authority in heterogeneous groups composed of many subgroups. This is the situation facing leaders of diverse societies and diverse institutions such as many college campuses. In these cases subgroups may become more focussed on getting their share of rewards than in being treated fairly. Competition for rewards then strains the group fabric. A recent study of these issues shows that this concern can be overcome if individual group members have strong "superordinate identification" with the larger group as well as

strong identification with their subgroup (Huo, Smith, Tyler, & Lind, 1996).

Furthermore, a strong superordinate identification need not imply a weakened

identification with a smaller subgroup. Strong identification with both the larger and

smaller subgroups can co-exist and produce a focus on fairness rather than competition

among subgroups. The challenge for leadership is to keep superordinate identification

strong and salient. Leadership must relate a persuasive story about the fairness,

inclusiveness, and value of the larger group.

VII. Conclusion

We began by noting how powerfully students' attitudes can be influenced by their

peers during the college years. These changes can be understood in terms of social

comparison theory, which outlines the consequences for group dynamics of people's need

to evaluate their opinions and abilities. An expanded account of social comparison

processes considers the further group consequences of the need for self-esteem. The

distinction between informational and normative social influence underlines the

importance of people's standing in groups for their self-concepts and self-esteem. Social

identity theory expands these accounts to consider the implications of self-esteem needs

for intergroup competition, discrimination and hostility. Leadership within groups is

critical in countering the destructive consequences of tendencies toward fragmentation of

larger groups into smaller homogeneous groups which think and act in extreme ways and

which enact ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination.

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