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*Small Group Research* 1997; 28; 72

DOI: 10.1177/1046496497281003

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# GROUPTHINK

## An Examination of Theoretical Issues, Implications, and Future Research Suggestions

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*Despite its widespread appeal, the groupthink model has come under severe attack recently. Taking the position that recent calls for major revisions to the original formulation are premature, this article examines four theoretical areas that have been problematic for scholars investigating the groupthink phenomenon. This examination allows for the presentation of both implications and research suggestions designed to refocus research efforts on the model as originally proposed by Janis.*

**Over the past two decades**, acceptance of the groupthink model as an explanation for faulty group decision making has grown to the point that the term is virtually part of popular vocabulary (Aldag & Fuller, 1993). Despite its popularity, the groupthink process has little empirical support from which to justify its lofty position in the group decision-making literature. Park (1990) conducted a comprehensive review of the extant methodological research and was unable to find support for the overall model as well as for several of the antecedent conditions. In a more recent review of the empirical literature, Aldag and Fuller (1993) conclude that "it seems clear that there is little support for the full groupthink model . . . and in no study were all results consistent with the model" (p. 539). Indeed, the authors contend that the popularity of the model owes more to its intuitive appeal than to empirical support.

Several authors have noted that the lack of empirical support for the overall model and its constituent parts is a result, primarily, of

SMALL GROUP RESEARCH, Vol. 28 No. 1, February 1997 72-93

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Janis's rather vague and incomplete delineation of the nature of the antecedent variables and their interrelationships (Bernthal & Insko, 1993; Park, 1990; Turner, Pratkanis, Probasco, & Leve, 1992). Consequently, there is a need for an extensive revision to the theoretical framework of the groupthink process (Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Park, 1990; Turner et al., 1992). Recent research efforts have attempted to answer this call. Several studies have endeavored to clarify the nature of the antecedent conditions and their relationships to each other, as implied by Janis (Bernthal & Insko, 1993; Mullen, Anthony, Salas, & Driskell, 1994; Turner et al., 1992), while others have proposed including potentially relevant but overlooked variables (Luechauer, 1989; Moorhead, Ference, & Neck, 1991). At the extreme end of the revision continuum, two current efforts have essentially called for the dismissal of the groupthink model as a framework for explaining faulty group decision-making processes (Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Whyte, 1989).

Given the fact that empirical research on groupthink has been hindered by an ambiguous and equivocal theoretical framework (Bernthal & Insko, 1993; Park, 1990; Turner et al., 1992), it seems premature to dismiss the groupthink model as invalid or inappropriate. Before we draw this rather final conclusion, it would be wise to put our theoretical house in order. Herein lies the purpose of this work. Specifically, this article consolidates recent research findings and presents recommendations directed at four theoretical aspects of the groupthink model. The first two areas involve the most important and problematic element in Janis's original formulation: the nature of the group cohesion variable and its relationship with other antecedent conditions in the model. The last two areas examine issues recently raised about the nature of groupthink and research arguing for the inclusion of additional variables into the model. This consolidation forms the basis for several suggestions for future study on groupthink, with an eye toward keeping the current research momentum alive and moving forward. The article concludes with summary remarks.

Before directing our attention toward the theoretical issues involving the model, one caveat should be made. Although this article examines various components of the groupthink process, analysis

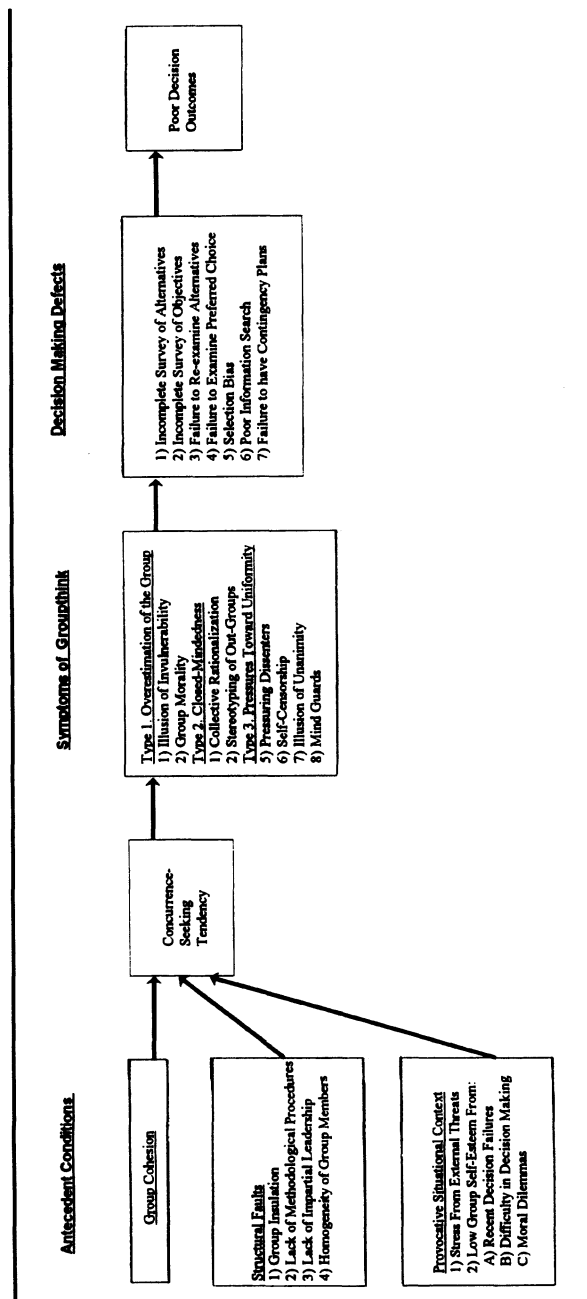
is restricted primarily to those variables comprising the antecedent conditions categories. Consequently, a detailed explanation of all components in the complete model will not be undertaken here. Specifically, analysis and description of the variables included in the Symptoms of Groupthink and the Decision-Making Defects categories (see Figure 1) will not be presented. There are at least two important reasons for such a restriction: First, researchers have focused their empirical and theoretical efforts almost exclusively on the antecedent conditions (Park, 1990; 't Hart, 1991). This is due, undoubtedly, to the overwhelming importance these variables are posited to play in the development of groupthink. As a result, very few studies have examined in detail the extent to which Janis's conceptualization of the remaining two groups of variables is accurate (Park, 1990; 't Hart, 1991). Second, knowledge of the nature and importance of these variables to the overall model is unlikely to emerge until we have a much stronger theoretical and empirical understanding of the antecedent variables. All three groups of variables comprising the complete groupthink model, as it is generally interpreted (Park, 1990; 't Hart, 1991), can be found in Figure 1.

## **THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This section examines four issues related to the theoretical framework of the groupthink structure: (a) a discussion of the most significant variable in the model, group cohesion, and recent research on its expected role in Janis's original formulation; (b) a look at the relationships between cohesion and the other antecedent conditions implied but not explicitly outlined by Janis; (c) an inquiry into issues recently raised about the nature of groupthink; and (d) an investigation of recent research indicating that the original formulation is incomplete and that additional variables may be needed.

### **THE GROUP COHESION VARIABLE**

*Background on group cohesion.* The original formulation of group cohesion was the result, primarily, of work by Festinger and



**Figure 1: The Groupthink Model**  
Adapted from Janis (1982).

his associates (Back, 1951; Festinger, 1950, 1954; Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950). These researchers defined cohesion as "the resultant of all forces acting on members to remain in the group" (Cartwright, 1968, p. 91). These "forces" consist of interpersonal attraction between group members, liking for or commitment to the group task, and the attractiveness of group prestige or pride derived from membership in the group (Cartwright, 1968). Interestingly, the conceptualization of cohesion as a multidimensional construct did not take hold with researchers studying group decision processes at that time (Mullen et al., 1994). Mullen and colleagues (1994) reported that several proximate studies on group cohesion "shifted the conceptualization of cohesiveness to a unitary construct" (p. 193). The interpersonal attraction element emerged as the primary target of interest to researchers and, to this day, retains its prominent position in cohesion research: "While a few recent studies have revived interest in distinct components of cohesiveness (see Mudrack, 1989; Zaccaro & McCoy, 1988), most treatments of group cohesiveness have focused exclusively on the interpersonal attraction component (Hogg, 1992)" (Mullen et al., 1994, p. 193).

In addition to exploring the characteristics of group cohesion, early group dynamics researchers found "that members of cohesive groups hold uniform opinions and act in conformity to group pressure" (Back, 1951, p. 9). This fact (i.e., that cohesive groups consist of members who will conform their opinions and decisions in response to group pressure), coupled with the aforementioned delineation of cohesion, provided the basis for Janis's early work on group decision-making dynamics (Janis, 1963). Janis was not the first to view cohesion as strong interpersonal attraction among group members, nor was he the first to recognize the power of cohesion to affect the views and opinions of the members. He was, however, the first to argue that high levels of group cohesion could lead to faulty decision-making outcomes ('t Hart, 1991). The importance Janis placed on this variable is reflected in Figure 1, where group cohesion is an antecedent category in and of itself.

Researchers have long recognized the central role Janis attributed to cohesion: "The cohesiveness of decision-making groups

is the crucial linchpin in Janis's own depiction of the dynamics of groupthink. In fact, it is the sole group-level factor that he singles out as a substantive, independent cause of groupthink" (t' Hart, 1991, p. 251). Indeed, Janis consistently maintained that a high level of group cohesion was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the development of groupthink (Bernthal & Insko, 1993). Although he was emphatic about the importance of cohesion in the model, he was not specific as to *which* conception of cohesion (uni- vs. multidimensional) is the most important to the development of groupthink. As a result, most researchers have assumed that Janis viewed cohesion as synonymous with interpersonal attraction (Bernthal & Insko, 1993; Park, 1990).

*Research review.* Park's (1990) review of the extant empirical research on groupthink concluded that "group cohesiveness, either alone or in interaction with other variables, does not affect groupthink in most cases" (Park, 1990, p. 236). There are two main reasons for the inconclusive evidence concerning this variable: First, as alluded to earlier, Janis's original conceptualization of this antecedent condition is rather ambiguous. He appears to have adopted the dominant view in the literature at that time—that is, that group cohesion is a unidimensional construct best characterized by strong interpersonal attraction (t' Hart, 1991). Subsequent research on groupthink followed Janis's lead and conceptualized cohesion in a similar fashion, thereby adding little conceptual insight to the cohesion-groupthink relationship. Researchers have not been shy about publicizing this point: Longley and Pruitt (1980) criticized the model for failing to provide a clear definition of cohesion, a point echoed by recent research (Bernthal & Insko, 1993; Park, 1990; Turner et al., 1992). Second, due in large part to ambiguity in the definition of cohesion, researchers have generally been unable to reliably reproduce group cohesion during experimental manipulations (Bernthal & Insko, 1993; McCauley, 1989; Steiner, 1982; Turner et al., 1992). Given the ambiguous definition of this variable and the inability of researchers to experimentally reproduce it, it should not be surprising that efforts to capture and understand group cohesion have been severely retarded (Park, 1990).

In response to the justifiably bleak conclusions drawn by Park (1990), researchers recently have addressed the theoretical ambiguity in Janis's formulation of the cohesion variable. Importantly, there has been a conscious effort to study the cohesion variable as it was initially formulated by early researchers. That is, recent studies have adopted the original position that group cohesion is a multidimensional construct consisting of interpersonal attraction, commitment to the group task, and the prestige of being associated with membership in the group (Back, 1951; Festinger et al., 1950).

Bernthal and Insko (1993) operationalized two types of group cohesion: task cohesion and socioemotional cohesion. Groups that tend to emphasize the task at hand, rather than the social nature of the group, are said to be task cohesive. Groups that focus more on the social and emotional aspects of the group are socioemotionally cohesive. These two views of cohesion are compatible with the original conceptualization of the variable (Festinger et al., 1950): Task cohesiveness is equivalent to the degree to which group members are committed to the task of the group, and socioemotional cohesion is consistent with the interpersonal attraction and pride in group membership components. (It should be noted that Bernthal and Insko [1993] emphasized the interpersonal attraction aspect of cohesion to a greater degree than the pride in group aspect. It seems logical to argue, however, that pride in group membership, with its concomitant wealth of emotions and feelings, is clearly an aspect that would "fit" into the authors' delineation of socioemotional cohesion.) Within this framework, Janis's view of cohesion is consistent with the socioemotional variable (Bernthal & Insko, 1993).

In their study, Bernthal and Insko (1993) found that groups high in socioemotional cohesion are more likely to display groupthink symptoms than are groups high in task cohesiveness. More specifically, the propensity for the group to display groupthink symptoms is greatest when socioemotional cohesion is high *and* task cohesiveness is low. Conversely, groups high in task cohesiveness *and* low in socioemotional cohesiveness are unlikely to develop groupthink. These findings have important implications for the groupthink model. To the extent that groupthink occurs only in the presence of high socioemotional cohesion, it provides support for



the importance of the cohesion variable. In addition, the fact that the development of groupthink is hindered by high levels of task cohesion provides indirect support for the model:

The hypotheses of this study provide a corollary to Janis's assertions by showing that conditions preventing groupthink can be instituted by providing a task-oriented focus within the decision-making group. Because of its highly analytical focus on decision making, task-oriented cohesion promotes a more vigilant search and appraisal of information. (Bernthal & Insko, 1993, p. 84)

In effect, Bernthal and Insko present preliminary evidence indicating that groupthink is a function of the type of cohesion present in the group. Apparently, a high level of socioemotional cohesion, not task cohesion, is at least a necessary condition for the emergence of groupthink.

Turner et al. (1992) conducted several experiments in which cohesion was manipulated. Specifically, evidence was found for the existence of a "self-categorization and social-identity aspect of cohesion, that is, the categorization of others as members of the group rather than as unique individuals" (p. 795). The authors found that the more the group engages in the adoption and maintenance of a social identity, the more it is prone to groupthink. In addition, there appears to be conceptual congruity between this facet of cohesion and the pride of a membership component in the original version of group cohesion (Back, 1951). To the extent that a group member's feelings of pride and prestige result from association with the group (i.e., it is an honor to be a member), it is reasonable to argue that he or she will be strongly inclined toward maintaining identification with the group. Given that the other individuals in the group can be expected to do the same, members can be said to have adopted a social identity perspective. Thus the resulting cohesion between group members is based on social identity, driven by each individual's desire for the pride and prestige derived from association with the group.

Turner et al. (1992) believe the social identity aspect of cohesion is consistent with a liberal interpretation of the cohesion variable in Janis's model, and, given the earlier discussion, it appears that the social identity aspect of cohesion is also conceptually similar to the

socioemotional form of cohesion as put forth by Bernthal and Insko (1993).

A third recent study (Mullen et al., 1994) found evidence for the effects of interpersonal attraction and the development of cohesion in groups. Although their research did not find any overall effect of cohesiveness on the quality of group decisions (when examined *independently* of other groupthink antecedent conditions), the authors did find that

the component of cohesiveness that appears to be critical for the emergence of groupthink is interpersonal attraction: Cohesiveness impaired decision quality more as the operationalization of cohesiveness entailed more interpersonal attraction, and less as the operationalization entailed more commitment to task. (p. 189)

The similarity of this finding to the findings of Bernthal and Insko (1993) is considerable. In both studies, high levels of interpersonal attraction correlated with the presence of groupthink, and high levels of task cohesion tended to reduce the likelihood of groupthink. These two studies, along with the Turner et al. (1992) findings, appear to provide reasonably strong support for the crucial role cohesion is expected to play in the development of groupthink.

Although crucial to the development of groupthink, cohesion is not the only antecedent condition in Janis's model. The next section will discuss some of the relationships between the variables in the model.

#### COHESION AND OTHER ANTECEDENT VARIABLES

Basically, the model assumes that the presence of high group cohesion, although not sufficient by itself, is a necessary condition for the development of groupthink (Bernthal & Insko, 1993; Neck & Moorhead, 1992). Further, Janis (1971) indicated that cohesion would tend to interact with other antecedent conditions; unfortunately, he did not specify with which variables and in what manner interactions could be expected to occur (Longley & Pruitt, 1980; 't Hart, 1991).

Given that early research on the groupthink model did not address the poor theoretical stature of the cohesion variable, it is

not surprising that Park (1990) found that cohesion, either by itself or in conjunction with other antecedent conditions, had little or no effect on the development of groupthink. Similarly, Aldag and Fuller (1993) observed that early research efforts examining the effects of combinations of antecedent conditions "were rarely faithful to the original conceptualization, in which cohesion was a necessary condition" (p. 539). This situation, like the conceptualization of group cohesion, may be changing, however. Research has started to examine the effects of group cohesion in combination with other antecedent conditions and, in three recent studies, has found a relationship supportive of the groupthink model.

Mullen et al. (1994) conducted a meta-analytic integration of the effects of cohesiveness on the emergence of groupthink and found that the more cohesive the group (i.e., the higher the level of interpersonal attraction), the poorer the decision quality *when additional antecedent conditions were present*. Specifically, the authors found that the presence of directive leadership and the lack of methodological procedures for evaluating alternative decision options, when combined with high interpersonal attraction between group members, resulted in poor decision outcomes.

In another study, Turner et al. (1992) examined the relationship between cohesion and external threats to the self-esteem of the group. In this case, the authors operationalized cohesion as a form of social identity maintenance. Basically, group cohesion is the extent to which individuals view themselves and others as members of the group and not as unique individuals who happen to be in the same group. Based on this conception of cohesion, Turner et al. found that groups with moderate-to-high levels of cohesion exposed to high external threat conditions formed poorer-quality decisions than did moderate-to-high cohesion groups exposed to low-threat conditions. These results, as well as those of Mullen et al. (1994), are important because both are consistent with Janis's original interpretation of the processes underlying the relationships between cohesion and the other antecedent conditions. In neither study was cohesion, by itself, sufficient to induce groupthink; however, when cohesion was combined with additional antecedent

variables, the poor-quality decisions consistent with the presence of groupthink emerged.

A third study found support for the necessity of a cohesion + other antecedent variable relationship, albeit in a somewhat back-door manner. Neck and Moorhead (1992) used a case study format to examine a situation where it appeared that all but one of the antecedent conditions for groupthink were substantially present, but groupthink did not result. In this study of jury deliberations, methodological procedures *were* in place to consider alternative decision options. Because groupthink did not occur, the researchers concluded that the presence of methodological procedures moderated the development of groupthink. The authors argued that if procedures for evaluating alternative decision paths had not been in place, coupled with the high levels of group cohesion exhibited by the jurors, groupthink would have certainly occurred. This interpretation lends indirect support to the cohesion + additional antecedent conditions effect, as expounded by Janis.

The next portion of this article examines issues recently raised about the nature of the groupthink phenomenon.

#### THE NATURE OF GROUPTHINK

A survey of the literature on groupthink reveals that researchers have raised questions as to the nature of the groupthink processes. These questions may be grouped into three areas, each of which will be examined next.

*Weak versus strong interpretation.* Most scholars have interpreted Janis's model as having an additive nature; that is, the more antecedent conditions present, the higher the likelihood of groupthink. The initial conditions are part of a causal chain linking antecedent conditions to symptoms to defects to faulty outcomes (Aldag & Fuller, 1993). This strong form interpretation was generally adopted without question by early research, a position clearly consistent with Janis's intentions (Aldag & Fuller, 1993). In response to the lack of empirical support for the model, however, a few authors have argued that a less restrictive rendering is in order

(Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Turner et al., 1992). The weak interpretation views the groupthink framework as more of a guide; the existence of some smaller group of antecedent variables may be enough to elicit groupthink. In addition, the causal chain is suggestive rather than deterministic. To date, Turner et al. (1992) presented the only study whose findings are consistent with the weak form interpretation.

*Individual characteristics.* Two recent research efforts have raised the issue of the effect dispositional characteristics of individuals in a group can have on the development of groupthink. Luechauer (1989) suggests that the self-monitoring propensity of group members may act as a means for moving groups toward groupthink (Aldag & Fuller, 1993). Basically, fantasy themes held by group members may force a group to "draw a boundary around itself that resists intrusions" (Aldag & Fuller, 1993, p. 538). The greater the self-monitoring of group members, the stronger the boundary and the greater the likelihood of groupthink.

Kroon, van Kreveld, and Rabbie (1992) drew on findings from the gender stereotypes literature to argue that males may be more prone to groupthink than females. The authors point out that virtually all decision groups analyzed in Janis's case studies, as well as those of subsequent researchers, were composed almost entirely of males. This is in sharp contrast to the usual mixed-sex membership used by investigators conducting experimental research on groupthink. It is possible that a major reason for the equivocal experimental findings on groupthink can be attributed to this issue (Kroon et al., 1992).

*Level of group development.* Longley and Pruitt (1980) argued that there may be different types of cohesiveness at different stages in the group's development (Heinemann, Farrell, & Schmitt, 1994). Specifically, groupthink may be more likely at early stages, when members are insecure about expectations, norms, and roles (Aldag & Fuller, 1993). Similarly, Leana (1985) suggested that groups with a longer history of decision making will be more secure in their behaviors and expectations toward group members. Thus they will

be more secure in their ability to challenge the majority position of the group, ultimately resulting in fewer symptoms of poor decision making (Aldag & Fuller, 1993). One set of researchers (Heinemann et al., 1994) successfully used the developmental perspective to design a strategy for combating potential groupthink emergence.

Janis's model does not address considerations such as those just outlined. Recently, researchers have argued that the conceptual structure of the model is incomplete as well (Moorhead & Montanari, 1986; Moorhead et al., 1991). The next section of this article presents research aimed at expanding the theoretical structure of the model.

#### ADDITIONAL VARIABLES IN THE MODEL

Several researchers have asserted that the groupthink model is incomplete as specified by Janis (Moorhead et al., 1991; Park, 1990; Turner et al., 1992). In a study of the space shuttle *Challenger* disaster, Moorhead et al. (1991) maintain that the results of their case analysis emphasize the need for two additional variables in the model: the presence of time pressures and the role of the leader of the group. The presumption here is that groups under time pressure are less likely to consider and assess alternative courses of action and, therefore, will generally make decisions consistent with the extant majority view. Similarly, groups with nondirective leadership can be expected to eschew minority views in favor of the more popular majority position. The authors believe that the two variables can be expected to act in a moderating fashion, that is, the degree to which each is present and is expected to influence the development of groupthink.

In the previously mentioned study of jury deliberations, Neck and Moorhead (1992) noted that virtually all antecedent conditions for groupthink were present, but groupthink was avoided. The main reason for this was the existence of systematic procedures for gathering and analyzing information and critically appraising alternatives. Consequently, the researchers call for including a moderating variable, "utilization of methodological procedures for information search and appraisal" (Neck & Moorhead, 1992, p. 1087).

In addition to the variables just discussed, three others have been advocated as important for the groupthink model:

1. *The effects of group norms.* Group norms have been found to moderate the effects of cohesiveness on group performance (Aldag & Fuller, 1993).
2. *Leader power within the group.* Generally, the more attractive and powerful the leader, the stronger the push within the group for consensus in the leader's direction (Aldag & Fuller, 1993).
3. *The nature of the task at hand.* It appears that tasks requiring participation from all group members to successfully complete are more conducive to the development of groupthink because of the interaction necessary on the part of the members. Conversely, tasks that can be solved by one member of the group, for example, require less member interaction and, therefore, less opportunity for the development of groupthink (Aldag & Fuller, 1993).

At this point, four areas of importance for the theoretical framework of the model have been presented. The next section presents implications related to these concerns and suggests several areas for future research on the groupthink model.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

*Cohesion.* Several of the studies reviewed in this article present findings concerning the impact of group cohesion on the development of groupthink. These studies provide reason for optimism to researchers who view Janis's groupthink model as a legitimate framework for understanding faulty group decision-making processes.

The recent work of Turner et al. (1992), Bernthal and Insko (1993), and Mullen et al. (1994) have contributed to the understanding of group cohesion and its impact on groupthink in at least three ways: First, these findings, taken together, provide strong support for the original conceptualization of group cohesion as a multidimensional construct (e.g., Back, 1951; Festinger, 1950; Festinger et al., 1950). For example, both Bernthal and Insko and Mullen et al. were able to find effects of the task commitment and



interpersonal attractiveness components of group cohesion. In addition, Turner et al. captured the essence of the pride in the group membership aspect of cohesion in their operationalization of cohesion as a member's desire to adopt and maintain a social identity perspective with the group. Second, these studies were successful in establishing a relationship between the three aspects of cohesion and the emergence of groupthink. Interpersonal attraction among members and pride in group membership were both positively related to the development of groupthink (Bernthal & Insko, 1993; Turner et al., 1992), but task cohesion was negatively related to the presence of groupthink (Mullen et al., 1994; Neck & Moorhead, 1992). Given the inability of early groupthink scholars to consistently find such relationships, the importance of these studies becomes readily apparent. Third, these studies provide much needed evidence in support of Janis's view that a moderate to high level of cohesion is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for groupthink to occur. In each study, groupthink emerged only when high levels of cohesion were present and did not occur when cohesion levels were low.

These studies have significant implications for future research on groupthink. First, and perhaps most important, modification in our conceptualization of group cohesion seems to be in order. Given that the antecedent conditions in Janis's original formulation of the model are expected to *increase* the likelihood of groupthink occurring, it seems logical to define group cohesion as a function of its components that are positively related to groupthink. Thus this article suggests that group cohesion, as it applies to the groupthink model, be viewed as consisting of two elements: interpersonal attraction among members and pride in group membership. As noted previously, both these components have been shown to promote the development of groupthink. The third aspect of the original conceptualization of group cohesion, task commitment, was found to be negatively related to groupthink (Mullen et al., 1994; Neck & Moorhead, 1992) and should, therefore, be partitioned out of the new conceptualization of group cohesion. However, this does not mean that the role of task commitment is not accounted for in the model. Indeed, Mullen et al. (1994) argue that



the effects of task cohesion *are* accounted for in the original model, albeit in an indirect manner:

In a sense, cohesiveness in terms of commitment to task may actively thwart groupthink by undoing one of the antecedent conditions for groupthink, namely the lack of methodological procedures for search and appraisal of decision alternatives. (p. 200)

If groups high in task commitment methodologically search and appraise alternative courses of action to a larger degree than do groups low in task commitment, then it seems to follow that a *lack* of methodological procedures for search and appraisal is indicative of a group low in task cohesion. In other words, we might expect task cohesion and methodological procedures for search and appraisal to be related in the following manner: Low task cohesion results in a lack of methodological procedures, and high task cohesion results in the presence of methodological procedures. Consequently, the presence of task cohesion may be inferred as a function of the degree to which norms for methodological procedures for search and appraisal are in place. In this manner, we can partition out the task commitment element from the original group cohesion definition without necessarily losing an understanding of its impact on the development of groupthink. Although there is intriguing evidence suggesting that this line of reasoning may be correct (e.g., Mullen et al., 1994; Neck & Moorhead, 1992), additional research is needed.

Adopting this revised definition of group cohesion supports the groupthink model in two ways: First, by clarifying Janis's equivocal specification of group cohesion, it provides strong theoretical and empirical support for the importance of this variable to the model. Second, clearly defining group cohesion in this manner should make it easier for researchers to operationalize and manipulate cohesion in future studies of groupthink. The model will be clear about what is meant by group cohesion; arbitrarily deciding how to define and manipulate it will not be left up to each researcher, as was often the case in early studies (Park, 1990).

A second implication for future research involves replicating the findings of the studies of cohesion presented in this article. In addition to providing both the cohesion variable and the groupthink

model with sorely needed empirical support (Mullen et al., 1994; 't Hart, 1991), researchers should be able to increase the model's domain of external validity. Several scholars (Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Whyte, 1989) have noted that Janis's retrospective case studies have, almost without exception, involved individuals in extremely high profile groups (e.g., Kennedy and his staff in the Bay of Pigs debacle; Nixon and his staff in the Watergate cover-up, etc.). By way of contrast, case study researchers might focus their attention on lower-level, more typical decision-making groups to increase the generalizability of the overall model. Continued laboratory research also will serve to extend the explanatory power of the model. As is the case with any concept, the greater the domain of external validity the groupthink model can claim, the more powerful, useful, and accepted it will be as a framework for explaining faulty group decision-making processes.

A final area of interest involves Janis's original belief that cohesion is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the development of groupthink. The recent studies reviewed in this article provide tentative evidence for his position. These studies show that high cohesion (of the type consistent with the new definition) was present when groupthink symptoms emerged. The Mullen et al. (1994) study, however, found that cohesion by itself was not sufficient to induce groupthink; only when additional antecedent conditions were present along with high levels of cohesion did groupthink occur. Clearly, our understanding of the groupthink process would benefit from future research directed at further refinement of the nature of group cohesion as well as determining under what conditions, if any, presence of cohesion by itself is sufficient to cause groupthink.

*Cohesion and the other antecedent variables.* Because most of the early work on groupthink was unable to empirically substantiate the importance of cohesion on the development of groupthink, it comes as no surprise that few of the other antecedent conditions in the model have been examined from either an empirical or theoretical perspective (Park, 1990; Turner et al., 1992). Our ability to

determine when, and if, groupthink results from an interaction between cohesion and other antecedent conditions will be dramatically affected by how well we understand the cohesion variable. Recent findings provide the foundation for a more comprehensive conceptualization of group cohesion that, it is hoped, will provide future researchers with the impetus for a thorough exploration of the other antecedent conditions and their relationships with the cohesion variable.

Because this has been a relatively untapped area of inquiry, many basic questions need to be addressed: Is there a specific number of additional antecedent conditions in conjunction with cohesion that needs to be present for groupthink to develop? Does the presence of a large number of antecedent conditions necessarily increase the likelihood of groupthink occurring? Does one aspect of group cohesion (e.g., pride in group membership) lend itself more readily to the development of groupthink when in the presence of additional antecedent variables than does the other aspect (i.e., interpersonal attraction)? Fortunately, recent research has started to provide preliminary answers to questions such as these.

Turner et al. (1992) found that cohesive groups experiencing stress due to external threats to the group's self-esteem were more likely to make poor decisions than were cohesive groups not exposed to such threats. Mullen et al. (1994) found that the presence of directive leadership and the lack of methodological procedures for evaluating alternative decision options, when combined with high interpersonal attraction among group members, resulted in poor decision outcomes. Finally, the study on jury deliberations (Neck & Moorhead, 1992) also provided indirect support for the effect of methodological procedures on the decision-making process of highly cohesive groups. Although these studies provide encouraging support for Janis's model, more research on the potential relationships between cohesion and other antecedent conditions is needed.

*Nature of the groupthink process.* As indicated earlier, there is some question as to whether the strong or weak form interpretation of the model is most appropriate. Janis clearly intended a strong

interpretation (Aldag & Fuller, 1993), although some scholars, in response to the lack of empirical support for the model, have argued that a less restrictive explication is needed (Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Turner et al., 1992). Interestingly, research directed at the delineation and exploration of the various antecedent conditions can be expected to shed light on this subject. As researchers uncover the nature of various relationships between the antecedent variables, it will be possible to determine the relevant perspective from which to view the overall model. If it appears that more antecedent conditions equate with a higher likelihood of groupthink, then a strong, additive interpretation may be correct; if the existence of some smaller group of antecedent variables is enough to elicit groupthink, then the weaker version would be appropriate. Consequently, scholars analyzing the manifold antecedent variables in the groupthink model would do well to consider the impact of their findings on the strong versus weak form debate.

Another area concerning the nature of the groupthink process involves the issue of group development. Several researchers in the 1980s argued that the stage of group development can have an impact on the occurrence of groupthink (Leana, 1985; Longley & Pruitt, 1980). Despite this, no attempts have been made to incorporate the findings from the group development literature into the theoretical framework of the groupthink model. This appears to be an oversight that can no longer be ignored. To the extent that group cohesion varies as a function of the stage of group development (Leana, 1985; Longley & Pruitt, 1980), it seems reasonable to conclude that groupthink may be similarly affected. Clearly, more research into the relationship of group stage development and the occurrence of groupthink is needed.

*Comprehensiveness of the model.* As was outlined in the section questioning the comprehensiveness of the original groupthink formulation, recent research efforts have proposed the inclusion of several additional variables in the model. These proposals were, in large part, a response to the overall lack of empirical support for the original formulation of the model. Although it may be that these additional variables are, in fact, relevant to the development of

groupthink, it is the position of this article that including these factors into a revised model is premature at this time. Rather than adding new factors to the model, it seems logical instead to focus attention on those variables in Janis's original model that have yet to be studied in any significant detail. In particular, the variables comprising the symptoms of groupthink and decision-making defects categories will benefit from our growing understanding of the nature and impact of the antecedent conditions on the development of groupthink. To the extent that future researchers will be able to consistently and reliably reproduce groupthink, the opportunities to study these variables will be increased dramatically.

## CONCLUSION

The groupthink phenomenon is an extremely popular concept in the group decision-making literature (Aldag & Fuller, 1993). Despite its popularity, several researchers have recently attacked the model as inappropriate and invalid as a model of faulty group decision-making processes. Some scholars have suggested that the model, as Janis originally conceived it, should be severely modified if not outright abandoned (Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Whyte, 1989). This article has taken the position that, rather than dismiss the groupthink model as invalid or inappropriate, an effort should be made to redirect research efforts to areas that have been problematic for the model. In defending this position, the present article contributes to the groupthink literature in three ways: First, a review of the most important and traditionally problematic antecedent condition in the model was presented. The discussion on group cohesion concluded that recent evidence appears to support the role this important variable is posited to play in Janis's model. Second, it was argued that this evidence provides a basis for a reformulation of group cohesion as it applies to the study of groupthink. In addition to presenting this revision, implications and suggestions for future research as they relate to group cohesion were offered. Third, several other areas of importance to Janis's model were examined: (a) the relationship between group cohesion and other antecedent

conditions in the model, (b) issues recently raised about the nature of groupthink, and (c) research arguing for the inclusion of additional variables into the model. Implications and suggestions for future research in each of these areas were also made. It is hoped that the contributions of this article will add to the current research momentum being generated by researchers examining this important model of faulty group decision-making processes.

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