

“ATTENDING A SERVICE IN THE GOTHIC CATHEDRAL, WE HAVE THE SENSATION OF BEING ENCLOSED AND STEEPED IN AN INTEGRAL UNIVERSE, AND OF LOSING A PRICKLY SENSE OF SELF IN THE COMMUNITY OF WORSHIPERS.”

—YI-FU TUAN, 1982

self-awareness

A self-conscious state in which attention focuses on oneself. It makes people more sensitive to their own attitudes and dispositions.

the presence of a mirror had no effect on cheating

[[Fix spacing.]]

deindividuating group experiences—dances, worship experiences, team sports—where we can enjoy intense positive feelings and closeness to others.

Diminished Self-Awareness

Group experiences that diminish self-consciousness tend to disconnect behavior from attitudes. Research by Ed Diener (1980) and Steven Prentice-Dunn and Ronald Rogers (1980, 1989) revealed that unself-conscious, deindividuated people are less restrained, less self-regulated, more likely to act without thinking about their own values, and more responsive to the situation. ~~These findings complement and reinforce the experiments on self-awareness.~~ These

Self-awareness is the opposite of deindividuation. Those made self-aware, by acting in front of a mirror or a TV camera, exhibit *increased* self-control, and their actions more clearly reflect their attitudes. In front of a mirror, people taste-testing cream cheese varieties eat less of the high-fat variety (Sentryrz & Bushman, 1998).

People made self-aware are also less likely to cheat (Beaman et al., 1979; Diener & Wallbom, 1976). So are those who generally have a strong sense of themselves as distinct and independent (Nadler et al., 1982). In Japan, where ~~(mirror or no mirror) people more often imagine how they might look to others, people are no more likely to cheat when not in front of a mirror~~ (Heine et al., 2008). The principle: People who are self-conscious, or who are temporarily made so, exhibit greater consistency between their words outside a situation and their deeds in it.

We can apply those findings to many situations in everyday life. Circumstances that decrease self-awareness, as alcohol consumption does, **increase** deindividuation (Hull et al., 1983). Deindividuation **decreases** in circumstances that increase self-awareness: mirrors and cameras, small towns, bright lights, large name tags, undistracted quiet, individual clothes and houses (Ickes et al., 1978). When a teenager leaves for a party, a parent’s parting advice could well be “Have fun, and remember who you are.” In other words, enjoy being with the group, but be self-aware; maintain your personal identity; be wary of deindividuation.

[[Italicize "increase" and "decreases."]]

SUMMINGUP: Deindividuation: When Do People Lose Their Sense of Self in Groups?

- When high levels of social arousal combine with dif-fused responsibility, people may abandon their normal restraints and lose their sense of individuality.
- Such *deindividuation* is especially likely when people are in a large group, are physically anonymous, and are aroused and distracted.
- The resulting diminished *self-awareness* and self-restraint tend to increase people’s responsiveness to the immediate situation, be it negative or positive. Deindividuation is less likely when self-awareness is high.

[[comp: should be GROUP POLARIZATION:]]

[[Fix spacing.]]

GROUP POLARIZATION: DO GROUPS INTENSIFY OUR OPINIONS?

Describe and explain how interaction with like-minded people tends to amplify preexisting attitudes.

Many conflicts grow as people on both sides talk mostly with like-minded others. Which effect—good or bad—does group interaction more often have? Police brutality and mob violence demonstrate its destructive potential. Yet support-group

leaders, management consultants, and educational theorists proclaim group interaction's benefits, and social and religious movements urge their members to strengthen their identities by fellowship with like-minded others.

Studies of people in small groups have produced a principle that helps explain both bad and good outcomes: Group discussion often strengthens members' initial inclinations. The unfolding of this research on **group polarization** illustrates the process of inquiry—how an interesting discovery often leads researchers to hasty and erroneous conclusions, which ultimately are replaced with more accurate conclusions. This is a scientific mystery I can discuss firsthand, having been one of the detectives.

get

[DM]

The Case of the "Risky Shift"

More than 300 studies began with a surprising finding by James Stoner (1961), then an MIT graduate student. For his master's thesis in management, Stoner tested the commonly held belief that groups are more cautious than individuals. He posed decision dilemmas in which the participant's task was to advise imagined characters how much risk to take. Put yourself in the participant's shoes: What advice would you give the character in this situation?¹

Helen is a writer who is said to have considerable creative talent but who so far has been earning a comfortable living by writing cheap westerns. Recently she has come up with an idea for a potentially significant novel. If it could be written and accepted, it might have considerable literary impact and be a big boost to her career. On the other hand, if she cannot work out her idea or if the novel is a flop, she will have expended considerable time and energy without remuneration.

Imagine that you are advising Helen. Please check the *lowest* probability that you would consider acceptable for Helen to attempt to write the novel.

Helen should attempt to write the novel if the chances that the novel will be a success are at least

- 1i n10
- 2i n10
- 3i n10
- 4i n10
- 5i n10
- 6i n10
- 7i n10
- 8i n10
- 9i n10

← [[Fix spacing. It should read "1 in 10" and so on.]]

10 in 10 (Place a check here if you think Helen should attempt the novel only if it is certain that the novel will be a success.)

After making your decision, guess what this book's average reader would advise.

Having marked their advice on a dozen items, five or so individuals would then discuss and reach agreement on each item. How do you think the group decisions compared with the average decision before the discussions? Would the groups be likely to take greater risks, be more cautious, or stay the same?

To everyone's amazement, the group decisions were usually riskier. This "risky shift phenomenon" set off a wave of group risk-taking studies. These revealed that risky shift occurs not only when a group decides by consensus; after a brief discussion, individuals, too, will alter their decisions. What is more, researchers successfully repeated Stoner's finding with people of varying ages and occupations in a dozen nations.

During discussion, opinions converged. Curiously, however, the point toward which they converged was usually a lower (riskier) number than their initial average. Here was a delightful puzzle. The small risky shift effect was reliable, unexpected, and without any immediately obvious explanation. What group influences produce such an effect? And how widespread is it? Do discussions in juries,

an intriguing

¹This item, constructed for my own research, illustrates the sort of decision dilemma posed by Stoner.

[DM's]

business committees, and military organizations also promote risk taking? Does this explain why teenage reckless driving, as measured by death rates, nearly doubles when a 16- or 17-year-old driver has two teenage passengers rather than none (Chen et al., 2000)? Does it explain stock bubbles, as people discuss why stocks are rising, thus creating an informational cascade that drives stocks even higher (Sunstein, 2009)?

After several years of study, we discovered that the risky shift was not universal. We could write decision dilemmas on which people became more *cautious* after discussion. One of these featured “Roger,” a young married man with two school-age children and a secure but low-paying job. Roger can afford life’s necessities but few of its luxuries. He hears that the stock of a relatively unknown company may soon triple in value if its new product is favorably received or decline considerably if it does not sell. Roger has no savings. To invest in the company, he is considering selling his life insurance policy.

Can you see a general principle that predicts both the tendency to give riskier advice after discussing Helen’s situation and more cautious advice after discussing Roger’s? If you are like most people, you would advise Helen to take a greater risk than Roger, even before talking with others. It turns out there is a strong tendency for discussion to accentuate these initial leanings; groups discussing the “Roger” dilemma became more risk-averse than they were before discussion.

my [DM's] colleagues and I

(Myers, 2010)

leanings. Thus,

Do Groups Intensify Opinions?

Realizing that this group phenomenon was not a consistent shift toward increased risk, we reconceived the phenomenon as a tendency for group discussion to *enhance* group members’ initial leanings. This idea led investigators to propose what French researchers Serge Moscovici and Marisa Zavalloni (1969) called group polarization: *Discussion typically strengthens the average inclination of group members.*

GROUP POLARIZATION EXPERIMENTS

This new view of the group-induced changes prompted experimenters to have people discuss attitude statements that most of them favored, or that most of them opposed. Would talking in groups enhance their shared initial inclinations? In groups, would risk takers take bigger risks, bigots become more hostile, and givers become more generous? That’s what the group polarization hypothesis predicts (Figure 8.8).

Dozens of studies confirm group polarization.

- Moscovici and Zavalloni (1969) observed that discussion enhanced French students’ initially positive attitude toward their president and negative attitude toward Americans.

- Mititoshi Isozaki (1984) found that Japanese university students gave more pronounced judgments of “guilty” after discussing a traffic case. When jury members are inclined to award damages, the group award similarly tends to exceed that preferred by the median jury member (Sunstein, 2007a).

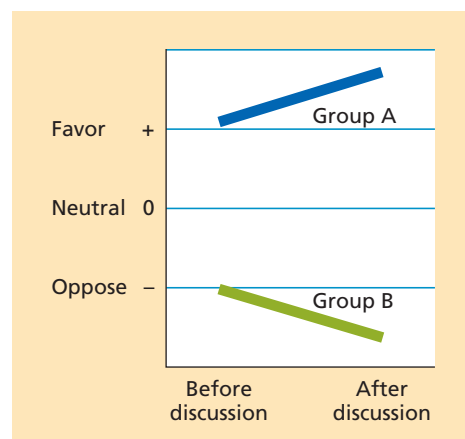
- Markus Brauer and co-workers (2001) found that French students’ dislike for certain other people was exacerbated after discussing their shared negative impressions.

[[Fix spacing]]

Fig. 8.8
SPU

FIGURE :: 8.8 Group Polarization

The group polarization hypothesis predicts that discussion will strengthen an attitude shared by group members.



[[Fix spacing.]]

Another research strategy has been to pick issues on which opinions are divided and then isolate people who hold the same view. Does discussion with like-minded people strengthen shared views? Does it magnify the attitude gap that separates the two sides? [DM]

George Bishop and I wondered. So we set up groups of relatively prejudiced and unprejudiced high school students and asked them to respond—before and after discussion—to issues involving racial attitudes, such as property rights versus open housing (Myers & Bishop, 1970). We found that the discussions among like-minded students did indeed increase the initial gap between the two groups (Figure 8.9).

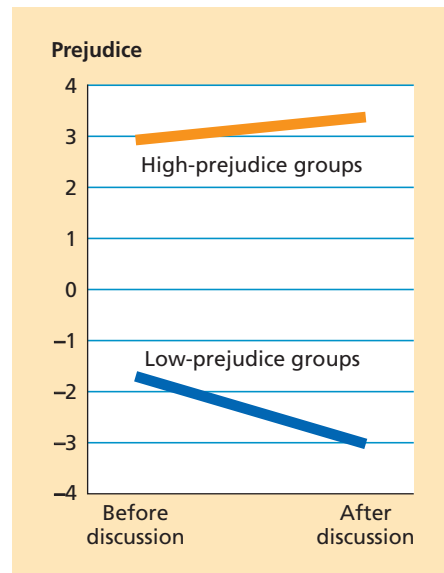


FIGURE :: 8.9

Discussion increased polarization between homogeneous groups of high- and low-prejudice high school students. Talking over racial issues increased prejudice in a high-prejudice group and decreased it in a low-prejudice group.

Source: Data from Myers & Bishop (1970).

Fig. 8.9
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[[Insert p. 283a after "(Figure 9)."]]

Studies in Britain and Australia confirm that group discussion can magnify both negative and positive tendencies. When people share negative impressions of a group, such as an immigrant group, discussion supports their negativity and increases their willingness to discriminate (Smith & Postmes, 2011). And when people share concern about an injustice, discussion amplifies their moral concern (Thomas & McGarty, 2009).

the Attraction chapter,

GROUP POLARIZATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

In everyday life, people associate mostly with others whose attitudes are similar to their own. (See Chapter 11, or just look at your own circle of friends.) Does everyday group interaction with like-minded friends intensify shared attitudes? Do nerds become ~~nerdier and jocks jockier?~~

nerdier, the jocks jockier, and the rebels more rebellious?

the
increases

It happens. The self-segregation of boys into all-male groups and of girls into all-female groups ~~accentuates over time~~ their initially modest gender differences, notes Eleanor Maccoby (2002). Boys with boys become gradually more competitive and action oriented in their play and fictional fare. Girls with girls become more relationally oriented.

On U.S. federal appellate court cases, "Republican-appointed judges tend to vote like Republicans and Democratic-appointed judges tend to vote like Democrats," David Schkade and Cass Sunstein (2003) have observed. No surprise there. But such tendencies are accentuated when among like-minded judges. "A Republican appointee sitting with two other Republicans votes far more conservatively than when the same judge sits with at least one Democratic appointee. A Democratic appointee, meanwhile, shows the same tendency in the opposite ideological direction."

"WHAT EXPLAINS THE RISE OF FASCISM IN THE 1930s? THE EMERGENCE OF STUDENT RADICALISM IN THE 1960s? THE GROWTH OF ISLAMIC TERRORISM IN THE 1990s? . . . THE UNIFYING THEME IS SIMPLE: WHEN PEOPLE FIND THEMSELVES IN GROUPS OF LIKE-MINDED TYPES, THEY ARE ESPECIALLY LIKELY TO MOVE TO EXTREMES. [THIS] IS THE PHENOMENON OF GROUP POLARIZATION."

GROUP POLARIZATION IN SCHOOLS Another real-life parallel to the laboratory phenomenon is what education researchers have called the "accentuation" effect: Over time, initial differences among groups of college students become accentuated. If the first-year students at college X are initially more intellectual than the students at college Y, that gap is likely to increase by the time they graduate. Likewise, compared with fraternity and sorority members, independents tend to have more liberal political attitudes, a difference that grows with time in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Researchers believe this results partly from group members reinforcing shared inclinations.

GROUP POLARIZATION IN COMMUNITIES Polarization also occurs in communities, as people self-segregate. "Crunchy places . . . attract crunchy types and become crunchier," observes David Brooks (2005). "Conservative places . . . attract

—CASS SUNSTEIN, GOING TO EXTREMES, 2009


[[Fix spacing.]]

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yers & J. Twenge (in press). Social Psychology, 12th Edition (NY: McGraw-Hill).

p. 283a

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Moreover, report Jessica Keating and her collaborators (2013), people are unaware of the phenomenon in their own lives. When small groups of like-minded people discussed whether Barack Obama or George W. Bush was the better president, participants underestimated how much the discussion polarized their attitudes (they misremembered their earlier attitudes).



UN8.5
SPU

Animal gangs. The pack is more than the sum of the wolves.

can

[[New caption:]] Groups often exceed individuals. A gang is more dangerous than the sum of its parts, much as "the pack is greater than the wolf."

conservatives and become more so." Neighborhoods become echo chambers, with opinions ricocheting off kindred-spirited friends.

Show social psychologists a like-minded group that interacts mostly among themselves and they will show you a group that may become more extreme. One experiment assembled small groups of Coloradoans in liberal Boulder and conservative Colorado Springs. The discussions increased agreement within small groups about global warming, affirmative action, and same-sex unions. Nevertheless, those in Boulder generally converged further left and those in Colorado Springs further right (Schkade et al., 2007).

With communities serving as political echo chambers, the United States is increasingly polarized. ~~Political clustering even appears in shopping options. One analysis found 89 percent of Whole Foods stores in counties that supported Obama in 2008 and 62 percent of Cracker Barrel restaurants in counties supporting his Republican opponent, John McCain (Stolberg, 2011). The end result has become a more divided country.~~ The percentage of landslide counties—those voting 60 percent or more for one presidential candidate—nearly doubled between 1976 and 2008 (Bishop, 2008). The percentage of entering collegians declaring themselves as politically "middle of the road" dropped from 60 percent in 1983 to 46 in 2010, with corresponding increases in those declaring themselves on the right or the left (Pryor et al., 2005, 2010).

2007

2013,

In two trials, South African courts reduced sentences after learning how social psychological phenomena, including deindividuation and group polarization, led crowd members to commit murderous acts (Colman, 1991). What do you think: Should courts consider social psychological phenomena as possible extenuating circumstances?

Eagan et al., 2014;

In laboratory studies, the competitive relationships and mistrust that individuals often display when playing games with one another often worsen when the players are groups (Winqvist & Larson, 2004). During actual community conflicts, like-minded people associate increasingly with one another, amplifying their shared tendencies. Gang delinquency emerges from a process of mutual reinforcement within neighborhood gangs, whose members share attributes and hostilities (Cartwright, 1975). If "a second out-of-control 15-year-old moves in [on your block]," surmises David Lykken (1997), "the mischief they get into as a team is likely to be more than merely double what the first would do on his own. . . . A gang is more dangerous than the sum of its individual parts." Indeed, "unsupervised peer groups" are "the strongest predictor" of a neighborhood's crime victimization rate, report Bonita Veysey and Steven Messner (1999). Moreover, experimental interventions that take delinquent adolescents and group them with other delinquents ~~actually~~—no surprise to any group polarization researcher—~~increase the rate of problem behavior (Dishion et al., 1999).~~

#

GROUP POLARIZATION ON THE INTERNET ~~E-mail, blogs, and electronic chat rooms offer a potential new medium for like-minded people to find one another and for group interaction that increases social fragmentation and polarization. Facebook~~

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From the invention of the printing press to the increasing number of cable channels to the Internet, the amount of available information has mushroomed. Where once people shared the same information from a few networks and national news magazines and newspapers, today we ~~must~~ choose from a myriad of sources. With so many choices, we naturally “selectively expose” ourselves to like-minded media. We enjoy media feeds that support our views and slam those we despise. (Tell us which media you read and we’ll guess your political ideology.)

As people selectively read blogs and visit chat rooms, does the Internet herd them into “tribes of common thought”? Do the Internet’s segregated communities amplify social fragmentation and political polarization?

~~offers tens of thousands of groups of kindred spirits discussing religion, politics, hobbies, cars, music, and you name it. The Internet's countless virtual groups enable peacemakers and neo-Nazis, geeks and goths, conspiracy schemers and cancer survivors to isolate themselves with like-minded others and find support for their shared concerns, interests, and suspicions (Gerstenfeld et al., 2003; McKenna & Bargh, 1998, 2000; Sunstein, 2001, 2009). Indeed, most of us read blogs that reinforce rather than challenge our views, and those blogs link mostly to like-minded blogs—connecting liberals with liberals, conservatives with conservatives—like having conversations with the bathroom mirror (Lazer et al., 2009). Will such discussions produce group polarization? Will socially networked birds of a feather find support for their shared beliefs, values, and suspicions? Will peacemakers become more pacifistic and militia members more terror prone? E-mail, Google, and chat rooms “make it much easier for small groups to rally like-minded people, crystallize diffuse hatreds, and mobilize lethal force,” observes Robert Wright (2003). As broadband spreads, Internet spawned polarization will increase, he speculates. According to one University of Haifa analysis, terrorist websites—which grew from a dozen in 1997 to some 4,700 at the end of 2005—increased more than four times faster than the total number of websites (Ariza, 2006).~~



© Erik Hingerdt/The New Yorker Collection/www.cartoonbank.com

[[New paragraph]]
Research confirms that

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observed

Peacemakers become more pacifistic and militia members more terror prone.

GROUP POLARIZATION IN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS From their analysis of terrorist organizations throughout the world, Clark McCauley and Mary Segal (1987; McCauley, 2002) note that terrorism does not erupt suddenly. Rather, it arises among people whose shared grievances bring them together and fans their fire. As they interact in isolation from moderating influences, they become progressively more extreme. The social amplifier brings the signal in more strongly. The result is violent acts that the individuals, apart from the group, would never have committed.

Moreover, the longer people spend in segregated "Dark Web" forums, the more violent their messages (Chen, 2012). The Boston Marathon bombers Tamerland and Dozhokhar Tsarnaev, reportedly were "self-radicalized" through their Internet exposure (Wilson et al., 2013).

September 11, 2001,

For example, the 9/11 terrorists were bred by a long process that engaged the polarizing effect of interaction among the like-minded. The process of becoming a

focus ON

Group Polarization

Box UN8.1
SPU

Shakespeare portrayed the polarizing power of the like-minded group in this dialogue of Julius Caesar's followers:

Antony: Kind souls, what weep you when you but behold Our Caesar's vesture wounded? Look you here. Here is himself, marr'd, as you see, with traitors.

First Citizen: O piteous spectacle!
Second Citizen: O noble Caesar!

Third Citizen: O woeful day!
Fourth Citizen: O traitors, villains!
First Citizen: O most bloody sight!
Second Citizen: We will be revenged!
All: Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay! Let not a traitor live!

Source: From *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare, Act III, Scene ii, lines 199–209.

[No new paragraph.]

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views

The net result is that in today's world political polarization—despising people of opposing political view—has become considerably more intense than racial polarization (Iyengar & Westwood, 2014). More information deepens rather than moderates partisan divisions.

terrorist, noted a National Research Council panel, isolates individuals from other belief systems, dehumanizes potential targets, and tolerates no dissent (Smelser & Mitchell, 2002). Group members come to categorize the world as “us” and “them” (Moghaddam, 2005; Qirko, 2004). Ariel Merari (2002), an investigator of Middle Eastern and Sri Lankan suicide terrorism, believes the key to creating a terrorist suicide is the group process. “To the best of my knowledge, there has not been a single case of suicide terrorism which was done on a personal whim.”

According to one analysis of terrorists who were members of the Salafi Jihad—an Islamic fundamentalist movement, including al Qaeda—70 percent joined while living as expatriates. After moving to foreign places in search of jobs or education, they became keenly mindful of their Muslim identity and often gravitated to mosques and moved in with other expatriate Muslims, who sometimes recruited them into cell groups that provided “mutual emotional and social support” and “development of a common identity” (Sageman, 2004).

are

Massacres, similarly, ~~have been found to be~~ group phenomena. The violence is enabled and escalated by the killers egging one another on, noted Robert Zajonc (2000), who knew violence as a survivor of a World War II Warsaw air raid that killed both his parents (Burnstein, 2009). It is difficult to influence someone once “in the pressure cooker of the terrorist group,” notes Jerrold Post (2005) after interviewing many accused terrorists. “In the long run, the most effective antiterrorist policy is one that inhibits potential recruits from joining in the first place.”

noted

Group

Explaining Polarization

Why do groups adopt stances that are more exaggerated than that of their average individual member? Researchers hoped that solving the mystery of group polarization might provide some insights into group influence. Solving small puzzles sometimes provides clues for solving larger ones.

Among several proposed theories of group polarization, two have survived scientific scrutiny. One deals with the *arguments* presented during a discussion and is an example of ~~what Chapter 6 called~~ *informational influence* (influence that results from accepting evidence about reality). The other concerns how members of a group view themselves vis-à-vis the other members, an example of *normative influence* (influence based on a person’s desire to be accepted or admired by others).

INFORMATIONAL INFLUENCE

According to the best-supported explanation, group discussion elicits a pooling of ideas, most of which favor the dominant viewpoint. Some discussed ideas are common knowledge to group members (Gigone & Hastie, 1993; Larson et al., 1994; Stasser, 1991). Other ideas may include persuasive arguments that some group members had not previously considered. When discussing Helen the writer, someone may say, “Helen should go for it, because she has little to lose. If her novel flops, she can always go back to writing cheap westerns.” Such statements often entangle information about the person’s *arguments* with cues concerning the person’s *position* on the issue. But when people hear relevant arguments without learning the specific stands other people assume, they still shift their positions (Burnstein & Vinokur, 1977; Hinz et al., 1997). *Arguments*, in and of ~~themselves, matter.~~

themselves, matter.

But there’s more to attitude change than merely hearing someone else’s arguments. *Active participation* in discussion produces more attitude change than does passive listening. Participants and observers hear the same ~~ideas, but~~ when participants express them in their own words, the verbal commitment magnifies the impact. The more group members repeat one another’s ideas, the more they rehearse and validate them (Brauer et al., 1995).

ideas. But

One of the Islamic State’s senior militants reports that his movement was born inside an American prison in Iraq: “If there was no American prison in Iraq, there would be no IS now. [The prison] was a factory. It made us all. It built our ideology. . . . We had so much time to sit and plan. It was the perfect environment” (quoted by Chulov, 2014).

“IF YOU HAVE AN APPLE
AND I HAVE AN APPLE AND
WE EXCHANGE APPLES,
THEN YOU AND I WILL STILL
EACH HAVE ONE APPLE.
BUT IF YOU HAVE AN IDEA
AND I HAVE AN IDEA AND
WE EXCHANGE THESE
IDEAS, THEN EACH OF US
WILL HAVE TWO IDEAS.”

—ATTRIBUTED TO GEORGE
BERNARD SHAW (1856–1950)

~~This illustrates a point made in Chapter 7. People's minds are not just blank tablets for persuaders to write upon. With central route persuasion, what people think in response to a message is crucial. Indeed, just thinking about an issue for a couple of minutes can strengthen opinions (Tesser et al., 1995). (Perhaps you can recall your feelings becoming polarized as you merely ruminated about someone you disliked, or liked.) Even just expecting to discuss an issue with an equally expert person holding an opposing view can motivate people to marshal their arguments and thus to adopt a more extreme position (Fitzpatrick & Eagly, 1981).~~

NORMATIVE INFLUENCE

A second explanation of polarization involves comparison with others. As Leon Festinger (1954) argued in his influential theory of **social comparison**, we humans want to evaluate our opinions and abilities by comparing our views with others'. We are most persuaded by people in our "reference groups"—groups we identify with (Abrams et al., 1990; Hogg et al., 1990). Moreover, ~~wanting~~ **we** want people to like us, ~~so~~ **so** we may express stronger opinions after discovering that others share our views.

When we ask people (as I asked you earlier) to predict how others would respond to items such as the "Helen" dilemma, they typically exhibit **pluralistic ignorance**: They don't realize how strongly others support the socially preferred tendency (in this case, writing the novel). A typical person will advise writing the novel even if its chance of success is only 4 in 10 but will estimate that most other people would require 5 or 6 in 10. (This finding is reminiscent of the self-serving bias: People tend to view themselves as better-than-average embodiments of socially desirable traits and attitudes.) When the discussion begins, most people discover they are not outshining the others as they had supposed. In fact, ~~some~~ **date** others are ahead of them, having taken an even stronger position in favor of writing the novel. No longer restrained by a misperceived group norm, they are liberated to voice their preferences more strongly.

Perhaps you can recall a time when you and someone else wanted to ~~go out with~~ **was not interested** each other but each of you feared to make the first move, presuming the other ~~probably did not have a reciprocal interest~~. Such pluralistic ignorance impedes the start-up of relationships (Vorauer & Ratner, 1996).

Or perhaps you can recall when you and others were guarded and reserved in a group, until someone broke the ice and said, "Well, to be perfectly honest, I think. . . ." Soon you were all surprised to discover strong support for your shared views. Sometimes when a professor asks if anyone has any questions, no one will respond, leading each student to infer that he or she is the only one confused. All presume that fear of embarrassment explains their own silence but that everyone else's silence means they understand the material.

~~Dale Miller and Cathy McFarland (1987) bottled this familiar phenomenon in a laboratory experiment. They asked people to read an incomprehensible article and to seek help if they ran into "any really serious problems in understanding the paper." Although none of the individuals sought help, they presumed other people would not be similarly restrained by fear of embarrassment. Thus, they wrongly inferred that people who didn't seek help didn't need any. To overcome such pluralistic ignorance, someone must break the ice and enable others to reveal and reinforce their shared reactions.~~

Social comparison theory prompted experiments that exposed people to others' positions but not to their arguments. This is roughly the experience we have when reading the results of an opinion poll or of exit polling on election day. When people learn others' positions—without prior commitment and without discussion or sharing of arguments—will they adjust their responses to maintain a socially favorable position? As **Figure 8.10** illustrates, they will. This comparison-based

we want

social comparison

Evaluating one's opinions and abilities by comparing oneself with others.

pluralistic ignorance

A false impression of what most other people are thinking or feeling, or how they are responding.

date

UN8.6
NEW--see image grid

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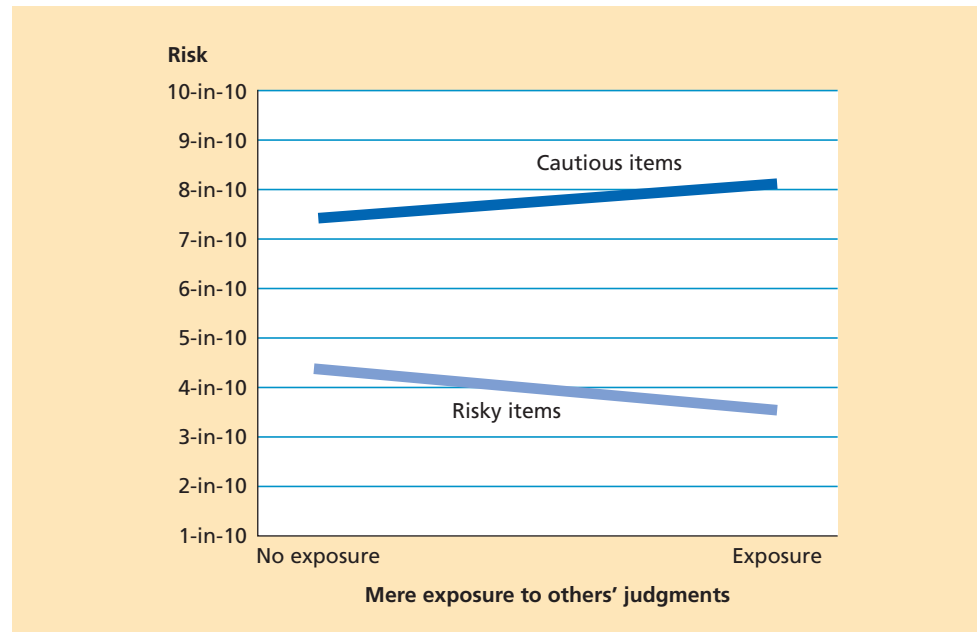
[[NEW CAPTION:]] Pluralistic ignorance. Sometimes a false presumption of another's disinterest may prevent two people with a mutual romantic interest from connecting.

Fig. 8.10
SPU

FIGURE :: 8-10

On "risky" dilemma items (such as the case of Helen), mere exposure to others' judgments enhanced individuals' risk-prone tendencies. On "cautious" dilemma items (such as the case of Roger), exposure to others' judgments enhanced their cautiousness.

Source: Data from Myers (1978).



polarization is usually less than that produced by a lively discussion. Still, it's surprising that instead of simply conforming to the group average, people often go it one better.

Merely learning others' choices also contributes to the bandwagon effect that creates blockbuster songs, books, and movies. Sociologist Matthew Salganik and colleagues (2006) experimented with the phenomenon by engaging 14,341 Internet participants in listening to and, if they wished, downloading previously

One experiment engaged

(Salganik et al., 2006)

unknown songs. The researchers randomly assigned some participants to a condition that disclosed previous participants' download choices. Among those given that information, popular songs became more popular and unpopular songs became less popular.

Group polarization research illustrates the complexity of social-psychological inquiry. Much as we like our explanations of a phenomenon to be simple, one explanation seldom accounts for all the data. Because people are complex, more than one factor frequently influences an outcome. In group discussions, persuasive arguments predominate on issues that have a factual element ("Is she guilty of the crime?"). Social comparison sways responses on value-laden judgments ("How long a sentence should she serve?") (Kaplan, 1989). On the many issues that have both factual and value-laden aspects, the two factors work together. Discovering that others share one's feelings (social comparison) unleashes arguments (informational influence) supporting what everyone secretly favors.



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An Economist cover about the 1987 stock market crash. Reprinted by permission of Kevin Kal Kallaugher, The Economist, Kaltoons.com

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