**Introduction to Sociology**

Chapter 8 “Groups”: Assignments with answers

**8.1 Groups unite and divide**

**Q1.**

List 5 groups you are affiliated to. What kind of affiliations do you have to these groups? Different types of affiliations to one group are possible.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Group** | **Type of affiliation** |
| 1 |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |
| 5 |  |  |

Answer.

Any group affiliation is essentially valid. Three types of affiliation are: membership (i.e., officially registered as group member), participation (i.e., actively participating in a certain group activities), and identification (i.e., psychologically identifying with a certain group). In this way, one may for example identify with a group without participation, or someone may be both a member and a participant at the same time, but not identify with the group.

Some examples:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Group** | **Type of affiliation** |
| 1 | Student association | Membership, because I am a registered member  Participation, because I attend meetings |
| 2 | Students in my city | Membership, because I am registered at university  Identification, because I feel psychologically related to other students when it comes up in discussions, even if I haven’t met them |
| 3 | Certain political party (*specify*) | Participation, because I vote this in elections |
| 4 | Certain religious group (*specify*) | Identification, because I was raised in the religion and even though I don’t personally participate anymore, nor have any membership affiliation, I still feel psychologically connected to this group |

**Q2.**

Some groups can also be considered to be voluntary associations. Give an example from your own environment and explain why this example fits the characteristics of a voluntary organization.

Answer:

Answer should emphasize the voluntary nature of the group, the fact that it has an organizational structure that one can participate in, and that the association serves a common interest for the (same, or a larger) group.

**Q3.**

Consider the statement by Putnam (Chapter 8), regarding the existence of civil societies. He posed that governmental institutions functioned very differently between the North and South in Italy. In the North, so he claimed there was more of a civil society. Fill in the theory schema below to fit this argument.

(P)

(C)

(O) In the North of Italy, governmental institutions function more effectively than in the South.

Answer:

(P) The more a civil society is present in a region, the more effectively governmental institutions function.

(C) The North of Italy has more of a civil society than the South of Italy.

(O) In the North of Italy, governmental institutions function more effectively than in the South.

**Q4.**

Explain in your own words what a “civil society” is, and why this is vital for social cohesion.

Answer:

A civil society is a society where many people participate in voluntary associations. Because of the high level of participation voluntary associations, society is thus characterized by high organizational involvement. This is important for social cohesion because this participation helps to develop and reinforce practices and values that are important for the functioning of a society as a whole, such as trust, solidarity and cooperation with others. Because people build up experience with these elements in voluntary associations, these are argued to then be generalized to society as a whole.

**Q5.**

How does the concept of “civil society” relate to the concept of “organizational cohesion”?

Answer:

Organizational cohesion refers to the degree of cohesion on the group level: in addition to the cohesion between people individually, it is considered here whether people are part of associations as well. In this regard, organizational cohesion ranges on a continuum from a society having no associations at all (minimum of organizational cohesion) to a society in which there are many voluntary associations (maximum). A civil society refers to a society in which there are many voluntary associations, so to higher levels of organizational cohesion.

**Q6.**

Does high organizational cohesion imply high intergroup cohesion?

Answer:

Organizational cohesion and intergroup cohesion are capturing different types of cohesion. Organizational cohesion captures the degree to which people are organized in voluntary associations. This does not say anything about the cohesion between groups. People can be highly involved in voluntary associations (= high organizational cohesion), but there can be, at the same time, tensions between groups (= weak intergroup cohesion). For example, Christians and Muslims may be strongly integrated in their own group, but there can be conflicts between groups.

**Q7.**

What are the most important group boundaries in your society? Between which groups is there a lack of social cohesion?

Answer:

Open to discussion. E.g., ethnic, social class, left-right, etc.

**8.2 Group segregation**

**Q1.**

Consider the following hypothetical network, depicting two groups and their individual members’ ties.

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Q1a. How many group-bridging ties are there in this example? And how many group-bonding ties?

Answer:

Two group-bridging ties, and 14 group-bonding ties.

Q1b. What is the group segregation index here? What does this number mean?

Answer:

The group segregation index is the number of group-bonding ties divided by the total number of ties. In this case: 14/14+2 = 0.875. This indicates a rather high segregation between the two groups, as 87.5% of all ties are within-group, and only 12.5% are between-group.

Q1c. Suppose the economics students all follow a class along with the sociology students, to increase their understanding of sociological insights. As a result, some new friendships between students of the two majors emerge. What will this likely do to the group segregation index, assuming that students don’t end their existing friendships?

Answer:

Assuming all other friendships stay the same, this will mean that the group segregation index goes down: the number of group-bonding ties stays the same, while the total number of ties goes up due to an increase in group-bridging ties.

**Q2**

Think about your five best friends. How homogenous is your best-friends network in terms of gender and ethnicity? Are there other dimensions that make your network homogenous?

Answer:

Core networks are very homogenous: friends are often of the same sex, age, ethnicity, etc.

**Q3.**

Think about the marriages (or cohabitation) within your own family (parents, grandparents). For each of these marriages, describe whether they are endogamous or exogamous. Which group affiliation do you consider (e.g., ethnicity, education)?

Answer:

If the relationships are endogamous, both partners belong to the same group. For instance, parents or grandparents may both be part of the same ethnic group, or both have a university degree. At the same time, the relationships may be exogamous based on other group memberships, such as religion or social class. This is to demonstrate that what is considered intermarriage or exogamy depends on the group affiliation that is considered.

**8.3 The Causes of Group segregation**

**Q1.**

Consider the following press release from the United States census of 2010: *“Interracial and interethnic married couples grew by 28% percent over decade*”, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb12-68.html>. Give three possible factors that may have influenced this development and explain *how* they may have affected intermarriage rates.

Answer:

In explaining such social dynamics (changes over time), one could rely on general mechanisms of tie formation: opportunities, homophily and third party effects. One explanation, which relies on opportunities, is that neighborhoods, schools and other local meeting places have become less segregated, increasing chances of meeting those of another racial or ethnic group. Furthermore, preferences may have changed: Rather than strong homophily preferences along racial or ethnic lines, preferences may have shifted to homophily on the basis of other characteristics such as for example educational attainment. Finally, the influence of relevant third parties may have changed. Whereas before parents and co-ethnics may have reinforced group boundaries, a continuing shift to individualism may have decreased this influence of third parties.

**Q2.**

According to structural opportunity theory, why will ties more easily emerge among those who share foci?

Answer:

Ties will likely emerge among those in the same foci, because they are often in an environment in which they meet each other: the foci thus impose a structural constraints on who can be met – that is, only those in the same focus can meet within that focus. For this reason, connections can more easily be made within compared to outside of a focus.

**Q3.**

Can you think of an example in which third parties may promote or disincentivize the formation of interethnic romantic relationships?

Answer:

A possible answer would be that parents take up the primary task of selecting (a number of) potential partners that suit not only their child’s criteria, but also their own desires for a son or daughter-in-law. In this way, third parties influence and get a substantial say in the formation of new relationships. But peers and parents may also play a role in other ways, such as approving or disapproving interethnic dating.

**8.4 In-group favoritism**

**Q1.**

Suppose you have become interested in the minimal group paradigm and want to set up your own experiment. However, you still struggle with deciding on an appropriate group characteristic. What is a prerequisite for group characteristics based on which minimal group experiments are set up? Explain also why this is an important consideration when deciding on a group characteristic. Can you give an example of a group characteristic that would be unsuitable for a minimal group experiment?

Answer:

In the minimal group paradigm, group characteristics should be irrelevant in day-to-day life. A division along ethnic group lines, for example, would already reinforce ideas that are socially circulated, thereby reducing the validity of the experiment. By being assigned to a group based on trivial criteria, this problem is overcome: this basis for group membership is never relevant or salient in other social situations, and the group can thus be used in the minimal group paradigm.

**Q2.**

What is “social identity”? How does this concept relate to “personal identity”, and what role does it play in intergroup situations according to social identity theory?

Answer:

A social identity is an identification with a group. Group identification is part of your personal identity. According to social identity theory, people want to evaluate themselves and their in-group positively, and they derive these positive feelings through in- and out-group comparisons. Because of this, in us-vs-them situations that highlight group membership, you are likely to feel a stronger connection to members of your own group, compared to a member of an out-group: you feel as though the group is part of who you are and thus the in-group member feels more close to you. Consequently, you want in-group members to do well, as this reflects positively on you due to the interlinkage between social and personal identity.

**Q3.**

How does social identity theory relate to the minimal group paradigm? And how do these concepts together relate to in-group favoritism?

Answer:

In a minimal group paradigm, new social identities are formed on the basis of irrelevant characteristics. Based on these social identities, denoting an in-group and out-group(s), resources need to be allocated. Because people strive for a positive in-group evaluation, they are likely to slightly favor their own group compared to out-groups: they will thus display a degree of in-group favoritism. Because people identify with their in-group, they will derive positive self-view from their in-group performing slightly better than the out-group. Through this, social identity theory and the subsequent pattern of in-group favoritism may explain findings from minimal group experiments.

**8.5 Social context and in-group favoritism**

**Q1.**

It is argued in the textbook that intergroup cohesion is “contingent on social context”. Explain in your own words what this means.

Answer:

The baseline tendency of intergroup cohesion is set by in-group favoritism. However, beyond this tendency, intergroup cohesion is contingent. This means that the cohesion between any two groups depends on specific social conditions. While some two ethnic groups may display high degrees of intergroup cohesion in one country, the same groups may face intergroup conflict in another country. Thus, despite the fact that the ethnic groups are the same in both situations, the intergroup cohesion varies depending on context because this context leads to different kinds of interactions between groups.

**8.6 Group Threat Theory**

**Q1.**

Explain in your own words how sometimes, in-group favoritism may lead to decreasing intergroup cohesion, according to group threat theory. Make sure to define concepts and theories you refer to.

Answer:

Group threat theory states that people, when competing over scarce resources, divide the competing individuals into in- and out-group members. Rather than being a personal competition, then, it becomes a competition between groups: even if an individual is not personally involved, they still want other in-group members to outperform the out-group and gain more resources from the competition. Because of this process, tensions may grow between the two groups: people perceive out-group members to pose a threat to their access to resources. Because of this, there then is a trend toward decreased intergroup cohesion: people of different groups start interacting with one another less and less.

**Q2.**

Consider again the case of the Robbers Cave Experiment. While in week 2 of this experiment, conditions favored the development of intergroup competition, this was overcome in week 3. Explain how this was done and come up with an example applying this solution to a real-life situation.

Answer:

In the Robbers Cave Experiment, intergroup competition was no longer the case in week 3. Instead, the two groups had to work together toward a common goal. They were coordinating to realize superordinate goals. While the categories of Eagles and Rattlers were still present, they now also shared a common identity in the superordinate group. In real life, this could be achieved by encouraging the identification with a superordinate group that works toward a common goal. The EU is a good example of this, where we can speak of a superordinate multinational identity. While all members are part of a specific national group, all members are also member of an overarching group of ‘EU Nationals’. By organizing under this superordinate identity, and working toward a common goal for example through EU legislation and court systems, intergroup cohesion may be improved.

**Q3.**

Group threat theory is a well-known theory in the sociology of intergroup relations. Core to this theory are two propositions: the *economic competition proposition* and the *cultural competition proposition.*

Q3a. How could you use these propositions to understand contemporary intergroup conflicts? Give an example and explain.

Q3b. Use one of these propositions to derive a new hypothesis.

Example.

P. The more economic scarcity in the population, the weaker the intergroup cohesion.

C. In the year 2019, there is more economic scarcity in Sudan than in Switzerland.

H. In the year 2019, the intergroup cohesion is weaker in Sudan than it is in Switzerland.

**Chapter generic questions**

**Q1.**

Read the following article in *The Conversation*: “*Are Americans becoming more xenophobic?*” published in 2017, which can be found here: <https://theconversation.com/are-americans-becoming-more-xenophobic-70509>

Q1a. Which groups were discerned in the study, and what kind of affiliation do people have with this group?

Answer:

White Americans (the in-group of all respondents) and minorities (out-groups) are discussed in this article, along with an explanation of the Implicit Association Test making the distinction specifically between White and Black Americans. These are groups that people identify with.

Q1b. The article mentions how the findings are consistent with group threat theory. Which manipulation in the described experiment represents this group threat? Who and what is being threatened?

Answer:

The manipulation in this article is making people read texts describing different consequences of growing diversity. One article specifically mentioned increasing group size, threatening the in-group’s current majority status in numbers, while the other mentioned increasing political power for the out-group, threatening the in-group’s current majority status in power.

**Q2.**

Suppose you want to know whether homophily plays a role in determining who becomes friends with whom in a school class. You have unlimited time and funds for this study, but it is of utmost importance to ensure that you study the purest possible effect of (a certain kind of) homophily. Make sure you answer the following questions in your design: (1) What does your research design look like? Which form of homophily do you study? Which steps do you have to take to ensure you are studying the effect of homophily, rather than structural constraints or meeting opportunities? Does this research design consider revealed preferences, or stated preferences?

Answer:

Answers should contain the following elements: (1) A clear description of the type of homophily that is being studied (e.g., social class homophily, or ethnic homophily) , (2) To what extent this type of homophily can be studied within school classes (e.g., studying gender homophily in a single-sex school might not work), (3) How opportunity can be controlled for (e.g. taking into account ethnic group size within the class), (4) A clear description of the way in which homophily is measured, leading to an explanation of whether these are revealed preferences (looking at formed ties) or stated preferences (asking children to state what they look for in a friend).