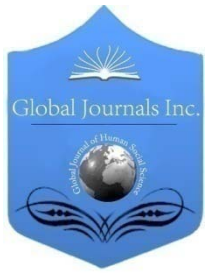
Volume 16 Issue 14
Originally issued as C3



Global Journal of human-social science: C
Sociology & Culture
Volume 16 Issue 3 Version 1.0 Year 2016
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Groupthink Phenomenon in Youth-Gangs: An Illusion of being Invulnerable

By Sinan Çaya
Istanbul University, Turkey

Abstract- In this article, groupthink phenomenon is defined. Its symptoms specified in the related literature are cited. Then, a typical youth gang is related to each of those specific symptoms. The result depicts a high probability that such a gang may fall into groupthink, indeed!

Keywords and phrases: *juvenile gang (street gang); groupthink; cohesive; invulnerability illusion.*

GJHSS-C Classification : *FOR Code: 160899*



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



© 2016. Sinan Çaya. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License http://creative commons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Groupthink Phenomenon in Youth-Gangs: An Illusion of being Invulnerable

Sinan Çaya

Abstract- In this article, groupthink phenomenon is defined. Its symptoms specified in the related literature are cited. Then, a typical youth gang is related to each of those specific symptoms. The result depicts a high probability that such a gang may fall into groupthink, indeed!

Keywords and phrases: *juvenile gang (street gang); groupthink; cohesive; invulnerability illusion.*

I. Introduction

The following analysis pertains to delinquent gangs, which are essentially an aspect of urban life style in western societies. However, such gangs are getting more and more common in Turkish big cities also. As early as two decades ago a prominent avenue in Istanbul, Bağdat Caddesi, was shaken by juvenile gang terror. Many local press articles dealt with news stories involving high school students who carry knives and even guns and who engage in gang-fights.

When a "small, cohesive group" indulges in "errors and mistakes of judgment" by not acknowledging wrong decisions, it means that the group is in groupthink. Such a group "clearly underestimates the strength of the other side" (Huse & Bowditch 1977: 176).

President John F. Kennedy and his associates were known to fall in groupthink in the affaire of the Gulf of Pigs and Cuban crisis. Since nobody in the president's close circle wanted to oppose the generally accepted view and thus fall from favor; it is possible that even some keen-minded ones must have played along. The unsuccessful landing of the fugitive Cuba citizens with a view to overthrow the communist regime only proved to be a disaster and the story is widely employed as a classical example of groupthink in textbooks on behavioral and management sciences.

II. Symptoms of Groupthink and their Occurrence in Juvenile Gangs

Symptoms of groupthink are given by co-authors Wexley & Yuki (1984: 147-148) as follows:

- Illusion of invulnerability
- Rationalization of negative information
- Stereotyping of out-groups
- Assumption of morality
- Self-censorship
- Illusion of unanimity.
- Mind-guards
- Direct social pressure

A delinquent gang is very cohesive, indeed, to begin with. As Neisser & Ridenour (1960: 17) put it "the sign of the delinquent gang is the almost blind loyalty between [among] its members".

Often the phony feeling of invulnerability is also there. Even the fearful name of the gang reflects this. The members' athletic capabilities must surely add to this feeling.

"Some delinquent gangs require trials of strength or endurance for admission" (Neisser & Ridenour 1960: 18). Cortés and Gatti (1972: 191) also confirm the association between superior physical built and potential aggressiveness.

Since gangs flourish predominantly in slum areas, lower class culture makes its play in the gang mentality. Here, as Miller (1968) puts it; virtues like toughness, smartness and trouble (1) are focal concerns.

In the case of a Turkish street gang, the trouble-seeking feature is probably even more exaggerated. This might be deduced from the following reasoning: A common trait of Turkish society is to be seen in the challenge motifs present in the folklore. As Tugrul (1969: 70) points out, in anonymous Turkish literature, many tales descending from the ancestors through the verbal culture involve some examination patterns for trying a person's capabilities like ordering accomplishment of difficult tasks (ordeals), testing one's loyalty, arranging bets or competitions to determine the best candidate etc.

An over-zealous trouble-seeker almost automatically ignores negative information or his mind processes it differently. The second item in the groupthink symptoms list is thus "fulfilled".

As for the third item, regarding "stereotyping of out-groups", here too, many aspects of gangs hold true: "As a consequence of 'toughness', higher class men (the opposing camp, the hostile party) are commonly characterized with effeminate labels". Moreover Miller (1968) — with a Freudian outlook — specifies that the lower class concern with masculinity lies in the fact that

Author: *Ph.D. Istanbul University, Institute of Marine Administration and Sciences, Turkey. e-mail: sinan.caya@gmail.com*

© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US)

many lower class males were reared by mothers in broken homes.

Here, too, a Turkish background in the "picture" must further compound the stereotyping of out-groups as being weak, cowardly and womanly.

Indeed, Turks, as a society, are very anxious to sexualize many concepts, to begin with, as Tezcan (1987: 163) determines in his work specifying parallel traits between culture and personality.



Figure 1 : AA youth gang " in action" (illustration of the Author —S.Ç.)

This national attitude is prevalent especially in football matches. The opposing team is invariably depicted as a female (2) entity.

[Before an imminent fight], "the rivals' evilness is strongly stressed in order to build up the warrior-spirit" (Strodtbeck1968). Based on this point the morality of the in-group is established. The chief of the youth group or gang "represents the courageous masculine figure who imposes conformity (3) to a code of values" (Ajuriaguerra 1974). Thus, who can take on the role of the "devil's advocate" and counter the chief's opinion so easily? As Neisser and Ridenour (1960: 18) underline, "gang laws are no less firm for being unwritten".

Moreover; as for self-censorship, illusion of unanimity, mind-guarding and direct social pressure; none of these are lacking in the game, either!

III. Conclusion

The concept of groupthink occurs in a cohesive group whereby the members collectively underestimate the rival side, consider themselves to be stronger than they are and persist in this false idea mutually without opening their eyes to the reality. It is possible to see the basic symptoms of a groupthink phenomenon in juvenile gangs. In fact such symptoms perfectly match with those mentioned in the related literature.

© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US)

When all those above-mentioned factors are all interwoven the groupthink phenomenon is inevitable in a youth gang! Obviously this groupthink nourishes the success illusion and aggravates criminal behavior in a situation where otherwise some form of deterrence could have easily function to discourage a possibility of indulging in some sort of unlawful act.

Notes

a) In the movie "The Marathon man" (starring Dustin Hoffman and Lawrence Olivier) the following realistic episode is highly interesting:

The history student goes to a bunch of toughs. He asks them to rob his own house and to bring him his own revolver, in return. The chief asks: "Where is the catch?" The student answer: "It is dangerous" (The house is being watched by the ex-Natzi's men). The chief knowingly smiles. Danger is their business, anyhow!

b) Especially the goal-keeper who could not prevent a score and then undergoes a remorse crisis by hitting his head against the goal posts resembles "an awkward virgin woman who could not protect her chastity" as it was described in a short story by the famous Turkish playwright Haldun Taner (1971, 2006: 144).

The author (1971, 2006: 146-147), in this story glorifying a Christian gentleman player of a humble football team, also draws parallels between a football team and a group of prostitutes held under control by the old mama: *Just like the mama sometimes subjects her girls to the magic smoke of a burning incense to avert the evil eyes over them and to motivate them; the club manager sometimes takes the team to visit the shrine of a famous saint in order to build up the members' team spirit and to boost their morale with the intention of increasing the match ticket sales.*

Many folk songs are also improvised by the cheer leaders and repeated aloud by the spectators in a manner to convey demeaning sexual messages onto the opposing football club.

c) In a Turkish youth gang obeying the chief (even if he is a despotic one or an incompetent one) is maybe even more pronounced. This, too, follows from the long cultural historical traditions grounds. Obedience have always been a precious virtue in all walks of life. Leaders have always been blindly followed and cherished. In fact a Turkish saying says that "he who holds the seal is Solomon". In other words, he who happens to be at a top position any time under any circumstances whatever represents the prophet Solomon with the kingly stamp firmly held in his blessed hand. One must merely execute his orders whatever the consequences may come out to be.

References Références Referencias

1. deAJURIAGUERRA, J. (1974). Manuel de Psychiatrie de L'enfant, Paris: Masson et Cie éditeurs.
2. CORTES, Juan B. & GATTI, Florence, M. (1972). Delinquency and Crime: A Bio-psycho-social Approach, Napier-New Zealand: Seminar Press.
3. HUSE, Edgar F, & BOWDITCH, James L. (1977). Behavior in Organizations, Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
4. MILLER, Walter B. (1968). "Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency" in SHORT, James F. ed.: Gang Delinquency and Delinquent Structures, New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
5. NEISSER, Edith G. & RIDENOUR, Nina (1960). Your Children and Their Gangs, U.S. Welfare Administration, Children's Bureau.
6. STRODTBECK, Fred L. (1968). "Why Gangs Fight" in SHORT, James F. ed.: Gang Delinquency and Delinquent Structures, New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
7. TEZCAN, Malunut (1987). Kültür ve Kişilik: Psikolojik Antropoloji [Culture and Personality: Psychological Anthropology], Ankara: Bilim Kitap-Kırtasiye Printinghous.
8. TANER, Haldun (1971, 2006). "Ases" in TANER, Haldun: Bütün Hikâyeleri-3 [All his Stories-3], Cağaloğlu-İstanbul: Bilgi Publishing Hous, pp.139-153.
9. TUGRUL, M. (1969). Mahmutgazi Köyü'nde Halk Edebiyatı: Menkıbe, Hikâye, Masal, Fıkra [Folk Literature in the Village of Mahmutgazi: Legends, Stories, Fairy Tales, Anecdotes], Istanbul: Printing House of National Education.
10. WEXLEY, Kenneth N. & YUKL, Gary A. (1984). Organizational Behavior and Personnel Psychology, New York: Richard D. Irwin Inc.

© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US)