

Sociology and Terrorism

- SRA-211, Threat of Terrorism and Crime
- Penn State Altoona
- Larry Garvin

Sociology and Terrorism

- Aum Shinrikyo has been [formally designated](#) a [terrorist organization](#) by several countries, including [North Korea](#), [Russia](#), [Canada](#), [Kazakhstan](#), and the [United States](#). Japan's Public Security Examination Commission considers them to be branches of a "dangerous religion" and announced in January 2015 that they would remain under surveillance for three more years.
- The group developed biological and chemical weapons and launched several deadly attacks in Tokyo and through out Japan.
- Shoko Ashhara – the leader, raised money, gained followers and became so popular and powerful that he sold his beard clippings for \$375! Crazy right?



VID

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYlIN4C4oJs>

Sociology and Terrorism

- Now what if I told you the people that joined this cultish terrorist group were Doctors, Scientist, and Engineers from the best universities in Japan.
- When the terrorist group got shut down and dismantled authorities tried to understand why people like this would join such an irrational group.
- When interviewed, the individuals were embarrassed to say and struggled to explain it but when they became part of the group they lost all sense of judgment and morality.

Sociology and Terrorism

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IchGuL501U>

Two Sociologic Factors

- The terrorist organization itself consisting of
 - The group driven by values and ideology – Thoughts, examples?
 - National movements – more popular, Example Sons of Liberty. Any other examples?
- The role of society in the development and support of terrorism – Meaning, is terrorism part of the norm in the society?
- Terrorism is a normal part of life. Sad but true, Society can become immune to terror.

Group Influence on Individuals

- Individuals adapt to the group's expectations – and causes a drastic change in ones thinking
 - Develop a feeling of belonging
 - Massive shift in self esteem
- But Ironically, the opposite takes place
- Groupthink begins to outweigh the individual's judgment
- The organization becomes their only source of information, information which confirms everything that they believe
- THE RESULTS ARE FANATICS WHOSE SENSE OF REALITY IS DISTORTED.

Group Influence on Individuals

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGxGDdQnC1Y>

Terror Organization Characteristics

- As the terror groups go underground or more secluded, the sociological aspect gets worse.
- WHY?
 - Members get more detached from friends and family.
 - The terror group becomes your only source of information.
 - Essentially the Terrorists group becomes the individual identities. (not what members thought when they started!)
 - Creates a snowball effect - External pressure, danger and living together increases group unity when done together. (Imagine robbing a bank together with your roommates)
 - A dynamic emerges in which the individual must conform to the group's way of thinking.
 - Group thought along with commitment to the cause and the group takes over and self sacrifice can become a reality.

Group Morality Takes Over and Trickle Down

- Individual morality is not permitted – Why? Examples?
- Individuals become less likely to question acts – Why?
 - Group morality is paramount; the group's morality justifies terrorist acts
- All questions of morality of terror acts receive justification – Examples?
- As this atmosphere of conformity takes hold, even moderate leaders can lose out to more extreme individuals, and in fact, leaders of terrorist organization gradually increase the harshness of their behavior to maintain control



Understanding Groupthink

- By understanding groupthink we can get a better understanding of how a terrorist thinks.
- Groupthink is the idea that individual identity gives way to the collective mind of the organization. Members engaged in groupthink tend to exhibit four traits

What is Groupthink?

- **Groupthink** is a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people in which the desire for harmony or conformity in the group results in an irrational or dysfunctional decision-making outcome.
- Group members try to minimize conflict and reach a consensus decision without critical evaluation of alternative viewpoints by actively suppressing dissenting viewpoints, and by isolating themselves from outside influences.

Groupthink

- Groupthink requires individuals to avoid raising controversial issues or alternative solutions, and there is loss of individual creativity, uniqueness and independent thinking.
- The dysfunctional group dynamics of the "ingroup" produces an "illusion of invulnerability" (an inflated certainty that the right decision has been made).
- Thus the "ingroup" significantly overrates its own abilities in decision-making and significantly underrates the abilities of its opponents (the "outgroup").
- Furthermore, groupthink can produce dehumanizing actions against the "outgroup".

4 Traits of Groupthink

- Feeling of invulnerability
- Certainty of the organization's morality
- Simplistic perception of the enemy as evil
- Intolerance toward internal dissent

Groupthink

- Illusion of Invulnerability: Members ignore obvious danger, take extreme risk, and are overly optimistic. Thoughts, Examples?
- When you think you cant be hurt it alters your thought process. Thoughts, Examples?

Groupthink

- Illusion of Morality: Members believe their decisions are morally correct, ignoring the ethical consequences of their decisions.
- This justifies doing wrong and proclaiming it was just right after the terrible incident happen. Examples?

Groupthink

- Simplistic perception of the enemy as evil: gives the terrorist the feeling that it is ok to harm the innocent.
- Example – Nazis – when you think of Jewish people as bad it becomes a lot easier to do the unspeakable things they did.

Groupthink

- Intolerance toward any internal dissent: opinions are not encouraged and in fact are punished.
- Can even lead to death

Threat of Victory – What happens if they win?

- Terrorists don't want to win - Sounds Strange?
- Reasons why
 - When terrorists achieve their goals, their reason for being is gone
 - Terrorists want to be successful enough to attract new members, attract attention, and keep the organization going, but winning is bad for them WHY?
 - Loss of heroics
- If they are successful, they respond by escalating their demands to ensure the survival of the organization

Examples of the Problems of Victory

- Hezbollah was an organization dedicated to expelling Israel from southern Lebanon. When Israeli troops withdrew in 2000, Hezbollah responded by setting new goals such as more control in Lebanon.
- Have to keep the cause going!

Examples of the Problems of Victory

- In 1993, the Oslo Accords laid the groundwork for peace between Israel and the Palestinians
- Instead of pursuing peace, Yasser Arafat focused his resources on more violence rather than pursuing Palestinian infrastructure
- Arafat wasn't interested in the mundane business of building roads, collecting taxes and managing civil responsibilities

Demonizing the Enemy

- Terrorists demonize their enemies to enable themselves to go about the business of killing innocent people-this is moral justification
- Three tactics
 - Scapegoating
 - Conspiratorial explanations
 - Identify a co-conspirator

Scapegoating

- Project everything negative onto enemies
- For example, when terrorists lose bloody standoffs with law enforcement, they blame the authorities for the deaths because no harm would have come to the victims if only the police had listened to their demands

Conspiratorial Explanations

- Events are interpreted in ways that suggest that there is more to them than there actually is
- For example, conspiracy theorists advocate that the point of the Iraq war is to take over Iraq's oil. However, this doesn't wash from an economic perspective
- Note that this is not to suggest that oil is not irrelevant

Identify a Co-Conspirator

- Provide information that victims of the conspiracy want to believe
- For example, the United States invaded Iraq at the bidding of Israel. Israel is widely despised in the Arab world, which makes the theory more credible to those who are inclined to believe it

9/11 Conspiracies

- Hezbollah's satellite television station originated a story in which the 9/11 attacks were blamed on the CIA and Israeli intelligence
- Even after al Jazeera news broadcasted that bin Laden took responsibility people still believed it was the CIA and Israeli intelligence
- It offered the United States as the scapegoat, an effort to damage Arab reputations, and Israeli as co-conspirators
- 9/11 conspiracy theories in general make for some wild reading

Separating Military From Political

- Recently, terrorists have taken to separating their terror wings from their political leadership
- By doing this, the political leadership distance themselves from the wrongs of the military wing
- The reality is that this separation does not exist
- Confuses democracies, but...
- It also gives democracies a pretext for negotiating

Examples

- Saudi Arabia, for example, financed Hamas' welfare programs
- Gerry Adams of the Irish Sinn Fein was invited to the White House over objections of the British government
- Hamas's played both sides of the aisle for years until Israel grew tired of the game and began targeting Hamas "political leaders"

Society's Role

- Support from society can help terrorists- Example Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- How did Osama bin Laden successfully hide for so long? Where was he found?
- Collapsing state systems result in violence along tribal, ethnic, regional and religious lines
- think Iraq? Sunni (Saddam & AMZ) vs. Shia (MAS). Enter US
- Terrorism is unknown in strict societies such as dictatorships and communist governments cause they can use the same tactics.
- It is the more liberal societies such as democracies that have trouble as they are targets of terrorism and democracies appear indecisive and on the defensive.