

***Interior Dynamics*: Concepts from Social Psychology for Enhancing Character/Script Development**

Introduction

Many of concepts emerging from (social) psychology have entered common parlance, and they are often used as a 'short-hand' with which people discuss personalities and how they respond to situations.

But it might be useful to go into these concepts in more detail.

- common parlance is often wanting, and sometimes perpetuates rather superficial ideas
- looking in more detail might add to an understanding of characters and their development, and...
- help to unpack the interior dynamics between character, and help with script development

Last time we looked at evidence from the Psychopath Checklist and Freudian Defence Mechanisms...

Whilst this suggest ideas and perhaps add depth to the understanding of individuals, we hardly ever experience the world as individuals. We are always made in and through some kind of relationship with others...

One of the underlying problems with psychology is its tendency to over-psychologize, and treat individuals in isolation from these relationships and social situations...

... So this time, a look at some of the evidence from the psychology of groups.

1. The Universality of Groups

We are all in groups...

We are all in groups all of the time...

We are all in different groups at different times...

We are sometimes in 'ascribed groups' – race, gender, age...

We are sometimes in 'chosen groups' – subcultures, communities...

We are in, at various times of our life,

- Families
- Tribes
- Occupations
- Friendship networks
- Local and regional identities
- Nations

We all actively declare our group, or tribal memberships, though,

- Use of language
- Expressions of opinion
- Cultural equipment – clothes, music, car,
- Voting behaviour

We all find a sense of self through the 'presentation of the self' – and the place we do that 'identity work' is more often than not inside groups

So...

2. The Power of Groups

Groups are very treasured, emotional places giving us

- place and home
- identity
- meaning to life
- social bonds
- clear roles in life
- love and friendship
- long-term reliable relationships

And precisely because they give us so much, have a very powerful hold over us, they can be very dangerous places,

- Groups as pressure-cookers
- Groups and the creation of guilt
- Groups leading to irrational behaviour

Wicker Man Clip

3. The Group Mind

The many theorists who have looked at groups all agree about one thing...

... that groups develop a 'group mind', and this group mind is different from the individual mind.

Which means

- Groups behaviour is not simply the sum of the collected thinking of the individuals

- that make it up
- The group mind has its own particular, often peculiar dynamic
 - Individuals-in-groups do things that they would not do as individuals

So what are the interior dynamics of the group mind?

4. The Dynamics of Groups

- (a) For Sigmund Freud, the interior dynamic of groups is characterized by,
- **Mutualism** – the 'I'll-agree-with-you-if-you-agree-with-me-and-then-together-we-can-all-pretend-to-be-happy/right/safe/moral' syndrome
 - **Suggestability** – groups are much more credulous, easily led, or outright dumb than any one individual within them would ever be – the '**herd instinct**' and the way people in groups are often much more sheep-like
 - **An Illusion of Invincible Power** – given internal mutualism and suggestability, groups often tend towards an **irrational illusion** of their own grandeur, a superiority complex, an illusion of invulnerability or ideas about an 'undefeated record' etc

Added to this,

- **Guilt** - Freud saw guilt as a defining feature of the human condition, as the vehicle by which we learned to repress our wilder impulses in favour of more polite, 'civilized behaviour' – and because groups are the place we get so much emotional stuff from, they tend to be **places of heightened guilt, or microcosms of the pressures of guilt**

First Chocolate Clip

(b) In his book *The Established and the Outsiders*, Norbert Elias makes similar points. He also talks at length about how groups 'police' what goes on in them, by using

- social/guilt pressure to **maintain conformity**
- the threat of **ostracising** 'put down' etc. disagreement of dissent
- **hostility** to other groups or individual outsiders so as to reaffirm the need for group solidarity

'... setting up sharp barriers... placing the Outsider as excluded from participation in the grace and virtues attributed to those who belong'. (Norbert Elias. 1975)

(c) R.D. Laing's work tends to look at the finer detail of all this.

In particular, he looks at how, once the experiences of being in a group start, it becomes a self-perpetuating and emerge from the very fact of being in/doing it.

The experiences of groups become,

- a 'reality'

- an identity
- reified – seeming to be a 'thing' whilst it is only really a vague shared agreement to think the same

For R.D. Laing, the concept of 'collusion' is central to understanding how and why this happens; what experiences and behaviour create and maintain the illusion.

Question?

5. The Fine Details: Collusion

The process of collusion describes the way each group member acts in accordance with what they feel the others want from them, such that everyone is doing it to everyone else, albeit through unspoken illusions.

Each group member experiences being under 'inspection' by each other, so it becomes a matter of safety and comfort for everyone congregate around the assumption they make about everyone else's assumptions, about what is appropriate behaviour, opinion, dress etc.

And this circular, self-referring, self-validating system becomes what Laing calls the group synthesis. When him, you and me come together to form a group, then...

I interiorize your and his synthesis; you internalize his and mine; he interiorizes mine and yours. I internalize your internalization of mine and his; you interiorize my interiorization of your and his. Furthermore, he interiorizes my interiorization of his and yours – a logical in-going spiral of reciprocal perspectives to infinity (from *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*, by R.D. Laing)

Anyone refusing to play the mutual interiorization game risks the 'shooting the messenger' thing.

They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game. If I show them I see they are, I shall break the rules and they will punish me. I must play their game, of not seeing I see the game. (from *Knots*. By R.D. Laing).

Second Chocolate Clip

So once the experiences of the group become self-perpetuating and 'real' through the collusion dynamic, it is,

- difficult to see and/or easy to miss for what it is

- strongly held-on to, defended
- in need of constant re-confirmation, re-affirmation
- open to manipulation by 'leaders' etc.

*All those people who seek to control the behaviour of large numbers of people work on the experiences of those other people. Once people can be induced to experience a situation in a similar way, they can be expected to behave in a similar way. **Induce people all to want the same thing, hate the same thing, feel the same threat, then their behaviour is already captive.** (from *The Politics of Experience*, by R.D. Laing)*

This has been intuitively known and used throughout history, in 1514 Niccolo Machievelli wrote in *The Prince*,

*A city used to freedom can be more easily ruled through its own citizens...
Men nearly always follow the the tracks made by others and proceed in their affairs by imitation...*

6. The Stockholm Syndrome – Strange Attractors

Sometimes identification with the group internalization of its 'reality' gets very strange.

The Stockholm syndrome is a psychological response sometimes seen in abducted hostages, in which the hostage shows signs of loyalty to the hostage-takers, regardless of the danger or risk in which they have been placed.

- *The syndrome is named after the 1973 Nommalmstorg Robbery of The Kreditbanken in Stockholm, hence the name. The bank robbers held bank employees hostage from August 23rd to August 28th during which the victims became emotionally attached to their victimizers and even defended their captors after they were freed from their six-day ordeal*
- *The millionaire heiress Patty Hearst was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) and after two months in captivity she actively took part in a robbery they were orchestrating. Her unsuccessful legal defense was that she suffered from Stockholm Syndrome and was coerced into aiding the SLA*
- *During 2002 in Missouri, Shawn Hombeck was kidnapped at age 11 and held for four years by Michael J. Devlin. Shawn started using Devlin's last name and despite talking to police on two separate occasions about other unrelated matters, he did not seek their assistance. There have been many cases including victims of sexual abuse and kidnapping who have expressed their understanding and support for Shawn's decisions not to make an attempt to escape.*

Questions?

7. Checklist

So much for some of the key theorists of groups and the group mind. Lets end with the checklist of 'groupthink' behaviour and mentalities provided by Irwin Janis, in his famous book *Groupthink*.

The 'symptoms' of groupthink are,

Type 1: - Overestimations of the Group – its Power and Morality

- *An illusion of invulnerability, shared by most or all the members, which creates excessive optimism and encourages taking extreme risks*
- *An unquestioned belief in the groups inherent morality, inclining the members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions*

Type 2: - Closed-mindedness

- *Collective efforts to rationalise in order to discount warnings or other information that might lead the members to reconsider their assumptions before they recommit themselves to their past decisions*
- *Stereotyped views of 'enemy leaders' as too evil to warrant genuine attempts to negotiate, or as too weak and stupid to counter whatever risky attempts are made to defeat them.*

Type 3: - Pressures Towards Conformity

- *Self-censorship of deviations from apparent group consensus, reflecting each member's inclination to minimize to him/herself the importance of his/her doubts and counter-arguments*
- *A shared illusion of unanimity concerning judgements conforming to the majority view, partly resulting from self-censorship of deviations, augmented by the false assumption that silence means consent*

Given these symptoms, the common behaviour of individuals-in-groupthink is to work to maintain the group illusions, or silence anyone not so conforming to them.

Commonly this involves,

- an incomplete survey of alternative ways of seeing, thinking and behaving – **being**

- ***unplanned, impulsive and disinterested in other views***
- an incomplete survey of objectives – ***being unclear and confused about the point of it all***
- a failure to re-appraise initially rejected alternatives – ***being stubborn, unmoveable, non-persuadable***
- a poor information search – ***being wilfully blind and uninformed***
- a selective bias in processing information at hand – ***being irrational and sticking to illusions or stereotypes***
- a failure to work out contingency plans – ***sticking to Plan A at all costs, avoiding any Plan B's***

Questions?

8. Concepts for Workshops

- **Collusion** – eg *Mafia, Lord of the Flies*
- **Stockholm Syndrome** – eg *Patti Hearst, Homeland, The Hunger Games*
- **Shoot the Messenger** – eg *The Environment Agency, 'Enemy of the People' by Ibsen*
- **Guilt** – eg *Emotional Blackmailing, Chocolate*
- **The Illusion of Invincible Power** – eg *Banking Crisis,*
- **Suggestability-** *Football Fans, Big Brother TV,*
- **Leadership and Manipulation** – *1984, Coriallanus*