

Ingroup cooperation and the social exchange heuristic

Toko Kiyonari and Toshio Yamagishi

In the sociological tradition, a group is not a mere aggregate of people. According to a sociology dictionary (Mitchell, 1968), “it is necessary to distinguish an aggregate or category of persons possessing some common features...from a number of persons between whom there are relationships based on interaction.” According to this definition, people who sit in the waiting area of an airport, for example, hardly constitute a group. The fact that the individuals share certain characteristics such as sitting in the same place does not make them a group. What makes a group distinct from a simple aggregation is the existence of actual or imaginary interactions. Founders of social psychology shared this substantive view of the group. More recently, however, social psychologists, especially in the tradition of social cognition, define the group in terms of the members’ perceived similarities. In this tradition, occupying the same salient social category is at the core of the group process. Thus, actual interactions occurring within and between groups are generated by the perception of the group members’ similarity and homogeneity. Although this cognitive view of the group is not consistent with the traditional sociological view, the effect of social categories *per se* in the generation of intergroup and intragroup processes has been demonstrated empirically through a series of so-called *minimal group experiments* (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971). Findings in these experiments support the view of the group shared by the majority of contemporary social psychologists.