Human Group Behaviour and Subculture

"Groupism" then as a primary human behavioural pattern is the readiness to form groups round any observed or imagined differences in bodily or mental characteristics; almost anything will serve: proximity, language, age, sexual inclination, skin colour, eye and hair colour, shared historical or individual experience, metaphysical beliefs, shared descent - even apparently trivial interests such as StarTrek, soccer, basketball or baseball teams, real ale. Those who consider themselves similar in some respect tend to aggregate, to form a herd or flock and in so doing immediately are distinguished from (more or less strongly) those who identify themselves with other groups.

National, international, local and social history is largely the record of the consequences of groupism, a biologically necessary (no doubt) product of the evolution of the species. If groups are formed, group interests are bound to diverge and can result in Crusades, concentration camps, football hooliganism, Waco, city riots - or even sociology v evolutionary psychology. Groupism is a central aspect of human evolutionary psychology. Nations, societies, or states are ingroups on the largest scale, formed of multiple subsidiary ingroups and regarding other nations, societies or states as outgroups. Consideration of smaller groups can throw light on the cohesion of the largest groups. The obverse of the unity of the group is the potential for intergroup conflict. Social identity plays an important role in ingroup-outgroup relations, the distribution of resources, self-categorization, and expectations for behavior. It is an automatic redefinition of "self" in terms of shared group membership.

Ethnic groups (that is groups with real or apparent genetic similarity) are a central source of values and identity, significantly more so than class, so much so that the modern state has been unable to absorb them. What the modern state has done, however, is to carry through a far-reaching integration of ethnic groups, so that those living in the same state share a range of features, attitudes, values when it comes to politics. Such groups are the central mechanism for providing individuals with their identity; "rather than thinking about individuals 'sacrificing' part of their identity when the become part of a group, [we should regard] individual identity as possible only in the context of secure group attachments...The notion of individuals apart from groups...is a product of western thought, not the human experience" (Ross, 1993: 76).

Nations, being large human groups, have very similar characteristics to the smaller groups examined by social psychologists. Anderson (1983) suggests that unlike smaller groups, they are "Imagined Communities" because the members of even the smallest nation do not know most of their fellow-members, they will never meet them, they will never even hear of them, and yet, in the mind of each member of a nation lives the idea or ideal of national togetherness. However this applies to many groups (political parties, football fan clubs) besides nations. One can ask where in fact is the group, the nation or the state. The group, the nation and the state have their existence only in the minds of the individuals forming the group, the nation or the state. The existence of the group, the state or nation is a kind of shared virtual reality or one might compare the individual's awareness of them with the individual's awareness of his own body, the body-image, and think of the body-image of the state, the nation, the society, the group generally. The individual's body-image and the largest grouping to which an individual belongs, are in fact a mapping of the experienced environment of the individual, existing only in the individual mind. One can indeed in the light of this repeat that to understand the functioning of the group, the state and the nation, one should start from evolved individual psychology.

Subculture

In sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, a subculture is a group of people with a culture (whether distinct or hidden) which differentiates them from the larger culture to which they belong. If a particular subculture is characterized by a systematic opposition to the dominant culture, it may be described as a counterculture.

As early as 1950, David Riesman distinguished between a majority, "which passively accepted commercially provided styles and meanings, and a 'subculture' which actively sought a minority style...and interpreted it in accordance with subversive values".[1] Sarah Thornton described subcultural capital as the cultural knowledge and commodities acquired by members of a subculture,

raising their status and helping differentiate themselves from members of other groups.[citation needed] Roe uses the term "symbolic capital".[citation needed]

Identifying subcultures

Subcultures can be distinctive because of the age, race, ethnicity, class, and/or gender of the members. The qualities that determine a subculture as distinct may be aesthetic, religious, political, sexual, or a combination of factors. Members of a subculture often signal their membership through a distinctive and symbolic use of style, which includes fashions, mannerisms, and argot.[2]

The study of subcultures often consists of the study of symbolism attached to clothing, music and other visible affectations by members of subcultures, and also the ways in which these same symbols are interpreted by members of the dominant culture. According to Richard Middleton, "the audience ... manipulates the product (and hence the producer), no less than the other way round."[3] For example, when a member of a subculture

listens to music, even if no-one else is around, he listens in a context of imaginary 'others' - his listening is indeed often an effort to establish connection with them. In general what he perceives in the mass media is framed by his perception of the peer-groups to which he belongs. These groups not only rate the tunes but select for their members in more subtle ways what is to be 'heard' in each tune.[4]