Scientists Discuss How to Study the Psychology of Collectives, Not Just Individuals

January 10, 2024

In an era of increasing radicalization and polarization, psychologists are looking beyond the individual mind to understand how groups think and behave. In a set of articles appearing in Perspectives on Psychological Science, an international array of scientists discusses how the study of neighborhoods, work units, activist groups, and other collectives can help us better understand and respond to societal changes.

“Psychologists must go beyond the traditional focus on the individual mind,” David Garcia, Mirta Galesic, and Henrik Olsson of the Complexity Science Hub Vienna, Austria, write in an introduction to the article collection. “This is even more pressing given the pace of the digital transformation of our society, as new information and communication technologies reshape how we interact, create new networked structures of humans and machines, and provide a digital breeding ground for new kinds of collective behavior.”
The authors cover the topic from a number of angles, including collective memory, group intelligence, and crowd behavior. Among other factors, they highlight how:

- groups form and evolve
- collectives can amplify or dampen individual emotions, beliefs, and decisions
- individuals can misperceive the accuracy of their group’s knowledge

The contributing authors also discuss the need to integrate their research with their peers in other disciplines, such as anthropology, economics, neuroscience, and sociology. Some of the authors propose new approaches and perspectives for studying collectives.

Topics discussed in the collection of 19 articles include collective intelligence, emotions, knowledge, and performance. The list of articles is below:

**The Psychology of Collectives**  
*David Garcia, Mirta Galesic, and Henrik Olsson*

**Group Formation and the Evolution of Human Social Organization**  
*Carsten K. W. De Dreu, Jörg Gross, and Angelo Romano*

**Polarization and the Psychology of Collectives**  
*Simon A. Levin and Elke U. Weber*

**Understanding Collective Intelligence: Investigating the Role of Memory, Attention, and Reasoning Processes**  
*Anita Williams Woolley and Pranav Gupta*

**The Emerging Science of Interacting Minds**  
*Thalia Wheatley, Mark Thornton, Arjen Stolk, and Luke Chang*

**Struggling With Change: The Fragile Resilience of Collectives**  
*Frank Schweitzer, Christian Zingg, and Giona Casiraghi*

**Motivated Cognition in Cooperation**  
*Susann Fiedler, Hooman Habibnia, Alina Fahrenwaldt, and Rima-Maria Rahal*

**The Spread of Beliefs in Partially Modularized Communities**  
*Robert Goldstone, Marina Dubova, Rachith Aiyappa, and Andy Edinger*

**Individuals, Collectives, and Individuals in Collectives: The Ineliminable Role of Dependence**  
*Ulrike Hahn*

**Communities Of Knowledge in Trouble**  
*Nathaniel Rabb, Mugur Geana, and Steven Sloman*

**A Network Approach to Investigate the Dynamics of Individual and Collective Beliefs: Advances**
and Applications of the BENDING Model
Madalina Vlasceanu, Ari M. Dyckovsky, and Alin Coman

Maintaining Transient Diversity Is a General Principle for Improving Collective Problem Solving
Paul E. Smaldino, Cody Moser, Alejandro Pérez Velilla, and Mikkel Werling

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Crowds to Address Global Problems
Stephen B. Broomell and Clinton P. Davis-Stober

Crowds Can Identify Misinformation at Scale
Cameron Martel, Jennifer Allen, Gordon Pennycook, and David G. Rand

What Makes Groups Emotional
Amit Goldenberg

New Forms of Collaboration Between the Social and Natural Sciences Could Become Necessary for Understanding Rapid Collective Transitions in Social Systems
Stefan Thurner

Toward Understanding of the Social Hysteresis: Insights From Agent-Based Modeling
Katarzyna Sznajd-Weron, Arkadiusz J?drzejewski, and Barbara Kami?ska

Human Crowds as Social Networks: Collective Dynamics of Consensus and Polarization
William H. Warren, J. Benjamin Falandays, Kei Yoshida, Trenton D. Wirth, and Brian A. Free

A Cognitive Computational Approach to Social and Collective Decision-Making
Alan N. Tump, Dominik Deffner, Timothy J. Pleskac, Pawel Romanczuk, and Ralf H. J. M. Kurvers

Featured Research from Perspectives on Psychological Science.
How Science Can Reward Cooperation, Not Just Individual Achievement

Two social scientists propose a different approach to scientific recognition and rewards: shifting the focus away from individual scientists and toward the larger groups in which scientists are embedded.
**Guilty as Charged: How We Contribute to Polarizing Content on Social Media**

Podcast: Steven Rathje (New York University) and APS’s Özge G. Fischer-Baum explore the implications for societal change, in-group and out-group behavior, and emotional choices on internet usage.
Artificial Intelligence Systems Excel at Imitation, but Not Innovation

While children and adults alike can solve problems by finding novel uses for everyday objects, AI systems often lack the ability to view tools in a new way, researchers explain in this study.

Feedback on this article? Email apsobserver@psychologicalscience.org or login to comment.