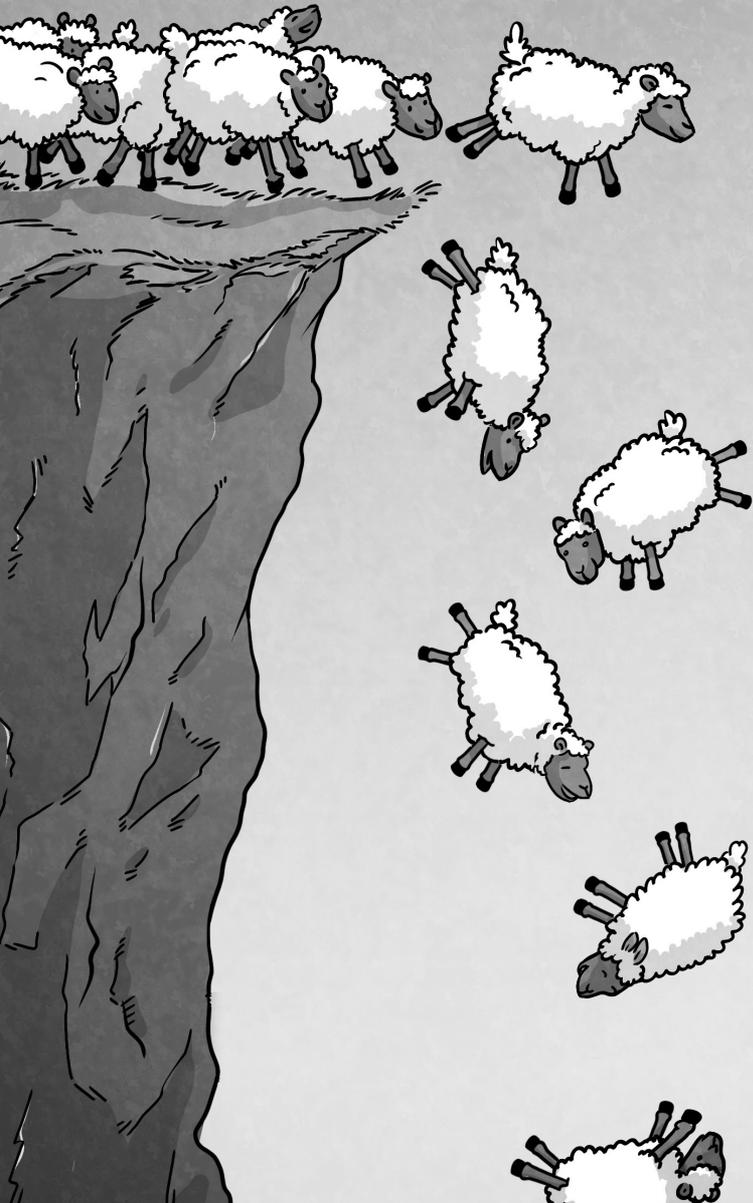


# GROUP THINK

Peer pressure can lead you to adopt opinions and believe ideas that are popular with your social group. Something isn't true just because most people think it is, so take time to evaluate something critically before you form an opinion about it.



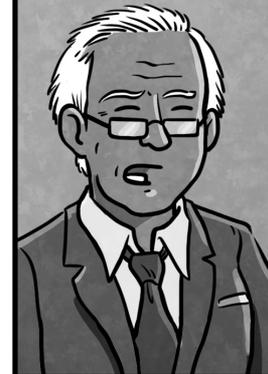
If I were you, I'd disregard the data from the latest study.

It contradicts the narrative of our peers and superiors.



It doesn't matter what's true. We need votes!

Read the words on the screen if you want to win the election.



If we keep our opposition from being heard, we will win!

Our cause is morally right, so their facts are morally wrong!



## Ignorance Is Strength

When we identify with a group, there's always social pressure to conform to that group. This isn't always a bad thing. It can aid in creating a common moral code. For example, our parents taught us that stealing and hitting people was wrong. We want to be accepted, so we conform to the group (i.e., society).

We don't question these fundamental morals as we grow; we simply adopt them as they are consistently reinforced by people we know and trust. While not stealing or hurting each other is mutually beneficial, groupthink is different. It leads to terrible judgments that are harmful and have disastrous results.

In a way, peer pressure can be considered a common example of groupthink. The group pressures you to change your behavior to fit the norm. Whether this pressure comes from a friend or someone else, we're coerced into conforming to the group rather than retaining our individuality. Resistance is seen as an act of hostility as the group increases pressure on the individual.

Groupthink flourishes when a group is isolated. This can result from physical isolation or when a digital platform becomes hostile to opposing opinions. With group members unable to access other viewpoints, they begin to feel a false sense of unity as everyone agrees. In this environment, highly biased leaders can quickly rise and push the group toward poor decisions even faster, resulting in catastrophic effects.

Many examples of this type of behavior can be seen throughout history: communism, fascism, the Salem witch

trials, the Spanish Inquisition, the French Revolution, McCarthyism, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution are all examples of groupthink at its worst. Our worst moments in history happen when individuals fail to question the group they belong to—whether they believe in the message or just fear being attacked for not believing it.

No area in society is immune to groupthink, be it business, politics, science, medicine, government, religion, or the media. Groupthink can make us close-minded, irrational, complacent, overconfident, naive, ignorant, and blindly obedient. Of all the biases in this guide, it may be the most dangerous. With the power of numbers, poor decisions are magnified on a national or worldwide scale.

Even when some group members realize how dangerous or misguided a group is, it can easily get out of control and be almost impossible to stop. If a group member questions the group's motives, they can be attacked, demonized, and destroyed.

Groupthink can also cause people to act irrationally or out of character and do things they would never have considered on their own. Led by fear of disagreeing with the group or the conviction that the group is morally right, terrible acts are possible.

The process of groupthink is more complicated than the other biases and often consists of the following:

- Members of the group strongly believe that the group is morally right (or on the right side of history).
- Individuals believe the group is invincible as long as everyone acts together.

- Group norms dismiss any need for analysis of their actions and emphasize the justification of group behavior as correct since their cause is correct.
- Pressure within the group promotes self-censorship, rejection of criticism, an illusion of unanimity, and reporting of any dissent.
- Group members tend to stereotype people who don't belong to the group.

## An Example with Ethan and Emily

One beautiful Saturday morning, Emily and Ethan decided to earn some extra money by washing the family car. Ethan sprayed down the van as Emily scrubbed it with a soapy sponge. Out of the corner of his eye, Ethan noticed his neighbor Fred's house. His jaw dropped as he froze in place, and the hose dropped from his hand.

Emily looked up in surprise. "What is it?"

Ethan pointed toward Fred's house, and Emily stood up to get a better view. Someone had ripped the American flag off the house and spray-painted letters across Fred's porch. Emily dropped the sponge, and they both ran over to check on Fred. On the ground, Ethan found a spray can, a bent yard sign, and a torn American flag. He picked up the flag as Emily ran up the porch and rang the doorbell.

A moment later, Fred was at the door. "Hello, Emily. How are..." Fred looked past her to see Ethan holding the flag. He stepped out on the porch and surveyed the damage. Shaking his head sadly, he took the flag from Ethan. "Are you two okay? Is anyone hurt?"

"We're all fine," Ethan said. "We just noticed this while we were washing the car."

"Come in," Fred said as he waved them inside.

"Are you going to call the police?" Emily asked.

"I'll file a report, but it was probably just some kids." He shook his head again. "I can paint over the graffiti, put up a new flag, and get a new sign. The real problem is where all of this is going."

"What do you mean?" Emily asked.

"They targeted me because of the flag and veteran sign in my yard. I never thought I would see this in my lifetime."

"See what?" Ethan asked.

Fred stared him straight in the eyes. "Do you know what groupthink is?"

"Mom taught us about it," Emily said. "That's when a group's beliefs override rational thought and behavior."

Fred smiled. "Excellent, Emily. Sometimes groupthink can be relatively harmless, like when we all believe our last-place football team will go to the championship. Other times, it's used to target and attack specific people based on race, religion, class, or beliefs. That's what the Nazis and Communists did when they rose to power."

"I'm glad to live in a democratic republic. We don't have to worry about that," Ethan said proudly. "We have a Constitution and checks and balances to guard against abuses of power."

"I don't mean to burst your bubble, Ethan, but groupthink

doesn't respect borders or checks and balances. A man named Edmund Burke once said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

"Those letters in the graffiti," Emily said. "I've seen them before. Some of my friends have yard signs with them. I heard other kids are changing their social media profiles to that group's symbol. It's like that's all they care about."

Ethan nodded. "Yeah, I don't recognize some of my friends anymore. They're obsessed with this new cause. It's like a religion."

Fred motioned for Emily and Ethan to take a seat. Fred sat across from them and began delicately folding the flag on his lap. "You're right, Ethan. That's exactly what groupthink is. It's a religion."

"How can it be a religion if it doesn't believe in God?" Emily asked.

Fred smiled again. "You don't need to believe in God to be religious. All you need is to be faithfully devoted to a cause above all else." He finished folding the flag and set it aside. "You see, we all need a mission, Emily. God made us to seek a purpose greater than ourselves. Groupthink capitalizes on this. People in a group believe they're doing something noble. For many, this is the first time they felt real purpose. It's exciting." He looked down at the flag. "As evil as the Nazis and Communists were, they couldn't accomplish their goals without support. Many people who supported them thought they were doing something good. They convinced themselves they were on the right side of history. They didn't realize how easily a cause can be perverted until it was too late."

He set the flag on a side table and reached into its drawer. Fred pulled out a small locket, popped it open, and handed it to Emily. Emily looked down at the image of a young girl inside.

Fred cleared his throat. "That was my mother's cousin. They were pen pals. She was about your age when the Nazis brought her family to a death camp. I know you believe nothing like that could ever happen here. Still, it's a reminder to me that when we're complacent and don't stand up for what is right, incredible evil is possible."

Ethan and Emily both stared at the locket, at a loss for words. Could something that horrible ever really happen here?

## What Happened?

Ethan, Emily, and Fred never saw who committed the vandalism to his home. However, it was evident by the graffiti that Fred was targeted because of his beliefs. The people who committed the crime wanted to intimidate Fred into silence. This is one of the trademarks of groupthink. Group members hope that their intimidation will force others to self-censor. Through self-censorship, they're able to claim the illusion of unanimity.

While this didn't work on Fred because he would repaint the house and get a new flag and sign, it can be an effective tactic. Fred taught Ethan and Emily that while conforming to the crowd or being silent may be the easy thing to do, that doesn't mean it's the right thing to do. Groupthink can happen anywhere, and we can't allow ourselves to grow complacent or silent out of self-interest. Because when

good people refuse to stand up, nothing is left to stand in the way of evil.

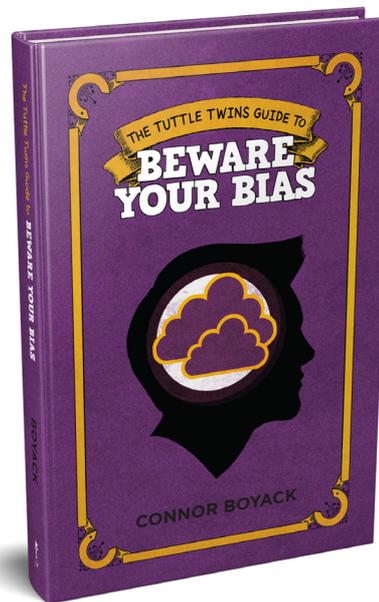
## Tuttle Twins Takeaway

The critical thing to remember about groupthink is that unity doesn't mean the group's decision is correct or moral. As we've seen in history, groupthink can lead to behavior that individual group members would never consider on their own.

If you're in a leadership role, there are some things you can do to combat groupthink. Give others time to come up with solutions to the problem you face before sharing yours. Also, assign at least one person to the role of devil's advocate for anything that the group might come up with. Finally, discuss the group's decision with an outsider and encourage group members to be critical of the final decision.

However, if you're not a leader, avoiding groupthink is more complicated, especially when you find yourself in the midst of it. Going against the grain is never easy, but we can still develop a habit of asking questions and not allowing popular opinion to lead us. Remember, the greatest heroes in history were willing to stand up against groupthink no matter the personal cost. Sometimes, we believe heroes are remarkable in some way and different from us. Yet, Rosa Parks, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Susan B. Anthony, and Frederick Douglas were all just regular people willing to stand against groupthink.

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- |                        |                   |                       |
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| Sunk Cost              | Barnum Effect     | Just-World Hypothesis |
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| Curse of Knowledge     | Negativity Bias   | Placebo Effect        |
| Confirmation Bias      | Declinism         | Bystander Effect      |
| Dunning-Kruger Effect  | Framing Effect    | Reactance             |
| Belief Bias            | Attribution Error | Spotlight Effect      |
| Self-Serving Bias      | Halo Effect       |                       |