

Chapter 2

The Concept of Social Cohesion

Introduction

Cohesiveness has been a topic of long-term interest in sociology and psychology as well as in mental health and more recently in public health. While the concept of social cohesion is intriguing, it has also been frustrating because its multiple definitions prevent its meaningful measurement and application. Investigators have conceptualized social cohesion, and developed methods for studying it, based on the theoretical assumptions of their own discipline. In sociology, social structure provides the framework for studying the behavior of social groups and organizations.¹ In social psychology, cohesiveness is considered an attribute along with other processes operating within and between small groups.² In psychology, cohesiveness relates to the members of a group who share emotional and behavioral characteristics with one another and with the group as a whole.³ In mental health, the small group is viewed as a dynamic system in which the differentiation of roles during phases of group development is dependent upon a cohesive group bond.⁴ And, in public health, cohesiveness is viewed as part of the social and environmental context of individuals and societies that influence health risks and protective factors.⁵ Disciplinary boundaries have protected the definitions of social cohesion and made it difficult to investigate multi-disciplinary, multilevel aspects of the concept.⁶

Historical Overview of Conceptions of Social Cohesion

There has been much theoretical and empirical research on social cohesion in both sociology and social psychology. A review of key studies of the concept from the late 19th century to the early 21st century showed that they seemed to cluster around three methodological approaches: empirical, experimental, and social network analysis (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Historical overview of conceptions of social cohesion in sociology and social psychology

Theorist/investigator*	Key observations and findings
Le Bon (1896)	<i>Solidarity of the crowd is due to its uniformity of action</i> which, in turn, is largely due to its anonymity and contagion. Antisocial motives are released through suggestion
Durkheim (1897)	Different rates of suicide reflect differences in <i>social integration</i> ; categories of people with <i>strong social ties</i> had low suicide rates, whereas individualistic categories of people had high suicide rates
Cooley (1909)	A primary group is a small social group whose members <i>share personal and enduring relationships</i> in contrast to secondary groups, which are large, impersonal whose members pursue a specific goal or activity
Freud (1921)	Primary identification explains loyalty and attachment to the group leader and to group members by <i>intense emotional ties</i> which represent the social bonds of groups
MacDougall (1921)	The group is more than the sum of individuals; it has a life of its own, a collective soul, or group mind, <i>a common mode of feeling, and reciprocal influence</i> among members
Moreno (1934)	Founder of sociometry; deals with the inner structure of social groups and the forms emerging from forces of attraction and repulsion among group members. <i>Selective relations among individuals give social groups their reality</i> . Social configurations can be determined by measurement of <i>choices and patterns of the degree of group reality</i>
Lewin (1943)	The essence of a group is the <i>interdependence of its members</i> . A group is a dynamic whole; a change in any subpart changes the state of any other subpart. The degree of interdependence depends upon the size, organization, and <i>intimacy of the group</i>
Lippett & White (1943)	The cohesiveness of a group is higher under conditions of <i>democratic leadership</i> . Cohesiveness and high morale are largely the result of <i>having one's expectations met</i>
Deutsch (1949)	Provided analysis of group problem-solving and interaction process when members of groups are placed in a situation where <i>cooperation is to their mutual benefit</i> . Group members rewarded on a cooperative basis were more cohesive than members rewarded on a competitive basis
Homans (1950/1961)	Social behavior is an exchange of more or less valuable rewards. Cohesiveness refers to the <i>value of the rewards available in a group</i> . The more valuable the rewards, the greater the cohesiveness
Festinger et al. (1950)	Formalized a theory of group cohesiveness. Cohesiveness is a key phenomenon of membership continuity – <i>the "cement" binding together group members and maintaining their relationships</i> to one another. Investigated how face-to-face small, informal, social groups exerted pressure upon members to adhere to group norms
Back (1951)	In experimental groups Back found that in <i>more cohesive groups, members made more effort to reach agreement and were more influenced by discussion</i> than in less cohesive groups
Schachter (1951)	Schachter <i>produced clubs with high cohesiveness by grouping students who expressed moderate or high interest in their activities</i> ; he created clubs with low cohesiveness by grouping students who expressed little or no interest in their activities

Table 2.1 (continued)

Theorist/investigator*	Key observations and findings
Cartwright (1950); Cartwright & Zander (1953)	A group in which <i>norms are well institutionalized</i> will be able to <i>present a secure front</i> to the outside world. When a group member accepts and conforms to group norms his security is enhanced by the <i>supportive power of the group</i>
Asch (1952)	Showed the <i>power of groups to generate conformity</i> . In an experiment, he showed that group members are <i>willing to compromise their own judgment to avoid being different</i> even from others they do not know
French (1956)	Proposed a <i>theory of social power</i> that defined seven sources of power for changing conditions inside or outside a social group
Miligram (1965)	Studied <i>pressures of conformity</i> – in an experiment demonstrated that people are likely to follow directions from not only legitimate authority figures but from groups of ordinary individuals, even when it means inflicting harm on another person
Lott & Lott (1966)	Cohesiveness is that property which is <i>inferred from the number and strength of mutual positive attitudes among the members of a group</i> . . . where. . . the primary condition for the development of mutual positive attitudes among group members is seen as the attainment of goals or receipt of rewards in one another’s presence
Sherif & Sherif (1969)	<i>Cooperative interdependence in the pursuit of shared goals which cannot be achieved by an individual alone</i> results in a well-defined group structure. Mutual need satisfaction through cooperative interaction imbues group members with positive valence and so makes the group attractive and encourages members to remain in it
Janis (1972)	“Groupthink” is a term coined by Janis. Groupthink occurs when a group makes faulty decisions because group pressures lead to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment
Granovetter (1973)	Most network models deal with strong ties in small, well-defined groups. Granovetter suggests the <i>power of weak ties</i> in linking micro and macro levels of sociological theory. <i>Personal experiences of individuals are bound up with larger scale aspects of social structure</i> . Weak ties are a bridge to parts of the social system that otherwise might be disconnected
Stokes et al. (1983)	Studied the relationship between self-disclosure and intimacy in groups. Intimate self-disclosure more desirable in the early life of a group to create cohesion

Table 2.1 (continued)

Theorist/investigator*	Key observations and findings
Piper et al. (1983)	Studied group dynamics in six member learning groups where participants assessed cohesion. Responses yielded a five item factor authors called " <i>commitment to the group</i> ," which they said represented their conception of group cohesion
Friedkin (1984)	Examines the use of <i>network cohesion</i> for studying the emergence of <i>consensus among group members</i>
Wellman (1979); Wellman et al. (1988)	Studied residential area in central Toronto with a tradition of cohesion. The community ties they found did not fit sociological criteria for community. Only some ties provided strong support, only a few were part of densely knit solidarities. <i>Treated networks as personal communities; ways in which networks fit persons.</i> Treating communities as networks helped in understanding how resources were channeled to members and how small interpersonal ties fit into larger social networks
Braaten (1991)	Proposes a multidimensional model of group cohesion based on an extensive literature review. Two factors are generic in models of cohesion namely attraction and bonding, and self-disclosure and feedback
Wellman & Wortley (1990)	<i>Different types of ties provide different kinds of supportive resources.</i> Not all types of ties are supportive. <i>Most relationships provide specialized support. Strong ties provide emotional aide, small services, and companionship.</i> Physically accessible ties provide services. Friends, neighbors, and siblings provide about half of all supportive relationships
Bollen & Hoyle (1990)	Propose that individual group members' perceptions of their cohesion is important for the behavior of the individual and the group. They say that perceived cohesion has two dimensions: <i>a sense of belonging</i> and <i>feelings of morale</i> . They use a Perceived Cohesion Scale to test and confirm their theory in two random samples
Carron & Hausenblas (1998)	Defined cohesion as a dynamic process that reflects a group's tendency to stick together and remain united in satisfying member needs. They believed this definition applies to most groups such as sports teams, military units, fraternities, and friendship groups
Moody & White (2003)	Focused on the basic network features of social cohesion. They differentiate <i>relational togetherness</i> from a <i>sense of togetherness</i> . They believe cohesion is a property of relationships. They examine the paths by which group members are linked

* References for investigators are listed in the References section at end of book.

Empirical Studies (Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries)

Gustave Le Bon, a French social psychologist, in 1896, formulated an explanation for collective behavior. He observed that crowds exerted a hypnotic influence over their members. Crowds could assume a life of their own, stirring up emotions and driving people toward irrational acts. Le Bon's contagion theory was, perhaps, the earliest precursor of the concept of social cohesion. About the same time, Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, in 1897, studied the relationship between social cohesion and suicide.⁶ He collected data that revealed patterns showing that certain categories of people were more likely to commit suicide. He found that different rates of suicide were the consequence of variations in social structure, especially of differences in the degree and type of social solidarity. Charles Horton Cooley (1909) formulated the idea of primary groups. Primary groups were characterized by intimate, face-to-face communication, exhibited cooperation and conflict, and had members who spent a great deal of time together and knew each other well. Sigmund Freud, in 1921, observed that an individual's primary identification came from the intense emotional ties they experienced in closely bonded groups. William MacDougall, in 1921, pointed out that a group is more than the sum of individuals; it has a life and mind of its own. He introduced the idea of reciprocity and a common mode of feeling members have for each other.

These social theorists interpreted social data as they *observed* them. What they lacked was a method for checking and extending their observations.

Experimental Studies (Early- to Mid-20th Century)

The early- to mid-20th century was the period during which experimental studies of social cohesion flourished. Jacob Moreno, a Romanian psychiatrist, theorist, and educator, founded psychodrama, sociometry, and group psychotherapy. Recognized by Harvard University as one of the greatest social scientists in the world, Moreno became interested in the potential of group settings in therapeutic practice. Sociometry is a quasi-quantitative technique invented by Moreno that measures the degree of relatedness between people. Measurement of relatedness can be useful in the assessment of behavior in groups and for interventions to bring about positive change and determining the extent of change. Group sociometry can be used to enhance communication and reduce conflict because it allows the group to see itself objectively and to analyze its own dynamics.

In 1946, Kurt Lewin founded the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is known for his field

theory that is based on the proposition that human behavior is the function of both the person and the environment. This means that one's behavior is related to both one's personal characteristics and to the social situation in which one finds oneself. Lewin found that experiential learning is best facilitated when there is a conflict between immediate concrete experience and detached analysis within the individual. A cycle of action, reflection, generalization, and testing is characteristic of experiential learning.

The most fundamental construct of Lewin's is that of the psychological field or life space. All psychological events are a function of life space, which consists of the independence of the person and the environment. He saw the individual as an equilibrium-maintaining system. He viewed the group as a dynamic whole – the interdependence of its members – in which a change in any subpart changes the state of other subparts. The degree of a group's interdependence depends on the group's size, organization, and intimacy.

The early experiments of Ronald Lippitt and Robert White and others such as J. R. P. French and Leon Festinger, were instrumental in initiating experimental investigations of group life in social psychology and sociology. Lewin, Lippitt, and White's study of the effects of different types of leadership behavior demonstrated how crucial the position of leadership is in determining the atmosphere of a group. Lippitt also studied behavioral contagion in groups, specifically the relationship between status and the ability to influence others in the group. These studies provided the rationale for the use of communication as a key instrument for characterizing group structure and for locating the occupants of various positions within this structure. Lippitt and White also studied the influence of process in organizations. They believed that behavior is primarily influenced by authority, that is, the control over reward and punishment and by persuasion, or by a combination of these. The way in which these modes of influence are used by superiors determines their style of leadership.

Morton Deutsch, a student of Lewin's, is considered the founder of the theory and intervention in conflict resolution. He found that a group may be defined as a set of members who mutually perceive themselves to be cooperatively or promotively interdependent in varying respects and degrees. He stated that it was clear that cohesiveness refers to the forces that bind the parts of a group together and which resist disruptive influences. He believed that the study of the conditions affecting social cohesiveness and of the effects the variations in social cohesiveness have on group functioning was at the basis for understanding group life. Deutsch found that group members who were rewarded on a cooperative basis were more cohesive than members rewarded on a competitive basis. He proposed that members of cohesive groups were (1) more ready to accept the actions of other group members as

substitutable for intended actions of their own, (2) more ready to be influenced by other group members, and (3) more likely to positively respond to the actions of other group members. Deutsch also found that the motivation of members to continue working with the group, feeling an obligation to the group, and the evaluation of the group's performance were affected more by the group's dynamics than by its goal attainment.

George Homans was the founder of social exchange theory. This perspective explains social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties. For example, when a person perceives the costs of a relationship as outweighing the perceived benefits, the theory predicted that the person will choose to leave the relationship. When the costs and benefits are equal in a relationship, then that relationship is considered as equitable. Cohesiveness refers to the value of rewards in a group. The more valuable the rewards, the greater the group's cohesiveness.

Leon Festinger, Stanley Schachter, and Kurt Back defined cohesiveness as "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group." The nature and strength of forces acting on a member to remain in the group may vary from member to member. There may be many different forces acting upon an individual as well as those they initiate. However, Back found that in more cohesive groups, members made more efforts to reach agreement and were more influenced by discussion than in less cohesive groups, no matter what the basis of attractiveness was for joining the group. People in groups composed of members attracted to the group by a liking for other group members were more chatty, but where cohesiveness was based on the prestige of the group, members were more cautious and less relational with one another, and where cohesiveness was based on the group as a means to a goal, members were more impersonal and task-oriented.

A number of experimental investigations bear on the factors determining group cohesiveness. Back found that he could produce high cohesiveness by stressing to members how much they would like each other, how important it was for the group to do well on the task since the task was a test of ability, or how prestigious the group was. Schachter produced clubs with high cohesiveness by grouping students who expressed moderate or high interest in their activities; he created clubs with low cohesiveness by grouping students who expressed little or no interest in their activities.

Festinger's theory of social comparison had significant implications for group formation and group structure. He found that the drive for self-evaluation can lead people to associate with one another and to join groups. His theory suggests that the selective tendencies to associate with others of similar opinion and ability guarantee relative homogeneity of opinions and abilities within groups. The theory of social comparison was extended by

Schachter to apply to the evaluation of emotions as well as to the evaluation of opinions and abilities. He demonstrated that the tendency to affiliate with others undergoing a similar experience increases when people are anxious. Schachter proposed that the emotions experienced by an individual are often influenced by the process of social comparison.

Dorwin Cartwright succeeded Kurt Lewin at his death in 1947 as the Director of the Research Center for Group Dynamics at MIT and oversaw the Center's move to a new Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. Alvin Zander joined the faculty and Cartwright and Zander became collaborators. The two colleagues facilitated the growth of group dynamics as a field of inquiry. Cartwright endorsed the concept of "power field" – a field that could induce changes in the life space within its area of influence. He acknowledged that power was not the attribute of a single person but rather a relationship between persons. The mechanism by which power is demonstrated is in the form of control. Cartwright found that if a superior is expected to control subordinates, he/she must be given that authority. To support his/her authority, the superior is generally given some control over inducements as well as some control over the fate of the subordinate. The superior may also use informal means of influence such as persuasion.

Solomon Asch's conformity experiments were a series of studies that demonstrated the power of conformity in groups. People conform because they want to be liked by the group and because they believe the group is better informed than they are. Asch found that one of the situational factors that influences conformity is the size of the opposing majority. People conform less if they have an ally. It is difficult to be a minority of one but less difficult to be a minority of two. Asch concluded that it is difficult to maintain a perception or opinion when no one else does. Group pressure can lead to the modifications and distortions making a person see or believe almost anything.

J. R. P. French analyzed how conditions can be changed inside and outside a group drawing upon seven sources of social power: (1) *connection power* – the ability to draw on the resources of influential people and organizations; (2) *expert power* – having the knowledge to help the group achieve a particular goal; (3) *information power* – possessing information that is needed by the group; (4) *legitimate power* – holding an official position and the authority, rights, and privileges that go with that position; (5) *reference power* – being liked and admired by group members; (6) *reward power* – the ability to offer social or tangible rewards; and (7) *coercive power* – the ability to sanction, punish, or deny access to resources, rewards, and privileges.

Stanley Miligram tested Asch's theory of conformity by conducting a series of experiments that described the relationship between the group of

reference and the individual person. A person who has neither the ability nor expertise to make decisions, especially in a crisis, will leave decision-making to the group and its hierarchy. The group is the person's behavioral model. Miligram set up an experiment to test how much pain a person would inflict on another person simply because he/she was told to do so by an experimenter. He found that people would go to almost any length to obey a command by an authoritative figure. His work pointed out that people will carry out orders which have destructive effects and are incompatible with fundamental standards of morality when they have few resources to resist authority. Miligram repeated his experiments throughout the world with similar results.

Albert Lott and Bernice Lott were interested in the relationship between group cohesiveness and individual learning. They predicted that children would learn better if they studied with children they liked than if they studied with children they liked less. They presumed that the degree of member liking was an indicator of group cohesiveness. They found that high IQ children who were in high cohesive groups performed better on learning tests than high IQ children who were in low cohesive groups. For low IQ children, however, cohesiveness, or the degree of interpersonal attraction among group members, made no difference, although there was a tendency for low IQ children to do better in high cohesive groups. The investigators believed that children who worked with other children they liked would be more likely to have a greater drive to learn than children who were neutral or had negative attitudes toward their fellow group members. However, cohesiveness made little difference in learning among high IQ children.

Social psychologists Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn Sherif studied the origin of conflict in social groups in a classic study called the Robbers Cave experiment, a Boy Scout Camp surrounded by Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma. During the study, M. Sherif posed as an observer in the role of camp janitor. Twenty-two 11-year-old boys who did not know each other were assigned to two groups of 11 each. They chose names for their groups and developed internal social hierarchies. Contact between the two groups in the form of sports competitions elicited hostility between the groups. To lessen friction and promote cooperation Sherif devised tasks, or superordinate goals, that required the two groups to work together. Hostilities subsided and the groups bonded to the extent that all the boys insisted that they ride the same bus home. The experiment provides an example of how superordinate goals can transcend intergroup conflict and promote social cohesion.

Irving Janis is known for the formulation of "groupthink." Groupthink occurs when a group makes faulty decisions because group pressures lead to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment. Groups affected by groupthink ignore alternatives and tend to take irrational

actions. A group is especially vulnerable to groupthink when its members are similar in background and there is a desire to avoid being seen as foolish, or a desire to avoid embarrassing or angering other members of the group. Groupthink can cause groups to make hasty decisions, or irrational decisions where individual doubts are put aside for fear of upsetting the group's balance. Classic examples of groupthink are the Bay of Pigs Invasion (1959–1962) and the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster (1986).

Mark Granovetter said that a fundamental weakness of current sociological theory is that it does not relate micro-level interactions to macro-level patterns. He suggested the analysis of social networks as a tool for linking these levels. Most network models focus on strong social ties; instead Granovetter proposed the power of weak ties. He defined the strength of a tie as a combination of time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services that characterize the tie. Weak ties are viewed as indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities. Strong ties, on the other hand, foster local cohesion and lead to fragmentation.

During the 1970s and 1980s especially, there was considerable interest among group therapists in how preconditions in a group and members' perceptions of each other affected cohesion in the group as a whole. Stokes and his colleagues found that groups in which members disclosed intimate topics were perceived to be more cohesive than were groups in which members disclosed less intimate topics. This finding supported studies that showed a positive relation between risk-taking and cohesion. These authors suggest that too much as well as too little risk-taking inhibits the development of cohesion in groups. The time in the life of a group in which disclosures occur is important in influencing the cohesiveness of a group.

William Piper and colleagues attempted to provide an empirical basis for the clarification of the concept of cohesion. They gathered self-report data from 45 adults who participated in nine groups that met on eight occasions. Each group was led by an experienced psychologist or psychiatrist. Three sets of factors that dealt with the participant's perception of the other participants, the leader, and the group as a whole were obtained through a questionnaire, leader ratings of participants, and five behavioral variables that were monitored by the leaders at each group session. The researchers concluded that defining cohesion as a basic bond does not define the term "group cohesion," nor does it indicate a cohesive group. They believed that these were separate issues. They defined group cohesion as the group property that emerges from the set of bonds that exist in a group. A cohesive group is one where a majority of the participants possess a commitment to the group, to one another, and to the leader. These three factors focused on the group as a whole, but each factor had a different meaning and a different set of empirical properties. Piper and his colleagues stated that their approach helped to

restrict the definition of cohesion, distinguish it from other concepts, and was a good representation of cohesion as defined as a basic bond or uniting force in a group.

Braaten reviewed major studies of group cohesion from 1968 to 1989, which showed a consensus that a cohesive group climate in group psychotherapy was an analogue of a good therapist–client relationship. Based on this review, he advocated a multidimensional model of group cohesion. He proposed three pre-group conditions necessary to attain a high degree of group cohesion: the selection of suitable participants, a balanced composition of the group, and effective orientation, training, and contracting. Furthermore, three early group conditions must be met for cohesion to occur: resolving conflict and rebellion, constructive norming and culture building, and reducing avoidance and defensiveness. Finally, several in-group factors including attraction and bonding, self-disclosure and feedback, support and caring, listening and empathy, and process performance and cooperation toward group goals must be part of the group climate in order for it to achieve a high degree of cohesiveness.

Social Network Analysis (Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries)

Barry Wellman and several colleagues studied the Toronto borough of East York. They documented the prevalence of non-local friendship and kinship ties, demonstrating that community is no longer confined to geographical areas but rather communities exist as personal networks. Analyzing the intimate networks of 845 adult residents of East York, Wellman found close ties to be prevalent, composed of kin and non-kin, non-local, asymmetric, and of sparse density. He found that help in dealing with both emergencies and everyday matters was available from almost all intimate networks, but only from a minority of intimate ties. Different kinds of social ties provide different kinds of social support. Most relationships provide specialized support. The kinds of support provided are related more to characteristics of the relationship than to characteristics of the network itself.

Bollen and Hoyle proposed a theoretical definition of cohesion that they believed captured the extent to which individual group members feel “stuck to,” or a part of, particular social groups. They introduced the concept of *perceived cohesion*. They did not claim that this is the only aspect of cohesion but it was an aspect not considered in previous studies. They wished to identify elements of a member’s perception of their group membership that might reflect a tendency to cohere or “stick to” the group. Furthermore, they believed that perceived cohesion mediates much of cohesion’s objective influences. These authors believed that it is possible to combine group

members' perceptions to characterize the cohesion of the group as a whole. Thus, at the individual level perceived cohesion reflects the role of the group in the lives of group members and, at the group level, perceived cohesion reflects the role of individuals in the life of the group.

Albert Carron and several colleagues proposed a model to understand and measure cohesion in sport teams. They considered cohesion to be a multidimensional construct and developed an 18-item inventory to measure cohesiveness in sports teams and exercise groups. They believed that their definition of cohesiveness incorporated its dynamic nature, its instrumental basis, and its affective dimension; therefore, the multidimensional character of their instrument could be utilized in a variety of groups in addition to the sports teams.

James Moody and Douglas White suggested that to be analytically useful, it was important to differentiate the *relational togetherness* of a group from the *sense of togetherness* that members express. They defined *structural cohesion* in terms of sets of relationships rather than as sets of individuals.

Structural cohesion has five features: (1) it describes how a collection of individuals are united; (2) it is expressed as a group property; (3) it is continuous; (4) it rests on observable social relationships among individuals; and (5) it makes no reference to group size. Cohesion begins when every group member can reach every other member through at least one relational path – the paths that link members are the social glue that hold them together. Group cohesion varies in strength depending on the number of connected individuals. The strongest cohesive groups are those in which every member is connected to all other members, but the group has a status beyond any individual group member.

Moody and White also pointed out that cohesive groups are nested within one another. Nestedness captures the idea of sets of relationship that are embedded in a social network. For example, ethnic ties constitute a strong basis for cohesion and stability in immigrant communities where the readiness of direct assistance and the reliability of information are critical to successful accommodation. It has been found that Asian immigrants typically turn to friends, acquaintances, and relatives in their immigrant community during the initial period of transition as few have social connections outside their kin and ethnic groups. The deep embeddedness of ethnic ties, however, can come at a cost to their acculturation if immigrants rely exclusively on permanent jobs in the ethnic community.⁷

Measuring Social Cohesion in Small Groups

Efforts to measure cohesiveness began in the early 1950s. Some of these studies were undertaken at the Research Center for Group Dynamics at

the University of Michigan and are summarized in a monograph by Lester Libo.⁸ These particular studies were conducted by social psychologists who were concerned with determining how the strength of attraction-to-group is affected and how it affects individual behavior and group process. The most widely used method of measuring attraction-to-group has been the paper-and-pencil questionnaire. A projective picture technique (the Group Picture Impression), less obvious in its intent than a questionnaire, and more sensitive to situational influences, has been used with varying degrees of success. Self-report instruments have also been developed and continue to be used to measure different aspects of social cohesion.⁹

Table 2.2 presents a list of some of the more commonly used quantitative instruments to measure cohesion in small groups from 1952 to the present. As would be expected the objectives of these various instruments reflect the diversity of definitions of group cohesion and the ways they have been operationalized, resulting in what Friedkin¹⁰ has called “the disarray of research on social cohesion.”

What is particularly striking is that the developers of instruments to measure group cohesion were usually not the same investigators who sought theoretical connections and offered definitions for the concept. Sociologists Neal Gross and William Martin¹¹ in 1952 were critical of investigators who were only focused on social cohesiveness in specific situations. They said,

...such schemes are devoid of any roots to theory. Methodologically, the experimenter is left adrift; his only basis for choice of technique of investigation lies in the immediate situation (p. 546).

Bruner’s¹² comment on progress in measuring social cohesion in social psychology was: “Our methods become increasingly exquisite; their use remains ad hoc” (p. 119).

According to Gross and Martin, the most stimulating and ingenious studies of group cohesion were those of the Research Center of Group Dynamics at the University of Michigan because “the hypotheses that are tested are not ad hoc hypotheses but rather flow from the deduced logical interrelationships of clearly stated nominal definitions” (p. 546).

How social cohesion should be defined and measured has been debated since the 1950s and there is no widely accepted operational definition or method of measuring it. The central issues in the debate relate to whether social cohesion is unidimensional or multi-dimensional¹³ and the micro-macro linkage of individual and group levels.¹⁴ Friedkin¹⁵ has urged that we deconstruct the various definitions of social cohesion so that we might focus on the specific constructs that are involved in the definitions and explore the causal interrelationships between these constructs. In other words, we need to rethink causal models and discover new network structures that provide

Table 2.2 Instruments to measure social cohesion in small groups

Investigator(s)*	Instrument/method	Objective of instrument
Gross & Martin (1952)	Gross Cohesiveness Scale	A self-report measure of 9 items taps aspects of group cohesion considered to be unidimensional
Moos & Humphrey (1974)	Group Environment Scale	Assesses 10 dimensions of the social climate of psychotherapy and mutual support groups and task-oriented groups
Silbergeld et al. (1975)	Group Atmosphere Scale	Measures the psycho-social environment of therapy groups – distinguishes different therapy groups
Mackenzie (1981)	Group Climate Questionnaire	Assesses group climate and process development in therapy groups
Piper et al. (1983)	Group-Member-Leader Cohesion Scale	Obtains self-report and behavioral data on a number of aspects of cohesion
Carron et al. (1985)	Group Environment Questionnaire	To develop an instrument to measure group cohesion in different groups and contexts
Evans & Jarvis (1986)	Group Attitude Scale	A measure of attraction to a group
Budman et al. (1987)	Harvard Group Cohesiveness Scale	Assesses global group cohesiveness and observable behaviors related to group cohesion
Hinkle et al. (1989)	Group Identification Scale	To measure intragroup identification
Bollen & Hoyle (1990)	Perceived Cohesion Scale	To measure sense of belonging and feelings of morale as two dimensions of group cohesion
Treadwell et al. (2001); Veeraraghavan et al. (1996)	The Group Cohesion Scale-Revised	Measure group cohesion at a specific point

* References for investigators are listed in the Reference section at the end of the book.

the theoretical framework for understanding the social processes that create and sustain social cohesion. Furthermore, Scott Budge¹⁶ pointed out the need to abandon current assumptions about cohesiveness that define it as a static, positive, totality, in favor of a paradigm that views cohesion as a dynamic process through which cohesiveness develops. Similarly, Kaplan¹⁷ and his colleagues have suggested that small groups are dynamic equilibrium-seeking social systems that evolve gradually, through sequences of developmental phases or stages. The fact that a group develops over time also suggests that its adaptive capacities will allow it to become cohesive.¹⁸ This should indicate that an assessment of a group's degree or level of cohesiveness must be both situationally and developmentally sensitive.

Measuring Social Cohesion in Large Groups

Social cohesiveness in large groups is difficult to study partly because large groups may be geographically dispersed making it impossible to follow up individuals in the group. Also, not all of the instruments used to assess cohesiveness in small groups are appropriate to large groups. Several different approaches have been developed to study cohesion in large groups.

Feelings of Social Cohesiveness

Galanter¹⁹ developed a model based on the empirical relationship between members' feelings of social cohesiveness and their potential to experience distress when alienated from a larger group. Empirical data were obtained from the investigation of two contemporary religious sects, the Divine Light Mission and the Unification Church ("Moonies").

The Divine Light Mission members were followers of Guru Maharaj, Jr., a Hindu preacher who came to the United States from India in 1971. Most members lived in communal residences of 2–15 people. Group cohesiveness was assessed using eight statements rated on a five-point Likert scale. The scale tapped feelings toward immediate acquaintances in the sect as well as the more abstract sense of cohesiveness in relation to the sect as a whole. A second scale assessed the level of subjective distress the respondents were experiencing, both immediately before and immediately after joining the sect. Findings indicated that individuals experienced diminished distress upon affiliation with a large group. The degree to which they experienced a decrease in stress was significantly correlated with the degree to which they felt cohesively toward the group. While it is possible that some members actually recalled a higher level of distress prior to joining than they had actually felt at the time, this would not detract from an individual's continued commitment to the group.

Galanter proposed that a consensually validated system of beliefs would serve to sustain the integrity of a large group. As a consequence, it was reasonable to consider that the human capacity to adopt, and adhere to, a cognitive framework supported by the group would augment the affective basis for social cohesiveness. In order to examine this issue, Galanter undertook a second study with members of the Unification Church. This group followed the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, a Korean Christian. This sect is more highly structured than the Divine Light Mission, with members living in large communal residences, and devoting long hours every day to church activities. A sample of 237 American-born members was selected from the New York area. These individuals were given the same scale of well-being

given to the Divine Light members. In addition, they were given a series of items reflecting their religious beliefs. Not surprisingly, a strong adherence to group norms was found. The cohesion items (beliefs) were found to be strong predictors of psychological well-being.

According to Galanter, these two studies lend support to the hypothesis that there is an innate relationship within the individual between distress and alienation on the one hand, and between psychological well-being and affiliation on the other hand. Large groups play a major role in defining the identity and social roles of their individual members. Members' social affiliations lie in large part with individuals who have joined the group. Finally, large groups rely on their members and eschew the surrounding culture.

Perceptions of Social Cohesiveness

Carron and Spink,²⁰ in a series of studies of group size effects in exercise groups, found that members of small exercise groups hold stronger perceptions of cohesiveness of their group than members of large exercise groups. The results of a related study showed, however, that differences in the perceptions of cohesiveness between members of small and large exercise group disappeared when a team-building intervention program was introduced. They concluded that, in larger groups, it may be possible and desirable to offset the negative effects of group size on cohesiveness and effectiveness through the use of team-building strategies.

Social Network Analysis

Another way to understand the significance of cohesion in large social groups is by using social network analysis to study the patterns of interactions or "ties" that members have with other members, their so-called degrees of separation. It has been found that in many networks, the distribution of degrees among members is highly skewed, with a small number of members having an unusually large number of ties. Research has shown that this skewness could have an impact on the way groups operate, including the way information travels through the network and the stability of groups when certain members are absent or removed.²¹

Recent work on social networks has focused on three features of network structure. The first is the "small world" effect meaning how people can have a short connecting path of acquaintances in a network that has an insular or culturally homogeneous social structure. This relates to the second

characteristic of social networks and that is clustering or the probability that two friends getting together is greater than that of two people at random. A high degree of clustering indicates greater cliquishness. Third, the feature of a skewed degree distribution is of interest in network analysis. Having a knowledge of skewed degree distribution in a group can provide insights, for example, into how decisions are made, sources of group power, and how group boundaries are established and maintained.²²

The benefit of social network analysis is that it focuses on how group ties affect individuals and their relationships. For example, smaller, tighter networks are often less useful to the members than networks with many loose connections (weak ties) to individuals outside the network. More open networks with many weak ties are more likely to introduce new ideas and opportunities to their members than closed networks with redundant ties. It is usually better for individual success to have connections in a variety of networks rather than many connections within a single network.

Summary

Carron and Spink²⁰ said, “It could be argued that the terms *cohesion* and *group* are tautological; if a group exists, it must be cohesive to some degree. Thus it is probably no surprise that even in collectives where minimal group characteristics are present, manifestations of cohesion are evident” (pp. 86–87). There seems little doubt that group cohesion exists, but disciplinary eyes see it differently and, in turn, researchers have different ways of measuring what they see. Therefore, there are only disciplinary pockets of agreement on the definition of cohesiveness. We seem to define cohesiveness best by identifying consequences when it is absent and are less clear about how cohesiveness is created, nourished, and sustained.

As definitions of cohesiveness have evolved over time and become more specific, the concept has become fragmented and specialized, which is reflected in the diverse instruments used to measure it. Issues of the measurement of cohesiveness differ in small and in large groups. Because of the complexities of assessing cohesiveness most attention has been given to small group cohesion.

Despite repeated calls for consensus in the definition of cohesiveness in the literature there appears little progress in this regard. There are some fresh approaches to theorizing and studying cohesion using social network analysis. This approach is appealing because it stresses the patterns of social ties and network connections that are conducive to different degrees of cohesiveness irrespective of group size.

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