

## Identifying Victims of Groupthink From Public Statements of Decision Makers

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The present study attempts to test hypotheses derived from Janis's groupthink analysis of several foreign policy decisions of the American government. Content analyses were performed using the public statements of key decision makers involved in crises for which Janis's case studies revealed or did not reveal evidence of groupthink. Consistent with Janis's theory, it was found that, relative to non-groupthink decision makers, groupthink decision makers were more simplistic in their perceptions of policy issues and made more positive references to the United States and its allies (own group). Inconsistent with Janis's theory, groupthink decision makers did not make significantly more negative references to Communist states and their allies (opponents). Possible explanations for the findings are assessed, and methodological and practical obstacles to definitive testing of the groupthink model are examined.

Investigators have taken diverse theoretical approaches to the problem of how psychological factors influence political decision making. Most of this research has focused upon psychological processes that occur within individuals: unresolved psychodynamic conflicts (e.g., Glad, 1973); the needs for achievement, affiliation, and power (Winter, 1973); cognitive maps of the political world (e.g., Abelson, 1973; Axelrod, 1976; Holsti, 1976; Jervis, 1976); pressures toward cognitive consistency (e.g., Jervis, 1976); or the effects of stress on information processing complexity (e.g., Hermann, 1972; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977).

Political decisions are not, of course, made in a social vacuum. They are usually made

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in organized group contexts in which implicit and explicit norms regulate the conduct of the decision maker. However, relatively few psychologically oriented studies have considered how patterns of social interaction among policy makers can influence decision making. One noteworthy exception to this generalization is the work of Janis (1972) on the *groupthink* phenomenon. Janis argued that intense social pressures toward uniformity and in-group loyalty within decision-making groups can build to the point where they seriously interfere with both cognitive efficiency and moral judgment. Groupthink occurs when independent critical analysis of the problem facing the group assumes second place to group members' motivation to maintain group solidarity and to avoid creating disunity by expressing unpopular doubts or opinions.

In several case studies of major foreign policy decisions by the American government, Janis attempted to trace the effects of social pressures toward groupthink on decision making. He selected for analysis cases in which he felt the signs of poor decision making as a result of concurrence seeking were "unmistakable" (Janis, 1972, p. 10). These included the decisions to pursue the

defeated North Korean army beyond the 38th parallel, to launch the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, and to escalate involvement in the Vietnam War. In each situation, Janis discovered similar predisposing conditions to groupthink. The policy makers invariably belonged to cohesive groups characterized by high levels of mutual attraction among the members. The policy-making groups were relatively insulated from the judgments of qualified outsiders and lacked systematic procedures for evaluating and searching out new evidence relating to the problem. During the deliberations on the particular issues, the group leaders tended to promote their preferred solutions rather than to encourage open-minded, careful analysis of policy alternatives. Finally, all decisions were made in highly stressful situations in which policy makers were not hopeful of finding an alternative superior to the one that the group currently favored.

Under these conditions, certain distinctive attitudes and patterns of interaction emerged within the groups (see Janis, 1972, pp. 197-198). Decision makers appeared to believe that the group was invulnerable to outside attack—a belief that encouraged excessive optimism and risktaking. Group members undertook collective efforts to discount warnings concerning the popularly agreed-upon solution and exhibited unquestioning belief in the inherent righteousness of the group's policies and the inherent immorality and incompetence of the enemy. Decision makers often self-censored any personal doubts about the group's policies. The group applied direct pressure to those few members who showed signs of deviating from the consensus. Self-appointed "mindguards" shielded the group from external sources of dissonant or counterattitudinal information.

In a social atmosphere so inhospitable to rigorous analysis of policy options, decision-making procedures fell far short of the ideal "rational actor" standard (cf. Allison, 1971). According to Janis and Mann (1977), decision making in groupthink situations failed to meet any of the major procedural criteria that they used to determine whether decision-making procedures were of high quality.

Groupthink policy makers generally did not (a) adequately survey the full range of policy alternatives; (b) consider the full spectrum of objectives that might be affected by the chosen policy; (c) obtain adequate information for evaluating the alternative policies; (d) weigh the costs and benefits of each alternative carefully; (e) take proper account of information that contradicted prior beliefs and preferences; (f) reexamine evaluations of all known alternatives, including those previously regarded as unacceptable; (g) develop sufficiently detailed plans for implementing the chosen policy, with special reference to contingency plans in the event known risks materialized. As Janis (1972, p. 10) noted, the outcomes of groupthink decisions *deserved* to be fiascoes "because of the grossly inadequate way the policy makers carried out their decision-making tasks."

Janis contrasted the groupthink decisions with two examples of well-worked-out foreign policy decisions: the development of the Marshall Plan and the handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In these instances, the decision-making groups and their leaders gave high priority to critical appraisal and open discussion of policy options. "Decision makers had to undergo the unpleasant experience of hearing their pet ideas critically pulled to pieces" (Janis, 1972, p. 165). The policies ultimately developed within these groups were based upon careful analysis of the likely consequences of large numbers of policy options, with frequent attempts at proposing new solutions that maximized the advantages and minimized the disadvantages of options already analyzed.

Janis provided no quantitative evidence bearing on the validity of his classification of foreign policy deliberations into the groupthink and non-groupthink categories.

For purposes of hypothesis construction—which is the stage of inquiry with which this book is concerned—we must be willing to make some inferential leaps from whatever historical clues we can pick up. (Janis, 1972, p. v)

Unfortunately, the most appropriate documents for testing the groupthink hypotheses

—verbatim records of formal and informal meetings among decision makers—were not available. The historical clues upon which Janis relied—observer accounts of private conversations and participant memoirs—were susceptible to serious retrospective distortion of a motivational or cognitive nature (cf. Fischhoff & Beyth-Marom, 1976, on the “certainty-of-hindsight” bias). Moreover, Janis did not specify the criteria that he used in deciding to include or exclude data. Thus, he may inadvertently have given too much weight to evidence that supported groupthink hypotheses and too little weight to contradictory evidence.

A wide range of behavioral research methods can be used to test Janis’s analysis. Two possible approaches are (a) laboratory simulation studies that factorially manipulate hypothesized determinants of groupthink and then observe effects on social interaction and quality of decision making, and (b) content analysis studies of archival records that cast light on how decision makers think in actual crises. Each approach has compensating methodological advantages and disadvantages.

Flowers’s (1977) research exemplifies the first approach. In a  $2 \times 2$  laboratory experiment, Flowers found that “open-leadership style” led groups to suggest more solutions to a problem and to use more available information than “closed-leadership style.” This finding was compatible with Janis’s (1972) analysis. Contrary to Janis, though, “degree of group cohesiveness” did not affect quality of decision making. This latter finding is, however, difficult to interpret. On the one hand, Janis’s theory may need revision. On the other hand, Flowers’s operational definition of cohesiveness (using groups of college students) probably differs from the cohesiveness displayed within foreign policy-making groups (who have typically known each other for many years and are confronted by extremely ego-involving tasks). The interpretive ambiguity reflects a fundamental limitation of simulations: the impossibility of ensuring that a simulation fully captures the processes operating in the original situation (cf. Bem, 1972).

The present study takes the second approach. It applies standardized content analysis procedures to statements of key decision makers involved in the groupthink and non-groupthink crises that Janis examined. Relative to laboratory studies, the primary advantage of this approach is the high external validity achieved by dealing with real-life decisions by top policy makers; the primary disadvantage is the relative lack of control over both independent and dependent variables.

With respect to independent variables, the laboratory researcher can often be confident that his or her experimental conditions differ in only a few theoretically relevant ways. Whether the same can be said for the hypothesized groupthink and non-groupthink foreign policy decisions is unclear. As is almost inevitable in comparing complex naturally occurring phenomena, possible confounding variables exist. For instance, the groupthink decisions all involved military interventions or escalations of questionable success; the non-groupthink decisions involved more restrained policies having desirable consequences (from the standpoint of the decision makers). It is debatable, however, whether these differences are independent of or attributable to groupthink. For example, Janis (1972) suggested that groupthink predisposes decision makers to seek rapid, clear-cut military solutions to complex problems. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that the groupthink/non-groupthink contrast in this study can be reconceptualized as a contrast between unsuccessful military and successful nonmilitary national policies.

With respect to dependent variables, the laboratory researcher has relatively direct access to subjects’ decision-making deliberations. Such records are much less accessible when one’s subjects are heads of state and their advisors. Currently, the only standardized records of how groupthink and non-groupthink decision makers perceived policy options consist of decision makers’ public statements during the relevant crises. This need not, however, be a serious liability. Although public statements are undoubtedly more influenced by efforts to manage polit-

ical impressions than are private statements, there are good reasons to assume that manifestations of groupthink will appear in both private and public statements. Political elites—for a variety of reasons—probably do not frequently endorse policy positions that are very dissimilar to those they endorse in private (cf. Graber, 1976). Political leaders are usually concerned with maintaining an image of trustworthiness that would be jeopardized by failure to maintain some consistency between their words and deeds (cf. Graber, 1976; Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971). To the extent that groupthink seriously interferes with the cognitive efficiency and moral judgment of decision makers, groupthink also probably affects how decision makers attempt to justify their policies to the world.

The study reported here selected content analysis procedures for their appropriateness in identifying two major manifestations of groupthink: (a) the tendency to process policy-relevant information in simplistic and biased ways, and (b) the tendency to evaluate one's own group highly positively and to evaluate one's domestic and international opponents highly negatively. These variables were selected partly because they are more likely to be revealed at an overt or public level than others (e.g., self-censorship of doubts, direct pressuring of deviants, or the emergence of mindguards) and partly because reliable and valid measurement techniques could be readily adapted for the purpose of assessing them.

The integrative-complexity coding system was used to determine the degree to which "simpler" (i.e., less differentiated and less integrated) modes of information processing prevailed in groupthink situations. The coding system was initially developed as a measure of the integrative-complexity dimension of personality (Harvey, Hunt, & Schroder, 1961; Schroder, 1971; Schroder, Driver, & Streufert, 1967). Recent research indicates that the coding system is also sensitive to situationally induced shifts in complexity of information processing and can be usefully applied to such documents as letters, essays, speeches, and diplomatic communications (Suedfeld, 1978; Suedfeld & Rank, 1976; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977; Suedfeld, Tetlock,

& Ramirez, 1977). For instance, Suedfeld and Rank (1976) have shown that the integrative complexity of successful revolutionary leaders who subsequently held onto power was higher after victory than before victory, whereas leaders who failed to maintain power after victory did not show such a change. They argued that this finding reflects the need for change from the simple cognitive strategies appropriate to a revolutionary struggle toward the complex approach required of governments in power. Suedfeld et al. (1977) found that the complexity of Arab and Israeli speeches to the United Nations tended to decline prior to the outbreak of major wars. They argued that this finding probably reflects the disruptive effects of stress on complex information processing (see also Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977). Such data strongly suggest the usefulness of the complexity coding system for unobtrusively assessing cognitive structural variables from archival data and, most relevant here, for testing Janis's groupthink analysis.

Evaluative assertion analysis was used to test the hypotheses concerning the effects of groupthink on "in-group" and "out-group" attitudes (see Osgood, 1959; Osgood, Saporta, & Nunnally, 1956). The technique has grown out of Osgood's research on the dimensions of meaning and the congruity principle of attitude change. It has been used successfully in a wide variety of research projects, including the coding of psychotherapeutic interviews (Osgood, 1959), the examination of John Foster Dulles's attitude toward the Soviet Union (Holsti, 1967), and the assessment of bias in the news coverage of presidential candidates (Westley et al., 1963). The common purpose underlying the diverse applications of evaluative assertion analysis has been "to extract from verbal communications the evaluations being made of significant concepts" (Osgood et al., 1956, p. 47). The significant concepts in the present context are defined as *groups with which the speaker identifies and domestic and foreign opponents*.

In summary, this study employed two independent techniques of content analysis to test hypotheses abstracted from Janis's case studies of groupthink in American foreign

policy making. The integrative-complexity coding system was used to assess the relative differentiation and integration of decision makers' public statements in groupthink and non-groupthink crises. Evaluative assertion analysis was used to assess the direction and intensity of in-group and out-group attitudes in these situations.

### Method

Archival records of public statements by leading decision makers in five American foreign policy crises provided the data for the current study. Statements were drawn from primary sources that included the *United States Department of State Bulletin*, the *Congressional Record*, *Collected Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, and *Vital Speeches*. The decision makers for whom materials were scored included: the Marshall Plan—President Harry S. Truman, Secretary of State George C. Marshall, Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson; the invasion of North Korea—President Harry S. Truman, Secretary of State Dean Acheson; the Bay of Pigs invasion—President John F. Kennedy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk; the Cuban Missile Crisis—President John F. Kennedy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk; The Vietnam War escalation decisions—President Lyndon B. Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Public statements were taken from the following time periods: the Marshall Plan—May 1, 1947–December 19, 1947; the invasion of North Korea—September 10, 1950–November 20, 1950; the Bay of Pigs invasion—January 20, 1961–April 20, 1961; the Cuban Missile Crisis—October 16, 1962–October 29, 1962; the Vietnam War escalation decisions—December 1, 1964–July 1, 1965. A total of 12 (paragraph-sized) passages were randomly selected for each major decision maker within each crisis period.

A topic restriction was enforced. Public statements were analyzed only if the material was primarily concerned with the foreign policy decision on which the Janis case studies focused. The primary reason for this restriction is uncertainty regarding the degree to which groupthink in one topic area generalizes to other areas. The following guidelines were used:

1. The Marshall Plan. All statements pertained to the economic state of Europe and the role that American aid could play in facilitating recovery.
2. The invasion of North Korea. All statements pertained to the conduct of the war and political and moral justifications for the war.
3. The Bay of Pigs invasion. All statements pertained to the dangers presented by the Castro government in Cuba and to the role of the United States in helping prevent expansion of Communist influence in Latin America.
4. The Cuban Missile Crisis. All statements per-

tained to the threat posed by the actions of the Soviet Union in Cuba.

5. The Vietnam War escalation decisions. All statements pertained to the danger of the Communist threat in Southeast Asia and the need for American aid to defend the non-Communist governments in the region.

The Bay of Pigs invasion posed unique problems for obtaining data. Since the invasion was a secret operation, decision makers did not describe or justify the invasion policy in their public statements. In this sense, the Bay of Pigs case differs from the other four crisis situations examined. Data analyses have been performed both with and without the data collected from the Bay of Pigs time period.

### *Integrative-Complexity Coding*

All material was scored for integrative complexity on a 7-point scale (see Schroder, Driver, & Streufert, 1967, Appendix 2, for detailed discussion of the coding rules). The scale defines complexity in terms of both differentiation and integration. Differentiation refers to the number of characteristics or dimensions of a problem situation that are recognized and taken into account in decision making. For instance, a decision maker may process information relating to policy options in an undifferentiated fashion by placing options into only one of two categories: the "good, patriotic" policies and the "bad, defeatist" policies. A more differentiated approach would recognize that policy options can have multiple, often contradictory effects that cannot be classified on a single evaluative dimension of judgment—for example, effects on different political constituencies, various sectors of the economy, military strength, and the strategies of one's opponents. Integration refers to the development of complex connections among differentiated characteristics. (Differentiation is thus a prerequisite of integration.) The complexity of integration depends on whether the dimensions of judgment employed by the decision maker are perceived as operating in isolation (low integration), in hierarchical interaction (medium integration), or according to multiple, complex, and perhaps flexible patterns (high integration). Scores of 1 reflect low differentiation and low integration. Scores of 3 reflect medium or high differentiation and low integration. Scores of 5 reflect medium or high differentiation and medium integration. Scores of 7 reflect high differentiation and high integration. Scores of 2, 4, and 6 represent transition points between adjacent levels.

Initial scoring for integrative complexity was performed by the author and Peter Suedfeld, who were, however, both aware of the hypotheses being tested and the sources of the material (interrater agreement  $r = .91$ ). The reliability of this scoring was checked by having material rescored by trained coders associated with a research group under Suedfeld at the University of British Columbia. These coders were blind to both the hypotheses being tested and the

Table 1  
*Attitude Objects Included Under General Categories of "Domestic and Foreign Opposition"  
 and "Groups With Which Speaker Identifies"*

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Marshall Plan
Opposition
Communism, USSR, East European Communist states, Communist parties of Western Europe, totalitarian regimes, Communist victories, fall of Europe
Groups with which speaker identifies
American government, American people
Invasion of North Korea
Opposition
Communism, USSR, North Korea, Communist China, forces of Communism, Communist imperialism, new colonialism, Soviet leaders
Groups with which speaker identifies
American government, American people, United Nations Command in Korea, South Korea, UN soldiers, we, American history to the present, policy of increasing strength
Bay of Pigs invasion
Opposition
Communism, USSR, Castro's Cuba, alien ideology, Communist agents
Groups with which speaker identifies
American government, American people, Cubans opposed to Castro government, those concerned with maintaining peace, our long-range aspirations, Kennedy, our (OAS) delegates, anti-Castro guerrilla fighters, Cuban people, security of Latin America
Cuban Missile Crisis
Opposition
Communism, USSR, Castro's Cuba, new Soviet moves, Khrushchev's decision, extracontinental power
Groups with which speaker identifies
American government, American people, nations of this hemisphere, unanimity of Western Hemisphere, free nations
Vietnam War escalation decisions
Opposition
North Vietnamese, Viet Cong, Red China, USSR, aggressors, yielding to aggression, policy of withdrawal
Groups with which speaker identifies
American government, American people, South Vietnamese government, policy of standing firm

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sources of the material. High interrater agreement ( $r = .88$ ) was obtained between the complexity ratings assigned by persons aware and unaware of the hypotheses. Analysis of disagreements revealed no relationship to the groupthink hypothesis.

#### *Evaluative Assertion Analysis*

Evaluative assertion analysis was performed on the same materials. (Osgood et al., 1956, present a more detailed discussion of how to perform evaluative assertion analysis.) The analysis involved four basic stages and was performed by two coders, one of whom was the author; the other was an individual otherwise uninvolved in the study. The first stage of the evaluative assertion analysis was the identification and isolation of attitude objects. Two general classes of attitude objects were selected for analysis: *political groups with which the speaker identifies* and *domestic and foreign opponents*. Table 1 presents the variety of specific terms taken from public statements that were considered to fall into one of these two general categories. It was possible to obtain extremely high interrater agreement for identifying and classifying

ing these terms. Disagreements were resolved by using the judgments of the coder unaware of the hypotheses.

The second stage involved translating all statements in which these attitude objects appeared into one of two common sentence forms:

Attitude Object 1 / Verbal connector /  
 Common meaning term  
 Attitude Object 1 / Verbal connector /  
 Attitude Object 2.

For example, the sentence "An aggressive North Korea threatens freedom-loving South Korea" would be translated to read:

North Korea / is / aggressive  
 North Korea / threatens / South Korea  
 South Korea / is / freedom loving.

Here, again, coding disagreements were rare and were resolved by using the judgment of the blind coder.

In the third stage, the verbal connectors and predicates were rated for intensity and direction on 7-

point scales ranging from  $-3$  to  $+3$ . A verbal connector received a negative score to the degree that it dissociated the subject from the predicate ("never is" would receive a score of  $-3$ ) and a positive score to the degree that it associated the subject and the predicate ("always is" would receive a score of  $+3$ ). A predicate received a negative score to the degree that it represented a negatively evaluated attribute or quality (e.g., evil, aggressive) within "the language community of the speaker" (Osgood et al., 1956). The predicate received a positive score to the extent that the attribute or quality cited was positively evaluated within the language community of the speaker (e.g., freedom, peace). Reliability checks were obtained to ensure that verbal connectors and common meaning terms were being assigned ratings that reflected common linguistic standards. The correlations of coder ratings of verbal connectors and common meaning terms were .93 and .94, respectively.

The direction and intensity of evaluative sentiment directed toward each of the two categories of attitude objects were computed for each paragraph unit. Within each unit, references to each of the two classes of attitude objects were separated. The direction and intensity of evaluative sentiment directed to each class were computed by (a) multiplying the values assigned to the verbal connectors and predicates used to describe attitude objects falling within the class and (b) summing the products thus obtained. Two scores were obtained in this way for each paragraph unit from the evaluative assertion analysis: One specified the intensity and direction of evaluative feeling toward political groups with which the speaker identified, and the other specified evaluative feeling toward the speaker's opponents.

### Results

Unweighted-means analyses of variance were used to test the groupthink hypotheses. The analyses of variance always involved three independent variables: type of crisis (groupthink vs. non-groupthink), decision makers within crises, and the random ordering of the 12 passages of material sampled from each decision maker's statements.

The analyses of variance were complicated by the fact that individual decision makers were unevenly represented across different crisis situations. In analysis of variance terms, decision makers were partly "crossed" with and partly "nested" within crises. For instance, Truman and Acheson both appeared in the 1947 (non-groupthink) and 1950 (groupthink) crises (that is, they were crossed with these two crises); similarly, Kennedy and Rusk both appeared in the 1961 (groupthink)

and 1962 (non-groupthink) crises. Neither pair of decision makers appeared in crises involving the other pair. Marshall appeared only in the 1947 crisis, and Johnson appeared only in the 1964-1965 (groupthink) crisis. Finally, Rusk appeared most frequently: in the 1961, 1962, and 1964-1965 crises.

To resolve this complicated situation, it was assumed that different decision makers were involved in each crisis (i.e., decision makers have been treated as nested within crises). This assumption was conservative in the sense that it reduced the likelihood of detecting significant differences between groupthink and non-groupthink crises. The assumption sacrifices the opportunity to control statistically for the effects of personality variables. The groupthink effect must overcome personality effects in order to be detected.

A second, conservative assumption was also made. In all analyses of variance, the groupthink and non-groupthink crises have been treated as random effects. The crises were viewed as a sample from the population of groupthink and non-groupthink decisions. For this reason, quasi- $F$  ratios have been constructed to test the significance of crisis effects (cf. Clark, 1973; Winer, 1971). These quasi- $F$  ratios are smaller than the ordinary  $F$  ratios that would have been appropriate if crises were viewed as a fixed variable.

Table 2 presents the mean integrative complexity scores of each major decision maker within each crisis. Consistent with the groupthink hypothesis, a planned orthogonal contrast of complexity scores revealed that decision makers in groupthink crises were significantly less complex than their counterparts in non-groupthink crises, quasi- $F(1, 17) = 18.29$ ,  $p < .01$ . This effect remained significant when the data obtained from the Bay of Pigs period were deleted, planned contrast, quasi- $F(1, 16) = 15.77$ ,  $p < .01$ . No other effects were significant.

Decision makers' mean evaluations of political groups with which they identified are also presented in Table 2. As predicted, decision makers in groupthink crises evaluated political groups with which they identified more positively than did decision makers in non-groupthink crises, planned contrast, quasi-

Table 2  
*Mean Ratings on the Three Dependent Variables*

Decision maker	Integrative complexity	Evaluation of group with which speaker identifies	Evaluation of opponents
Non-groupthink crises			
1947			
Truman	3.66	5.5	- 1.75
Acheson	4.5	.666	- 1.0
Marshall	5.9	0	- .166
1962			
Kennedy	4.33	2.92	0
Rusk	3.16	2.0	- 4.08
Groupthink crises			
1950			
Truman	1.0	14.0	-10.5
Acheson	1.83	13.33	- 1.92
1961			
Kennedy	2.16	12.33	- 6.25
Rusk	2.58	9.833	- 4.0
1964-1965			
Johnson	2.16	4.83	- 9.83
Rusk	2.5	3.33	- 2.92

$F(2, 17) = 17.37, p < .01$ .<sup>1</sup> This effect remained significant when the data obtained from the Bay of Pigs period were deleted, planned contrast, quasi- $F(1, 16) = 8.03, p < .05$ . No other effects were significant.

Table 2 also presents decision makers' mean evaluations of domestic and foreign opponents. Contrary to theoretical expectations, there was no significant difference between groupthink and non-groupthink crises in negative evaluations of domestic and foreign opponents, planned contrast, quasi- $F(1, 13) = 2.9, p < .15$ . The effect remained nonsignificant when data from the Bay of Pigs period were deleted, planned contrast, quasi- $F(1, 11) = 2.34, p < .25$ . In both analyses, the difference was in the direction predicted by the groupthink analysis. The other effects were also nonsignificant.

Low significant correlations existed between integrative complexity and the evaluative assertion analysis measures. More complex statements tended to include fewer positive evaluations of political groups with which the speaker identified,  $r(130) = -.27, p < .001$ , and fewer negative evaluations of domestic and foreign opponents,  $r(130) = .33, p < .001$ .

A major disadvantage of treating decision makers as nested within crises is that it prevents comparison of how individuals who appeared together in two crises (e.g., Truman and Acheson; Kennedy and Rusk) reacted in the different situations. For example, one decision maker may have been highly consistent in the integrative complexity and evaluative intensity of his public statements, whereas another may have been highly inconsistent. To examine this hypothesis, matched-pairs  $t$  tests were performed on the data obtained from Truman and Acheson in the crises in which they appeared (1947 and 1950) and on data obtained from Kennedy and Rusk in the crises in which they appeared (1961, 1962, and in the case of Rusk, 1964-1965). The results indicated that public statements of individual decision makers did not always change in the directions predicted by the groupthink analysis. While Truman's, Acheson's, and Kennedy's statements were less

<sup>1</sup> Degrees of freedom for the quasi- $F$  statistics were calculated using Satterthwaite's formula (see Winer, 1971, pp. 375-378). With this formula, it is possible for numerator degrees of freedom of a planned contrast to be greater than one.



complex in groupthink than in non-groupthink situations, the complexity of Rusk's statements remained relatively constant through the 1961, 1962, and 1964-1965 crises. Truman's evaluations of opponents were significantly more negative during the 1950 crisis (relative to the 1947 crisis), but his evaluations of political groups with which he identified were not more positive. Acheson's evaluations of political groups with which he identified were, however, more positive in the 1950 crisis (relative to the 1947 crisis), but his evaluations of opponents were not significantly more negative. Kennedy's public statements changed most in conformity with the groupthink model. Between the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy showed significant or marginally significant changes in the predicted direction on integrative complexity, evaluations of opponents, and evaluations of political groups with which he identified. Rusk's public statements were least in conformity with the groupthink model. He showed no significant shifts on any of the three dependent variables between the 1961 and 1962 crises or the 1962 and 1964-1965 crises. In sum, evidence exists for individual differences in decision makers' reactions to groupthink and non-groupthink situations.

An important unresolved issue is how to determine whether groupthink is occurring in given situations. The present research suggests that relatively objective content analysis procedures applied to the public statements of decision makers may be useful for this purpose. As a first step toward developing clear criteria for distinguishing groupthink and non-groupthink decisions, discriminant analysis was used to evaluate the usefulness of the three dependent variables employed in this study in differentiating groupthink and non-groupthink decisions (cf. Cooley & Lohnes, 1971).

The discriminant function obtained was significant at the .001 level,  $\chi^2(3) = 72.7$ , and accounted for 45% of the total variation between groups. The standardized discriminant function coefficients for maximally distinguishing the two groups were (a) integrative complexity, .89; (b) evaluations of political groups with which speaker identifies, -.21;

and (c) evaluations of domestic and foreign opponents, .08. This pattern indicates that public statements in groupthink crises can be best distinguished from public statements in non-groupthink crises on the basis of integrative complexity and, to a lesser extent, evaluations of political groups with which the decision makers identify. The "evaluations of opponents" variable appears to have no independent discriminatory power. The discriminant function correctly predicted the groupthink or non-groupthink origins of 78% of the public statements.<sup>2</sup>

### Discussion

The results for two of the three dependent variables strongly supported the predictions derived from Janis's groupthink analysis. Public statements of decision makers in groupthink crises were characterized by significantly lower levels of integrative complexity than the public statements of decision makers in non-groupthink crises. Decision makers in groupthink crises evaluated political groups with which they identified more positively than did decision makers in non-groupthink crises. However, contrary to expectation, groupthink and non-groupthink decision makers did not significantly differ in the intensity of their negative evaluations of domestic and international opponents.

With the exception of the last dependent variable, the current findings converge impressively with the conclusions of Janis's intensive case studies. The convergence is impressive primarily because the findings of this study and those of Janis (1972) are based upon markedly different types of data (public statements versus the retrospective accounts of observers and participants) that have been processed in very different ways (quantitative content analysis vs. intuitive reconstruction of historical episodes). The present study underscores how multiple methods of investigation—ranging from case studies to content analysis studies to laboratory experiments—

<sup>2</sup> A separate discriminant analysis was performed without the Bay of Pigs data. The results did not differ substantially from those reported above.

can be brought together to test the validity of the groupthink construct.

Nonetheless, it is appropriate to introduce a cautious note. The evidence reported here does not rule out all alternative explanations. The skeptic can point out that the groupthink and non-groupthink crises differed in ways that render interpretation of the results somewhat ambiguous. For instance, as noted earlier, the groupthink decisions all led to unsuccessful military interventions or escalations, whereas the non-groupthink decisions did not lead to significant military action. Differences in public statements prior to these decisions may reflect differences in propaganda strategies used to convince the American public to accept military or nonmilitary solutions to conflicts. Political leaders may justify militaristic decisions by emphasizing in simple terms their total opposition to the enemy and their total dedication to their own nation's values. The disadvantage of this interpretation is that, unlike the groupthink model, it cannot explain most of the available historical evidence on the behavior of policy makers in the relevant crises (see De Rivera, 1968; Graff, 1970; Janis, 1972; Neustadt, 1964). The propaganda explanation accounts only for the results of the content analyses of public statements.

A decisive test of the groupthink and propaganda explanations will probably elude us for a long time. At least two lines of further research can, however, help to clarify the applicability of the competing positions in particular historical settings. One (still not feasible) approach is to compare the private statements of decision makers in the hypothesized groupthink and non-groupthink crises. If groupthink is operating, manifestations of the syndrome should appear in private and public statements. If the propaganda position is correct, there is no reason to expect the private statements of groupthink and non-groupthink decision makers to differ, even though significant differences would emerge in their public statements. A second approach is to draw upon case studies in the historical and political science literatures to identify a much larger sample of probable groupthink and non-groupthink decisions, some of which have led

to war and some of which have not. If the propaganda position is correct, symptoms of groupthink should appear in public statements prior to the decision to go to war, independently of how the decision was made. If the groupthink position is correct, manifestations of groupthink should appear only in the public statements of the groupthink decision makers.

Regardless of whether the war propaganda or groupthink interpretation of this study is correct, the results reported here have intriguing practical implications. The propaganda interpretation suggests that it should be possible to predict in advance the occurrence of military interventions or escalations using content analysis indicators of integrative complexity and attitude polarization. The groupthink interpretation suggests that it should be possible to use the same content analysis indicators to monitor the quality of decision making of governmental leaders. Such monitoring activity may have the beneficial effect of sensitizing policy makers to the manner in which they make decisions and may, in the most optimistic of scenarios, lead to improvements in the quality of their decision making.

Finally, a few comments are in order concerning the lack of significant differences in negative evaluations of opponents in the groupthink and non-groupthink crises. This result is puzzling for both the groupthink and war propaganda explanations (indeed, perhaps especially puzzling for the propaganda explanation). There may, however, be a methodological reason for the result. Content analyses of public statements may be insensitive to differences in evaluations of opponents in groupthink and non-groupthink crises. In this regard, the fact that the public statements sampled contained 33% fewer negative than positive evaluative assertions is suggestive. This finding is not surprising in view of the considerable social psychological evidence indicating that people are more likely to offer positive than negative evaluations and that persons giving positive evaluations are themselves regarded as more attractive than those giving negative evaluations (see Folkes & Sears, 1977). It is probably effective impression management for politicians to "accentuate the positive" in their

public statements. Diplomatic norms may add further pressure in this direction. An advocate of the groupthink position could simply argue that groupthink decision makers were reluctant to express fully their negative feelings toward opponents.

The argument above points again to the need for research that analyzes verbatim records of actual group deliberations. A more conclusive test of the groupthink analysis awaits the declassification of such documents.

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