

Groupthink Tensions: Analysis of the Peer-review Process for Arts Funding

Marisol D'Andrea*

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

OISE-252 Bloor St. W, Toronto, ON, M5S 1V6

marisol.dandrea@utoronto.ca

ORCID # 0000-0002-8623-8516

Twitter: @Marisol_DAndrea

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/marisoldandrea>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/marisol.dandrea.5>

*Marisol D'Andrea, Ph.D., The Department of Leadership, Higher & Adult Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto. Her research interest includes arts administration, decision-making, thinking process, and cultural constructs.

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marisol.dandrea@utoronto.ca

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Abstract

This paper explores the extent to which the eight symptoms of groupthink are present during the adjudication process for arts funding in the three Canadian arts councils. I draw from Irving Janis' conceptual framework on groupthink, a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people in which the desire for conformity in the group results in poor decision-making outcomes. Evidence shows that a group often outperforms individuals. Good group decisions can allow us to reach new heights and achieve more than an individual might accomplish. But poor group decisions can jeopardize successful outcomes. I rely on 26 face-to-face interviews and a field observation. I find that during the deliberation process, there is a tension between groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance; groupthink symptoms are often mitigated by negotiation tactics, which create conditions that are insufficient for groupthink avoidance.

Keywords: Arts Funding, Arts Councils, Group Decisions, Groupthink

Introduction

Groupthink theory is utilized by many scholars (See Esser 1998; Hart 1990; Longley & Pruitt 1980; McCauley 1998; Nijstad 2009; Whyte 1989) and can be found in journals and textbooks in a variety of disciplines such as sociology, psychology, business, management and political science. The notion of groupthink was originally developed to illuminate political failures that resulted in fiascos (Hart 1990; Janis 1972, 1982; Whyte 1989) such as the Bay of Pigs invasion, the escalation of the Vietnam conflict, and the Watergate cover-up, to illustrate flawed group problem solving in organizations (Hart 1990; Janis 1972, 1982). As a model it offers an array of testable assumptions regarding symptoms that lead to a poor decision-making process. The consequences of groupthink may certainly be poor outcomes (Janis 1972 & 1982), although “defective decisions based on misinformation and poor judgment sometimes lead to successful outcomes” (Janis 1982, 11). In any case, any symptoms of groupthink affect decision-making outcomes.

In this paper, I am specifically interested in addressing the following question: how do jurors make *group* decisions during the adjudication process in publicly funded arts councils? Groupthink theory provided an additional perspective on decision making and revealed jurors’ strength in decision making (e.g., negotiation). In order to conduct the analysis, I explore the extent to which the eight symptoms of groupthink occur under three major categories: Overestimation of the Group (1. Invulnerability, 2. Morality), Closed-Mindedness (3. Rationale, 4. Stereotyping) and Pressures Toward Uniformity (5. Self-Censorship, 6. Illusions of Unanimity, 7. Pressure on Dissenters, and 8. Mindguards).

The decision-making process for arts funding in publicly funded arts councils has been scrutinized because of its lack of transparency and/or clarity (Chubin 1994; D’Andrea 2017). The

peer-review is often comprised of at least three jurors who are peers. Their decisions are arrived at by consensus or majority agreement and with a recommendation to accept or reject it (D'Andrea 2017). Scholarly literature on the group performance of jurors in the field of the arts funding is lacking.

This paper demonstrates that underneath the jurors' decision-making process lies a gray area of groupthink symptoms. I identified additional features of groupthink, not covered by Janis, such as horse-trading and degree of preparedness. Horse-trading refers to the hope of a reciprocal exchange that often takes place during deliberations. In my study, a juror explains, "Horse-trading is that thing where a juror... looks at somebody else and says, 'I really want this guy to get the money and you didn't like him but, I'll like your guy if you'll like my guy'" (Participant 1). The same participant admits, "There's also a little bit of horse-trading that goes on at the end of the process" (Participant 1). This is symptomatic of groupthink that exists within the realm of the deliberation process, and, as such, should be examined.

Good group decisions can allow us to reach new heights and achieve more than an individual might accomplish. Scholarly evidence shows that groups often outperform the individuals (Laughlin, Hatch, Silver, & Boh 2006; Schultze, Mojzisch & Schulz-Hardt 2012). Often, working in a team allows a group to complete tasks, finish projects quickly, and learn from each other. Groups can provide people with the opportunity to reach heights far greater than any individual might accomplish, but poor group decisions can jeopardize successful outcomes. I draw from Irving Janis' influential book, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, which was originally published in 1972 and revised and enlarged in 1982. Janis' conceptual framework on groupthink describes a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a

group of people in which the desire for conformity in the group results in irrational or poor decision-making outcomes.

This research allows us to understand the factors whose interaction affects the peer-review process. In addition, this paper explores group decision-making in an organization where the peer review process takes place and reiterates the contributions of the groupthink model, while illuminating the limitations of groupthink as a concept. This analysis considers two opposite poles of groupthink: symptoms (how jurors exhibit signs of groupthink) and avoidance (how jurors avoid the symptoms of groupthink). Additionally, I acknowledge the uphill battles jurors are faced with in funding decisions. To be a juror is not an easy task: hundreds of arts grant applications sail through their hands and only a select few secure funding. This paper is intended to engender increased awareness and understanding of the process of decision-making regarding arts funding while also providing analyses that will signal areas for jurors to reflect on with regard to group homogeneity and its effects.

In this study, symptoms of groupthink were found to be present in the adjudication process for arts funding in the three publicly funded Canadian arts councils at the federal, municipal, and provincial levels: the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA), Ontario Arts Council (OAC), and Toronto Arts Council (TAC). I analyze 26 face-to-face interviews and a field observation.

This qualitative study identifies some evidence of groupthink within the peer-review process. At the same time, I examine the tension between groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance. Groupthink symptoms are often mitigated by negotiation tactics, which create conditions that are insufficient for groupthink avoidance. The methodology used to understand

the decision-making process can still be leveraged by other non-profit organizations that award funding.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a source of well-grounded data, and allows for rich description and interpretation of experiences and understandings (Merriam 2009). Face-to-face interviews offer the best insight into a participant's perceptions and thoughts about a particular topic or issue (Merriam 2009). The researcher can observe eye contact or body language as a signal that it is acceptable to ask probing questions.

I conducted semi-structured 26 face-to-face interviews: 16 with former jurors, professional and established visual artists in the contemporary scene (some of their additional occupations include arts professors, curator, and law) and 10 with arts leaders (Council heads, museum leaders, grant officers, independent arts leader), in the city of Toronto, Canada. The interviews took place between January 2013 and March 2014. Most panel members had between one and 20 years of previous experience serving on arts funding panels. The interviews took place in Toronto and Ottawa (where the Canada Council for the Arts is located). By the 24th interview, saturation was achieved; participants' responses had become repetitive. A verbatim transcript of each tape-recorded interview was created with the help of a research assistant. Each transcription resulted in approximately 12 to 15 pages of text.

In order to observe a deliberation process, I engaged in lengthy negotiations over a period of six months with each of the three publicly funded arts councils before I was given access to observe one of the deliberation processes. Only one organization consented. After I signed a formal agreement covering the conditions of participants' confidentiality, the Ontario Arts

Council (OAC) alone permitted my attendance. My non-participant (naturalistic) observation at OAC for the deliberations in the category of “Established Artists” lasted two full days (July 21 & 22, 2014). I observed and wrote notes, but did not partake in the deliberation process or decision-making. My observation notes focused on the process of scoring and were shared with and approved by the OAC staff.

Data Analysis

In each of the three arts councils, the peer-review panel is often comprised of at least three jurors (artists’ peers). Their decisions are arrived at by consensus or majority agreement and provide advice directly to council staff recommending specific grant applications. Applications are evaluated in terms of artistic merit, excellence, and each council’s strategic priorities (D’Andrea 2017). “Peer evaluation procedures are kept fairly secretive, ostensibly to protect the assessors” (Webb 1989, 93). Jurors are active artists, often past arts grant recipients, and are likely to know personally or by reputation many artists whose areas of practice closely aligned with their own (D’Andrea 2017).

The selection process in each arts council is as follows: Council staff do a preliminary review of the application, jurors are selected, a panel convenes, the grants officer (facilitator) reads the council’s policies (known as the “Charge”), jurors discuss the applications and make recommendations. Each arts council can overturn juror decisions, but this hardly ever occurs (D’Andrea 2017).

I used NVivo to identify common themes such as characteristics of the arts community councils serve, local and external factors that affect decision making. I examined the eight symptoms of groupthink against the data, creating memos and notes from my observation notes.

Ethical Review

This research includes human participants; thus, it was reviewed by the University of Toronto Ethics Review Committee in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS-2). Participants in this study remain anonymous.

Limitations

Funding applicants, worth noting, do not receive any feedback on the funding decisions made. The peer review process is conducted behind closed doors. Hence, this research is challenged by the limited opportunity for observation of the adjudication process. During the observation of a single adjudication meeting, the participating jurors were made aware of this research study and might have acted differently than usual. The Council reviewed and approved the observation notes, which might have had a chilling effect on my written observations. My interview approach enabled me to examine the complexity of group decision-making in this field of the arts that has never been done previously.

Groupthink

After examining several decision-making models, I found that groupthink complemented and resonated with this research. Although a dated model, the theory of groupthink is still significant because it allows us to understand the factors that interact to affect the peer-review process. Furthermore, the group decision-making process for arts funding has never been examined academically, nor has the groupthink model ever been applied on the field of the arts. Irving Janis' concept of groupthink is described as a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people, in which the desire for conformity in the group results in an irrational, dysfunctional, or poor decision-making outcome. The adjudication process for arts funding is

shaped under consensus-oriented decision-making. Hence, this study uncovers the extent of the tensions of groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance within the arts adjudication process.

Groupthink (Janis 1972 & 1982) is a psychological phenomenon in which people strive for consensus within a group based on the desire for harmony or conformity in the group, resulting in a poor decision-making outcome. In Janis' words, groupthink is "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (9). Janis adds, groupthink "refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures" (9).

People end up engaging in groupthink when, for example, they silence dissenting viewpoints, suspecting that their ideas/objections might disrupt the harmony of the group. Suppressing viewpoints can lead to poor decision-making (Posner-Weber 1987) and disappointing outcomes. The groupthink concept upends some of the traditional ideas about the effects of harmony or cohesiveness on group performance (Hart, 1990). Mullen, Anthony, Salas, and Driskell (1994) report that groups that are more cohesive rendered poorer quality decisions when conditions of groupthink were present.

In order to identify the symptoms of groupthink, Janis studied selected fiascos that were the result of the U.S. Government's foreign policy decisions. Janis drew his analysis from texts such as internal documents (e.g., record kept of the policy-makers' meetings). The symptoms of groupthink are characterized by Janis (1982)'s data in three major categories. First, Overestimations of the Group — its power and morality: its high degree of optimism and group cohesion, where a group wants to remain affiliated and is inclined to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of its decisions. Second, Closed-Mindedness — collective efforts to rationalize in

order to discount warnings and stereotyped views that weaken decision-making. In other words, the group is insulated from outsiders, has a lack of leader impartiality, and has high group member homogeneity. Third, Pressures Toward Uniformity — self-censorship of deviations from the group consensus, a shared illusion of unanimity concerning judgments conforming to the majority view, direct pressure on any members who expresses strong arguments, and self-appointed mindguards who protect the group from adverse information that might shatter their shared complacency about the effectiveness and morality of their decisions.

Janis argues that there are antecedent conditions that produce or facilitate the occurrence of groupthink symptoms, such as: (a) structural faults of the organization — insulation of the group, lack of tradition of impartial leadership, lack of norms requiring methodical procedures, and homogeneity of members' social background and ideology; and (b) provocative situational contexts — high stress from external threats with low hope of better solutions or low self-esteem temporarily induced by, for example, moral dilemmas.

Results

Analysis of Groupthink Symptoms vs. Groupthink Avoidance

There have been previous case studies of groupthink and groupthink avoidance (Esser 1998). The peer-review process contains both. In order to present these findings, I turn to the subsequent tables (1, 2, and 3), where I list, for direction, the eight symptoms of groupthink as defined by Irving Janis (1982) under three major themes: Overestimation of the Group, Closed-Mindedness, and Pressures Toward Uniformity.

The examination of groupthink and groupthink avoidance in the deliberation process follows.

Table 1 - Type One: Overestimation of the Group

Groupthink Symptoms	
1	<i>Invulnerability</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Excessive optimism ▪ Encourages taking extreme risks ▪ Failure to respond to clear warnings of danger
2	<i>Morality</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Belief in the inherent morality of their in-group, the rightness of their cause ▪ Inclined to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions ▪ Things are left unsaid in group meetings

Adapted from: Janis, 1982

Groupthink Symptoms.

Invulnerability and morality are the two symptoms of groupthink. Under the groupthink spell, Janis (1982) argues, group members share the optimistic belief that “we are a good and wise group” that inclines them to use group concurrence as a major criterion to judge the morality, as well as the efficacy, of any policy under discussion” (256). Janis adds,

“Since our group’s objectives are good, the members feel that ‘any means we decide to use must be good.’ This shared assumption helps the members avoid feelings of shame or guilt about decisions that may violate their personal code of ethical behavior.” (257)

At the arts councils, jurors shared collective assumptions that helped them to make decisions. There is a shared optimism based on the panel’s expertise, autonomy, and discourses about deciding which art works are worthy of funding. Jurors, who are also peers of other artists, are deemed experts by councils, creating the sense that they are the most qualified to assess peers’ grants applications. Bonner, Baumann, Lehn, Pierce and Wheeler (2006) argue that group members, when making collective choices, are twice as likely to “adopt an option proposed by

an expert compared to other group members” (617). My interviews uphold the groups’ consensus that experts are the best candidates to judge the works of their peers. An arts administrator argues, “There is expertise that we don’t run into problems with the jury not being able to comment” (Participant 3). Other arts administrators contend, “We try and have the right expertise for a given competition” (Participants 9 and 23).

The data show that jurors strongly believe in the inherent morality of the group and the rightness of their cause. Arts councils construe jurors as “reasonable” people to use group concurrence to judge artists’ applications based on the criterion of excellence. A participant contends, “Jurors are generally very reasonable people,” and then adds, “Jurors know they’re not here to only support work that looks like theirs, or their favourite art form” (Participant 3). According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, reasonable (in referring to a person) means “Having sound judgement; fair and sensible, based on good sense.”¹ Using this definition, one may ask whether jurors are reasonable in their deliberations for arts funding. A participant explains, “Jurors try to argue why they want their favourites to be it. So, there's lots of tricks, not tricks, but lots of like games they try to play in that sort of space to have people sort of look at it from other sides” (Participant 18). Thus, favouritism plays out during the decision-making process. At times, jurors select members of their collective to maintain the solidarity of the group. A juror adds, “There’s also a little bit of horse trading that goes on at the end of the process.” Another juror adds, “There always a case or two like that—that somebody makes a strong case for somebody they know personally.... in those cases, you feel a bit uncomfortable” (Participant 7).

¹ Oxford Dictionaries. Retrieved from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/reasonable>, May 29, 2016

The degree of expertise is at play; not all jurors are well-prepared for the deliberation process, as an arts administrator contends, “There's always degrees of not prepared” (Participant 1). Another former administrator elaborates,

“I have experienced everything from absolute negligence to just somebody who just really -- maybe they got the book a month before, they skimmed it, and then they didn't pick it up again until they walked into the room that morning and they've forgotten half of what they read. Or, they skimmed it and didn't make any notes: Didn't circle anything, didn't highlight anything, and didn't even put a question mark in a margin. That's a bit of a problem” (Participant 1).

Even though this apparently happens infrequently, when some jurors fail to prepare for the deliberation process, their votes are considered equally valid (Participant 2 and 9).

Some jurors assert that often panel members may act in self-interest; as a juror contends, “We found people [jurors] have their own agendas” [Participant 5] during the deliberations. When jurors were asked, “What do you like the most about the peer-review process?” two jurors responded, “Networking.” Networking is an important activity in many careers, and in this study, it was one of the reasons jurors gave for taking part in the process. A juror stated, it is “very, very important for building a kind of cultural network and fabric” (Participant 9). Another juror noted, “I like connecting, networking with other professionals within the field” (Participant 17).

Another issue is that jurors might lack knowledge or expertise in a particular field; as one interviewee states, “I didn't know anything about abstract art, painting, so I tended to say yes or maybe if the juror in the group was keen on the work” (Participant 25) — ignoring the moral manifestations of their decisions. As well as, a juror admits,

“I had one situation where there was this very sweet guy, but every time a photographer came up, he’d say no. And I finally turned to him and I said, ‘Why are you saying no to all the photographers?’ And he basically said, ‘Well, I don’t know anything about photography.’ So I just said, ‘Okay, well then if you don’t know anything about photography, don’t say no, because you’re not going to ever learn anything about it’” (Participant 4).

The aforementioned illustrates a belief in the overestimation by the group. There are symptoms of *invulnerability and morality* reflected in the discourses of favouritism, horse trading, unpreparedness, and self-interest, as well as ignoring the moral and ethical consequences of decisions. This can be construed instead as “unreasonable” acts because calibrating the votes, being unprepared, or horse trading discredits the criteria of merit and excellence. This evinces an illusion of invulnerability and morality, which leads to a degree of over-optimism and overestimation of the group where decisions are made mainly based on the reliance of ‘experts.’

Groupthink Avoidance.

There are also signs of groupthink avoidance. Jurors grapple with “trying to make sense out of each applicant’s work, out of each proposal” (Participant 23) and engage in negotiations. Groupthink avoided stands out in the ability of jurors and grant facilitators to ensure enough room for discussion and negotiation, to not let “things be left unsaid.” During the adjudication process, relevant information about the applicant is shared among the group, but the acts of negotiation and persuasion are also pivotal during the deliberation process to make final decisions. As one juror affirms, “It comes down to persuading your fellow juror” (Participant 16). Another juror adds, “There are people who sit on juries and they fight and fight” (Participant 19). Similarly, another juror noted, “You push back, and then I say okay ... then I push back to

you. And in the end, it's a negotiation" (Participant 14). This statement demonstrates that things may not be left unsaid. A related point to consider is that during my field observation, I did not witness significant negotiations, but rather an agreeable approach. However, groupthink avoidance comes with a cost — other groupthink symptoms, discussed below, which must not be ignored.

Table 2 - Type Two: Closed-Mindedness

Groupthink Symptoms	
3	<i>Rationale</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collectively construct rationalizations in order to discount warnings ▪ Avoid critical discussion of prior decisions ▪ Do not reconsider their assumptions
4	<i>Stereotyping</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Construct negative stereotypes of anyone outside the group

Adapted from: Janis, 1982

Groupthink Symptoms.

There is marking evidence of closed-mindedness among jurors. There is high group-member homogeneity, as all jurors are artists and all represent the contemporary arts scene. Relying on enhanced optimism, they collectively construct rationalizations to explain why everyone conforms to subjective decisions. Moreover, the closed-door nature of the peer-review process discounts any warning from those in the community who seek out transparency in the process.

Subjectivity is the result of this cohesive social construct; similarly, individual jurors rely on their own subjectivity to rationalize and make decisions. A juror contends, "I definitely have my own subjective preferences" (Participant 25), and another juror notes, "It is subjective...It is

what you think makes a good artwork” (Participant 5). A third juror states, “I try to be objective as possible but I think there is quite a bit of a subjective view that gets applied to who gets the grant” (Participant 11). A fourth juror says that his decisions are based on “subjective interpretation of what that means” (Participant 16).

The literature on subjectivity describes it as a common dilemma faced by decision makers (Ravitch, 1989) and says that it is inevitable in the decision-making process (Peshkin 1988; Ravitch 1989). Social psychology presents us with an array of subjectivity theories (See Ellis 1992; Ortner 2005; Peshkin 1988; Ratner 2002; Ravitch 1989) in an attempt to improve decision-making. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines subjectivity as “the way a person experiences things in his or her own mind: based on feelings or opinions rather than facts.” I am addressing subjectivity in the psychological sense, in terms of the inner feelings, intentions, desires, and tastes of individuals.

Alternatively, Ravitch (1989) contends that “Subjectivity is part of decision-making and is not intrinsically bad” (281), because decision analysis requires judgement to structure, estimate and evaluate decisions. Subjective judgments are inescapable and part of being human, but understanding them are crucial to better decision-making and problem solving (Peshkin 1988; Ravitch 1989; Ortner 2005). Peshkin (1988) argues that it is better to acknowledge that subjectivity is an invariable component of decision-making rather than trying to achieve objectivity. Awareness of subjectivity will help shape decision-makers’ inquiry and outcomes. Understanding one’s own subjectivity will allow us to “have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset” (17). Peshkin adds, “Untamed subjectivity mutes the emic voice” (21), and affirms that being conscious of one’s own subjectivity will limit biases that subjectivity engenders. Understanding subjectivity

requires a degree of reflexivity (Ortner 2005). As the literature suggests, subjectivity is inexorable, and during the deliberation process, subjectivity is a product of social discourses.

Jurors do not criticize or suggest the secrecy of the deliberation process for arts funding should be reconsidered. Indeed, arts councils insulate the panel members from outsiders; decision are made behind closed doors. A juror affirms, “In a closed room, you feel a sense of freedom to express” (Participant 6). A former arts administrator states that jurors “have to be free to say something and not expect it to go on the record” (Participant 26). Another juror contends, “A jury is like in a trial, we will need the freedom to be able to say things about a project” (Participant 6). However, most legal trials are open to the public, and at the least, the evidence jurors use to make decisions is open for consideration, while adjudications are not.

Jurors also construct negative stereotypes of those outside the group. They feel that if the deliberation process is open to the public, it will lead to controversial outcomes. The assumption is that the public (including emerging artists) is not skilled in the field, and thus, unable to make appropriate funding decisions; only professional artists have the competency to do so. As one juror asserts, “They [the general public] don’t have that knowledge, education or understanding” (Participant 11) to make funding decisions. Incongruously, their decisions are often made subjectively. Are we then to assume that an expert will have better subjective outcomes than a non-expert?

Groupthink Avoidance.

Jurors do not avoid critical discussion. On the contrary, all jurors are encouraged to debate the “excellence” of the work. An arts administrator contends, “It’s a negotiation, they have to reach consensus around the results” (Participant 23). From my field observations, it was evident that jurors are passionate about the work they want to support. However, discussions are

characterized by negotiation discourses. The words disagree, fight, persuade, and convince describe the actions during the interviews. As one juror puts it, “negotiate and disagree sometimes and come to an agreement to be enlightened by each other” (Participant 26). Another juror contends, “Even if you vehemently disagree with each other, you need to be open about it” (Participant 1). The next juror states, “To a certain degree you're trying to persuade each other” (Participant 3).

Groupthink Symptoms.

The pressures towards uniformity that emerged from these data are depicted in Table 3. Pressures toward uniformity are reflected at the Canadian arts councils. Jurors are a cohesive group who share a common background (artists) and social discourses in the realm of the contemporary arts field.

Table 3 - Type Three: Pressures Toward Uniformity

Groupthink Symptoms	
5	<p><i>Self-Censorship</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Keep silent about their misgivings; doubts and deviations from the perceived group consensus are not expressed
6	<p><i>Illusion of Unanimity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Majority view and judgment assumed to be unanimous ▪ Conformity to the majority view ▪ Reliance on consensual validation ▪ Silence seen as consent
7	<p><i>Pressure on Dissenters</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Members under pressure not to express arguments against any of the group's views ▪ Reinforces the concurrence-seeking norm that loyal members are expected to maintain
8	<p><i>Mindguards</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-appointed members protect the leader and fellow members from information that is contradictory or problematic to the group's cohesiveness ▪ Protect from breaking group complacency

Adapted from: Janis, 1982

The symptoms of groupthink are discernible in the ways pressure towards uniformity emerged from the data. When a dominant voice was leading the discussion during the deliberation process, some jurors kept silent about their misgivings and let the grant officer mediate the discussion (Participant 16; field observation). As one juror says, if the councils get an application from

“a more senior artist, somebody whose opinion tends to be rather overbearing. So that depends also on the grants officer that [his or her] their voice is -- doesn't become the dominant voice in the room” (Participant 7).

There is a strong *illusion of unanimity*, where the majority view and judgements are assumed to be consistent across participants. Dressler (2006) defines majority voting as an instance when “group members agree to adopt whatever decision most people (or some determined threshold percentage of the group) want to support” (8). The concurrence-seeking tendency is manifested by shared illusions of overestimation, which helps the members to maintain a sense of group solidarity, seeking concurrence “at the expense of seeking information, critical appraisal, and debate” (Janis 1982, 47). It is worth noting that councils and jurors describe the peer-review model as employing the discourses of a consensus model, when in fact, the peer-review process abides by the majority vote. A juror confirms, “the majority - nobody gets funded with less than majority” (Participants 7 & 10). Jurors reinforce the concurrence-seeking norm that loyal members are expected to maintain.

There is pressure to rely on consensual validation and conforming to the majority view, as one juror contends, “If people can't reach consensus, then we resort to a majority vote” (Participant 23). Dressler (2006) defines *consensus* as “a co-operative process in which all group members develop and agree to support a decision that is in the best interest of the whole” (4). Janis (1982) explains that the group's “superficial conformity appears to have been motivated by a fear of being humiliated by being expelled from the group altogether” (246). The fear of rejection and disapproval in the group is manifested when it involves “a constant striving for homogeneous beliefs and judgments among all members” (Janis 1982, 114). Striving for consensus helps members “achieve a sense of group unity and *esprit de corps*” (Janis 1982, 114)

— the psychological basis for the symptoms of groupthink. A juror argues, “I prefer that people reach consensus” (Participant 23). At times, the preservation of friendly relationships at the expense of making the best decision is preferred (Janis 1982). Consensual validation is also reflected by jurors’ ‘trade-off’ practices; as a juror notes, there will be “always a trade off you may have one that you really want to support because you think that's the best work in your opinion and then they'll say these are the ones they prefer and you'll say yes” (Participant 25) — to conform with the majority of the team.

Groupthink Avoidance.

For the most part, silence is not seen as consent since grants officers ensure every juror has the opportunity to speak. As a juror states, “you hear everyone’s debate, everyone had opinions and we talked about it for a while” (Participant 11). Doubts and deviations from the perceived group consensus are expressed to the point that jurors are “not dismissive by any means. They try very earnestly to get a good sense of whether or not a proposed project makes sense” (Participant 23).

There is no clear evidence of “Mindguards” or self-appointed members who protect the leader and fellow members from information that is contradictory or problematic to the group’s cohesiveness. However, grant officers, who are not self-appointed but rather appointed by the councils as facilitators, act as mindguards—members who protect the group and the leader from information that is problematic or contradictory to the group’s cohesiveness, control dissent and direct the decision-making. Indeed, grant officers act to protect the interests of the council and preserve group contentment, at the same time, ensuring a fair process. This appointment protects negotiations from groupthink symptoms. Jurors confirm that grants officers remain neutral

during the decision process. And, they sometimes bring things – facts -- to the table (Participant 7).

Discussion

Madness is the exception in individuals but the rule in groups ~Friedrich Nietzsche

Figure 1 – Groupthink



D'Andrea, Marisol, 2016

I have now painted a portrait of the symptoms of groupthink in the themes or types within the arts council adjudication process. Type 1 is Overestimation of the Group: invulnerability and morality, which leads to a degree of over-optimism about the expertise of jurors. Type 2 is Closed-Mindedness: rationale and stereotype open up the element of subjectivity, along with the justification for the “secrecy” of the deliberation process. Finally, Type 3 is Pressure Toward Uniformity, which is the most contemplative in the councils. Jurors share common backgrounds and rely on consensual validation and often conform to the majority view.

Groupthink symptoms transpire in the panel peer-review because the peer-review process is consensual, but also because there are no formal guidelines for the judgment process if, for example, the panel includes unprepared jurors or jurors who are unable to speak about work outside their fields of expertise. Evidence suggests that there is an over-optimistic perception of the jurors as experts “who know best,” regardless of their lack of knowledge in a particular field or moral inclinations to support work that may reflect their own. Baron, Vandello, and Brunzman

(1996) found that individuals tend to conform more to the opinion of others when faced with difficult tasks, relying on others' judgments when they are unable to check their own judgments. Making arts funding decisions is a demanding, challenging and emotional task since jurors need to essentially compete to secure limited funding for their preferred works. There are several factors that further affect the jury decision-making process at the arts council. For instance, limited funding, time pressures, stress, and other sentiments all play a role. This requires further research.

One may ask what constitutes sound group decision-making. According to Janis (1982), the criteria of sound decision-making are employed when the decision-makers (1) thoroughly canvass a wide range of alternative courses of action; (2) survey the objectives and the values implicated; (3) carefully weigh the costs, drawbacks, and subtle risks of negative and positive consequences; (4) continuously search for relevant information; (5) take into account the information and the expert judgment to which they are exposed; (6) re-examine the positive and negative consequences of all main alternatives; and (7) make detailed provisions for executing the chosen course of action (136). Furthermore, I believe we need to pay detailed attention to what everyone else is saying (or trying to say) because jurors might miss relevant information as they attempt to make sound decisions. Also, having no fear of disagreeing with others is a sign of groupthink avoidance, something art jurors in this study seem to be doing very well.

Implications and Future Research

Decision-making is a complex process, and making decisions in the arts is multifaceted and subjective. This new study contributes to the expansion of groupthink theory when dealing with group decision-makers, and has contributed to new insights by the identification of

additional factors that affects decision making in arts funding. It may be worth applying those identified key features (e.g., horse-trading, degree of preparedness) in other decision-making models used in groups. This study also merits future research into comparisons of group decision-making models for funding in different organizations (e.g., non-profit and for profit). In other words, how does “groupthink” look different in private and public grant funding proceedings?

Methods used to understand the decision-making process can still be leveraged in other organizations that award funding. For instance, the arts councils — publicly funded — studied herein make extraordinary efforts to recruit a diverse panel with varied demographics and release the names of the adjudicators once the winners are announced. In contrast, private, self-funded councils remain closed doors. Despite criticisms of the peer review process (see Ahlfinger & Esser 2001; McCauley 1998; Packer & Ungson 2017), I have demonstrated that the groupthink model is still relevant as the basis for group decision-making, and this model could be expanded by considering extra features, such as horse-trading, and degree of preparedness.

This paper has illuminated more questions than solutions. How do we know when jurors, for example, act in self-interest on behalf of the artist? What constitutes a bad decision? Are all dimensions being evaluated equally weighted during the adjudication process? Can the quality of work be measured? Or should it be based on feedback? What are the consequences of poor decisions in arts funding? What constitutes sound decision-making when selecting the art works worthy of funding? Do juror-experts guarantee the best decision-making? How does this decision affect the cultural production? To what extent do jurors’ homogeneity affect the decisions and cultural outcomes? To what extent are negotiations well-founded?

Groupthink theory provided another perspective on decision-making and revealed jurors' strengths in decision-making (e.g., negotiation). However, the funding of controversial art would definitely speak to the outcome of the decision-making because it will cause an immediate response and perhaps a fiasco in the public realm. Indeed, groupthink is more pervasive with homogenous grant review panels; hence, the more diverse panels yield better decisions and outcomes. Yet, not all bad or poor decisions end up as fiascos (Janis, 1982).

Conclusion

Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work ~Vince Lombardi

The leitmotif of groupthink is concurrence seeking, “[b]ut concurrence-seeking generally occurs in group decision-making, and it is not unique to group decision-making, and it is not unique to groups that perform poorly” (Whyte 1989, 41). The overall significance of this study is that it has created a clearer picture of how the peer-review process works for arts funding, and most important, how decision-making for arts funding is construed and how jurors *think together* when making decisions about funding for their peers. This paper has also intended to engender reflection on the application of groupthink in the peer review process for arts funding in Canada. Fortuitously, the fierce negotiations that take place in the deliberation process mitigate many of the groupthink symptoms. However, there are some symptoms that ought not to be ignored (i.e. favouritism, horse-trading, self-interest, and unpreparedness).

Overall, there are also pitfalls that can arise from group interaction. People often reach unanimous agreement even when the facts point to another, perhaps more appropriate, outcome. What a group needs to keep in mind is that the tendency to seek concurrence among the in-group

could be at the expense of good outcomes. In addition, grant reviewers (in particular homogeneous groups) need to be mindful of the impact of their decisions to the artists and cultural production.

In sum, this paper has attempted to shed some light on what happens behind the closed doors of the peer-review process in arts organizations where arts funding is concerned. Moreover, this study aims to generate discussion and reflection on the group decision-making process in order to increase the chances of effective, equitable and successful effective decision-making processes, as well as the considerations of emerging factors such as horse-trading and unpreparedness. In rendering better decisions, there ought to be an awareness of groupthink symptoms and groupthink avoidance, in order to prevent fiascos.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Elaine Smith for her feedback and support.

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