



Figure 2.2:
Connections within groups supports wellbeing.

Groups in the community

Groups are a very important part of everyday life, because it is through them that people can make connections with other people and have a sense of belonging. Whether people realise it or not, individuals will always have some sort of group to align with. The reason is because each community comprises a large variety of groups. The group might be formal and be subject to rules or regulations, and some examples of that type of group are family groups, religious groups, work groups and sporting groups, as well as many other groups – such as political groups – that operate in a set environment.

Groups can also be informal and be subject to no guidelines or rules, meaning they are just a group of people who spend time together because they share an interest in something or someone. That type of group includes friendship groups, leisure groups, some cultural groups, study groups, and subculture groups.

Types of groups

The community has many types of groups within it, and specific groups will exist throughout any given community. Those groups include family and friendship groups, sporting and leisure groups, study and work groups, and religious and cultural groups. However, they can vary and are dependent on the community they exist within. There are also special-interest groups that might exist within only specific communities.

Family and friendships groups

Family groups are the group people are born into. People spend time with family members because they live with them, have things in common with them and love each other. Family groups can comprise immediate family and/or extended family:

- Immediate family includes mother, father and siblings.
- Extended family includes grandparents, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and cousins.

Family groups can grow as new members are born into the family. Also, as people grow up, their immediate family can change to be their own family, including a husband or wife and children of their own.

Friendship groups are the groups that people associate with by choice. They comprise people who have a relationship because they have come together due to their similarities, which can include going to the same school, being the same age, growing up in the same street or liking the same genre of music. Friendship groups are formed over time and can constantly be subjected to change that is based on the stage of life individuals are at.

Sporting and leisure groups

Sporting and leisure groups include groups of people who play or are interested in the same sport or share an interest in a leisure activity.

Sporting groups can be based on a sport you play, such as football, netball or soccer; however, they can be broader and include the whole club, or be more specific and associated exclusively with the team. Membership of them can entail specific rules that everyone has to follow, such as attending training sessions or following the instructions given by the coach, referee or captain. They can also be based on what sporting team you support.

Leisure groups can include people who share enjoyment from participating in an activity, which can include physical activity but not at a competitive level. Some examples of leisure groups are a water-aerobics group, a walking group, a book-club group and an online-gaming group. Leisure groups are often more casual and do not have strict rules or guidelines the members must follow. You join a leisure group because you find happiness in participating in the activity.



Figure 2.3: Friendship groups comprise people who have a relationship due to their similarities.



Figure 2.4: Membership of sporting groups can entail specific rules that everyone has to follow, such as attending training sessions.

Study and work groups

Study groups are groups of people who come together in order to study, at the level of high school, TAFE or university. Study groups for school students include classmates and teachers. In this type of group, the members formally exchange information in order to learn. Study groups can also be informal, and some examples of informal study groups are when the members go to the library during the exam period so they can study together.

Work groups are groups that are formed on the basis of the members' workplace. They include work colleagues and can also include management-level employees such as the team leader or the boss. Depending on the workplace, the work groups will be involved in various tasks and activities, and the group members will have various roles and skills. For example, a corporate work group might be involved in marketing new products, whereas a trade work group might be involved in building a house within a designated timeframe.

Religious groups

These groups exist within all communities, and depending on the community lived in, specific religious groups will be more prevalent. Religion is understood as believing in a higher power, and the world has many types of religion, for example Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. Religious groups are clusters of people who are likeminded in their beliefs or have a similar spirituality and who come together to practise the beliefs. Depending on the religion, the group members might practise their beliefs in a place of worship such as a church, a temple, a mosque or a synagogue. People might also practise their religion in the comfort of their own home by praying, meditating and leading a life based on moral righteousness.

As a result of new technology, religious groups can congregate and develop their faith online using various websites and social media pages that are devoted to religious prayer and relevant news such as upcoming holy days or a change of religious leader.



Figure 2.5:
Groups may form because of similar religious beliefs.

Cultural groups

Culture comprises a variety of aspects of a person's lifestyle. They all have an impact on how one lives their life on a daily basis and how their life takes shape. Culture includes ethnicity or nationality, religion, geographical location, family morals and beliefs, and many other factors. In families, culture and cultural values are often passed down from one generation to the next.

Nowadays, however, cultural groups tend to be very dynamic, especially in areas in which the population is characterised by a variety of cultures. In that type of setting, it is common for people in a variety of cultures to assimilate and experience cultures other than their own, perhaps in the form of elements such as cuisine, fashion, music and sports. This cultural diversity might be evident at a shopping centre's food court, at which many types of cuisine are available, such as Chinese, Lebanese, Italian and Greek.

Other specific groups within the community

Apart from the aforementioned categories, many types of groups exist in each community. These other groups include, but are not limited to:

- rotary groups
- 'after-school care' groups
- political parties
- groups for older people and people who have a disability
- school P&C (parents and citizens) groups
- fan club groups
- animal-rights groups.

Internet activity

Log on to TitanOnline and complete Activity 2.1 about the groups that are important to you.

Communities can also include various subculture groups, which comprise people who associate with each other because they share a set of interests. Some contemporary examples of subculture groups are skateboarders, Goths, emo's, environmentalists, bodybuilders, vegans and hipsters. Subcultures can be characterised by dressing in a specific style, listening to specific music, having a specific political agenda or participating in the same activities outside work and school.

Learning activity

1. Identify the groups you belong to.
2. Design a graph in which you demonstrate how much time you dedicate to each group you meet with on a weekly basis.
3. Study your graph and analyse why some groups are featured more often in it.
4. With a partner, discuss the similarities and differences between your graphs and the reasons for the differences.
5. Explore various types of groups that exist in the community, and explain why the members have formed each group.



Figure 2.6:
Common geographic location can influence the formation of groups.

Reasons for group formation

People form a group for a variety of reasons. Some people intentionally and knowingly develop one, such as a special-interest group, whereas other groups come into being naturally, such as a peer group or friendship group. People form groups for a number of reasons and form them over an undefined period. Group formation can be linked to many factors, such as locality or geography, gender, a shared interest or common goal, security, sexuality, a specific need, social interaction, and culture or religion.

Locality or geography

Locality or geography is related to the position where people live. It can be as broad as what country people reside in, or be categorised according to a more technical environmental framework, such as 'suburban' (the suburbs), 'urban' (town or city life) or 'rural' (the countryside, a farm). Location and geography can potentially influence the access a person has to specific resources. For example, someone who lives in an urban environment might have access to a broader variety of services and might therefore have more groups to choose from. A mother who lives in an urban environment might be able to choose from six or seven mothers' groups, whereas a mother who lives in a rural environment might have the choice of only one or two of that type of group.

Geographical location also has an impact on the types of group that are on offer. For example, the residents of a coastal town might have surf clubs and surf-skills groups to join whereas the residents of a country town will not have access to that type of group because they do not have access to beaches.

Gender

Gender is a fluid term that can often be confused with sexuality. Gender describes someone's sexual identity, orientation and behaviour to define who they express themselves as sexually. It means the sex a person identifies with and feels most comfortable being a member of. Over time, a number of different gender descriptions have been developed as a result of increasing awareness of various types of relationships in society.

Gender identity is how a person feels. Traditionally, society recognised two genders, male and female. These terms were based on sexual anatomy. However, gender can be a complex term and people are defining themselves in new and different ways, such as transgender or gender fluid, as a deeper understanding of gender identity is formed throughout society.

Gender groups form for a number of reasons. These include:

- companionship
- identity
- safety
- self-esteem
- sense of belonging
- information.

Shared interest or common goal

People can join a group that has a shared interest or common goal. This type of group might be a long-term affiliation, such as supporting a specific sports team or being a fan of the same musician. These groups might network online or congregate at sporting events on a weekly basis.

Shared-interest groups or groups that have a common goal might form for a short period, depending on the goal they are trying to reach. For example, a group might form in order to organise protests against a specific environmental issue or current event because the members adhere to the same ideology and want the same outcome. Another example of forming a group to achieve a common goal is formation of a carpool, which involves several parents forming a group to drive their children to and from school or sport sessions because the parents find that to achieve the goal, it is easier to be part of the group than do it on their own. Being part of a special-interest group or a common-goal group is important because the members are able to express themselves and converse with people who have the same interest.

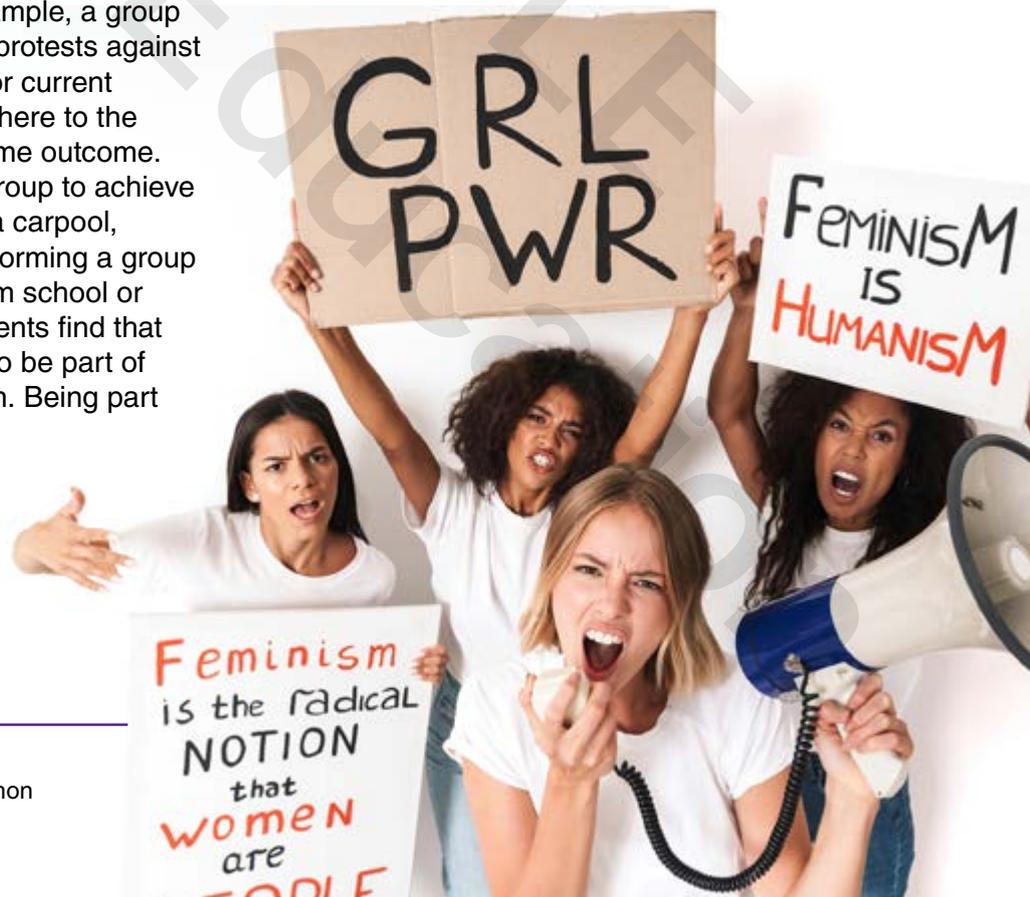


Figure 2.7:

People may form groups around common goals, such as women's rights.

Security

The term 'security' means a feeling of being safe from harm and absence of feeling threatened. People will form this type of group in order to make another group feel safe and secure when the members of the latter group might not be able to make themselves feel safe and secure; two examples are children who depend on the adults in their lives and people who depend on each other, such as residents who form a Neighbourhood Watch group so they can maintain the safety and/or security of their loved ones and the people who live on the same street.

Another reason that individuals might join a security group is that they wish to protect their own safety and security. This type of group might include gangs or subculture groups because the members feel safer by affiliating with it. An example occurs in prison when some of the inmates join a gang because they believe they will gain a sense of security, safety and power from it.



Figure 2.8: People may form a Neighbourhood Watch group to help maintain the safety of their community.

Sexuality

Sexuality is about the sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions and behaviours towards other people. A person can find other people physically, sexually or emotionally attractive, and all those things are a part of their sexuality. Sexuality is diverse and personal, and it is an important part of a person's identity.

Groups for people with diverse sexuality have formed for a number of reasons. Discovering and exploring sexuality can be a very liberating and positive experience for some people. For others, it can cause confusion and anxiety; some people may experience discrimination due to their sexuality. Talking to people in support groups can help individuals facing negativity or judgement about their sexuality, and friendship/social groups can help individuals to connect with other members of their community.



Figure 2.9: People join groups based on their sexuality.

Specific need

The meeting of a need is another reason that many groups are formed. Needs and wants are things without which people would have a less fulfilling life.

The basic needs are food, water and shelter, but other needs might include:

- the need to lose weight or get fit, and meeting the need by joining a gym or an exercise group
- the need to receive support after starting a family, and meeting the need by joining a mothers' group or an after-school care group
- the need to receive support because you have a medical illness or condition, and meeting the need by joining an online community in which the members share general support and keep up to date with current research, or meeting the need by joining a group of people who complete daily tasks together because they have the same illness or condition or a similar one, for example a cancer-support group and a sporting team in which the members have a disability or an impairment
- the need to receive support because you have previously made a specific lifestyle choice to, for example, take up cigarette smoking or consume excessive amounts of alcohol, and meeting the need by joining an appropriate support group.

Social interaction

Social interactions include any encounter a person has with another person. They are a very important part of most people's lives, because the desire to fit in or belong is very common. This desire to fit in or belong leads to formation of groups in which the members can share their time with people who are similar to them. People who join a social group enable themselves to have a sense of belonging, and people who form that type of group create a community in which the members share a desire to connect with other people and enjoy each other's company. Two examples of a social group are a book club and a group of parents at a sports match.

Because modern society is changing and people on one side of the world can connect with and communicate with people on the other side of the world, people can now also use social media forums and sites in order to form social groups.



Figure 2.10:

Cancer support groups address the specific health needs and experiences of those going through cancer.



Figure 2.11:

Sports fans may form social groups to watch their favourite teams play.



Figure 2.12:

Migrants may choose to live in an area, such as Chinatown, where many people of the same culture live.

Culture

People form a culture group because the members will have beliefs and values that are similar to their own. A culture group can be formed naturally because of the group a person is born into, which might be based on, for example, nationality or the values inherited from parents. However, a cultural group can also be socially constructed, a fact that is highly evident among groups of people who migrate to Australia and choose to live in an area in which many people of the same culture live. People congregate in this way for various reasons, such as seeking of comfort and security, overcoming of language barriers, networking, and enjoyment of shared interests. People might also form a cultural group in an effort to create a sense of security in their community, and might also join a group based on their culture and heritage, such as in the case of a Maori group or an Irish-dancing group.

Religion

People form a religious group because they wish to strengthen their spirituality and develop closeness to their god. They might inheritably become part of a group because of their religious beliefs and practices, such as by attending their local church and therefore becoming part of the congregation.

People might instead join a religious group later in life because of their life experiences. For example, a prisoner might start to read the Bible in prison and on leaving prison might decide to practise Christianity by becoming involved in the community of his local church. Another example is when a family loses a child due to an illness and during the illness the family members embrace their religious faith more than they embraced it before the illness, for support and guidance.

Other

People have many other reasons for forming or deciding to join a group and a common reason is that they have a specific belief that is not based on any of the aforementioned factors. They might feel a need to take action against a specific idea or concept that they believe is unjust and might therefore form a group in order to raise awareness, spread the message, and gain followers and support. This reason for forming a group is becoming increasingly evident on social media pages, where people form a group for either a trivial reason, such as having an interest in a celebrity scandal, or a more serious reason, such as wanting to protest against shark culling or drilling for coal-seam gas.

People can also form a group because they are members of a minority group, for example, when a handful of people who do not fit in with any other group decide to first form their own group and then work out what they have in common and what interests they share.



Figure 2.13: Groups can form online, through forums, social media apps/sites and gaming platforms.

Learning activity

1. Research a group you are not involved in, such as a different religious group or a group based on gender or sexuality.
2. Outline the reasons for the group's formation.
3. Analyse why it is important for people to be involved in a variety of groups.
4. Critically analyse any groups you belong to, by:
 - a. identifying the type of group
 - b. explaining why each group was formed
 - c. justifying why you belong to each.