
A Film Analysis of 12 Angry Men, a Film Directed by Sidney Lumet

12 Angry Men (1956) is a film about a court jury determining the verdict of a homicide trial. The film features a small group of the standard 12 person jury. The film itself can be summarized as 12 men arguing in a room for an hour and a half but we're here to talk about the group's dynamics.

The group is a secondary group. It is a team with the purpose of completing a task. The interdependence of the group is the basis of the entire movie. Because it's a jury the 12 men have to make a unanimous decision about the case. Every person in the group has an effect on the other people on the group. In the beginning all but one man view the defendant as guilty, due to the interdependence of the group, they are incapable of reaching the goal without that man's vote being the same. As Communication Matters (Kory Floyd) puts it "small groups are cohesive". In this group, they are working towards the common goal of a verdict. They require cohesion to accomplish it.

The group develops fairly quickly from forming and having stiff speech to storming and getting aggressive and impolite with one another. During the first vote towards a verdict there seems to be a bit of public compliance groupthink that takes place as a man or two raise their hands a bit hesitantly towards the vote for guilty. To avoid this later the one man who voted not guilty put forth the idea to do an anonymous vote to erase pressure from the rest of the group so each person could feel they had the option to vote freely. This works and begins the process of the jury one by one changing their votes to not guilty. Eventually the when the jury reach the final verdict of not guilty the last man to change his vote seems to suffer a bit from private acceptance groupthink. Seeing that everyone is now opposed to him, and that he is no longer certain of how to continue his argument, he concedes and changes his vote.

Early on one man takes on the informal role as leader. He keeps people organized and tallies the votes keeping track of the group's progress. Because he has no real power over the group and informally took the position he leads in a democratic way. Mostly visible in the way he always asks if people are opposed to taking a vote or the voting method. However within the group there are in a way two leaders. Because in the beginning only one man votes not guilty, it is them put on him to lead the motion of exploring the possibility of a not guilty verdict, thus having the leader of the whole group and a sub leader with a more specific task within the group.

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The group partakes mostly in problem solving communication (Communication matters pp. 213-214), debating evidence to determine which way to vote. The group also engages in encounter communication the debate often gets heated and the conversation changes from the case to at one another, also during breaks the jury members talk amongst each other about non case related subjects such as weather or jobs.

At one point later on in the process when most of the group has changed its vote to not guilty. One of the men still voting guilty gets very stressed and aggressively yells his argument, rather than engage the man and add fuel to the argument, the men turn away from him to disengage from him and let him burnout to diffuse the stress of the situation. The yelling man lacking an audience is forced to calm down and decompress. The conflict resolution technique being that of avoiding.

Because of the environment the group not all the 5 steps of getting socialized into a small group take place. Because jury duty is mandatory the men didn't have to think about if they wanted to join or not making the antecedent phase not applicable. The anticipatory phase was probably heavily in play but the film doesn't show it. The encounter would have taken place in the court room. The assimilation phase took place while the jury were in the room deciding a verdict. Finally the exit phase took place once all the men made the cohesive vote of not guilty and left the courthouse having completed their task.

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