Social network sites are gaining ground with a huge pace. This study takes a group perspective on the phenomenon, investigating the significance of groups on an internationally well-known social network site, Facebook. The consequences of the co-presence of multiple groups with which an individual identifies and the mechanisms that individuals use to cope with the situation are investigated. The study is positioned in the tradition of social identity approach. Special attention is allocated to the concepts of group and group identification and to multiple social identities.

The study is based on two sets of material, online observations and semi-structured interviews. The Facebook profiles of ten medical students and ten employees of a big IT company were observed in order to enumerate their groups and networks. Five students and five employees were then interviewed to deepen the understanding of the studied phenomenon. The research subjects were all native Finns, their ages ranging from 20 to 31. The interview material was analyzed with theory-bound qualitative content analysis.

In the analysis, social categorizations were divided into two distinct types, to explicit and implicit groups. The former ones are explicitly defined in the user interface of the site whereas implicit groups on the site are not. The latter ones are salient for the user as feasible categorizations of his/her personal network. The central finding of the study is that co-presence of multiple groups does indeed occur on Facebook. However, individuals perceive relatively few tensions due to it since they are actively finding ways to deal with the situation. The situation is made less problematic by creating more inclusive ingroup identities. Individuals are also coping with the situation by preventing potential problems beforehand.

The most central references: