into three categories. The syndrome begins when a group quickly settles on a course of action. Group members then drum up support for this decision by engaging in a process Janis calls concurrence seeking. Fearing that dissent will rock the boat and alienate them from the group, most group members remain silent (self-censorship). Those who do disagree are told they are being disloyal and need to get on board (intolerance of dissent). Finally, certain group members (called mindguards) insulate the group’s leader from hearing anything other than support for the group’s policies. Collectively, these tendencies create an illusion of unanimity: a false belief that since no one is voicing an objection, everyone supports the proposed plan. Arthur Schlesinger, one of Kennedy’s advisers, describes this process as it applied to the decision to invade Cuba:

In the months after the Bay of Pigs I bitterly reproached myself for having kept so silent during those crucial discussions in the Cabinet Room, though my feelings of guilt were tempered by the knowledge that a course of objection would have accomplished little save to give me a name as a nuisance. (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 225)

Having decided that everyone supports the group’s plan, group members proceed to rationalize and justify their decision. They become overconfident and decide they can’t possibly be wrong. These perceptions fuel an illusion of invulnerability. This perception probably pervaded the thinking of the engineers who decided to launch the space shuttle Challenger (Moorhead, Ference, & Neck, 1991). At the time of the launch, NASA had flown 55 consecutive missions and had not lost an astronaut since 1967. They had put men on the moon, built and launched the space station Skylab, and succeeded in retrieving failed satellites from orbit and even bringing the crew of Apollo 13 home safely. Finally, the space shuttle program had become so successful that launches had become almost routine. Given this history of success, no one believed the mission could fail.

Finally, groupthink is characterized by an illusion of inviolability. Group members come to believe that their cause is morally justified—“God is on our side” goes the thinking. This, in turn, leads them to disparage and stereotype the opposition. In the