

Robbers Cave Experiment

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<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/muzafer-sherifs-robbers-cave-experiment-was-a-real-life-lord-of-the-flies-25s8jzdw>

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Muzafer Sherif

* July 29th 1906 in Turkey

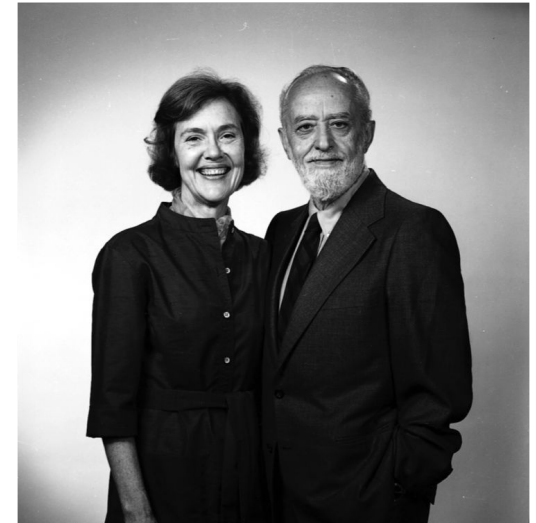
† October 16th 1988 in Fairbanks, Alaska

- Turkish-American social psychologist
- Born and raised in Turkey
- BA in philosophy in Istanbul
- MA at Harvard University where Gordon Allport was teaching
- Visited Berlin in 1932 to attend Wolfgang Köhler's lectures on Gestalt psychology
- PhD at Columbia University
- Return to Turkey and fear of political persecution
- Emigrated permanently to the US in 1945



Muzafer Sherif

- Married to Carolyn Wood
- Taught at Yale University, University of Oklahoma and Pennsylvania State University
- One of the founders of modern social psychology
- Helped to develop the *social judgement theory* and *realistic conflict theory*



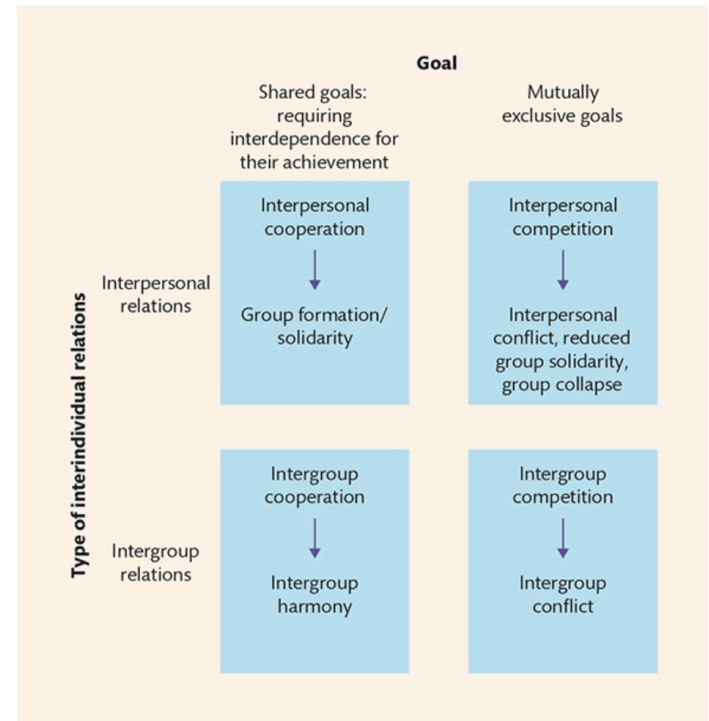
Accomplished psychologist vs political activist

Influences on Sherif's research

- **Goal:** understanding social norms, intergroup relations and social conflict
- Experienced World War I and II, the Turkish War of Independence and the Cold War
- Witness to the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany
- Political involvement: supported communists, criticized Nazi-supporters and fascism
- Escaping punishment and fleeing to the US
- Ideal of universal peace and cooperation

Realistic conflict theory

- Competition for scarce resources tend to produce intergroup conflict
- Cooperation to achieve a shared goal reduces conflict



The experiment

Outline

- Informal study
- Isolated summer camp
 - > **natural, spontaneous** group behavior
- 11 - 12 year old boys
- Controlled conditions = no inference from personal background / experience

Selection of boys:

- **Homogeneous background** (social, intelligent, white, protestant, middle-class)
- No connection to other boys
- No awareness of experiment -> fun camping activities & games

Three experiments

1949

Connecticut

1953

New York
(Middle Grove)

1954

Oklahoma
(Robbers Cave)

Structure of experiment

Phase I

Group **formation**

Phase II

Group **conflict**

Phase III

Conflict **resolution**

Phase I: Group formation

- Task distribution (cooking, fire-making, leadership)
- Nicknames, inside-jokes
- Punishment of members who did not contribute to group effort

Estimation of each other (ball throwing contest):

- Overestimation of performance of most highly regarded members
- Underestimation of performance of members low in status

-> **Hierarchical structure**

“(...) when two groups have conflicting aims, i.e., when one can achieve its ends only at the expense of the other - their members will become hostile to each other even though the groups are composed of normal well-adjusted individuals.

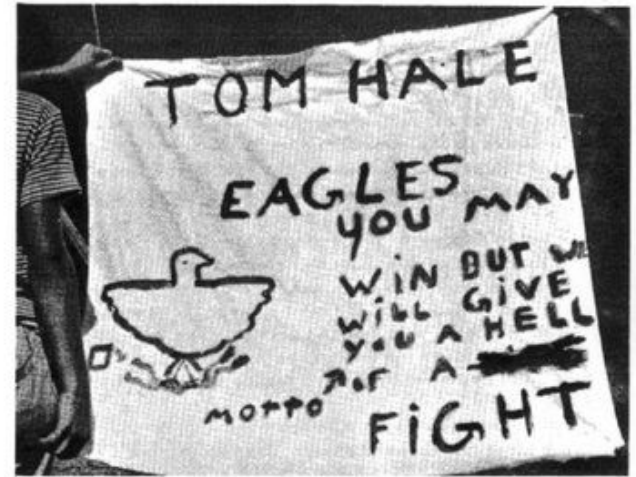
- Muzafer Sherif, 1956

Phase II: Group conflict

- Competitive games (baseball, touch football, tug-of-war)
- Boys refuse to interact with other group
- Negative ratings for other group's members
- Name-calling, shoving, **friction** between groups

1949: One group raids bunkhouse of other group, turning over beds, etc.

1954: Eagles burn a banner left by Rattlers, next morning: Rattlers seize Eagles flag



June 4th, 2023 from: <https://www.psychologywizard.net/sherif-aot.html>

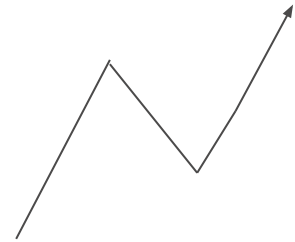
Phase II: Group conflict

Solidarity & morale within group: increases

- Changes in group structure
- E.g. new leader, because old one not tough enough
- Morale, cooperativeness, democratic behavior strengthened

-> Never towards the other group!

-> **In-group & out-group behavior**



What do you think will reunite the conflicted groups?

Name a few ideas on Menti:

82 81 90 4



Phase III: Conflict resolution

- 1st approach: **mere contact**
- Sharing a dining hall, watching a movie together,

-> only led to **more** conflict
(shoving, throwing food in dining hall)

Phase III: Conflict resolution

Solution: superordinate goals

- Appeal to both groups, can only be achieved by **working together**
- Water supply problem, starting food truck
- At first: back to name-calling, etc.
- Gradually: more inter-group **friendships**, taking the bus home together



Sherif, M. (1956). Experiments in group conflict. *Scientific American*, 195 (5), 54-59

Phase III: Conflict resolution

The water supply problem:

- Water -> camp in pipes from a tank
- Experimenters interrupted water flow
- Almost all boys volunteered to solve problem
- Worked together as one large group
- No shoving, name-calling
- Rattlers let Eagles drink first without arguing



Sherif, M. (1956). Experiments in group conflict. *Scientific American*, 195 (5), 54-59

Conclusion

- Social contact -> can serve as an opportunity for intensifying conflict
- E.g. leaders of groups meeting
- Harmony can be achieved when groups cooperate
- Working towards a shared goal

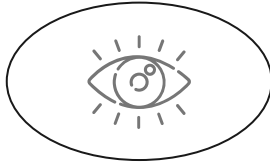
“In short, hostility gives way when groups pull together to achieve overriding goals which are real and compelling to all concerned.”

**“I’m not traumatised by the
experiment, but I don’t like lakes,
camps, cabins or tents”**

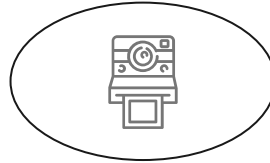
Focus Question:

What can be criticized about the study?

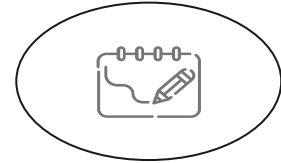
Criticism



ETHICAL



METHODOLOGICAL



REPLICATIONAL

A) Ethical concerns

1. **Lack of Informed Consent:**
 - Participants not fully informed about the nature of the study and the potential consequences of their participation
2. **Psychological Harm:**
 - Manipulation of behavior by creating intergroup conflicts and fostering aggression has potential to cause psychological distress and harm to participants
3. **Deception:**
 - Researchers concealed true nature of the study from participants
4. **Lack of Debriefing:**
 - Participants received no proper debriefing session to explain the purpose of the study, clarify misconceptions, and address potential negative emotional experiences
5. **Potential for Long-Term Effects:**
 - Intense manipulation and creation of conflict between groups may have had long-lasting effects on the participants' attitudes, behaviors, and intergroup relations



B) Methodological Problems

1. Lack of Ecological Validity

- experiment took place in a controlled laboratory environment, conditions may not accurately reflect the reality of group interactions and conflicts

2. Limited Generalizability of Results

- homogeneous and small participant groups, consisting of boys from similar backgrounds

3. Potential Biases from Demand Characteristics

- participants adjusted behavior to meet the researchers' expectations (Pygmalion Effect)

4. Limitations of the Experimental Design

- experimental design allowed for high control over conditions, but may have oversimplified aspects of group dynamics and conflict

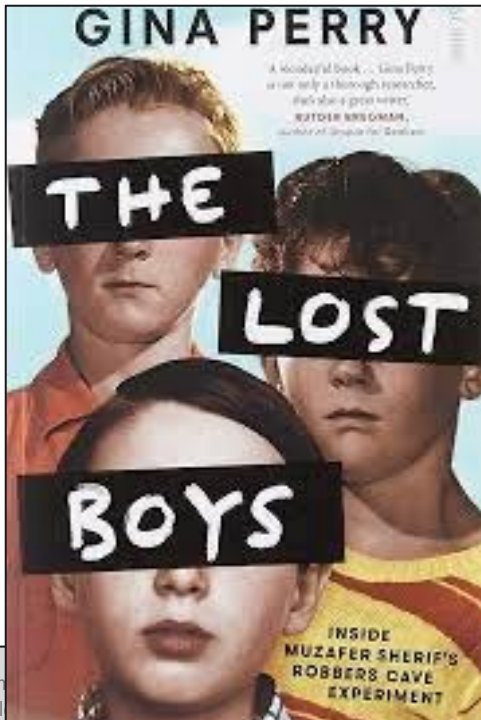
C) Replication issues and inconsistent findings

- 1953 Sherif already tried to prove his theory with: **Middle Grove Camp**
- Set up similar to Robbers Cave: two groups of boys, who compete against each other
- Main difference: **Boys were not separated from the beginning**, but after day two
- After day two: Experimenters try everything to turn the Pythons and the Panthers against each other
- But no success: when the experimenters knock over the pythons' tent and try to blame the panthers, the **boys help each other** rebuild it
- Boys slowly recognize experimenters' intentions
- **Situation between Sherif and his employees escalates**
- Boys found out that they were manipulated and the **experiment had to be aborted**



What happened to the boys?

New Developments



THE LOST BOYS

“I’m not traumatised by the experiment, but I don’t like lakes, camps, cabins or tents,”

“All the boys I spoke to had an uneasy feeling about this experience. It has troubled people”
- Gina Perry

Interview with Gina Perry

ACCUSATION	QUESTION	ANSWER
Bias	Did Sheriff orchestrate the results of his experiment?	„Sherif was aiming to prove his theory“
Manipulation	How did Sherif’s active involvement in the study skew the results?	„An objective analysis shows that there were three groups.“
		„the men refused to acknowledge they were a third powerful group and their behavior greatly influenced the children“
Generalizability	If the study was done with 15 and 16-year olds, how do you think it might change the results?	„Perhaps 15- and 16-year old’s as young adults would have been more rebellious“
		„They would have been more aware of the context and therefore more likely to question the adults“
Scientific value	If Middle Grove and Robbers Cave aren’t scientifically rigorous, does that mean they’re of no value??	„There was a kind of breadth of vision about Robbers Cave...He was trying to tackle big issues.“

WHAT CAN WE TAKE AWAY FROM IT?

Understanding Intergroup Conflict:

- How competition over limited resources lead to hostility and prejudice between groups
- Recognize factors that contribute to conflict, to develop strategies to mitigate or resolve such tensions in real-life settings

Promoting Intergroup Cooperation:

- Through superordinate goals, intergroup harmony and cooperation can be fostered
- This can be applied to community building, workplace dynamics, and peace-building efforts

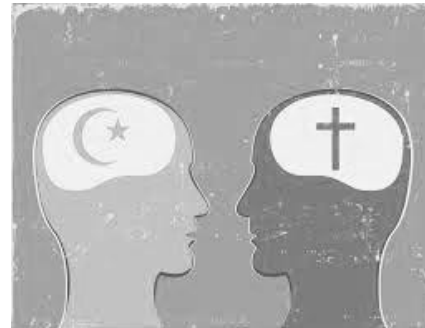
Combating Prejudice and Stereotypes:

- underscored impact of social categorization and ingroup/outgroup biases on intergroup relations
- develop interventions and educational programs to reduce prejudice and break down stereotypes

Realistic Conflict Theory

- Competition for scarce resources tend to produce intergroup conflict
- Cooperation to achieve a shared goal reduces conflict

In what areas of
your life do you
recognize
Realistic Conflict
Theory?



APPLICATION



International Politics

- When Russia invaded Ukraine, the EU worked more closely together than ever before (agreeing on sanctions and taking in Ukrainian refugees)
- the common goal of ending the war in Ukraine brought the countries of Europe closer together

Racial Discrimination

- in 1970 most whites held negative attitudes toward school districts' attempts to integrate mixed race schools
- this was because blacks were perceived as a danger to valued lifestyles, goals, and resources



Reality TV: Plötzlich Krieg



https://www.google.de/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=video&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwizif_B6az_AhUNPOwKHaBOABwQuAJ6BAgJEAU&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.faz.net%2Ffaktuell%2Ffeuilleton%2Fmedien%2Fdas-sozialexperiment-ploetzlich-krieg-von-zdfneo-funktioniert-nicht-13877495.html&usg=AOvVaw0VnHJOHBA C0nU7xFIwSVbP

**Thank you for your
attention!**

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