THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GROUPS

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Summary

The relationship between groups is often characterized by conflict and hostility. The basis for this conflict may be competition for limited resources and/or the desire for individuals to enhance the status of groups to which they belong. Social identity theory argues that part of each individual's identity is formed by the groups to which they belong. In order to have a positive social identity, individuals favor their own group and discriminate against out-groups (groups that they do not belong to). Individuals are typically more attracted to their own group than to out-groups. Similarity and proximity generally leads individuals to be more attracted to in-group members. However, similarity and proximity enhance conflict and discrimination against out-groups. Ambivalence, such as feeling both attraction to and hostility towards the out-group, often is resolved by increased hostility toward and rejection of the out-group. There is a tendency for people to perceive their own group as being heterogeneous (composed of members with different characteristics), but the out-group is viewed as homogeneous

(comprised of similar members). This leads to reduced interaction with out-group members because of the belief that familiarity with the out-group can be achieved by interactions with few members. Stereotypes are cognitive representations of groups of people. The stereotype is a simplified picture of the group that is used to describe all members of the group or category. The relationship between groups can be improved by repeated contact between group members. The most beneficial contact results when the members have equal status and cooperate to achieve a common (superordinate) goal. Cooperation is more effective than helping because helping relationships typically divide groups between powerful/competent parties and powerless/incompetent parties. Improving the relationship between groups is generally a slow process that occurs over time and repeated encounters.

1. Introduction

It is rare for a scholarly area to be able to trace its beginning to a single study, but this is arguably the case for the experimental study of intergroup relations. Before the 1950s, several investigators anticipated the advent of this research. Sociologist William Graham Sumner presented a wonderfully rich analysis of the relationship between societies in 1906, examining the differentiation of groups into the we-group (in-group) and "everybody else, or the others-groups, out-groups." Ethnocentrism, he argued, is the view that "one's own group is the center of everything," leading each group to see itself as superior and look with contempt on outsiders. Gordon Allport offered an equally insightful and influential perspective of prejudice, delving into the causes of prejudice, its effect on the victims of prejudice, and approaches that might reduce prejudice. Both Sumner and Allport were concerned about grand social problems (warfare, prejudice) that infected large segments of societies.

But it was in the summer of 1954 that these grand theories took on a new perspective and the seeds for research on intergroup relations were sown. During that summer, a group of "normal, well-adjusted boys of the same age, educational level, from similar sociocultural backgrounds and with no unusual features in their personal backgrounds" were bussed from their homes in Oklahoma City to a summer camp setting in Robbers Cave State Park in southeastern Oklahoma, USA. The camp was like many in the area, except that upon arriving, the campers were split into two groups and separated from each other. During the separation, each group developed its own structure, adopted a name (Rattlers and Eagles), and quickly embraced a we-they perspective between their own group and the other group of campers. During the next week, Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues brought the two groups together to compete in a series of events such as a tug-of-war, baseball games, and a treasure hunt. Winners and losers were clearly identified. In one instance, the groups competed in a bean-collecting game to win US$5. After the contest, the campers were shown two jars of beans, supposedly representing each group's collective effort, and asked to estimate the number of beans in each jar. Each group estimated that its own jar contained more beans than the other's jar. The result of these competitive exercises was evident in a wide range of other measures. Raids and fights broke out between the two groups. Friendships developed within each in-group, but rarely between members of different groups. In fact, campers were rebuked by their in-group comrades for friendly contact with out-group members.

With intergroup hostility firmly entrenched in the camp, Sherif and his colleagues introduced a series of interventions aimed at improving the relationship between the two groups. One attempt involved intergroup contact in which the groups joined together in activities such as eating and watching films. These events did not lead to an abatement of hostility, but instead served as opportunities for continued fighting (e.g. food fights in the dining hall). In an earlier (1953) camp study Sherif and Sherif introduced a common enemy. The two warring groups had to combine efforts in a baseball game against a team from an outside camp. This approach did reduce hostility during the game, but when normal life at camp resumed, so too did the conflict between the two groups. Further, Sherif noted that the common enemy approach simply led to a wider sphere of conflict; now there were two groups against one new group.

The most successful approach to improve relations between the two groups resulted when the groups had to combine their efforts to achieve superordinate goals. A superordinate goal was a goal that could be reached only if both groups worked together. For example, in one case, a truck bringing food to the campers became mired in a ditch, and the strength of all the campers (in both groups) was necessary to move it. After a series of cooperative efforts to achieve superordinate goals, positive relationships began to develop between the groups, and when the busses pulled out of the camp to take the boys home, seating arrangements did not follow group lines.
The Sherif camp studies were remarkable for a number of reasons. It will be helpful to recap these areas and show how they have been built upon by research and theory on intergroup relations.

2. Expanding the Field: Types of Groups and Events Defining Relationships between Groups

Before the Sherif camp studies, most of the interest in intergroup relations found its energy within the paradigm of prejudice and discrimination. This paradigm focused on the manner in which the characteristics of an actor (race, education, religion, sex, childhood experiences, role models, etc.) led to a relationship (action/attitude) with the victim, largely based on the characteristics of the victim (religion, education, physical characteristics, etc.). This proved to be a valuable model for the study of racism, and it gave rise to host of research programs. Some, such as the classic study by Adorno and colleagues, adopted a psychodynamic approach, focusing on characteristics of the actor as setting the tone for the nature of intergroup relations.

These investigators argued that early childhood training and family dynamics could conspire to develop an "authoritarian personality" that, in turn, primed individuals to hate certain out-groups. Another approach toward understanding prejudice and discrimination relied on social learning theory, which focused on the role of models and schedules of reinforcement for teaching individuals to hate and aggress.

A companion approach to the emphasis on the actor was a focus on the characteristics of the victim. Allport showed in the early 1950s how being visible (often because of distinct physical characteristics) and strange or different enhanced the likelihood of a group being a target of discrimination. A decade later, Berkowitz pointed out that weakness made a group a safe and likely target for discrimination. And several early

investigators suggested that discrimination was the result of displaced aggression against a target who had some characteristics of the initial source of frustration.

This focus on the characteristics of the target of discrimination is seen in research designed to determine if there is a "kernel of truth" in the stereotypes of certain groups. The central question in this research involves the "accuracy" of stereotypes. However, disagreements about how to measure "accuracy" have dogged this line of research since its beginning.

Although this early work offered valuable insight into the dynamics of prejudice, Sherif and his colleagues broadened the scope of the study of intergroup relations. Their studies demonstrated that a group of "normal, well-adjusted" kids could be incited to dislike and aggress against another group of "normal, well-adjusted" kids when the two groups were placed in a situation involving competition and conflict. Hence, the relationship between groups was not necessarily dictated by the characteristics of groups, but rather by the nature of the interaction that exists between the groups. Realistic conflict theory argues that competition over limited resources (materials, power, territory) leads to hatred between groups. In an interesting series of studies, Insko and his colleagues found that a competitive situation is particularly corrosive to the relationship between groups because groups are generally more competitive than individuals acting alone. Sherif and his colleagues expanded the breadth of the field of intergroup relations by demonstrating that competition could create hostility between groups that had no previous history of conflict and differed on few readily apparent dimensions.

2.1. The Social Identity Perspective

Before the dust had settled on Sherif's contribution to the field of intergroup relations, the British psychologist Henri Tajfel (1970) presented a series of studies that called into question the role of competition in determining the nature of intergroup relations. Tajfel's basic paradigm was elegantly simple. Participants (both adults and children) were assigned to groups on the basis of a "trivial performance criterion," such as guessing the number of clicks of a metronome or preference for paintings. The participants remained anonymous throughout the study and never met members of their in-group or the out-group. "Thus, these groups are purely cognitive, and can be referred to as minimal," hence, the name minimal group paradigm. The participants were then asked to award points (and money, in some cases) to pairs of individuals, one from the in-group and one from the out-group. The participants never met the recipients. The consistent finding in the studies was that participants assigned more points (money) to in-group members than to out-group members; there was favoritism toward the in-group and discrimination against the out-group. But this was not the end of the story. The pattern of responses indicated that resources were assigned to increase the difference (maximum difference) between the in-group and out-group rather than to simply maximize the in-group profit.

These studies were a very important addition to the Sherif camp studies. The results demonstrated that simply assigning individuals to groups was sufficient to incite discrimination; overt competition between the groups was not necessary. Further, the "groups" created by Tajfel were "minimal," involving no interaction between members

and no expressed purpose. From an intergroup relations perspective, these findings, therefore, suggest that the relationship between groups is highly likely to be one of conflict and discrimination. Why should this be the case?

In answering this question, Tajfel and Turner turned from the arena of group dynamics to the psychology of the individual. They argued that an individual's self-esteem is composed of personal identity (characteristics and traits that are unique to the individual) and social identity (identity based on the groups and categories to which one belongs). Individuals, they suggested, strive to maintain and/or enhance their self-esteem. One way to do this is to join positive groups. Another way is to enhance the value or position of groups to which one belongs in comparison with the value or position of groups to which one does not belong. Therefore, people will be motivated to assign their in-group more resources than the out-group and/or perceive the product of their own group as better than that of the out-group. It is important to recognize that the social identity theory approach to intergroup relations is rooted in the psychology of the individual.

2.2. Self-Categorization

A further emphasis of the intrapsychic realm of intergroup relations is found in Turner's theory of self-categorization. Whereas Tajfel's minimal group paradigm involved appointing individuals to groups, Turner and his colleagues argued that individuals divide their social world into categories following the principle of meta-contrast: people within a category have less (perceived) difference among themselves on the relevant dimension than between people in one category compared to another. A host of factors (personal, situational) can determine the category dimension that is relevant.

So at one moment, an individual may perceive her world as involving men/women, while at another moment the world may consist of Italians/Germans. The categories are formed with the self as a referent and they vary in level of the abstraction from the most superordinate (self as a human being) to the most subordinate (self as a unique individual). When the subordinate category is salient, the individuals interact at a personal level, one individual relating to another. However, when social identity is salient, the social world is depersonalized and relationships are perceived as involving categories (the self-category and the out-category). Like social identity theory, self-categorization theory argues that individuals will attempt to enhance the relative position of the self-category in comparison with the category to which the individual does not belong.

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Biographical Sketch

Stephen Worchel received a B.A. in psychology/anthropology from the University of Texas (1967) and his Ph.D. in psychology from Duke University (1971). He is currently dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of psychology at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. Professor Worchel's previous academic positions include University of Southern Maine (dean and professor), Texas A&M University (department head and professor of psychology), scholar at Fudan University (Shanghai, PRC), University of Padua (Italy), University of the Basque Country (Spain), and Waikato University (New Zealand). He was a senior Fulbright Research Fellow in Athens, Greece (1979/80). Professor Worchel has authored or co-authored over 75 journal articles and 15 books in various areas of psychology. His most recent book, *Written in Blood: Ethnic Identity and the Struggle for Human Harmony*, examines the roots of ethnic violence and explores approaches to reduce this conflict. Professor Worchel conducts research in the areas of group dynamics, conflict and conflict resolution, intergroup relations, organizational psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and ethnic violence. He is presently funded by the National Science Foundation to examine approaches to reduce violent and protracted ethnic violence.