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Intergroup Discrimination

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The Henri Tajfel Experiments

Intergroup discrimination refers to the phenomenon where factions of a single group develop conflicts against each other as by-products of competition and prejudice.

Different social and psychological factors become roots of conflicts between groups. However, within a group, conflicts mostly root from psychological prejudice then developing into a more serious form of intergroup discrimination. Though not all conflicts between different groups stem from competition, it still cannot be avoided that people automatically discriminate against those who are not part of their own group. It also follows that since we instantly discriminate against the outsiders, we can also discriminate against others for no apparent reason aside from developed prejudice.

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Background of the Study

Henri Tajfel conducted a series of experiments on intergroup discrimination in Bristol City in 1970. Tajfel's idea came from a Slovene friend who spoke about stereotypes that existed regarding immigrant Bosnians who originated from a poorer region of Yugoslavia. This was then related to the stereotypes that existed for our own immigrants and their British-born children. The paper questions the reasons that attributed to these negative stereotypes.

Tajfel's experiments focused on the behavior of an individual towards both other in-group members and outgroup members. The subjects in the study were presented with a clear alternative to discriminating against the outgroup.

Methodology

All of the participants in Tajfel's study were aged 14 to 15 and attended the same educational institution in Bristol – same year group and occupied a common school house. A total of 64 individuals were asked to participate in the study.

The experiment consisted of 2 distinct parts. The first part aimed to establish an intergroup categorisation while the second part aimed to assess the effects of the said categorisation on intergroup behavior.

In the first part of the experiment, the group was randomly divided into two where each group consisted of 8 participants. The experimenters however told the participants that they were categorised according to their scores in tests they just previously took.

In the test, each of the participants was to allocate amounts to another group member without awarding any money to himself. They were next asked to allocate amounts to two members of the out-group. In the experimental condition, the participants were given a matrix where the top row contained the amounts they will be awarding to a fellow group member, and the bottom row contained amounts that will be awarded to members of the other group. The results later on showed whether subjects ended up discriminating against the out-group or not.

From the first part of the experiment, it was found that majority of the participants significantly allocated greater amounts to members of their own group compared to the outsiders. In the other two conditions, amounts were allocated in a fair manner.

On the second part of the study, the experimenters were aiming to find out the type of strategy used by the boys when allocating points.

Results

The primary aim given to the boys was to maximise the profit. However, they were given the choice whether to maximize the profit for everyone to enjoy, or for just their own group to enjoy. The results showed that a significant majority chose to allocate money for the good of only their own group.

It was also found that the boys were more concerned in creating as much difference as possible between the amounts allocated to each group than consolidating a greater amount

for everyone altogether; of course favouring their own respective groups. Tajfel infers that this is in itself an obvious form of discrimination caused by the segregation or categorisation.

Sources

Most of this article is based on this article: "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination" on <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/gary.sturt/tajfel.htm> ^[1]

Intergroup Discrimination Experiments of Henri Tajfel (1970)

Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination by Tajfel H. (1970) ^[2]

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[1] <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/gary.sturt/tajfel.htm>

[2] <http://www.holah.karoo.net/tajfestudy.htm>