

Robbers cave experiment

Psychology



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The Robbers Cave Experiment Muzafer Sherif was the first who tried to overcome limitation of motivational approaches. Having introduced the category of interaction and seeing a determinant of area of intergroup phenomena as a basis in it, i. e. in direct interaction, Sherif thereby planned a different way of analysis of this area in general. His target experiments were later recognized as classical and represented a starting point for the kind of the researches, which overcame a framework of actually interactional orientation in social psychology. These experiments were made in a summer camp for children. The administration of camp acted as an experimenter organizing and changing camp life.

In general it is possible to define four stages in Sherif's experiments. At the first of them, after arrival of the boys in camp, all-camp activity was organized, during which the boys had the time to establish friendship with each other. At the second stage they were divided into two groups in such a way that those, who managed to become friends earlier, appeared in different groups. At this stage intra-camp life was already organized separately for each group. The third stage consisted mainly of a number of competitions organized by the administration of the camp, in which one of groups became a winner, and another suffered a defeat. At the fourth stage the administration of a camp created difficulties in the activity of a camp, (breakage of a water supply system, malfunction of the truck bringing the food, etc.) which could be successfully resolved only on the condition of the combined efforts of the both groups. The fourth stage was entered only into the third and the last experiment, which differed from the first two also by one important point: they lacked the first stage as children came to camp already divided into two groups.

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It was easy to foresee the main results of these experiments: intergroup competition at the third stage leads to social and psychological effects, which are unambiguously associated with the intergroup conflict (Baumeister, 2007). The objective conflict of interests led to manifestation of the out-group hostility, aggression and negative out-group stereotypes. The situation considerably changed after the introduction of the fourth stage of the experiments characterized by the artificial creation of difficulties, which could be eliminated only with the combined efforts of the competing groups. Here it is possible to make a conclusion that if to provide, for instance, employees of an organization with the common task to implement for mutual benefit, the work would be more productive (Brief, 2005).

The results of studies of Muzafer Sherif weren't unexpected or essentially new. The general contribution of these researches is, however, very essential for studying of intergroup perspective in general. First of all, Sherif introduced group approach to research the intergroup relations when sources of intergroup hostility or cooperation are looked for not in the individual motivational factors, but in the features of the intergroup interaction itself, regardless of individual motivational structures (Whitley & Kite, 2010). It is very essential that the experiments were made on real, not on artificially created groups. Sherif managed to track the history of formation and development of the intergroup relations depending on the nature of intergroup interaction created experimentally. His main opponents — cognitive scientists had to recognize all these indisputable merits.

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