



TAJFEL ET AL. (1970, 1971)

Aim: To test the idea that prejudice and discrimination can occur even without group history

Social Identity Theory -

the idea of an individual's perception on self-concept, including adopting the norms and attitudes of those within your in-group

Tajfel carried out a number of studies to develop and test **social identity theory**. Tajfel et al. wanted to test the idea that prejudice and discrimination can occur between groups even if there is no history between them, and no competition. Having found prejudice between such **minimal groups**, Tajfel et al. wanted to investigate further into the possible causes.

Minimal Groups -

groups which have no history and no competition

EXPERIMENT 1: ESTIMATING NUMBERS OF DOTS

For the first of two experiments, 64 boys aged 14 and 15 were used. They were all from a comprehensive school in Bristol. They all knew each other very well and were split up into eight groups of eight boys each. The experiment was run in a laboratory. The experiment was designed to establish **in-group categorisation** (formation of the groups) and to assess the effect on behaviour of the group formations. To form the two groups, the boys were taken into a lecture room where forty clusters of varying numbers of dots were flashed onto a screen. They were asked to write down how many dots they thought there were each time on a score sheet. After they had estimated the number of dots:

- ❖ in condition 1, they were told that people constantly overestimate or underestimate the number
- ❖ in condition 2, they were told that some people are more accurate than others

Their judgements were then scored by one of the experimenters, and they were then randomly split into groups. They were told, in condition 1, that one group was the overestimators, and the other the underestimators; and in condition 2, they were told that one group was the better group at making judgements, and the other group worse.

The boys were told that the task used *real money* for rewards and punishments. They would know the code number of each boy and which group they were in, and would have to decide whether or not to allocate money to the other boys. They had to choose how much to reward or punish another boy in either their own group or the other group.

-14	-12	-10	-8	-6	-4	-2	-1	3	7	11	15	19	23
23	19	15	11	7	3	-1	-2	-4	-6	-8	-10	-12	-14

The experimenters showed the boys the type of matrix they would be using (similar to the above example), each one with 2 rows of 14 numbers. Those which were positive figures would represent amounts potentially rewarded to the boys; the negative numbers would be the amounts to be taken away from them. The boys could *not* allocate money to themselves, and had to work through a booklet of matrices.

The experimenter would call out "These are the rewards and punishments for member XX of your group" or "These are the rewards and punishments for member XX of the other group". They had to decide which pair of numbers to allocate to the boys, because one number from each pair would affect one boy and the other affecting another.

The boys had to make decisions about the rewards and punishments they would impose. They had three types of decision: 'in-group/in-group', 'in-group/out-group' or 'out-group/out-group'. If the boys allocated as much as possible to one boy, they were given a score of 14 (because there were 14 decisions for each row on each matrix). If they allocated as little as possible, the score was 1. For each decision they were allocating to two boys. Therefore, a fair score would be 7 because this would mean that they had allocated rewards (or punishments) equally.

Results




When decisions involved two boys, one from each group (an in-group/out-group decision), the average score was 9 out of 14. When boys were making in-group/in-group or out-group/out-group decisions, the average score was 7.5

It seemed that decisions about boys in the same groups were fairer than decisions when one boy was in the same group as the boy making the judgements and one boy was in the other group. A large majority gave more money to their own groups and showed **in-group favouritism**. This was found in all trials of this study.

EXPERIMENT 2: KLEE AND KANDINSKY PREFERENCES

This second experiment involved three new groups of 16 boys per group. The boys were shown twelve slides, showing paintings by foreign artists **Klee** and **Kandinsky**, six of each artist. The boys had to express a preference for one of the painters. The paintings were not signed, so that, in actual fact, the boys could be randomly assigned the groups, as again they had nothing to do with their choices, even though they were led to believe this was not the case.

The first experiment showed that forming groups led to in-group favouritism. The experimenters wanted to investigate this further by examining the factors leading to the boys making their decisions. They chose to investigate:

-  **maximum joint profit** – what was the most the two boys represented by each matrix would ‘receive’ from the boys?
-  **maximum in-group profit** – what was the most the boys would give to their in-group members?
-  **maximum difference** – what was the most difference between an in-group and out-group member benefiting the in-group members?

As in the first experiment, there were the same three conditions when making the choices. There were matrices as before, and again a choice was made of one pair of ‘rewards and punishments’. The experimenters could see if the boy had chosen the highest possible for his own group member, the lowest possible for a member of the other group, or a decision that was the lowest for both (or other similar patterns).

Results

Maximum joint profit did not seem to guide the boys’ choices. Maximum in-group profit and maximum difference in favour of the in-group worked against maximum joint profit. If the boys had a choice between maximum joint profit for all and maximum profit for their in-group, they acted on behalf of their own group. Even if giving more to the other group did not mean giving less to their own group, they still gave more to their own.

CONCLUSIONS

- Out-group discrimination was found and is easily triggered
- There is no need for groups to be in intense competition, this goes against the realistic conflict theory
- In the two experiments, all the boys needed was to see themselves as in an in-group and out-group situation, and discrimination ensued
- People acted according to the social norms that they had learnt, such as favouring the in-group
- The boys responded to the social norms of “groupness” and fairness and in general kept a balance between the two
- In real life “groupness” may override fairness, for example, if the group is more important than counting dots, or choosing a preference between Klee and Kandinsky
- Given the side effects of discrimination that were found in these experiments, teams in schools may not be a good idea