

Social Identity Research: Cialdini

Aim: Investigate the role of social identity in self esteem

Procedure

- This was a field study carried out on the campuses of 7 large American universities, which all had popular American football teams
- Researchers recorded what clothing students were wearing the Monday after a big football match was played against a rival university
- Researchers also called the students and asked them their opinion of their team's performance

Findings

- Students were far more likely to wear clothing associated with their university (like a T-shirt with the school logo) if their university team won the football match
- When asked to describe their team's performance, students were more likely to use first person pronouns (ex. "**We** played a great game") if the team won, and more likely to use third person pronouns (ex. "**They** didn't play well as a team") if the team lost

Conclusion

- Social identity (the groups you belong to) play an important role in self esteem
- To maintain a strong sense of self-esteem, people tend to closely associate themselves with a group when it is successful, and establish distance from a group when it fails

Evaluation

- This study involved natural observation of real world behavior, so ecological validity is high
- All participants were of a similar age (university students) and from the same culture (United States), so unclear of these results can be generalized to other age groups or cultures
- Not clear if these findings apply to other types of groups as well - such as national or religious groups - or only to sports teams. For example, if your country has a bad reputation for starting wars or violating human rights, will that cause you to identify with your country less? More research is needed on this

Social Identity Research: Tajfel

Aim: Investigate how even minimal groups affects behavior

Procedure

- British schoolboys (aged 14-15) were randomly divided into groups. In one experiment, they were divided into groups based on whether they overestimated or underestimated the number of dots on a picture, while in another, they were grouped based on whether they preferred the paintings of one artist or another
- After playing a number of competitive games, the participants were given the opportunity to divide money (or points) to members of each group

Results

- Most boys gave more money (or points) to members of their own group, and less money to members of the other group
- The majority of participants divided money (or points) between the groups in such a way as to **maximize the difference** between the groups. In other words, many participants would accept less money for their own group if it meant that the other group would receive an even greater loss of money
- Participants also rated their own group members as more likeable than the members of the other group

Conclusion

- This study supports social identity theory. People naturally categorize themselves into groups, identify with their own group, and seek to compare themselves favorable with opposing groups
- This study suggests that even random, trivial and meaningless groups still have a significant effect on our behavior, resulting in loyalty to our group and hostility to the out-group

Evaluation

- This study involved participants who were all British schoolboys aged 14-15. Teenage boys are known to be quite competitive, so it is questionable whether the same results would be seen in girls, adult participants, or participants from other cultures
- The study may have had **demand characteristics** - the boys may have felt the study was a competitive game to game the most money (or points) as possible, and hence acted accordingly