



Group Conflict

Dr Katie Sullivan



Introduction to Group Conflict...

- Tension, hostility, or competition between groups
- Often based on perceived differences or competition over resources.
- Underpins many forms of prejudice, discrimination, and societal division.

Examples:

- Immigration debates (e.g., "they're taking our jobs").
- Political polarization (e.g., left vs. right ideologies).
- Ethnic and religious tensions (e.g., sectarian conflict).

REALISTIC GROUP

CONFLICT THEORY (RGCT)

- ❖ Campbell (1965)
- ❖ Levine and Campbell (1972)
- ❖ Sherif (1966)



Robbers Cave Experiment (Sherif et al., 1961)



**In-group
Formation**

**Intergroup
Conflict**

**Conflict
Resolution
(Superordinate
Goals)**

Robbers Cave cont...

Key Psychological Insights

- Competition breeds conflict
- Group identity forms rapidly
- Superordinate goals reduce conflict

Theoretical Implications

- Supports Realistic Group Conflict Theory
- Challenges purely cognitive models of prejudice
- Influenced later theories

Critiques and Limitations

- Homogeneity of participants:
- Ethical concerns
- Artificial setting

Applications

- Education
- Workplace
- Conflict resolution

Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RGCT)

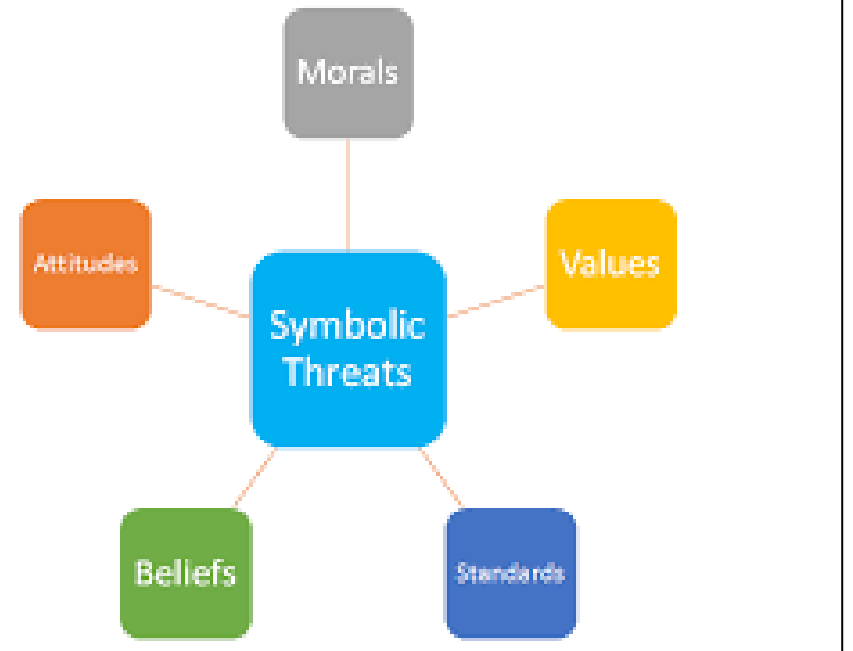
Group Conflict and Cooperation (Robbers Cave;
Sherif et al., 1961)

Ethnocentrism and Other Altruistic Motives
(Campbell, 1965)

Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes,
and Group Behavior (Levine & Campbell, 1972)

Realistic vs. Symbolic Threat

REALISTIC THREAT



SYMBOLIC THREAT

Realistic Threat

Psychological Mechanism

- Self-interest and group survival.
- Fear, anger, and hostility toward out-groups.

Some supporting Research

- Sherif et al. (1961)
- Esses et al. (2001)
- Quillian (1995)

Applications

- Anti-immigration rhetoric during economic downturns.
- Political campaigns emphasizing “us vs. them” resource competition.

Critiques

- Overemphasis on material factors
- Ignores symbolic and identity-based conflict

Symbiotic Threat

Psychological Mechanism

- cultural worldview defense and identity protection
- moral outrage, disgust, or fear

Some supporting Research

- Stephan & Stephan (2000)
- Sniderman et al. (2004)
- Sniderman et al. (2004)

Applications

- Resistance to immigration based on cultural differences.
- Opposition to LGBTQ+ rights framed as moral or religious conflict.

Critiques

- Subjectivity
- Overlap with realistic threat

Integrated Threat Theory (ITT; Stephan & Stephan, 2000)

Realistic
Threat

Symbolic
Threat

Intergroup
Anxiety

Negative
Stereotypes

Related Theories...

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1990)

Intergroup Emotion Theory (Mackie et al., 2000)

RELATIVE DEPRIVATION THEORY

RUNCIMAN (1966), WALKER & SMITH (2002)



ABSOLUTE
DEPRIVATION



RELATIVE
DEPRIVATION

RELATIVE DEPRIVATION THEORY

RUNCIMAN (1966), WALKER & SMITH (2002)

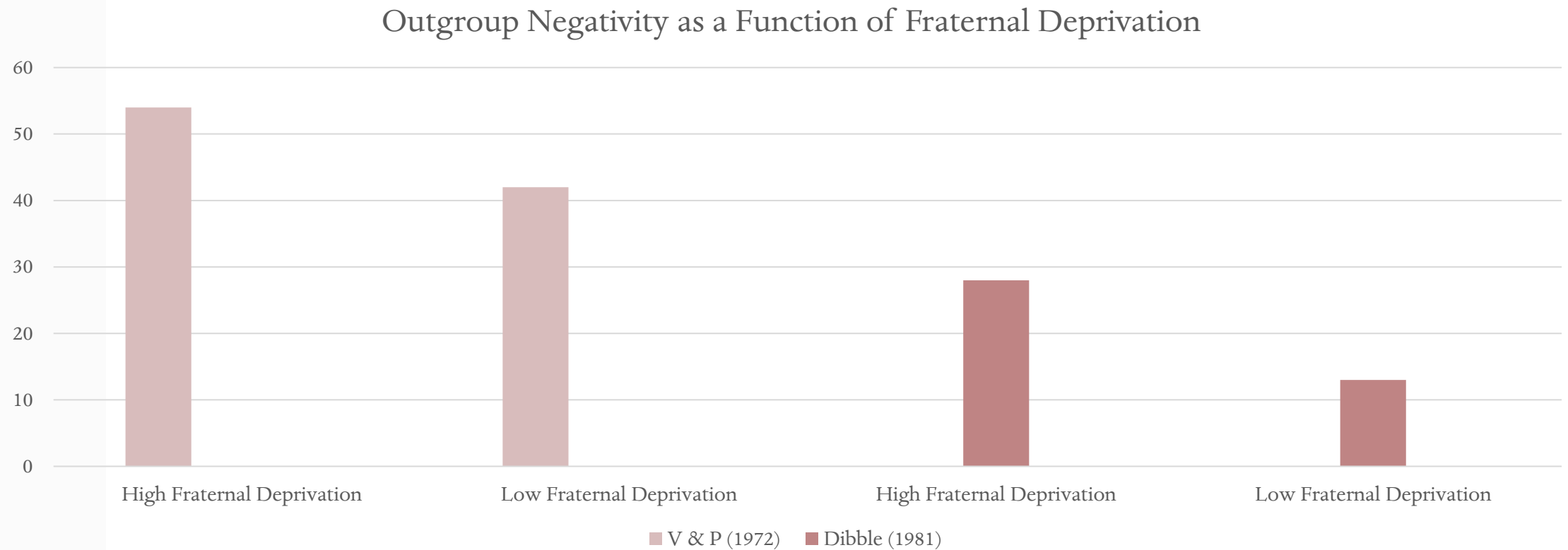


EGOISTIC
DEPRIVATION



FRATERNAL
DEPRIVATION

Relative Deprivation: Individual versus Group



ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES



WHO IS DESERVING
OF RESOURCES?





Thank you for listening