



**Perry, Gina. (2018). The Lost Boys: Inside Muzafer Sherif's Robbers Cave Experiment.
London: Scribe.**

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At just eleven years old a group of twenty-two boys set out to a remote summer camp where they were unknowingly about to create history and have their lives darkened forever. Gina Perry wrote the book, “The Lost Boys: Inside Muzafer Sherif’s Robbers Cave Experiment.”, as a way of addressing the preconception Muzafer Sherif and his researchers projected onto the Robbers Cave experiment. Perry with a Ph.D. in psychology, created her intensively researched book on the well-known experiment to append more information including recent discoveries that apply to the study, as well as, how the biases Sherif held affected his research and motivations. She was able to use her expertise to examine the results found in the original experiment which were that groups inflicting hostility towards one another are unable to revert their preconception of one another simply by combining groups. Then, she applied her own observations about prejudice, conflict, and contention to provide more clarity on the situation that occurred. Throughout the book, Perry demonstrates how Sherif’s background affected his research towards proving two groups experiencing conflict with each other can reach a compatible level of peace together using interdependence and cooperative tasks.

Gina Perry identifies Sherif as a parvenu throughout her book as she explores why his past had so heavily influenced his decisions leading to and during the Robbers Cave experiment. As

Perry pointed out, Sherif believed that people were not actually bad. Instead, he thought that we were taught to hate certain groups and encouraged to compete against them. As a reaction to his upbringing, it was no surprise, he wanted to prove individuals were inherently good. He demonstrated how he had turned the boys against each other by saying, “these “disturbed, vicious ... wicked youngsters” were actually boys who were “the ‘cream of the crop’ in their communities”(), as a way of showing even the vilest individuals could return to good-natured citizens. During World War One Sherif was still a child who unwillingly had to witness the horrors of mass murders against Armenian youth. He was forced to stand by as his classmates and friends were slaughtered simply because of their ethnicity. Perry believed these events led him desperately wanting to prove that hate against others is trained in the mind and not an impulse a human is born with. Perry concludes Sherifs backstory with an explanation of why these events affected why he let the experiment continue on for as long as they did. The need to teach the world how to be good again during the Cold War was his main priority evidently backed up by the fact this was his third summer camp study. It is important to see that these are simply theories Perry believes and are not supported with facts or evidence.

In previous studies completed by Sherif, he conducted similar research and found similar results. Perry mentions that the reason he saw the conclusions to be ‘failures’ was that the bonds between the split groups were still too strong. He thought these previous boys had too much compassion remaining for one another, so in each experiment, he increased the hostility in an attempt to concretely find evidence to prove his hypothesis. He intentionally prevented the two groups from developing friendships with the opposite side to avoid this issue in his 1954 study.

Gina Perry explored how this led to Sherif experiencing confirmation bias when he found the conclusion he wanted. He dismissed evidence that didn't support his findings such as how society is not a lawless environment and instead created a "choreographed enactment" (pp. 216) of what he wanted to see instead of what was realistic.

Perry continued to reflect on the choices of the experimenter and the reasons for the middle-class boys' actions in the Oklahoma summer camp in 1954. The young boys involved in the experiment were subdued into extreme violence where they conformed and displayed an incredible example of deindividuation. "Will used his head as a battering ram and threw himself at Red's stomach. They both fell, rolling and grabbing at each other, punching and struggling." This is a perfect example of how the boys were trained to seek each other out for a fight and display actions they wouldn't have been done previous to the camp. These children burned up flags, fought one another, and trashed their 'enemies' living quarters until their actions had gone too far and that part of the experiment was forced to come to a halt. Perry witnessed the trauma the children had gone through and wanted to listen to their perspectives. Fifty years after the experiment she revealed to the twenty-two boys that they were in fact the participants in the famous Robbers Cave study. Doug Griset a victim of the study explained that knives were given out as recompense after the camp held a competition designed to add tension between groups.

Continuously through the book, Perry displays the effects of the experiment on the youths by contacting the boys and listening to how their lives changed following the study. Doug Griset revealed while interviewing with Perry, "I don't like lakes, camps, cabins, or tents. My kids always said, 'Why is it, Dad, that you never want to go camping?'" (pp. 246), showing the developed a

phobia related to the setting of the camp which has impacted his entire life continuing on. Another child from the 'camp' named Dwayne explained that as he reached adolescent brain development, he began correcting his problems with the use of force. His conformity at Robbers Cave had imprinted onto him that violence is the first option to dealing with conflict. However, Perry states these children were not the only people affected by this study.

Perry also displayed the effects of the experiment on Muzafer Sherif and the psychology world. Sherif's longing to prove that hostility could be diminished by having enemies achieve a common goal had allowed his experiment to go too far to the point of severe psychological damage to the participants. His eagerness to show the world that different cultures and societies can intermingle and care for one another in the height of the cold war pushed him to keep the experiment going until it was too late. He violated today's current standards for ethics and failed to predict the outcome of his plans. For the field of psychology, the Robbers Cave experiment had a huge impact. Gina Perry in no way undercuts the value the research had on topics of conformity and the human mind, yet she continuously stresses in her book that the harm done to those 22 children will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Gina Perry's, "The Lost Boys: Inside Muzafer Sherif's Robbers Cave Experiment.", did have its issues including her own theories that had not been proven and her attempt to degrade the experiment due to its lack of ethics, failing to recognize the current ethical rules were not as strict in the 1950s. When seeing past the unnecessary added information her book provides insight on conformity, deindividuation, and confirmation bias. Teaching readers to investigate deeper into the researcher's findings because when people's lives get involved with the need to find

supportive results, contributing factors and opposing evidence get ignored. This book also highlights the importance of having ethics applied to experiments as the results can have lifelong effects on the participants such as her lost boys. Finally, this book was able to give the victims of the study a voice and clarity for their past allowing them to experience closure. The results of which make this book important to the families of the twenty-two youths and for psychologists analyzing the Robbers Cave study and will contribute to new research about closure. Academics in psychology and sociology will be able to use the data from this book efficiently.