Social Psychology

► How groups and cultural forces compel us to behave like saints and monsters

► Our actions are affected by:

norms – *rules, both obvious and subtle, that control social interactions*

roles – *social positions governed by norms*

culture – *shared rules & values that control behavior in a community/society*

Milgram – How far will people go?

► The Obedience Study – Can authority figures cause us to push aside our ethical standards?

► You better believe it.

► Everyone shocked the unlucky student and most went all the way, to **XXX!!**

Details

- ► The "student's" pleas and shrieks were heard but futile.

- ► Some protested, but only "The experiment requires that you continue." was enough to compel compliance, and more shocks.

- ► Others trembled, sweated, stuttered, and groaned, but kept pushing the button.

- ► Replicated over and over again.

But, if the *situation* changes ...

► A few situations or factors emerged in which some would say, "I won't do it!"

► Authority figure leaves, or lacks authority.

► Looking at the victim.

► Contradictory orders.

► Others lead the way.

► It's the **situation,** not the **person.**

Zimbardo's Prison Study

► Further proof of the power of *roles*

► Convincing prison-like setting

► Students at random divided into prisoners and guards

► Prisoners show distress

► Some guards get mean

► Two week project lasts six days

How could this happen?

► The power of roles & the *social situation*

► Uniforms

► Authority

► Were they just following orders?

► Easy relevance to Abu Gharib

► "The barrel corrupts anything it touches."

Factors ensuring obedience

► It's essential that people obey laws, but why do some go too far?

► Beyond consequences, why do some obey even when they feel it's wrong?

► **Passing responsibility –** " Just following orders."

► **Routine –** it starts to feel normal

► **Politeness –** we want to be liked

► **Entrapment –** once you get involved …

Social cognition

► *Social influences on thought, memory, perception, and belief*

► Now neuroscientists use brain imaging studies to study emotions and social relations, and …

► Why did he/she do that?

Attributions

► *We constantly try to explain the cause of our and other's behavior*

► Why is he always late?

► Why does she get upset so easily?

► Is it a question of *character* or the *situation?*

Two alternatives

► **Situational attributions**

► He is late because he is very busy.

► She's upset because she's under a lot of stress.

► **Dispositional attributions**

► He's late because he is selfish.

► She's always mad because she' a ……

Implications

► Pointing towards character or factors from the environment can have big impact.

► Happy couples *attribute* their successes to *disposition* and their struggles to the *situation*

► Unhappy pairs do the opposite

The Fundamental Attribution Error

► All to often, when we assess the actions of others we ignore the *situation* and focus on *disposition* or personality

► We pin nasty personality traits on others for performing certain actions, even if they are required to behave in that manner

► Very common in Western societies

The Self-Serving Bias

► While Westerners are quick to *attribute* **others** faults to personality flaws (disposition),

► They are quick to *attribute* their own mistakes to factors outside their control (situations)

► We take credit for our successes and blame others for our failings

Just-World Hypothesis

► We want, maybe have, to believe that the world is a fair place

► Accordingly, we believe that good people live well, while bad people suffer through hardship because of their misdeeds

► This comforts us, but it often leads to *blaming the victim*

► But bad things **do** happen to good people

► We cannot shrug away other's suffering

The Behavior of Individuals within Groups

► We act differently in groups

► The structure and dynamics of the group often push us into unexpected and inexplicable actions

Conformity

► *Acting based upon real or imagined group pressure*

► In the 50's, Solomon Asch showed how we can deny what we plainly see

► If enough people tell us a cat is beach ball, most of us will agree

► Now, in the US this has slightly changed

Is this good?

► In many ways, our strong inclination to conform is necessary and helpful

► Things go easier when people share values and attitudes

► Similarity builds a sense of community

► But there are many bad aspects to conformity

Groupthink

► *When members of a group suppress dissent and make poor decisions out of an exaggerated sense of conformity*

► Group dynamics stymie dissent and cause obvious risks to be overlooked

► Conformity at its worse, and most dangerous

Hallmarks of Groupthink

► Careful analysis of historic examples of groupthink has revealed the following characteristics

► **Illusions of Invincibility –** we are "the smartest guys in the room"

► **Self-censorship –** few dare to question

► **Dissent crushed –** the few are silenced

► **Illusions of unanimity**

The Price

▶ The Bay of Pigs

▶ NASA – *The Challenger* & *Columbia*

▶ Vietnam

▶ Iraq

Prevention

► Encourage alternative ideas

► Foster dissent

► Humility

Who could do that?

► Four powerful men stood between Lincoln and the White House

► They were better educated, more sophisticated, more stylish and openly contemptuous of his abilities

► But when he defeated them, he ignored their criticisms and invited them to serve on his cabinet

The Result

► They came to Washington, convinced that Lincoln was a fool

► They would push him aside and run the US

► Intense, often bitter disputes followed

► Some betrayed him

In the end

► Slowly, they realized that they had underestimated Lincoln

► His basic humanity, humility, and keen assessment of human nature proved his genius

► With their help, he freed the slaves and saved the United States

Safety in Numbers?

► You are suddenly struck with a medical emergency

► Where would you most likely find help?

In a crowded urban setting?

Or a lonely rural path?

The Diffusion of Responsibility

► If we think that someone else should or might do it, we won't

► *Bystander Apathy* – the Kitty Genovese tragedy

► *Social Loafing*

Deindividuation

► The power of crowds

► Uniforms

► Masks

On the other hand ….

► Maurice Cheeks to the rescue