

Social Psychology

- The study of how the **thoughts, feelings, and behaviors** of individuals are influenced by the **actual, imagined, or implied** presence of others.

Classic Social Psych Study



- Stanford Prison Experiment: Why are prisons so violent? Guards beat prisoners up, some prisoners beat other prisoners up.
- Dispositional explanation:
 - People who are sent to prison are passive or violent, people who work in prisons are domineering and cruel
- Situationist explanation:
 - The hierarchy system of prisons, plus the roles of prisoner and guard, plus deindividuation due to costumes and anonymity produce violence.

Stanford Prison Experiment
A Simulation Study of the Psychology of Imprisonment Conducted at Stanford University

Welcome to the Stanford Prison Experiment web site, which features an extensive slide show and information about this classic psychological experiment, including articles on the nature of **deindividuation**. What happens when you put good people in an evil place? Does humanity go over and, or does not? These are some of the questions we asked in the dramatic simulation of prison life conducted in the summer of 1971 at Stanford University.

How we went about testing these questions and what we found may interest you. Our detailed two-week investigation into the psychology of prison life had to be ended prematurely after only six days because of what the situation was doing to the college students who participated. In only a few days the guards became violent and the prisoners became depressed and showed signs of extreme stress. Please see our a slide that describes this experiment and answering what it tells us about the nature of human nature.

Philip A. Zimbardo
English Slide Show

Power turns good soldiers into 'bad apples' By Philip G. Zimbardo | Boston Globe, May 9, 2004

Stanford Prison Experiment
Slide Show

Types of Guards

In the 1971 study, a new relationship had formed between guards and prisoners. The guards no longer were just men. They were now **guards** and all their own behavior was now being seen and judged as such.

Some guards had a sense of humor. Some were very serious. Some were very cruel. Some were very kind. Some were very violent. Some were very passive. Some were very aggressive. Some were very obedient. Some were very rebellious. Some were very obedient. Some were very rebellious. Some were very obedient. Some were very rebellious.

Philip A. Zimbardo
English Slide Show

THE HORRIFYING PHOTOS of young Iraqis abused by American soldiers have shocked the world Now there is a rush to analyze human behavior, **blaming flawed or pathological individuals for evil and ignoring other important factors.**

Human behavior is much more under the control of situational forces than most of us recognize or want to acknowledge. In a situation that gives permission, many of us can be morphed into creatures alien to our usual natures.

Some of the necessary ingredients are:

- Diffusion of responsibility
- Anonymity,
- Dehumanization,
- Peers who model harmful behavior.



Zimbardo's Hypothesis

- Situational factors will outweigh personality traits, producing role-congruent behaviors – cruel guards, passive prisoners – in anyone.
 - Important factors:
 - Diffusion of responsibility – many people are to blame if anyone's questioned
 - Anonymity – people don't feel easily identifiable
 - Modeling of negative behaviors by peers in same role
 - Power differentials – power only goes in one direction, down
 - How were these factors present in the Stanford study
 - How may have they been present in the Iraqi guard/prisoner situation?

Group Activity

- Design a lab experiment that tests the effects of one of these factors on role-congruent behavior (doing what the situation demands instead of what you may think is right)
 - **Diffusion of responsibility** – many people are to blame if anyone's questioned
 - **Anonymity** – people don't feel easily identifiable
- For example:
 - With airport security, does **anonymity** (wearing a uniform, a nametag with only one's first name, and tinted glasses) make it easier to grope passengers?
 - In a game of dodge ball, does **diffusion of responsibility from being in a group** affect the level of aggressiveness against other team members?
- Use your imagination - design a lab experiment that manipulates one of these factors to test its effect on role-congruent behavior in some setting.
- Say how you're going to measure your independent and dependent variables.

Research Methods in Social Psychology

Experimental Method

Experimental Method:

- One or more **independent variables** is systematically varied for randomly assigned participants.
- The relationships between independent variables and dependent variables are assessed.
 - What are the IVs and DVs in your experiments?

Judgment vs. Impact Experiments

- **Judgment experiments:** participants are observers, asked to evaluate stimulus materials presented by an experimenter.
 - Person perception and stereotyping research –
 - Dissertation a friend of mine did
 - Inform participant of ethnicity, race, or sex of a person they have to judge.
 - Give other information (e.g., information about career goals)
 - See how ethnicity, race or sex information affects interpretation of other information
 - Benefits: Lots of control over experiment
 - Costs: not too involving
- **Impact experiments:** experiments in which people are active participants in an unfolding series of events, and have to react to these events as they occur.
 - Group process research
 - **Interventions** that are tested experimentally
 - Benefits: Involving
 - Costs: Lower control

Control vs. Impact

- **Control:** being able to standardize procedures and stimuli, and randomly assign participants
- **Impact:** participant involvement in experiment.
- Often in conflict.
- Judging woman's HIV risk by dress (study by UConn psych grad students a few years ago)
- Do men judge woman as being more likely to have HIV if she is dressed in "revealing" clothes or non-revealing clothes.
- **Study 1: High Control Judgment Study:**
 - Showed participants videotapes of two women, dressed either in revealing or nonrevealing clothes.
 - Participants rated women on attractiveness, revealingness of clothing, likelihood of HIV infection
 - It worked, but only for one of the female stimulus persons (still a control problem, stimulus standardization).
- **Study 2: Low Control Impact Study**
 - Same two women interacted with college student participants at UConn bar at night
 - Then participants were asked to rate stimulus women on the same dimensions as Study 1.
 - Higher impact: actual interaction, in a real setting
 - Didn't work at all.
 - Depended on interaction
 - Depended on time of night it took place
 - Depended on who handed out the survey

Classic Impact Experiment

- Aronson, E., & Mills, J. (1959). Effect of severity of initiation on liking for a group. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 59, 177-181.
 - "Persons who go through a great deal of trouble or pain to attain something tend to value it more highly than persons who attain the same thing with a minimum of effort."

Research question:

- Is severity of initiation related to group preference, when motivation for admission is held constant?

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

- **Cognitive Dissonance Theory:** we try to maintain consistency between our thoughts and behaviors.
- When thoughts (or thoughts and behaviors) are inconsistent, we experience dissonance, an unpleasant state.
 - If we hate radishes and eat them of our own free will, we feel dissonance.
 - If we think we're a nice person and we behave cruelly to someone, we feel dissonance.
- We're motivated to reduce dissonance by changing thoughts or behaviors, and it's easier to change thoughts.
 - We decide we love radishes, or that we were tricked into eating them.
 - We decide we're evil, or we blame our victim and say they deserved it, or liked it.

Dissonance and Group Membership

- Even if we are attracted to a group, there will be **negative aspects** to the group.
- If a person undergoes an **unpleasant initiation** to get into the group, two cognitions are dissonant:
 - There are things about this group that **I do not like**
 - I have gone through an **unpleasant initiation** to gain admission
- To resolve this dissonance you have to do one of these:
 - Convince one's self that the initiation was not unpleasant, **OR**
 - Exaggerate the positive characteristics of the group and minimize its negative aspects
- With very **severe initiations**, the first option is not really available, so one has to overestimate the attractiveness of the group to reduce dissonance

Cover Story

- Participant was told she was joining an ongoing group discussing the psychology of sex.
- The experiment was about “group discussion processes.” Sex was chosen because it was an interesting topic.
- To reduce embarrassment, each group member was supposedly in a different room, communicating with the rest of the group through microphones.
- Before joining the group, participant had to be tested to see if she could discuss sex freely.

Experimental Conditions

- **Control condition** – Participant told she was now a member of the group, with no test.
- **Initiation conditions.** Participant told she must undergo “embarrassment test” reading aloud sexually oriented material to the experimenter.
- Experimenter would make a clinical judgment of her embarrassment, based on hesitation, blushing, etc., and decide if she could participate.
 - **Severe initiation condition** – The participant read 12 obscene words from 3X5 cards, read aloud two vivid descriptions of sexual activity from contemporary novels.
 - **Mild initiation condition** – read 5 words related to sex but not obscene.

Independent Variable

- The variable an experimenter changes or varies to see if it has an effect on some other variable.
- What was it?
- **Severity of initiation;** Whether or not the participant had to read obscene words and passages.

Incredibly Important: Manipulation Check

- **An independent measure of the effectiveness of the experimental treatment.**
 - *What could they have checked?*
 - Did participants think the severe initiation was actually severe?
- What other uses are there for manipulation checks?*
- **Internal analyses** – studying just participants for whom the manipulation “worked.”
 - “Whoops” factor
- **How could you incorporate manipulation checks into the experiments you designed?**

Dependent Variable

- **The variable a researcher measures to see if it is influenced by the independent variable; the researcher hypothesizes that the dependent variable will depend on the level of the i.v.**
- *What were the dependent variables in this experiment?*
 - Attraction to group; Participants’ ratings of the group on scale.
- What other kinds of measures could have been used?

Demand Characteristics

- “The totality of cues which convey an experimental hypothesis to the subject”
- These cues that convey an experimental hypothesis to the subject may affect their behavior.
- A subject's behavior in any experimental situation will be determined by two sets of variables:
 - (a) those which are traditionally defined as experimental variables and
 - (b) the perceived demand characteristics of the experimental situation.
- Boring experiments are interpreted as “test of determination”
- Cover stories are used to reduce demand characteristics.
- What might have happened if the participants knew the hypothesis of the Aronson and Mills experiment prior to going in?
- How about in the Zimbardo experiment?
- How about in your experiment?

Unobtrusive or Nonreactive Dependent Variables

- DVs that aren't subject to biased responses
- Examples:
 - Is a painting in a museum popular?
 - There will be increased wear on the carpet near it.
 - Did a dental flossing lecture work?
 - Students will have cleaner teeth the next day.
 - Did a safer sex intervention for commercial sex workers work?
 - There will be more condoms discarded in the park they work in.
 - What nonobtrusive measures could be incorporated in your experiment?
