

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE REAL WORLD

OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY MILGRAM (1963)

"The social psychology of this century reveals a major lesson: often it is not so much the kind of person a man is as the kind of situation in which he finds himself that determines how he will act."
(Milgram, 1974)

MILGRAM'S RESEARCH (1960-63)

- **1,000** subjects in **18** different experiments
- **Predicted results:** 120 - 150 volts maximum
- **Actual results:** ALL 40 in base-line condition went to 300 volts
- **Actual results:** 26 out of 40 went to maximum 450 volts

DISTANCING: THE 'COMFORT ZONE'

Violence is often easier when there is a physical distance between perpetrator and the victim (e.g. Milgram, 1963)

OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY

- Milgram (1963) provided evidence that the characteristics of the **situation** are sufficient to cause people to demonstrate destructive obedience.
- This is a product of the **sequential** nature of action and the process of **agentic shift**.

"The willingness of Germans to tolerate the most offensive behaviour from anyone wearing a uniform or official insignia was something that always surprised Western visitors" (Craig, 1980 *The Germans*)

THE 'FINAL SOLUTION'

THE OBEDIENCE ALIBI (MANDEL, 1998)

- Milgram's findings have been used to support the idea that Holocaust perpetrators were 'only following orders'
- These conclusions are unjustified when compared with actual Holocaust events
- Relying on an obedience explanation for events of the Holocaust detracts attention away from other important factors and effectively exonerates Holocaust perpetrators of any blame.

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

- **Mandel (1998)** suggests that Milgram's monocausal emphasis ignored many other more plausible explanations for Holocaust events.
- **Goldhagen (1996)** identifies 'eliminationist anti-semitism', and not obedience as the primary motivation for perpetrators' actions.

"We must not forget that when the Nazi plans were boldly proclaimed, they were so extravagant, that the world refused to take them seriously"

Justice Robert H. Jackson,
Chief US Counsel to the Nuremberg War Trials

Muhammed Abdul Bari
Head of the Muslim
Council of Britain
November, 2007

"Every society has to be really careful so the situation doesn't lead us to a time when people's minds can be poisoned as they were in the 1930s. If your community is perceived in a very negative manner, and poll after poll says that we are alienated, then Muslims begin to feel very vulnerable. We are seen as creating problems, not as bringing anything and that is not good for any society."

DEHUMANIZATION

"A redefinition of another person or group as not deserving the protection due to members of our species (Charny, 1999)"

DEHUMANIZATION

The psychological process of devaluing or demonizing the enemy, making them seem less than human and hence not worthy of moral consideration.

RAPE AS DEHUMANISATION

- Over 20,000 Muslim girls and women were raped during atrocities in Bosnia.
- Estimated that Iraqi soldiers raped 5,000 Kuwaiti women during invasion of Kuwait.
- During the civil war in Rwanda, 500,000 women and girls suffered brutal forms of sexual violence, including gang-rape and sexual mutilation, after which many of them were killed (Oosterveld, 1998)

RAPE AS DEHUMANISATION

This was not a case of soldiers whose morals had been loosened by the hardships of war, but a case of men "thriving in the dark atmosphere of the dehumanization of those believed to be enemies"

(Judge Florence Mumba summing up at the trial of three Bosnian soldiers convicted for the rape of Muslim women in the village of Foca in 1992)

**THE STANFORD
PRISON EXPERIMENT**
(Haney, Banks and Zimbardo, 1972)

RESERVE POLICE BATTALION 101

Browning (1992) saw many similarities between the actions of **Reserve Police Battalion 101** and subjects in **Zimbardo's prison simulation study**

WHY ARE THEY SIMILAR?

Zimbardo found...

- Approx one-third of guards were 'cruel and tough'
- About half were 'tough but fair'
- Less than 20% were 'good guards'

➤ Browning found...

- A nucleus of 'enthusiastic killers'
- Larger group who 'performed' only when assigned killing duties
- Less than 20% were 'refusers and evaders'

No evidence that *either* group was self-selected on the basis of aggressive personality characteristics

A VALUABLE LESSON?

Zimbardo has applied a social psychological perspective – notably the findings from the **Stanford Prison Experiment** to the abuses committed by American soldiers in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison.

ABU GHRAIB

Dr. Philip Zimbardo said that while the rest of the world was shocked by the images from Iraq, "I was not surprised that it happened. I have exact, parallel pictures of prisoners with bags over their heads from the Stanford Prison study", he said. At Stanford and in Iraq, he added: "It's not that we put bad apples in a good barrel. We put good apples in a bad barrel. The barrel corrupts anything that it touches."

[New York Times, May 6 2004]

When the Abu Ghraib prison abuses in Iraq came to light in 2004 there were striking similarities with the SPE. Isolated within the confines of the prison, a group of guards appeared to expand their assigned roles to include horrific acts of abuse against Iraqi prisoners.

Jail abuse likened to Abu Ghraib

[BBC News 24 Monday, 17 January, 2005]

Abuse of youngsters at a jail in West London has been compared to that at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison. Details of a serious assault on an inmate at Feltham Young Offenders Institution emerged at the inquiry into the murder of Zahid Mubarek.

It heard how one man was forced to strip before polish was smeared on him. "This is torture by prison officers on a defenceless prisoner," said Suresh Grover. He called for a national response to the treatment of inmates, and said the actions of the prison officers was "to humiliate him and dehumanise him".

Mr Grover said it was similar to the experience suffered by prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and called for a national response to the allegations.

SELF-DESTRUCTIVE OBEDIENCE IN THE AIRPLANE COCKPIT

- One context for the obedience dynamic is the airplane cockpit.
- The situation of a captain with too much authority who is in error can have disastrous consequences (Tarnow, 2000)

Brazil plane crash blamed on pilot error

[ABC News July 29, 2007]

Pilot error was responsible for a crash that killed nearly 200 people. On July 17, a TAM airline Airbus 320 carrying 187 people overran the runway while landing at Sao Paulo's Congonhas airport, crossed a road and slammed into an airport building.

Investigators found that one of the levers that controlled the jet's turbines was in the wrong position. While the left turbine was thrust in reverse and was helping the plane slow down, the right one was accelerating.

Contrary to earlier reports the plane did not skid on the wet runway, nor did the plane's brakes malfunction. Key information was obtained from the plane's black boxes.

MILGRAM'S RESEARCH (1960-63)

Proximity of authority - closer the authority - greater the obedience

Institutional context - obedience high in high status setting and drops in lower status setting

Hesitant challenging - Teacher's objections to giving shocks often hesitant and easily overruled by the experimenter

Lack of monitoring - Teacher accepts authority's definition of the situation, which does not include the choice of disobedience

HOW RELEVANT IS MILGRAM'S RESEARCH TO THE COCKPIT?

Role of 'experimenter' = the airplane captain

Role of the 'teacher' = the first officer

Harm to the learner = the aircraft crashing

HOW RELEVANT IS MILGRAM'S RESEARCH TO THE COCKPIT?

Milgram's experimenter was given additional authority by the *context* of the experiment. This decreased when the experiment was repeated in less prestigious surroundings.

In the US, the Code of Federal Regulations states that "...the pilot in command of an aircraft is directly responsible for, and is the final authority as to the operation of that aircraft."

HOW RELEVANT IS MILGRAM'S RESEARCH TO THE COCKPIT?

National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

Reviewed all serious aircraft accidents (75) in the US between 1978 and 1990 where:

- 1) A voice recorder was available on the plane
- 2) NTSB had conducted a major investigation
- 3) Flight crew actions were a causal or contributing factor in the crash

Resulted in 37 accidents under these criteria

HOW RELEVANT IS MILGRAM'S RESEARCH TO THE COCKPIT?

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Lack of monitoring

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- ❖ NTSB report found major '**monitoring/challenging**' errors in 19 of the 37 accidents investigated.
- ❖ As initial total was 75 accidents, suggests that 25% could have been prevented by monitoring/challenging.
- ❖ If monitoring/challenging errors are due to excessive obedience, this may cause 25% of *all* airplane accidents.
