Social Psychology

The last lecture!!!

Social Attribution Theory

• Imagine you are driving and you get cut off… what do you think of the person that just cut you off?

• Are you more likely to:
  – Give them a break and believe that they didn’t mean to
  – Figure that they are a crappy driver and should be off the road- How DARE they!

Now….

• Imagine that you are that driver that cut someone off… (you know you’ve done it)

• Why did you do it?
  – Because you didn’t realize that you had to get over that quickly…
  – Because you are a crappy driver and shouldn’t be on the road

Fundamental Attribution Error

• More likely to attribute bad behavior of others to their personality and not to the situation

• This is the opposite of what we do for ourselves
  – More likely to say that the situation caused our own bad behavior

Interesting Quote

• “Calling 9/11 senseless, mindless, insane, or the work of madmen is wrong… it fails to adopt the perspective of the perpetrators, as an act with a clearly defined purpose that we must understand in order to challenge it most effectively.”
  – Phillip Zimbardo

Social Attitudes

• Attitude: feelings, often based on our beliefs, that predispose us to respond in a particular way to objects, people, and events

• Can attitudes affect actions?
  – Of course
  – If we believe that someone is mean, we may act differently towards them
Actions affect attitudes too

- Foot in the door phenomenon
  - Tendency for people that agree to do something small to comply later with a larger request
  - Korean war vets
    - Through small steps eventually were manipulated into believing that communism is good and capitalism is bad

“Drive Carefully” sign experiment

- “Would you display a large ugly sign in your front yard?”
  - 17% of people asked said yes
- “How about a small 3 inch tall sign?”
  - Nearly all agreed
  - Two weeks later, 76% of those 3 inch sign homes agreed to display that large ugly sign that most wouldn’t post originally

Stanford Prison Study

- Phillip Zimbardo
- Began with 24 arrests made in Northern California
  - Subjects had responded to an ad in the newspaper to participate in a role playing prison experiment
  - Fingerprints were taken
  - Miranda rights were read

Population

- 24 average, middle class, healthy males
- Had over 70 applicants
  - Able to pick an “average” sample

Once in prison

- Divided into 2 groups
  - Either a prisoner or a guard
- A prison was set up in the basement of the psychology building, with the help of a consultant
  - Installed an intercom system in each room to make announcements and to monitor what the prisoners were saying about each other

Prisoners

- Taken to the prison blindfolded
- Greeted by a warden once they arrived
  - Told just how serious their offenses were
Humiliation…

- Prisoners were strip searched
- Doused with a spray to eliminate lice
- Forced to wear a dress with no underwear
- Shackles on feet
  - Not typical prison attire- wanted to remind them of where they were for the sake of the experiment

A few more things

- Prisoners were assigned ID numbers and forced to wear caps that would minimize their individuality
- No rules given about enforcement techniques
  - Guards could make their own up

Take a moment…

- Predict what is going to happen in this situation…
- How will the experiment end?

First major meeting

- The prisoners were awakened at 2:30AM by the guards for a count
  - This happened multiple times often at night
- Brakes the prisoner’s morale
- Punishment in the form of pushups

Day 2

- Prisoners rebelled and took their hats off, removed their numbers, barricaded themselves in their cells
- What would the guards do?
  - Use force against force
  - Forced the prisoners away from the doors with fire extinguishers

To the extreme?

- The guards broke into each cell, stripped the prisoners naked, took the beds out, forced the ringleaders of the prisoner rebellion into solitary confinement, and generally began to harass and intimidate the prisoners.
Psychological Tactics

- Guards decided to use psychological tactics instead of physical ones
  - One of the three cells was designated as a "privilege cell." The three prisoners least involved in the rebellion were given special privileges. They got their uniforms back, got their beds back, and were allowed to wash and brush their teeth. The others were not.
  - Privileged prisoners also got to eat special food in the presence of the other prisoners who had temporarily lost the privilege of eating. The effect was to break the solidarity among prisoners.

Messing with them

- After a few days of the privilege cell, the guards randomly switched the prisoners around, which confused them
  - Prisoners began to suspect each other of being informers (to gain special privileges)

Zimbardo’s Words

- Less than 36 hours into the experiment, Prisoner #8612 began suffering from acute emotional disturbance, disorganized thinking, uncontrollable crying, and rage. In spite of all of this, we had already come to think so much like prison authorities that we thought he was trying to "con" us – to fool us into releasing him.
- When our primary prison consultant interviewed Prisoner #8612, the consultant chided him for being so weak, and told him what kind of abuse he could expect from the guards and the prisoners if he were in San Quentin Prison. #8612 was then given the offer of becoming an informant in exchange for no further guard harassment. He was told to think it over.
- During the next count, Prisoner #8612 told other prisoners, "You can't leave. You can't quit." That sent a chilling message and heightened their sense of really being imprisoned. #8612 then began to act "crazy," to scream, to curse, to go into a rage that seemed out of control. It took quite a while before we became convinced that he was really suffering and that we had to release him.

#819

- The only prisoner who did not want to speak to the priest was Prisoner #819, who was feeling sick, had refused to eat, and wanted to see a doctor rather than a priest. Eventually he was persuaded to come out of his cell and talk to the priest and superintendent so we could see what kind of a doctor he needed. While talking to us, he broke down and began to cry hysterically, just as had the other two boys we released earlier. I took the chain off his foot, the cap off his head, and told him to go and rest in a room that was adjacent to the prison yard. I said that I would get him some food and then take him to see a doctor.
  - While I was doing this, one of the guards lined up the other prisoners and had them chant aloud: "Prisoner #819 is a bad prisoner. Because of what Prisoner #819 did, my cell is a mess, Mr. Correctional Officer." They shouted this statement in unison a dozen times.
#819: more

- As soon as I realized that #819 could hear the chanting, I raced back to the room where I had left him, and what I found was a boy sobbing uncontrollably while in the background his fellow prisoners were yelling that he was a bad prisoner. No longer was the chanting disorganized and full of fun, as it had been on the first day. Now it was marked by utter conformity and compliance, as if a single voice was saying, "#819 is bad." I suggested we leave, but he refused. Through his tears, he said he could not leave because the others had labeled him a bad prisoner. Even though he was feeling sick, he wanted to go back and prove he was not a bad prisoner.
- At that point I said, "Listen, you are not #819. You are [his name], and my name is Dr. Zimbardo. I am a psychologist, not a prison superintendent, and this is not a real prison. This is just an experiment, and those are students, not prisoners, just like you. Let's go."
- He stopped crying suddenly, looked up at me like a small child awakened from a nightmare, and replied, "Okay, let's go."

The end

- The study was planned to last 2 weeks
- It lasted 6 days
- Couldn’t justify keeping it going
  - Parents were shocked and the emotional toll was obvious