

Workshop: Challenging common misconceptions in social psychology – set of student tasks on four topics

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1. Bystander effect (Levine: Helping in emergencies Revisiting Latan and Darley's bystander studies, 2012)

Murder of Kitty Genovese (13 March 1964) made a newspaper headlines because of assumed non-intervention from witnesses. The story was that: For more than half an hour 38 respectable, law abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a women in three separate attacks...

This was a shocking statement and the following public discussion exaggerated breakdown of moral and social values in urban population. Cities were understood as a space that dehumanize people, who became less empathetic, focus only on themselves, as if "possessed by devils" as psychologist John Darley observed.

Psychologists John Darley and Bibb Latan, inspired by the Genovese case, proposed that the lack of intervention was due to social psychological factors rather than moral failure and ethical breakdown. They asked questions such as: How might anyone in that situation be influenced not to respond? What influences reach the person from the group? Latan and Darley reasoned that first people need to define the situation as an emergency and next they look for others to see their actions.

Darley and Latan conducted experiments simulating emergencies to study how the presence of others affects an individual's willingness to help. They varied the number of bystanders in scenarios like seizures or fire alarms and found that more bystanders led to less and slower intervention. They attributed this to "diffusion of responsibility," where individuals feel less compelled to act with more people present, and "pluralistic ignorance," where inaction by others discourages individual intervention. Despite strong evidence for these concepts, further research also acknowledged limitations to their approach.

However, recent studies have corrected the original narrative about Kitty Genovese, showing fewer witnesses and more intervention than previously reported, but the myth of unhelpful bystanders persists.

In further experiments the relationship between perpetrator and the victim was identified as a key predictor or intervention. For instance strangers seem to be more willing to intervene if they believed perpetrator and victim were strangers and not intimate or if they share a group membership with the victim.

Current research explores how groups can have also a positive impact on helping, particularly via shared social identity derived from a group membership. This stream or research suggests that behaviour in a collective setting can be both pro-social or anti-social depending on not only number of other witnesses but also on of what kind of identities are experienced as important in the given context and what kind of actions those guide. For instance a study by Levine and colleagues primed subjects for importance of their football fan identity and in the experimental situation, subjects were more likely to help people wearing football jerseys.

Further research is conducted exploring on what conditions groups can promote bystander interventions.

Questions:

1. What was the primary reason John Darley and Bibb Latané believed bystanders failed to intervene in the Kitty Genovese case?
 - A) Lack of moral values in urban settings
 - B) Fear of becoming victims themselves
 - C) Social psychological factors
 - D) Legal consequences of intervening

2. Which concept explains why individuals might feel less compelled to act when more people are present?
 - A) Group cohesion
 - B) Social facilitation
 - C) Diffusion of responsibility
 - D) Collective efficacy

3. What is the significance of recent studies in relation to the Kitty Genovese case?
 - A) They confirmed the original narrative of widespread bystander inaction.
 - B) They debunked the myth of unhelpful bystanders by revealing the true extent of intervention.
 - C) They concluded that the original narrative was entirely accurate.
 - D) They emphasized the importance of bystander training programs.

4. According to recent studies, what factor can significantly influence the likelihood of a bystander intervening?
 - A) The time of day
 - B) The relationship between the perpetrator and the victim
 - C) The weather conditions
 - D) The size of the victim

5. How does shared social identity affect bystander intervention, according to current research?
 - A) It has no significant effect on intervention.
 - B) It decreases the likelihood of intervention due to increased anonymity.
 - C) It increases the likelihood of intervention, especially when the victim shares an identity with the bystander.
 - D) It only affects intervention if the bystander is in a leadership position within the group.

2. Conformity (Hornsey, Jetten: Conformity. Revisiting Asch's line-judgement studies, 2012)

For decades, psychologists have studied why we often conform to others' views despite clear evidence that these views are wrong. A pivotal study in this field was Solomon Asch's line-judgment experiments, which demonstrated how task characteristics and social context can significantly pressure individuals into conformity.

In a study framed as a test of visual judgment, group of subjects were shown cards with lines and asked to match them. Initially, the task appears straightforward, with participants answering in sequence, the real subject often going last. However, partway through, confederates of the researcher deliberately give wrong answers, consistently backed by others. Faced with this, 76% of participants conformed to the incorrect answer at least once. It was distressing for participants to face a majority apparently perceiving things differently, footage reveals them squinting and angling for a better view.

Asch's experiments are typically interpreted as demonstrating normative influence, where the fear of standing out drives people to conform. In one variation, conformity decreased when just one other participant dissented. However, ridicule was directed at a lone confederate providing wrong answers. Follow-up studies showed that private answer recording, even after hearing others, led to almost no conformity. This suggests the power of informational influence—being swayed by the opinions of others in the original study.

Asch's experiments garnered significant attention for demonstrating why people conform to the majority, seemingly without critical thought. This tendency to conform has been linked to diverse behaviors, including adherence to Nazi propaganda, eating disorders, and football hooliganism, suggesting that individuals in group settings often succumb to peer pressure.

Is conformity truly a weakness or merely a rational response to group dynamics? After Asch's experiment, many participants explained their conformity by not wanting to appear foolish or disrupt the study. Some thought the first incorrect answer was due to visual impairment and didn't want to embarrass that person. Although many conformed despite knowing the correct answer, others genuinely convinced themselves they were mistaken, suspecting an optical illusion rather than believe that many could be wrong.

Among those who resisted conformity were two groups: one confident in their answers, unaffected by the majority, and another who doubted the majority but still voiced their own perceptions. Even those sure of their opinions found the experience unsettling but felt relief after the debriefing. Participants rationalized their responses by forming theories about why the majority gave wrong answers, justifying either conformity or non-conformity as they sought to resolve cognitive dissonance. Claims that people were blindly following the majority are misleading; their decision-making was an active process.

People aren't indifferent to others in groups; they care about peer perception. Yielding to majority pressure isn't mindless; it reflects a desire for group harmony and consensus. Accepting influence is vital for group cohesion. Yet, the study isn't just about conformity; around 25% never conformed, challenging the notion of group uniformity. Social change often begins with individuals questioning the majority's views, emphasizing the complexity of group dynamics.

Questions:

1. In a study framed as a test of visual judgment, group of subjects were shown cards with lines and asked to match them. Initially, the task appears straightforward, with participants answering in sequence, the real subject often going ____.

- a) first
- b) last
- c) second

2. Asch's experiments are typically interpreted as demonstrating normative influence, where the fear of standing out drives people to ____.

- a) argue
- b) dissent
- c) conform

3. Asch's experiments garnered significant attention for demonstrating why people conform to the majority, seemingly without critical thought. This tendency to conform has been linked to diverse behaviors, including adherence to ____ propaganda.

- a) Nazi
- b) democratic
- c) socialist

4. Yielding to majority pressure isn't mindless; it reflects a desire for group harmony and ____.

- a) conflict
- b) disruption
- c) consensus

7. Focusing only on conformity paints an unequal portrait of group life. About 25% participants never conformed, challenging the notion of group ____.

- a) uniformity
- b) conformity
- c) coherence

3. Obedience (Reicher, Haslam: Obedience. Revisiting Milgram's shock experiments, 2012)

Interested in human capacity for evil, Milgram recruited volunteers from diverse backgrounds for a supposedly memory and learning experiment at Yale University. Upon arrival, they encountered an experimenter and another individual, unaware that the latter was a confederate. The experimenter, wearing a grey lab coat, explained the study's focus on punishment's effects on learning. Using a rigged draw, volunteer became the teacher, while the other, the learner. They proceeded to a separate room, where the learner was equipped with electrodes.

Both the learner and the experimenter adhered to prepared scripts. In the baseline study, the learner mentioned a mild heart condition and responded distinctly to various shock levels, audible to the teacher despite being in another room. However, after 330 volts, the learner ceased all responses. The experimenter's script was adaptable; if the teacher showed reluctance, the experimenter employed a set of predetermined prods.

1. Please continue,
2. The experiment requires that you continue,
3. It is absolutely essential that you continue
4. You have no other choice, you must go on

The prods were given in escalating series, with higher-level prods used only if lower-level ones failed. Teachers were assured there was no permanent tissue damage, emphasizing the learner's need to learn all the words correctly. In the baseline condition, 26 out of 40 participants administered shocks up to the maximum level. Among those who refused, most (6) did so at the 150-V level (strong to very strong shock), while others stopped at various higher levels.

After the session, participants underwent an extensive post-experimental procedure, including reassurance that the shocks were not real and meeting with the learner, who affirmed their goodness. They later received a full report and questionnaire assessing their experience. Milgram conducted various study variants with different scripts, settings and participant numbers and gender. The studies revealed obedience levels ranging from over 90% to 0%, illustrating both obedience and disobedience. Participants seemed to obey legitimate authority figures providing clear guidance, with most stopping at 150-V, often the first time the learner demanded to quit.

While ethical constraints prevent replication, analyzing archived materials offers insights. Statistical analysis identified eight critical factors: experimenter's directiveness, legitimacy, and consistency; group pressure to disobey; indirectness, proximity, and intimacy of the teacher-learner relationship; and distance between teacher and experimenter. It's crucial to consider not only the high baseline obedience but also the significant variance across studies. Thus the key idea is that participants grappled with conflicting relationships and obligations, not inherent human compulsion to obey.

Further exploration reveals that harm occurs when we prioritize the appeals of malicious authorities over those of their victims, often linked to our identification with one over the other. Research is needed to understand why people side with the experimenter rather than the learner. An intriguing observation emerges: while Milgram's studies are often summarized as demonstrating blind obedience to orders, only the final prod constitutes a direct order. Yet, subsequent research found this to be the least effective prod, even eliciting negative reactions. Participants sought justification from trusted figures they identified with, suggesting obedience stemmed not from mere orders but from a belief in doing the right thing.

Questions:

1. How did the experimenter respond if the teacher showed reluctance to continue?
 - A) By providing a mild shock
 - B) By offering encouragement and support
 - C) By employing a set of predetermined prods
 - D) By terminating the experiment immediately

2. What was the approximate percentage of teachers who administered shocks up to the maximum level in the baseline condition?
 - A) 40%
 - B) 65%
 - C) 75%
 - D) 90%

3. What did the extensive post-experimental procedure include for participants?
 - A) Receiving a full report and questionnaire
 - B) Receiving monetary compensation
 - C) Receiving a certificate of participation
 - D) Receiving additional shock therapy

4. What was a crucial consideration regarding participants' obedience levels?
 - A) Participants' gender
 - B) The experimenter's clothing color
 - C) The distance between the teacher and learner
 - D) The participants' prior experience with psychology

5. What is emphasized as a crucial consideration regarding participants' behavior in Milgram's experiments?
 - A) The importance of providing monetary incentives to participants
 - B) The impact of the teacher's prior experience with psychological studies
 - C) The need to maintain consistency in the experimenter's instructions
 - D) The significant variance across studies and participants' grapple with conflicting relationships and obligations

4. Tyranny (Haslam, Reicher: Revisiting Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment, 2012)

Zimbardo aimed to study how social influences lead to extreme behaviors, opting for a more naturalistic approach than Milgram's controlled experiments. He chose a prison setting, leveraging recent real-world events. To avoid confounding factors like individual personalities of actual criminals and guards, he created a mock prison in Stanford's basement, recruiting 24 male students as prisoners and guards.

The experiment, initially planned for two weeks, was terminated after six days due to the mock prison becoming unbearable. The intense level of abuse prompted the early release of five prisoner-participants.

Before this study, psychologists often assumed a dispositional hypothesis, attributing violent behavior to pathological traits. However, the participants in the Stanford Prison Experiment were normal, healthy college students randomly assigned roles. Zimbardo argued for the situation hypothesis, asserting that social context primarily influences behavior. He suggested that people can be influenced to do nearly anything in compelling situations, with negative situational forces overpowering positive dispositional ones. His claims were supported by four features of SPE's methodology: participants had normal personalities; random assignment to roles; experimental setting that was best possible and functional simulation of the psychology of imprisonment; participants roles were novel to them, they had no prior knowledge of what could be expected and were not trained for their role.

Results from the study are well-known for the guards' brutality towards prisoners, prompting Zimbardo to end it prematurely. The situation unfolded in three phases: an initial settling-in period where roles were not fully embraced, followed by a rebellion phase where prisoners displayed signs of insubordination, and culminating in a tyranny phase where guards intensified harassment and intimidation tactics, including dividing prisoners to undermine solidarity.

Zimbardo's involvement in instigating or condoning these actions remains unclear, but he was far from a detached observer. For example, he recruited one prisoner as a snitch, whose behavior deeply affected others, with prisoners collective crushed and guards more confident in their domination. However, not all guards turned tyrannical (about one third did so), some maintained a tough but fair approach, and others aimed to be friendly and helpful. Zimbardo himself became more focused on the security of the prison than the participants' well-being, admitting to neglecting their needs as a researcher. He faced criticism for his instructions to guards and for providing props without intervening in problematic practices, potentially leading guards to believe their actions were acceptable.

Despite its influence, the study faced extensive criticism. Critics argued that the presence of guards who maintained standard behavior suggests that situational context alone cannot fully explain the results. The interactionist perspective emphasizes the importance of considering factors such as personality, attitudes, and expectations. Individuals vary in their propensity for antisocial behavior, and the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environment is crucial. While group contexts can transform individuals, individuals also have the capacity to shape and influence group dynamics.

Recent BBC Prison Study, which was partial replication, revealed how the formation of a shared group identity can lead to tyrannical leadership. Participants rejected assigned roles, formed their own group and plotted a coup within the mock prison. Tyrannical behavior emerged as a deliberate choice driven by strong identification with this group and its mission.

Questions:

1. The Stanford Prison Experiment, initially planned for two weeks, was terminated after six days due to the mock prison becoming _____.
 - a) unbearable
 - b) boring
 - c) biased

2. Before this study, psychologists often assumed a dispositional hypothesis, attributing violent behavior to pathological traits. However, the participants in the SPE were normal, healthy college students randomly assigned _____.
 - a) roles
 - b) rewards
 - c) grades

3. Zimbardo argued for the situation hypothesis, asserting that social context primarily influences behavior. He suggested that people can be influenced to do nearly anything in compelling situations, with negative situational forces overpowering positive _____ ones.
 - a) dispositional
 - b) intrinsic
 - c) inherent

4. The situation unfolded in three phases: an initial settling-in period where roles were not fully embraced, followed by a rebellion phase where prisoners displayed signs of _____, and culminating in a tyranny phase where guards intensified harassment and intimidation tactics.
 - a) starving
 - b) compliance
 - c) defiance

5. The BBC Prison Study revealed how the formation of a shared group identity can lead to _____ leadership. Participants rejected assigned roles, formed their own group and plotted a coup within the mock prison.
 - a) tyrannical
 - b) authoritarian
 - c) despotic