

Psychology in general: focus on individuals – how they think, feel and behave.

Social Psychology:

Works to understand human behavior in its social context

Examines how our thoughts, behaviors, feelings are influenced by the real (or imagined) presence of others

- For better (others generally enhance and enrich our lives)
- Or for worse (influence of others can also threaten our integrity and even our lives!)

Sample questions for social psychology:

How can the power of leaders turn rational individuals into blindly obedient masses?

How do groups change the behavior of individuals?

4 Classic Social Psych Studies that Demonstrate the Incredible Power of the Situation on Our Behavior!

Lewin (1939): Leadership Style and Resulting Behavior (including how group identity impacts behavior)

Experiment: 3 groups of boys: 3 types of leaders:

Autocratic leaders: make all decisions for the group

Laissez Faire leaders: allow complete freedom with little guidance

Democratic leaders: actively encouraged and assisted group decision making

Findings: Behaviors of (same) boys under:

Autocratic leader: worked hardest when watched; most hostile/aggressive

Laissez Faire leader: least productive; poorest quality

Democratic leader: highest motivation; most original and playful; most praise

Conclusion: leadership style and social situation created differences, not individual personality!

Asch (1955): Studies on Conformity

**Conformity** – changing one's behavior to match that of other people.

Not necessarily bad – it is adapted and a way to educate ourselves; in many situations conformity is actually beneficial; other times conformity works against us (ex: being pressured into something we don't want to have to do)

Experiment:

Findings:

- 70% side with wrong at least once!
- Many felt bad if they didn't.
- Increased group size up to 4.
- As long as one dissents – stops.
- Recent studies – still powerful.

Milgram (1963): Studies on Obedience

**Obedience** – changing behavior at the command of an authority figure.  
(vs. conformity and compliance)

Not necessarily bad – if you are a child and running into the street and mom yells stop, and you obey, it can save your life.

Experiment: Series of shocks.

Findings:

- 2/3 went all the way (expert predictions?)
- Many objected, but still obeyed (even though heard complaints and told possibly lethal)
  - Extremely difficult for most to disobey authority, even if it goes against own values
- Men, women, old, young, Yale?

Conclusion: Blind obedience not limited to fascist mentality, part of basic human condition brought out by situations.

Contributing Factors to Obedience:

- Authority claims responsibility
- Demands placed escalate gradually (Ex: frog)
- Targeted individual shifts perspective to “how well am I doing what's asked?” vs. “what am I really doing?”
- Authority figure close by
- Authority appears to be legitimate and prestigious
- Victim out of sight
- See others obeying – no role model for disobeying (Ex: 2 authority figures who disagree)

## Zimbardo (early 1970s): The Stanford Prison Experiment

**Experiment:** Six days – random assignment to roles; create behavior differences?  
(Dehumanize quickly, uniforms)

Hour long documentary “Quiet Rage”

**Findings:** Even with equal chance at group placement...

- Nice boys became brutal guards; healthy kids got sick (extreme stress reactions)
- Active boys became passive and zombie-like
- All participants easily lost all perspective
- When situations end, people return back to “regular” behavior

**Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE):** tendency to overestimate the role of internal factors (personality traits) and underestimate the situational factors to people’s behavior *when other people succeed or fail*.

When people succeed we overestimate the personal qualities that lead to that, and underestimate the situational factors that lead to that. When people fail, its vice versa.

### **Why do we all do this regularly?**

1. We have trouble admitting how influenced we are by situations and the environment
2. Our society emphasizes individual accomplishments

Ethical Concerns have been raised about both the Milgram and the Zimbardo studies. Ethical guidelines and approval procedures are in place today that would make it highly unlikely that either of the studies would be allowed today.

## Conformity, Obedience, Compliance

**Compliance** – change your behavior at the request of someone else  
(Another form of social influence)

Conformity – you choose;

Obedience – someone commands you;

Compliance – someone requests you to

## Seeing Through Compliance Tactics

Social influence – the process through which the real or implied presence of others directly or indirectly influences the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of an individual

**Compliance tactics (CTs)** work via social influence:

CTs are used by advertisers, salespeople, fundraisers, neighbors, enemies, and friends!

*(All know how to increase the chance that you will do what they want you to do)*