

Title

Ordinary People

Grade Level

7-12

Time Period

1 class period

Author

Adam Schmitt

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson the learner will be able to...

1. identify and describe Millgram experiment and the Asch conformity experiments.
2. Begin to discuss and evaluate the implication these experiments have for humanity

Appropriate National Standards

5.b – analyze group and institutional influences on people, events and elements of culture

9.b – explain conditions and motivations that contribute to conflict, cooperation and interdependence among groups, societies and nations

9.h – illustrate how individual behaviors connect with global systems

Background

One of the major questions that students have when trying to grapple with the complexity of genocide, or human atrocities in general, is how every day, “normal” people are capable of doing such horrible things. In this lesson, students examine two famous experiments that explore the ways in which authority and perceived social pressure can affect individual and group behavior.

Materials

Computer

LCD projector

Video of Millgram experiment (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcvSNg0HZwk>)

Video of Asch experiment (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYIh4MkcfJA&NR=1>)

Procedure

1. Students should begin the lesson by answering the following question in their notebook: have you ever had an experience where you went along with a group, or did something you weren't supposed to? Explain why you made the choice you did?
2. After students have individually completed their questions, they should take a moment to share their thoughts with someone sitting near them.
3. The teacher will then ask students to share their answers with the class.
4. The teacher will then introduce the idea that seemingly ordinary people have been shown, in history, of being capable of doing horrible things, like genocide. In order to understand why people are able to do such things, psychologists have done a number

of studies investigating why. Today, students will be learning about two of these experiments.

5. The teacher should first show the Asch experiment. After showing the video, the teacher should pause and ask clarifying questions to ensure the students understand what they saw. Questions can include:
 - What was this experiment testing?
 - How did the experiment work?
 - What were the findings of the experiment?

The teacher should also answer clarifying questions the students have before moving on.

6. The teacher should then show the Millgram experiment, which demonstrates individuals' ability to impose harm on a stranger when told to by a perceived authority figure. **NOTE:** the version of the video linked above actually has three parts. The total running time is 16 minutes. In addition, students (especially younger ones) should be warned that what they see may be uncomfortable and if they need to excuse themselves, they may. They should also be reminded that no people were actually harmed in this experiment.
7. After viewing the Millgram experiment, students should be asked the same clarifying questions as before.
8. The teacher should spend the rest of the class period engaging in discussion about the meaning of what the students saw. **NOTE:** some students may continually insist that they would never do such a thing. It is important that the teacher remark that it is often times impossible to gauge what one would actually do until confronted with a scenario. Discussion questions can include:
 - What kinds of actions do you think these experiments were meant to explain?
 - What do you think are the larger implications of these experiments?
 - Do you think it's right for people to excuse harmful behavior by saying that they were told to do it by an authority figure?
 - What do these experiments say about free will?
 - How do you think the participants administering the shocks in the Millgram experiment felt? How can you tell? What affect does the feeling of responsibility, or the direct of relation between persecutor and victim have on the persecutor?
 - What do these experiments say about free will and choice?
 - How can people shift guilt in order to avoid responsibility for their actions?
 - What are some examples of these findings in history or contemporary society?
 - How do some people resist the influence of social pressure and authority? What are examples of this resistance that you have seen in your own life (e.g. tolerance/acceptance of those perceived to be different or standing up to bullying)?
 - Has your thinking about humanity changed at all? Why?
9. The teacher can wrap up the class period by asking students to write a reflection for homework.

Assessment

Students should write a 1-page reflection on their reaction to what they saw, examples they can think of and its greater meaning for humanity, specifically in regards to violence and responsibility.