

Department of Psychology, Syracuse University

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF GENOCIDE AND MASS KILLING

PSY 775 (M002), Seminar in Social Psychology, Fall, 2007
Tuesday, 9:30 –12:15, Huntington Hall, 530C (The Allport Room)

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Course Overview and Objectives

The last century was called “Age of Genocide” by some observers. Not surprisingly, organized mass murder has already been the subject of quite a bit of scholarly inquiry. Over the past decade or so, however, public discussion of mass murder and genocide might actually have increased. The prominence of the topic is due in part to a number of tragic events in the world (e.g., the killings in Bosnia and Rwanda and the ongoing tragedy in Darfur). In addition, a few books on the topic (e.g., Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, Jan Gross’s *Neighbors*, Iris Chang’s *The Rape of the Nanking*, and Phillip Gourevitch’s *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*) received a great deal of media attention and inspired quite a bit of public debate. Curiously, though, social psychologists have not played a particularly prominent role in this debate.

The silence of social psychologists is ironic, because as

discussed by Ned Jones in his classic 1985 *Handbook of Social Psychology* chapter on the history of the field, for many years the research agenda of social psychologists was profoundly influenced by the mass killings of Jews and other groups during World War II. Many classic programs of research (e.g., Stanley Milgram's obedience studies, Adorno et al.'s work on the authoritarian personality) were launched in order to shed light on the behavior of the perpetrators of the Holocaust. In recent decades, though, why people might become perpetrators of genocide has not been so obviously an important issue for social psychologists. That is unfortunate, because among social scientists, social psychologists would seem to be especially well-positioned to shed light on the processes that lead individuals and groups to become mass murderers. Typical definitions of social psychology are usually very similar to the one offered by Brehm and Kassin (1996, p. 6), who stated that social psychology is "the scientific study of the way individuals think, feel, desire, and act in social situations". One would hope, then, that social psychological principles could be applied to the thoughts, feelings, desires and actions of people in social situations involving the systematic murder of other human beings.

The premise of this class is that social psychologists do in fact have a great deal to offer to people seeking a way to make sense of the behavior of people who plan, participate in, or passively observe genocide. Many of the assigned readings will be from the social psychological literature, and very often, they will *not* directly concern genocide. By the end of the semester, though, it is hoped that class members will have an appreciation for how the psychological processes covered in those readings might play a role in the horror and evil of genocide.

Course Requirements and Grading

As in all of your graduate classes and seminars, the most basic

course requirement is attendance and participation (20% of the final grade). To contribute to the discussion in a meaningful way, you will need to do the assigned readings before the class for which they are assigned. Readings will be made available (at least a week in advance) on-line via the class's Blackboard site. At least once during the semester, each student in the class will do an extra reading (in addition to the ones assigned to everyone) and summarize it for the class.

Students will be required to write two papers. One of these will be an 8-10 page paper on a course-relevant topic of the student's own choosing (40% of the final grade). The topic must be selected and approved by the instructor by the end of Week 11 of the semester and it is due on the last day of the Fall 2007 semester. In addition, during the class meeting, each student will prepare a 10 to 15-minute long class presentation on his or her topic.

As noted above, by the end of the semester students should have developed an appreciation for how social-psychological processes can be used to explain the planning, initiation, and maintenance of genocide. Another goal of this course is to enhance your ability to share that appreciation with non-psychologists. Therefore, as a second writing assignment, students will write 750-word (newspaper editorial length) essays focusing on one of the social-psychological processes or variables covered in the course. These essays should make the case that these concepts or phenomena shed light on the causes of genocide, and they should be written with intelligent laypeople as the intended audience.

Summary of grading:

1. Quantity and quality of class participation 20%
2. Coverage of extra

reading(s)	5%	
3. Brief “Editorial”		25%
4. Presentation of final paper	10%	
5. Final paper		40%

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100%

Students with disabilities who require accommodations for access and participation in this course should inform the instructor and consult with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). Please contact ODS at 315/443-4498 (voice) or 315/443-1372 (TTY).

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Week 1 (August 28): Introduction

Moshman, D. (2005). Genocidal hatred: Now you see it, now you don't. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *The psychology of hate* (pp. 185-209). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Shaw, M. (2007). *What is genocide?* (Chapter 4, “The minimal euphemism”). Malden, MA: Polity.

Week 2 (September 4): Justification and the continuum of destructiveness

(Or—The first few steps are the most important ones

you'll ever take)

Newman, L. S. (2002). What is a “social-psychological” account of perpetrator behavior? The person versus the situation in Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. In L. S. Newman & R. Erber (Eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The social psychology of the Holocaust* (pp. 43-67). New York: Oxford University Press.

Kelman, H. (1973). Violence without moral restraint: Reflections on the dehumanization of victims and victimizers. *Journal of Social Issues, 29*, 25-61

Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 3*, 193-209.

Darley, J. M. (1992). Social organization for the production of evil. *Psychological Inquiry, 3*, 199-218.

EXTRA READING: Cooper, J. (2007). *Cognitive dissonance: Fifty years of a classic theory* (Chapter 6, “Vicarious cognitive dissonance”, pp. 117-134). Los Angeles: Sage.

Week 3 (September 11): Conformity, pluralistic ignorance, and the role of bystanders

(Or—Don’t underestimate human decency—but don’t overestimate how difficult it is to express it)

Miller, D. T., & Prentice, D. A. (1994). Collective errors and errors about the collective. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20*, 541-550.

Mandler, G. (2002). Psychologists and the National Socialist access to power. *History of Psychology, 5*, 190-200.

Slovic, P. (2007). "If I look at the mass I will never act": Psychic numbing and genocide. *Judgment and Decision Making, 2*, 79-95. (With related NY Times article by Nicholas Kristof and letters to the editor).

Power, S. (2003). *"A problem from hell": American and the age of genocide* (preface. pp. xi-xxi). New York: Harper Collins.

EXTRA READING: Swim, J.K., & Hyers, L. L. (1999). Excuse me—What did you just say? : Women's public and private responses to sexist remarks. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 35*, 68-88.

Week 4 (September 18): Crises and scapegoats

(Or—Scapegoats always seem plausible)

Staub, E. (1989). *The roots of evil* (Chapter 3, pp. 35-50). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Glick, P. (2002). Sacrificial lambs dressed in wolves' clothing: Envious prejudice, ideology, and the scapegoating of Jews. In L. S. Newman & R. Erber (Eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The social psychology of the Holocaust* (pp. 113-142). New York: Oxford University Press.

Balakian, P. (2003). *The burning Tigris: The Armenian genocide and America's response*. (Chapter 13, "The Balkan Wars and World War I: The road to genocide," pp. 159-173). New York: Harper Collins.

Kruglanski, A. W., Pierro, A., Manetti, L., & De Grada, E. (2006). Groups as epistemic providers: Need for closure and the unfolding of group-centrism *Psychological Review*, *113*, 84-100.

EXTRA READING: Cottrell, C. A., & Neuberg, S. L. (2005). Different emotional reactions to different groups: A sociofunctional threat-based approach to “prejudice”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *88*, 770-789.

Week 5 (September 25): Individual differences: Is there a “genocidal personality”?

(Or—Normal people become perpetrators)

Kressel, N. J. (2002). *Mass hate: The global rise of genocide and terror (Updated edition)*. (Chapter 7: “The personality of the perpetrator”). Cambridge, MA: Westview Press.

Baumeister, R. F., & Campbell, W. K. (2002). The intrinsic appeal of evil: Sadism, sensational thrills, and threatened egotism. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *3*, 210-221.

Newman, L. S. (2001, May). The banality of secondary sources: Why social psychologists have misinterpreted Arendt’s thesis. Paper presented at “Eichmann in Jerusalem: Forty years later”, conference held at DePaul University, Chicago, IL.

Sudefeld, P., & Schaller, M. (2002). Authoritarianism and the Holocaust: Some cognitive and affective implications. In L. S. Newman & R. Erber (Eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The social psychology of the Holocaust (pp. 68-77 only)*. New York: Oxford University Press.

EXTRA READING: Mandel, D. R. (2002). Evil and instigation of collective violence. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 2, 101-108.

Week 6 (October 2): Are there genocidal cultures?

Oyserman, D., & Lauffer, A. (2002). Examining the implications of cultural frames on social movements and group action. In L. S. Newman & R. Erber (Eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The social psychology of the Holocaust* (pp. 162-187). New York: Oxford University Press.

Smith, D. N. (1998). The psychocultural roots of genocide: Legitimacy and crisis in Rwanda. *American Psychologist*, 53, 743-753.

Chang, I. (1997). *The rape of Nanking: The forgotten holocaust of World War II* (Chapter 1, pp. 19-34). New York: Basic Books.

Browning, C. R. (1998). Ordinary men or ordinary Germans. In R. R. Shandley (Ed.), *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate* (pp. 55-73). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

EXTRA READING: Nisbett, R. E. (1993). Violence and U.S. regional culture. *American Psychologist*, 48, 441-449.

Week 7 (October 9): Film, “The Architecture of Doom”

Week 8 (October 16): Obedience

(Or—Okay, so the Milgram Experiment does not resemble

Auschwitz, but...)

Browning, C. R. (1992). *Ordinary men: Reserve police battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland* (Chapters 1 & 18, pp. 1-2, 159-189). New York: Harper Collins.

Blass, T. (2002). Perpetrator behavior as destructive obedience: An evaluation of Stanley Milgram's perspective, the most influential social-psychological approach to the holocaust. In L. S. Newman & R. Erber (Eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The social psychology of the Holocaust* (pp. 11-42). New York: Oxford University Press.

Hatzfield, J. (2003). *Machete Season* (pp. 10-16, 71-76). New York: Picador.

Mandel, D. R. (1998). The obedience alibi: Milgram's account of the Holocaust reconsidered. *Analyse & Kritik*, 20, 74-94.

EXTRA READING: Fenigstein, A. (1998). Were obedience pressures a factor in the Holocaust? *Analyse & Kritik*, 20, 54-73.

Week 9 (October 23): Film, "Hotel Rwanda"

Week 10 (October 30): Genocide, human nature, and evolutionary psychology

(Or—Is genocide inevitable?)

Diamond, J. (1992). *The third chimpanzee* (chapter 16, pp. 276-309). New York: Harper Perennial.

Waller, J. (2002). *Becoming evil: How ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing*. (Chapter 5, pp. 136-168: “What is the nature of human nature: Our ancestral shadow”). New York: Oxford University Press.

Sudefeld, P., & Schaller, M. (2002). Authoritarianism and the Holocaust: Some cognitive and affective implications. In L. S. Newman & R. Erber (Eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The social psychology of the Holocaust* (pp. 77-90 only). New York: Oxford University Press.

Faulkner, J., Schaller, M., Park, J. H., & Duncan, L. A. (2004). Evolved disease-avoidance processes and contemporary xenophobic attitudes. *Group Processes and Intergroup Behavior*, 7, 333-353.

Zajonc, R. (2002). The zoomorphism of human collective violence. In L. S. Newman & R. Erber (Eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The social psychology of the Holocaust* (pp. 222-238). New York: Oxford University Press.

de Waal, F. B. M. (2005, Oct 8). The empathic ape. *New Scientist*, 52-54.

EXTRA READING: Landesman, P. (2002, September 15). A woman's work. *New York Times Magazine*, 82-89, 116, 125, 130-132.

Week 11 (November 6): “Losing oneself” – Roles, deindividuation, and strong situationism

Zimbardo, P. G., Maslach, C., & Haney, C. (2000). Reflections on the Stanford Prison Experiment: Genesis, transformations, consequences. In T. Blass (Ed.), *Obedience to authority:*

Current perspectives on the Milgram paradigm (pp. 193-237). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Reicher, S., & Haslam, S. A. (2006). Rethinking the psychology of tyranny: The BBC prison study. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 45*, 1-40.

Zimbardo, P. G. (2006). On rethinking the psychology of tyranny: The BBC prison study. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 45*, 47-53.

Haslam, S. A., & Reicher, S. (2006). Debating the psychology of tyranny: Fundamental issues of theory, perspective and science. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 45*, 55-63.

Newman, L. S. (2007). Beyond situationism: The social psychology of genocide and mass killing. In H. Kramer (Ed.), *NS-Täter aus interdisziplinärer Perspektive*. München, Germany: Meidenbauer

EXTRA READING: Carnahan, T., & McFarland, S. (2007). Revisiting the Stanford prison experiment: Could participant self-selection have led to the cruelty? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 33*, 603-614 (with erratum)

Week 12 (November 13): The aftermath: Lying, distortion, collective guilt—and reconciliation

Bar-On, D. (1989). *Legacy of silence: Encounters with children of the Third Reich*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (Chapter 1: “The physician from Auschwitz and his son”, pp. 14-41).

Castano, E., & Giner-Sorolla, R. (2006). Not quite human:

Infrahumanization in response to collective responsibility for intergroup killing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 804-818.

Branscombe, N. R., Doosje, B., & McGarty, C. (2002). Antecedents and consequences of collective guilt. In D. M. Mackie & E. R. Smith (Eds.), *From prejudice to intergroup emotions: Differentiated reactions to social groups* (pp. 49-66). Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

Wohl, M. J. A., & Branscombe, N. R. (2005). Forgiveness and collective guilt assignment to historical perpetrator groups depend on level of social category inclusiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 288-303.

Staub, E., Pearlman, L. A., Gubin, A., & Hagengimana, A. (2005). Healing, reconciliation, forgiveness and the prevention of violence after genocide or mass killing: An intervention and its experimental evaluation in Rwanda. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24, 297-334.

EXTRA READING: Stanton, G. H. (2005). Twelve ways to deny a genocide. In J. Apsel (Ed.), *Darfur: Genocide before our eyes* (pp. 43-47). New York: Institute for the Study of Genocide,

Week 13 (November 20): Do social psychological explanations condone perpetrators?

Miller, A.G., Gordon, A. K., & Buddie, A. M. (1999). Accounting for evil and cruelty: Is to explain to condone? *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3, 254-268.

Rosenbaum, R. (1995, May 1). Explaining Hitler. *The New Yorker*, pp. 50-73.

Friedrich, J., Kierniesky, N., & Cardon, L. (1989). Drawing moral inferences from descriptive science: The impact of attitudes on naturalistic fallacy errors. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 15, 414-425.

EXTRA READING: Pronin, E., Lin, D. Y., & Ross, L. (2002). The bias blind spot: Perceptions of bias in self versus others. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 369-381

Week 14 (November 27): Heroic helpers and resisters—the continuum of benevolence?

To be shown in class (brief film): “Defying genocide: Choices that saved lives”

Chang, I. (1997). *The rape of Nanking: The forgotten holocaust of World War II* (Chapter 5, pp.105-139). New York: Basic Books.

Staub, E. (2002). The psychology of bystanders, perpetrators, and heroic helpers. In L. S. Newman & R. Erber (Eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The social psychology of the Holocaust* (pp. 11-42—**pp. 32-36 only**). New York: Oxford University Press.

Rochat, F., & Modigliani, A. (2000). Captain Paul Grueninger: The chief of police who saved Jewish refugees by refusing to do his duty. In T. Blass (Ed.), *Obedience to authority: Current perspectives on the Milgram paradigm* (pp. 91-110). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Leftwich, A. (Summer, 2002). I gave the names. *Granta*, 78, 9-31.

SUPPLEMENTARY EVENT:

Robert Koolakian

Author , “Struggle for Justice: A Story of the American
Committee for the Independence of Armenia, 1915–1920”

Tuesday, November 27

4 p.m.

Peter S. Graham Scholarly Commons, E.S. Bird Library, First
Floor

**Week 15 (December 4): Presentations, discussions of final
papers**