The Atrocity Triangle

You are going to follow along with this lecture on the atrocity triangle.

All atrocities have 3 main agents involved:

1) Victims
   a. They have acts committed against them. They experience the pain, suffering and horror of the atrocity.

2) Perpetrators
   a. They commit the atrocious act; they inflict the pain, suffering and horror on all of the agents.

3) Bystanders
   a. Bystanders are the on-lookers, observers, witnesses and first-hand accounts of the atrocity. There are 2 types of bystanders:
      i. Internal
         1. Immediately experience the atrocity; right there are it happens.
      ii. External
         1. Learn about the atrocity through second-hand accounts; they hear it from others.

We are going to address and explore some key questions related to the agents in the atrocity triangle.
1) What motivates the perpetrators to commit atrocious acts? Why do regular people commit terrible acts?
2) How do victims become victims? Is it random or are there patterns we can perceive?
3) Why do some bystanders intervene while others seem to look the other way?

Victims

When something terrible happens to someone we refer to them as victims. The big questions are:

1) Who is targeted? Was the atrocity random or part of a larger pattern?
   a. Vulnerable
   b. Marginalized; unworthy, dehumanized, less valuable, objectified
2) What conditions existed that made the atrocity possible? With who does power rest?
   a. Economic- poverty
   b. Social- racism, sexism, misogyny (hatred of women), social exclusion
   c. Historical- colonization, oppression
   d. Cultural- gender roles

Bystanders

When atrocities become public, known to others; we call them bystanders. There are 2 main types of bystanders:

1) Internal (Immediate) - they are on-lookers, witnesses, observers, first-hand accounts.
2) External (Hear from others, see video or photos)- they hear from others what happened through a variety of means

The overriding issue for bystanders is their responsibility in the atrocity. Should I intervene? How can I intervene?
Here a psychological and social phenomenon exists:

**The Bystander Effect**

Why are bystanders indifferent (*Not my affair*) and reluctant (*What can I do?*)

a. **Diffusion of responsibility** - the more people the less responsible
b. **Identification with victim or perpetrator** (*in my moral universe*)
c. **Consequences of intervention** (*Reward vs. punishment*)
d. **Immediate feelings** (*Powerless, helpless*)

Bystanders can deny the significance of the atrocity.

- They deserved it (*Just World Hypothesis, people get what they deserve*)
- Who cares (*They have no value*)
- So what (*It wasn’t such an atrocity*)

**Perpetrators**

How can ordinary, normal people do terrible things and at the same time **DENY** the meaning of what they do?

Perpetrators must deny the importance of what they did. Their acts must fall within their own moral universe and therefore the victims must be excluded from that universe.

How do they do it?

1. **Dehumanize the victim** - the victim must become an object or an **instrument of the perpetrators needs.** (*Target*)
2. **Justify the anti-social actions** - the perpetrator constructs reasons to act; these reasons **CAUSE** the action. (*Motive*)
   a. Resist subordination of their will or desire to higher authority
   b. **Manipulate and control others**
   c. **Manage impressions have of them**
   d. **Teach a lesson; impose a consequence; revenge**
3. **Rationalize after the fact** - the perpetrator constructs reasons (excuses) to get people on their side or off their back. (Avoidance of moral responsibility)

How do people become perpetrators of deviance and crime? Let’s look at Robert Merton’s Strain Theory that explains why people deviate from social norms and values and behaviours.

**Merton’s Strain (Anomie) Theory**

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<th>Attitude towards societal goals</th>
<th>Attitude towards means of attaining goals</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
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