

Transformation from Normal to Sociopathic in a Community

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Abstract: Most of people live in a community in their daily life. However, since the dark side of human nature exists in everyone's mind, people living in a community can be deindividualized by triggering and flourishing the evil existing in people's hearts, emphasizing obedience, and creating an "enemy" for community members. People would rationalize their immoral behaviors to escape from the feeling of guilt and regret. As a result, the savagery in human nature is triggered and normal people in a community are transformed to sociopath.

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A community is a group of people who have common goals and values. However, not every group shares positive values and goals. As a result, people often transform themselves in a negative way when they try to fit into an evil group. In other words, the evil group can inspire the dark side of human nature. For example, this phenomenon can be seen in the genocidal behaviors of normal German people after they became Nazis, and the savage transformation of boys after they come to the island in *Lord of the Flies*: the abuse of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. All in all, certain characteristics of community trigger savagery in human nature and lead to the transformation of normal people to the sociopath.

First of all, human beings are considered as an advanced breed of primates who can think and distinguish between right and wrong. However, although most people try to be civilized, some humans still cannot get rid of the savagery of human nature.

This savagery can be triggered, especially when people seek to survive under an extreme circumstance. For instance, in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, a group of innocent and educated young boys revealed the dark side of human nature when they were adapting to life on an uncivilized island. In this book, the "lord of flies" is a symbolic representation which is related to human nature. In David Spitz's article "*An Interpretation of Golding's 'Lord of the flies,'*" he proposed his explanation of the meaning of "Lord of the flies": "Who and what, then, is the Lord of the flies? He is Beelzebub — a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew Ba'al Zevuv, which means Lord of the flies; or, as it is rendered in some New Testament texts, Beelzebul, which means Lord of dung, or Lord of a fly-ridden dung heap. As such, he is the personification of evil. In other words, "lord of flies" is the representation of the evil side of human nature. At the same time, in "*Lord of the flies*," one of the boys, named Simon, who always played a role of thinker, had an interesting conversation with the "Lord of flies" in the book " "Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!" said the head. For a moment or two, the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter: "You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?"^[1]. According to this conversation, "Lord of flies" is the beast and it cannot be killed or hunted, and it is a part of people. So in fact, "Lord of flies" is the exposition of the dark side of human nature which exists in every human's heart. Furthermore, the evil human nature is the ultimate reason which leads normal boys to be uncivilized.

On the other hand, the human nature still included innocence, but the innocence would not be destroyed when the savagery of human nature was inspired. In *Lord of the Flies*, there are some scenes including

butterflies which represented a unique symbolic meaning. Specifically, in *Lord of the Flies*, Golding wrote “Jack found the throat and the hot blood spouted over his hands. The sow collapsed under them and they were heavy and fulfilled upon her. The butterflies still danced, preoccupied in the center of the clearing”^[1]. Substantially, the butterflies which are always considered as symbols of pure and innocence, appeared when Jack was committing some violent behavior. Robert J. White thinks the butterfly scene represented the coexist of evil and innocent in human nature. Her article “*Butterfly and Beast in ‘Lord of the Flies’*” expressed that “The spiritual side of man’s nature can only witness helplessly the emergence and the triumph of the dark side. To draw attention to this, Golding has employed the butterflies to symbolize the spiritual side of man’s nature. The souls immortality is clear from the butterfly”^[2]. Significantly, human nature is very complex because it can’t be simply judged as good or evil. In fact, there is innocence living in human nature, at the same time, there is evil coexist with the innocence. And for most of time, the innocence and evil are not able to interact with each other. As a result, the innocence of human nature cannot prevent people from acting some immoral behaviors. Indeed, the evil of human nature cannot stop people help and act kind to each other.

The dark side of human nature is not only represented in fiction but also in real world. One example, in the Nazi concentration camps during World War II, normal people were transformed into cold blooded soldiers who killed thousands of people after they went to the army. Philip G. Zimbardo’s journal “*The Psychology of Evil: A Situationist Perspective on Recruiting Good People to Engage in Antisocial Acts*” represented that:

They were middle-aged, family men too old to be drafted into the army, from working class and lower middle-class backgrounds, with no military police experience...In just 4 months they had shot to death at least 38,000 Jews and had another 45,000 deported to the concentration camp at Treblinka...There is no evidence of any special selection of these men, only that they were as “ordinary” as can be imagined until they were put into a situation in which they had permission and encouragement to act sadistically and brutishly against those labeled as the enemy^[3].

On the whole, people cannot ignore the existence of the dark side of human nature since it lives in every individual human. Although most of time, the evil of human nature hides in the inner of people’s hearts, it will be ultimately inspired when people are living in an

extreme environment. This phenomenon explained why some ordinary people can engage in immoral behaviors, such as genocide and abuse behaviors.

Whether the savage boys in *Lord of the Flies* or Nazi soldiers in the concentration camps, they all have one thing in common: they were all living in an evil community. As far as people know, people needed to change their own values and goals to fit into the community, and this process is called deindividuation. So to make the community absorb more loyal members, the community used some tactics to proceed this process. For example, the community would ask the members to make their appearances identical. At the same time, people tended to show more acceptance of violent behaviors when an individual’s own identity was concealed. In the journal “*The Psychology of Evil: A Situationist Perspective on Recruiting Good People to Engage in Antisocial Acts*,” the author Philip G. Zimbardo wrote “Anything that makes someone feel anonymous, as if no one knows who they are, creates the potential for that person to act in evil ways if the situation gives permission”^[3]. So the community will conceal people’s identities and give them permission to act violently. As a result, people can engage in the violent activities more easily and feel less guilty and regret. In *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph found that savage boys changed their appearances when he was hiding from the hunt “He had even glimpsed of them, striped brown, black, and red, and had judged that it was Bill. But really, thought Ralph, this was not Bill. This was a savage whose image refused to blend with that ancient picture of a boy in shorts and shirt”^[1]. People found that the boys who lived with the savage community have already completely lost their own identities: they painted their faces just like savages. And the chief of the boys gave them order to act violently, so the civilized boys started act cruelly and participate in murder activities.

At the same time, the community can also deindividuate the members by emphasizing obedience. Otherwise, people’s moral choices will be charged by the community, rather than themselves, when people are fully obedient to a community. Essentially, people’s moral choice represents their relationships with each other. Kristen Renwick Monroe represented her opinion that people’s relationship charged people’s moral choice in her journal “*Ethics in an Age of Terror and Genocide: Identity and Moral Choice*”. She wrote “Our moral choices reflect our basic sense of who we are in relation to others, and identity constrains moral choices through setting the range of options we perceive as

available, not just morally but cognitively”. So people’s moral choices are influenced by the sense of what their role is in the world. As a result, people will make evil moral choices when they identify themselves as the members of an evil community. At the same time, the evil communities will emphasize the personality of obedience to produce more loyal members. For instance, the Nazi party will make the soldiers feel like they are tools rather than a human being. In a journal “*Moral Rationalization and the Integration of Situational Factors and Psychological Processes in Immoral Behavior*,” the author Jo-Ann Tsang wrote:

Because of this emphasis on obedience, concentration camp guards were reduced to a means to another end, and the question of moral choice no longer existed for them... For example, because many members of the Nazi party felt as if they were tools for a greater cause, they felt stripped of volition to choose between good and evil and no longer saw themselves as responsible for their actions, moral or otherwise^[4].

Principally, because the Nazi soldiers were taught to submit to the Nazi party, so Nazi soldiers would perform inhumanely when they were in the concentration camp. In other words, people will lose their control of their moral choices because they choose to be obedient to the evil group. As a result, the evil group controls its members’ moral choices and the dark side of human nature will be triggered.

Lastly, creating an “enemy” for members is another tactic used by the community to control its members, especially when the community wants its members to engage in war to kill someone. The normal people will not likely to kill other normal people; as a result, the community will tell them that the people they killed are their enemies. For instance, in the article “*The Psychology of Evil: A Situationist Perspective on Recruiting Good People to Engage in Antisocial Acts*,” the author Philip G. Zimbardo said “Considering how nations prepare their young man to engage in wars in which they must kill other young men. This difficult transformation is accomplished by a special form of cognitive conditioning: images of the “enemy” are created by national propaganda to prepare young men to kill on order whoever has been labeled as the “enemy” of their people”^[3]. All in all, a person who has a normal mental state can be transformed into a killer by setting up an imaginary enemy. That is the reason why a normal people can be cruel and violent when they join the certain community. At the same time, the same tactic was also used in Nazi’s concentration camp. In this case, Nazi used propaganda to create a negative

image of Jewish people. In the article “*Ethics in an age of Terror and Genocide: Identity and Moral Choice*,” the author Kristen Renwick Monroe analyzed a loyal member of Nazi party, “Florentine was a true believer who remained staunchly loyal to her Nazi ideals...Her view of Nazis as simple, trusting people, tricked and threatened by Jews, resembled other Nazis’ worldviews. It is not unique and, as bizarre as it might sound, it is worldview in which Nazis become the victims of Jewish plots”. According to the analysis, there were only good and bad in Florentine’s world. She hated Jewish and wanted to eliminate them since she simply thought Jewish was the representation of bad. Her opinion was similar to most of the soldiers in the concentration camp; as a result, the Nazi soldiers were being cold blooded and cruel to Jewish people. In addition, Nazi soldiers also treated Jewish people as belongings rather than human beings. Specifically, in Theodore Abel’s journal “*The Sociology of Concentration Camps*,” he wrote “Indeed, it is theoretically conceivable that at the extreme limit of social distance from possible inclusion in the in-group, human beings might be regarded as belongings to a different species toward whom, then, no humane principles need function as guides to conduct”. Indeed, in the concentration camp, Nazi considered the Jewish people more likely as belongings rather than human beings. So when Nazi abused Jewish, they tended to be crueler and violent than normal people. In fact, most Nazi just simply thought they were abusing senseless objects or enemies who deserved to be treated inhumanely and violently.

In fact, everyone could engage in immoral behavior under the certain extreme circumstances because the dark side of human nature existed in everyone’s mind. And people will rationalize their immoral behaviors to escape from the feeling of guilt and regret. Specifically, in Jo-Ann Tsang’s article “*Moral Rationalization and the Integration of Situational Factors and Psychological Processes in Immoral Behavior*,” she wrote “All of us have the potential to commit evil actions, given that right circumstances. Once individuals realize the moral ramifications of their actions, they can work actively to convince themselves and others that their evil behavior falls within moral standards”^[4]. So the people who engage in the immoral behavior actually know they violated the moral standard; however, they will find an excuse for themselves to make their behaviors seem normal in their own perspective. In *Lord of the Flies*, the savage boys kill Simon, but they insist that they killed the beast. The author William Golding wrote:

He came disguised. He may come again even though

we gave him the head of our kill to eat. So watch; and be careful.” Stanley lifted his forearm off the rock and held up an interrogative finger. “Well?” “But didn’t we, didn’t we?” He squirmed and looked down. “No!” In the silence that followed, each savage flinched away from his individual memory. “No! How could we-kill-it?”^[1]

So after savage boys found that they murdered people, they tried to conceal their immoral behavior by rationalizing it. They told themselves they killed beast instead of a human being. After that, they can escape from their guilty feelings. In conclusion, the evil existed in people’s hearts, and it will be triggered and flourished under certain circumstances, particularly when people live in an evil community.

Indeed, there exists some current events which represented normal people who act immorally in an evil community. Specifically, the guards in Guantanamo Bay abuse the prisoners which is against the moral standards. In the article “*Alka Pradhan v. Gitmo*” by Jeffrey E. Stern, the author describes how the prisoners were tortured by the guards “Someone came with a cup, showed it to him and poured it out. This ritual was repeated. He was kept awake. When he fell asleep, he was punched, his legs throbbing and swollen from standing. Finally, Baluchi saw a doctor approach. The doctor measured the swelling and approved Baluchi for more abuse”^[5]. The prisoners were treated inhumanely. Indeed, the guards basically did not consider the prisoners as human beings. As a result, the guards abused the prisoners cruelly and the evil side of human nature flourished under this circumstance. At the same time, the guards’ mental transformation was similar to that of the soldiers and savage boys in some ways; they both rationalized their immoral behaviors. In this case, Mark Danner described a guard’s speech to the prisoners in his article “*Guantanamo Diary*” by Mohamedou Ould Slahi, “‘You’re Arab, you’re young, you went to jihad, you speak foreign languages, you’ve been in many countries, you’re a graduate in a technical discipline.’ ‘And what crime is that?’ I said, ‘Look at the hijackers: they were the same way’^[6]. The image of an enemy was established in the guards’ minds, so the guards could torture the prisoners constantly. There is an interesting phenomenon in the prisons; some of the guards actually know that they did something horrible. Specifically, take Joe Nocera’s article “*A Detainee’s Diary*” as an example, “But the quote that sticks with the most is something that one of his guards told him, something that could stand as a fitting epitaph

for Guantanamo itself: “I know I can go to hell for what I did to you”^[6]. So originally, the guards knew that their behaviors were immoral and violated the moral standards; however, their moral choices were not conducted by the community they were living in instead of themselves. As a result, the guards proceeded their violent behaviors in the prisons. All in all, the abuse phenomenon happened in Guantanamo Bay is an example of how immoral behavior flourished under extreme circumstance.

In conclusion, living in communities is the daily life for most of the humans; however, the dark side of human nature will be fostered when people live in an evil community. And the community will use some tactics to trigger the evil of human nature of every member of the community. The community can also make people crueler by promoting obedience. At the same time, the community will set an enemy image for the members to guide them to cruel behaviors. Lastly, when the members realize that they were against the moral standard, they will rationalize their evil behaviors to escape from a sense of guilty. And at the same time, the guards’ abuse behaviors in Guantanamo Bay also showed the deindividuation process and the dark side of human nature. All in all, since people live in communities every day, they need to keep a clear mind and think critically instead of just doing whatever other people ask. Then, people will be able to remain their own values and goals when they are living in communities.

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