

Psychology of morality

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Contemporary Issues in Psychology

- Zimbardo's prison-guard experiment
- Video of Zimbardo theory of "situational immorality"
- Haidt's understanding of moral behavior

Class objectives



personality

Context/
situation

- *"What happens when you put good people in an evil place? Does humanity win over evil, or does evil triumph?"*
 - *~Philip Zimbardo~*
- Stanford University
- Summer 1971

Prisoner-Guard Experiment

- * 1933
- PHD Yale
- NYU, Columbia
- Professor at Stanford
- Now retired
- Co-director of Shyness Clinic



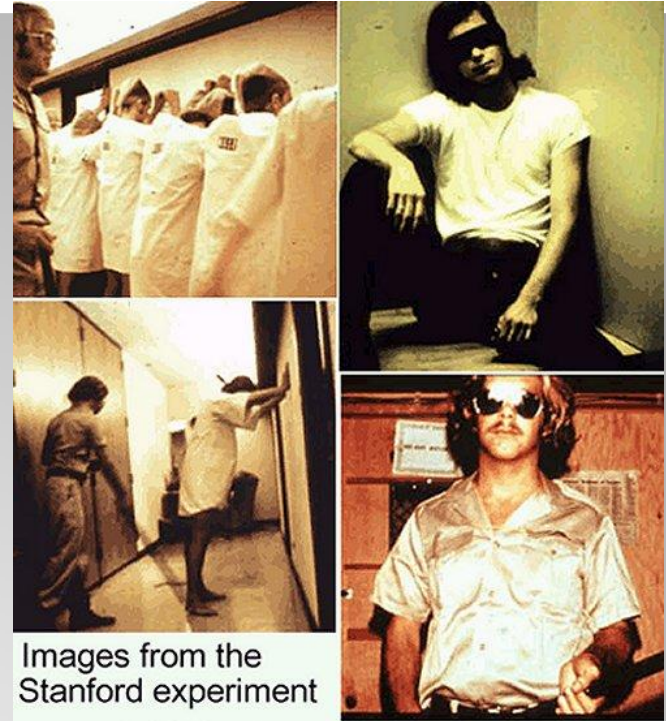
Who is Philip Zimbardo?

- “Male college students needed for psychological study of prison life. \$15 per day for 1-2 weeks beginning Aug. 14. For further information & applications, come to Room 243, Jordan Hall, Stanford U.”



Advertising the study

- 24 persons
- 12 prison guards
- 12 prisoners

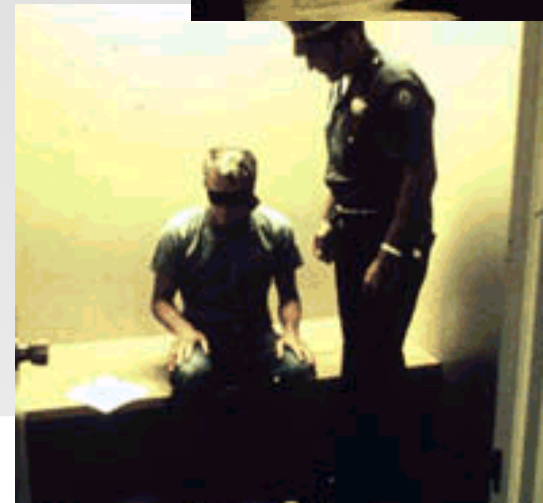
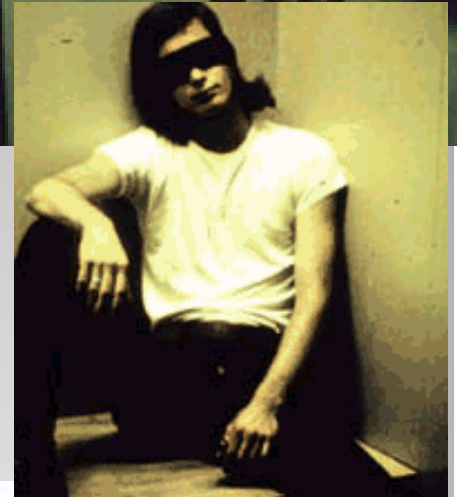


Images from the
Stanford experiment

(with thanks to Philip Zimbardo)

The research sample

- No windows
- The arrests
- Humiliation of the prisoners (searched, naked)
- All participants were unaware of being watched

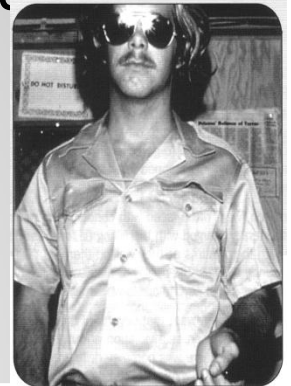


The prison setting

- Uniforms
- ID numbers
- chains



- no instructions obtained
 - Khaki uniforms
 - Wore sunglasses
 - Had wooden batons
 - Had whistles
-
- Task: to maintain a reasonable degree of order in the prison and not to use physical violence.



Prisoners versus Guards

- Soon it got out of control....
- All prisoners' rights were redefined as privileges
- Many seemed to enjoy the power
- Punishment with little or no justification
- Appeared to forget that they were only acting



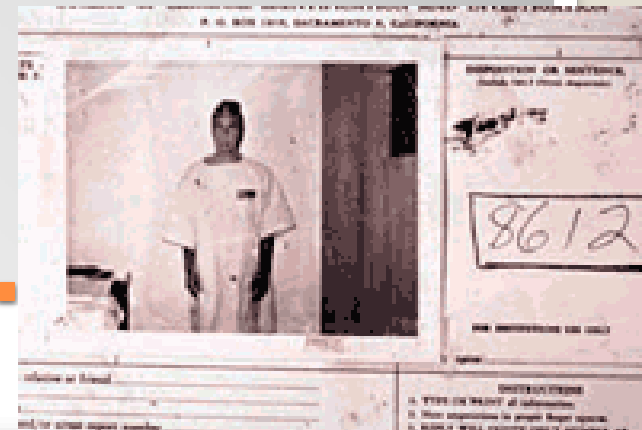
- Psychological strategies
- Good and bad cells
- With and without privilege



Changing tactics

- Prisoner 8612
- The first one released
- Emotionally disturbed: uncontrolled crying, fits of rage, disorganised thinking and severe depression
- Three others developed the same symptoms
- Another prisoner developed a rash over his whole body
- They became demoralised and apathetic

After only 36 hours....



- The prison changed into a nice, friendly place



When their families visited...



Mass escape plot conspiracy

Plan A

“After our meeting, we decided to put an informant (an experimental confederate) in the cell that #8612 had occupied. The job of our informant would be to give us information about the escape plot. Then I went back to the Palo Alto Police Department and asked the sergeant if we could have our prisoners transferred to their old jail.

My request was turned down because the Police Department would not be covered by insurance if we moved our prisoners into their jail. I left angry and disgusted at this lack of cooperation between our correctional facilities (I was now totally into my role).”

-Philip Zimbardo

“Then we formulated a second plan. The plan was to dismantle our jail after the visitors left, call in more guards, chain the prisoners together, put bags over their heads, and transport them to a fifth floor storage room until after the anticipated break in. When the conspirators came, I would be sitting there alone. I would tell them that the experiment was over and we had sent all of their friends home, that there was nothing left to liberate. After they left, we'd bring our prisoners back and redouble the security of our prison. We even thought of luring #8612 back on some pretext and then imprisoning him again because he was released on false pretenses.”

-Philip Zimbardo

Plan B

Payback

Angry over the energy spent on preventing the rumored escape, the guards make life unbearable for the prisoners...



- The study was abandoned after just six days because of the prisoners' pathological reactions
- Originally planned for 2 weeks
- Full debriefing of participants took place, weeks, months and years after

Ending...

Zimbardo

“The security of my men and the stability of my prison was at stake, and now, I had to deal with this bleeding-heart, liberal, academic, effete dingdong who was concerned about the independent variable!”



"Listen, you are not #819. You are [his name], and my name is Dr. Zimbardo. I am a psychologist, not a prison superintendent, and this is not a real prison. This is just an experiment, and those are students, not prisoners, just like you. Let's go." He stopped crying suddenly, looked up at me like a small child awakened from a nightmare, and replied, "Okay, let's go."

Prisoner #819



Ending the Experiment

- Abuse of prisoners was getting out of hand
- "It's terrible what you are doing to these boys!"
- 2-week planned prison simulation ended on the 6th day...



- Zimbardo et al aimed to show that situational (environmental) rather than dispositional factors (personality) caused negative behaviour and thoughts patterns found in prisons by conducting a prison simulation with 'normal' participants playing the roles of guard and prisoner.

- This experiment illustrated that situational factors rather than dispositional (i.e., personality) are more important in shaping our behaviour .
- Are we all capable of acting out of character when placed in certain situations???

conclusions

- http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/philip_zimbardo_on_the_psychology_of_evil.html