Discussion points

• Effects of era?
  – The early 1960s were a different time
• Effects of participant demographics?
  – Tested only men, in all three roles

Scenario

• You’re assistant manager at a restaurant
  – Police officer calls
  – Describes a theft there, and the perpetrator
  – The description matches an employee
  – Officer asks you to confiscate the employee’s clothing and do a strip search
• What do you do?

Scenario

• McDonald’s assistant manager:
  *You have no idea what you’d’ve done in that situation. You think you do but you don’t.*
• Is she special, or is she like the rest of us?
  – Dispositional attribution: She’s special
  – Situational attribution: Anyone in that situation would be at risk

Research question

• Why do ordinary people do evil things?
  – Is an authority figure necessary?
• Research also addresses: Why don’t victims of abuse just leave?

The Stanford Prison Experiment

18 participants randomly assigned to be prisoners or guards
• College students, paid $15 per day
• Study was to last two weeks
  • Canceled on day 6
  • Gave more-or-less informed consent
• Passed IRB then, probably wouldn’t today
The Stanford Prison Project

- Prisoners were arrested by actual police
  - Taken to mock prison
  - Basement of Psych department
  - Strip searched and “deloused,” put in chains and jumpsuits, assigned numbers
- Guards had uniforms, billy clubs, sunglasses
  - Billy clubs to be used “only as symbolic weapons”

Abu Ghraib prison, Iraq

- Site of prisoner abuses by US Army and CIA personnel, 2003-2004

Lynndie England

[w/ Charles Graner]

Among 12 people convicted for offenses at Abu Ghraib

ConsenT
Sabrina Harman

“I guess we weren’t really thinking. Hey, this guy has family, or, Hey, this guy was just murdered,” Harman said. “It was just—Hey, it’s a dead guy, it’d be cool to get a photo next to a dead person. I know it looks bad. I mean, even when I look at them, I go, ‘Oh Jesus, that does look pretty bad.’ But when we were in that situation it wasn’t as bad as it looks coming out on the media, I guess, because people have photos of all kinds of things. Like, if a soldier sees somebody dead, normally they’ll take photos of it.”

Implications

- Why do ordinary people do evil things?
  – Why don’t victims of abuse fight back, or leave?
- The situation drives initial behavior
- Then dissonance reduction takes over
  – So people grow into roles (abuser or abused)
- Observers make dispositional attributions
  – Reinforcing the roles