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 would’ve done in that situation. You think you do but you don’t:
- Is she special, or is she like the rest of us?

The Stanford Prison Experiment

The Stanford Prison Project (Zimbardo, 1972; www.prisonexp.org)

- 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

Questions

- Why ...
  - ... do seemingly normal people do evil things?
  - ... don’t victims of abuse leave their surroundings?

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”
Among 12 people convicted for offenses at Abu Ghraib

Lynndie England
(w/ Charles Graner)

Sabrina Harman

Questions

- Why ...
  - do seemingly normal people do evil things?
  - don’t victims of abuse leave their surroundings?
- Situational pressures can be very strong
  - Lead us to behave in ways we then have to justify
    - Dissonance reduction
  - Observers don’t always see this process
    - Fundamental attribution error