Social Psychology

- Focuses on behavior and mental processes of the individual in context of other people
- Outline for next four classes:
  - First impressions
  - Attribution errors; attitudes and behavior
  - Obedience to authority
  - The Stanford Prison Experiment

Milgram discussion points

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

Replicating Milgram

(Burger, 2009)

- Replicated Milgram, with two main changes:
  - Quit the procedure at 150 volts
    - The point where the participant first objected
  - In-depth screening of participants
    - Almost 50% of participants were screened out
    - 29 men and 41 women actually took part

Replicating Milgram

(Burger, 2009)

- Explanatory factors:
  - Obedience to authority and deference to perceived expertise
  - Gradual increase in demands
  - Limited information in a novel environment
  - Responsibility not assigned or diffused

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.
- Limitation: This is a case study
  - She may have been a bad person, or very naïve
  - Or the situation could have been very powerful, in ways that we can’t tell
  - Hard to generalize from one example
The Stanford Prison Experiment

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 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

• 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”

CONSENT

Prison Life Study
Dr. Zimbardo
August 1971

I, ____________________, the undersigned, hereby consent to participate as a volunteer in a prison life study research project to be conducted by the Stanford University Psychology Department.

The nature of the research project has been fully explained to me, including, without limitation, the fact that paid volunteers will be randomly assigned to the roles of either "prisoners" or "guards" for the duration of the study. I understand that participation in the research project will involve a loss of privacy, that I will be expected to participate for the full duration of the study, that I will only be released from participation for reasons of health deemed adequate by the medical advisers to the research project or for other reasons deemed appropriate by Dr. Philip Zimbardo, Principal Investigator of the project, and that I will be expected to follow directions from staff members of the project or from other participants in the research project.

Witness: ____________________

______________________________
(signature of volunteer)
One interpretation

- 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)
- Participants make dispositional attributions
  - Reinforcing the roles