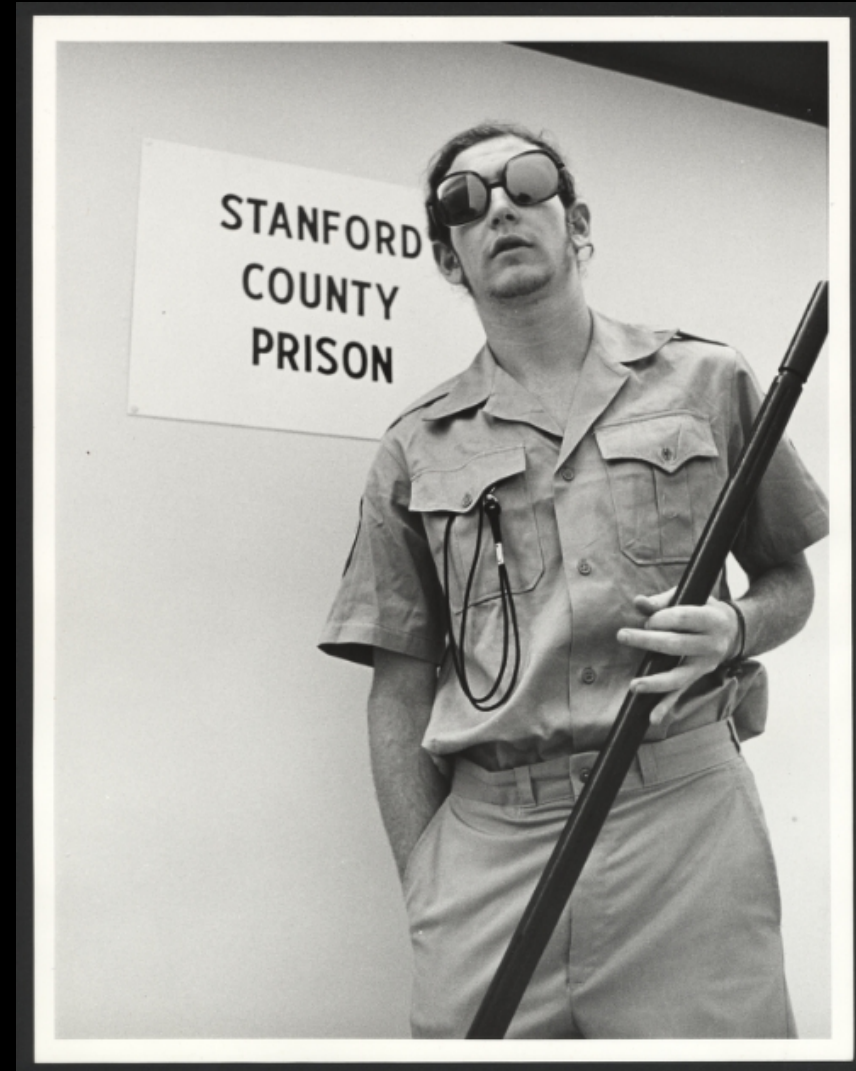


The Stanford Prison Experiment



- The Stanford Prison Experiment was a landmark psychological study of the human response to captivity, in particular, to the real world circumstances of prison life.
- Conducted in 1971 by Philip Zimbardo of Stanford University.



Subjects were randomly assigned to play the role of "prisoner" or "guard".

Guards →
Were given
sticks and
sunglasses

Prisoners →
Were arrested by the Palo Alto police
department, deloused, forced to wear
chains and prison garments, and
transported to the basement of the
Stanford psychology department, which
had been converted into a makeshift jail.



- Several of the guards became progressively more sadistic - particularly at night when they thought the cameras were off, despite being picked by chance out of the same pool as the prisoners.



- The experiment very quickly got out of hand. On day two a riot broke out. After only 6 days (of a planned two weeks), the experiment was shut down, for fear that one of the prisoners would be seriously hurt.



Is there anything wrong with this ad?

MALE students needed to participate in psychological study of **prison life. \$15 per day for 1-2 weeks, beginning Aug. 14. Further information and applications may be obtained in rm-248 Jordan Hall.**

- Why would “prison life” be a bad idea to include?
- It has been shown that the words “prison life” would attract a certain personality that is more aggressive in nature and prone to conflict.

- Although the intent of the experiment was to examine captivity, its result has been used to:
 - Demonstrate the impressionability and obedience of people when provided with a legitimizing ideology and social and institutional support.
 - It is also used to illustrate *cognitive dissonance theory* and the power of seniority/authority (think Milgram Experiment).



Cognitive Dissonance

- If I believe I am good, but then do something bad the discomfort I feel is cognitive dissonance.



- It can be argued that the conclusions that Professor Zimbardo and others have drawn from the Stanford Prison Experiment are not valid.
 - Why?
 - Professor Zimbardo acknowledges that he was not merely an observer in the experiment, but an active participant as the Warden of the prison and in some cases it is clear he was influencing the direction the experiment went.



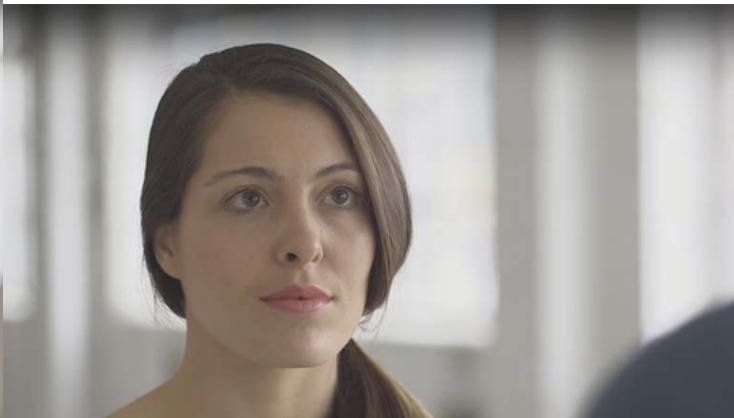
Problems (cont.)

- Wore sunglasses as an example of their dehumanization.
- The student "guards" were also issued batons by Professor Zimbardo on their first day, which may have predisposed them to consider physical force as an acceptable means of running the "prison."

Pick a partner in class. It has to be someone you
DO NOT know.

Please grab a chair and go somewhere in the
classroom. Sit so your knees are passing one
another.

You will now sit silently and stare into each
other's eyes for the next 5 minutes...



WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME
YOU REALLY LOOKED INTO A STRANGER'S EYES ?



- Professor Zimbardo also acknowledges initiating several procedures that do not occur in actual prisons:
 - Blindfolding incoming "prisoners"
 - Making them wear women's clothing
 - Not allowing them to wear underwear
 - Not allowing them to look out windows
 - Not allowing them to use their names.
- Zimbardo justifies this by stating that prison is a confusing and dehumanizing experience and it was necessary to enact these procedures to put the "prisoners" in the proper frame of mind.
- However, it opens the question of whether Professor Zimbardo's simulation is an accurate reflection of the reality of incarceration or a reflection of Professor Zimbardo's preconceived opinions of what actual incarceration is like.

Can the Stanford Prison Experiment be used for real life events?

Yes

- The human rights abuses that occurred at the Abu Ghraib prison under the authority of the American armed forces in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq war may be a recent example of what happened in the experiment in real life.
 - Soldiers were thrust into the role of prison guards and began to sadistically torment prisoners there and at other detention sites in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many of the specific acts of humiliation were similar to those that occurred in the Stanford Prison Experiment, according to Zimbardo.
- This theory has been challenged in allegations by Seymour Hersh
 - Why?
 - Because these soldiers were acting under direct orders of their superiors as part of a top secret Pentagon intelligence gathering program authorized by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.