

them because they do little favors for the prisoners and never punished them. The reason I picked them is because I'm a very nice person and I wouldn't treat someone so harsh like they (bad guards) treat the prisoners.

I am very sure that I would have been a good guard because I am a very lenient person. I don't like to hurt people purposely.

A substantial group of students said they would have been "tough but fair," noting that they were raised in such a manner; and many said that they had children of their own now and this was how they wanted to raise their own kids. A surprising number (18.9%) admitted that they would have become hostile just like the "bad guard" students in the experiment. These students admitted that to do otherwise would have led to a loss of respect among the prisoners and to a loss of control. I teach in Louisiana, a conservative "Red" state that is a "law and order" kind of place. Some of these students who said they would have been tough or hostile said they come from military or law enforcement families, and therefore had little sympathy for anyone in a prisoner role, even if it is a "mock prison" role.

The second part, or part B of question two had to do with how sure the person was that they would be the type of guard that they had mentioned in the first part. Well over fifty percent said that they were pretty sure of the type of guard they would be, and I often wonder whether these young charges of mine really grasped the basic conclusion from the study, that even "normal" people can behave badly when put in the wrong social environment. I was more reassured by the substantial minority that, after saying what kind of guard they would have become, qualified their answer by saying that they could not be sure; after all, the participants in the Stanford study could not have predicted the bizarre outcome. Farrell Levy, for example, wrote:

If I were a guard I would be a good guard, or at least I hope I would. Even the best people, when put under the wrong circumstances, can turn into that which they seek to fight against. So while I would start out as a good guard and strive to maintain my stand, unforeseen events might try to alter my position.

Others similarly qualified their initial statements:

I would hope I would be a good guard, but it is hard to say because I am rarely given that sort of power.

I have a feeling that I would have started out being a "good" guard and then later I would have become a "bad" guard. I think this only because when I am in charge I like the people I am in charge of to listen to me and I would not have reacted very well to the prisoners' harassment and cursing.

In question 3, regarding what prevented the good guards from objecting to the orders of the bad guards, most students got the point that peer pressure or fear was involved; the good guy types were just not strong enough or did not have the kinds of personalities to override the more authoritarian type bad guards.

Question 4 asked if the student were in the place of the Stanford prisoners, could they have taken the experiment. Most said no, and said that they would have somehow been able to distinguish the experiment from the reality. They would have simply resigned, remembering that they were just participating in an experiment. Almost universally, the students said they would not be able to withstand a long stay in a real prison.

In question 5, the students were asked why the student prisoners worked within the arbitrary system that had been set up, and did not try to change the system. Most indicated that the situation had become real for the prisoners, and that they were acting like real prisoners.

In question 6, the introductory students were asked to relate what they learned from the experiment. Answers varied, as it was expected that each person may take away something different from the experience of watching the slide show and reflecting upon it. A few examples:

If you are ever put in any kind of prison, it's important that you hold onto whatever morality or sanity you have, because you are not going to gain any in prison.

People change according to their environments. One never knows how he/she will really react until he/she goes through it.

People can change into another role quicker than I thought, and they really started acting like real prisoners quickly without knowing they were changing.

AFTERWORD

The assignment about the Stanford experiment appeared to resonate with today's students; I feel that if nothing else, it gets them away from a traditional lecture and an opportunity to spend time on a more technological kind of project, which many enjoy anyway. More important, though, is that the assignment appears to be memorable and something that they may retain from the class well after it is over. The Abu Ghraib scandal of 2004 appeared to illustrate the timeless nature of the experiment; I feel confident that whenever events like that scandal occur in the future, the Stanford Prison Experiment will be mentioned again.

During the summer of 2004, the Sociology Club of the college where I teach held two forums about the Abu Ghraib scandal. The forums drew two different kinds of student crowds. The first was a mostly anti-Iraq war crowd that deplored the prisoner abuse and argued that there had been Geneva Convention violations and that the responsibility for creating a culture of abuse extended all the way to the top of the Pentagon, to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. A second forum, initiated by pro-war students who felt they did not have time to adequately argue their case in the first session, featured a former prison guard from Abu Ghraib who had actually seen the work setting where the abuse occurred and knew some of the people charged with the abuse. His basic argument was that the abusers were just "bad apples" who got carried away in the free-wheeling environment and acted in a manner uncharacteristic of the typical American soldier serving in Iraq.

The arguments articulated by the students in the two sessions are interesting if turned back to the subject of the experiment itself as a means of critiquing it. Who was to blame for the culture of violence in the mock prison? Is Dr. Zimbardo himself to blame due to his permissive, laissez faire leadership as the administrator in the prison? How about Dr. Zimbardo's department head, or Zimbardo's Dean, or the Provost of the school, or Stanford's President? Or, as a counter argument, was the abuse traceable to one or two

"bad apples" amongst the guards whose strong, authoritative leadership went unchallenged and led all the other guards astray down the wrong path? If that is the way one evaluates the experiment, then the findings are somewhat validating of the work of the Frankfurt School that studied the origins of totalitarianism after World War II. Perhaps just as Erich Fromm (1941) argued, there is something in human nature that causes people to escape from the freedom that surrounds them by submitting themselves to a strong leader, and if that is so, there might still be something of value in the videotapes of the Stanford Prison Experiment that still could be looked at after all these years. The research staff may regret once again that they adopted such realistic prison roles and neglected some of the more academic aspects of their most unusual experiment.

REFERENCES

- Baumrind, D. 1964. Some thoughts on the ethics of research: after reading Milgram's 'Behavioral Study of Obedience.' *Amer Psychologist* 19 421-423.
- Fromm, E. 1941. *Escape From Freedom*. NY: Avon.
- Garfinkel, H. 1956. Conditions of successful status degradation ceremonies. *Amer Soc Rev* 61 420-424.
- Goffman, E. 1974. *Frame Analysis*. NY: Harper and Row.
- _____. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. NY: Anchor.
- Jackson, G. 1972. *Blood in My Eye*. NY: Random House.
- Milgram, S. 1975. *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. NY: Harper and Row.
- _____. 1964. Group pressure and action against a person. *J Abnormal Social Psych* 69 2 Aug 137-143.
- Mixson, D. 1972. Instead of deception. *J Theory Social Behav* 2 2 Oct 145-177.
- O'Leary, C., F. Willis, & E. Tomich. 1970. Conformity under deceptive and non-deceptive techniques. *Sociological Qtrly* 11 1 Win 87-93.
- Patten, S. 1977. The case that Milgram makes. *Philosophical Rev* 96 3 July 350-364.
- Rothman, D. 1972. Of prisons, asylums, and other decaying institutions. *Public Interest* 26 Win 3-17.
- Sherif, M. 1961. *Social Judgment; Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Communication and Attitude Change*. New Haven, CT: Yale U Press.
- Stannard, M. 2004. Stanford experiment foretold Iraq scandal. *San Francisco Chronicle* May 8.
- Zimbardo, P. 2005. The Stanford prison experiment. Available online: <http://www.prisonexp.org>.