

Psychology paper



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Psychology Paper The abusive events that took place at the Abu Ghraib prison in 2003 by United States soldiers bears a striking resemblance to the infamous and controversial Stanford Prison Experiment of 1971. It can be argued that one sole difference exists between the two events. The volunteers of the prison experiment knew that they were involved in an experiment, while the Iraqi prisoners were fully aware of their harsh reality. However, it can also be argued that since the line between stimulation and reality was blurred during the prison experiment, the separate experiences were hardly different from one another. One of the first similarities between what took place at the prison outside of Baghdad and what unraveled at the makeshift prison at Stanford is that the people portraying the guards had no previous experience in those roles. The United States soldiers only had experience as soldiers, but they still enforced their authoritative roles on their prisoners, much like the guards in the prison experiment. These roleplaying guards also did not have experience, though that did not stop them from making it known who had the greater power. In both cases, the soldiers and the pseudo-guards conformed to the roles of real prison guards the more that they exercised their power over the prisoners, doing what they could to dehumanize them. The guards and the prisoners alike had no choice but to accept these roles, even though the guards soon began to abuse their power. The abuse itself was similar in nature and in intensity. The purposes behind the abuse in both cases were to degrade and humiliate. The abuse was also used to instill a sense of fear in the prisoners, as well as to make it known who was in charge. The rights and bodies of the prisoners were violated, and they were denied essential aspects of a healthy life, such as food or a healthy environment. These actions were undergone to make the

prisoners powerless, especially in their weakened attempts to fight back. Also, like the volunteers in the prison experiment, the Iraqi prisoners were stripped of their clothes and humiliated in presence of the soldiers. The volunteer prisoners were forced to wear blindfolds and women's stockings over their heads, whereas the United States soldiers forced their Iraqi prisoners to wear bags over their heads. Though the volunteer prisoners wore frocks that were similar to women's dresses, when they began to get out of hand they were stripped of their clothes and forced to wander the prison in the nude. The Iraqi prisoners had a similar fate, being forced out of their clothing. However, their abuse was taken further and they were sexually humiliated and photographed during the incident. In both the Abu Ghraib prison and the Stanford makeshift prison, the dominating factor was corruption. The soldiers and the volunteer guards saw opportunities to exercise their powers over others and they took these chances. Unlike the prisoners in the Stanford Prison Experiment, however, those in the Abu Ghraib were unable to just walk away after everything had been done to them. As real prisoners, they had no choice but to stay in the situation that they were in until their conditions were made known when the photos of their assaults and humiliations were released.