Zimbardo et al. 1973 Investigation of conformity to Social Roles: The Stanford Prison Experiment:

Aim:
- Investigate how people would conform to new roles by observing how quickly people would adopt to the roles of guard/prisoners in a role-play exercise that simulates real prison life
- Find out if the brutality among guards in American prisons was due to the sadistic personalities of the guards (Dispositional explanation)
- Or had more to do with the prison environment (Situational explanation)

Procedure:
- Well adjusted, healthy male, paid $15/day, take part in a 2-week simulation study of prison life
- Volunteers randomly allocated to roles of guards/prisoners
- Local police helped ‘arresting 9 prisoners at their homes, X warning’
- Ps=taken, blindfolded to the ‘prison’basement of Stanford Uni.
- Ps=stripped, sprayed with disinfectant, smocks to wear, prison no. to memorize
- Ps=referred by nos. only
- 3 guards on each shift, wore khaki uniforms, dark glasses, wooden batons
- X physical aggression permitted

Findings:
- Guards=harassed, humiliated the prisoners (Conformed to their perceived roles)
- Study discontinued after 6 days (planned to last for 2 weeks)
- Prisoners rebelled against guards after 2 days
- Guards quelled prisoners by fire extinguishers
- Prisoners=depressed, anxious
  (1 released after 1 day)
  (2 more released on day 4)
  (Day 6, prisoners=submissive to guards)

Conclusions:
- Explained conformity by Situational factors
- Environment=important factor to guard’s brutal behavior
  (None showed sadistic behavior before study)
- People=readily conform to Social roles they are expected to play
- Roles people played shaped their attitude, behavior
- If it took 6 days to alter behavior, roles in real life will have more far reaching effects
Evaluation:
- X informed consent
- Humiliation, distress experienced by Ps
- Guards had to face up to the unpalatable fact that they had been willing to mistreat 'prisoners'
- 'Prisoners' psychological harm
- Follow up interview with Ps no lasting –ve effects

Results demonstrate how easily people behave in uncharacteristic ways when placed in new situations, roles
- Some Ps tried to be 'good subject', behaved in ways they thought the researcher wanted (Demand Characteristics)

- Zimbardo acted as both prison-superintendent and chief researcher=Wrong (Produced conflict of roles whereby he lost sight of harm being done to Ps)

Ethics in Zimbardo's study:
- Harm to Ps:
  - Savin 1973 criticized they way they humiliated Ps
  - Ended 8 days earlier because of unexpectedly extreme emotional, behavioral effects
  - Savin: even the most intelligent, well-intentioned among us can be overwhelmed by social influence

Need for independent surveillance:
- Zimbardo shouldn't have acted as a prison-superintendent and chief researcher
- He=trapped in day-to-day business of his superintendent role, rather as part of prisoners' be absorbed in their roles
- Zimbardo: research should be ethically sensitive
- Should be an independent monitor and more vigilant surveillance by the institution concerned (Ps=protected)
  (Valuable info=acquired)

Deceiving Ps:
- Not necessary & unethical
- Leaving Ps feeling foolish, humiliated
- Other ethically acceptable methods can be used
- E.g. asking Ps to imagine how they/others would have behave in certain situations
- Zimbardo: "As if" procedure =/= Real life
- If imagination works, simulations would be useless
- There are situations that can't be imagined
- Needs to feel and become entrapped in the power of the situation
Implications from research on conformity and obedience:

1. Resisting unwanted influences:
   • Need for us to be aware of the circumstances that lead to
     E.g. blind obedience/failure to empathies with the plight of others
   • Zimbardo 2007: Ten step to resist unwanted influences:
     i. Admit mistakes:
        Apologize and don’t waste time justifying errors
     ii. Be mindful:
        Pay attention to words, actions of those who try to influence us
     iii. Be responsible:
        Take responsibility for our actions, decisions
     iv. Assert your individuality:
        Be clear about our identity, credential
     v. Respect just authority but rebel against unjust authority:
        Distinguish between those who have authority based on expertise and wisdom and those who lack substance
     vi. Balance desire for group acceptance with value of own individuality:
        We are social animals but we need to determine when to follow group norms and when to reject
     vii. Be frame-vigilant:
        Way issues are described may be highly influential
     viii. Develop a balanced time perspective:
        Beware of going with the flow if others=doing badly
     ix. Don’t sacrifice freedoms for the illusion of security:
        Sacrifices=real
        Security may be a distant illusion
     x. Oppose unjust systems:
        Although a daunting undertaking, individuals along with others of the same mind can make a difference

2. Educating nurses:
   • Holfing et al.’s 1966 obedience study of nurses behavior
   • Raised awareness about the potential for senior staff to influence junior personnel to the point where they might break hospital rules