

RESEARCH ASSESSMENT 4: DR. PHILIP ZIMBARDO

BY: SHRINIDHI JOSHI

DATE: 10/16/2016

SOURCES:

1. Kelling, George L., and James Q. Wilson. "Broken Windows." The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, Mar. 1982. Web. 16 Oct. 2016.
2. "The Homepage of Professor Philip G. Zimbardo." The Homepage of Professor Philip G. Zimbardo. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2016.
3. "Home." Stanford Prison Experiment. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2016.
4. Saul McLeod Published 2008, Updated 2016. "Stanford Prison Experiment." Simply Psychology. N.p., 01 Jan. 1970. Web. 17 Oct. 2016.

ANALYSIS:

When learning about the Broken Windows Theory, I briefly came across a description of an experiment conducted by Dr. Philip Zimbardo, a psychologist. Just by reading the short paragraph on one of his experiments, I became interested in finding out more about him and his numerous experiments. Through my research, I discovered that Dr. Philip Zimbardo was not only a psychologist but a researcher, media personality and university Professor. Not only has he conducted numerous psychological experiments but he also has approximately three hundred publications. On top of that, he became a media personality through his PBS-TV series, *Discovering Psychology*. Additionally, while he is currently a Professor in Psychology at Stanford, he has also taught at prestigious schools such as Columbia, NYU, and Yale. Moreover he has had received many awards and honors. For example, one distinguishing position he has held in the last few years is the position of being the president of the American Psychological Association. Overall, he is a notable figure in the field of psychology.

I first became interested in Professor Philip Zimbardo's teachings when I read about his Broken Windows Theory experiment. In 1969, Zimbardo unknowingly tested out the Broken Windows Theory by arranging a simple experiment involving two cars. First, he had two cars without license plates parked on a street in the Bronx and a street in Palo Alto respectively. The cars were then both observed from afar. To start, Zimbardo observed that "the car in the Bronx was attacked by vandals within ten minutes of its abandonment." In fact, the first 'vandals', a family comprised of a father, mother, and young son, stripped the car of its radiator and battery. Soon after, within twenty-four hours, "virtually everything of value had been removed." After the car lost value, 'random destruction' began and windows were smashed and parts torn off among other things. Afterwards, the shell of the car began to be used by children as a playground

of sorts. In Palo Alto, however, the story was initially quite different. Unlike the quick degradation of the Bronx car, the Palo Alto car remained untouched for longer than a week. It wasn't until Dr. Zimbardo smashed part of the car with a sledgehammer did the Palo Alto car begin to see similar results as its counterpart in Bronx. Once the car was partially damaged, people began to participate as the car was completely destroyed within hours. Surprisingly enough, in both cases Zimbardo observed that the vandals were primarily whites who were dressed respectably. The theory could be seen through this ~~experiment~~ experiment easily. As eloquently stated in the famous article by George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson, "untended property becomes fair game for people out for fun or plunder and even for people who ordinarily would not dream of doing such things and who probably consider themselves law-abiding. Because of the nature of community life in the Bronx—its anonymity, the frequency with which cars are abandoned and things are stolen or broken, the past experience of "no one caring"—vandalism begins much more quickly than it does in staid Palo Alto, where people have come to believe that private possessions are cared for, and that mischievous behavior is costly. But vandalism can occur anywhere once communal barriers—the sense of mutual regard and the obligations of civility—are lowered by actions that seem to signal that "no one cares."" As can be seen Zimbardo's experiment was vitally used as support of the well known Broken Windows Theory and reflected the impact of environment on human behavior.

While the experiment discussed above is interesting enough, one cannot write about Professor Zimbardo and not mention his infamous and chilling Stanford Prison Experiment. It is important to note that the Stanford Prison Experiment is far too complex to be fully explained in a single paragraph and that the following will be a very superficial description. However, I do plan on writing a full description and analysis of the psychology of the experiment in a different assessment. For the Stanford Prison Experiment, Dr. Zimbardo and his colleagues had students volunteer to be guards and prisoners in order to find out "what the psychological effects were of becoming a prisoner or prison guard." The researchers placed the volunteers in a role-playing exercise in a very realistically simulated prison meant to reflect prison life. Within two weeks, the guard and the behaviors began to reflect the behavior of their roles and many forgot that it was simply an experiment. Guards began to abuse their roles and prisoners became mostly complacent though there were a few rebellions. The experiment was ended a week early due to the "situation [the researchers had created] in which prisoners were withdrawing and behaving in pathological ways, and in which some of the guards were behaving sadistically." At the end of the Stanford Prison Experiment, it could be concluded that prisons influence individuals negatively and dehumanize them.

On that note, I can say that reading about Dr. Philip Zimbardo has been enlightening and beneficial. Not only have I learned about two interesting psychological experiments, but I have also

learned about the qualities and work a extraordinary psychologist has and produces. I strive to be just as great in my field , though I do hope to avoid controversy more. However, it is understandable that somethings must be done in order to learn and improve the situations of others. For example, many find the Stanford Prison Experiment unethical but without it, we would not have found out that it is prisons that cause behavior in prisoners and guards and that the negative behavior is not brought into the prison. It is not necessarily the individual but the institution.