

Good the stanford prison experiment research paper example

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [INTRODUCTION](#) \n \t
2. [DISCUSSION](#) \n \t
3. [CONCLUSION](#) \n \t
4. [REFERENCES](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

INTRODUCTION

Understanding human beings, their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors has always been a fascination of society. While human beings, as animals, are dependent upon a certain number of biological imperatives; the most basic needs, wants, and desires. Psychology looks not solely at the physical but the psyche of human beings. They seek to understand why some people react differently to differing situations and are some behaviors able to be triggered based on a scenario or created environment. Psychology has always simulated environments in order to gauge people's responses or to see if certain responses could be recreated. That is exactly what was done in the Stanford Prison Experiment in 1971. The concept, organized and oversaw by psychologist Philip Zimbardo, of the experiment was to place a number of student volunteers to portray prisoners and another number to portray prison guards (Lee, 2010). However, the experiment itself produced some interesting results, it also brought about a number of ethical questions; these questions are why this experiment remains controversial to this day.

DISCUSSION

Zimbardo was the student of another psychologist, Stanley Milgram, who studied the nature of "obedience experimentation." He hoped to adapt on his work and expand upon that work. The experiment would involve creating a genuine prison environment. The idea was to determine how people's ethics, morality and behaviors may change when either deprived of their rights and freedoms or granted power over others who are deprived of rights and freedoms. In other words will good people do bad things when forced into such a situation? The mock prison was erected in the basement of the Stanford University psychology building. He then selected 24 student participants; they would portray either a prisoner or prison guard. The participants had to have no previously criminal record, be free of psychological conditions, and no serious medical illnesses. They were paid \$15 a day for their time and energy (Cherry 2014). In retrospect many of the participants probably did not feel like that was enough.

Initially the experiment was anticipated to last for 14 days. The prisoners were arrested by actual cops and taken through the process of being booked and relocated to their cells. The participants playing guards were given some preliminary training in the field. However, the experiment had to be ended early, after only six days, due to the behaviors of both the prisoners and prison guards (Cherry, 2014). Once the different players were assigned their role in the experiment, which included Zimbardo as the fictitious prison warden, the "role play" could begin. Those who were prisoners began suffer depression, became passive, and even began plotting escape plans. The prisoner guard's behavior was even more shocking. The guards almost

immediately began to abuse their power, they mistreated the prisoners, harassed them, devalued them, and treated them both unprofessionally and entirely unethically (Kraus Whitbourne, 2013).

The results of the experiment brought up many disturbing points. These people all lost a little bit of their “ grip” on reality. Given the opportunity these guards subjugated the prisoners and the prisoners lost their sense of pride and identity. Even Zimbardo, himself, admitted that he knew of the abuses and prisoner complaints, yet during the experiment did little to rectify the problem. Zimbardo felt this verified his idea that pervasive powers can be quite corruptive. The presence of “ pathological prisoner syndrome” was detected in most of the prisoners, which guides a prisoner to become entirely submissive, even siding with guards against other prisoners (Kraus Whitbourne, 2013). Very few of the prisoners were able to survive the experiment without giving in to the environment itself. Simply put, the experiment was not concluded, but its proof is incontrovertible. Sometimes, some people, given access to great power and control will become an entirely different person when granted such power. In turn it verified that being treated inhumanly can strip individuals from the sense of self and self-image (Cherry, 2014).

The Stanford Prison Experiment has faced a great deal of criticism in the years since it took place. There have been a number of films, television, and novels written on the topic however most contain some creative licensing that may not be reflective of the real experiment. However, the point is that according to the Ethics Code of the American Psychological Association the experiment defies modern ethics and would never be considered today.

Many argue the validity of the study. After all Zimbardo used an experiment group made-up of primarily white males. That makes it difficult to gain a broad spectrum of results. Also, many question ones ability to recreate a prison environment effectively. They feel that this experiment was simply a task in cruelty that went terribly wrong. Years later, even Zimbardo himself would say that, even though it ended early, “ we did not end it soon enough” (Cherry, 2014).

All the same, Zimbardo’s experiment did verify that good, normal, mentally healthy people, when placed into degrading situations will often succumb to the treatment or when given authority over others will very often take full advantage of that power. Even the leader of the study, Zimbardo, was not immune to the roles that they were playing in the experiment. People’s typical and predictable behaviors will change given differing environments (Kraus Whitbourne, 2013). Human beings are adaptive and have a huge survival instinct. We know today that any person will do things, they might not otherwise do, in order to survive a situation, For example, in Stockholm Syndrome we see people who become sympathetic to the very people who are holding them against their will. That said it is not so great a surprise to hear that these people in this experiment responded in very similar ways.

CONCLUSION

In the modern world, we no longer need anyone to prove to us that power corrupts people. We see it every day in politics, law enforcement, and even in our supervisors and managers. The Stanford Prison Experiment was meant to shed light on the behaviors of people in a prison setting; what they

learned was quite shocking. It does not take long for those given dominion and control over others to quickly become “ drunk” and vicious with that power. To a modern eye it looks to be an experiment of cruelty, at least for half of the participants and one that we should be grateful would never be allowed to be conducted today. In fairness, human beings are capable of both great cruelty, but, also, great compassion and care. However, in oppositional situations like the relationship between prisoners and their guards it only breeds the worst emotions from both sides. If nothing else, the Stanford Prison Experiment taught future psychology professionals of how not to conduct an experiment.

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