

The stanford prison experiment: reaction of prisoners

Psychology, Behaviorism



The case of the Standard Ford Experiment is what happens when convicted persons are put in a confined place with relatively good people. The central inquiry at this juncture is whether the conquest between evil and good could bear any fruit. The Standard Ford experiment was an initiative launched to investigate the psychological effects of imaginary power, maintain a close focus on the struggle that prison guards encounter when they are confined with inmates. The experiment took place in 1971, August, at the Stanford University and it used college students as the subjects under the scrutiny of a university professor, Zimbardo Philips (Bachman & Schutt, 2015).

Consequently, the experiment is an attempt to investigate whether the roles that people find themselves in compel them to behave in certain ways.

Overview of the Study

The Standard Prison Experiment is a psychological initiative that involves participants who assume two roles, namely that of a prison guard and a prisoner in the quest to understand their experiences while confined between prison walls (Bachman & Schutt, 2015). The members are encouraged to develop their respective roles as the guards are compelled to enforce a set of strict measures that lead to a state of psychological torture for the perceived prisoners (Ricciardelli, 2014). The majority of the prisoners accepted the extended torture treatments passively and even go to seek permission from the guards to perpetrate actual torture to fellow inmates (Creswell, 2013). During the design of the experiment, Zimbardo assumed the role of the superintendent, and his primary task was to play a supervisory role to ensure that the psychological torture under the eyes of the prison guards is carried out to the latter (Ricciardelli, 2014). Though the

experiment did not flow to completion because of the assertiveness of a graduate student who objected the conditions that the participants were subjected to, it provided valuable psychological insights. Some of the audience members decided to film the proceedings of the experiment and availed the video tapes to government authorities for application to deal with convicted persons and their guards.

Research Design

The purpose of the Stanford Prison experiment is an explanatory study that seeks to explain the implications of the relationship and socialization between prison guards and convicted people (Creswell, 2013). Zimbardo and his team developed a hypothesis that aimed to test the inherent characteristics of guards and prisoners and associate them with the cause of abusive treatment that occurs between prison walls. As such, to verify the relationship between the personality traits of the participants and the probability of abusive behavior in a jail setting, Zimbardo selected a total of 24 males who were assumed to be the healthiest and most psychologically stable (Bachman & Schutt, 2015). Consequently, they choose white participants as the majority, and they were also well off economically, having been pooled from the middle-class level. Those who reflected a weak psychological structure were excluded, including those with past criminal records and medical complications. According to the principle of explanatory research, participants are used in the study to investigate a new phenomenon, whereby the aim of the researcher is to connect insights and ideas that help to create the link between causes and effects, thereby enhance the meaning that is being sought (Ricciardelli, 2014).

Ethical Standards and Principles

For research to be considered valid, it has to fulfill a myriad of universal ethical concerns, principles, and expectations. The Stanford Prison experiment fulfilled some basic ethical considerations, for instance, the researcher to provide information to the participants of the nature and aim of the study, including being told about the length of the study (the study was to take a total of 2 weeks). Secondly, Zimbardo who was the supervisor and owner of the experiment had to ensure that he instills an open and transparent sense of communication with the prisoners to furnish them with the requirements and expectations of the operation (Bachman & Schutt, 2015). Such issues included things like what the participants would be expected to do, behave, react, where they were required to be passive, moments of putting up dynamic behaviors, and others. On the contrary, to provide all the information to the participants is one thing and to get their full, and voluntary consent is another.

With reference to the experiment, this analysis discovered that Zimbardo was unethical because he compelled some participants to take part in the test even without securing their full consent. The issue of consent is one of the most serious ethical issues because it reveals that the participants have agreed to take part in an experiment, bearing in mind that some studies present some serious risks with regards to human subjects (Ricciardelli, 2014). A look at the fourth ethical concern reveals that Zimbardo failed in fulfilling some of the ethical guidelines that are availed for human-subject researches. Accordingly, he associated the behaviors around prison cells with the nature of prisoners and totally ignored the harsh conditions that

prison facilities pose to both convicted inmates and their guards (Bachman & Schutt, 2015). Imperatively, prison life is a source of psychological torture within itself and critics maintained that it is not the nature of prisoners that compel the guards to treat them with harshness, but the character of the surrounding environment (Bachman & Schutt, 2015).

Validity and Reliability of the Experiment

Validity is the reflection of how sound research is, meaning there are a set of conditions that must be fulfilled to consider a study to be valid. One of the requirements that help to make a research correct is whether it has fulfilled some basic ethical concerns. Going by the discussion in the previous section (on ethical concerns), the Stanford Prison experiment was able to furnish the participants with all the details of the study, including what they were expected to do and the exemptions, the time frame of the research, the hypothesis statement to prepare their minds psychologically with reference to expectations, and sundry (Ricciardelli, 2014). There was open communication between the researcher and the participants, and since they were human subjects, they were extended the individual dignity that is worthy of people. Far from expectations, the researcher did not hold his patience to wait for the participants to offer their full consent; thus, the validity of the experiment is considered inferior (Ricciardelli, 2014). In a different perspective, the approach is relatively reliable since the experiences of the participants and the general finding that the roles that people find themselves in compelling them to behave in various ways could be used in various situations (Bachman & Schutt, 2015).

Application and Conclusion

The Stanford Prison Experiment is an attempt to determine whether the roles that people assume in their daily lives and situations, for instance, prison guards and convicts, compel them to behave in certain ways. It was initiated by Zimbardo who used 24 males in an experiment that took two weeks.

Consequently, the findings could be used measure the readiness of people to conform to the roles of prisoner and guard in an exercise that is designed to simulate prison life closely.