

# Stanford Prison Experiment

A study in power, situational circumstances, and prison life.

## Overview

- Occurred in 1971 at Stanford University
- Philip Zimbardo wanted to see the effects of prison life on both prisoners and guards.
- He recruited 24 male college students to participate for \$15 a day.
- All recruited students were screened and deemed “average” in terms of behavior and personality.

**MALE students needed to participate in psychological study of prison life. \$15 per day for 1-2 weeks, beginning Aug. 14. Further information and applications may be obtained in rm-248 Jordan Hall.**

## The Setting



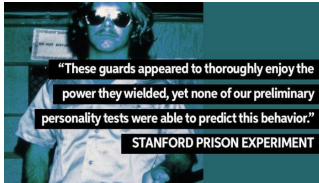
- The experiment took place in the basement of the psychology department.
- The space was turned into a mock jail.
- The prisoners did have a corridor area that they could walk but had very little freedom.

## How it began....

- The “prisoners” were arrested by police officers and taken to the “jail”.
- The prisoners were booked and taken through an intake process like actual prisoners.
- The “prisoners” were not told that they would be arrested in this way.
  - Ethical issues
- Prisoners were given a number when they arrived.



## The Guards



- The guards were given few rules.
  - They were told to keep order
  - No physical violence was allowed.
- The guards were all given identical uniforms, a whistle, and were allowed to wear sunglasses to hide their eyes.
- They were in charge of establishing the rules.

## Issues arises....

- The “prisoners” had expected some harassment and civil rights would be violated.
- The guard tried to assert their authority over the prisoners.
  - Roll calls at 2:30 a.m.
  - Push-ups were a common form of punishment.
- Rebellion of the prisoners on the second day.
  - This caused an extreme reaction from the guards.

## Issues arises...

- Within 36 hours, one prisoner had to be released out of fear of “psychological damage”.
  - This heightened the anxiety and fear of prisoners.
- The guards continued to be cruel, harsh, and unethical with the prisoners for little to no reason.
- There was news that a “mass escape” was being planned.
  - The guards continued to think about how they could prove their power and control.
  - Even Zimbardo was unable to think rationally

## Issues arises...

- Prisoner #819
- 3 types of guards began to emerge.
  - Tough but fair
  - “Good” guy
  - Harsh, cruel, power-hungry
  - One emerged as the cruelest and harshest as well
- After five days, people and lawyers had begun to question the experiment and the experiment was stopped.

## The Good....

- The study showed the power dynamic that exists in American prisons.
- “Average” people could change their personalities and actions based on their situation/position.
- Power in the wrong hands can lead to horrifying situations.
- The power of the group and dehumanizing (affected both groups)

## The Bad....

- People have criticized this study.
- Many have said that this study was unethical and caused harm.
- No women were used in this study.
- People have said that the guards and prisoners were influenced based on information told to them.

## Connection to Animal Farm

Journal Prompt: The theme of power is discussed heavily in Animal Farm and power influenced the actions of the guards in the Stanford Prison Experiment. How could some of the actions by the pigs (guards) or the other animals (prisoners) be explained by the Prison Experiment?

Think about this theme of power in today's world. Where do you see the use or abuse of power in our world today? What do you think that George Orwell would have a problem with in the governments of the world today?