

What the Stanford prison experiment taught us — and didn't teach us — about evil

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Boston Globe:

Via Longreads, Stanford Magazine has a fascinating piece on the infamous Stanford prison experiment. For those who never took a psychology class, in August of 1971 a psychologist named Phil Zimbardo and his colleagues took a bunch of male college students, divided them into “guards” and “prisoners,” stuck them in a fake prison on the Stanford campus, and observed their subsequent interactions.

What happened next shocked the world, led to a rewriting of ethics guidelines for psychology experiments, and is still resonating today: Almost immediately, the guards started humiliating and berating the prisoners (they were told not to harm them physically, but some of their behavior certainly crept up to that that line), while the prisoners took on the attributes of, well, prisoners, in many cases slipping into profound despondency. Things got so bad that Zimbardo had to call the experiment off the six-week experiment just two days in, lest he permanently scar one of his prisoners (or unwittingly produce the world’s next Josef Stalin).

Read more: [*Boston Globe*](#)