Stanford Prison Experiment

The movie “The Stanford Prison Experiment” is based on a real [social psychology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_psychology) experiment that attempted to investigate the [psychological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychology) effects of perceived power, focusing on the struggle between [prisoners](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoner) and [prison officers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prison_officer). The main idea of this experiment was to investigate how fast people would conform to their roles and responsibilities. To study this professor Zimbardo converted Stanford University basement into a prison.

It is important to mention that there are few factors which must have been explaining applicants’ behavior. First explaining behavior in term of individual’s personality, second in terms of environmental factors, third when an individual loses their sense of self (i.e. individuality).

During the six days of experiment professor Zimbardo and his staff were watching and examining the behavior and emotional stability of applicants. Applicants conformed to their roles without any difficulties and it was clear that their behavior was mainly based on which “uniform” they wore.

The steps taken in this experiment were supposed to be most close to the reality. Prisoners felt themselves being in a real prison and guards felt the control over others. Prisoners were given ID number by which they were referred afterwards, in my opinion, this is when they start to lose their identities because they don’t feel like themselves anymore, as well as guards were given the uniform that they wore and felt the need to behave differently than they usually would.

The study had many ethical challenges, for example not fully informed consent by participants.  
Zimbardo himself didn’t know what would have happened during the experiment, because it was unpredictable. Also, participants playing the role of prisoners were not protected from psychological harm, experiencing incidents of humiliation and distress.

In conclusion, from this experiment we can clearly see that people will readily conform to the [social roles](https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-roles.html) they are expected to play, especially if the roles are as strongly stereotyped. Of course the environment also plays a big role in such kind of study, that’s why it felt real for prisoners and explained brutal behavior of guards. Therefore, the findings support the situational explanation of behavior rather than the dispositional one.