

Siamo.
uomini e caporali
Psicologia della disobbedienza

THE HUMAN BEHAVIOR EXPERIMENTS

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Jigsaw Productions

NARRATOR: In 1971, in the basement of the Psychology Department of Stanford University, a mock prison was created. It was an experiment that rivaled all social psychology experiments in controversy.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: Shortly after I finished the Stanford prison study, Milgram embraced me, and said, I'm so happy that you did this, he said. He said, 'cause now you can take off some of the heat that, that he's had to bear alone, heh, of having done the most unethical study.

NARRATOR: Although this experiment is over 30 years old, its enduring power has been underscored by the events at Abu Ghraib.

SOLDIER: When we got to Abu Ghraib, it was eerie. People were being told to rough up Iraqis that wouldn't cooperate. I mean, they're torturing, they're abusing detainees. You're looking at the s-, the situation thinking, they've condoned this, but why? And if it wouldn't have been for those photos, no one would have ever believed what was going on over there.

M: When I first saw the pictures, and immediately a sense of familiarity s-, struck me. Because I knew that I had been there before; I had been in this type of situation; I knew what was going on. [I might.]

M: The photographs were strikingly familiar to the photographs that we had taken, many of the photographs I had taken, in the prison study.

M: We didn't do any of the stuff that you see in Abu Ghraib where they, you know, get [them] in big piles. [UI] but [I] certainly subjected them to all kinds of humiliations. I don't know where [I would have stopped myself, given enough time [UI].

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: When the images of the abuse and torture at Abu Ghraib were revealed, immediately the military went on the defensive, saying, it's a few bad apples. When we see somebody doing bad things, we assume they were bad people to begin with.

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But what we know in our study is there are a set of socialpsychological variables that can make ordinary people do things they never could imagine doing.

NARRATOR: At Abu Ghraib, ordinary people perpetrated extraordinary abuses. To understand why, it helps to reach back to the lessons of Zimbardo's experiment: how people respond to a cruel environment without clear rules.

{HIGH-PITCHED NOISE}

X: Everybody up! [UI] come on. Up, up!

F: I think he, and everybody else who came down into that situation got caught up into that situation. And the sense that this was an experiment; that began to fade away. It became just life.

X: {YELLING} [UI] Zimbardo!

RESEARCHER: We frankly didn't anticipate what was gonna happen. And we tried to really test the power of the environment to change and transform otherwise normal people. Much as Milgram had changed or transformed otherwise normal people in an obedience situation, we wanted to do it in a prison-like situation.

NARRATOR: Over 70 men volunteered for Zimbardo's experiment.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: And they completed a battery of psychological tests. We picked two dozen; 24 who were the most normal, [and] most healthy. Half are gonna be guards; half are gonna be prisoners. And it's like flipping a coin, and heads, this one's a guard, this one a prisoner. So at the beginning, there's no difference in the kinds of people who are in your two groups.

"GUARD": When we were given our jobs as, uh, guards, we were issued a uniform, which was a plain sort of khaki, uh, or lighter-colored uniform.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: And then we gave them the symbols of power: uh, handcuffs, a whistle, a big billy club. And then the other thing we gave them were silver reflecting sunglasses.

M: When you have mirror sunglasses on, then nobody can see your eyeballs. I think that anytime you put on what essentially is a mask, and you mask your identity, then it allows you to behave in ways that you would not behave if you didn't have the mask on.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: To make it more realistic, I had arranged with the S-, Palo Alto Police Department to make mock arrests.

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"PRISONER": When I was arrested, it was a surprise to me. I didn't think I was gonna [be] brought to an actual police station; I didn't think I was gonna go through a booking process.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: The guards then put a blindfold on them; stripped them naked; and then they put them in dresses – smocks, with no underpants. Each had a number that replaced their name. They had to know their number; they, they could only be referred to by that number. And they had a chain on one foot, which was put there to remind them, at all times, of their loss of freedom. So all of these things produces a sense of being dehumanized.

On the first day, I said, this is not gonna work. I mean, the guards felt awkward, giving orders. And they'd say, okay, line up, and repeat your numbers. And the prisoners would [start] giggling.

"GUARD": Hey! I don't want anybody [laughin'].

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: And then a very interesting thing happened. Dave Eshleman, who the prisoners named "John Wayne," like he's a Wild West cowboy; he begins to be more extreme.

DAVE ESHLEMAN: I decided that I would become the worst, most, uh, intimidating, uh, cruel prison guard that I could possibly be.

{PRISON EXPERIMENT TAPE UNINTELLIGIBLE}

"JOHN WAYNE": Say it again.

X: [Thank you, Mr. Correction...].

"JOHN WAYNE": Say [bless you,] Correction Officer.

X: [Bless you], Mr. Correction Officer.

DAVE ESHLEMAN: I was sort of fascinated myself that people were believing the act. And I was trying to see how far I could take it before somebody would say, okay, that's enough. Stop.

{PRISON EXPERIMENT TAPE}

Y: Yeah!

"PRISONER": We did have to do things like pushups. Uh, we would have to sing things. But at the beginning, we protested some of the actions. We did things to irritate the guards.

{PRISON EXPERIMENT TAPE}

"PRISONER": But if I gotta be in here, I'm not gonna put up with any of your shit.

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RESEARCHER: So the guards' authority was challenged right off the bat. Then the guards had to decide how they were gonna handle that, and they had to decide it without our input. I mean, again, this was not a Milgram study, in which we were standing over them, telling them what to do. And they began to see the prisoners' behavior as a kind of an affront to their authority. And they began to push back.

DAVE ESHLEMAN: We would ramp up the general harassment. Just sorta crank it up a bit. Nobody was telling me I shouldn't be doing this. The professor is the authority here; you know, he's the prison warden. He's not stopping me.

"PRISONER": This is unbelievable. He took our clothes...

"GUARD": Hands off the door.

M: It was the first evening, a kind of rebellion that took place.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: The prisoners rebelled. They barricaded themselves in their cells; they said, we refuse to come out. They took off their numbers; they didn't want to be de-individualized. They started cursing the guards to their face. And the key, the key turning point was, the guards began to think of them as dangerous prisoners. And so the guards formulated a plan; they used a fire extinguisher.

{NOISE}

Took the doors down; they dragged the prisoners out; stripped them naked. And essentially broke the rebellion in a purely physical way.

"GUARD": [UI] your bedding, your clothes, and strip it.

RESEARCHER: From that point on, the study was as remarkable a, a series of events as I've ever seen.

RESEARCHER: It was, it was a real laboratory for Zimbardo and, and I to, to watch human nature transformed in a very rapid way, uh, in the face of a very powerful situation.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: People really suffered. I mean, guards did terrible things to the prisoners. They punished them by putting them in solitary confinement, which was a small closet. You could squat or stand, but you know, you, you couldn't sit. And it was dark, and, and uh, dank, actually.

{PRISON EXPERIMENT TAPE}

X: [UI].

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F: Every hour, every day, there's a teeny, little bit more of an increment. And they're stepping up taunting the prisoners; they're stepping up the counts, not letting them sleep; they're stepping...I don't think from one minute to the next, the people who are in it see the change and see the difference.

"GUARD": [UI]. [UI] gonna see to it that you don't get [UI].

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: And the k-, next key thing happened, beside the rebellion, Prisoner 8612, he was the first one to have an emotional breakdown.

"PRISONER": I feel really fucked up inside. You don't know. I gotta go. I, uh, uh, uh, to a doctor; anything. I mean, Jesus Christ, I'm burnin' up inside! Don't you know? I'm fucked up! I don't know how to explain it! I'm fucked up inside! [UI] out! Let me out now!

1:45:04 DAVE ESHLEMAN: At the time, if you had questioned me about the effect I was having, I would say, well, they must be, they must be a wimp. They're weak, or they're faking. Because I wouldn't have believed that what I was doing could actually cause somebody [to have a] nervous breakdown. It was just us sorta getting our jollies with it. You know. Let's, let's be like puppeteers here. Let's make these people do things.

"GUARD": What if I told you to get down on that floor, and fuck the floor? What would you do then?

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: The guards now began to escalate their use of power. Some of them had prisoners clean out toilet bowls with their bare hands. They now taunt, humiliate, degrade the prisoners in front of each other. And they exert arbitrary control over the prisoners. They keep thinking of more and more unusual things to do. And very soon, after the fourth day, things begin to turn sexual.

"GUARD": You be the bride of Frankenstein. And you be Frankenstein. I want you to walk over here like Frankenstein, and say that you [love] [UI].

DAVE ESHLEMAN: If you want to f-, fully sort of humiliate somebody, then you want to get them in the, in those things that they're, the, where their biggest fears are. And a lot of us have a lot of sexual hangups. And so that was part of that effort to humiliate them even further.

"GUARD": Get up [close]. Get [up close].

X: I love you [UI]. I love you [UI].

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"GUARD": [UI]. You get down here and do 10 pushups!

RESEARCHER: The guards knew that had the coin come up heads rather than tails, they would have had the dress on, rather than the uniform on; they knew that. So they certainly knew that the prisoners who were being mistreated had done nothing wrong to deserve the[ir] mistreatment. And yet, the roles themselves were so powerful, and the environment itself was so powerful, that they ended up punishing those prisoners as though they had done something wrong.

"PRISONERS": Prisoner 819 did a bad thing! Prisoner 819 did a bad thing!

"PRISONER": We were told to chant something about how he was a bad prisoner. And at the time, I went along with it, I'm thinking, what does this matter? We don't believe this, but we can c-, go along and chant it.

"PRISONERS": [UI] Prisoner 819 did. [UI] what Prison 819 did. [UI].

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: That night, he had a breakdown. Every day after that, another prisoner broke down, in a similar way, but broke down. I mean, extreme stress reaction. And we released another one on, one on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday.

RESEARCHER: Nobody who was in that study could deny that the prisoner breakdowns were genuine. They were, they were scary to see; they were upsetting to us; we, they were unexpected; but they were, they were very clearly the real thing. At some level, we understood that something was happening that we were no longer in control of; and it was damaging people; we didn't quite have a grasp on what to do about it. One of the mistakes we made was that we didn't, we hadn't built in time to step back and to look at what was happening, and call it what it was; which was mistreat[ment]. We were caught up in the events that were, that were taking place.

"GUARD": Or you can keep your blanket, and 416 will stay in another day. We got three against one. Keep your blankets; 416, you're gonna be in there for awhile. So just get used to it.

NARRATOR: On the fifth day of the study, Zimbardo invited his girlfriend, recently psychology graduate Christina Maslach, to visit the mock prison.

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CHRISTINA MASLACH: I had heard bits and pieces, uh, from Phil, uh, about what was going on [it]. And then when I w-, was down there that evening, it really was kind of a [UI]. The thing that really got to me was when some of the guards took the prisoners down the hall to the men's room.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: She looks out, and sees a line of prisoners, with paper bags over their heads; each one holding the other one's shoulder.

CHRISTINA MASLACH: And they're leading them down the hall. And Phil comes over, and [like], look, look, you know, my god, look at that! And I looked up, and something about it just, you know, again, it was the dehumanizing, demeaning kind of treatment. I just, I couldn't watch it.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: And she said, it's terrible what you're doing to those boys. [And] she got tears in her eyes. And I said, what? And she runs out, you know. And I'm furious. I'm saying, you know, I'm saying, look, this is, you know, I run outside, we have this big argument. I'm saying, look, this is, this is dynamics of human behavior. Look, it's fascinating; power of the situation; all [the]. So I'm giving all of the psychological basis, and what kind of psychologist are you? You don't appreciate this. Um, and she said...

CHRISTINA MASLACH: I don't understand [it]. You're a stranger to me. I don't understand this. How could you not see what I see? I mean, you know, you're a caring, compassionate person. I know you from all of [these] other things. Somethin's gone wrong here.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO: And then, the next thing she said, which I, had an equally big impact, is, uh, you know, I'm not sure I want to, you know, have anything to do with you if this is the real you. And that was like a slap in the face. Because what she was saying is, you've changed. You know, the power of the situation has transformed you from, from the person I thought I knew to this person that I don't know. And at that moment, I said, wow, you're right. We gotta end it.

NARRATOR: After only six days, Dr. Zimbardo shut down his experiment.