



The Lucifer Effect by Philip Zimbardo

Exploring The Dark Side of Human Nature

The Stanford University's experiment was what it was like to be a prisoner, a guard, or a prison Superintendent by students, the Stanford Prison Experiment. We will examine in some detail research on conformity, obedience, de-individuation, dehumanization, moral disengagement, and the evil of inaction.

The Stanford Prison Experiment went from initially being a symbolic prison to becoming an all-too-real one in the minds of its prisoners and guards.

Our sense of power is more vivid when we break a man's spirit than when we win his heart.

Some of our volunteers who were randomly assigned to be guards soon came to abuse their newfound power by behaving sadistically—demeaning, degrading, and hurting the "prisoners" day in and night out. Their actions fit the psychological definition of evil I had proposed. Other guards played their role in tough, demanding ways that were not particularly abusive, but they showed little sympathy for the plight of the suffering inmates. A few guards, who could be classified as "good guards," resisted the temptation of power and were at times considerate of the prisoners' condition, doing little things like giving one an apple, another a cigarette, and so on.

There is one interesting parallel between the Nazi SS doctors involved in the death camp at Auschwitz and our Stanford Prisoner Experiment guards. "Zealots" who participated eagerly in the extermination process and even did 'extra work' on behalf of killing; those who went about the process more or less methodically and did no more or no less than they felt that they had to do: and those who participated in the extermination process only reluctantly."

Recall that the best good guard, shared the night shift with the worst guard. He never once made any attempt to get the worst guard to "chill out," never reminded him that this was "just an experiment," that there was no need to inflict so much suffering on the kids who were just role-playing prisoners. Instead, as we have seen from his personal accounts. The good guard simply suffered in silence—along with the prisoners. Had he energized his conscience

into constructive action, this good guard might have had a significant impact in mitigating the escalating abuse of the prisoners on his shift.

In my many years of experience teaching at a variety of universities, I have found that most students are not concerned with power issues because they have enough to get by in their world, where intelligence and hard work get them to their goals. Power is a concern when people either have a lot of it and need to maintain it or when they have not much power and want to get more. However power itself becomes a goal for many because of all the resources at the disposal of the powerful.