



The Lucifer Effect by Philip Zimbardo

Anonymity and De-individuation

In addition to the power of rules and roles, situational forces mount in power with the introduction of uniforms, costumes, and masks, all disguises of one's usual appearance that promote anonymity and reduce personal accountability. When people feel anonymous in a situation, as if no one is aware of their true identity (and thus that no one probably cares), they can more easily be induced to behave in antisocial ways. This is especially so if the setting grants permission to enact one's impulses or to follow orders or implied guidelines that one would usually disdain. Our silver reflecting sunglasses were one such tool for making the guards, the warden, and me seem more remote and impersonal in our dealings with the prisoners. Their uniforms gave the guards a common identity, as did the necessity of referring to them in the abstract as, "Mr. Correctional Officer."

When all members of a group of individuals are in a de-individuated state, their mental functioning changes: they live in an expanded-present moment that makes past and future distant and irrelevant. Feelings dominate reason, and action dominates reflection. In such a state, the usual cognitive and motivational processes that steer their behavior in socially desirable paths no longer guide people.

Dehumanization: The Other as Nothing Worthwhile

One of the worst things that we can do to our fellow human beings is deprive them of their humanity, render them worthless by exercising the psychological process of dehumanization. This occurs when the "others" are thought not to possess the same feelings, thoughts, values, and purposes in life that we do. Any human qualities that these "others" share with us are diminished or are erased from our awareness. This is accomplished by the psychological mechanisms of intellectualization, denial, and the isolation of affect. In contrast to human relationships, which are subjective, personal, and emotional,

dehumanized relationships are objectifying, analytical, and empty of emotional or empathic content.