

PSYC 4900 History of Psychology Fall 2020

The Stanford Prison Experiment

Phillip Zimbardo: Saint or Sinner? (Angel or Devil?)

Please limit your response to 1-2 pages (but do not exceed 2 pages)

Please upload to the BlazeVIEW assignment folder called "Stanford Prison Experiment" by Sunday night, September 27, 2020 (the folder closes at 11:30 pm)

Your Task for this Assignment:

Think about Phillip Zimbardo's famous (or infamous) Stanford Prison Experiment. This social psychology study is one of the most recognized studies in the history of psychology. Psychology professionals and students alike recognize this study as do many non-psychology people in the general public. The research made Zimbardo a psychology rock star – and served as a shining example of the fun and importance of psychological science. The study provided great publicity for the discipline and helped to recruit many students to major in psychology (or at least to take psychology courses).

In recent years, however, so-called whistle-blowers and critics have not only challenged the study's findings – they have focused on the study's flaws and accused Zimbardo of gross academic fraud (analogous to the egregious fraud of Sir Cyril Burt's views on race and intelligence – which we shall look at this semester).

In an example of psychology's version of the phenomenon of "cancel culture," a host of persons have called for canceling both the study and Zimbardo. Some have gone as far as to demand that the study should be purged from all textbooks in psychology and allied disciplines. The barrage of critics has caused Zimbardo to defend the study and his reputation with great vigor (while still acknowledging the study's flaws)

First read these three brief opinion articles that attack the study:

McGreal, S. (2019). Twilight of the Stanford Prison Experiment: The infamous experiment was even more deeply flawed than previously suspected. *Psychology Today*.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/unique-everybody-else/201909/twilight-the-stanford-prison-experiment>

Topo, G. (2018). Time to dismiss the Stanford Prison Experiment? *Inside Higher Education*.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/20/new-stanford-prison-experiment-revelations-question-findings>

Gray, P. (2013). Why Zimbardo's prison experiment isn't in my textbook: Results of the famous Stanford Prison Experiment have a trivial explanation. *Psychology Today*.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-learn/201310/why-zimbardo-s-prison-experiment-isn-t-in-my-textbook>

What is your opinion?

- If the flaws in Zimbardo's study are linked to fraud, does this justify canceling the Stanford Prison Study and purging it from textbooks?
- Or, despite its flaws the Stanford Prison Experiment has served as a positive light for promoting the “gospel” of psychological science to the masses?