

College Experiment With Prison Proves Too Realistic to Bear

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STANFORD, Calif. (UPI)—A college experiment in which students "lived" as prison guards and inmates became so realistic that it had to be halted a week early.

The guards became brutal and tyrannical and the prisoners degenerated into "sniveling" convicts. Three of the 10 inmates suffered long crying jags and four had to be "paroled" six days into the two-week experiment.

"It got me so down, I didn't believe it," said Jim Rowney of Mountain View, Calif., one of the paroled convicts. "I just couldn't take it and broke down."

"I though this would be a piece of cake, but it got to me—the whole thing—the total loss of privacy, the humiliation of being slaves to the guards, being in a small, small cell with two other guys 24 hours a day, and the complete loss of freedom."

It Was Too Real

"The fact that it was a simulation, the fact that it wasn't a real prison, made no difference," said Mr. Rowney, a freshman at the University of California in Berkeley this fall who received \$15 a day for participating.

Prof. Philip Zimbardo, the psychology professor who conducted the \$5,000 project in a special jail built in a basement on the Stanford University campus, said the results showed conditions tended to label and type individuals.

"It is clear that almost anyone put in a certain kind of situation can be made to behave toward other human beings in a demeaning and brutal fashion," Professor Zimbardo said.

"Another thing we've learned is that any prison, even a good prison, is terrible."

The experiment was supposed to last two weeks, with the guards working 8 to 10 hour shifts and the prisoners locked up fulltime in the make-shift prison.

The cells in the basement of the psychology building were built as realistically as possible, including barred doors and brick walls.

In only six days, Professor Zimbardo said, the student inmates turned into abject prisoners begging to be let out and some of the guards were exhibiting sadistic and brutal extremes.

One student-convict attempted to be a "model" prisoner, executing all demands to extremes in the hope of an early parole from the prison.

A tall blond prison guard with "an angelic face" earned the hatred of the inmates as he warmed to the job.

"Let me assure you, it was all acting," he said afterward.

But it was hard to escape the fact that all of his abusive treatment occurred when monitoring authority was lax, late at night or early in the morning, Professor Zimbardo said.