

### Reading 2:3

The following reading provides a vivid description of Zimbardo's famous prison experiment.

An unusual experiment conducted at Stanford University in August, suggests that brutalization [in a prison setting] is all but inevitable. For the experiment, psychology professor Philip Zimbardo, advised by an ex-convict, asked volunteers to spend 14 days in a mock but grimly realistic prison.

He got recruits through ads in the Palo Alto and campus newspapers, offering \$15 a day as a bait. Applicants were screened, and those with medical or psychological problems eliminated. Zimbardo ended up with a group of 21 middle-class educated young men, all white except for one oriental. Eleven of them were chosen at random as guards. The ten designated as prisoners were picked up at their homes by the Palo Alto police on "charges" of assault with a deadly weapon. They had not been expecting such a public "arrest" (some neighbors offered sympathy to their families), and most of them were anxious from the start. They were frisked, handcuffed and driven to police headquarters. There they were blindfolded and taken to cells at an undisclosed location — in reality, the basement of Jordan Hall, Stanford's psychology building, which had been converted into a prison.

The guards wore khaki uniforms and reflecting sunglasses to make themselves more impersonal. They carried billy clubs, whistles and handcuffs.

The rules were tough. When prisoners arrived, they were ordered to strip, and then were skin-searched, sprayed with delousing powder and dressed in the prison uniform, a numbered smock. Although Zimbardo could not require the prisoners to shave their heads, he did order them to wear stocking caps at all times.

During meals, rest periods and after 10 p.m. lights out, prisoners were forbidden to speak. Every night at 2:30, they were roused out for a head count. Almost immediately the prisoners began to rebel against this treatment.

"When they woke us up that first night," said Jim Rowney, a freshman at neighboring Berkeley, "I realized this was not going to be a relaxing two weeks. I started to think of ways to escape, or counter the experiment."

Others were plotting similar resistance. On the second day, the prison erupted with a series of spontaneous disturbances. Some inmates barricaded the door with their beds. Others ripped off their num-

bers and refused to eat.

The guards, also beginning to act spontaneously, were so upset that they set out to forestall any further rebellion. They did so by pitting the inmates against one another. In a cell that contained a sink, the guards turned the water on as a treat and also gave the prisoners in that cell a special meal. The men in the other cells received nothing at all to eat.

"The technique worked perfectly," said Professor Zimbardo. "The prisoners no longer had solidarity. This is what guards do within the prison system. That's why racism and homosexuality are tolerated, to set prisoners against each other and not against the establishment. The reaction of prisoner Rowney was typical. "If we had gotten together then, I think we could have taken over the place. But when I saw the revolt wasn't working, I decided to toe the line. Everyone settled into the same pattern. From then on, we were really controlled by the guards."

In triumph some of the guards turned sadistic, abusing the prisoners verbally and physically. One kept a man in the "hole" for three hours instead of the prescribed one hour, and would have left him there one night if one of Zimbardo's assistants had not intervened. Michael Varn, 24, a Stanford graduate student, hardly realized how brutally he had acted as a guard until the experiment was over. "I was surprised at myself, I was a real crumb. I made them call each other names and clean out the toilets with their bare hands. I practically considered the prisoners cattle, and I kept thinking I have to watch out for them in case they try something."

Professor Zimbardo watched what was happening with increasing alarm. On the second day, one prisoner complained of stomach pains and headache and wanted to see a doctor. Appealing privately to an assistant, the prisoner broke down and cried uncontrollably for half an hour.

On the next two days, two more prisoners complained of the same symptoms, and they, too, lapsed into nearly hysterical weeping.

On the fifth day, still another student broke out in a head-to-toe rash after his "parole," a request to be released early was turned down.

"I knew by then," said Zimbardo, "that they were thinking like prisoners and not like people. If we were able to demonstrate that pathological behavior could be produced in so short a time, think what damage is being done in 'real' prisons like Attica and San Quentin."

The experiment was scheduled to continue for two weeks. On the sixth day, a thoroughly shaken Professor Zimbardo called it off.