

**O**N A SUMMER SUNDAY in California, a siren shattered the serenity of college student Tommy Whitlow's morning. A police car screeched to a halt in front of his home. Within minutes, Tommy was charged with a felony, informed of his constitutional rights, frisked, and handcuffed. After he was booked and fingerprinted at the city jail, Tommy was blindfolded and transported to the Stanford County Prison, where he was stripped and issued a smock-type uniform with an I.D. number on the front and back.

Tommy became "Prisoner 647." Eight other college students were also arrested and assigned numbers during that mass arrest by the local police.

The prison guards were anonymous in their khaki military uniforms, reflector sunglasses, and nameless identity as "Mr. Correctional Officer," but with symbols of power shown off in their big night sticks, whistles, and handcuffs. To them, the powerless prisoners were nothing more than their worthless numbers.

The guards insisted that prisoners obey all of their many arbitrary rules without question or hesitation. Failure to do so led to losses of privileges. At first, privileges included opportunities to read, write, or talk to other inmates. Later, the slightest protest resulted in the loss of "privileges" of eating, sleeping, washing, or having visitors during visiting nights. Failure to obey rules also resulted in a variety of unpleasant tasks

such as endless push-ups, jumping jacks, and number count-offs that lasted for hours on end. Each day saw an escalation of the level of hostile abuse by the guards against their prisoners: making them clean toilets with bare hands, do push-ups while a guard stepped on the prisoner's back, spend long hours naked in solitary confinement, and finally engage in degrading forms of sexual humiliation. "Prisoner 647" encountered some guards whose behavior toward him and the other prisoners was sadistic, taking apparent pleasure in cruelty; others were just tough and abusive, but none of the few "good" guards ever challenged the extremely demeaning actions of the "perpetrators of evil."

Less than 36 hours after the mass arrest, "Prisoner 8412," the ringleader of an aborted prisoner rebellion that morning, had to be released because of an extreme stress reaction of screaming, crying, rage, and depression. On successive days, three more prisoners developed similar stress-related symptoms. A fifth prisoner developed a psychosomatic rash all over his body when the parole board rejected his appeal, and he too was released from the Stanford County Jail.

At night, "Prisoner 647" tried to remember what Tommy Whitlow had been like before he became a prisoner. He also tried to imagine his tormentors before they became guards. He reminded himself that he was a college student who had answered a newspaper ad and agreed to be a subject in a two-week psychological experiment on prison life. He had thought it would be fun to do something unusual, and he could always use some extra money.

STANFORD  
COUNTY  
PRISON



Everyone in the prison, guard and prisoner alike, had been selected from a large pool of student volunteers. On the basis of extensive psychological tests and interviews, the volunteers had been judged as law-abiding, emotionally stable, physically healthy, and "normal-average" on all psychological measures. In this mock prison experiment, assignment of participants to the independent variable treatment of "guard" or "prisoner" roles had been determined by random assignment. Thus, in the beginning there were no systematic differences between the "ordinary" college males who were in the two different conditions. By the end of the study, there were no similarities between these two alien groups. The prisoners lived in the jail around the clock, and the guards worked standard eight-hour shifts.

As guards, students who had been pacifists and "nice guys" in their usual life settings behaved aggressively—sometimes even sadistically. As prisoners, psychologically stable students soon behaved pathologically, passively resigning themselves to their unexpected fate of learned helplessness. The power of the simulated prison situation had created a new social reality—a functionally real prison—in the minds of both the jailers and their captives. The situation became so powerfully disturbing that the researchers were forced to terminate the two-week study after only six days.

Although Tommy Whitlow said he wouldn't want to go through it again, he valued the personal experience because he learned so much about himself and about human nature. Fortunately, he and the other students were basically healthy, and extensive debriefing showed that they readily bounced back from the prison experience. Follow-ups over many years revealed no lasting negative effects on these students. The participants had all learned an important lesson: Never underestimate the power of a bad situation to overwhelm the personalities and good upbringing of even the best and brightest among us (Haney et al., 1973; Haney & Zimbardo, 1998; Zimbardo, 1973,

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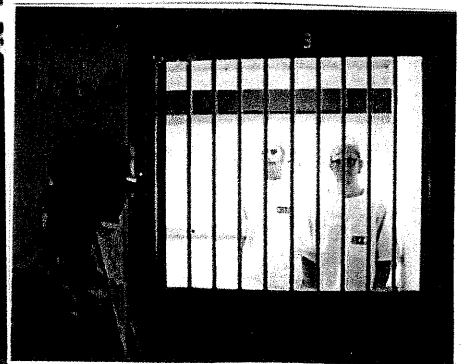
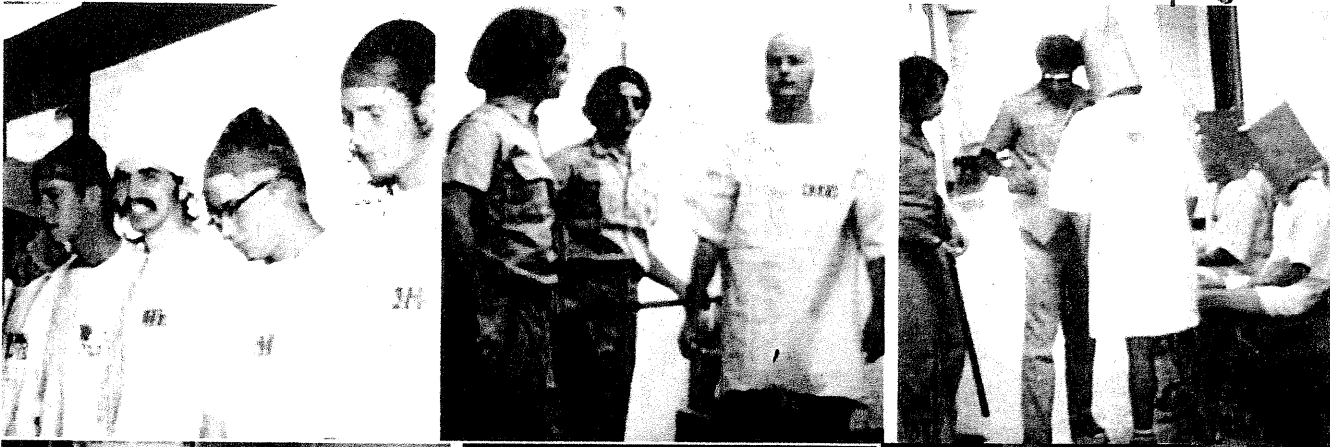
A **social role** is one of several socially defined patterns of behavior that are expected of persons in a given setting or group. The roles you assume may result from your interests, abilities, and goals—or they may be imposed on you by the group or by cultural, economic, or biological conditions beyond your control. In any case, social roles prescribe your behavior by making obvious what you should do, how you should do it, and when.

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Remember that no one taught the participants to play their roles. Each student called upon *scripts* about those roles. A **script** involves a person's knowledge about the sequence of events and actions that are expected of a particular social role. So, if an individual understands the role of "guard" as someone who uses coercive rules to limit the freedom of "prisoners," then that person is likely to use a script derived from that schema to become an authoritarian guard under conditions such as the Stanford prison experiment.

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**Social Norms** In addition to specific social roles, groups develop many "unwritten rules" for the ways that members should act. These expectations, called **social norms**, dictate socially appropriate attitudes and behaviors. Social norms can be broad guidelines, such as ideas about which political or religious attitudes are considered acceptable. Social norms can also be quite specific, embodying standards of conduct such as being quiet in the library or shining your shoes for a job interview. Norms can guide conversation, as when they restrict discussion of sensitive or taboo subjects in the presence of certain company. And norms can define dress codes, whether requiring uniforms or business suits or prohibiting shorts and tank tops.



"Only a few people were able to resist the situational temptations to yield to power and dominance while maintaining some semblance of morality and decency; obviously I was not among that noble class," Zimbardo later wrote in his book *The Lucifer Effect*.

## **Discussion Questions**

Answer the following discussion questions in your group BEFORE you create your presentation for the class. Use these questions to ensure that everyone in your group has a thorough understanding of all of the information.

1. How do social norms, roles, and scripts impact our behavior?
2. Why do good people sometimes do bad things? How can we prevent this?
3. Are there times when we must risk harming participants in order to gain helpful information? What do you consider to be too much harm? Did this study cross that line?
4. What types of studies could you use to replicate these findings? How would you set up this study?
5. How does this impact our lives today? Where have you seen examples of this?

# Rhythmic Activity

(Independent or Collaborative Learning)

Examine the assigned handout. Then write a song, rap, or poem that conveys and justifies your opinion about the information in the handout and argues against an opposing viewpoint (or viewpoints).

## Assessment Criteria

Your completed assignment must meet all of the following criteria:

- Assignment is written in the form of a song, rap, or poem.
- Song, rap, or poem demonstrates a clear understanding of the who, what, why, when, and where of the information in the handout.
- Song, rap, or poem makes use of three or more of the following: rhyme, alliteration, repetition, onomatopoeia, and/or different voices.
- Song, rap, or poem clearly conveys your opinion about the information presented in the handout, and includes at least three reasons for your opinion.
- Song, rap, or poem refutes (argues against) an opposing viewpoint by providing at least three reasons why that viewpoint is not valid.
- Song, rap, or poem accurately includes ALL of the following terms in a form other students can understand: Social Roles, Social Norms, Social Script, Random Assignment, Zimbardo, Generalizability, Independent Variable, Dependent Variable

## Oral Presentation Rubric : Complex Instruction

Teacher Name: Ms. Greenwald

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
<b>Props</b>	Group uses visual aids that meet all of the assessment criteria and make the presentation better.	Group uses visual aids which meet most of the assessment criteria and make the presentation better.	Group uses visual aids that do not meet most of the assessment criteria and do not improve the presentation.	Group does not use visual aids OR the visual aids distract from the presentation.
<b>Content</b>	All members show a full understanding of the topic.	All members show a good understanding of the topic.	Some members show a good understanding of parts of the topic.	Group members do not seem to understand the topic very well.
<b>Speaks Clearly</b>	Group speaks loudly, clearly and distinctly through the entire presentation.	Group speaks loudly, clearly and distinctly most of the time	Group speaks loudly, clearly, and distinctly only some of the time.	Group members often mumble or cannot be understood.
<b>Posture and Eye Contact</b>	Stands up straight, looks relaxed and confident. Establishes eye contact with everyone in the room during the presentation.	Stands up straight and establishes eye contact with everyone in the room during the presentation.	Sometimes stands up straight and establishes eye contact.	Slouches and/or does not look at people during the presentation.
<b>Collaboration with Peers</b>	All group members almost always listen to, share with, and support the efforts of others in the group.	Group members usually listen to, share with, and support the efforts of others in the group.	Group members sometimes do not listen to, share with, and support the efforts of others in the group.	Group members rarely listen to, share with, and support the efforts of others in the group.