

## INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY

The following 2 pages are taken from the psychology GCSE text book. The "Stanford Prison Study" mentioned is studied in even more depth at A-level so it's worth familiarising yourself with it now.

Philip Zimbardo, the famous psychologist who originally conducted this experiment, created his own website on it. You can read the story and his comments about his study. The website is at <https://www.prisonexp.org/>

As you can see from the second page below, studying psychology is primarily understanding a) the reasons for doing an experiment or study b) how you would carry out that experiment or study so that your results are accurate and applicable to the real world c) critical evaluation of famous experiments that have already been carried out and how they could be improved.

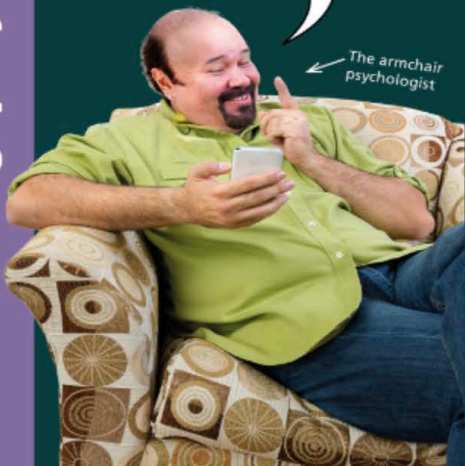
See if you can apply a), b) and c) above to the Stanford Prison experiment. This would set you up really well for getting into the practices of an A-level psychology student.

We hope you find it interesting and enjoyable!

Mrs. Hawker & Miss Bayley



Oh I can explain that!  
Those prisoners are just a bad lot.  
That's why they got there in the first place. They're criminals for goodness sake so we wouldn't expect anything else.  
Give them a chance and they'll attack everyone.



You are going to love psychology. Psychologists study everything about people – and what could be more interesting than people?

Psychologists want to explain why people (and animals) behave as they do. They are always on the lookout for interesting things about what people do. Just look in any newspaper or on Facebook – they are full of stories about people's behaviour.

Here's an example – I (Cara) was listening to the news on the radio today and one of the items was about a major prison riot in Birmingham.

The question people ask psychologists is:

Why do prisoners riot?

Is it because they are 'bad apples'? They are criminals who have little care about other people so it isn't that surprising that they would behave like that.

Or is it because of the 'bad barrel'? Prisoners are in a situation where the conditions are difficult and it would force anyone to behave like that.

Everyone has an opinion on why prisoners behave like that – we call them *armchair psychologists*.

The key to psychology is that we go beyond common sense and beyond personal opinions. The single thing that matters most in psychology is evidence. Real psychologists, as opposed to armchair ones, are expected to provide evidence for their every utterance (well, almost every one).

Evidence doesn't come from personal experience, or subjective opinion. It comes from research studies that are carefully designed to be objective.

So let's look at some evidence about why prisoners riot....

## The Stanford Prison study

How could you test whether ordinary people might behave the same way in prison as criminals do?

A psychologist called Philip Zimbardo devised a way. The year was 1971. He put an advertisement in a newspaper seeking male college students willing to take part in his study. He gave applicants various tests to determine that they were 'normal' – for example he asked about their family backgrounds and physical and mental-health histories. In the end he selected 21 'normal' students to take part in his study.

He then flipped a coin to find out who would play the role of prison guard and who would be a prisoner; 10 of the volunteers were given the role of guard and 11 were to be prisoners.

The mock prison was set up in the basement of one of the buildings at his university, Stanford University in California, USA. Activity in the mock prison was recorded on film.



**Male college students needed for psychological study of prison life.** \$15 per day for 1-2 weeks beginning Aug. 14. For further information & applications, come to Room 248, Jordan Hall, Stanford U.

## Prisoners are arrested

On the morning of August 17 local police officers unexpectedly arrived at the homes of each of the prisoners and 'arrested them'.

The prisoners were delivered to the prison. They were put through a delousing procedure, searched, given a prison uniform with ID number, nylon stocking caps (to make their hair look shaved) and an ankle chain. The guards referred to the prisoners only by their number.

The guards were also dressed according to their role. They had uniforms, clubs, whistles, handcuffs and reflective sunglasses (to prevent eye contact).

These outfits were selected to help the volunteers get into their roles and really feel they were a prisoner or guard. Uniforms reduce each person's sense of their own individuality and help them take on the role. People are then more likely to be guided by role expectations rather than personal morals.

## The routine

The guards worked shifts but the prisoners were in prison 24 hours a day. The prisoners were allowed certain 'rights': three meals a day, three supervised toilet trips, two hours for reading or letter-writing, two visiting periods and two movies per week. They had to line up three times a day to be counted and tested on the prison rules.

## What happened?

Over the first few days the guards grew increasingly tyrannical. They woke prisoners in the night and got them to clean the toilets with their bare hands. Some guards were so enthusiastic in their role that they even volunteered to do extra hours without pay.

Many of the prisoners were submissive, agreeing to the unreasonable requests with little protest. However, there was some rebellion. The prisoners realised that they could work together and protest. On Day 2 some of the prisoners ripped off their caps and barricaded themselves in their prison cells. However, the guards broke in and placed the prisoners in solitary confinement.

The participants appeared at times to forget that they were only acting. Even when they were unaware of being watched (when in their 'cells'), they still played their roles. When one prisoner had had enough, he asked for parole rather than saying he wanted to stop being part of the experiment. Had he come to think that he was actually a prisoner?

Five prisoners had to be released early because of their extreme reactions (crying, rage and acute anxiety) – symptoms that had started to appear within two days of the beginning of the study. In fact the whole study was ended after six days (it was due to last two weeks) because of the distress it was causing and the extreme behaviour by the guards.

## Conclusions

What the study clearly shows is that the 'normal' volunteers stopped behaving normally and took on the roles of prisoners and guards. This suggests that behaviour is at least partly determined by the situation.

The psychological explanation is that the participants were conforming to certain 'social rules' of how prisoners and prison guards are supposed to behave. Humans are social animals and our behaviour is very much influenced by those around us – we like to fit in with our chosen social group and don't like to be rejected. In any social group we therefore take on the behaviour expected of us. We learn these behaviours from early childhood – through direct experience and also from watching TV.

But wait ... there's more ...





# Introducing psychology

continued

## Evaluation

Not surprisingly this study has caused a huge amount of discussion over the last 40+ years. Just have a look on the Internet for endless descriptions of the study and comments on its meaning. There is a website created by Zimbardo ([www.prisonexp.org](http://www.prisonexp.org)) and recently a film was made about the study with Zimbardo's assistance – called *The Stanford Prison Experiment* (watch a trailer on YouTube). Zimbardo has also written a book *The Lucifer Effect* describing the study in great detail and drawing many interesting conclusions.

But that's not the point ... one of the things you will quickly notice, if you do look around the Internet, is that there have been a LOT of criticisms of the study. In fact, as you were reading the study you too may have been thinking, 'hang on, I don't think this is very good evidence'.

Let's just look at two key criticisms:

### 1. Were the participants just play-acting?

One weakness of the study is that just playing the part of a prisoner or guard isn't like actually being one.

The prisoners and guards knew they were being watched most of the time, which means they might have felt they had to act in a certain way. In addition, there is an important difference between acting a part, even if you really get into the role, and actually being that person. If you are actually a prison guard, for example, you draw on your own personal ideas of right and wrong. Whereas, if you are acting, you draw on ideas of how you think prison guards behave.

Therefore, it may not be appropriate to use the findings of this study to explain how prisons work.

### 2. Well-controlled study

One strength of the study is that it was well designed. (Yes, critical points can be positive).

For example, participants were checked to see that they had no mental-health problems and they were randomly assigned to the roles of prisoners and guards. This means we can say, with some confidence, that 'normal' people are likely to behave like criminals if they are put in a prison situation.

## Doing your own evaluation

To write good evaluation points you need do more than simply state the point.

If you look at the points above, we have separated the point from the explanation and we have finished with a conclusion.

This is how you do good evaluation:

**P** – state the **POINT**.

**E** – **EXPLAIN** your point giving **EVIDENCE** and/or **ELABORATION**.

**C** – write a **CONCLUSION** or **CONSEQUENCE**.

Throughout this book this is the way we have presented critical points. You should do that whenever you write evaluation. You are going to learn about research studies (and theories) but, as we have shown here, it is vital to evaluate them.

Not sure if I agree with these criticisms.



Feel free to disagree – that's what evaluation is all about. Evaluation is not a fact – people argue about it.

And feel free to do that throughout this book. Exercise your intellectual muscle.

## Application

We started out with the question of whether prison rioting could be blamed on the bad apples (prisoners) or bad barrel (the prison system). So we should apply our findings back to this situation.

In fact, as result of this study, Zimbardo was asked to testify to the US Congress about prison reform. He argued that 'the mere act of assigning labels to people, calling some people prisoners and others guards, is sufficient to elicit pathological [disturbed] behaviour' (<http://pdf.prisonexp.org/congress.pdf>).

Zimbardo's testimony led to some reforms in the care of juvenile offenders.

In fact, this, in itself, is an evaluation of the study – a positive criticism. It is the aim of all research to have **real-world applications**. In other words research ought to provide us with ideas that we can use.

Throughout this book we will show ways that research (studies and theories) has been applied to real-world situations. But, in addition, we will ask you to do this. For example, here is what is called the stem (or scenario or case study):

Rosie has just started work as a voluntary policewoman. On her first day at work she helps out at a football match. A group of fans come up to her and ask directions to their seats. Rosie gets very annoyed with them because they are rude and tells them to behave themselves or she will arrest them. Rosie's supervisor thinks she is being too aggressive.

How can 'conformity to social rules' help us to understand Rosie's behaviour?

**Answer:**

The context of this question is that Rosie is behaving quite aggressively.

The concept that we know from psychology is 'conformity to social rules' – she is behaving like she thinks the police should behave.

The link is that Rosie's reaction is based on how she thinks the police should behave. That perception of police behaviour is a stereotype she has probably learned from films.

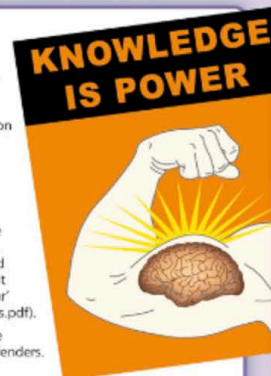
## Doing your own application

When answering 'Apply it' questions in this book you will be using your knowledge of the study or theory on the spread.

It is important to always do **CONTEXT + CONCEPT + LINK** as we have done above.

1. Identify a part of the 'stem'. This is the **CONTEXT**.
2. Identify something you know from psychology. This is the **CONCEPT**.
3. **LINK** them together.

Sometimes it is better to do **CONCEPT + CONTEXT + LINK**



## Description and evaluation and application

Don't forget that we began with description – we described Zimbardo's study. So that is the third skill you will be using in this course.

What we have just done gets to the very heart of your course in psychology. This is what you are going to be doing:

1. You are going to look at human (and some animal) behaviour and experience.
2. In particular we will describe research studies that demonstrate what people actually do and/or we will describe explanations / theories based on research studies.
3. Then we will evaluate the studies and explanations / theories.
4. Some of those evaluations will look at real-world applications. But you will also have a chance to apply your new-found knowledge.

## What is Psychology?

Psychology is the science of behaviour and experience. And it is a science because it is based on evidence. We psychologists always say to those people in armchairs 'Where is your evidence? And also 'How good is your evidence?'

The girl on the right is shocked because the evidence of what her burger looks like is nothing like it was advertised. Always ask for evidence.

Enjoy your journey.

Cara, Dave, Ruth, Mark and Rob



## Doing your own describing

When it comes to describing a research study or a theory, the key thing to remember is **DETAIL**.

Detail does not mean you have to write lots and lots but what is important is that you include the key pieces of information.

For example, on the previous spread we described Zimbardo's study. The description is over 600 words. What if you tried to write it in 100 words? What are the key pieces of information you would include? What are the important details? Try it.

Note: one of the ways to get detail into your writing is to use **PSYCHOLOGICAL VOCABULARY**. You haven't got that yet but it is something to bear in mind.

Find out more about description, application and evaluation, and also how to use this book.