

Consensus Statement

on the Stanford Prison Experiment and BBC Prison Study

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We, the undersigned researchers who conducted the Stanford Prison Experiment (Philip Zimbardo and Craig Haney) and BBC Prison Study (Alex Haslam and Stephen Reicher), recognize that our studies, results, and public statements have engendered strong debate and, at times, misunderstanding within and beyond psychology. In an effort to promote constructive scientific dialogue, we are therefore releasing this consensus statement to highlight common ground and clarify our views on the research in question.

First, we jointly believe that it is critically important to develop a scientific understanding of toxic human behavior, including brutality and the abuse of authority and power.

Second, we regard the Stanford Prison Experiment and BBC Prison Study as valid studies and valuable resources for advancing such understanding. At the same time, we recognize that both investigations have methodological limitations and are best viewed as one-trial demonstration studies rather than traditional experiments.

Third, the BBC Prison Study differs from the Stanford Prison Experiment in essential ways and is not a direct replication of the earlier study. We do, however, see value in comparing the different outcomes of the two studies (and others) as a means of advancing conceptual understanding.

Fourth, the behaviors observed in the Stanford Prison Experiment and BBC Prison Study were a function of many factors, including roles, norms, leadership, social identification, group pressure, and individual differences, not all of which are necessarily mutually exclusive. It is only natural that explanations of social behavior will be complex and multifactorial.

Fifth, we believe in open science and welcome the public release of information that aids in the interpretation of these and other studies.

Sixth, we encourage others to investigate, discuss, and teach about the roots of toxic behavior and effective ways to prevent it.

Seventh, we regret instances in which our statements appeared to involve ad hominem criticisms or used intemperate language. Although it is legitimate to debate the accuracy, comprehensiveness, and meaning of research reports, we have no definitive evidence that any signatory of this statement committed scientific fraud or deliberately misled others about their research findings.

Eighth, we hope that future discussions and debates about our research and other studies of toxic behavior will be open, collegial, and respectful of differing points of view.

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