



THE OVERVIEW OF THE FINAL RECKONING

--- Hugo Meijers ---

The Final Reckoning of the Stanford Prison Saga is a series of articles on the most audacious theater in social science history. Step-by-step, leaving no stone unturned, what truly happened way back in 1971 is revealed. And it was nothing like we were led to believe.

In this overview, you will find a recap of my endeavor to devour the official narrative. Applying narratological principles to detect the flaws in a composed work of art, I uncovered doctored data, planned prisoner releases, and completely fabricated scenes. Further, my research helped surface numerous conflicting accounts, distortions in reported incidents, critical discrepancies, baffling design flaws, logic-defying contradictions, and a whole bunch of conceived drama.

Notably, irrefutable evidence shows no simulated sodomy or confrontation between Zimbardo and his fiancée Christina Maslach took place on the last night. Zimbardo did not decide around midnight to stop the study. He planned to finish the experiment prematurely to support brutality spiraling out of control.

The outcome of delving into the archived and online available data is that the experiment is a false narrative. Zimbardo and his confederates scripted a behavioristic Pirandellian *Theater of the Absurd*. They cleverly mixed fiction and facts to create the illusion that normal-average students turned evil. But in reality, diligent guards did nothing out of the ordinary while the psychologists looked on in silent approval.



Subsequently, these psychologists lived their conclusion for a half-century, showing that the power of academic authority can corrupt good researchers to turn rogue. At the same time, they also lived the antithesis by consciously regurgitating their fabrication and incessantly lie with impunity.

All in all, psychology's seminal study is not sloppy or bad science. The science is nonexistent, and the story is science fantasy. That's the way a baseless cookie crumbles. So in effect, we have all been played. Everyone who believed Zimbardo and his accomplices were right was dead wrong.

The take-home message is that the Stanford Prison Experiment is finally blown to smithereens.

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THE OUTLINE

[Part 1: The Aftermath of The Lifespan of a Lie](#)

Some years ago, two bold men — Ben Blum and Thibault Le Texier — made a valiant attempt to expose a landmark psychology experiment for a lie. Their frontal attack with substantiating evidence of event staging and students faking bowled over a receptive audience. Within weeks the ire of the Internet came down on the Stanford researchers, with Philip Zimbardo as principal researcher taking the brunt.

For a brief moment, Zimbardo was held accountable. But after he wrote a self-serving response to a few cherry-picked issues, the surging uproar quickly ebbed away. The outraged left the echo chambers, and scholars continued to review and revisit the famous experiment.

So despite the disclosure of severe flaws, the directed demonstration still stands as a colossal social sciences monument. Courageous efforts to debunk the prison simulation did not bring it down. Zimbardo escaped final judgment once more. Yet did he tell the truth in his response?



I decided to delve into the narrative to answer this question. Zimbardo's response proved to be an illuminating breadcrumb trail to follow. And after properly introducing the cast members, I aimed my crosshairs at the most brutal guard in the lead role.

Part 2: David Eshleman's deepfake

The first on stage is David Eshleman, the tyrannical actor nicknamed John Wayne. Stanford Prison revolves around his abusive character. He was the quintessential example of how a good person can turn bad in the wrong place and setting, except the notorious guard playacted for posterity.

Scrutinizing the purported heinous acts by John Wayne began with Eshleman and Zimbardo in a deadlock. For years they bickered about acting versus internalization and rationalizing after the fact. A foolhardy feud that inevitably ends in an unresolvable impasse.

Fortunately, Chuck Burton, the unsung sidekick of the night shift, recently shared that Eshleman playacted all the time. When the prisoners went to sleep around 10 p.m., he chitchatted zeitgeist stuff with Eshleman till relieved by the morning shift at 2 a.m.

Fact-checking what the guards did reveals good did not turn evil. The archived recordings support only Eshleman hamming his hazing experience. The evidence illustrates that the infamous John Wayne, or any other guard for that matter, did not spiral out of control. In truth, the action fizzled out. By Wednesday, things were utterly relaxed.

From the onset, Eshleman maintained he ran a little secret experiment of escalating abuse to see when he was stopped, but no one ever did. In 2019, Zimbardo professed in a podcast that he led the secret experiment. It seems Eshleman acted by proxy.

Putting Eshleman's claim that no one ever held him in check to the test, he fails. Prisoners told him to get lost on numerous occasions when he tried to cross the line of decency, especially on the last night. The psychologists, however, never intervened.

Furthermore, Zimbardo claimed in his response that Eshleman ordered simulated sodomy on the last night with a 10-minute video as evidence. But the video recording unequivocally shows there is no camel humping. Eshleman instructed four prisoners to play innocent leapfrog. And the prisoners refused when Eshleman tried to get them to do things doggy style.

Critically, the video recording of the last night is doctored, masking that Wednesday was uneventful. The night-shift recordings of Wednesday and Thursday are intermixed. Reel Prison #26, minute 16.15, shows the sudden break. To boot, Zimbardo attributed some of Thursday's events to Wednesday in chapter six — Wednesday Is Spiraling Out of Control — of his book *The Lucifer Effect*. He did this to mask that nothing was going on.

Part 3: John Mark's insubordination.

Next to take center stage is guard John Mark. He was David Eshleman's counterpart and, ironically, his former high school friend. From 2007 onward, Mark publically tried to open everyone's eyes to the massive flaws in the alleged experiment. He voiced doubt about the random assignment of prisoners and guards, the role of the staff and a conflict of interest, the distorted representation of



the findings, and working towards a pre-ordained conclusion. All his remarks turn out to hold merit, except few took him seriously. That is until now.

Mark played arguably the kindest guard who refused to act tough. So he got instructed by warden Jaffe to get into the act. Zimbardo defended Jaffe's attempt as a minor reprimand compared to real-life prison. Although this makes sense, the original critique was related to Zimbardo claiming everything in the basement occurred organically without researcher interference. Evidently, it did not.

What somehow moved into the background is that Mark did not comply. The instruction, if anything, had an adverse effect, demonstrating that when bad leaders bully good subordinates, good still prevails. This conclusion is as valid as any other.

Notwithstanding, the instruction was nothing compared to warden Jaffe non-stop ordering the guards to elicit tough-guard behavior. The master sadist of the Toyon Hall pilot came up with tedious chores to force tension. He scheduled desired events and assured the guards earned their pay in the staged play. Basically, he ran the prison.

Until now, commentaries overlooked that verbal directions are only a small part of soliciting behavior. Prisoner rules, guard orders, daily schedules, and planned events scripted what occurred. And non-intervention played a decisive role in demanding expected behavior.

Moreover, during guard orientation, the staff discussed topics like control and punishment. Especially Jaffe retelling his pilot experience of emerging aberrant behavior primed the guards to act out. Not that much happened, according to Mark. And he appears to be right.

Zimbardo made a point of no guard stepping in to stop their comrades. But six of the nine guards were never privy to the night-shift pranking. They couldn't intervene. Nor was it their duty. The researchers were responsible for prison management. But they neglected their duty.

Instead, playing a prison role gave the psychologists free rein to meddle with events, change guard shifts, replace and remove prisoners, or generally look on in silent approval. Above all, they committed illegalities with sleep deprivation and unlawful imprisonment. So inactive psychologists in the role of prison superiors were the real evil. They created the brutal environment for the students.

[Part 4: Douglas Korpi on trial](#)

In this part, specialist deceiver Douglas Korpi stands trial. He is the conscience-ridden psychologist who came clean that he faked his breakdown after thriving on his con for decades to fill his psychology practice. However, did he tell the truth this time? The jury was still out.

Korpi was shocked to find himself falsely imprisoned and dead-set on getting out of the basement. Zimbardo gave him two grounds to get released – medical or psychiatric – which he tried by faking nausea and acting hysterical. The data corroborates this.

However, discomfiting audio recordings reveal that Korpi stayed in a backroom when he went into a brief tantrum on cue. Only warden Jaffe witnessed the outburst. During the lengthy casual conversations that followed, Korpi talked level-headed and gave multiple hints of acting and putting on a show. Korpi even apologized for the psychological concert.



Without question, Korpi faked in cahoots with Jaffe. Later that Monday night, Korpi discussed with Haney how to escape and if this would be a breach of contract. He also talked about returning as a guard to help the prisoners escape.

Korpi's talks with the staff make the breakout rumor highly dubious. I found three irreconcilable moments of overhearing the rumor — Monday evening, Tuesday morning, and Tuesday evening — reported by Zimbardo over time. This discrepancy signifies a made-up event.

On Tuesday, the prisoners heard that Korpi was sent to maximum security for the disciplinary problems he caused. Informer Gorchoff attested the prisoners were unaware of a pending breakout. The spy also revealed that not situational forces but self-imposed beliefs caused prisoner behavior, like wanting to get paid, not escaping in fear this would backfire on the guards, worry that escape was a breach of contract, and identifying with the guards.

I also uncovered contradicting accounts on moving the prisoners to the old County Jail and the moment of introducing the snitch. More inconsistencies popped up between recordings and transcripts. Crucial information proofing Korpi faked is not transcribed correctly from the audiotapes. Discernable revealing parts of the conversation are falsely marked unintelligible/inaudible. Also, evidence surfaced of blanking out names and critical references to prisoners.

Furthermore, all the releases of the other four prisoners on Wednesday and Thursday are tainted. The staff planned the releases. Conflicting times emerged, and the recorded data make the reported emotional breakdowns and development of a psychosomatic rash untenable.

Part 5: An orchestrated apotheose

Clay Ramsey (#416) entered the simulation late Wednesday night after receiving a call from Zimbardo's secretary. The next day he went straight on hunger strike. His testimony of losing himself in prisoner #416 within hours inside the simulation is inconceivable. Was he ordered to force the tension?

The reports on the Parole Board are a shambles. The journal papers mention one board on Thursday with five prisoners while there were two hearings, each with four. Moreover, a board for detainees before sentencing makes no sense. It is a Kafkaesque scene explaining why the students got confused.

Three plotlines of uncontrollable guards, suffering prisoners, and apathetic prison supervisors intertwine to a crescendo finale on the last night. But was Zimbardo confronted by his fiancée and brought back from the realms of internalized roleplaying? Or was the alleged forced premature end a ruse to fool everyone?

No one entertained the idea of a fake termination with an invented falling-out. Yet prisoner Richard Yacco (#1037) attested in 2011 that the staff told him around 8 p.m. on Thursday they would end the experiment the next day. When Zimbardo remarked in his response that he decided to terminate the experiment earlier on Thursday, while he has always been adamant about a midnight decision to stop the study, alarm bells went off.



I found several references to a scheduled end. The evidence found on planned prisoner releases also hints at a controlled termination. These findings led to searching for clues about whether the alleged confrontation between Zimbardo and his fiancée actually occurred.

Extensive evidence proves the climax was invented. The fight between the lovers and the midnight decision to terminate the study are both fictional. Zimbardo's dissociative fugue — losing awareness of one's identity — is bunk.

When lights went out around 10 p.m., the night shift began evaluating the experiment. They knew their play for pay was over. The others continued till Friday noon. However, how the staff contacted the lawyer for the Friday interview with the prisoners is baffling. I dug up three conflicting accounts. And he was not a public defender but a second-year law student.

Part 6: The last judgment

This episode recaps what I dug up from the archives and found online, highlighting the many discrepancies and distortions, detrimental design flaws, selective sampling, confirmation-seeking anecdotes, added drama, fantasized fiction, and tampering with data. The undeniable conclusion is that the Stanford Prison Experiment is a false, nefarious narrative.

The purported guard brutality did not spiral out of control. The most brutal guard could impossibly do anything out of the ordinary. Physical violence was not allowed. The directive made the prison simulation surreal.

All prisoner releases are off. Korpi never incited an exodus. It was the staff that orchestrated who left the basement and when. The reported false psychosomatic rash and invented breakdowns suggest the researchers suffered from Munchausen by proxy. Prisoners that stayed the course never lost sight of playing a part in a prison play.

Psychologists losing themselves in their prison role is a ploy. They simply did not run the prison professionally. Warden Jaffe non-stop pushed the tension while superiors approved by looking on, illustrating that superiors' derelict of duty can lead to power perversion.

Most main events do not hold up under scrutiny. The random selection and rigorous testing, Korpi's breakdown and alleged jailbreak rumor, the relocating to the old County Jail, fleeing to the fifth floor, the Parole Board hearings and the confrontation on the last night are distorted or fabricated.

Moreover, the researchers spun absurdity with force in perpetual circular reasoning to preach the power of the situation. Psychologists ran the prison not running anything. Psychologists in power were powerless, yet powerless guards wielded absolute power. Playacting became real because reality is playacting. Brutal guards created the environment that created them. And the folly goes on and on.

Impalpably we have all been played. The presented proof supports plain science fraud far worse than the likes of Diederik Stapel. Stapel confessed that the rotten barrel of social science polluted his mind. Did Zimbardo and his culprits fall victim to situational and systemic scholastic pressures?



Part 7: Making sense of the shambles

Rogue researchers wrote and subsequently defended a re-enactment of Pirandello's *Theater of the Absurd* by cleverly mixing fiction and facts. But how could they go on unabated with pathological lying? Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes* seems to fit the bill. Onlookers did not shout that there was nothing to see.

Ironically, Zimbardo lived his conclusion. He paradoxically demonstrates that personal interests and self-imposed beliefs make a good person capable of unethical deeds for decades while convinced of the opposite.

Still, it was all for naught. Zimbardo's conclusion in his response is a no-brainer. External influence on behavior is undisputed. A diabolical prison design called the *Panopticon*, Greek for all-seeing, demonstrated centuries earlier the power of the situation. It was a prison of mind over mind.

Not the setting but imposed constraints and self-imposed restraints forced behavior. In fact, conscious decisions dictated behavior whereby each student made an individual choice. Prisoners either coped for the duration in various ways or tried to get out. The guards decided to push the envelope, play firm but fair, or defy expectations by acting kindly.

Therefore, it was a mistake to ignore cognition. Attributing behavior to either disposition or situation is a false dichotomy. Furthermore, the inference not A means B is a fallacy. Disproving something is not proof of something else. The experiment was logic in remission from the start.

Over the years, attempts to debunk the mock prison conclusion led to nothing because the process is bunk. There is no arbitration, no due process. Zimbardo simply picked the criticism he wanted to address. Besides, it is impossible to falsify fiction. You can however prove that a story is fantasy.

A half-century of deceit reveals many flaws in the science system. Once guilty by association, scholars will tend to turn agnostic to keep face. Controversy gives a fabrication a scientific seal of approval. And critique dies when countered, ending in a courteous agree to disagree.

All in all, Stanford Prison is a cautionary tale of psychologists, given the opportunity, can create a delusional alternative reality and live a pathological lie as long as they have platforms to preach their invented gospel. The caveat is that academic authorities do abuse the power of position to further their careers.

Part 8: Cleansing the pandemonium

Non-stop fudging the truth for 50 years while basking in media attention and academic adoration is unsurpassed. Therefore accept this is unadulterated fraud. Hold the involved accountable. Primarily the tenured professors, including those who played along or covered up.

Although it is a massive task, rectify papers, textbooks, websites, and curricula referring to the Stanford Prison Experiment. Foremost, retract the journal papers. Stop endorsing the fable as anything realistic and add disclaimers. Books and chapters on the experiment are also null and void.

Do not rewrite history by removing the study from the psychology canon. Yet stop polluting impressionable and inquisitive fresh minds. Tell the official version and emphasize the flaws,



falsifications, and fabrications. Add what made the story stand the storms of critique and highlight the many flaws in the scientific system.

Learn from the debacle. Investigate why no one picked up on the numerous outlandish claims, senseless statements, red flags and smoking guns. Counter the perverted practices of renaming, reframing, and explaining away deceptive misconduct by the psychology community. Take appropriate measures to prevent history from repeating itself.

Above all, determine psychology's role in turning a crafted fable into a seminal science study. Academic power, prestige, and poor functioning of scientific scrutiny corrupted researchers. Instead of stopping the folly in its tracks, esteemed peers turned a blind eye or collaborated. Some still keep referring to a famous study to inflate their publications.

Hence, part of the solution is a culture change, but also practices need revision. Presently, academics create their own bubble and decide on what to read, believe, recite, construct, write about and teach — a confirmation seeking and dissonance avoiding practice. Controversy only results in trench warfare leading nowhere.

Part 9: Finishing off the response

There are two remaining issues in Zimbardo's response. Early publications appeared outside peer-reviewed journals to avoid rejection, and a British research team failed to replicate the simulation. The plot thickens in how the power of a mesmerizing parable ensnared the press and the general public.

In 1973, the Stanford psychologists published three papers. Blum raised the point that the researchers sidestepped the usual peer review to avoid rejection. Zimbardo denied he did and had a point. Willfully circumventing peer review was never in play.

Anyway, peer review is highly overrated. Science's safeguard is deeply flawed. Besides, the appraisal by colleagues did not stop later publications on the Stanford Prison Experiment in peer-reviewed journals. A point Zimbardo raised.

We should be looking at the early involvement of the press as raised by Le Texier. Zimbardo hit the publicity ground running with news releases during the experiment stating the outcome. Consequently, bold headlines with a pre-ordained conclusion appeared regularly in news outlets from coast to coast.

Zimbardo fudged audacious one-liners to shock a wider audience and bombarded the press with results that had not been tabulated or analyzed. He did everything to gain maximal media exposure for years before the papers were published. The rebuttal about the proper release sequence is a farce. He did nothing but circumvent the scientific field.

In 2002, the BBC Prison study failed to replicate Stanford Prison's findings, further undermining its scientific credibility. The outcome was somewhat controversial because the exact opposite occurred. Prisoners dominated and terrorized the guards.

The paradoxical result didn't sit well with Zimbardo. For years he tried to stop the publication of the results by stressing biases, fallacies, and distortions in the replication. Zimbardo called the BBC prison



a fraudulent reality TV show, claiming Haslam and Reicher frequently intervened. But all his comments are more applicable to his experiment. After all, psychologists ran the Stanford jail.

Although Zimbardo consistently appeared to denounce the BBC study, in actuality, he facetiously promoted the replication to add more weight to his fabrication. Conversely, the replicators relentlessly keep on referring to a famous study to promote their idea of leadership identification. In 2018, they even signed a consensus statement together with the common intellectual ground to promote constructive scientific dialogue.

In the same year, Haslam and Reicher rethought the role of identity leadership based on guard Mark getting instructed to act tough. This was the smoking gun they had been seeking since 2002. But Mark did not pay heed to the order. He did the opposite, demonstrating good people stand up to power abusers. The smoking gun misfired.

Part 10: The narratological method

I relied on narratological principles to review the Stanford Prison Saga. Narratology is the study of stories with a focus on persuasive elements that convey meaning. You focus on the message or moral that relays knowledge shaping our perception of reality and the logical sequence of events involving characters pursuing a goal.

Stories are a compilation of fiction and fact. And counter to common beliefs, science papers are crafted tales relaying research. Only a tiny part pertains to facts. The rest is fiction — an imaginative re-creation of a constructed reality.

Therefore, narratology provides a novel look at scientific stories. Seeing with new eyes allows you to detect unexpected and unnoticed characteristics. The narrative prism also provides a linguistic basis to formulate the results of a review.

Hence, scrutinizing the cleverly crafted Stanford Prison narrative using narratology was an obvious choice to unravel flaws and fabrications. A good starting point is to know which version you are reviewing. Different accounts offer the opportunity to look for inconsistencies.

The next step is overseeing the structure to understand which scenes are essential in making the prison tale compelling and memorable. Then dissect core story components to map the narrative territory, like scenes, characters, point of view, and plotlines.

I devised a two-stage investigative approach. *Composition* gives an overview of the layout of the land with its narrative components and a list of suspect topics. Next is *Decomposition* — dissecting the details and fact-checking flagged items.

After meticulous fact-checking, many dubious elements turned out to be flawed, false or fabricated. I gave several examples of using the narrative lens in both stages and added an extensive list of rules and guidelines to review a composed piece of literature.