

# Roles & Situations

Psychology

The Stanford Prison Experiment, and the serious challenges to it.

## The claim

- Ordinary students became abusive guards
- Roles overwhelmed individual disposition
- Stopped after six days
- Widely cited as showing situational power

## The critique

- Guards were explicitly coached toward harshness
- Demand characteristics were strong
- Small, self-selected sample
- Not replicated under better controls
- Reicher and Haslam's BBC study found different results

### THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Situational forces are real and well evidenced elsewhere. This particular study is weak evidence for them.

Included because every course covers it — and because knowing the critique matters more than knowing the finding.