

# Conformity to Social Roles: The Stanford Prison Study



***This activity will help you to:***

- Understand and recall the study by Zimbardo et al\* (1973)*
- Take notes from rapidly presented material*
- Write clearly and concisely about psychological material*
- Consider some questions of ethics in psychological research*

## **The Stanford Prison Study (Zimbardo et al, 1973)**

The Stanford Prison Study is another study of conformity. It examines a different type of conformity to the Asch study. Zimbardo et al looked at how people conform to social roles.

### **What You Need To Do**

You will be shown a short video clip about the Stanford Prison Study. You need to pay careful attention to it, and use it to take some short notes about the research. You will only get to see the clip once, so you must make your notes as you go along. Your notes need to cover the following areas:

- What did Zimbardo et al do?
- What did they find?
- What conclusions can be drawn from their findings?

### **Write a description of the study...**

Now write a three-paragraph description of the Zimbardo et al study. Each paragraph should cover one of the areas above. The paragraphs should start:

- Zimbardo et al carried out a study in which they...
- They found that...
- This study shows that...

### **And if you finish that, try these (advanced activities)...**

1. Zimbardo's study was very traumatic for those who took part. The student volunteers were subjected to deprivation of their freedom, humiliation and social isolation. Many of them suffered greatly during the study. Is it right for a psychologist to do this to people in order to find things out about human behaviour? Write a short paragraph explaining your views.

2. Whilst at school, it is very likely that you were taught by a teacher you didn't like, because of how they behaved towards you. Most people, when they meet someone like that, assume that their unpleasant behaviour is due to their having an unpleasant personality (this is called a dispositional explanation). A psychologist looks at things differently. Think about the teacher you didn't like, and about what the Stanford Prison Study tells us about the causes of people's behaviour. Can you be sure that the teacher's behaviour had dispositional causes? Write a short explanation of how Zimbardo might explain their actions.