
Gold Medal Award for Life Achievement in the Science of Psychology

The American Psychological Foundation (APF) Gold Medal Awards recognize distinguished and enduring records of accomplishment in four areas of psychology: the application of psychology, the practice of psychology, psychology in the public interest, and the science of psychology. The 2012 recipient of the Gold Medal Award for Life Achievement in the Science of Psychology is Philip G. Zimbardo.

Dorothy W. Cantor, president of the APF, will present the APF Gold Medal Awards at the 120th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association on August 3, 2012, at 4:00 p.m. Members of the 2012 APF Board of Trustees are Dorothy W. Cantor, president; Charles L. Brewer, vice president/secretary; Gerald Koocher, treasurer; Elisabeth R. Straus, executive vice president/executive director; Norman Anderson; Brian N. Baird; David H. Barlow; Camilla Benbow; Sharon Stephens Brehm; Connie Chan; William Howell; Anthony Jackson; Ronald F. Levant; Aurelio Prifitera; Sandra Shullman; Archie L. Turner; and Kurt Geisinger, APA Board of Directors liaison.

Philip G. Zimbardo

Citation

“This award honors the distinguished career and groundbreaking contributions that Philip G. Zimbardo has made to the advancement of psychological science. His classic study on the psychology of imprisonment, the Stanford Prison Experiment, stands as one of psychology’s most famous demonstrations that situational factors can powerfully shape human behavior. In addition, his pioneering studies on shyness, deindividuation, time perspective, and heroism have helped establish important new areas of investigation on topics of great social and humanitarian concern, and his bestselling text and trade books and *Discovering Psychology* video series have brought psychological science to millions of people around the world. In recognition of these extraordinary accomplishments, the American Psychological Foundation is pleased to recognize Philip G. Zimbardo with its Gold Medal Award for Life Achievement in the Science of Psychology.”

Biography

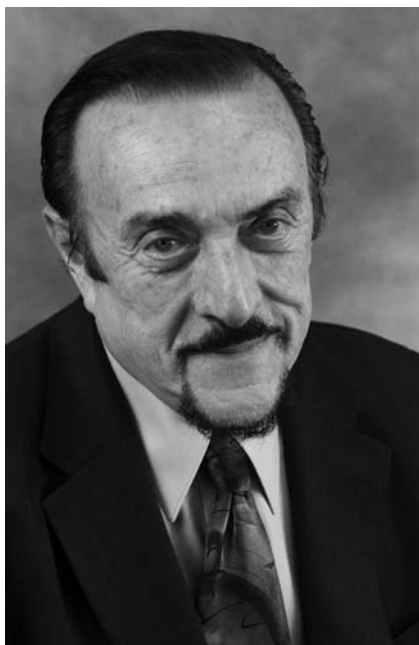
Nature dealt Philip G. Zimbardo a tough hand; Nurture worsened it. A skinny, sickly kid who grew up in the Depression era of the 1930s, in the ghetto of New York’s South Bronx, with undereducated parents of Sicilian heritage, in poverty, and on welfare, he managed to do good in America, and for psychology.

His most formative early experience was being quarantined for five months, starting at the age of five in 1938, for whooping cough compounded by double pneumonia. Along with many other poor kids, he was housed in a hospital for children with every known contagious disease, at a time without “magic meds” such as penicillin. While children died daily in the game of genetic roulette, Zimbardo resolved not to die, but to survive with daily prayers to be smart, strong, brave, and healthy. He made a mental heaven of that earthly hell in which parental visits were limited to one hour on Sundays and in which there were no phones, no mail, no music, no games, no human contact, and no touch ever. He honed his ingratiation skills by complimenting the surgically masked nurses, he developed leadership skills by inventing group games for kids in nearby beds, and he learned to read and write from H.E.R.O. comic books. The experience was the wellspring of his later interests in shyness, prisons, anonymity and deindividuation, and heroism. And of course, it fueled an eternal optimism, resilience, and need to help others in need.

Discriminated against by local toughs for looking Jewish, he learned to run fast, eventually becoming captain of the varsity track team at Brooklyn College. Ignored for the last place on the 151st Street stickball team, he practiced hitting the Spalden in the schoolyard until he became a two-sewer distance hitter. Realizing he was destined to be a scrawny follower, Zimbardo first bulked up by going camping every weekend and carrying a huge backpack on long hikes with a friend. Then, after observing what made some kids become leaders, he chose that life path, eventually becoming the captain of all the sports teams he played on, the president of everything from his college fraternity to the American Psychological Association and the Western Psychological Association, and for good measure, the chair of all the presidents in the Council of Scientific Society Presidents.

Zimbardo’s making it out of poverty can clearly be traced to two sources: becoming educated and developing a future-oriented time perspective. He loved school, reading, writing, and his teachers, who created alternate realities for him in which to excel. But even as a child, he realized that to succeed required planning, setting goals, and making decisions based on best estimates of outcomes and of costs versus gains. In contrast to the totally present-focused, hedonistic lifestyle of his father and relatives, which doomed them to live a “what is” kind of life, he chose a “what could be better if I do this and not that now” kind of life. Research into this neglected domain of human thinking and action eventually surfaced as a major research interest for Zimbardo.

Philip G. Zimbardo



During the year his family lived in North Hollywood, California, he was shunned by high school classmates because they believed he was part of the Italian Mafia, and his emerging asthma became the excuse for his family to move back home to the South Bronx. The next year, Zimbardo was voted the most popular boy in the senior class at James Monroe High School. His classmate Stanley Milgram believed that it was attributable to a situation change, not a disposition change. Trying to understand the links between situational experiences, physiological reactions, and behavioral outcomes from that social-rejection-induced asthma, Zimbardo early on became interested in the mind–body connection, placebo effects, and cognitive control of motivation.

Growing up in ethnically and racially mixed environments led Zimbardo to study the intergroup dynamics between people of color already living in the Bronx and newly arriving Puerto Ricans—and resulted in his first publication, in 1953, as a junior at Brooklyn College (Zimbardo, 1953). Earlier, his enthusiasm for psychology having been dimmed by his boring introductory psychology course (in which he earned his only C grade ever), he had switched his major to sociology/anthropology. In his senior year, he added a psychology major following his delight in doing research in an experimental psychology course that he had taken as a favor to a buddy who needed a research partner.

Zimbardo almost did not get into his first-choice graduate school, Yale University, because there was a split vote in the psychology department between those who believed he was “black” and thus likely to fail under the demands of their program and those who felt they should take “one this once.” Their judgment was based on a variety of circumstantial evidence that in retrospect seems convincing, but

the delayed choice meant that he was the only candidate available when Gordon Bower turned down their offer to him (to get an MA elsewhere). Despite his avowed interest in continuing to study race relations, the only research associate position available was as a rat runner working on exploratory behavior under K. C. Montgomery. Zimbardo published a number of articles on their research following his mentor’s untimely death and even was senior author of an original research article with Neal Miller (Zimbardo & Miller, 1958) and of a *Science* article on rat sexual behavior (Zimbardo & Barry, 1958) during his grad student days.

At Yale, he worked with, and published with, as many different faculty as he could; his most significant mentor was Carl Hovland, who inspired him to work on issues of persuasion. Zimbardo was also much influenced by the intellectual intensity of Gordon Bower, his eventual housemate. The breadth of those experiences increased Zimbardo’s psychological curiosity until it was virtually boundless, as is evidenced by the more than 40 diverse areas in which he has since published.

His passion for teaching was also sparked back in 1958 when he taught his first introductory psychology course at Yale, which eventually led to teaching classes of more than a thousand students at a time during his 40 years at Stanford University. Zimbardo is most proud of the teaching he did in creating the PBS television series *Discovering Psychology*, which has been seen by more than a million viewers in colleges, high schools, and among the general public globally. He has complemented his research career with extensive textbook writing, notably authoring *Psychology and Life* (Zimbardo & Ruch, 1975) and *Psychology: Core Concepts* (Zimbardo, Johnson, & McCann, 2012).

Zimbardo has always been at the forefront of making psychology accessible and inviting to the general public, as well as to national decision makers, through his popular trade books and many media appearances, as well as with his groundbreaking research, such as the Stanford Prison Experiment.

Since retiring officially in 2008, Zimbardo is perhaps busier than ever, working simultaneously on many fronts, most notably as founder and president of the Heroic Imagination Project (<http://heroicimagination.org/>), created to inspire and teach people of all ages how to be everyday heroes.

Selected Bibliography

- Zimbardo, P. G. (1953). The dynamics of prejudice and assimilation among two underprivileged minority groups in New York City. *Alpha Kappa Delta*, 24(1), 16–22.
- Zimbardo, P. G. (1969). *The cognitive control of motivation*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Zimbardo, P. G. (1969). The human choice: Individuation, reason, and order versus deindividuation, impulse, and chaos. In W. J. Arnold & D. Levine (Eds.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation* (Vol. 17, pp. 237–307). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Zimbardo, P. G. (1977). *Shyness: What it is, what to do about it*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley. [Reprinted in 1991]
- Zimbardo, P. G. (1999). Discontinuity theory: Cognitive and social searches for rationality and normality—may lead to madness. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 31, 345–486.

- Zimbardo, P. G. (2004). Does psychology make a significant difference in our lives? *American Psychologist, 59*, 339–351. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.59.5.339
- Zimbardo, P. G. (2007). *The Lucifer effect: Understanding how good people turn evil*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Zimbardo, P. G., & Barry, H. (1958, January 10). Effects of caffeine and chlorpromazine on the sexual behavior of male rats. *Science, 127*, 84–85. doi:10.1126/science.127.3289.84
- Zimbardo, P. G., & Boyd, J. N. (2008). *The time paradox: Understanding and using the revolutionary new science of time*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Zimbardo, P. G., Cohen, A. R., Weisenberg, M., Dworkin, L., & Firestone, I. (1966, January 14). Control of pain motivation by cognitive dissonance. *Science, 151*, 217–219.
- Zimbardo, P. G., & Duncan, N. (2012). *The demise of guys: Why boys are struggling, and what we can do about it*. New York, NY: TED Books.
- Zimbardo, P. G., Ebbesen, E. B., & Maslach, C. (1977). *Influencing attitudes and changing behavior* (2nd ed.). Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Zimbardo, P. G., Haney, C., Banks, W. C., & Jaffe, D. (1973, April 8). The mind is a formidable jailer: A Pirandellian prison. *The New York Times Magazine*, Section 6, pp. 38 ff.
- Zimbardo, P. G., Johnson, R. L., & McCann, V. (2012). *Psychology: Core concepts* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Zimbardo, P. G., & Leippe, M. (1991). *The psychology of attitude change and social influence*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. [Also hardcover by Temple University Press, 1991]
- Zimbardo, P. G., & Miller, N. E. (1958). Facilitation of exploration by hunger in rats. *Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology, 51*, 43–46. doi:10.1037/h0048820
- Zimbardo, P. G., & Radl, S. L. (1981). *The shy child*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Zimbardo, P. G., & Ruch, F. L. (1975). *Psychology and life* (9th ed.). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman. [19th ed., 2011, Gerrig, R., & Zimbardo, P. G., Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon]
- Zimbardo, P. G., Sword, R., & Sword, R. (2012). *The time cure: Overcoming PTSD with the new psychology of time perspective therapy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, an Imprint of Wiley.
- Zimbardo, P. G. (Co-writer, chief academic advisor, host), & WGBH-TV with the American Psychological Association (Producers). (1990). *Discovering psychology* [26-program video series.] Washington, DC: Annenberg Foundation and Corporation for Public Broadcasting. [Updated ed., 2001]