Netflix's 'New Stanford Prison Experiment' sparks online debate

By VIVIAN GAGE
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On Oct. 21, "The New Stanford Prison Experiment" will premiere on Netflix, and it's exactly what it sounds like. The six-episode unscripted mini-series is a "modern reimagining of the infamous study" where "30 people enter a real prison for two weeks and shifting power dynamics expose what they're capable of," according to Netflix.

The trailer is just as dramatic as you would expect, with intense music in the background and various shots of guards restraining prisoners and inmates pacing anxiously in cells. Multiple quotes from participants build suspense, including "worst case scenario, my inner demon is stronger than I thought," "let em' rot in there" and "we went too far, I think we made a mistake."

The trailer seems to suggest that this new Stanford experiment will turn out much like its predecessor, which may excite or concern viewers.

The original Stanford Prison Experiment took place in 1971 and became one of psychology's most infamous cautionary tales of what not to do. The experiment, which took place at Stanford University inside a mock prison in the basement of a campus building, was a social psychology study in which college students became prisoners or guards, according to Britannica.

The 24 participants, all college-aged men who were paid $15 a day, were randomly assigned roles, split evenly between prisoners and guards. The experiment "was intended to measure the effect of role-playing, labeling and social expectations on behavior over a period of two weeks," according to Britannica. The experiment ended in just six days, instead of 14, when mistreatment of prisoners escalated so alarmingly that the principal investigator, American psychologist Philip G. Zimbardo, stopped it early.

The prisoners, to create an atmosphere of oppression, were made to wear a "dress" as a uniform, and each had a padlocked chain around one ankle. Guards were ordered not to physically abuse prisoners and wore mirrored sunglasses that prevented any eye contact with prisoners. On the second day, the prisoners staged a rebellion that was put down by the guards. By day four, three prisoners had become so traumatized that they were released. "Stripped naked, hooded, chained and denied food and sleep," many of the prisoners suffered from nervous breakdowns due to the guards' psychological torture, according to an article by the University of Melbourne.

The experiment's methods have been heavily scrutinized for ethical violations. A translation of a 2018 book by French science historian Thibault Le Texier claims guards were "coached by the research team in how to create a psychologically hostile environment" before the experiment.

Apparently, the guards were given "a list of rules to impose and procedures aimed at dehumanizing prisoners," with staff reprimanding guards who were too lenient once the experiment began. Conversely, prisoners were given little to no preparation beforehand, leading many to respond in shock to their harsh treatment. The prisoners weren't allowed to quit the experiment without pressing a medical or psychiatric emergency, despite being told beforehand they could leave at any time.

Zimbardo argued, "that the transformation of seemingly normal people into cruel guards and passive prisoners was proof that social situations have the power to corrupt human behaviour." Despite its many flaws, and the general understanding that it was not a valid scientific study, the experiment is still considered extremely influential, and its findings have been applied to many situations beyond prison.

Understandably, Netflix's decision to produce a reality show recreating this infamously unethical experiment has stirred some controversy on social media. Under an X post from DiscussingFilm, one comment read, "The Stanford Prison Experiment was arguably the most disastrous & disturbing social experiment ever conducted, so of course Netflix turned it into a shitty reality show for cheap views."

Under an X post by Variety with over 11 million views, one user commented, "would've expected this from mr beast," while another said, "Jesus Christ we are truly living in a dystopian hell."

On Instagram, a post by the user gverma reads "...there is SO much documented evidence around why and how the Stanford Prison Experiment actively caused harm to the people involved and it feels truly absurd… to put people in these conditions again, especially knowing how much of it was full of the same bias that plagues reality TV itself." On a post about the series by the account buzzingforhorror, one user commented, "This is so fucking tone deaf. This should be cancelled."

The show's creators acknowledge the reasoning behind the controversy, but suggest their experiment is different.

"If we were simply recreating the original experiment, that would be unconscionable," said executive producer Jane Lipsitz. "But this is a different time, with different participants, different safeguards and, ultimately, a very different journey."

Many people online have expressed shock that Netflix would greenlight such a show, but Lipsitz said, "Netflix has always been an incredible supporter of ambitious projects that take risks, push boundaries and tell challenging stories."

According to Lipsitz, to protect participants, there were psychological screenings before the study began and "everyone had a safe word they could use to opt out at any time, and psychologists were available 24/7 for support."

Unlike the original experiment, this group of 30 participants cast a wider net meant to better reflect the world today, "diverse in geography, gender, political beliefs, socioeconomic background and life experience." Women were involved as well, though from the trailer it appears there are only three of them, all serving as guards.

The new experiment also takes place in a real prison, not a simulated one, with cameras filming 24/7.

Time will tell how consumers react to this new experiment once it is released, but one user on X sums up my thoughts perfectly: "I can't prove it, but Mr. Beast is to blame for this."



ILLUSTRATION BY HARRY ZELLER

'Sunrise on the Reaping' brings 'The Hunger Games' back to theaters

By AMANDA MACHADO
Contributing Writer

The odds must be in our favor because the beloved series "The Hunger Games" is returning to the big screen in a little over a month as one of the most anticipated movies of the year.

Since the release of the original "The Hunger Games" book, the series has become beloved for its memorable characters, exciting storylines and political themes. Author Suzanne Collins created a dedicated fanbase that eagerly looks forward to each release, excited to learn more about the characters they love.

"Sunrise on the Reaping" is a prequel to the original series that follows Haymitch Abernathy, who appeared in the original series as a mentor to the main characters Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark. Abernathy's story is something the fans have wanted to learn more about for years, since he was already such a beloved character in the original series.



ILLUSTRATION BY HARRY ZELLER

"Sunrise on the Reaping" follows Abernathy's journey from his reaping through his time in the arena to life after his victory. Those who go to this movie can expect a story filled with a lot of love and emotion, and definitely some tears. The book is often described by readers as the saddest of "The Hunger Games" books because of the tragic losses Abernathy feels during both his time in the arena as well as in his life after.

The book's epilogue is one of the fans' favorite moments in the story, as it includes the original characters, Everdeen and Mellark, giving fans a nostalgic nod back to the original trilogy. Many fans of the books are speculating about whether the moment with these original characters will be included in the movie, bringing back actress Jennifer Lawrence and actor Josh Hutcherson to reprise their roles.

The film features an amazing new cast tasked with bringing these beloved characters to life. The cast stars actor Joseph Zada, best known for his role in the TV show "We Were Liars," as Abernathy. The cast also features well-known names such as actresses McKenna Grace, Elle Fanning, Whitney Peak and actor Kieran Culkin, alongside so many others, adding to what many feel is one of the most accurately cast movie series.

However, this movie isn't the fans' first time hearing of Abernathy's story. The "Sunrise on the Reaping" book was released in March 2025, and it quickly gained attention. The novel sold more than 1.4 million copies in the United States alone during its first week of sales, quickly becoming a No. 1 New York Times bestseller.

However, this demand was not unprecedented. In fact, it was predicted. Due to the popularity of the original series and the demand for a new addition to the series, the movie adaptation was announced the same day as the book. This is very rare for book adaptations, and one of the only other times this was done was for another installment in "The Hunger Games" series, "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes," which was announced in 2019.

These movies are not only known for their powerful characters and captivating storylines; they are well known for the original songs and soundtracks that are released with each movie.

The franchise has featured music from prominent artists across multiple installments. Past contributors include singer-songwriter Taylor Swift, singer-songwriter Lorde, rock band Coldplay, singer-songwriter Olivia Rodrigo and so many more. This release includes a song that has just been released by singer-songwriter Noah Kahan titled "Draw You Out." This release is especially exciting due to the success of his most recent album "The Great Divide," which has amassed more than 2 billion streams since its release earlier this year. Kahan's song is just the first on an album that is sure to be filled with exciting new music.

The film's press tour has already begun generating attention on social media ahead of its release. The tour kicked off in Paris with Grace, who is portraying Maysilee Donner, wearing an iconic piece from the original trilogy. Grace made headlines for wearing a dress inspired by the wedding dress that Everdeen wore in "The Hunger Games: Catching Fire" to the premiere.

In just over a month, the newest installment of "The Hunger Games" will return to big screens. With an exciting and heartbreaking new story, it is sure to keep all viewers on their toes while staying true to the powerful messaging of the original series.