

An Experiment

By Brent Holland

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DEDICATION

To Aubrey and Rhett. What are we gonna do tonight?

STORY OF THE PLAY

Portrayed in a fantasy world, five confused participants wake up with no memory of their past life ... with only one word, a personality descriptor (such as compassionate, courageous or orderly) written in type on their shirts. The doctor explains that each is here willingly, and that they are all being compensated for their participation in a research study. Will the participants assigned attribute affect their behavior when under extreme duress? Once the experiment begins and they find out that to lose is to die, all five do what they must to survive the experiment. *The Hunger Games* meets *Survivor* in this experiment. This show requires very little set, few costumes, and is entirely gender flexible. It is perfect for one-act competitions. Time: 25 - 30 minutes.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

This show was originally produced by Laney High School in October of 2018 and was taken to the North Carolina Theatre Festival as well as the Ashley Play Festival. Awards won at the 2018 North Carolina Theatre Conference:

* Rating of Superior.

* Award for Excellence in Stage Combat.

DEVIOUS: Arabella Grigley

COMPASSIONATE: Cassidy Fitz-Randolph

IMPULSIVE: Olivia Buffkin

COURAGEOUS: Ana Stinson

ORDERLY: Jasmine Jones

DR. SOLES: Hyrum Van Slyke

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 Actors)

DEVIOUS: A participant who insists he is not devious.

COMPASSIONATE: A participant who does not handle pressure well.

IMPULSIVE: A participant who is impulsive throughout.

COURAGEOUS: A participant who is courageous and decisive.

ORDERLY: A participant who is a rule follower.

DR. SOLES: The lead scientist and conductor of the experiment.

Four additional non-speaking actors are optional for the end of the play. These roles can be doubled.

*Every character is gender flexible. To simplify any confusion the pronoun "he" will be used throughout the script. Please use the correct pronoun for your cast.

SETTING

A laboratory setting. It can be simple or elaborate. There are five chairs spaced across the stage. There is a card placed under each chair.

COSTUMES

The original production used very colorful KISS type makeup to create a fantasy world. Each participant has a shirt with their attribute printed on it. (Devious, Compassionate, Impulsive, Courageous, and Orderly.) This can also be done with name tags. Each participant is also wearing a sort of thin collar. Dr. Soles wears a lab coat.

SFX

electric shock sound, bell chimes, pulsing countdown

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Scene 1

(LIGHTS up to reveal DR. SOLES walking around, inspecting the PARTICIPANTS. Each one is sitting asleep in a chair. Courageous is in the first seat, then Impulsive, Compassionate, Orderly, and last is Devious.)

DR. SOLES: Egan ... do you have readings on all five? *(He gets an answer.)* Excellent. And their collars? *(He gets an answer.)* Thank you. Prepare to innervate in five ... four ... three ... two ... one.

(The PARTICIPANTS start to slowly rouse.)

DR. SOLES: *(Cont'd. Seeing them rouse, in a soothing voice.)* There, there ... take it easy. The effects of the sedative should wear off pretty quickly.

IMPULSIVE: Where are we?

DR. SOLES: I'll answer all of your questions as a group in just a few minutes.

ORDERLY: *(Groggily.)* I can't remember anything ...

DR. SOLES: Completely normal, just a part of the process.

ORDERLY: What process?

DR. SOLES: Let's let the others wake up, then I will answer all of your questions.

(The OTHERS are becoming more alert.)

COURAGEOUS: My head hurts.

COMPASSIONATE: Me too.

DR. SOLES: All of the effects of the sedative ...

DEVIOUS: What sedative?

DR. SOLES: *(Looking around.)* Well, I guess you are all awake enough, so I guess we can begin. First, I am Dr. Soles ...

ORDERLY: What are you a Doctor of? And why can't I remember anything? ... I can't even remember my name.

DR. SOLES: This will go faster if you don't interrupt me. I can answer all questions when I am finished. Okay?

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(ALL basically agree.)

DR. SOLES: *(Cont'd.)* As I said, I am Dr. Soles, Doctor of Behavior. I am the Principal Researcher here at this facility. The five of you volunteered to be a part of our project and are being paid to participate.

COURAGEOUS: Why can't we remember anything?

DR. SOLES: *(Lecturing.)* I was just getting to that. In order for this project to function each of you has been given a strong memory suppressant that will last for the duration of your time in the experiment.

DEVIOUS: Experiment?

DR. SOLES: Yes, that is what you are being paid to be a part of. Each of you willingly signed up to participate, and today is the day!

IMPULSIVE: What kind of experiment is this?

DR. SOLES: The details are quite cumbersome; all you need to know is that it is an experiment in base behavior when placed under extreme duress.

COMPASSIONATE: *(Somewhat worried.)* Extreme duress?

DR. SOLES: Not nearly as bad as it sounds. *(Pause.)* Each of you have been placed here specifically, and in this particular experiment together, based off of core qualities of who you are. You will notice on each of your garments there reads one word.

(EACH looks down at their shirt or nametag.)

COURAGEOUS: Mine says "courageous."

DR. SOLES: In your initial interview it was decided that this was the attribute that best describes you.

COURAGEOUS: Cool.

IMPULSIVE: I'm impulsive!

DR. SOLES: Yes, you are.

IMPULSIVE: *(Not getting it.)* I don't feel impulsive.

DR. SOLES: Being impulsive is your most outstanding attribute, not necessarily a feeling. A person could be inherently violent, but not always feel like lashing out.

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COMPASSIONATE: I'm compassionate. That sounds nice.

ORDERLY: It sounds better than orderly. Am I like a librarian or something?

DR. SOLES: (*Laughing.*) No, although maybe you should have been.

DEVIOUS: (*To DR. SOLES.*) Excuse me ...

DR. SOLES: Yes?

DEVIOUS: It says I'm "devious."

DR. SOLES: And?

DEVIOUS: That's my outstanding attribute? That I'm devious?

DR. SOLES: According to our assessment—

DEVIOUS: (*A little pointed.*) I'm not devious.

DR. SOLES: It's nothing to get upset about.

DEVIOUS: You're not the one wearing the word "devious" on your shirt.

DR. SOLES: Ok ... so I guess now is the time to explain something to you all. This experiment is designed to see if your true selves will come out when put in pressure situations. While you may have been judged as courageous, or compassionate or ...

DEVIOUS: Devious.

DR. SOLES: Or even devious, this experiment, in temporarily erasing your memory, is testing to see whether such behavior is learned or just a part of your genetic makeup.

COMPASSIONATE: So, just because I was a compassionate person before, doesn't necessarily mean I will be now?

DR. SOLES: Exactly! You each come into this game with a clean slate. Which means ... (*Indicating to DEVIOUS.*)

DEVIOUS: That I don't have to be devious.

IMPULSIVE: Alrighty then, let's go ahead and get started!

ORDERLY: Hold on a sec, we don't know the rules.

DR. SOLES: Ah yes, the rules. Well, first you will notice that each of you woke up in a chair ... that area will be your home base and where you will start each phase of the experiment.

COURAGEOUS: Is that important?

DR. SOLES: It could be, it has been in past experiments.

COMPASSIONATE: What are these things on our necks?

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(EACH now notice that they are wearing a collar.)

DR. SOLES: I was just about to get to that! First, I now need each of you to repeat after me. *(Pause.)* I am ...

ALL: I am ...

DR. SOLES: At this point you add in your attribute ... as in I am courageous, or I am compassionate ...

DEVIOUS: But I'm not devious.

DR. SOLES: For this activity, please just play along.

DEVIOUS: What if I refuse?

DR. SOLES: That would be most unfortunate, and the reason you are wearing those collars.

ORDERLY: What does that mean?

DR. SOLES: Any time any one of you do or say anything against the rules of the game, all five will receive a penalty administered through those collars, which are quite impossible to remove.

DEVIOUS: What kind of penalty?

DR. SOLES: It will be quite painful, so please follow the rules. Now repeat after me ... I am ...

ALL: I am _____. *(ALL but DEVIOUS inserts their name into the sentence.)*

DEVIOUS: *(Insistent.)* I am NOT devious.

(SFX: Electric sound registers, shocking all five participants. ALL cry out and clutch their necks.)

DEVIOUS: *(Cont'd. Weakly.)* I'm not devious.

IMPULSIVE: Can I trade with Devious? I don't mind. I'll be devious as hell.

DR. SOLES: There can be no trading.

COURAGEOUS: The next time he asks us to repeat after him ... do it!

COMPASSIONATE: Please.

DEVIOUS: But I'm not devious.

ORDERLY: *(Exasperated.)* Who cares? It's just a part of the rules!

DR. SOLES: Exactly. Follow the rules and everything will be fine. So now ... repeat after me. I am ...

End of Freeview

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