



A History of Role-Play in Psychology, Prisons, and Performance

Stephen Scott-Bottoms

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> Ambitious, timely and original, *Incarceration Games* develops new understandings about role-play and imprisonment in relation to ideas of audience, agency, control, and coercion. The author brings a diverse range of performance examples into dialogue in a way that is playful, rigorous, and illuminating."

> ---Caoimhe McAvinchey, author of Applied Theatre: Women and the Criminal Justice System

INCARCERATION GAMES

A History of Role-Play in Psychology, Prisons, and Performance

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Do you want to play a game?

Incarceration Games reexamines the complex history and troubled legacy of improvised, interactive role-playing experiments. With particular attention to the notorious Stanford prison study, the author draws on extensive archival research and original interviews with many of those involved, to refocus attention on the in-game choices of the role-players themselves.

Role-playing as we understand it today was initially developed in the 1930s as a therapeutic practice within the New York state penal system. This book excavates that history and traces the subsequent adoption of these methods for lab experimentation, during the postwar "stage production era" in American social psychology. It then examines the subsequent mutation of the Stanford experiment, in particular, into cultural myth—exploring the ways in which these distorted understandings have impacted on everything from reality TV formats to the "enhanced interrogation" of real-world terror suspects. *Incarceration Games* asks readers to reconsider what they thought they knew about this tangled history, and to look at it again from the role-player's perspective.

Stephen Scott-Bottoms is Professor of Contemporary Theatre and Performance at the University of Manchester. He is the author of *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement* and coauthor of *Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance.*

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