

MILGRAM EXPERIMENT

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*Research on
people's obedience*

ABSTRACT

This paper is written in order to research and understand about the famous psychological experiment on people's obedience called "Milgram Experiment". It will cover the general theory which led to this experiment, hypothesis, sample selection, variables, results, conclusion, actual application and ethical issues of the research about Milgram Experiment. Meanwhile, however, this paper will not cover any other facts which are not covered above.

INTRODUCTION

Hypothesis and General Theory

While there are a lot of psychological researches and studies, The Milgram Experiment, a controlled experiment held by an American psychologist Stanley Milgram, would be one of the most famous experiments. It attempted to study and understand people's behavior of obedience and the influence of authority behind it, especially in regard to explain German's cruel behaviors toward Jews, homosexuals and Gypsies during the World War II. He said "'Could it be that Eichmann and his million accomplices in the Holocaust were just following orders? Could we call them all accomplices?" in 1974, wanting to know whether Germans were particularly obedient to authority figures as this was a common explanation for the Nazi killings in World War II. So why did Germans obey and why do people still obey something? According to the book HOLT Psychology Principles in Practice, humans mind have several causes behind their behavior of obedience. The first cause is socialization. People have been socialized to obey from their childhood. The second one is Foot in the Door Effect, stating that people tend to continue something once they got involved in. The third one is Confusion about Attitudes, stating that if one does not have strong attitudes toward something, then s/he tends to follow what other people do. The last one is that people tend to obey when others are doing the same thing, even though it looks immoral and unethical.

PROCEDURE

Sample Selection

Public Announcement

WE WILL PAY YOU \$4.00 FOR ONE HOUR OF YOUR TIME

Persons Needed for a Study of Memory

*We will pay five hundred New Haven men to help us complete a scientific study of memory and learning. The study is being done at Yale University.

*Each person who participates will be paid \$4.00 (plus 50c carfare) for approximately 1 hour's time. We need you for only one hour: there are no further obligations. You may choose the time you would like to come (evenings, weekdays, or weekends).

*No special training, education, or experience is needed. We want:

Factory workers	Businessmen	Construction workers
City employees	Clerks	Salespeople
Laborers	Professional people	White-collar workers
Barbers	Telephone workers	Others

All persons must be between the ages of 20 and 50. High school and college students cannot be used.

*If you meet these qualifications, fill out the coupon below and mail it now to Professor Stanley Milgram, Department of Psychology, Yale University, New Haven. You will be notified later of the specific time and place of the study. We reserve the right to decline any application.

*You will be paid \$4.00 (plus 50c carfare) as soon as you arrive at the laboratory.

TO:
 PROF. STANLEY MILGRAM, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY,
 YALE UNIVERSITY, NEW HAVEN, CONN. I want to take part in
 this study of memory and learning. I am between the ages of 20 and
 50. I will be paid \$4.00 (plus 50c carfare) if I participate.

NAME (Please Print)

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE NO. Best time to call you

AGE OCCUPATION SEX

CAN YOU COME:

WEEKDAYS EVENINGS WEEKENDS

The sample selection of Milgram's research have been said to be biased because of some reasons. First, as the figure above shows, Milgram announced about the experiment for

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investigating learning ability and gathered participants who responded and volunteered to the newspaper article. It means the sample was self-selecting. In order to follow the proper procedure and achieve generalized results of psychological research, we need variety of people in terms of ages, gender and cultures. However, Milgram chose only men from different ages and backgrounds. Then the result might not be able to reflect on female. That is why sometimes his sample selection is considered as biased. However, on the other hand, if you look at the hypothesis of this study, the researcher does not need female participants because the soldiers of World War II are all men. Therefore, we also can say that Milgram's sample was representative of the target population.

Experiment

The number of participants was 636 and they were divided into 18 separated groups. As the newspaper announcement above states, Milgram wanted 20 to 50 year-old males who are paid \$4.00. There are three kinds of people who are involved in this experiment: teacher, learner and researcher (or the experimenter). However, the actual participants gathered by Milgram were always set to be teachers and they pair up with learners who are given by Milgram, meaning only teachers did not know anything about the procedure and its purpose. After pairing up the teacher and learner, teacher experienced 45 volts of electric shock and they started the experiment. The teacher and researcher with grey lab coat went into a room which has electric shock generator and learner went into another room where both people can hear themselves through the interphone. The learner was strapped to a chair with electrodes and learned a list of word pairs. The teacher tested him by naming a word and asking the learner to recall its pair from possible choices. If the learner made a mistake, teacher was told to generate electric shock, increasing the level as the learner got more number of mistakes. There were 30 switches, from 15 to 450 volts

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which can lead people to death. The learner mainly gave wrong answers on purpose and teacher had to generate increased level of electric shock. However, actually, the learner was not getting any electric shock, acting as if they were getting, crying for the pain. And only teachers did not know about it. If the teacher refused to generate electric shock, watching learner suffering, then the researcher gave a series of orders (there are 4 of them) to ensure the teacher continues. They were “Please continue”, “The experiment requires you to continue”, “It is absolutely essential that you continue” and “you have no other choice but to continue”.

RESULT

As a result, 60% of the teachers obeyed researcher's command and continued until the highest level of 450 volts and all the participants continued to 300 volts even though hearing learners crying.

VARIABLES

As the variables which is constant and have influence on the result are called independent variable, it would be authority of the researcher with grey lab coat. And the dependent variable, which is the variable changed/affected by independent variable, would be teacher's behavior of obedience. Also, the learner's reaction to the fake given electric shock would be independent variable because it caused some teachers to stop and some teacher not to stop. Teachers' behavior (dependent variable) was determined by learner's reaction (independent variable). In addition, in order to generalize the results and conclusion, Milgram carried out more than one experiment (there were 18 variations), meaning there were alter situations. Therefore, the independent variable will be the number of experiments with the same procedure, means the learner and experimenter's reactions were the same all the time. And the dependent variables will be the altered results given by different teachers.

CONCLUSION

The research has concluded that most people are likely to follow the orders or commands given by authority, in this case that is the experimenter with grey lab coat. Also, they tend to obey orders from other people if they recognized their authority as morally right and legally based. This response to legitimate authority is due to variety of reasons; as the theory such as socialization, foot in the door effect and conformity to others. Since the very first aim of this experiment is to understand and explain German's cruel behavior during the World War II, Milgram was able to conclude German people obeyed because they were under extremely strong authority: Hitler.

In addition, according to the results, Milgram has suggested two social in which people are faced. The first one is "The autonomous state"; people direct their own actions and take responsibility for the results of these actions. The second one is "The agentic state"; people allow others to direct their actions and then pass off the responsibility for the consequences to the person giving the orders. In short, they act as agents for another person's will. Therefore, because the experimenter told them to do so, participants continued to generate electric shock of which all the responsibility would not be taken by them but the experimenter.

CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Experimental group is people who are being tested or exposed to the experiment. Thus, they get direct influence from the independent variable. In the Milgram's Experiment, the participants, teachers, are people of the experimental group because they are affected by experiment's independent variable such as authority and learner's reaction. Experimental group, the teachers, felt guilty hearing learners are crying with pain, but they continued to generate the electric shock because of the influence of authority (the experimenters).

On the other hand, the control group is the group which is not influenced by independent variables and is not necessary to have it in an experiment. The control group is usually used in order to compare and contrast the result of experimental group. However, if you look at the Milgram Experiment, there is nobody who has done the experiment without the independent variables because if teachers do not have learners and experimenters, then the experiment cannot be carried out. If there was a control group existed, then the independent variables (such as authority) would not exist so teacher might not obey.

As it is shown above, dependent variables are the reaction of teachers watching people suffering from pain. And independent variables are experimenter's authority and learners' scream. So how do they, IV and DV, varied from experimental group to control group (In here I will assume that there was a control group existed)? First, the dependent variable of experimental group and control group would be totally different. In an assumed control group, there is nothing which affects participants, means there is no authority telling them to "continue" and no scream from learners. Therefore, the teachers would not feel anything either to stop the experiment or not. So actually it means there would be no result for the obedience. Second, the experimental group is totally affected by the authority and obeyed the order. Therefore, if there was a control

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group in this experiment, the researchers might get two different results about people's behavior of obedience: either properly obey or freely decide to obey or not. So basically this experiment did not really need the control group since researchers only wanted to look at how a particular situation affects people's behavior of obedience. Even though there was a control group, it would just mess up the results or confound the variables.

EVALUATION

Criticisms

As it is shown above, Milgram Experiment's sampling was biased. He chose only male participants and it might lead different result if he also introduced female participants. Even though those males had several different backgrounds, the research could not properly generalize its findings. Also, his research could not be the representative of American population since samples were self-selected. It should have been randomly selected from all over states of America if the research wanted to represent as American population. Also, the place (Yale University) caused some people to have difficulty to come and participate, resulting only people around New Haven area could come which cannot represent the whole United States.

In addition, there is one criticism saying the participants' backgrounds are biased because the experiment is carried out in the western culture. Even though there are small differences of participants' backgrounds, as a whole they are still in the West of the world.

Ethics

As there are five basic ethical principles, the experiment was not following some of them properly. For example, participants, the teachers, believed that they were actually giving electric shock. It is in conflict with the ethical principle of deception: researchers should try to lessen to lie to the participants. However, Milgram denied this critic by interviewing participants after the experiment, resulting 83% of them said "glad to be in the experiment".

The next ethical consideration is protection of participants: participants should not get any physical or/and mental harm. The experiment provided a lot of stress on participants. They were sweating, trembling, stuttering, biting lips, laughing nervously and digging fingernails into

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palms of hands. What's more, three participants had uncontrollable seizures and many of them pleaded to stop the experiment. Milgram's argue was that the effect is only short term and many of them had not last for more than one year according to the interview held one year later.

The next ethical consideration is debriefing. It is totally followed because Milgram debriefed everything after the experiment. Also, he followed participants up to ensure their stress to fully disappear.

The next one is right to withdraw. This one is the biggest issue because Milgram did not announce participants that they had free right to withdraw anytime they wanted, regardless of the payment. However, as you can see the procedure, he did not allow anyone to withdraw by saying four phrases above: "Please continue", "The experiment requires you to continue", "It is absolutely essential that you continue" and "you have no other choice but to continue". However, once again, he argued that it was a study for obedience so there should not be announcement for the right to withdraw or else he might not be able to get the proper results.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

How can the result and conclusion of this experiment be applied to our life? What does this mean to our real life? The conclusion stated that the people tend to obey when there is strong authority even though some other people are suffering in front. Also, Milgram stated that people tend to pass off the responsibility to the people who ordered to do specific things. One of the easiest practical application examples of the experiment is Hitler's Holocaust. He used this tendency to let Germans obey. In other words, Germans followed Hitler's cruel order because of not only his strong authority but also they thought that Hitler would take the responsibility because he was the one who ordered. Also, another way to apply this Milgram's idea is to teach children or students not to follow the inappropriate demands. Through the education, people can become to decide to either follow a certain order or not. Therefore, knowing about this human behavior about the obedience and authority can be applied to many situations in the real life. In addition to that, we will be able to apply the ideas from Milgram Experiment in our future experiments. Because we find some ethical issues in this experiment, we should fix them for the next time. For example, the learners were in extremely stressful state while doing the experiment. But it could not be helped because it was the actual purpose of the experiment. However, there might be other ways not to harm participants. Therefore, if you look at the ethical criticism of this experiment, you will be able to make even better experiment.

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