

Milgram, S. (1963). Behavioral study of Obedience

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Procedures

Sample

1. Milgram selected 40 males from people who responded to a newspaper advertisement that was placed in a New Haven newspaper.
2. The men believed that they were to participate in a study of memory and learning (the study was actually studying levels of obedience).
3. The men were aged between 20-50 and had a variety of jobs (high school teachers, salesmen, and engineers etc.).
4. The educational levels of the men also varied from one who had not finished elementary school, to those who had doctorates and degrees.
5. Each man was paid \$4.50 for their participation in the experiment. However, they were told that the money was for attending the lab and they could keep it regardless of what happened after they had arrived.

Methodology

1. The study was a controlled observation that took place in a lab at Yale University.
2. Naive participants were introduced to another participant, Mr Wallace (a confederate). Participants drew slips to decide who would play the role of the teacher and learner (naive P's always ended up as the teacher as the draw was rigged – both slips had 'teacher' on).
3. Immediately after the draw, the teacher and learner were taken to an adjacent room and the learner was strapped to an 'electric chair'.
4. Instructions Milgram gave to Mr Wallace (confederate) – he was told to give approximately three wrong answers to every correct one. Mr Wallace was also told to make set responses:

Voltage	Accomplice response
75	Grunts
120	Shouts in pain
150	Says he refuses to continue with the experiment
200	Blood curdling screams
300	Refuses to answer, mumbles something about a heart condition
+330	Silence

5. The teacher was then taken to an adjoining room which had a shock machine in. The shock machine had 30 switches starting at 'slight shock' (15 volts) all the way up to 'XXX' (450 volts). The 'experimenter' (a man in a grey coat) acted as the authority figure and gave the teacher a sample shock to demonstrate that the machine was real. The experimenter remained in the same room as the teacher (participant).
6. Instructions given to teacher (participant) – he was told to administer a shock when the learner gave a wrong answer and to increase the voltage each time.
7. Instructions Milgram gave to experimenter – he was told to respond to any hesitation from the teacher with four standard prods:
 - Please continue.
 - The experiment requires you to continue.
 - It's absolutely essential that you continue.
 - You have no other choice, you must go on.
8. After the research was completed, the teacher was thoroughly debriefed, which included the experimenter reuniting the teacher and learner. They were then interviewed about their experience.

Findings and conclusions

Before the study

F – Milgram surveyed 14 psychology majors who estimated that 0-3% of participants would administer the full 450 volts.

Findings from the experiment

Voltage level	Number obeying
Up to 300	40
315	35 (5 less)
330	31 (4 less)
345	29 (2 less)
360	28 (1 less)
375	27 (1 less)
390-450	26 (1 less)

F – There were a number of signs of extreme tension displayed by 14 participants. These were things such as:

- nervous laughter and smiling
- sweating
- stuttering
- biting their lip
- digging their fingernails into their flesh.

F – Three participants had full blown uncontrollable seizures.

Conclusions

C – Milgram concluded that the circumstances in which the participants found themselves would combine to create a situation in which it proved difficult to disobey.

C – Milgram concluded that there were 13 elements of this situation that had contributed to these levels of obedience, such as payment and the experiment taking place at Yale University, which had an 'unimpeachable reputation'.

