

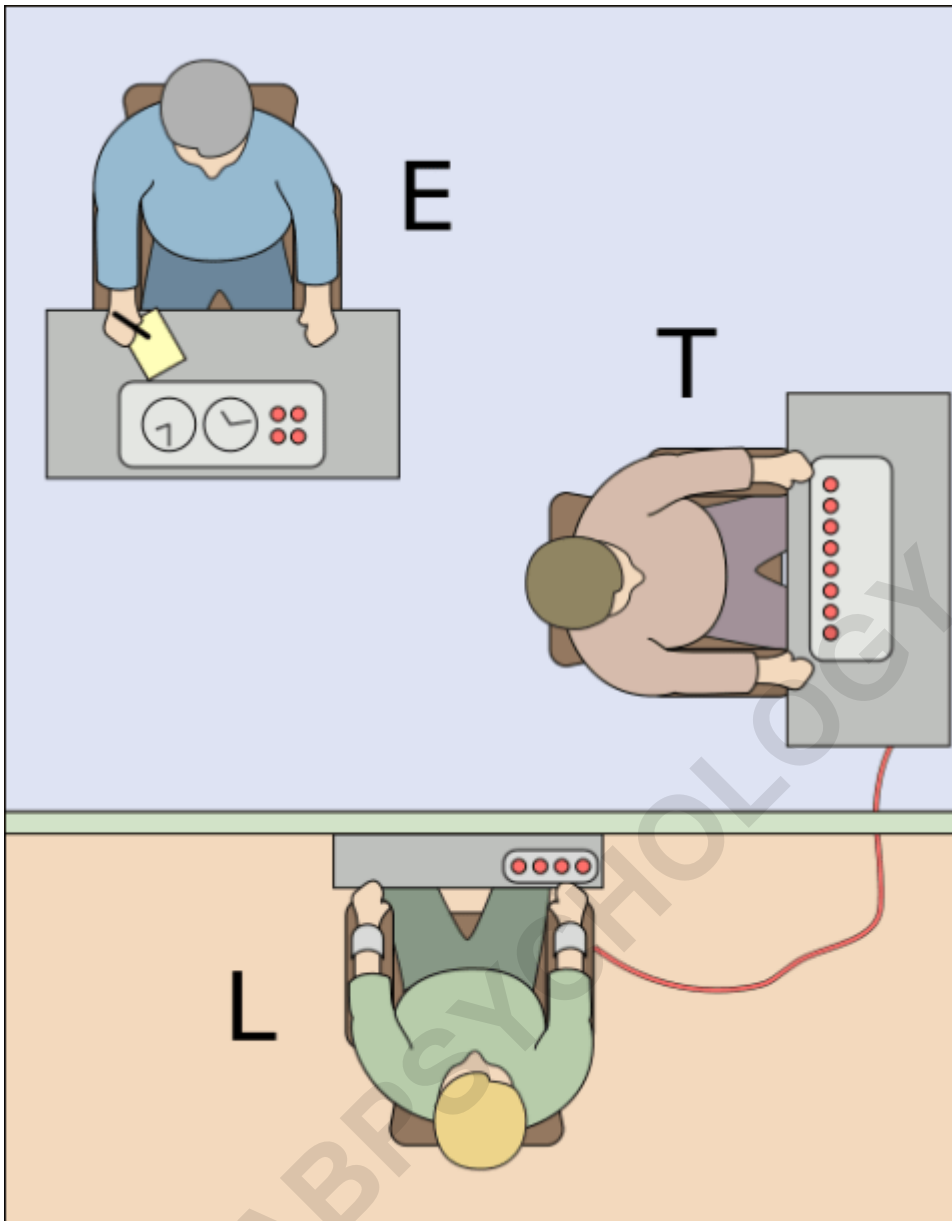
Milgram Experiment

Authored by
mohammad looti

November 19, 2022

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2022). *Milgram Experiment*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=39313>



The experimenter (E) orders the teacher (T), the subject of the experiment, to give what the latter believes are painful electric shocks to a learner (L), who is actually an actor and confederate. The subject believes that for each wrong answer, the learner was receiving actual electric shocks, though in reality there were no such punishments. Being separated from the subject, the confederate set up a tape recorder integrated with the electro-shock generator, which played pre-recorded sounds for each shock level.

The Milgram experiment on obedience to authority figures was a series of social psychology experiments conducted by Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram, which measured the willingness of study participants to obey an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts that conflicted with their personal conscience. Milgram first described his research in 1963 in an

article published in the Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, and later discussed his findings in greater depth in his 1974 book, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*.

The experiments began in July 1961, three months after the start of the trial of German Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. Milgram devised his psychological study to answer the question: Was it that Eichmann and his accomplices in the Holocaust had mutual intent, in at least with regard to the goals of the Holocaust? In other words, Was there a mutual sense of morality among those involved? Milgram's testing suggested that it could have been that the millions of accomplices were merely following orders, despite violating their deepest moral beliefs. The experiments have been repeated many times, with consistent results within societies, but different percentages across the globe. The experiments were also controversial, and considered by some scientists to be unethical or psychologically abusive, motivating more thorough review boards for the use of human subjects.

The experiment

Milgram Experiment advertisement

The volunteer subject was given the role of teacher, and the confederate (an actor), the role of learner. The participants drew slips of paper to 'determine' their roles. Unknown to the subject, both slips said "teacher", and the actor claimed to have the slip that read "learner", thus guaranteeing that the participant would always be the "teacher". At this point, the "teacher" and "learner" were separated into different rooms where they could communicate but not see each other. In one version of the experiment, the confederate was sure to mention to the participant that he had a heart condition.

The "teacher" was given an electric shock from the electro-shock generator as a sample of the shock that the "learner" would supposedly receive during the experiment. The "teacher" was then given a list of word pairs which he was to teach the learner. The teacher began by reading the list of word pairs to the learner. The teacher would then read the first word of each pair and read four possible answers. The learner would press a button to indicate his response. If the answer was incorrect, the teacher would administer a shock to the learner, with the voltage increasing in 15-volt increments for each wrong answer. If correct, the teacher would read the next word pair.

The subjects believed that for each wrong answer, the learner was receiving actual shocks. In reality, there were no shocks. After the confederate was separated from the subject, the confederate set up a tape recorder integrated with the electro-shock generator, which played pre-recorded sounds for each shock level. After a number of voltage level increases, the actor started to bang on the wall that separated him from the subject. After several times banging on the wall and complaining about his heart condition, all responses by the learner would cease.

At this point, many people indicated their desire to stop the experiment and check on the learner. Some test subjects paused at 135 volts and began to question the purpose of the experiment. Most continued after being assured that they would not be held responsible. A few subjects began to laugh nervously or exhibit other signs of extreme stress once they heard the screams of pain coming from the learner.

If at any time the subject indicated his desire to halt the experiment, he was given a succession of verbal prods by the experimenter, in this order:

Please continue.

The experiment requires that you continue.

It is absolutely essential that you continue.

You have no other choice, you must go on.

If the subject still wished to stop after all four successive verbal prods, the experiment was halted. Otherwise, it was halted after the subject had given the maximum 450-volt shock three times in succession.

Results

Before conducting the experiment, Milgram polled fourteen Yale University senior-year psychology majors to predict the behavior of 100 hypothetical teachers. All of the poll respondents believed that only a very small fraction of teachers (the range was from zero to 3 out of 100, with an average of 1.2) would be prepared to inflict the maximum voltage. Milgram also informally polled his colleagues and found that they, too, believed very few subjects would progress beyond a very strong shock.

In Milgram's first set of experiments, 65 percent (26 of 40) of experiment participants administered the experiment's final massive 450-volt shock, though many were very uncomfortable doing so; at some point, every participant paused and questioned the experiment, some said they would refund the money they were paid for participating in the experiment.

Milgram summarized the experiment in his 1974 article, "The Perils of Obedience", writing:

The legal and philosophic aspects of obedience are of enormous importance, but they say very little about how most people behave in concrete situations. I set up a simple experiment at Yale University to test how much pain an ordinary citizen would inflict on another person simply because he was ordered to by an experimental scientist. Stark authority was pitted against the subjects' strongest moral imperatives against hurting others, and, with the subjects' ears ringing with the screams of the victims, authority won more often than not. The extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority constitutes the chief finding of the study and

the fact most urgently demanding explanation.

Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority.

The original Simulated Shock Generator and Event Recorder, or shock box, is located in the Archives of the History of American Psychology.

Later, Prof. Milgram and other psychologists performed variations of the experiment throughout the world, with similar results although unlike the Yale experiment, resistance to the experimenter was reported anecdotally elsewhere. Milgram later investigated the effect of the experiment's locale on obedience levels by holding an experiment in an unregistered, backstreet office in a bustling city, as opposed to at Yale, a respectable university. The level of obedience, "although somewhat reduced, was not significantly lower." What made more of a difference was the proximity of the "learner" and the experimenter. There were also variations tested involving groups.

Dr. Thomas Blass of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County performed a meta-analysis on the results of repeated performances of the experiment. He found that the percentage of participants who are prepared to inflict fatal voltages remains remarkably constant, 61-66 percent, regardless of time or place.,

There is a little-known coda to the Milgram Experiment, reported by Philip Zimbardo: none of the participants who refused to administer the final shocks insisted that the experiment itself be terminated, nor left the room to check the health of the victim without requesting permission to leave, as per Milgram's notes and recollections, when Zimbardo asked him about that point.

Milgram created a documentary film titled Obedience showing the experiment and its results. He also produced a series of five social psychology films, some of which dealt with his experiments.

Ethics

The Milgram Shock Experiment raised questions about the research ethics of scientific experimentation because of the extreme emotional stress and inflicted insight suffered by the participants. In Milgram's defense, 84 percent of former participants surveyed later said they were "glad" or "very glad" to have participated, 15 percent chose neutral responses (92% of all former participants responding). Many later wrote expressing thanks. Milgram repeatedly received offers of assistance and requests to join his staff from former participants. Six years later (at the height of the Vietnam War), one of the participants in the experiment sent correspondence to Milgram,

explaining why he was glad to have participated despite the stress:

While I was a subject in 1964, though I believed that I was hurting someone, I was totally unaware of why I was doing so. Few people ever realize when they are acting according to their own beliefs and when they are meekly submitting to authority... To permit myself to be drafted with the understanding that I am submitting to authority's demand to do something very wrong would make me frightened of myself... I am fully prepared to go to jail if I am not granted Conscientious Objector status. Indeed, it is the only course I could take to be faithful to what I believe. My only hope is that members of my board act equally according to their conscience...

The experiments provoked emotional criticism more about the experiment's implications than with experimental ethics. In the journal *Jewish Currents*, Joseph Dimow, a participant in the 1961 experiment at Yale University, wrote about his early withdrawal as a "teacher," suspicious "that the whole experiment was designed to see if ordinary Americans would obey immoral orders, as many Germans had done during the Nazi period." Indeed, that was one of the explicitly-stated goals of the experiments. In the Preface (p. xii) to his book, *Obedience to Authority*, Milgram wrote: "The question arises as to whether there is any connection between what we have studied in the laboratory and the forms of obedience we so deplored in the Nazi epoch."

Interpretations

Professor Milgram elaborated two theories explaining his results:

The first is the theory of conformism, based on Solomon Asch conformity experiments, describing the fundamental relationship between the group of reference and the individual person. A subject who has neither ability nor expertise to make decisions, especially in a crisis, will leave decision making to the group and its hierarchy. The group is the person's behavioral model.

The second is the agentic state theory, wherein, per Milgram, "the essence of obedience consists in the fact that a person comes to view themselves as the instrument for carrying out another person's wishes, and they therefore no longer see themselves as responsible for their actions. Once this critical shift of viewpoint has occurred in the person, all of the essential features of obedience follow".

Alternative interpretations

In his book *Irrational Exuberance*, Yale Finance Professor Robert Shiller argues that other factors might be partially able to explain the Milgram Experiments:

"I have learned that when experts tell them something is all right, it probably is, even if it does not seem so. (In fact, it is worth noting that in this case the experimenter was indeed correct: it was all right to continue giving the 'shocks' -- even though most of the subjects did not suspect the

reason.)"

Milgram himself provides some anecdotal evidence to support this position. In his book, he quotes an exchange between a subject (Mr. Rensaleer) and the experimenter. The subject had just stopped at 255 V, and the experimenter tried to prod him on by saying: "There is no permanent tissue damage." Mr. Rensaleer answers:

"Yes, but I know what shocks do to you. I'm an electrical engineer, and I have had shocks ... and you get real shook up by them -- especially if you know the next one is coming. I'm sorry."

In a 2006 experiment using a computer simulation in place of the learner receiving electrical shocks, the participants administering the shocks were aware that the learner was unreal, but still showed the same results.

Replications and variations

Milgram's variations

In *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (1974), Milgram describes 19 variations of his experiment, some of which had not been previously reported.

Several experiments varied the immediacy of the teacher and learner. Generally, when the victim's physical immediacy was increased, the participant's compliance decreased. The participant's compliance also decreased when the authority's physical immediacy decreased (Experiments 1-4). For example, in Experiment 2, where participants received telephonic instructions from the experimenter, compliance decreased to 21 percent. Interestingly, some participants deceived the experimenter by pretending to continue the experiment. In the variation where the "learner's" physical immediacy was closest, where participants had to physically hold the "learner's" arm onto a shock plate, compliance decreased. Under that condition, 30 percent of participants completed the experiment.

In Experiment 8, women were the participants; previously, all participants had been men. Obedience did not significantly differ, though the women communicated experiencing higher levels of stress.

Experiment 10 took place in a modest office in Bridgeport, Connecticut, purporting to be the commercial entity "Research Associates of Bridgeport" without apparent connection to Yale University, to eliminate the university's prestige as a possible factor influencing the participants' behavior. In those conditions, obedience dropped to 47.5 percent, though the difference was not statistically significant.

Milgram also combined the effect of authority with that of conformity. In those experiments, the

participant was joined by one or two additional "teachers" (also actors, like the "learner"). The behavior of the participants' peers strongly affected the results. In Experiment 17, when two additional teachers refused to comply, only 4 of 40 participants continued in the experiment. In Experiment 18, the participant performed a subsidiary task (reading the questions via microphone or recording the learner's answers) with another "teacher" who complied fully. In that variation, 37 of 40 continued with the experiment.

Replications

In 2002 the British artist Rod Dickinson created The Milgram Re-enactment, an exact reconstruction of parts of the original experiment, including the rooms used, lighting and uniforms. An audience watched the four-hour performance through one-way glass windows. A video of this performance was first shown at the CCA Gallery in Glasgow in 2002.

A partial replication of the Milgram experiment was conducted by British psychological illusionist Derren Brown and broadcast on Channel 4 in the UK in The Heist (2006).

Another partial replication of the Milgram experiment was conducted by Jerry M. Burger in 2006 and broadcast on the Primetime series Basic Instincts. Burger noted that, "current standards for the ethical treatment of participants clearly place Milgram's studies out of bounds." In 2009 Burger was able to receive approval from the institutional review board by modifying several of the experimental protocols. Burger found obedience rates virtually identical to what Milgram found in 1961-1962, even while meeting current ethical regulations of informing participants. In addition, half the replication participants were female, and their rate of obedience was virtually identical to that of the male participants. Burger also included a condition in which participants first saw another participant refuse to continue. However, participants in this condition obeyed at the same rate as participants in the base condition.

The experiment was again repeated as part of the BBC documentary How Violent Are You? first shown in May 2009 as part of the long running Horizon series. Of the 12 participants, only 3 refused to continue to the end of the experiment.

In the 2010 French documentary, Le Jeu de la Mort (The Game of Death), researchers recreated the Milgram experiment with an added critique of reality television by presenting the scenario as a game show pilot. Volunteers were given €40 and told they would not win any money from the game, as this was only a trial. Only 16 of 80 "contestants" (teachers) chose to end the game before delivering the highest voltage punishment.

The experiment was performed on the April 25th, 2010 episode of Dateline NBC.

Due to increasingly widespread knowledge of the experiment, recent replications of Milgram's

procedure had to ensure that the participants were not previously aware of it.

Replications show societal dependence. In Western Anglo-Saxon and north European societies, results are along the lines of original Milgram experiment, showing very high obedience percentages. In some Asian societies, obedience percentage was even greater, especially in East Asian and Muslim countries. However, aboriginal populations of Africa and Inuit of Canada show much lower obedience percentage; in Europe, exception is found in the Balkan region, especially in Serbia and Bosnia; in Latin America, Brazil and Costa Rica have substantially lower obedience percentage, while people from Nigeria and Ivory Coast have also been tested to show low obedience percentages.

Other variations

Charles Sheridan and Richard King hypothesized that some of Milgram's subjects may have suspected that the victim was faking, so they repeated the experiment with a real victim: a puppy who was given real electric shocks. They found that 20 out of the 26 participants complied to the end. The six that had refused to comply were all male (54% of males were obedient); all 13 of the women obeyed to the end, although many were highly disturbed and some openly wept.