

Instructor: Paul Atchley, Ph.D.
Research Methods in Psychology
Homework Assignment #3

1) Stanley Milgram was very interested to see to what length people would go in order to obey authority. This curiosity was sparked as he tried to make sense of WWII, Nazi Germany. Specifically, he was inquisitive to the reasons why Germans went along with the termination of millions of innocent Jewish people. The people who were directly involved as well as the bystanders who failed to question the authority of the high ranking German officials carrying out these atrocities. With this in mind, Milgram set out to run his own series of obedience experiments at Yale University back in 1965.

2) Stanley had information sent out from the University about a study he was conducting on the effects of punishment on learning. He had a confederate be his 'learner', and then an unsuspecting volunteer would always be assigned the 'teacher'. His goal was to make this look very authentic and scary. He would assist the 'learner' in getting settled in a chair and was then strapped down. He used electro-conductive gel or paste to apply electrodes to the 'learner'. He explained that every time a 'learner' incorrectly recalled a list of words that had been previously taught him/her by the 'teacher', they were to administer an electric shock to the 'learner'. The 'perceived' authenticity of this experiment made the 'teacher' think that what they were doing was very serious. That was the biggest benefit to this study. Without completely preparing this study the way he did, no one would have thought it was real and that would have had detrimental affects on the outcome. The largest drawback to his study was the same thing that made it so believable. It wasn't ethical to stress out the 'teachers' how he did. They

really believed they were hurting, even killing the 'learners'. This kind of experiment would never be approved today by the current standards for ethics in the field of psychology.

3) I don't honestly believe this type of study could be replicated today. Not with the same type of integrity that surrounded the initial study anyway. It would have to be very convincing with a strong threat imposed to come anywhere near Milgram's famous study.

My Design:

I would start off by advertising my study, "MAKE AN EASY \$20.00 FOR PARTICIPATION IN A STUDY ON LEARNING" on bulletin boards at the school. Instead of electric shocks administered I would use cold hard cash as motivation for compliance. The 'teacher' would receive twenty bucks at the beginning of the session for agreeing to participate in the study. I would try to keep everything much intact of the original experiment. The 'learner' would still be a confederate. The 'teacher' subjects would be told that this was a study on punishment on learning just like Milgram's study. Every time a 'learner' failed to repeat a series of words in correct order, a dollar would be taken from the 'teacher'. This would continue until all the money was gone or the 'teacher' refused to comply. Prior to debriefing, the experimenter would interview the 'teacher' and have him/her rate the amount of frustration they felt while giving away their beer money for the weekend. Then they would be debriefed, and returned any amount of money they lost.

4) This design is ethical, once the debriefing has occurred. The only thing I'm

doing here involves deception which is usually okay in psychological studies as long as debriefing has happened.

5) My design is nowhere similar to Milgram's. There just isn't any way to mimic severe threat to safety the way he did. College students love extra cash, so the incentive is good for my study. It really doesn't even measure what Milgram was measuring. My study would be better for measuring frustration and anger more than obedience and compliance. I just can't think of any study as authentic as his that would produce the same result without some hard-core deception or with other questionable ethics. I know I couldn't come up with anything that would be approved by the KU Institutional Review Board that would maintain the validity and reliability that his study did. In every situation I thought of to at least partially mimic Stanley Milgram's study, I either compromised the obedience or the ethics. Maybe pitting two groups against each other (in group vs. out group) while using the 'foot in the door' persuasion technique, could simulate the type of compliance rendered in the Milgram study.