

PERILS OF OBEDIENCE OF AUTHORITY & CONFORMITY



Michaela Porubanová, Contemporary Issues in
Psychology, Autumn 2011

Briefly about Milgram

- **The Perils of Obedience**
- *"The social psychology of this century reveals a major lesson: often it is not so much the kind of person a man is as the kind of situation in which he finds himself that determines how he will act."* –Stanley Milgram, 1974

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

Fig. 1. Announcement placed in local newspaper to recruit subjects.

Method

- 40 men; each person was paid \$4.50
- Milgram developed an intimidating shock generator (30 volts-450 volts, increasing in 15-volt increments)
- "slight shock," "moderate shock" and "danger: severe shock." The final two switches-"XXX."
- "teacher" -"student"
- While the participant believed that he was delivering real shocks to the student, the student was actually a confederate in the experiment who would pretend to be shocked.

Method {continued}

- Complaints from the students (heart condition)
- 300-volt : reached, the learner banged on the wall and demanded to be released.
- Beyond :the learner silent and refused to answer any more questions. The experimenter then instructed the participant to treat this silence as an incorrect response and deliver a further shock.

Most participants asked the experimenter whether they should continue. The experimenter commanded:

- 1.Please continue.
- 2.The experiment requires that you continue.
- 3.It is absolutely essential that you continue.
- 4.You have no other choice, you must go on.



Results



- How far do you think that most participants were willing to go?
- Yale University students predicted that maximum 3 out of 100 participants would deliver the maximum shock.
- In reality, 65% of the participants in Milgram's study delivered the maximum shocks!!!

Out of the 40 participants in the study- 26 delivered the maximum shocks and only 14 quit before getting to the highest levels.

- Emotional disturbance (anxiety, anger)

Discussion



- serious ethical questions???
- Thomas Blass (1999) reviewed further research on obedience and found that Milgram's findings hold true in other experiments

determinants of levels of obedience:

- The physical presence of an authority figure dramatically increased compliance.
- The fact that the study was sponsored by Yale (a trusted and authoritative academic institution) led many participants to believe that the experiment must be safe.
- The selection of teacher and learner status seemed random.
- Participants assumed that the experimenter was a competent expert.
- The shocks were said to be painful, not dangerous.

Factor – proximity of experimenter

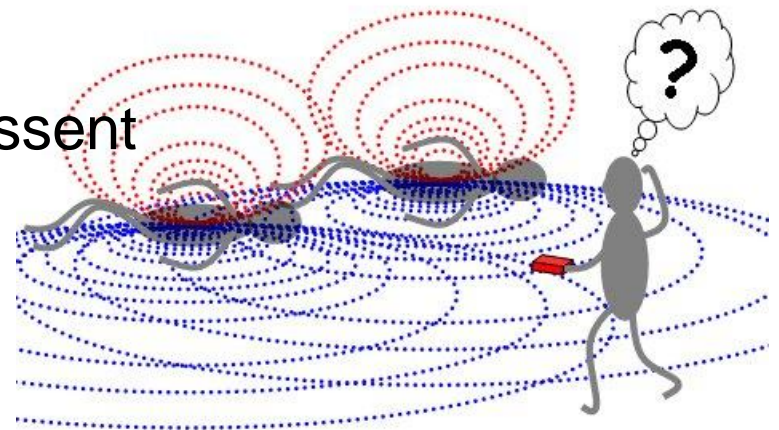
- Exp. 1: Standard methodology:
 - None of the subjects quit before 300 volts (just before “extreme intense shock” label)
 - 26/40 (65%) went all the way to 450 volts
- Exp. 2: Experimenter communicates by phone:
 - Full compliance drops to 21% (before 45%)
 - Some participants ‘faked’ continuing the experiment all the way “up”
 - Distance from authority increases dissent

■ WHY?



Factor – proximity of victim

- Exp. 3: Learner in the same room:
 - Full compliance drops to 40%
- Exp. 4: Touch Proximity – Teacher physically puts learners hand on the shock plate:
 - Full compliance drops to 30%
 - Some participants ‘faked’
 - *Proximity of v.* increases dissent



Further results

- Later experiments conducted by Milgram indicated that the presence of rebellious peers dramatically reduced obedience levels. When other people refused to go along with the experimenters orders, 36 out of 40 participants refused to deliver the maximum shocks.

Conformity

- Defined as changing one's behaviour or beliefs in response to explicit or implicit (whether real or imagined) pressure from others.
- Following your own beliefs versus following social norms?
- Most social norms, explicit or implicit, are obeyed by most persons much of the time
- society's expectations about how we should behave in various situations
- Why? What is the reason beyond that?



Conformity



Normative

- Adhering to group pressure because a person wants to fit in with the group.
- Fear of being rejected by the group.
- Usually involves compliance – where a person publicly accepts the views of a group but privately rejects them.

Compliance

- Publicly changing behavior but privately disagreeing.
- (This is seen in Asch's line experiment.)

Informational

- A person lacks knowledge, thus looks to the group for guidance.
- in an ambiguous (i.e. unclear) situation and socially compares their behavior with the group.
- Internalisation- a person adopts the views of the

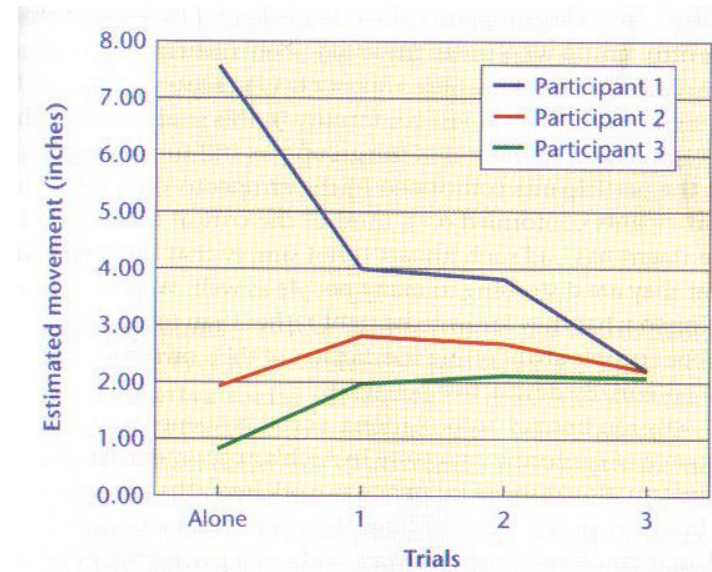
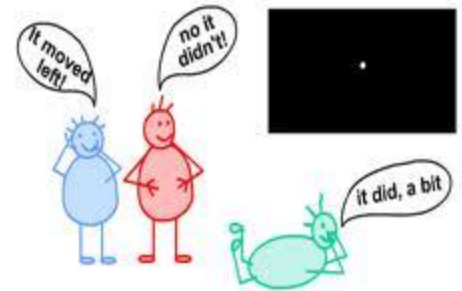
Internalisation

- Publicly changing behavior to fit in with the group and also agreeing with them privately.
- (Illustrated in Sherif's autokinetic experiment)

Experiments in the 30s

- **Sherif's experiment (1935)**
- demonstrating that people conform to group norms when they are put in an ambiguous situation

- **Autokinetic effect**

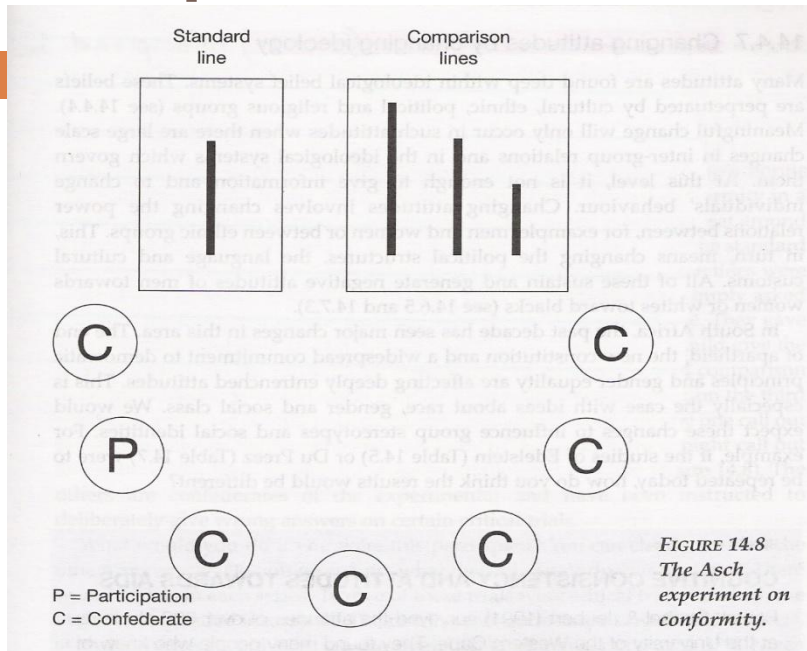


Experiments in the 50s : Asch

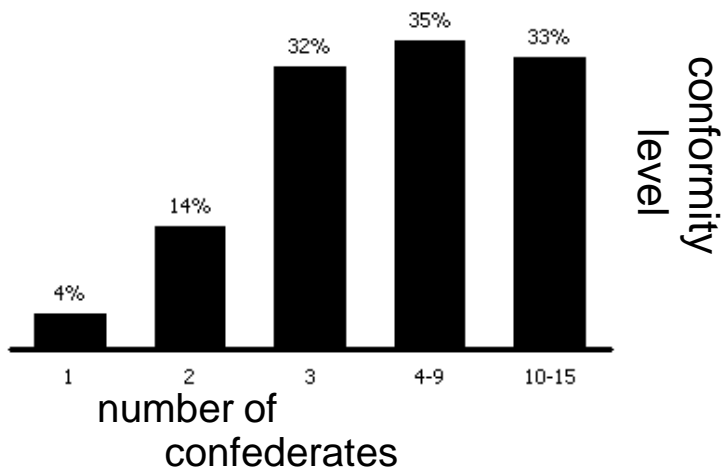
- 1951 – 2nd most famous study in social psychology
- Supposedly a simple perceptual discrimination task
- First two trials: confederates give correct response
- Trial 3 – new set of lines, participants 1 by 1 call out incorrect answer
- Next 15 trials – incorrect response on 11



Experiments in the 50s : Asch



- overall rating of conformity 37% (Asch, 1955)
- Out of 50 participants, 13 never conformed
- 14 conformed on more than 50% the trials



Experiments in the 60 s

- “Face the rear”
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJEpazcAL9k>

CONFORMITY is RELATIVE

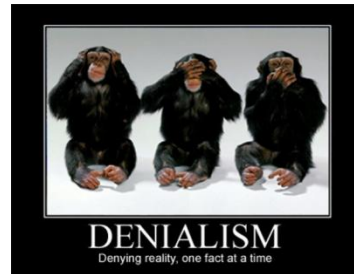


Conformity is Relative

© 1986, 1996 Christine Park

Conformity and cultural differences

- Great differences between cultures: highest levels of conformity in collectivist cultures e.g. among Zimbabwean students in 1960's (Smith & Bond, 1993)

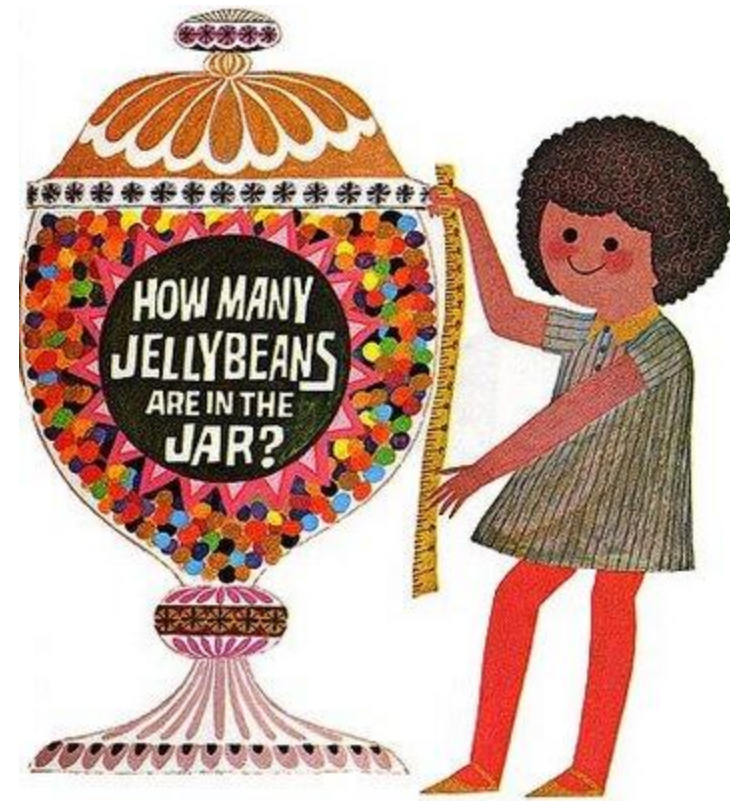



- 'The more one's fate is interdependent with others, the greater is the likelihood of conformity occurring' (Smith & Bond, 1993, p. 154)

Our beliefs about people's right-ness


- *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*
- the friend was right 62% of the time, while the audience provided the correct answer 91% of the time

- *Jack Treynor (economics)*
- estimating the number of jellybeans in a jar
- Intuition? Gut feeling? Not conforming? Average of other guesses? (94.5%)
- Richerson and Boyd have gone as far as suggesting that the conformist bias is a naturally selected adaptation to cultural living.





c o n f o r m i t y
h a s r e p l a c e d
c o n s c i o u s n e s s

- 
- What kind of “lesson” we should learn from the discussed studies?
 - Do you think those studies have an important contributions to science (understanding of human behavior)?
 - How is this going to influence you in your life?
 - What are the limitations of those studies?

Blass, T. (1991)

- What does the article discuss?

ARTIST GENERAL'S WARNING:
Conformity Is Addictive.
Don't Abuse It.

FIRST BUT NOT LAST: CUT-to-The-CLICK~ GOOGLE: ARTIST GENERAL

Richard Dawkins on morality

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCL63d66frS>
- Sam Harris on morality
- http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/sam_harris_science_can_show_what_s_right.html