

Chapter

X

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Reading 37 A PRISON BY ANY OTHER NAME

Reading 38 THE POWER OF CONFORMITY

Reading 39 TO HELP OR NOT TO HELP

Reading 40 OBEY AT ANY COST?

Social psychology is the branch of psychology that looks at how your behavior is influenced by that of others and how their behavior is influenced by yours. It is the study of human interaction. This branch of psychology is vast and covers a wide array of topics, from romantic relationships to group behavior to prejudice, discrimination, and aggression. This is probably the area in psychology many nonpsychologists will find the most relevant to their personal lives. Humans spend most of our waking hours interacting with other humans in one way or another, so we naturally seek to learn more about the psychological processes involved in our social relationships. Social psychology may also be the research domain that contains the greatest number of landmark studies.

The four studies chosen for this section clearly changed the field of psychology by (a) providing new insights into some extreme human social behavior; (b) sparking new waves of research to either confirm, refine, or contest theories and discoveries; and (c) creating heated controversy about research ethics that ultimately led to the ethical principles discussed in the Preface of this book.

The first discussion reviews one of the most well-known studies in the history of psychology: Philip Zimbardo's "Stanford Prison Study," which produced some startling revelations about the psychology of imprisonment. Second is a recounting of a crucial study that demonstrated the power of *conformity* in determining behavior. The third study revealed a surprising phenomenon called the *bystander effect*, which states that the more people who witness an emergency, the less likely anyone is to help. Fourth, we arrive at another famous and surprising milestone in our understanding of the extremes people may resort to in powerful situations: Stanley Milgram's study of blind obedience to authority.

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Reading 37: A PRISON BY ANY OTHER NAME . . .

Zimbardo, P. G. (1972). The pathology of imprisonment. *Society*, 9(6), 4–8.

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Have you ever been imprisoned? Let's assume your answer (and mine) is "no." Do you know anyone who has spent time incarcerated? Maybe. Regardless, most of us know very little about the psychological effects of spending time in prison. You may have read articles, stories, or novels about prisons, and almost certainly you've seen prison life portrayed in movies and on TV. From this exposure, most people's only certainty is that prison is not a place we ever want to wind up! We know it is a horrific experience and it surely must produce strong reactions and even pathological behaviors among inmates. Most of us also believe that those who choose to be prison employees, such as guards and wardens, probably possess certain unique, personal characteristics. But how can behavioral scientists study systematically the psychological and emotional effects of the prison experience, for either the inmates or the employees?

As for most complex real-life situations, studying the psychology of prison life is at best a difficult challenge for researchers because the methods used must be correlational—that is, we can observe the prison environment, interview inmates and guards, gather information about prisoners after they are released, and then try to make assumptions based on these accounts. But we cannot scientifically control the prison environment to draw clear, valid conclusions about the real causes of the behaviors that we observe. Does prison change people, or were the people in the prison system already "different" going in? One way around this research dilemma might be to create a simulated "research prison" and place people into it either as "prisoners" or "guards." Sound impossible? Perhaps this would be a difficult study to do today, but one famous psychologist, Philip Zimbardo, and his associates Craig Haney, Curtis Banks, and Dave Jaffe did just that over 30 years ago at Stanford University (the two articles listed at the beginning of this reading are the earliest discussions of their study). They wanted to create a simulated prison with randomly assigned, typical college students in the roles of "guards" and "prisoners." Their "prison" (which will be described in greater detail) was constructed in the basement of the psychology building on the Stanford campus.

THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Zimbardo was testing his belief that the environment around you, the situation, often determines how you behave more strongly than who you are—that is, your internal, dispositional nature. He contends that, although we may have certain inherent or internal behavioral *tendencies*, powerful situations can overcome those tendencies and lead us to engage in behaviors that are very

different from our usual selves. Zimbardo and his associates set out to discover what happens to normal people who are placed into a situation that exerts great power over individuals: prison.

Except for their initial belief that the situation exerts strong effects over our behavior, the researchers did not formulate any specific hypotheses. To test the impact of situational forces, they randomly assigned each participant to be either a "guard" or a "prisoner." They believed that random assignment to either the role of guard or prisoner would result in significantly different reactions in the mock prison environment on behavioral measures of interaction, emotional measures of mood and pathology, attitudes toward self, as well as other indices of coping and adaptation to this novel situation (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973).

METHOD

Setting

Zimbardo's goal was to create a situation that would resemble a prison or jail as closely as possible; he brought in a consultant: an ex-convict who had been incarcerated for 17 years. Although for this study the prison would not be real and participants in the study would know this, Zimbardo wanted to be sure to *simulate* a real prison experience.

Using space in the basement of the psychology building at Stanford University, Zimbardo supervised a crew as it transformed various rooms and hallways into a "prison." The prison had to be well-built because the study was planned to last for 2 weeks. Each end of a corridor was boarded up and the laboratory rooms became prison cells. To enhance realism, special cell doors were constructed with vertical bars for door windows and individual jail-cell numbers (see Figure 37-1). The enclosed hallway that ran along the cell

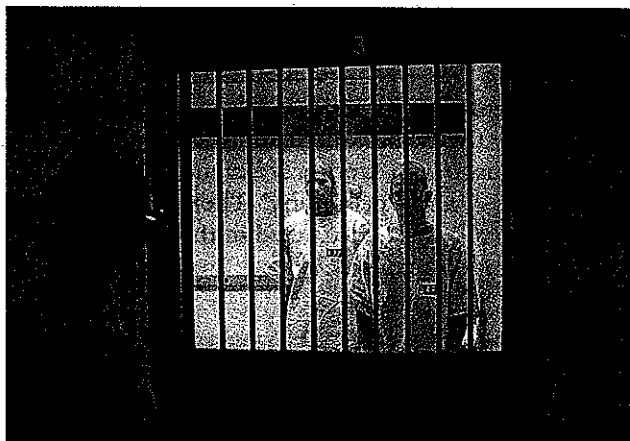


FIGURE 37-1 A typical "cell" at the "Stanford Prison." (Chuck Painter / Stanford News Service)

rooms was the “prison yard” where prisoner-participants would be allowed out of their cells to eat and move around. At the end of the hall was a small closet that would eventually be designated as solitary confinement for prisoners who were troublemakers, rebellious, disrespectful to the guards, or otherwise uncooperative. The bathroom was down the hall, but the guards would lead prisoners there blindfolded so they would not become aware of their location (Zimbardo, 2007b). The “prison” was equipped with a hidden observation camera and an intercom system that allowed the experimenters to maintain supervision of the guards’ and prisoners’ behavior.

Participants

If you are not already familiar with this famous study, what you are about to read may surprise or even shock you. As you read on, try to put yourselves into the mind-set of the participants. First, the researchers placed ads in local papers near Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, offering \$15 per day (that would be about \$75 today) for individuals to volunteer to participate in a research study about prison life. To ensure participants gave informed consent, volunteers were told about the general nature of the study and that during the study they might experience some violations of their personal privacy and civil rights and that the food they would receive might be minimal, although it would meet their basic nutritional needs. They all agreed to these provisions.

After extensive testing to screen out anyone with psychological problems or criminal backgrounds, 24 normal college-age men were selected from a group of nearly a hundred volunteers. Then, at random (by the flip of a coin), the men were divided into two groups of “prisoners” and “guards.” Remember, Zimbardo’s goal here was to separate internal, personality factors from the influence of the situation in determining behavior. Therefore, it was imperative for each group of participants, at the outset, to be as identical, on average, as possible (Zimbardo, 2005). Then all the participants went home, having received no instructions, no training, no preparation at all for what lay ahead.

Procedure

The goal of the study was to observe, record, and analyze the behavior of the prisoners and the guards. As mentioned, Zimbardo and his associates were looking for signs that the situations and roles into which these young men were placed would be strong enough to overcome their personal characteristics and behavioral tendencies as individuals.

The “Prisoners” Several days after the initial screening and selection, the participants assigned to the prisoner group were surprised at their homes on a Sunday morning by a knock on their door from an officer from the (real) Palo Alto Police Department. Each participant was “arrested” for armed robbery, searched, handcuffed, and whisked off to the station, sirens, lights, and all. Each prisoner was booked, fingerprinted, and thrown blindfolded into a

holding cell. Later, they were told that they were to be transported, still blindfolded, to the "Stanford County Jail" (this was the mock prison built in the psychology building basement).

When the prisoners arrived at the jail, the participants who were assigned to be guards proceeded to search (see Figure 37-2), strip, delouse (using an aerosol spray), and give each "inmate" a prison uniform consisting of a dress-like smock, each with a different four-digit number (these numbers would become the prisoners' names for the duration of the study), rubber sandals, a nylon stocking to wear over his hair at all times (to simulate head shaving, which occurs in most real prisons), and a chain wrapped around his ankle and padlocked (this was not attached to anything but was intended to serve as a reminder of prisoner status). Zimbardo pointed out that although these procedures varied from actual, real-life prison procedures, the idea behind them was to *simulate* the humiliation, repression, and entrapment inmates experience routinely in real prisons. The prisoners were assigned three to each small cell; each inmate had a cot with a thin mattress and one blanket. The three cots filled the space and there was virtually no extra room in the small cells.

The "Guards" Unlike the prisoners who were required to be in the prison 24/7 (they were incarcerated, after all), the guards worked 8-hour shifts, three men to a shift, and lived their normal lives when not on duty. They were given identical prison guard-style uniforms, nightsticks (although they were not allowed to strike prisoners), and reflective sunglasses designed to give them a menacing and anonymous appearance. Zimbardo explained that his idea for the mirrored sunglasses came from the 1967 film *Cool Hand Luke*, starring Paul Newman (Zimbardo, 2007). The guards received no

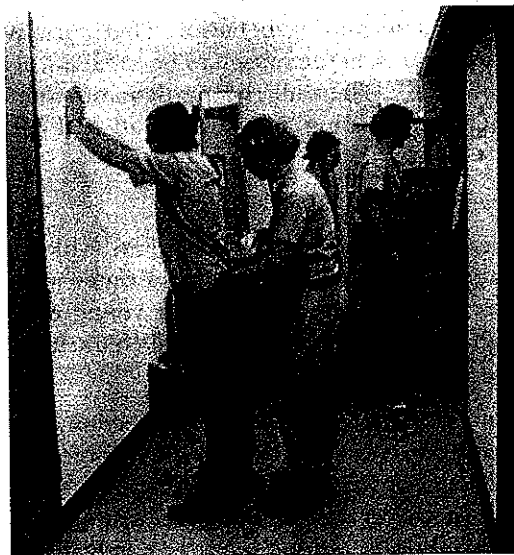


FIGURE 37-2 Stanford Prison "Guard" frisking new "Prisoner." (Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment)

specific training for their roles, and were merely charged with the responsibility of keeping the prisoners in line and maintaining order in the prison.

RESULTS

This is one of the most researched, discussed, and analyzed studies in the history of psychology. The personality and behavioral changes that occurred in the guards and the prisoners were profound and alarming. To summarize the complex findings in the limited space available here, specific, representative behaviors of the participants are condensed in Table 37-1. More generally, however, here is what happened over the next several days in the "Stanford Prison."

Faster than anyone would have predicted, the true identities and personalities of the prisoners and guards seemed to vanish, and the roles they were being asked to play took over. Within a day the line between "play" and real life became disturbingly blurred. As Zimbardo wrote of the participants in his original study (1972):

The majority had indeed become "prisoners" and "guards," no longer able to clearly differentiate between role playing and self. . . . In less than a week, the experience of imprisonment undid (temporarily) a lifetime of learning; human values were suspended, self-concepts were challenged and the ugliest, most base, pathological side of human nature surfaced. We were horrified because we saw some boys (guards) treat others as if they were despicable animals, taking pleasure in cruelty, while other boys (prisoners) became servile, dehumanized robots who thought only of escape, of their own individual survival and of their mounting hatred for the guards (p. 4).

Remember, this was a scientific study conducted by highly qualified, professional researchers, and it was rapidly taking on a life of its own. The participants, especially those given the role of prisoners, seemed to forget that they were college students with free will; they could have simply quit the study at any time, but they did not. After several days, many were pleading to be paroled, to be released, but when release was denied, they simply returned to their cells, dejected but obedient. The emotional breakdown and stress reactions of 5 of the prisoner-participants were so extreme that they became depressed, were unable to think clearly, and stopped eating. They had to be released from the study (or perhaps, more appropriately, from *the prison*) within the study's first several days.

Some of the guards took to tormenting the prisoners, apparently enjoying the power of their positions. Some of the guards were less strict and tried to be fair, but they never interfered with the more tyrannical guards and, more importantly, never went to the experimenters to suggest that the other guards might be "over the top" in their roles. Even Zimbardo himself forgot, at times, that he was in charge of a scientific study and found himself slipping into the role of "prison superintendent."

TABLE 37-1 "Prisoner" and "Guard" Behaviors and Reactions During the "Stanford Prison" Study

THE "GUARDS"	THE "PRISONERS"
Used demeaning, degrading language with prisoners; harassed and intimidated them	Quickly became docile, subservient, and conformed to the rules set by the guards
Made humiliating comments to prisoners (e.g., "Prisoner 2354, go over and tell prisoner 2578 that you love him.")	Showed clear and early signs of trauma and depression, including crying and profound depression
Raucously awakened all prisoners in the middle of the night (every night) for "inmate counts"	Begged to be paroled
Frequently used push-ups as punishment for minor offenses (One guard stepped on a prisoner's back as he was attempting to carry out the push-up punishment.)	Agreed to forfeit all payment in exchange for release
Appeared to enjoy their sadistic control over the prisoners	
Shot a fire extinguisher (ice-cold CO ₂) at prisoners to quell a rebellion	Experienced uncontrollable crying and rage and disorganized thinking
Placed prisoners in solitary confinement for entire nights	Planned and staged a "rebellion" that involved removing stocking caps, tearing off uniform numbers, barricading the cells with beds, and cursing and taunting the guards
Made visiting the bathroom a privilege, at times denying visits and placing a waste bucket in their cell	
Positioned an informant (a confederate of the experimenters) in the cells to spy on prisoners for signs of escape or rebellion plans	Designed an elaborate escape plan that never materialized
Stripped prisoners naked to achieve order following exposed escape plan; removed prisoners' beds and forced prisoners to give up blankets	Eventually gave up all attempts at rebellion and solidarity.
Allowed "privileges" (better food, teeth brushing, washing, etc.) to prisoners at random in an effort to divide and conquer and to break prisoner camaraderie, trust, and solidarity	Assumed an every-man-for-himself attitude, abandoning solidarity with other prisoners
Forced prisoners to clean toilets with their bare hands, extended "night counts" to several hours long, increased number of push-ups: all as punishment for the attempted escape	Docilely accepted with increasing hopelessness the guards' degrading and sadistic treatment of them as the study progressed
Were creative and inventive in finding ways of breaking the prisoners' spirit	After 6 days, all became completely passive and dehumanized, robotlike

(Haney et al., 1973; Zimbardo, 1972; Zimbardo, 2005; Zimbardo, 2007b.)

RECENT APPLICATIONS

As is true of Milgram's study of obedience (see Reading 40) Zimbardo's prison study has generated sweeping social and political effects over the 30-plus intervening years. It is difficult if not impossible to discuss Zimbardo's findings without

acknowledging the political nature of the research. One of the most controversial and heated issues facing the United States, and most countries worldwide, is prison reform. Throughout history, the systematic abuse of prisoners has been well documented and continues to this day. The headline history in the United States of prison riots, uprisings, rebellions, kidnappings, and murders from the time of Zimbardo's study to the present is filled with parallels, on a larger scale, to the events in that basement at Stanford. To aggravate further the potential for prisoner abuse, the number of inmates in U.S. prisons and jails grew from approximately 500,000 in 1980 to over 2.2 million in 2006 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007). This is the highest prisoner population of any country in the world. Moreover, since the mid-1970s the goal of rehabilitation in prisons has been generally abandoned (although the phrase *correctional facilities* is still in wide use) and replaced with the goals of punishment and removing offenders from the public (referred to as *incapacitation*). In 1998, Zimbardo and Haney analyzed how the prison system had changed since their study at Stanford. Here, in Zimbardo's words are their conclusion at that time:

Prisons continue to be failed social experiments using a dispositional [internal] model of punishment, and isolation of offenders rather than any basic rehabilitation practices that might reduce persistently high rates of recidivism. What our analysis revealed was that prison conditions had significantly worsened in the decades since our study as a consequence of the politicization of prisons, with politicians, prosecutors, DAs, and other officials taking a hard line on crime as a means of currying favor of an electorate made fearful of crime by media exaggerations. (Zimbardo, 2005)

As you have been reading this, you may have been thinking about the possible links between Zimbardo's prison study and the events that have occurred, and are occurring, in the war in Iraq and the subsequent U.S. occupation of that country. Several highly publicized events, especially the prisoner abuse scandals at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq and the reports of detainee abuse at the Guantanamo detention camp in Cuba (see Hooks & Mosher, 2005; Keller, 200), have brought the "Stanford Prison Study" back into the spotlight. Zimbardo, in his recent book *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (2007a), has revisited the prison study and expanded his research and commentary on prisoner abuse beyond prisons to the larger concept of human evil. We are disbelieving that events such as Abu Ghraib could ever truly happen—that anyone, especially citizens of a free, democratic society, could have engaged in such sadistic treatment of other humans. How could this be? Psychologists, such as Zimbardo, and other social scientists, have tried to help us understand; as the authors of one study about these abuses stated:

Journalists have looked to social scientific research to understand the abuse in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world. These accounts move away from an emphasis on a few "bad apples" and call into question an emphasis on punishing the lowest ranking soldiers. Zimbardo's (1972) research figures prominently in these accounts. He rejects out of hand the "bad apple" thesis, suggesting instead that the barrel is bad. Zimbardo faulted the Bush administration with a

“failure of leadership” and emphasized that the abusive interrogation techniques and harsh treatment of prisoners were “authorized from the top down” by military commanders and by the highest-ranking officials in the Bush administration. (Hooks & Mosher, 2005, pp. 1632–1633)

In report after report from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo, we have heard about and seen in graphic detail the horrendous abuses and torture of prisoners carried out by guards and interrogators, who, like Zimbardo’s prison participants are not, by all accounts, sadistic, brutal people. They are essentially normal people, perhaps not so different from you and me, who are drastically transformed by what may ultimately be the most powerful situational force of all for evil: war.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned, Zimbardo had planned for a 2-week study, yet he decided to call it off after only 6 days because the mock prison situation was so powerful that it had morphed, in alarming ways, into reality. These were no longer randomly assigned university students and experimenters; they had become their roles, had transformed into prisoners, guards, and wardens. These roles were so powerful that individual identities dissolved to the point that the participants, and even the experimenters, had difficulty realizing just how dangerous the behaviors in the “Stanford Prison” had become. Zimbardo wrote about his decision to halt the study as follows:

I terminated the experiment not only because of the escalating level of violence and degradation by the “guards” against the “prisoners” . . . but also because I was made aware of the personal transformation that I was undergoing personally. . . . I had become a Prison Superintendent, the second role I played in addition to that of Principal Investigator. I began to talk, walk and act like a rigid institutional authority figure more concerned about the security of “my prison” than the needs of the young men entrusted to my care as a psychological researcher. In a sense, I consider that the most profound measure of the power of this situation was the extent to which it transformed me. (Zimbardo, 2005, p. 40; see also, Zimbardo, Maslach, & Haney, 1999).

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Reading 38: THE POWER OF CONFORMITY

Asch, S. E. (1955). Opinions and social pressure. *Scientific American*, 193(5), 31–35.

Do you consider yourself to be a conformist, or are you more of a rebel? Most of us probably like to think that we are conformist enough not to be considered terribly strange or frightening, yet nonconformist enough to demonstrate that we are individuals and capable of independent thinking. Psychologists have been interested in the concept of conformity for decades. You can see why when you remember that psychological research focuses not only on explaining human behavior but also, and perhaps more importantly, on revealing the *causes* of it. The effect of people's willingness to conform to others can help us a great deal in understanding the sources of people's behavior.

When psychologists talk about conformity, they refer to individual behavior that adheres to the behavior patterns of a particular group of which that individual is a member. The usually unspoken rules or guidelines for behavior in a group are called *social norms*. If you think about it, you can probably remember a time in your life when you behaved in ways that were out of sync or in disagreement with your attitudes, beliefs, or morals. Chances are, whenever this occurred, you were part of a group in which everyone was behaving that way, so you went along with them. Conformity is a powerful force on our behavior and can, at times, cause us to behave in ways that, left to our own devices, we would never do. Therefore, conformity is clearly worthy of interest and study by behavioral scientists. However, no one undertook to study conformity scientifically until the early 1950s. Enter Solomon Asch. His experiments on conformity offered us a great deal of new information about conforming behavior and opened many doors for future research.

THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Suppose you are with a group of people you see often, such as friends or coworkers. The group is discussing some controversial issue or political candidate. It quickly becomes clear to you that everyone in the group shares one view, which is the opposite of your own. At one point the others turn to you and ask for your opinion. What are you going to do? The choices you are faced with are to state your true views and risk the consequences of being treated as an outcast, to agree with the group consensus even though it differs from your opinion, or—if possible—to sidestep the issue entirely.

Asch wanted to find out just how powerful the need to conform is in influencing our behavior. Although conformity often involves general and

vague concepts, such as agreeing with others' attitudes, ethics, morals, and belief systems, Asch chose to focus on a much more obvious type: *perceptual conformity*—that is, the extent to which humans tend to conform with one another's perceptions of the world: what we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch. Asch chose to study conforming behavior on a simple visual comparison task so that he could examine this phenomenon in a controlled laboratory environment.

If conformity is as powerful a force as Asch and many others believed, then researchers should be able to manipulate a person's behavior by applying group pressure to conform. This is what Asch set about testing in a very elegantly designed series of experiments, all incorporating a similar method.

METHOD

The visual materials consisted simply of pairs of cards with three different lengths of vertical lines (called comparison lines) on one card and a single standard line the same length as one of three comparison lines on the other (see Figure 38-1). Here is how the experimental process worked. Imagine you are a participant who has volunteered to participate in a "visual perception study." You arrive at the experiment room and find 7 other participants already seated in a row. You sit in the one empty chair at the end of the row. The experimenter then reveals a pair of cards and asks you to determine which of the three comparison lines is the same length as the standard line. You look at the lines and immediately decide on the correct response. Starting at the far end of the row away from you, each participant is asked individually for his or her answer. Everyone gives the correct answer, and when your turn comes you give the same obviously correct answer. The card is changed, the same process happens, and—once again, no problem—you give the correct answer along with the rest of the group. On the next trial, however, something odd happens. The card is revealed and you immediately choose in your mind the correct response (this all seems quite easy!), but when the other participants give their answers this time, they all choose the *wrong* line!

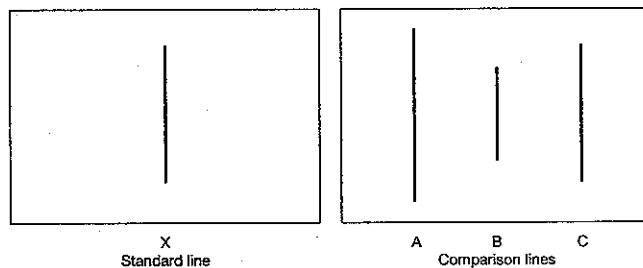


FIGURE 38-1 An example similar to Asch's line judging task card. (Adapted from p.32.)

And they all choose the *same* wrong line. Now, when it is your turn to respond again, you pause. You can't believe what is happening. Are all these other people blind? The correct answer is obvious. Isn't it? Have *you* gone blind? Or crazy? You now must make a decision. Do you maintain your opinion (after all, the lines are right in front of your nose), or do you conform and agree with the rest of the group?

As you have probably figured out by now, the other 7 "participants" in the room were not participants at all but, rather, confederates of the experimenter. They were in on the experiment from the beginning, and the answers they gave were, of course, the key to this study of conformity. So, how did the real participants in the study answer?

RESULTS

Each participant participated in the experimental situation several times. Approximately 75% went along with the group's incorrect consensus at least once. For all trials combined, participants agreed with the group on the incorrect responses about one-third of the time. Just to be sure that the line lengths could be judged accurately, individuals in a control group of participants was asked simply to write down their answers to the line comparison questions. Participants in this group were correct 98% of the time.

DISCUSSION AND RELATED RESEARCH

The powerful effects of group pressures to conform were clearly demonstrated in Asch's study. If individuals are willing to conform to a group of people they hardly know about a clearly incorrect judgment, how strong must this influence be in real life, where groups exert even stronger forces and issues are more ambiguous? Conformity as a major factor in human behavior, the subject of widespread speculation for years, had now been scientifically established.

Asch's results were important to the field of psychology in two crucial ways. First, as discussed, the real power of social pressure to conform was demonstrated clearly and scientifically for the first time. Second, and perhaps even more important, this early research sparked a huge wave of additional studies that continue right up to the present. The body of research that has accumulated since Asch's early studies has greatly elaborated our knowledge of the specific factors that determine the effects conformity has on our behavior. Some of these findings follow:

1. *Social support.* Asch conducted his same experiment with a slight variation. He altered the answers of the confederates so that in the test condition 1 confederate of the 7 gave the correct answer. When this occurred, only 5% of the participants agreed with the group consensus. Apparently, a single ally is all you need to "stick to your guns" and resist the pressure to conform. This finding has been supported by several later studies (e.g., Morris & Miller, 1975).

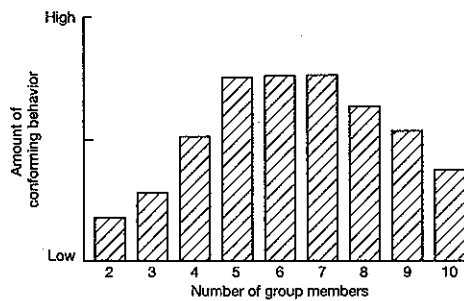


FIGURE 38-2 The relationship between group size and conformity. (Adapted from p. 35.)

2. *Attraction and commitment to the group.* Later research demonstrated that the more attracted and committed you are to a particular group, the more likely you are to conform to the behavior and attitudes of that group (see Forsyth, 1983). If you like the group and feel that you belong with its members (they are called your *reference group*), your tendency to conform to that group will be very strong.
3. *Size of the group.* At first, research by Asch and others demonstrated that the tendency to conform increases as the size of the group increases. However, upon further examination, it was found that this connection is not so simple. While it is true that conformity increases as the size of the group increases, this only holds for groups up to 6 or 7 members. As the group size increases beyond this number, conformity levels off, and even decreases somewhat. This is shown graphically in Figure 38-2. Asch has suggested this happens because as the group becomes large, people may begin to suspect the other members of working together purposefully to affect their behavior and, in response, they become resistant to this obvious pressure.
4. *Sex.* Do you think men and women differ in their tendency or willingness to conform? Early studies that followed Asch's work indicated that women seemed to be much more willing to conform than men. This was such a strong and frequently repeated finding that it entered the psychological literature as an accepted difference between the sexes. However, later research drew this notion into question. It appears that many of the early studies (all conducted by men) inadvertently created testing conditions that were more familiar and comfortable for men in those days than for women. Psychologists know that people will tend to conform more when placed in a situation where standards for appropriate behavior are unclear. Therefore, the finding of greater conformity among women may have simply been a systematic error caused by subtle (and unintentional) biases in the methods used. Research under better controlled conditions has failed to find this sex difference in conformity behavior (see Sistrunk & McDavid, 1971, for a discussion of these gender-related issues).

Numerous additional areas related to the issue of conformity also have been studied. These include cultural influences, the amount of information available when making decisions about conforming, personal privacy, and many others.

CRITICISMS

Asch's work on conformity has received widespread support and acceptance. It has been replicated in many studies, under a wide variety of conditions. One criticism concerns whether Asch's findings can be generalized outside of the lab and to the real world. In other words, does a participant's answer in a laboratory about the length of some lines really have very much to do with conforming behavior in life? This is a valid criticism for all research about human behavior that is carried out in a controlled laboratory setting. What this criticism says is "Maybe the subjects were willing to go along with the group on something so trivial and unimportant as the length of a line, but in real life, and on important matters, they would not conform so readily." However, although real-life matters of conformity can certainly be more meaningful, it is equally likely that the pressures for conformity from groups in the real world are also proportionately stronger.

RECENT APPLICATIONS

An article examining why young adults continue to engage in unsafe sexual practices demonstrates how Asch's work continues to influence research on important social issues (Cerwonka, Isbell, & Hansen, 2000). The researchers assessed nearly 400 students between the ages of 18 and 29 on various measures of their HIV/AIDS knowledge risk behaviors (such as failure to use condoms, multiple sex partners, alcohol and other drug use, and sexual history). Numerous factors were shown to predict high-risk sexual behaviors, including *conformity to peer group pressures*. You can see how an understanding of conformity pressures on people's choices about their sexual behaviors might be a valuable tool in fighting the continuing spread of HIV.

Another fascinating study incorporated Asch's 1955 article to examine why men are less likely than women to seek help, even when they are in dire need of it (Mansfield et al., 2003). This article begins with the following (old) joke: "Why did Moses spend 40 years wandering in the desert? Because he wouldn't ask for directions" (p. 93). This joke is (sort of) funny because it taps into a stereotype about men and help-seeking. Of course, failure to ask for directions *usually* does not cause serious problems, but men also tend to resist seeking medical and mental health care, and that can be dangerous or even fatal. The authors suggest that one of the primary forces preventing men from seeking help is conformity. "In the context of help seeking, men may be disinclined to seek help if they believe they will be stigmatized for doing so. . . . If a man greatly admires the people in his life who discourage or speak badly of seeking help, he will be less likely to seek help himself" (p. 101).

On a final note, culture appears to play an especially important role in conformity (Bond & Smith, 1996). Research in collectivist countries, such as Japan or India, has consistently found higher levels of conformity than in individualistic countries, such as the United States (see Triandis's research on collectivist and individualistic cultures in Reading 28). Such findings add to the ever-growing body of evidence that psychological research must never overlook the impact of culture on virtually all human behaviors.

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Reading 39: TO HELP OR NOT TO HELP

Darley, J. M., & Latané, B. (1968). Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *8*, 377–383.

One of the most influential events in the history of psychological research was not a study at all but a violent and tragic event in New York City that was picked up by media news services across the United States. In 1964, a young woman, Kitty Genovese, was returning to her apartment in a quiet, middle-class neighborhood in Queens after closing the Manhattan bar that she managed. As she left her car and walked toward her building, she was viciously attacked by a man with a knife. As the man stabbed her several times, she screamed for help. One neighbor yelled out of his window for the man to “leave that girl alone,” at which time the attacker began to run away. But then he turned, knocked Genovese to the ground, and began stabbing her again. The attack continued, and her screaming continued until finally someone telephoned the police. The police arrived 2 minutes after they were called, but Genovese was already dead and her attacker had disappeared. The attack had lasted 35 minutes. During their investigations, police found that 38 people in the surrounding apartments had witnessed the attack, but only 1 had eventually called the police. One couple (who said they assumed someone else had called the police) had moved two chairs next to their window to watch the violence. Genovese's killer, Winston Moseley, now in his 70s, remains incarcerated at a maximum-security prison in upstate New York. He has been denied parole 12 times during his 42 years in prison. His next parole hearing is scheduled for 2008.

If someone had acted sooner to help Genovese, she probably would have survived. New York City and the nation were appalled by the seeming

indifference on the part of so many neighbors who had failed to try to stop this violent act. People attempted to find a reason for this inaction. They blamed the alienation caused by living in a large city; they blamed the neighborhood of Queens; they blamed basic human nature.

The Genovese tragedy sparked the interest of psychologists, who, as scientists, rather than looking to place blame, set out to try to understand what psychological forces might have been at work that prevented all those people from helping the victim. The concept of helping others falls into a research area of psychology that behavioral scientists call *prosocial behavior*, or behavior that produces positive social consequences. Topics falling into this research area include altruism, cooperation, resisting temptation, and helping. If you witness an emergency situation in which someone may be in need of help, many factors affect your decision to step in and offer assistance. John Darley at New York University and Bibb Latané at Columbia University, both social psychologists, were among those who began to examine these factors. They termed the behavior of helping others in emergencies *bystander intervention* (or in the Genovese case, *nonintervention*).

Have you ever been faced with a true emergency? Contrary to what you may think from watching television and reading newspapers, emergencies are not very common. Darley and Latané estimated that the average person will encounter fewer than six emergencies in a lifetime. This is good and bad: good for obvious reasons; bad because if and when you find yourself facing an emergency, you will have to decide what to do, without the benefit of very much experience. Society dictates that we should take action to help in emergencies, but often, as in the Genovese case, we do not. Could that be because we have so little experience that we simply do not know what to do? Is it because of the alienation caused by urban living? Or are humans, by nature, basically uncaring?

Following the Genovese murder, Darley and Latané analyzed the bystanders' reactions. They theorized that the large number of people who witnessed the violent event decreased the willingness of any one individual to step in and help. They decided to test their theory experimentally.

THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Your common sense might tell you that the higher the number of bystanders present during an emergency, the more likely it is someone will intervene. Darley and Latané hypothesized just the opposite: they believed that the reason no one took steps to help Kitty Genovese was a phenomenon they called *diffusion of responsibility*—that is, as the number of bystanders in an emergency increases, the greater is the belief that “Someone else will help, so I don’t need to.” Have you ever witnessed an accident on a busy street or arrived at the scene of one soon after it has happened? Chances are that as you drove by you made the assumption that someone surely has called the police or ambulance by now, and therefore you did not feel a personal responsibility to do so. But imagine discovering the same accident on a deserted country road with no one else around. Would your response be different? The answer for most of us is “yes.”

The concept of diffusion of responsibility formed the theoretical basis for this chapter's study. The challenge was to re-create a Genovese-like situation in a controlled, laboratory-type situation so that it could be manipulated and examined scientifically. Darley and Latané were ingenious in designing experiments to do this.

METHOD

For obvious reasons, the actual events of the Kitty Genovese murder could never be re-created for experimental purposes. Therefore, the researchers needed to devise a situation that would approximate or simulate a true emergency so that the intervention behavior of bystanders could be observed. In this experiment, Darley and Latané told students in an introductory psychology class at New York University that they were interested in studying how students adjust to university life in a highly competitive, urban environment, as well as what kinds of personal problems they were experiencing. The students were asked to discuss their problems honestly with other students, but to avoid any discomfort or embarrassment they would be in separate rooms and would speak with each other over an intercom system. This intercom, they were told, would only allow one student to speak at a time. Each student would be given 2 minutes, after which the microphone for the next student would be activated for 2 minutes, and so on.

All this was a cover story designed to obtain natural behavior from the participants and to hide the true purpose of the experiment. The most important part of this cover story was the way the students were divided into three different experimental conditions. The participants in group 1 believed that they would be talking with only one other person; those in group 2 believed there would be two other people on the intercom; and the group 3 participants were told that five other people were on the line. In reality, each participant was alone, and all the other voices they heard through the "intercom" were recorded.

Now that the size of the groups was varied, some sort of emergency had to be created. The researchers decided that a very realistically acted epileptic seizure would be interpreted by most people as an emergency. As the discussions over the intercom system between the participants and the other "students" began, participants heard the first student, a male, tell about his difficulties concentrating on his studies and problems adjusting to life in New York City. He then added, with some embarrassment, that he sometimes had severe seizures, especially when under a lot of stress. Then the conversation switched to the next student. In group 1, the actual participant's turn came next, whereas in the other two conditions, the participant heard one or more other students speak before his or her turn. After the participant spoke, it was the first student's turn again. This is when the emergency occurred. The first student spoke normally as before but then began to have a seizure (remember, this was all on tape). Latané and Darley quote the seizure in detail in a later report as follows:

I-er-um-I think I-I need-er-if-if could-er-er somebody er-er-er-er-er give me a little-er-give me a little help here because-er-I-er-I'm-er-h-having a-a-a real problem-er right now and I-er-if somebody could help me out it would-it would-

er-er s-s-sure be good . . . because-er-there-er-ag cause I er-I-uh-I've got one of the-er-sei—er-er-things coming on and-and-and I could really use some help so if somebody would-er give me a little h-help-uh-er-er-er-er c-ould somebody-er er-help-er-uh-uh-uh [choking sounds] . . . I'm gonna die-er-er . . . help-er-er-seizure [chokes, then quiet]. (pp. 95–96)

To the participants, this was clearly an emergency. They felt sure that the “student” was in trouble and needed help immediately. To analyze the responses of the participants, Darley and Latané measured the percentage of participants in each condition who helped the student in trouble (helping was defined as leaving the cubicle and notifying the experimenter of the problem). They also measured the amount of time participants waited to respond to the emergency and to try to help. Participants were given 4 minutes to respond, after which the experiment was halted and participants debriefed.

RESULTS

The findings from this study offered strong support for the researchers’ hypothesis. As the number of others that participants believed were part of the study increased, the percentage who reported the seizure *quickly*—that is, as the attack was occurring—decreased dramatically (see Figure 39-1). Among those who *eventually* helped, the amount of delay in helping was greater when more bystanders were present. For group 1, the average delay in responding was less than 1 minute, whereas for group 3 it was over 3 minutes. The total number of participants who reported the seizure at all, either during or after it occurred, varied among the groups in a similar way. *All* the participants in group 1 reported the emergency, but only 85% of group 2 and 60% of group 3 did so *at any time* during the 4-minute period.

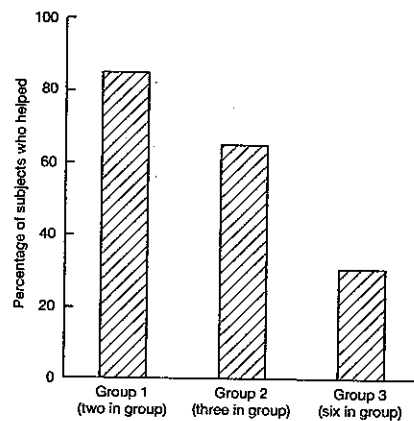


FIGURE 39-1 Number of participants in each condition who helped quickly during seizure. (Adapted from data on p. 380.)

DISCUSSION

As many did in the real-life case of Kitty Genovese, you might think that the participants in this study were simply uncaring toward the victim having the seizure. However, Darley and Latané are quick to point out that this was not true for the participants in groups 2 and 3 (or of Genovese's neighbors). All the participants reported experiencing a great deal of anxiety and discomfort during the attack and showed physical signs of nervousness (trembling hands, sweaty palms). The researchers concluded that the reason for their results must lie in the difference in the number of other people the participants believed were present. Whenever your behavior changes because of the presence of others a psychological principle known as *social influence* is at work. Obviously, social influence played a significant role in this study, but we are still left wondering why. What was it about the presence of others that was so influential?

Darley and Latané claimed to have demonstrated and supported their theory of diffusion of responsibility. As the number of people in the group increased, the participants felt less personal or individual responsibility to take action. It was "easier" in groups 2 and 3 for the participants to assume that someone else would handle the problem. Moreover, people not only feel a shared responsibility for helping when others are present, but they also sense less potential guilt or blame if they do not help. Because we consider helping others to be a positive action in our culture, refusing or failing to help carries shameful connotations. If you are the only person present in an emergency, the negative consequences of not helping will be much greater than if others are there to bear some of the burden for nonintervention.

Another possible explanation for this type of social influence is something that psychologists have termed *evaluation apprehension*. Darley and Latané contended that part of the reason we fail to help when others are present is that we are afraid of being embarrassed or ridiculed. Imagine how foolish you would feel if you were to spring into action to help someone who did not need or want your help. I remember a time when, as a teenager, I was swimming with a large group of friends at a neighbor's pool. As I was about to dive from the board I saw the neighbor's 13-year-old daughter lying facedown on the bottom of the pool. I looked around, and no one else seemed to be aware of, or concerned about, this apparent emergency. Was she drowning? Was she joking? I wasn't sure. Just as I was about to yell for help and dive in for the rescue, she swam lazily to the surface. I had hesitated a full 30 seconds out of the fear of being wrong and feeling embarrassed for overreacting. Many of us have had experiences such as this. The problem is that they teach us the wrong thing: helping others carries with it the possibility of looking foolish.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDINGS

From this and other studies, Darley and Latané became the leading researchers in the field of helping behavior and bystander intervention. Much of their early work was included in their book *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why*

Doesn't He Help? (Latané & Darley, 1970). In this work, they outlined a model for helping behavior that has become widely accepted in the psychological literature on helping. They proposed five steps you and most people typically pass through before intervening in an emergency:

1. You, the potential helper, must first notice that an emergency event is occurring. In the study this chapter examines, there was no question that something was wrong, but in the real world you may be in a hurry or your attention may be focused elsewhere, and you might completely fail to notice the event.
2. You must interpret the situation as one in which help is needed. This is a point at which fear of embarrassment exerts its influence. Again, in the present study, the situation was not ambiguous and the need for help was quite clear. In reality, however, most potential emergencies contain some degree of doubt or ambiguity, such as in my swimming pool example. Or, imagine you see a man stagger and pass out on a busy city sidewalk. Is he sick, having a heart attack, or just drunk? How you interpret the situation will influence your decision to intervene. Many of those who failed to help in the Genovese case claimed that they thought it was a lover's quarrel and did not want to get involved.
3. You have to assume *personal* responsibility. You will usually do this if you are the only bystander. If others are present, however, you may instead place the responsibility onto them. This step was the focus of this chapter's experiment. The more people present in an emergency, the more diffused the responsibility and the less likely it is that help will occur.
4. If you assume responsibility, you then must decide what action to take. If you do not know what to do or you do not feel competent to take the appropriate action, you will be less likely to help. In Darley and Latané's study, this issue of competence did not play a part because all the participant had to do was report the seizure to the experimenter. But if a crowd were to witness a pedestrian being run over by a car, a member of the group who was a doctor, a nurse, or a paramedic would be more likely than others to intervene because he or she would feel more competent to know how to help.
5. After you've decided what action to take, you have to take it. Just because you know what to do doesn't guarantee that you will do it. Now, you will weigh the costs and benefits of helping. Are you willing to personally intervene in a fight in which one or both of the participants has a knife? What about victims of accidents—can you help them, or will you make things worse by trying to help (the competence issue again)? If you get involved, can you be sued? What if you try to help and end up looking like a fool? Many such questions, depending on the situation, may run through your mind before you actually take action.

Figure 39-2 illustrates how helping behavior may be short-circuited or prevented at any one of these stages.

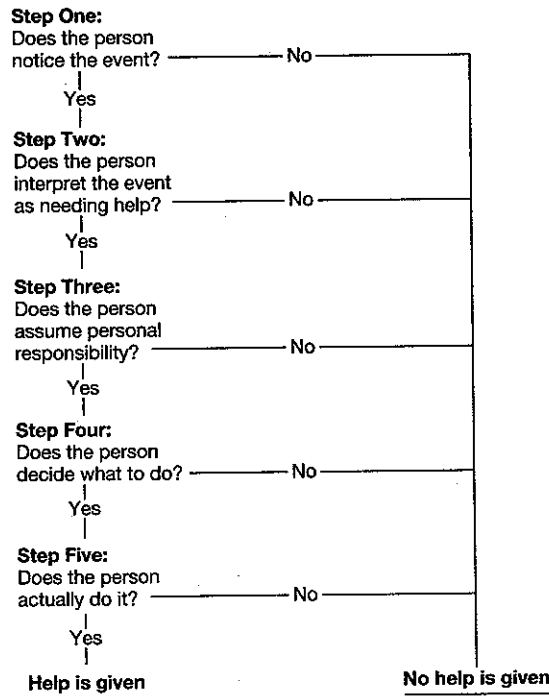


FIGURE 39-2 Latané and Darley's Model of Helping.

SUBSEQUENT FINDINGS AND RECENT APPLICATIONS

Both the Kitty Genovese murder and the experiment discussed in this reading involved groups of onlookers who were cut off from each other. What do you suppose would happen if the bystanders could see and talk to each other? Would they be more likely to intervene when they could be judged by others? Darley and Latané believed that, in some cases, even groups in close contact would be less likely than individuals to help. This would be especially true, they theorized, when the emergency is somewhat ambiguous.

For example, imagine you are sitting in a waiting room and smoke begins to stream in through a vent. You become concerned and look around at the others in the room. But everyone else appears quite calm and unconcerned. You think your reaction to the smoke must be exaggerated, and you decide against taking any action because if you take action and are wrong (maybe it wasn't smoke, just steam or something from the next room) you would feel sheepish and embarrassed. However, you don't realize that everyone in the room is feeling the same as you and hiding it, just as you are, to avoid embarrassment! Meanwhile, no one is doing anything about the smoke. Sound unbelievable? It's not.

Latané and Darley (1968) tested this idea by creating the situation just described. Psychology students volunteered to participate in interviews allegedly to "discuss some of the problems involved in life at an urban university." When

they arrived for the interview, they were seated in a room and asked to fill out a preliminary questionnaire. After a few minutes, smoke began to seep into the room through a vent. For this study, the smoke was a special mixture of chemicals that would not be dangerous to the participants. After several minutes, the smoke became so thick that vision in the room was obscured. The researchers timed the participants to see how long they would wait to report the smoke. Some of the participants were in the room alone; others were with either two or three confederates, believed by the participant to be other participants, who behaved very passively when the smoke appeared. Once again, Latané and Darley's results supported their theory. Of the participants in the alone condition, 55% reported the smoke within the first 2 minutes; only 12% of the participants in the other two groups did so. Moreover, after 4 minutes, 75% of the alone participants had acted, but no additional participants in the other groups ever reported the smoke.

Further evidence of the fear of embarrassment in people's hesitation to help others comes from a study that combined personality measures of shyness and *fear of negative evaluation* (FNE) with participants' willingness to help another (Karakashian et al., 2006). In this study, participants filled out scales to measure shyness and fear of negative evaluation. They were then given the opportunity to help a female confederate either alone or with two additional confederates in the room. In accordance with Darley and Latané's findings, participants' helping behavior decreased significantly with 2 other bystanders present, compared to the no-bystander condition, regardless of their scores on the personality tests. Beyond this, however, those who scored high on FNE and shyness were *less* likely to help in the no-bystander condition, but they were equally likely (or unlikely) to help when the 2 additional bystanders were present. This may seem counterintuitive to you—that is, someone who dreads being judged negatively or who is shy should be less likely to help in the presence of others—right? Not exactly. Think of it this way: if others are present, a shy person feels less pressure to help (due to diffusion of responsibility), so he or she, in essence, have an “excuse” to avoid helping just as the other bystanders do. On the other hand, if no other bystanders are present, that fear of (the potential for) negative evaluation kicks in and the shy person will be less likely to help than a non-shy person. The authors of the study stated it like this:

Because of the diffusion of responsibility in the social condition [with others present], the participant faces little decision of whether to help or not. Here, FNE does not become an issue, as there is little to no thought of helping, and in turn, no apprehension of being evaluated poorly. In the non-social condition [no other bystanders] the participant is left alone and has all the responsibility to help, and therefore must make a decision to act or not (Karakashian et al., 2006, p. 30).

Another study demonstrated the power of the bystander effect and diffusion of responsibility, not in real life, but in our *imaginations*. A study entitled *Crowded Minds: The Implicit Bystander Effect*, carried out by a team of researchers that included Darley, found that merely *imagining* being in a

group changed helping behavior (Garcia et al., 2002). In this study, participants were asked to imagine that they were either part of a group of people or with only one other person. Then, all participants were asked to donate to a charity. The participants who imagined themselves in the presence of others donated significantly less money, and felt less personal accountability, than did those who imagined being with one other person. These findings imply that our brains immediately “leap” at the chance to assume less individual responsibility when we are part of a group.

CONCLUSION

The results of this body of research may seem rather pessimistic about our inclination to help others in need, but you should recognize that these studies deal with extremely specific situations in which people fail to help. Frequent examples may be found every day of people helping other people, of altruistic behaviors, and heroic acts. Darley and Latané’s research is important, however, not only to explain a perplexing human behavior but also to help change it. Perhaps, as more people become aware of the bystander effect, they will make the extra effort to intervene in an emergency, even if others are present. In fact, research has demonstrated that those who have learned about the bystander effect (as you now have) are more likely to help in emergencies (Beaman et al., 1978). The bottom line is this: Never assume that others have intervened or will intervene in an emergency. *Always act as if you are the only bystander there.*

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Reading 40: OBEY AT ANY COST?

Milgram, S. (1963). Behavioral study of obedience. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67, 371–378.

If someone in a position of authority over you ordered you to deliver an electrical shock of 350 volts to another person, simply because the other person answered a multiple-choice question incorrectly, would you obey? Neither would I. If you met someone who was willing to do such a thing, you would probably think of him or her as cruel and sadistic. This study by Stanley Milgram of Yale University set out to examine the idea of obedience to authority and produced some disturbing findings.

Milgram's research on obedience joins Zimbardo's prison study (see Reading 37) as one of the most famous in all psychology's history. It is included in every general psychology text and every social psychology text. If you talk to students of psychology, more of them are familiar with these studies than any others. Out of this study came a book by Milgram (1974) on the psychology of obedience, as well as a film about the research itself that is widely shown in college and university classes. Not only is this experiment referred to in discussions of obedience, but it has also influenced the entire debate about ethics of involving human participants in psychological research.

Milgram's idea for this project grew out of his desire to investigate scientifically how people could be capable of carrying out great harm to others simply because they were *ordered* to do so. Milgram was referring specifically to the hideous atrocities committed during World War II and also, more generally, to the inhumanity that has been and is perpetrated by people following the orders of others. Milgram believed that in some situations, the human tendency to obey is so deeply ingrained and powerful that it cancels out a person's ability to behave morally, ethically, or even sympathetically.

When behavioral scientists decide to study some complex aspect of human behavior, their first step is to find a way to gain control over the behavioral situation so that they can approach it scientifically. This can often be the greatest challenge to a researcher, because many events in the real world are difficult to re-create in a laboratory setting. Milgram's problem was how to create a controlled situation in which one person would order another person to injure a third person physically, without anyone actually getting hurt. Now there's a researcher's challenge!

THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Milgram's primary theoretical basis for this study was that humans have a tendency to obey other people who are in a position of authority over them even if, in obeying, they violate their personal codes of moral and ethical behavior. He believed that, for example, many individuals who would never intentionally cause someone physical harm would inflict pain on a victim if ordered to do so by a person whom they perceived to be a powerful authority figure.

METHOD

The most ingenious portion of this study was the technique Milgram developed to test the power of obedience in the laboratory. Milgram designed a rather scary-looking shock generator: an electronic device with 30 toggle switches labeled with voltage levels starting at 30 volts and increasing by 15-volt intervals up to 450 volts (see Figure 40-1). These switches were labeled in groups such as *slight shock*, *moderate shock*, and *danger: severe shock*. The idea was that a participant could be ordered to administer electric shocks at increasing levels to another person. Before you conclude that Milgram was truly sadistic himself, this was a very realistic-looking simulated shock generator, but no one ever actually received any painful shocks.

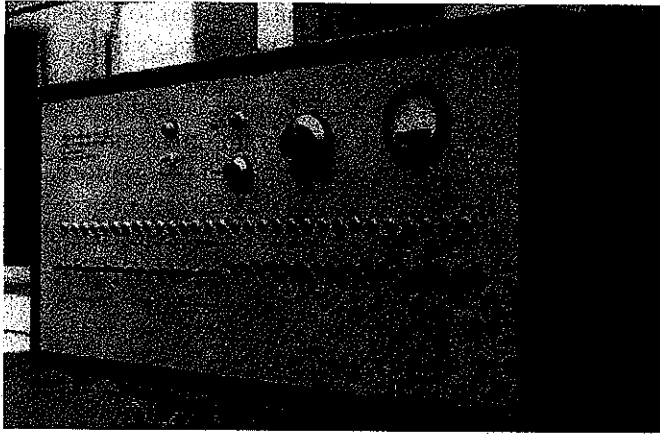


FIGURE 40-1 Milgram's experimental "shock" generator
(Copyright 1965 by Stanley Milgram. From the film *OBEDIENCE*,
distributed by Penn State Media Sales)

The participants for this study were 40 males between the ages of 20 and 50. They consisted of 15 skilled or unskilled workers, 16 white-collar sales- or businessmen, and 9 professional men. They were recruited through newspaper ads and direct-mail solicitation asking for volunteers to be paid participants in a study about memory and learning at Yale University. Each man participated in the study individually. To obtain an adequate number of participants, each man was paid \$4.50 (remember, these were 1963 dollars, worth about \$30 today). All participants were clearly told that this payment was simply for coming to the laboratory, and it was theirs to keep *no matter what happened after they arrived*. This was to ensure that participants knew they could withdraw at any time and did not feel coerced to behave in certain ways because they were worried about not being paid.

In addition to the participants, two other key participants were part of the study: a confederate (a 47-year-old accountant) posing as another participant and an actor (dressed in a gray lab coat, looking very official) playing the part of the experimenter.

As participants arrived at the social interaction laboratory at Yale, each was seated next to another "participant" (the confederate). Obviously, the true purpose of the experiment could not be revealed to participants because this would completely alter their behavior. Therefore, the experimenter told each participant a cover story explaining that this was a study on the effect of "punishment on learning." The participants then drew pieces of paper out of a hat to determine who would be the teacher and who would be the learner. This drawing was rigged so that the true participant always became the teacher and the accomplice was always the learner. Keep in mind that the "learner" was a confederate in the experiment, as was the person playing the part of the experimenter.

The learner was then taken into the room next door and was, with the participant watching, strapped to a chair and wired up with electrodes (complete

with electrode paste to “avoid any blisters or burns”) connected to the shock generator in the adjoining room. The learner, although his arms were strapped down, was able to reach four buttons marked a, b, c, and d to answer questions posed by the teacher from the next room.

The learning task was thoroughly explained to the teacher and the learner. Briefly, it involved the learner memorizing connections between various pairs of words. It was a rather lengthy list and not an easy memory task. The teacher-participant would read the list of word pairs and then test the learner’s memory of them. The teacher was instructed by the experimenter to administer an electric shock each time the learner responded incorrectly. Most important, for each incorrect response, the teacher was instructed to move up one level of shock voltage on the generator. All this was simulated so realistically that no participant suspected that the shocks were not really being delivered.

The learner-confederate’s responses were preprogrammed to be correct or incorrect in the same sequence for all the participants. Furthermore, as the amount of voltage increased with incorrect responses, the learner began to shout his discomfort from the other room (in prearranged, prerecorded phrases, including the fact that his heart was bothering him), and at the 300-volt level, he pounded on the wall and demanded to be let out. After 300 volts he became completely silent and refused to answer any more questions. The teacher was instructed to treat this lack of a response as an incorrect response and to continue the procedure.

Most of the participants would turn to the experimenter at some point for guidance on whether to continue the shocks. When this happened, the experimenter ordered the participant to continue, in a series of commands increasing in severity:

Command 1: Please continue.

Command 2: The experiment requires that you continue.

Command 3: It is absolutely essential that you continue.

Command 4: You have no other choice: you must go on.

A measure of obedience was obtained simply by recording the level of shock at which each participant refused to continue to deliver shocks. Because 30 switches were on the generator, each participant could receive a score of 0 to 30. Participants who went all the way to the top of the scale were referred to as *obedient subjects*, and those who broke off at any lower point were termed *defiant subjects*.

RESULTS

Would the participants obey the commands of this experimenter? How high on the voltage scale did they go? What would you predict? Think of yourself, your friends, people in general. What percentage do you think would deliver shocks all the way through the 30 levels. all the way up to “450 volts—danger: severe shock”? Before discussing the actual results of the study, Milgram asked

a group of Yale University senior psychology majors, as well as various colleagues, to make such a prediction. The estimates ranged from 0% to 3%, with an average estimate of 1.2%. That is, no more than 3 people out of 100 were predicted to deliver the maximum shock.

Table 40-1 summarizes the “shocking” results. Upon command of the experimenter, every participant continued at least to the 300-volt level, which was when the confederate banged on the wall to be let out and stopped

TABLE 40-1 Level of Shock Delivered by Participants

NUMBER OF VOLTS TO BE DELIVERED	NUMBER WHO REFUSED TO CONTINUE AT THIS VOLTAGE LEVEL
Slight shock	
15	0
30	0
45	0
60	0
Moderate shock	
75	0
90	0
105	0
120	0
Strong shock	
135	0
150	0
165	0
180	0
Very strong shock	
195	0
210	0
225	0
240	0
Intense shock	
255	0
270	0
285	0
300	5
Extreme intensity shock	
315	4
330	2
345	1
360	1
Danger: severe shock	
375	1
390	0
405	0
420	0
XXX—	
435	0
450	26

(Source: Adapted from Milgram, 1963, p. 376.)

answering. Most surprising is the number of participants who obeyed orders to continue all the way to the top of the scale.

Although 14 participants defied orders and broke off before reaching the maximum voltage, 26 of the 40 participants, or 65%, followed the experimenter's orders and proceeded to the top of the shock scale. This is not to say that the participants were calm or happy about what they were doing. Many exhibited signs of extreme stress and concern for the man receiving the shocks and even became angry at the experimenter. Yet they obeyed.

The researchers were concerned that some of the participants might suffer psychological distress from the ordeal of shocking another person, especially when the learner had ceased to respond for the last third of the experiment. To help alleviate this anxiety, after the participants finished the experiment, they received a full explanation (called a "debriefing") of the true purpose of the study and of all the procedures, including the deception that had been employed. In addition, the participants were interviewed as to their feelings and thoughts during the procedure and the confederate "learner" was brought in for a friendly reconciliation with each participant.

DISCUSSION

Milgram's discussion of his findings focused on two main points. The first was the surprising strength of the participants' tendency to obey. These were average, normal people—not sadistic, cruel individuals in any way—who agreed to participate in an experiment about learning. Milgram points out that from childhood these participants had learned that it is immoral to hurt others against their will. So why did they behave this way? The experimenter was a person in a position of authority, but if you think about it, how much authority did he really have? He had no power to enforce his orders, and participants would lose nothing by refusing to follow orders. Clearly it was the *situation* that carried a force of its own that somehow created an atmosphere of obedience.

The second key observation made during the course of this study was the extreme tension and anxiety manifested by the participants as they obeyed the experimenter's commands. Again, it might be expected that such discomfort could be relieved simply by refusing to go on, and yet this is not what happened. Milgram quotes one observer (who watched a participant through a two-way mirror):

I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse.... At one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered, "Oh, God! Let's stop it." And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experimenter and obeyed to the end. (p. 377)

Milgram listed several points at the end of the article to attempt to explain why this particular situation produced such a high degree of obedience. In summary, from the point of view of the participant, his main points were that (a) if it is being sponsored by Yale, I must be in good hands, and

who am I to question such a great institution; (b) the goals of the experiment appear to be important, and therefore, because I volunteered, I'll do my part to assist in the realization of those goals; (c) the learner, after all, also voluntarily came here and he has an obligation to the project, too; (d) hey, it was just by chance that I'm the teacher and he's the learner—we drew lots and it could have just as easily been the other way around; (e) they're paying me for this, I'd better do my job; (f) I don't know all that much about the rights of a psychologist and his participants, so I will yield to his discretion on this; and (g) they told us both that the shocks are painful but not dangerous.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDINGS

Milgram's findings have held up quite well in the 40-plus years since this article was published. Milgram himself repeated the procedure on similar participants outside of the Yale setting, on unpaid college student volunteers, and on women participants, and he found similar results each time.

In addition, he expanded further on his findings in this study by conducting a series of related experiments designed to reveal the conditions that promote or limit obedience (see Milgram, 1974). He found that the physical, and therefore emotional, distance of the victim from the teacher altered the amount of obedience. The highest level of obedience (93% going to the top of the voltage scale) occurred when the learner was in another room and could not be seen or heard. When the learner was in the same room with the participant and the participant was required to force the learner's hand onto a shock plate, the rate of obedience dropped to 30%.

Milgram also discovered that the physical distance of the authority figure to the participant also influenced obedience. The closer the experimenter, the greater the obedience. In one condition, the experimenter was out of the room and telephoned his commands to the participant. In this case, obedience fell to only 21%.

On a more positive note, when participants were allowed to punish the learner by using any level of shock they wished, no one ever pressed any switch higher than no. 2, or 45 volts.

CRITICISMS

Although Milgram's research has been extremely influential in our understanding of obedience, it has also had far-reaching effects in the area of the ethical treatment of human participants. Even though no one ever received any shocks, how do you suppose you would feel if you knew that you had been willing to shock someone (possibly to death) simply because a person in a lab coat told you to do so? Critics of Milgram's methods (e.g., Baumrind, 1964; Miller, 1986) claimed that unacceptable levels of stress were created in the participants during the experiment. Furthermore, it has been argued that the potential for lasting negative effects existed. When the deception was revealed to participants at the end of their ordeal, they may have felt used, embarrassed, and possibly distrustful of psychologists or legitimate authority figures in the future.

Another line of criticism focused on the validity of Milgram's findings (e.g., Brief et al., 1995; Orne & Holland, 1968). One commonly cited basis for this criticism was that because the participants had a trusting and rather dependent relationship with the experimenter, and the laboratory was an unfamiliar setting, obedience found there did not represent obedience in real life. Therefore, critics claim, the results of Milgram's studies were not only invalid, but because of this poor validity the treatment his participants were exposed to could not be justified.

Milgram responded to criticisms by surveying participants after they had participated. He found that 84% of his participants were glad to have participated, and only 1% regretted the experience. In addition, a psychiatrist interviewed 40 of the participants who were judged to have been the most uncomfortable in the laboratory and concluded that none had suffered any long-term effects. As to the criticism that his laboratory findings did not reflect real life, Milgram said, "A person who comes to the laboratory is an active, choosing adult, capable of accepting or rejecting the prescriptions for action addressed to him" (Milgram, 1964, p. 852).

The Milgram studies reported here have been a focal point in the ongoing debate over experimental ethics involving human participants. It is, in fact, arguable whether this research has been more influential in the area of the psychology of obedience or in policy formation on the ethical treatment of humans in psychological research (as summarized in this book's Preface).

RECENT APPLICATIONS

The breadth of influence that Milgram's obedience project continues to exert on current research can best be appreciated through a brief annotated selection of recent studies that have been primarily motivated by Milgram's early methods and findings. As has been the case every year since the early 1960s when Milgram carried out his studies, these studies are divided between attempts to refine and elaborate on people's tendency to obey authority figures and the omnipresent debate about the ethics of using deception in research involving human participants.

Thomas Blass, a leading authority on the work and career of Stanley Milgram, and author of a biography of Milgram, *The Man Who Shocked the World* (Blass, 2004), has reviewed all the research and social implications stemming from Milgram's obedience studies (Blass, 1999; 2002). In general, Blass has found universal support for Milgram's original findings, but, more importantly, he suggests that obedience rates have not changed significantly during the 40-plus years since Milgram first published his findings. This is contrary to many people's intuitive judgments that Americans in general have become less respectful of authority and more willing to rebel and fight back when ordered to perform behaviors with which they disagree.

Another question that often arises about Milgram's early studies concerns gender and the fact that all his original participants were male. Do you think, overall, that men or women would be more likely to obey an authority

figure? Blass's review of later studies by Milgram and numerous others found *no difference* in obedience rates for males versus females. (For more details about the history and influences of Milgram's work, see Blass's Web site at <http://www.stanleymilgram.com>.)

A very pertinent application of Milgram's findings examined the psychological experience of "execution teams" charged with carrying out the death sentence in Louisiana State prisons (Osofsky & Osofsky, 2002). The researchers interviewed 50 correctional officers who were directly involved with executions. They found that, although exposed far more than most people to trauma and death, the participants were not found to be clinically depressed. They reported relying on religious beliefs, identification with their peer group, and their ability to diffuse responsibility to deal with painful emotions. "Nevertheless, the officers experience conflicted feelings and frequently report having a hard time carrying out society's 'ultimate punishment'" (p. 358).

On the ethics side, a study employed Milgram's research in examining potentially thorny ethical issues for social science research conducted on the Internet (Pittenger, 2003). Today, a great deal of research is conducted via the World Wide Web, and the number of such studies is likely to increase significantly in the future. Pittenger contends that researchers must be alert to potential ethical violations relating to invasion of privacy, obtaining informed consent, and using deceptive tactics online. "The Internet offers unique challenges to researchers," Pittenger writes. "Among these are the need to define the distinction between private and public behavior performed on the Internet, ensure mechanisms for obtaining valid informed consent from participants, performing debriefing exercises, and verifying the validity of data collected" (p. 45).

An important question is this: What should be done to protect participants from irresponsible, deceptive practices in psychological research, while at the same time allowing for *some* deception when absolutely necessary for scientific advancement? A study by Wendler (1996) suggested that participants in studies involving deception be given an increased level of "informed consent." (See the discussion of this concept in the Preface to this book.) This enhanced informed consent would inform you of the study's *intention* to use deception before you agree to be a participant in the experiment, although you would not be aware of the exact nature of the deception. "This 'second order consent' approach to acceptable deception," claims Wendler, "represents our best chance for reconciling respect for participants with the occasional scientific need for deceptive research" (p. 87).

CONCLUSION

Milgram historian Thomas Blass's (2002) remarks in a biographical review of Milgram's life and work provide a fitting conclusion to this reading:

We didn't need Milgram to tell us we have a tendency to obey orders. What we didn't know before Milgram's experiments is just how powerful this tendency is.

And having been enlightened about our extreme readiness to obey authorities, we can try to take steps to guard ourselves against unwelcome or reprehensible commands (p. 73).

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