



Milgram (1963) ~ Behavioural Study of Obedience

Short Answer Question – suggested answers

1. State the main assumptions of the Social Approach in Psychology. (2 marks)

The Social Approach assumes that behaviour, cognitions and emotions can be influenced by other individuals and that behaviour, cognitions and emotions can also be influenced by groups or social contexts.

2. Define what is meant by legitimate authority. (1 mark)

Legitimacy of authority is an explanation of obedience offered by Milgram. Milgram suggested that we are more likely to obey a person who has a higher position or status in a social hierarchy.

3. What was the experimental method used in this study and how were participants selected? (2 marks)

Milgram used a lab experiment creating an artificial environment at Yale University and participants self-selected themselves by responding to a newspaper advert asking for volunteers.

4. Give two details about the participants used in this study? (2 marks)

All participants were male aged between 20-50 years from the New Haven area.

5. How did the researchers measure the dependent variable (obedience to authority)? (1 mark)

By recording the maximum score in volts that each participant went up to on the electric shock generator (15-450 volts).

6. Why did Milgram choose to rig the allocation of roles; teacher and learner? (2 marks)

Milgram allocated participants to the role of 'teacher' using a rigged procedure of drawing lots with a confederate, he did this as he needed the real participants to always play the role of the teacher following orders and giving electric shocks.

7. Briefly outline the procedure used for the participants in this study; from the moment they entered the experiment to being debriefed at the end. (4 marks)

In response to a newspaper ad offering \$4.50 for one hour's work, participants arrived in the lab to take part in a Psychology experiment investigating memory and learning. Each was introduced to a stern looking experimenter in a white coat and a rather pleasant and friendly co-subject (confederate). The experimenter explains that the experiment will look into the role of punishment in learning, and that one will be the "teacher" and one will be the "learner." Lots are drawn to determine roles, and it is decided that the individual who answered the ad will become the "teacher" (this is the real participant). The co-subject is taken to a room where he is strapped in a chair to prevent movement and an electrode is placed on his arm. Next, the "teacher" is taken to an adjoining room which contains a generator. The "teacher" is instructed to read a list of two word pairs and ask the "learner" to read them back. If the "learner" gets the answer correct, then they move on to the next word. If the answer is incorrect, the "teacher" is supposed to shock the "learner" starting at 15 volts. The electric shock generator goes to a maximum of 450 volts. If they protested, the experimenter would use verbal prods to encourage them to continue (4x). On completion the participant is reunited with the 'learner' and given a full debriefing about the nature of the experiment.

8. Describe the electric shock generator used in this experiment. (3 marks)

The generator had 30 switches increasing in 15 volt increments, each labelled with a voltage ranging from 15 up to 450 volts. Each switch also had a rating, ranging from "slight shock" to "danger: severe shock". The final two switches were labelled "XXX".

9. What factors were controlled to ensure the procedure was standardised for all participants? (2 marks)

The experimenters controlled several aspects of the procedure to ensure every participant received a fair test. These included the introduction to Mr. Wallace the confederate ('learner'), the questions used on the word sheet for the 'learner' to answer and the verbal prods used by the experimenter to encourage the participant to continue.

10. Give two quantitative findings from this study and one qualitative observation. (3 marks)

The findings showed that 100% of all participants went to 300 volts and 65% went all the way to the end at 450 volts. In addition, the experimenters observed participants displaying signs of anxiety and stress such as twitching or laughing nervously.

11. State the conclusion made about the power of authority from this study. (2 marks)

We can conclude that people will follow the orders of a person they believe is in a position of legitimate authority even if it means harming another individual.

12. Describe how the generalisation of this study may affect the conclusions? (2 marks)

The sample is not representative of the target population as there were only 40 and they were all male (androcentric) and all from New Haven in America (ethnocentric) which means the findings cannot be generalised to the wider population.

13. Give one reason why this study is given credit for its reliability. (2 marks)

The experiment was carried out as a lab experiment which means that replication is easier as there were several controls in place to reduce the extraneous variables, also there was a standardised procedure which means that all participants received the same experience. Both of these factors increase the reliability of the findings which might explain why it is given credit for its reliability.

14. How do the conclusions from this study have wider applications for the real world? (2 marks)

This study has helped provide us with a deeper understanding of how people in positions of legitimate authority can influence others to obey, even if it means causing harm to others. This has helped us to explain why soldiers during Hitler's reign in Nazi Germany may have committed such atrocious actions. We can use this to offer wider applications to prevent anything like the Holocaust happening again.

