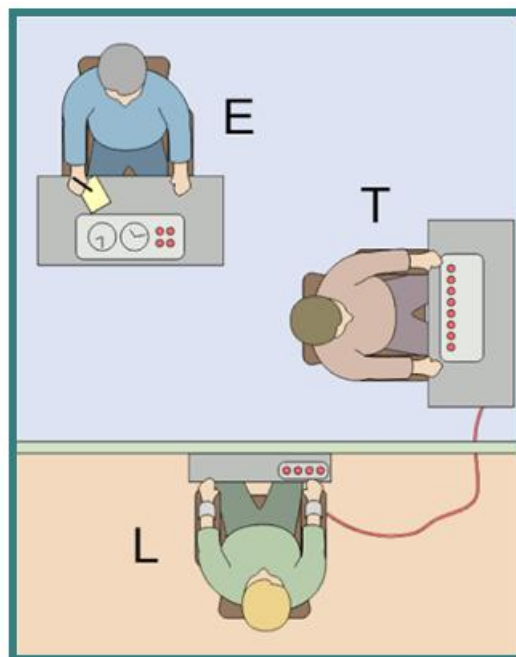


## **Situational Variables Affecting Obedience;**

### **Proximity and location, as investigated by Milgram, and uniform**

#### **The Original Study (Milgram, 1963)**

Milgram aimed to test obedience to authority even if it meant causing harm to another person. He selected 40 male volunteers from the New Haven area in Connecticut, aged between 20-50 years. They were offered \$4.50 to take part in an experiment about punishment and learning. On entering the lab at Yale University, the participants met with a confederate where they chose roles to play either the 'teacher' or 'learner'. The roles were rigged so all real participants were issued with the role of teacher. After seeing the learner/ confederate strapped to the electric shock generator in the opposite room, and both given a short 45-volt shock, the real participant was escorted to the test room. Here they were instructed to read a series of word pairs to the learner and administer a shock of increasing 15 volts each time an incorrect answer was given. The procedure was standardised, so the learner deliberately gave incorrect answers. The real participants were told to continue issuing electric shocks until they reached the maximum 450 volts on the generator. If they complained, the experimenter was told to read a series of verbal prods, telling them to continue.



All of the 40 participants went to the 300-volt mark, where some hesitated after hearing the learner bang on the wall and then go silent. However, 65% of the participants continued to the maximum of 450 volts, despite the signs illustrating that this was a dangerous and severe shock. Milgram concluded that people will blindly follow the orders of an authority figure, even if it means causing harm to another person.

## **Variations on Milgram's experiment:**

Milgram further investigated situational factors which he believed influenced obedience to authority by altering these factors in his variation experiments:

### **Proximity**

Proximity is the physical closeness or distance of an authority figure to the person they are giving an order to. In Milgram's original study the teacher and learner were in separate rooms, however in a variation experiment they were seated together in the same room. In this variation obedience levels dropped from 65% to 40%. This shows that obedience is affected by situational variables like proximity. In another variation showing touch proximity, the teacher was asked to force the learners hand onto an electric shock plate when he refused to give an answer. In this variation obedience dropped to 30%. In another variation of proximity, the experimenter left the room and gave all instructions by telephone. As the requests from the authority, were not face to face obedience levels dropped to 20.5%.

### **Location**

In another variation, Milgram changed the location to a run-down office in Bridgeport. He used a sparsely decorated office instead of the prestigious Yale University. This setting gave the authority figure less power and obedience levels fell to 47.5%.

### **Uniform**

In the original baseline experiment Milgram's experimenter wore a grey lab coat as a symbol of his authority and scientific credibility, yet in another variation he gave instructions by a confederate dressed as an ordinary man. Here the obedience levels dropped to 20%.

Bickman (1974) also investigated the power of uniform in an experiment conducted in New York. He used three male actors: one dressed as a security guard; one dressed as a milkman; and one dressed in ordinary clothes. The actors asked members of the public to follow one of three instructions: pick up a bag; give someone money for a parking metre; and stand on the other side of a bus stop sign which said, 'no standing'. On average the guard was obeyed on 76% of occasions, the milkman on 47% and the ordinary man on 30%. These results all suggest that people are more likely to obey, when instructed by someone wearing a uniform. This is because the uniform infers a sense of legitimate authority and social hierarchy/ power.

In another field experiment by Sedikides and Jackson (1990) a confederate dressed as a zookeeper asked people to stand back from a barrier railing, achieving 58% compliance, compared to 35% when dressed in casual shorts and a t-shirt.

