Conformity

- Conformity is changing behavior or beliefs to match those of other group members, due to unspoken group pressure, real or imagined.
- Obedience involves agreeing to an explicit demand.

Drawing by H. Martin; © 1979 The New Yorker Magazine.

Both personality and social factors influence behavior. However, many of us underestimate the social and environmental factors on our behavior, and overestimate individual factors—the fundamental attributional error.

Conformity

The picture on the left demonstrates what other psychological concept?

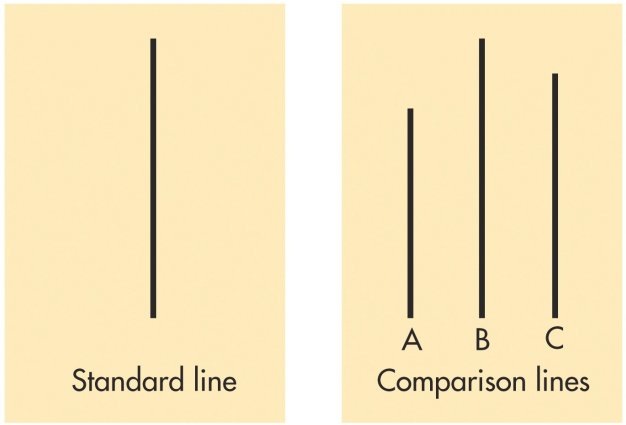
Conformity

It is understandable that people would conform to a group decision when what is "real" is unclear and difficult to determine.

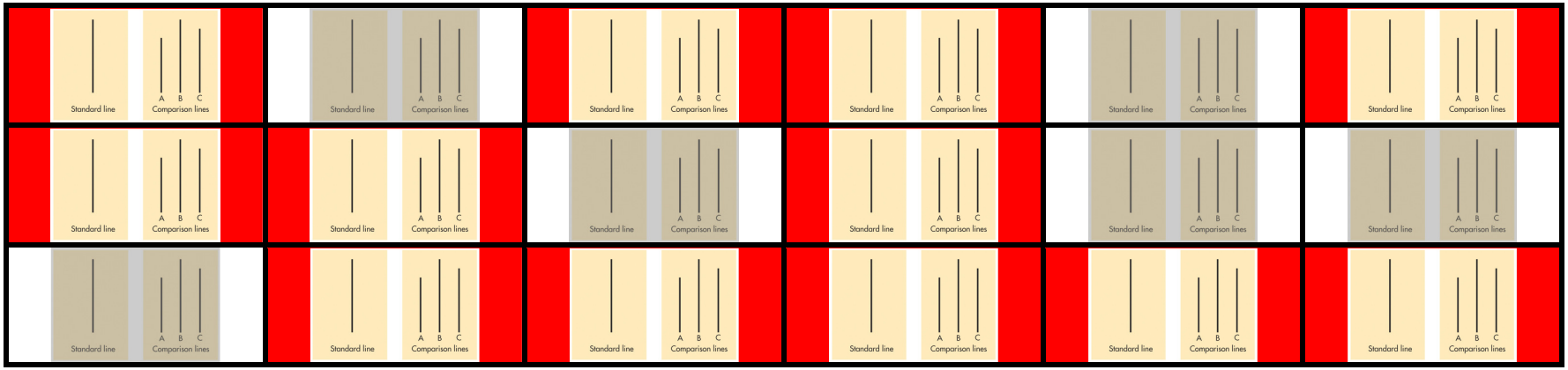
- Did everyone but me not understand the question?
- Was The Last Jedi a bad movie?
- Is Simon Cowell / Gordon Ramsey mean spirited?
- Should we wear masks to prevent the spread of COVID?

Solomon Asch wanted to illustrate that social pressure to conform to a group of strangers is powerful even in the presence of an objectively incorrect judgment.

Conformity



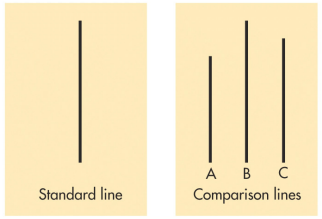
You performed 18 judgment tasks like this one. On 12 random trials, the first five people provided a clearly incorrect answer, such as line A. How many people went along with the group's incorrect judgment?



Results of the Asch Line Experiment

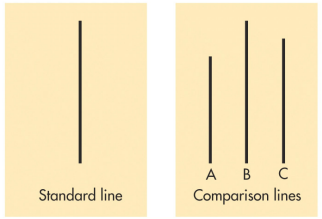
Control group subjects:

- A control group with no other members, only subjects had an error rate of 1%.



Test subjects:

- On at least once incorrect trial, 76% of the test subjects conformed to the group and gave the wrong answer (24% of the test subjects did not conform).
- On all incorrect trials, people conformed to the group and gave the wrong answer on 37% of all the incorrect trials.



Conformity

Most people tend to make a dispositional attribution, rather than a situational attribution. People underestimate the power of the situation. In addition, the following apply to the Asch line experiment:

(1) There is no direct pressure to conform.
(2) There is no explicit incentive offered to conform.
(3) The other people are strangers. Why should you care what they think of you?
(4) There is an objectively correct answer.

Conformity

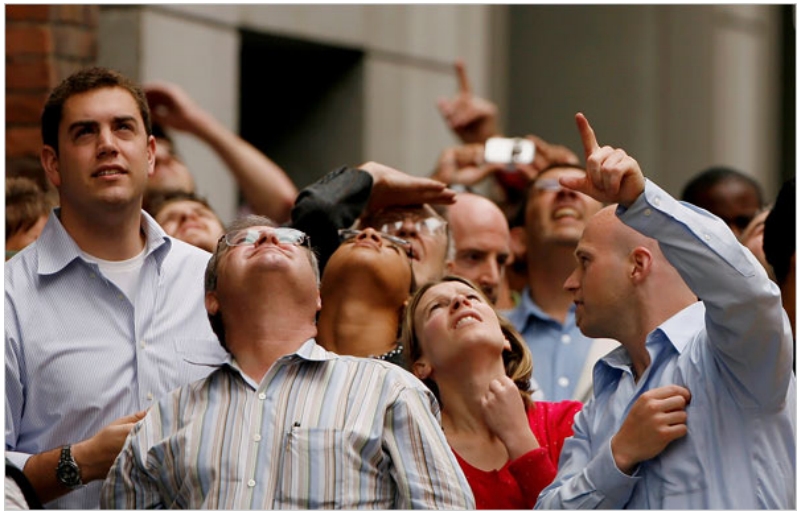
After a series of experiments that had some slight changes from the original Asch line experiment, several factors that affect conformity were identified.

Factors that promote conformity	
You're more likely to conform to group norms when: • You are strongly attracted to a group and want to be a member of it. • You are facing a unanimous majority of four or five people. • You must give your response in front of a group. • You have not already expressed commitment to a different idea or opinion.	**Normative social influence**
• You doubt your abilities or knowledge in the situation. (just like when you start a new job, or when you have low self-efficacy) • You find the task ambiguous or difficult.	**Informational social influence**

- Normative Social Influence: Behavior that is movivated by the desire to gain social acceptance and approval (page 461).
- Informational Social Influence: Behavior that is motivated by the desire to be correct (page 461).

Social Proof (informational social influence)

Deciding what the appropriate and acceptable behavior is by imitating the behavior of other people (this is not the definition in your textbook).



Student and personal examples of social proof (informational social influence)

As an instructor, I am involved in many fire drills. After spending about ten minutes outside people wonder if it is all right to go back in. Usually someone comes out and gives the okay signal. During the time it is unclear whether or not you should go in, people look for is if other people are going back in. The inference is that if others are going in, it must be all right to go in.

Sometimes we do not know what the speed limit is. This is particularly true if we are unfamiliar with the area. If we do not know what it is, often we around and see what other people are doing. By observing the behavior of others, we infer what the speed limit is.

Darek was in a bar that had a no-smoking sign posted on the wall. He likes to smoke but wasn't sure if he should violate the prohibition in the bar. When he looked around, he noticed quite a few people smoking near the pool tables so he figured it must be OK to light up, at least in that area of the bar.

If the rebels troops are suppose to evacuate as the Empire closes in on them, one clue is to see what others are doing.

Manufacturing Informational Social Influence

Groups, organizations, corporations, political parties and individuals can "manufacture" and exaggerate the predominance of a particular belief, thus affecting public opinion and policy. The form of persuasion is by inference and manipulation of the social environment, not a thoughtful dialogue.

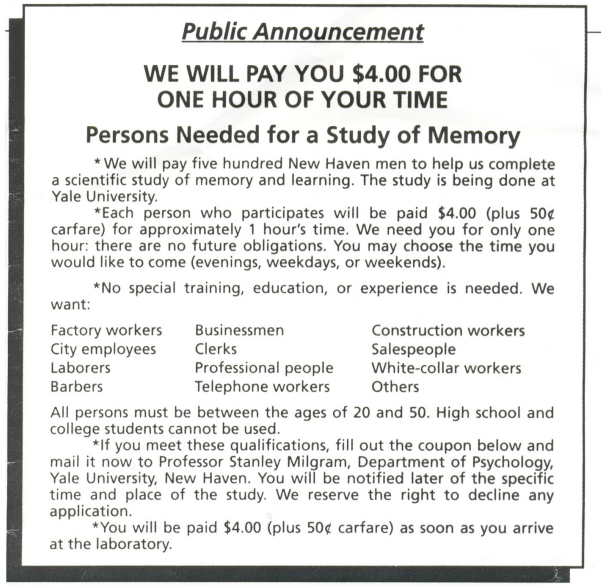
Examples:

- Microsoft: They tried to put pressure on state attorney generals, by "manufacturing" letters of protest of their lawsuits against Microsoft.
- Polls and television and radio "call-in polls"
- Politics: Presidential appearances are by invitation only. What you see on television are his supporters, not critics.

- Bartenders: They never empty a tip jar completely. They leave money in their tip jar to implicitly tell their customers that they are to leave money in the jar for them.
- My plan for the Salvation Army at Christmas: Have confederates with rolls of pennies always drop off pennies in the containers.

Obedience: The Milgram Experiment

- Obedience involves agreeing to an explicit demand.
- Conformity is changing behavior or beliefs to match those of other group members, due to unspoken group pressure, real or imagined.



Public Announcement

WE WILL PAY YOU $4.00 FOR ONE HOUR OF YOUR TIME

Persons Needed for a Study of Memory

*We will pay five hundred New Haven men to help us complete a scientific study of memory and learning. The study is being done at Yale University.

*Each person who participates will be paid $4.00 (plus 50¢ carfare) for approximately 1 hour's time. We need you for only one hour: there are no future obligations. You may choose the time you would like to come (evenings, weekdays, or weekends).

*No special training, education, or experience is needed. We want:

Factory workers	Businessmen	Construction workers
City employees	Clerks	Salespeople
Laborers	Professional people	White-collar workers
Barbers	Telephone workers	Others

All persons must be between the ages of 20 and 50. High school and college students cannot be used.

*If you meet these qualifications, fill out the coupon below and mail it now to Professor Stanley Milgram, Department of Psychology, Yale University, New Haven. You will be notified later of the specific time and place of the study. We reserve the right to decline any application.

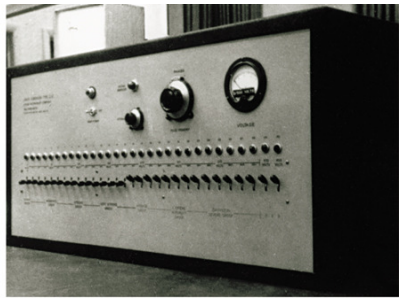
*You will be paid $4.00 (plus 50¢ carfare) as soon as you arrive at the laboratory.

In this experiment, two volunteers were recruited from a newspaper ad for research on learning. One volunteer would take the role of teacher and the other would take the role of the learner.

The teacher would help the learner learn by punishments—electric shocks.

Obedience: The Milgram Experiment

The teacher would read a list of words and the learner would repeat them back to the teacher. The teacher would administer electric shocks to the learner when he got an answer wrong. Each subsequent shock would be increased by 15 volts. A sample shock was delivered to the teacher just in case there was any doubts about that the generator could produce electric shocks.



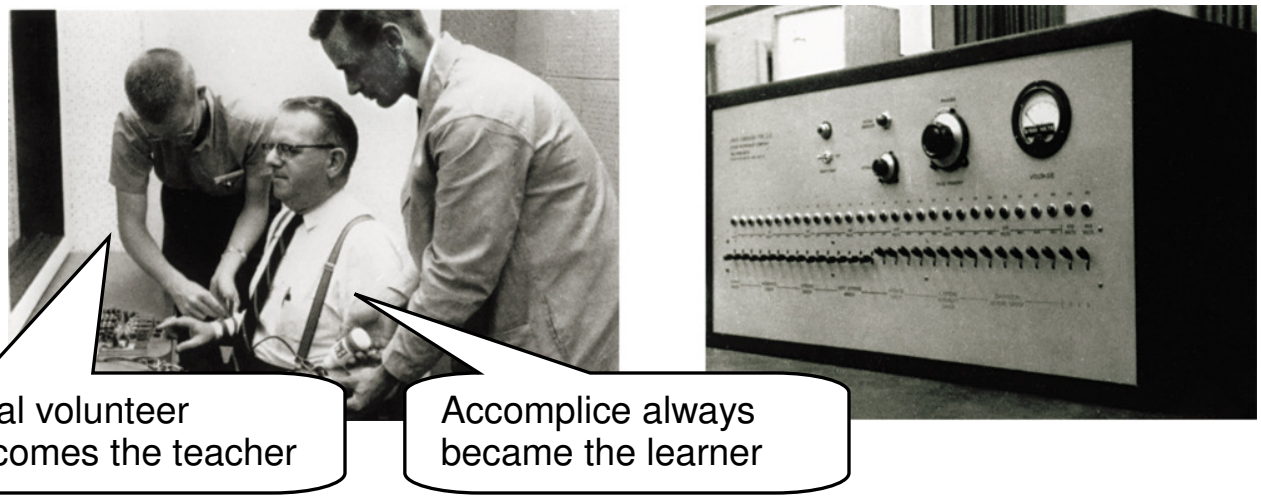
If the teacher protested and pleaded with the experimenter to stop the experiment, the experimenter said that you should treat no answer as a wrong answer and deliver an electric shock to the learner. The experimenter would prod the teacher with four verbal prods:

- Please continue (or please go on).
- The experiment requires that you continue.
- It is absolutely essential that you continue.
- You have no other choice, you must go on.

Only when the teachers refused to obey the experiment, or they reached 450 volts, the experimenter would stop the experiment. point out the word "choice"

Obedience: The Milgram Experiment (Rewind)

There appears to be two volunteers in this research. There is actually only one volunteer. Unknown to the real volunteer, the second "volunteer" was an accomplice of the experimenter. In this experiment, one of them became the teacher and one of them became the learner of a list of words. The two of them drew names to see who would become the teacher and the learner—the accomplice always became the learner.



When the volunteer and experimenter leaves this room, he unstraps himself from the chair. His apparent screams are pre-recorded at predetermined electric shocks. No electric shocks are delivered except for the sample shock given to the real test subject.

Table 12.3

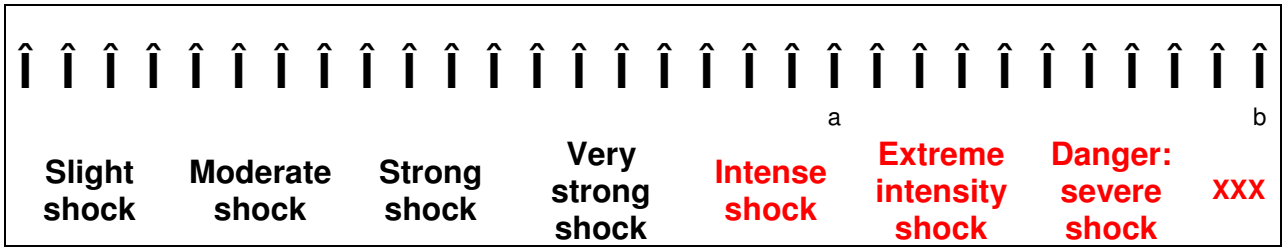
The Learner's Schedule of Protests in Milgram's Obedience Experiment

120 volts	→	Ugh! Hey, *this* really hurts.
150 volts	→	Ugh!!! Experimenter! That's all. Get me out of here. I told you I had heart trouble. My heart's starting to bother me now. Get me out of here, please. My heart's starting to bother me. I refuse to go on. Let me out.
210 volts	→	Ugh!! Experimenter! Get me out of here. I've had enough. I *won't* be in the experiment any more.
270 volts	→	(*Agonized scream.*) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out. Do you hear? Let me out of here.
300 volts	→	(*Agonized scream.*) I absolutely refuse to answer any more. Get me out of here. You can't hold me here. Get me out. Get me out of here.
315 volts	→	(*Intensely agonized scream.*) I told you I refuse to answer. I'm no longer part of this experiment.
330 volts	→	(*Intense and prolonged agonized scream.*) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. My heart's bothering me. Let me out, I tell you. (*Hysterically*) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. You have no right to hold me here. Let me out! Let me out! Let me out! Let me out of here! Let me out! Let me out!

SOURCE: Milgram (1974a), pp. 56–57.

Predicted outcomes of the Milgram Experiment

Milgram asked psychiatrists, college students and middle-class adults to predict how the subjects would behave.



(a) What percentage of test subjects would deliver electric shocks beyond 300 volts?

Class Expectation	Expectation by Psychologists	Experimental Results
	very few	35 of the 40 (87.5%)

(b) What percentage of test subjects would deliver shocks all the way to 450 volts?

Class Expectation	Expectation by Psychologists	Experimental Results
	no one—maybe one in 1000.	26 of 40 (65%)

In general, they believed that everyone would refuse to obey at some point, most would stop at 150 volts, a few would go to 300 volts and no one would go all the way to 450 volts.

Much everyone's surprise, 65 percent went all the way to 450 volts. What is the first kind of response by people when they hear this result?

The first thought was that these were sadistic people. After all, who would deliver electric shocks that were painful to a stranger—the fundamental attributional error?

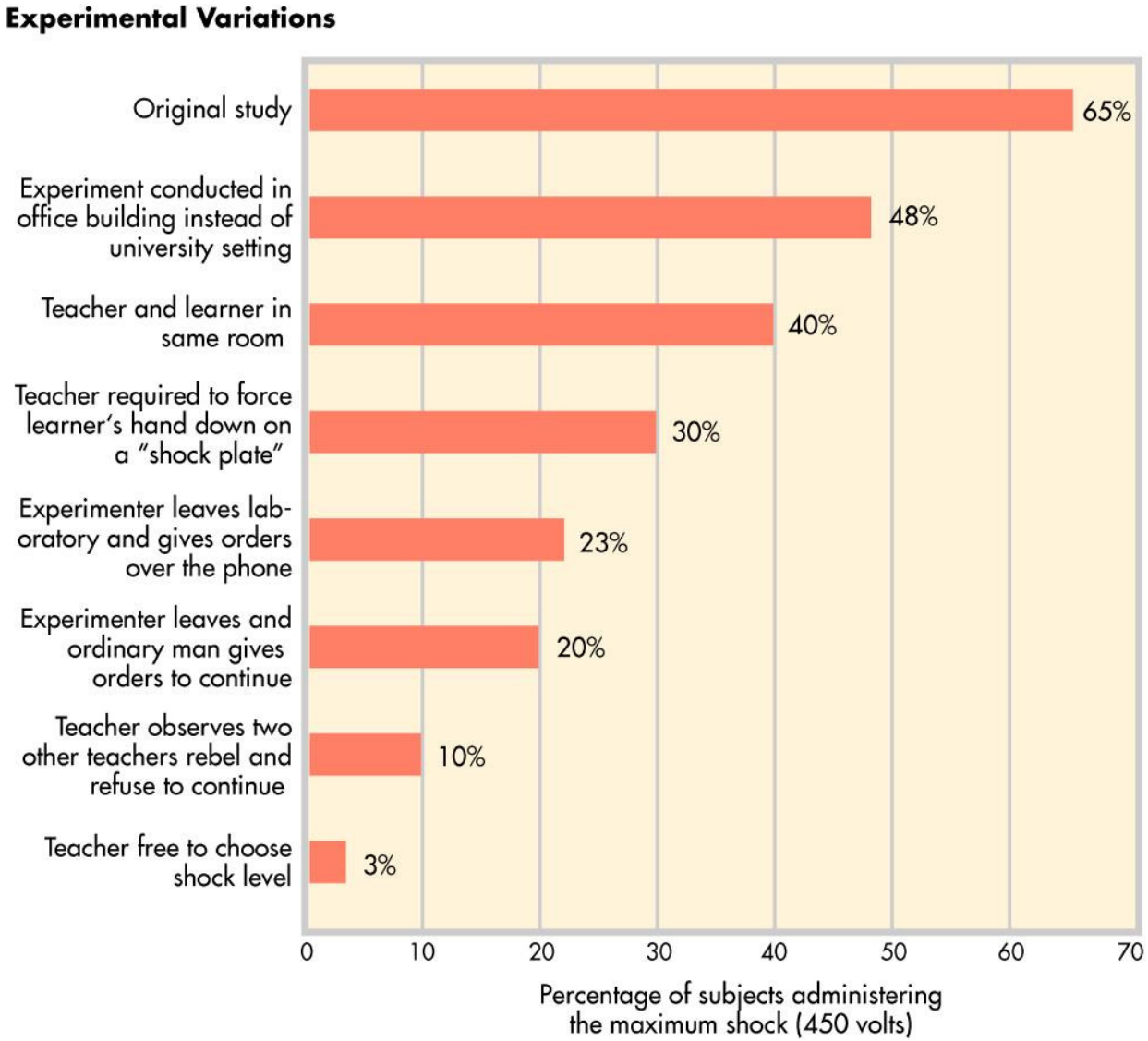
Results of the Milgram's Original Study

Table 12.4

The Results of Milgram's Original Study

Shock Level	Switch Labels and Voltage Levels	Number of Subjects Who Refused to Administer a Higher Voltage Level
	Slight Shock	
1	15	
2	30	
3	45	
4	60	
	Moderate Shock	
5	75	
6	90	
7	105	
8	120	
9	135	
10	150	
11	165	
12	180	
	Very Strong Shock	
13	195	
14	210	
15	225	
16	240	
	Intense Shock	
17	255	
18	270	
19	285	
20	300	
	Extreme Intensity Shock	
21	315	5
22	330	
23	345	4
24	360	2
	Danger: Severe Shock	1
25	375	1
26	390	
27	405	1
28	420	
	XXX	
29	435	
30	450	26

Factors that Decrease Obedience in the Milgram Studies



What is the nature of man?

What does the Milgram experiments reflect about the nature of people?

Are there good aspects (like the humanists focus on), or is it more destructive, as Freud believed?

(1) When the teachers were allowed to act as their own authority, 95% did not go beyond 150 volts (the first point the learner protested). They were not influenced as much (although some) by the authority figure.
(2) When the directions were given over the phone, obedience decreased. People lied about the electric shocks given (they only delivered 15 volts).
(3) Milgram saw that people were more likely to muster the courage to defy an authority when they saw someone else do so—see conditions that affect conformity.
(4) People truly felt bad about following orders. The teachers of the experiment did not behave in a cold-blooded, unfeeling way.

How does the fundamental attributional error make us make us comfortable in explaining the cruel behavior of others?

Why did people obey?

Multiple factors affected the willingness for the teachers to continue to obey the experimenter's orders.

- A previous well-established mental framework to obey. Participants volunteered for a psychological study and follow the experimenter's instructions and were paid in advance (rule of commitment).
- The situation or context, in which the obedience occurred. It took place in a scientific lab at Yale University with the context of doing scientific research. The experimenter was polite, making it difficult to refuse (rule of reciprocity).
- The gradual, repetitive escalation of the task. The escalation of the voltage was in small steps which made it easier to deliver a much larger electric shock.
- The experimenter's behavior and reassurances. The experimenter reassured the teacher that the experimenter was responsible for the well-being of the learner, thus reducing their perception of responsibility.
- The physical and psychological separation from the learner. The learner was in a different room and not visible to the teacher.
- No specific personality trait consistently predicts conformity or obedience in experimental situations.

Why is understanding the Milgram Experiment important? What behaviors does this experiment help explain?

Interest in the concepts of obedience and conformity increased after 5 to 6 millions of Jews were killed in World War II concentration camps. Their military executioners denied responsibility by saying that they were merely obeying orders. Could a person be pressured by others to commit an immoral act, such as hurt a stranger? How could mild mannered and "normal" people send Jews to the gas chamber? Situational factors affect behavior.

The commanding officer directed the unprovoked slaughter of hundreds of Vietnamese at My Lai. One participant in My Lai massacre recalled the following:

> *Lieutenant Calley told me to start shooting. So I started shooting. I poured about four clips into the group... They were begging and saying, "No, No." And the mothers were hugging their children and... Well, we kept right on firing. They were waving their arms and begging...*

Soldiers (and everyone) should disobey inappropriate orders, however, soldiers are not trained to recognize illegal or immoral orders.

Implications of Milgram's experiments:

- It's always easier to drop bombs on people from an airplane or fire missiles off shore or thousands of miles away…your victim is so impersonal and distant.

Whether obedience is good or bad is not a scientific question. In some circumstances it is important for people to obey certain rules and procedures (e.g. safety protocols, stopping at a stop sign, nurses obeying doctors, who seem legitimately an authority… that is the difficult part, establishing who is a legitimate authority.), while challenging and disobeying certain rules and commands (e.g. those that require you to harm others).

Deciding when to obey and when to challenge is difficult. Obeying is easy. Making a choice to disobey is hard and can make us anxious, uncomfortable and uncertain about our action. Choosing makes us responsible for our actions.

Most of us aren't aware of the pressure, use dissonance reduction techniques, factors that influence our perception of "reality", and don't think about the consequence and monitor our own behavior.

Should we have training on understanding who are legitimate authorities and how our perception of their legitimacy is influenced by others?

Pathways for Aggressive Behavior

Biological

- Brain damage
- Low levels of serotonin

Environmental

- Social forces (Milgram experiment)
  - Foot-in-the-door technique (gradual escalation of the task)
  - Separation of the victim
  - Impersonalization of the victim
  - Presence of authority figure or authority status
- Deindividuation

Psychological

- Observational (Ch 5)—observe someone hurting, killing, abusing another.
- Reinforcements (Ch 5)—Being reinforced for hurting, killing, abusing another
- Dehumanize the victim (cognitive dissonance)
- Traits

When the Greeks trained people to torture prisoners, they did it in small increments (the foot-in-the-door technique).

- guard a prisoner,
- participate in arrest squads,
- ordered to occasionally hit the prisoner,
- observe a torture, and finally
- practice it

There are other instances where we ignore the power of the situation (the fundamental attributional error) when explaining behavior that harms others?

- The rise of Hitler and the Nazi party
- The internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII
- The development of the atomic bomb
- The DOE exposed pregnant women to radiation and their unborn fetus without their knowledge
- The inappropriate use of intelligence tests to screen immigrants

Emotions and Dishonesty

Situation A:

Solve as many of 20 math problems in five minutes	Shred your work (it really wasn't shredded	Report how many math problems solve		Receive **$1** for each math problem solved	**The average reported 6, solved, the average solved 4** **(Some lying)**

Situation B:

Solve as many of 20 math problems in five minutes	Shred your work (it really wasn't shredded	Report how many math problems solve	*Receive a plastic token for each math problem solved*	Receive **$1** for each plastic token	**The average reported 8, solved, the average solved 4** **(more lying)**

http://www.npr.org/2012/06/04/154287476/honest-truth-about-why-we-lie-cheat-and-steal