**Article #1: Stanley Milgram Experiment (1961)**

Stanley Milgram started his experiment in 1961, shortly after the trial of the World War II criminal Adolph Eichmann had begun. Eichmann’s defense that he was simply following instructions when he ordered the deaths of millions of Jews roused Milgram’s interest. In his book Obedience to Authority, Milgram posed the question, “Could it be that Eichmann and his million accomplices in the Holocaust were just following orders? Could we call them accomplices?”

**Preparation of the Stanley Milgram Experiment**

Milgram created an electric ‘shock generator’ with 30 switches. The switch was marked clearly in 15 volt increments, ranging from 15 to 450 volts.

He also placed labels indicating the shock level, such as ‘Moderate’ (75-120 Volts) and ‘Strong’ (135-180 Volts). The switches 375-420 Volts were marked ‘Danger: Severe Shock’ and the two highest levels 435-450, was marked ‘XXX’. The ‘shock generator’ was in fact phony and would only produce sound when the switches were pressed.

40 subjects (males) were recruited via mail and a newspaper ad. They thought they were going to participate in an experiment about ‘memory and learning’.

In the test, each subject was informed clearly that their payment ($4.50) was for showing up, and they could keep the payment “no matter what happens after they arrive[d]”.

Next, the subject met an ‘experimenter’, the person leading the experiment, and another … acting as a subject (con-subject). He was a 47 year old male accountant.

The two subjects (the real subject and the con-subject) drew slips of paper to indicate who was going to be a ‘teacher’ and who was going to be a ‘learner’. The lottery was in fact a set-up, and the real subject would always get the role of ‘the teacher’.

The teacher saw that the learner was strapped to a chair and electrodes were attached. The subject was then seated in another room in front of the shock generator, unable to see the learner.

**Research Question**

The Standley Milgram Experiment aimed at getting an answer to the question:

“For how long will someone continue to give shocks to another person if they are told to do so, even if they thought they could be seriously hurt?” (the [dependent variable](https://explorable.com/dependent-variable))

Remember that they had met the other person, a likable stranger, and that they thought that it could very well be them who were in the learner-position receiving shocks.

**The Experiment**

The subject was instructed to teach word-pairs to the learner. When the learner made a mistake, the subject was instructed to punish the learner by giving him a shock, 15 volts higher for each mistake.

The learner never received the shocks, but pre-taped audio was triggered when a shock-switch was pressed.

If the experimenter (person leading the experiment), seated in the same room, was contacted (by the teacher), the experimenter would answer with predefined ‘prods’ (“Please continue”, “Please go on”, “The experiment requires that you go on”, “It is absolutely essential that you continue”, “You have no other choice, you must go on”), starting with the mild prods, and making it more authoritarian for each time the subject contacted the experimenter.

If the subject asked who was responsible if anything would happen to the learner, the experimenter answered “I am responsible”. This gave the subject a relief and many continued.

**Results**

During the Stanley Milgram Experiment, many subjects showed signs of tension. 3 subjects had “full-blown, uncontrollable seizures”.

Although most subjects were uncomfortable doing it, all 40 subjects obeyed up to 300 volts.

25 of the 40 subjects continued to give shocks until the maximum level of 450 volts was reached. Most participants asked the experimenter whether they should continue. But with the above “prods” did submit to authority.

The level of shock that the participant was willing to deliver was used as the measure of obedience. How far do you think that most participants were willing to go? When Milgrim posed this question to a group of Yale University students, it was predicted that no more than 3 out of 100 participants would deliver the maximum shock. In reality, 65% of the participants in Milgram’s study delivered the maximum shocks. It is important to note that many of the subjects became extremely agitated, distraught and angry at the experimenter. Yet, they continued to follow orders all the way to the end.

**Conclusion - Obedience to Authority**

Before the Stanley Milgram Experiment, experts thought that about 1-3 % of the subjects would not stop giving shocks. They thought that you’d have to be pathological or a psychopath to do so.

Still, 65 % never stopped giving shocks. None stopped when the learner said he had heart-trouble. How could that be? We now believe that it has to do with our almost innate behavior that we should do as told, especially from authority persons.

<https://explorable.com/stanley-milgram-experiment>