Year 11 Psychology Summer Task

As an introduction to AS level Psychology, if you are considering taking the subject in the sixth form, I would like you to complete the task below. This is important as it will give you an idea about what Psychology is and what areas they study.

Read the pages 4-6 on Stanley Milgram's study on obedience to authority. When you have read it write about half a page on what you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the study.

Use the following points to help you:

- Ethical issues-Read pages 2-3 on **ethical guidelines** that psychologists should follow to make sure they are protecting participants. Have a read of them and make note of any ways that you think Milgram broke these guidelines.
- Are there any problems with the type of sample (people) he used? Do you think they are representative of people in the general population? If not, why not?
- Are there any problems with the procedure he used to test the aim? How do you think you could conduct a study on obedience in better way?
- Are there any strengths of the study?
- You could also search Milgram's study on the internet and find out what happened in the study.

You MUST bring the work with you in September as this will link in with the topic you will study first.

ETHICAL GUIDELINES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

There are probably more major ethical issues in Psychology than in any other subject. There are a number of reasons for this:

- psychology involves the study of living creatures (human and animal)
- results of psychological research may reveal unpleasant facts about human behaviour.

The key ethical guidelines

Informed consent

Means researchers should tell potential participants exactly what is going to happen to them in the experiment, and ask them, without pressure of any kind, whether they are willing to take part.

Sometimes, researchers feel that they cannot tell participants what the experiment is about because they may show demand characteristics. Children are often considered to be too young to give their own consent, and the consent of their parents or teachers is enough and should be gained.

Deception

Means lying to people and deceiving them about something to do with the study.

The BPS guidelines say that you should try to avoid intentionally deceiving participants about the purpose and nature of the investigation However in certain circumstances, deceiving to your participants is acceptable and can be justified when:

- it does not lead to harmful consequences for participants;
- the study is potentially very useful to society or our understanding
- not deceiving participants may make the research invalid - in some studies, if participants are told exactly what the study is about, then they may behave differently (this is called **demand characteristics**).

Right of withdrawal

This means giving people the opportunity to leave the study at any time if they no longer want to take part.

This means that they can withdraw from the study and that the researcher will not use any of their data. Participants should be told abut their right to withdraw and if they are being paid for participating they should be informed that they will still be paid if they drop out.

Harm to participants

Participants should not be harmed, either physically or psychologically when participating in research.

In practice, however, participants often suffer distress or pain during the course of an experiment and his is considered acceptable as long as:

- the harm is unavoidable, and the study could not be carried out in any other way;
- the harm is short-term and relatively minor;
- the participants are not allowed to leave the study with any residual harm or distress.

Debriefing

Debriefing means telling the participants what the study was about before they leave .

One way to make sure that participants leave the experiment without suffering on-going distress or harm is to debrief, i.e. tell them exactly what the experiment was all about and reassure them that their behaviour in the experiment was 'normal'.

Confidentiality

Means keeping personal information confidential.

It is clearly important that personal information given by participants during the course of a study, or the results of tests taken by participants, are kept confidential. Results can be published, but they must not identify the individual, either by name, or by any other way. Participants should always be told that personal data will be kept confidential.

Observational Research

Studies that observe people in their natural environment must respect the privacy and psychological well-being of the individuals studied. Participants should either: (i) give their consent to being observed or (ii) be observed in a situation where they would normally expect to be observed by strangers. E.g. in a public park or on a bus.

Milgram (1963) Study of Obedience to Authority

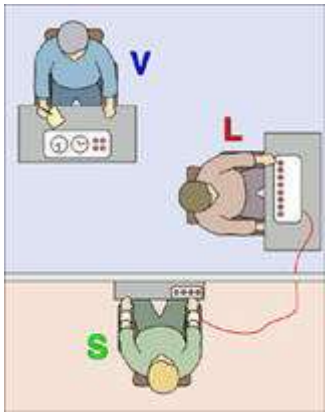
If a person in a position of authority ordered you to deliver a 400-volt electrical shock to another person, would you follow orders? Most people would answer this question with an adamant no, but Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted a series of obedience experiments during the 1960s that demonstrated surprising results. These experiments offer a powerful and disturbing look into the power of authority and obedience.

Introduction to the Milgram Experiment

Milgram started his experiments 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 1974 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 all accomplices?"

Method Used in the Milgram Experiment

The participants in the Milgram experiment were 40 men recruited using newspaper ads. In exchange for their participation, each person was paid $4.50. Milgram developed an intimidating shock generator, with shock levels starting at 30 volts and increasing in 15-volt increments all the way up to 450 volts. The many switches were labeled with terms including "slight shock," "moderate shock" and "danger: severe shock." The final two switches were labeled simply with an ominous "XXX."



Each participant took the role of a "teacher" who would then deliver a shock to the "student" every time an incorrect answer was produced. While the participant believed that he was delivering real shocks to the student, the student was actually a confederate in the experiment who was simply pretending to be shocked.

As the experiment progressed, the participant would hear the learner plead to be released or even complain about a heart condition. Once the 300-volt level had been reached, the learner banged on the wall and demanded to be released. Beyond this point, the learner became completely silent and refused to answer any more questions. The experimenter then instructed the participant to treat this silence as an incorrect response and deliver a further shock.

Most participants asked the experimenter whether they should continue. The experimenter issued a series of commands to prod the participant along:

1. "Please continue."
2. "The experiment requires that you continue."
3. "It is absolutely essential that you continue."
4. "You have no other choice, you must go on."

Results of the Milgram Experiment

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 Milgram 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.

Of the 40 participants in the study, 26 delivered the maximum shocks while 14 stopped before reaching the highest levels. 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.

Because of concerns about the amount of anxiety experienced by many of the participants, all subjects were debriefed at the end of the experiment to explain the procedures and the use of deception. However, many critics of the study have argued that many of the participants were still confused about the exact nature of the experiment. Milgram later surveyed the participants and found that 84% were glad to have participated, while only 1% regretted their involvement.

Discussion of the Milgram Experiment

While Milgram's research raised serious ethical questions about the use of human subjects in psychology experiments, his results have also been consistently replicated in further experiments. Thomas Blass (1999) reviewed further research on obedience and found that Milgram's findings hold true in other experiments.

Why did so many of the participants in this experiment perform a seemingly sadistic act on the instruction of an authority figure? According to Milgram, there are a number of situational factors that can explain such high levels of obedience:

- The physical presence of an authority figure dramatically increased compliance.
- The fact that the study was sponsored by Yale (a trusted and authoritative academic institution) led many participants to believe that the experiment must be safe.
- The selection of teacher and learner status seemed random.
- Participants assumed that the experimenter was a competent expert.
- The shocks were said to be painful, not dangerous.

Later experiments conducted by Milgram indicated that the presence of rebellious peers dramatically reduced obedience levels. When other people refused to go along with the experimenters orders, 36 out of 40 participants refused to deliver the maximum shocks.

"Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority" (Milgram, 1974).

Milgram’s experiment has become a classic in psychology, demonstrating the dangers of obedience. While this experiment suggests that situational variables have a stronger sway than personality factors in determining obedience, other psychologists argue that obedience is heavily influenced by both external and internal factors, such as personal beliefs and overall temperament.