**Aims and Context**

The context of this study is that after the Second World War, people were horrified to discover the atrocities that had been committed by the Nazi regime. In particular they could not understand how seemingly ordinary Germans had obeyed such orders and murdered over 6 million Jewish people in the Holocaust.

Adorno (1950) defined the Authoritarian Personality, which means that people obey those they perceived to be of a higher authority to them, e.g. Hitler. During World War II the Nazis ordered German soldiers to torture and kill millions of Jews. It was supposed German people were inherently evil and had the Authoritarian Personality, so they were more likely to be prejudiced against minority groups.

The aim of Milgram’s study into obedience was to explore the circumstances under which people might be encouraged to act against their conscience by inflicting harm on others. Obedience to authority means compliance with the demands of an authority figure (e.g. parent, employer, policeman etc.). It is the abdication of personal responsibility due to social power. If an experiment could get a majority of volunteers to administer agonising shocks (bordering on lethal) to another volunteer in a psychological laboratory, then the Nazi regime could certainly have made German soldiers kill innocent people.

Milgram aimed to test the ‘Germans are different’ hypothesis, which was a belief that obedience can be explained by innate factors e.g. genes. In order to test this he used American citizens to see how they reacted when they inflicted suffering on others, like the German soldiers did in Nazi concentration camps.

**Procedures**

Milgram placed an advertisement in a New Haven newspaper in the U.S.A. From those who responded, he selected 40 men aged 20-50 years old. The advertisement led the participants to believe they would be taking part in research regarding memory and learning. These men had a range of jobs – both skilled and unskilled. Each man was paid $4.50 for his participation in the study by Yale University.

The study consisted of a laboratory experiment (however there was no particular independent variable) at Yale University, when participants arrived they met the ‘experimenter’, a man around 30 years old dressed in a lab coat. Another participant was at the lab, a likeable 47-year-old accountant called ‘Mr. Wallace’ – in fact both men were working for Milgram. The participants drew lots to decide who the teacher/learner was –