Milgram (1963): “Behavioural Study Of Obedience”

**Methodology**
The study was conducted in a laboratory environment, although it was a controlled observation.

**Subjects:**
- 40 males (aged 20-50 years) from New Haven
- Subjects were obtained by a newspaper ad and direct mail solicitation
- They believed that they were to participate in a study of memory and learning at Yale University
- Had a range of jobs; high school teacher, postal clerks, engineers
- The range of educational levels from one who has not finished school to one who had a doctorate
- Subjects were paid $4.50 for participation
- However, they were told that payment was to come to the lab

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupations</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-50</th>
<th>% Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worker, skilled and unskilled</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales and Business</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Total (age)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Participants</td>
<td>40</td>
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</tbody>
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**Procedure**
1. Greeted by the “experimenter” a 31-year-old man (grey coat)
2. Another “participant” – mild-mannered and likeable 47-year-old accountant (conference of Milgram)
3. Drew slips of paper from a hat to determine who would be the learner
4. The drawing was rigged so that the naïve subject was always the learner (Both slips contained the word “teacher”)
5. Both taken to another room and the learner was strapped in an “electric chair”
6. The experimenter told the straps were to prevent excessive movement while being shocked
7. An electrode attached and paste was applied “to avoid blisters and burns”
8. Both told that electrodes were attached to the shock generator
9. “Although the shocks can be extremely painful, they cause no permanent tissue damage.”

**Findings**
**Quantitative Data:**
- Prior to the study, Milgram asked 14 Yale seniors, all psychology majors, to reflect carefully the detailed description of the experimental situation
- Had to predict the behaviour of 100 hypothetical subjects
- They estimated that 0-3% of the participants would administer 450 volts
- The actual study showed this was an underestimate as 5 (12.5%) of the participants refused to continue (All participants continued to this point) – Break off point
- A total of 26 of the 40 participants had continued to this end (65%) and gave full 450 volts
- Therefore, 35% defied the experimenter’s authority (14)
- 2 broke off at 330 volts

**Conclusions**
- Milgram concluded that it is the circumstances in which the participants found themselves that amalgamated to create a situation in which it proved difficult to disobey
- 13 elements contributed to this level of obedience
- For example, the location of the study at a prestigious university provided authority (“institution of unimpeachable reputation”)
- Participants assumed that the experimenter knew what he was doing and had a worthy purpose so should be followed
- The participant didn’t wish to disrupt the study because he felt under obligation to the experimenter due to his voluntary consent to take part