Milgram Experiment

Name

Institution Affiliation

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Introduction

The Milgram Experiment was research carried out in 1963 by Yale psychologist and pioneer Stanley Milgram with the objective of investigating the boundary that exists between personal morality and compliance with authority (Braunwarth, 2014). Stanley explored rationalizations for genocidal acts that were committed by those indicted at the Nuremberg War Criminal Proceedings of World War II. Most of the accused defended their actions claiming that they were centered on obedience and were just observing the instructions given by their seniors.

These tests started in 1961, a year after Adolf Eichmann was tried in Jerusalem (Braunwarth, 2014). There were questions that Milgram was trying to answer through the experiment: 1. Was it true that Eichmann and his million co-conspirators in the Holocaust just trying to respect the order of their superiors? 2. Could all of them be referred to as accomplices?

Milgram needed to examine whether the Germans were principally submissive to authority figures because this was frequently used to justify the Nazi killings in World War II (NPR, 2013). Milgram's experiments involved multiple variants and over 700 participants that were chosen through newspaper adverts that asked for involvement in a study of scholarship at Yale University (Braunwarth, 2014).

The method of study involved a procedure where the subject was put together with another individual, and they allegedly randomized the selection for who would be the "teacher" and who would be the "learner." However, the selection was fixed in such a way that the learner was always one of Milgram's associates (acting as an actual participant) and the participant was always the teacher.

The learner (Milgram's partner, Mr. Wallace) was put in a room and electrodes were connected to his arms. Meanwhile, the researcher and the teacher entered into a room right next to the learner's room that had an electric shock initiator and some switches that were arranged from 15 volts to 375 to 450 volts (Braunwarth, 2014). The subject was required to deliver a shock if the learner gave wrong answers. With increasing levels of pain with the shock, the learner would demand that the experiment stop. Nevertheless, the researcher would command the teacher to continue. About 60% of individuals would submit to the researcher and continue delivering the shock to the learner.

Impacts of the Study on Social Psychology

The inferences that were made from the Milgram experiments suggested that people would be willing to observe the authority even if it led to the infliction of injury to another. This revolutionized the field of social psychology in that it transformed the way psychologists would conduct research (Black, 2014). In the earlier years, psychoanalysts saw it unnecessary to subject participants to psychological pressure.

Criticisms and limitations of study. There are several criticisms and limitations of Milgram's experiment, and most of them are about the ethical infringements that were committed by the researcher. To begin with, Milgram deceived his participants into believing that the study was about the "consequence of penalty on learning" and that they were delivering real electrical shocks to the subjects. Milgram deemed this essential for the investigation because if there were knowledge of the actual intentions of his experiment, he would need to apply demand characteristics which would render the outcomes of the study worthless (Griggs & Whitehead, 2015). Secondly, there are concerns over the participant's right to pull out. Even though he firmly affirms that there was freedom to withdraw from the experiment when desired,

there were arguments over this on two grounds. The first reason is that the participants were receiving payment for participating in the investigation, and this might have warranted them to persist. Secondly, prompts that were given by the authority like requesting them to continue might have led them to feel as if they had to go on.

Social psychology theories that pertain to the observed impact.

Agency Theory

This concept was developed by Stanley Milgram who explained the underlying factors determining obedience. Stanley affirms that a human being can be in two states: autonomous (having free will and feeling accountable for our actions) and agentic (feeling that other people are answerable to the outcomes of our deeds) (Hoffman, Myerberg, & Morawski, 2015). People that are obeyed are regularly recognized authority figures such as law enforcement, parents, and teachers.

Theory of conformism

This discovery is established on the Solomon Asch conformity experiments that explain the underlying association between the individual and the group (Hoffman, Myerberg, & Morawski, 2015). It demonstrates that a subject that lacks the capacity nor skill for decision-making in a crisis will leave that power to the assemblage and the ranks within it.

Social influence

This is the modification of behavior that an individual instigates in another, purposely or inadvertently, because of the manner the transformed person identifies themselves in connection with the modifier, other persons, and the society (Black, 2014).

Three aspects relate to social influence

Conformity: this implies altering your behavior to fit in a group. This satisfies our need for self-regard and belonging in the effort to make friends and seek for approval. People will change their notions and ideals to be like their associates and revered leaders.

Compliance: this relates to doing something that is requested by another person. Although an individual could decide to observe or not, the consideration of castigation and social reward influences them to comply even when they do not want to do so.

Obedience: this means submitting to an instruction from an individual that is acknowledged as authority. When complying, one has alternatives. When obeying, one trusts that there is no other choice. Most managers and military commanders are aware of the power of obedience.

Implications on society. The Milgram experiment elaborates on a few concerns: the importance we put on authority and the need to educate on proper decision-making (Drinkard, 2017). People are capable of doing things that are against their values because they are not aware of any other available alternative. Human beings are able of committing brutal, damaging, and irrational acts to other people that they do not resent provided there is an ideal situation. The biggest lesson that can be learned in this scenario is that we should know how to oppose. This does not imply that begins to be detestable or disrespectful to police. This means that people should know what to do and how to react when being wrongful. One should not blindly accept something harmful or illicitly coerced by peers.

Personal Reactions

Milgram's experiment was able to elicit some reactions in me. First of all, I felt terrible that the participant obeyed the experimenter and continued to deliver the shocks to the learner. This was also shocking because it shows that human beings can be forced into torturing and

harming others. Secondly, I had a startling revelation about the way we can think and act. I realized that most people do not know what they are supposed to do and ultimately end up doing the worst things. Thirdly, upon assessing the experiment, I saw it wrong that Milgram lied to the participants that they were delivering the shock to the learner, and were oblivious to the fact that it was Milgram's partner. Nevertheless, Milgram conducted interviews on the participants to know about the impact of the deception. 83.7% revealed that they were happy to participate and 1.3% wished they were not part of it.

Lastly, learners were subjected to particularly worrying circumstances that could have resulted in psychological damage. Most of them were distraught. Symptoms that demonstrated stress in them included lip biting, quivering, and nervousness. Three of them exhibited uncontainable seizures and most requested to be permitted to halt the study.

Milgram defended himself contending that these were only temporary effects. The moment the participants were shown the truth and verified the state of the associate, their tension decreased. Moreover, Milgram cross-examined the participants a year after the experiment and established that many were glad to have participated. Nonetheless, he did reveal the truth to the participants after the investigation and checked up on them after some time to ensure that no damage was done.

He probed all of the participants right after the study and revealed the actual nature of the research. They were guaranteed that their conduct was natural and Milgram also reviewed them after a year and discovered that were no indications of permanent psychological damage. In reality, most of the participants (83.7%) stated that they were thrilled to have been part of his experiment.

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