CLASSICAL BOOK REVIEW

Resistance and Milgram's obedience studies in light of new research

Reviewed by **Majken Jul Sørensen**, *University of Karlstad, Sweden*

Stanley Milgram's studies of obedience to authority from the early 1960s are perhaps the most well-known social-psychological experiments in history. Together with Solomon Asch's studies about conformity and Philip Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment, they have informed generations of students in psychology and sociology and found their way into popular culture. Most importantly, the experiments have contributed to shaping dominant perceptions regarding 'human nature' in our societies. Perceptions about obedience and resistance are closely and inevitably interlinked, making it of utmost importance to re-read Milgram in light of the newest research about his experiments (for an overview see Reicher, Haslam, & Miller, 2014). With the opening of Milgram's personal archive and the possibility of re-analysing the original tape recordings of the experiments, new possibilities for understanding resistance emerge. In this review I will focus on what we can still learn from Milgram's 1974 book 'Obedience to authority', and what subsequent research has found about resistance and the validity of his studies.

Resistance in Milgram's experiments

Imagine you walk into the prestigious Yale University in 1961. You have volunteered for a psychological experiment about memory and learning and when you arrive at the appointed time, you meet another volunteer. A man in a lab coats tells you that the purpose of the experiment is to see what effect punishment has on learning, and that one of you will be the teacher and the other the learner. You draw lots to decide who will have which role, and you find yourself as the teacher. The learner is taken to another room and is strapped to a chair and has an electrode attached to him. As the teacher, you take your place in front of an impressive shock machine with 30 switches ranging from 15 volt to 450 volts, with intervals of 15 volts. There are eight labels on the switches, ranging from 'slight shock' over 'strong shock' to 'danger: severe shock'. The last two are

marked with 'XXX' (Milgram 2004 [1974]: 22). The man in the lab coat gives you a shock of 45 volts so you can feel for yourself what it is like.

The learner has to memorize pairs of words, and you are busy reading words and keeping up with the requirements of the experiment. Every time the learner gets an answer wrong, you have to administer a shock. The learner often gets the answer wrong, and every time you have to increase the level of the shock. When you reach 75 volts the learner grunts and at 150 volts he demands to be let out. Every time you hesitate, the experimenter says 'please continue'. If you still hesitate or raise objections, you are told that 'the experiment requires that you continue'. If you point out that the learner seems to be in pain, the experimenter says that the shocks might be painful, but that the learner will suffer no permanent damage. If you ask who is responsible if anything happens to the man, the experimenter in the lab coat says he takes full responsibility. The experiment will only end when you have pressed the maximum voltage three times or if you express your refusal to continue four times in a row. A total of 40 men participated in this condition, known as the 'baseline study'. Knowing that this is an experiment supposed to measure obedience to authority rather than memory and learning, most of us hope we would refuse to deliver any painful and potentially lethal shocks. However, 62% of the participants or 'research subjects' as they were called in Milgram's time went to the maximum 450 volts (Milgram, 2004 [1974]).

Milgram thought that he was measuring people's willingness to obey authority, and claimed his findings explained events such as the Nazi Holocaust (Milgram, 2004 [1974]). But is it this simple? First of all, as pointed out in the first critique already in 1964: The Nazis saw their victims as sub-humans, and within their frame of reference, they were not doing anything wrong. In contrast, many of Milgram's participants were deeply concerned about the wellbeing of the learner (Baumrind, 1964: 423).

The condition described above (voice feedback, condition 2) and a similar one where the learner has a heart condition are the most well-known. However, Milgram did 23 different variations, involving 780 participants from New Haven and the surrounding area. 40 of these were women, the rest were men. When I became interested in studying resistance, a mentor suggested I should read Milgram's 1974 book, since it documents much more resistance than what is commonly known. And indeed it does, something which makes both the 'baseline' and many of the variations highly interesting for resistance research. I remember being especially inspired by

the condition called 'group pressure to disobey' (number 17), where there are three people administrating the shocks, two of them confederates of the experimenter alongside the real participant in Milgram's experiment. In this condition, 90% refused to continue when they saw someone else refuse. I thought this was promising for resistance—if you can just get someone to start disobeying, it is likely that others will follow their lead. However, the downside is of course that in the opposite condition, group pressure is used to increase obedience.

In Milgram's understanding, obedience is a question of either/or. If the 'research subjects' were categorised as obedient, it meant they went all the way to the end and gave the maximum shock three times. It does not matter what kind of objections they had along the way. In order to be categorised as 'defiant', the participants had to refuse to continue four times in a row at some point during the experiment. However, another very interesting aspect of the 1974 book is that Milgram describes much subtle and discreet resistance that we would now call everyday resistance. For instance, many teachers would try to help the learner by emphasising the correct word, or they would press the lever as briefly as possible, in order to try to reduce the pain for the learner. Milgram himself recounts these instances (Milgram 2004 [1974]: 160-161), but without considering it disobedience because the participants nevertheless continued to give the shocks. Many of the participants who continued also argued with the experimenter, for instance 'Fred Prozi' who was recorded on video and became the embodiment of the 'obedience' experiments when they became public. The transcript in Milgram's book clearly shows Prozi's many attempts to extract himself from the experiment, although unsuccessfully (Milgram 2004 [1974]: 74-78). This indicates that the border between obedience and resistance is seldom as clear cut as it might seem at first sight, an understanding now firmly established within resistance studies. It also suggests that many other factors than 'automatic obedience' play a role in the experiments.

Some of the variations were quite similar to the one described above and similar percentages reached the maximum voltage. In the heart trouble variation, 65% reached the maximum. Milgram also moved the experiment from Yale to an industrial area in nearby Bridgeport, where 'obedience' was then reduced to 47%, suggesting that the aura of expertise associated with Yale played a role. But some of the conditions had far bigger differences, for instance involving two experimenters who give conflicting instructions. This condition resulted in 100% refusal to continue as long as both experimenters

remained in the room. In another version, the experimenter is called away by a rigged phone call, and the participant is told to call him on the phone if he has any questions. Here 75% are defiant (meaning they end the experiment) if the experimenter remains absent. However, this condition also provides more examples of everyday resistance, since those who did continue lied about how high the shocks they gave were. Milgram himself recounts how some of them repeatedly administered the lowest level in spite of assuring the experimenter on the phone that they were complying fully (Milgram 2004 [1974]: 63). If you look at all the variations combined, more than 60% of the participants did not continue to the end, the opposite result of what is commonly known (Perry, 2012: 9).

Gina Perry's book 'Behind the Shock Machine'

Right from the start, there have always been those critical of Milgram, but in the last decade this critique has been reinforced by the possibility of accessing Milgram's archive, including the sound recordings of the actual experiments and the immediate follow-up interview and 'de-hoaxing', as Milgram called it. Gina Perry was originally interested in finding out what happened to the participants in Milgram's experiment after it was over, asking herself how they made sense of what they have been though. Her book 'Behind the Shock Machine' (Perry, 2012) ought to be compulsory reading for anyone making reference to Milgram's experiments or trying to claim anything about 'human nature' based on the results. The book includes interviews with six of Milgram's participants who she managed to track down and who were willing to talk about their experience, but the book is so much more. A page-turner with the qualities of a detective story, the book makes a very compelling case for numerous problems with Milgram's experiments.

Milgram has always portrayed himself as a neutral observer who was simply recording 'natural' human behaviour and was personally shocked by what he found. However, Perry paints the portrait of a very ambitious, creative young assistant professor at the bottom of the hierarchy at Yale University. Milgram was extremely aware that headline grabbing results could ensure his future career. He ran several pre-studies which gave him clues about what it would take to get shockingly high levels of obedience, but without making everyone obey (See also Russell (2011) for this point). For instance, Perry describes how the design of the shock machine gradually developed to achieve the desired level of obedience. In the prototype

developed by his students, the machine only had 12 switches, with bigger intervals between the shocks. Milgram changed this to 30 switches, with only 15-volt increments. As we shall see in relation to Burger's partial replication of the experiments in 2006, the small increments are a very important factor for making people continue. Another design change from the prototype was to label the last switch 'XXX', something which leaves much more room for interpretation than the previous 'extreme shock – danger' (Perry, 2012: 50).

Milgram's problematic theory of the 'agentic state' and a new alternative theory: Identification based followership

Milgram's book is a fascinating read, and we still have much to learn from it, as long as we remain aware what Milgram was actually doing and keep in mind what later studies and theorising have found. The book includes detailed descriptions of the experiments themselves and the various reactions of his 'research subjects'. Much of this is coloured by his views of his participants and his desire to put forward a certain view of 'human nature'. Nevertheless, it is possible to set aside these matters and find the facts about how the experiments were carried out and what people actually said and did.

When it comes to theorizing about his findings, Milgram's book is a disappointment. It took more than 10 years from Milgram conducting the studies to the publication of his book, and one reason was his struggle to come up with a theoretical explanation for what his experiments had documented. In fact, his first article was rejected twice because Milgram had no theoretical explanation for what he found (Perry, 2012: 210). In his book, Milgram finally suggested a theory of what he called an 'agentic state'. The theory section is very short, but according to Milgram, people who obeyed slipped into a state of mind where they surrendered to authority and no longer saw themselves as responsible for their own actions. However, as Jetten and Mols (2014) have summarised, this theorising about 'slipping into authority' is both incomplete and inconsistent with what Milgram writes about in other parts of the book.

Taking incompleteness first, the theory of the 'agentic state' does not account for the people who refused to continue to the end, which is 35% in the baseline condition, and almost everyone in some of the other conditions. Simply judging from Milgram's own accounts, clearly many of the participants who obeyed were not in a state of mind where they

automatically and uncritically obeyed authority. On the contrary, Milgram's own descriptions show that people were questioning the experimenter and expecting him to put an end to it (see for instance Milgram 2004 [1974]: 74-78).

Jetten and Mols (2014) also point out that Milgram is inconsistent in his explanations of the participants' behaviour. In chapter 1, he claims 'It is the extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any length on the command of an authority that constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact most urgently demanding explanation' (Milgram 2004 [1974]:7). This is the agentic state as it is presented in the theory chapter. In contrast, when he explains what he calls 'binding factors' that made the participants continue administrating the shocks, he writes that the way the experiment situation was constructed made it almost impossible for the participants to defy the experimenter (Milgram 2004 [1974]: 151).

In recent years, Haslam, Reicher and various co-writers have suggested a theory which is more convincing than Milgram's, which they call 'identification-based followership'(Reicher et al., 2014). Rather than studying automatic obedience to authority, they think Milgram was documenting how the participants were cooperating with the experimenter. They base this on the fact that people would agree to continue the experiment only when the experimenter used prods about the scientific value of the experiment, not when he gave a direct order. The prod 'The experiment requires that you continue' convinced many to continue, but when the experimenter said they had no choice but to continue, people would refuse. This line of thinking is summarised nicely in the essay 'Contesting the "nature" of conformity: What Milgram and Zimbardo's studies really show' (Haslam & Reicher, 2012). Here the authors also point to the problems with the conclusions drawn from the Stanford Prison experiment carried out by Philip Zimbardo in 1971. This experiment is almost as (in)famous as Milgram's, but just as flawed when it comes to the idea of automatic obedience to authority.

Did the 'subjects' believe they were hurting the learner?

The theory of identification-based followership is more convincing as an argument than Milgram's idea of automatic obedience to authority in the 'agentic state', but the research of Haslam, Reicher and their associates is still based on the understanding that the participants really believed that they

were harming someone. But did the participants buy the set-up? Although Milgram went to great lengths to ensure that the deception was convincing, and himself claimed that nobody doubted it, this is hard to believe today. Hollander and Turowetz (2017) have analysed 91 interviews which took place immediately after the experiments, which include 46 'obedient' and 45 'defiant' participants. What they found was that among those who were 'obedient', the most common reason given for continuing the experiment was that 'the learner was not really being harmed'. These statements were made before they were fully debriefed (for many it would take almost a year before they had a full debrief), and before they had had time to think through what had happened. 72% (33 out of the 46) stated they did not believe the learner was really being harmed. Three other types of explanations were that they were following instructions (27), the importance of the experiment (11) and that they were fulfilling a contract (5) (the total is more than 46, since some participants gave more than one account). That only 11 spontaneously mention the importance of the experiment means that Haslam et al.'s theory about engaged followership cannot be the only one.

Hollander and Turowetz use ethnomethodology to explain how the participants in the experiments were trying to make sense of what was happening in a highly stressful and very uncertain situation. Ethnomethodology was developed by sociologist Harold Garfinkel to study how people make sense of the world in their everyday lives. Most famous is probably his 'breaching exercises', where he asked his students to seek out ordinary situations and behave in a way that did not belong in that context. What happens if you visit your parents, but behave as if you are a stranger? This way, Garfinkel and others working in the ethnomethodological tradition have highlighted how making sense of the world is a continuing, ongoing process that we engage in all the time. The world only seems ordinary because we are skilled at navigating it. When we encounter other people, we trust them to be who they seem to be. When we walk into the store to buy goods, we trust the salesperson to really be someone willing to sell us what is in the store. If she suddenly refuses to hand over the goods after we have paid the bill, we get bewildered and confused and try to find sensible explanations for this behaviour (she must be joking). Likewise, when we show up as volunteers for a psychological experiment about learning and memory at a well-respected university, we trust the experimenter to be a responsible person who knows what he is doing when he continues to say that 'the shocks might be painful, but there is no permanent damage, please

continue'. The ethnomethodological line of argument with Milgram was also suggested by Swedish social psychologist Johan Asplund (1987). In his theory of what he calls 'social responsivity', Asplund argues that human beings are inherently playful and responsive to other human beings (Asplund, 1987). It is through interaction with other human beings we really become alive. In a chapter about Milgram's experiments, Asplund points out that none of the participants refused to start the experiment after they heard about the set-up—they were all willing to take part in the game Milgram had created. This fact says a lot about how the participants were viewing the situation they were about to enter.

What Hollander and Turowetz found when they analysed further the accounts of the people who had said that they did not really believe that the learner was being harmed was that many of them trusted the experimenter. They thought that if the learner had been in real danger, the experiment would not have continued. For instance, they believed that Yale would never risk hurting anyone seriously, or they reacted to the fact that the experimenter showed no hesitation at all when the screams started. Some participants thought the learner was overreacting, maybe because he was more sensitive to shocks than what is normal. Some participants also had doubts about one or more aspects of the cover story: one person thought when the learner fell silent that someone must have let him out, and another did not think the shocks were as high as it said on the machine. This does not mean that they doubted the whole story, but they used these inconsistencies in the experimental set-up to try to make sense of what was going on (Hollander & Turowetz 2017).

Questioning the believability of the set-up is not new. When Milgram applied for more funding from the National Science Foundation in 1962, representatives from the funder came to Yale to see for themselves how the experiments were conducted. The funding was declined, and among other things the representative wrote it was likely that some of the participants understood there was a 'catch' (Perry, Brannigan, Wanner, & Stam, 2020: 92). In 1968, Orne and Holland published their criticism of Milgram's experiments from a methodological angel (Orne & Holland, 1968). They wrote that some of the participants must have had doubts about the set-up, based on the incongruity of the situation. To start with, it must appear strange that there is nothing in the task the teachers are given which could not have been carried out by the experimenter himself. This raises the question of what he needs the teacher for, if not to study him? Secondly,

the experimenter shows no sign of reaction when the learner seems to be suffering. Milgram sees this as automatic obedience to authority, but as Orne and Holland write, this 'can with equal plausibility be interpreted as a significant cue to the true state of affairs – namely that no one is actually being hurt' (Orne & Holland, 1968). Equally puzzling is the fact that the learner only screams and demands to be let out right after he is given the shocks—in between them he is silent (Orne & Holland, 1968). At the time of writing Orne and Holland did not have the evidence that Hollander and Turowetz have today, and Milgram's book with all its resistance had not been published yet, only two articles.

The issues raised by Orne and Holland are also supported by Perry's findings from the archives. For instance, just three weeks after the experiments began, a man wrote to Milgram that he had figured out during the experiment that he was the one being studied, based among other things on the fact that the learner was rather disinterested while the instructions were given, something that did not seem believable for someone about to take place in a 'strange experiment' (Perry, 2012).

Perry, Brannigan, Wanner and Stam (2020) are investigating further whether the participants actually thought they were harming another human being in their article 'Credibility and incredulity in Milgram's obedience experiments: A Reanalysis of an unpublished paper'. Already in 1962, Milgram's research assistant Taketo Murata was asked to link the responses from the questionnaire Milgram sent to the participants in July 1962 (after all the experiments were finished) to how the same individual had behaved in the lab. Murata's research paper was never published, but Perry et al (2020) have re-analysed the data and conclude that among those who fully believed the shocks to be painful, obedience was much lower than among those who did not believe the set-up. Perry et al. also convincingly explain how Milgram himself wrote misleadingly about how people had responded regarding the believability of the experiment in his 1974 book. In the questionnaire, the respondents could choose between five different options, ranging from 'I was certain the learner was not getting any shocks' to 'I fully believed the learner was getting painful shocks'. Milgram writes that 'Three-quarters of the subjects (the first two categories) by their own testimony acted under the belief that they were administrating painful shocks' (Milgram 2004 [1974]: 172). However, a closer look at the table Milgram himself provides will show any reader that in the three-quarters, Milgram has also included those who answered, 'Although I had some doubts, I believed the learner was *probably*

getting the shocks' (Milgram 2004 [1974]: 172, italics in original). This way, Milgram misleadingly turned about half of his participants into three-quarters.

Together with the questionnaire, the participants were also finally given a full debrief and informed about the true purpose of the experiment. Of course, some of those who answered they had doubts about the set-up might have re-constructed their memory of the event in light of their new knowledge about the purpose of experiment in order to maintain self-respect. However, Hollander and Turowetz's (2017) study of the interviews recorded straight after the experiment do not have the same level of post-facto explanation potential, since the participants had no time to think through what had happened in the experiment before they answered. Ironically, while Milgram dismissed the questionnaire responses from those who claimed they did not fully believe the set-up as 'not reliable', he did not hesitate to use data from the same questionnaire when he claimed that 84% 'were glad to have been in the experiment' (Milgram 2004 [1974]: 195).

During his lifetime, Milgram always accused anybody who was critical of his experiments of being uncomfortable with the results, suggesting that they were 'shooting the messenger'. This dismissal of legitimate critique is of course very problematic, and it is really a shame that Milgram was so focused on putting forward one understanding of the experiments in order to get maximum attention. It is even more regrettable when we can now see from the archive that privately, Milgram was much less certain of himself and how to interpret what he had found (Perry, 2012).

Burger's modern replication

In 2006, Jerry M. Burger replicated a condition in Milgram's study which is similar to the baseline condition described above and which had similar results of 'obedience', but where the learner mentions he has a heart condition. Burger had ethical permission to conduct the study and did a thorough screening of his participants, excluding anyone who might have a negative reaction to participating in the study or had heard about Milgram. However, most important when it comes to ethics, he stopped the experiment at the switch for 150 volts, when the learner is first demanding to be let out. Burger argues that one can still learn a lot from this replication, since 150 volts is a very crucial point in the experiment. Among those who continued beyond

this point in Milgram's experiments, the large majority (79%) also continued to the very end (Burger, 2009).

Burger's hypothesis was that his replication would result in similar levels of 'obedience' as Milgram's original experiments. The 45 years that had passed would not make any difference, because Milgram had created a situation that made it very difficult for the participants to refuse. Indeed, 70% of the 40 participants in the replication were prepared to continue after 150 volts and had to be stopped by the experimenter (Burger, 2009). Burger found no variation when it came to gender, and could also conclude that although some participants felt more concern for the learner than others, feelings of concern did not result in action. Burger (2014) discusses four important situational features of the experiment which explain why the results should not surprise us, although they might unsettle us. It is worth looking at these four features in more detail, since they go a long way in explaining what happened:

First of all, the gradual increase of the shocks is a very important feature of the experiment. Although it can only be speculation, Burger's guess is that most people would have refused if the first lever they had been asked to press had been the 450 volts with the text 'XXX'. The reason is that the 15-volt shock seems harmless, and at that point the participants had no reason to say no. By the time the learner demands to be let out, at 150 volts, the teacher has already pressed 10 levers. One reason it is difficult to quit is that the teacher will now have to justify to himself why he has given these 10 shocks. This is known as the foot-in-the-door effect, and from other areas of psychology it is well known that starting out with small increments can be an effective strategy to prepare people to take on bigger responsibility in the same area. A reason is that people change the view of themselves, in this case they are now someone who cooperates with the experimenter (Burger, 2014).

A second feature of the situation that Burger points towards is the novelty of the situation and the lack of normative information. Most participants had probably never thought of the possibility that they would be in a situation like this and how they would react. When we find ourselves in unfamiliar situations, we are likely to search for information about the right thing to do, for instance from people who have been in the situation before us or are an expert in the area. Again, it is no surprise that the participants in both Milgram's and Burger's studies turned to the experimenter for

information. He was the expert and could be expected to know what to do when the learner seemed to be in pain. As Burger writes:

> When looked at this way, we might say that Milgram's participants went along with the experimenter's instructions not because they were following orders from an authority figure, but because they were relying on a reasonable strategy to determine how they were supposed to act in this novel situation (Burger, 2014: 494).

Indeed, Burger and colleagues' detailed analysis of his participants' explanations for why they continued show that when the last of Milgram's prods were used (You have no other choice, you must go on), not a single person continued. The prods which were effective in making people continue were the first two ('please continue' or 'the experiment requires that you continue'), prods which have little to do with orders, but are requests for cooperation (Burger, Girgis, & Manning, 2011: 464). This is a quite startling result which raises the question of whether Milgram was measuring obedience at all.

The third feature which Milgram built into his experiment and which Burger replicated, which makes it unsurprising that so many people 'obeyed', was the opportunity to deny or diffuse responsibility. If the participants asked who would be responsible for any harm, the experimenter repeatedly assured them that he was responsible. Thus, although one might consider this a shortcoming of people's morals, it should not be made equivalent to obedience, since it is not an order.

The last aspect of the situation Burger considers an important feature is the lack of opportunity to reflect on the situation. The experiments were conducted 'at a brisk pace' and if the participant showed any sign of hesitation, he would immediately be urged on with the first of the prods. Additionally, being a teacher was a challenging job that required a lot of attention. Teachers were busy reading words, checking if the answer was correct and announcing the right answer, informing what the next level of shock was and pushing the lever. As Burger writes, '[w]e can only imagine how participants would have acted if the experimenter had responded to their initial reluctance by saying, 'Before we go on, why don't you take 10 minutes to think about what you want to do?' (Burger, 2014: 497). Burger himself think few would have chosen to continue.

Combined, these four situational features make it more difficult to refuse the experimenter. It also illustrates that that although it is possible to create situations where people will commit cruel acts, it might not be as easy as it seems at first glance.

More focus on resistance

The renewed interest in Milgram's studies after the opening of the archive also means that the participants' resistance in the experiments is finally getting the attention it deserves. In addition to the aspects about everyday resistance mentioned above, there are several new and interesting studies concerning resistance based on the old recordings. One of them is Hollander's conversation-analytical study where he identifies six strategies of resistance ranging from the less explicit, such as silence and hesitation, to the more explicit attempts to actually stop the experiment (Hollander, 2015). Another qualitative study relying on transcripts from some of the experiments examined the strategies used by the participants who were actually successful in ending the experiments. Using rhetorical and discursive psychology in his analysis, Gibson (2014) found that one effective strategy which could be applied in a number of different ways was reference to 'knowledge'. This could be to claim to know something about the danger of shocks or the ineffectiveness of punishment on learning. Another option involving 'knowledge' was for the participants to construct enough uncertainty about what they didn't know to justify not continuing the experiment. A third option was to expect the experimenter to 'know enough' to understand that it was not possible to continue (Gibson, 2014).

In his modern replication, Burger also built in a variation where he had expected to find more people ending the experiment when they saw someone else stop, just as in Milgram's experiment 17. However, the variation is quite different from Milgram's 'peer-pressure to disobey'. Where Milgram had his confederates loudly disapproving of the experiment and remaining in the room, Burger's setup was this: The participant and a confederate of the experimenter arrive at the same time, the confederate is given the role as teacher 1 and the real participant as teacher 2. The confederate, teacher 1, starts the experiment in the ordinary way, while teacher 2 sits next to him/her and observes without having any task. At 75 volts the confederate hesitates, and at 90 volts stops the experiment after two prods have been used. Based on Burger's description, the confederate's termination of the

experiment sounds rather uneventful, with the most dramatic comment being 'I don't think I can do this'. The real participant, teacher 2, is then asked to continue where teacher 1 stopped. The confederate remains in the room but keeps silent and avoids eye contact with the participant. Burger did not find any statistical difference between his two conditions, though in the new condition he expected more people to resist. He interpreted the result as reflecting that the situation was not different enough from the original set-up (Burger 2009: 8). Burger does not discuss what it would have taken to create a situation with more discontinuation, something which is highly relevant for anyone interested in resistance and could be included in future replications.

Ethics

The first publication of Milgram's results in 1963 created headlines around the world with its 'shocking' results, but according to Perry they also sparked a debate about research ethics among psychologists. The critique was one factor in developing the now standard demands for informed consent and no harm of participants in research, leading to a change in the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association (Perry, 2012: 236). Thus, it ended an era where it was common to use deception in psychological experiments, and where there was little respect for the wellbeing of the 'research subjects'.

Diana Baumrind's critique of Milgram's methods was published 1964, where she rightly raised concern about the well-being of Milgram's participants. Although not unusual at the time, Milgram's treatment of his research participants is heart breaking. Milgram claimed in his 1963 article that he 'de-hoaxed' his participants immediately after the experiment, but according to Perry's research, this simply meant that 'his "dehoax" involved substituting one untruth for another' (Perry, 2012: 73). On the positive side, Milgram did ensure that the participants had a friendly reunion with the learner so they could see he was unharmed. Participants who continued to the end with the shocks were assured that their behaviour was normal, and those who had stopped along the way were told they had done the right thing. Thus far thus good. However, for many, the 'de-hoaxing' directly after the experiment consisted of a one-and-a-half-minute monologue from the experimenter (Perry, 2012: chapter 3). Six hundred people left the lab still thinking they had actually shocked a man, and it was only 11 months after the experiments began that they were told the full story.

Another important ethical aspect is how Milgram chose to present his findings. His personal interest in creating results which would end up in headlines around the world have had a devastating effect on 'ordinary people's' belief in human's capacities for 'obedience' and thus also for resistance. It matters how results are communicated. Jetten and Mols (2014) did a small study where they presented undergraduate students with Milgram's results in two different ways, and the presentation mattered for how hopeful the students felt afterwards. Those who were presented with some of the different variations of the experiment were more likely to agree with the statement 'The findings show that despite tremendous pressure, people can be strong', compared with those who were just told about the baseline condition (Jetten & Mols 2014: 597). Thus, the way Milgram's results are presented affects how students and the general public view 'human nature', something which has implications for understanding resistance.

Conclusions

Critique of Milgram has come from many different directions. Some have focused on how he was looking for results which would serve his own needs and how he framed what he found with this goal in mind. Others have pointed to the problematic ways he was treating his 'research subjects' or to the fact that many participants did not believe in the set-up. One kind of critique points out how the results themselves are meaningless without a theory to explain them, and come up with theoretical innovations such as 'Identification based followership'. Yet others focus on the situational features Milgram created, which actually mean that the results are not extraordinary at all. Instead they are simply an expected outcome when people are trying to make sense of an incomprehensible, stressful situation.

All these critiques have important observations to share and many of them are highly relevant for those of us aiming to understand resistance better. However, there is little doubt that some of the participants in Milgram's study were obeying orders from an authority figure and genuinely thought the shocks were painful to another human being. Reading Milgram critically should not make us ignore the obedience he did identify. Unpleasant as it might be, such obedience is not surprising. Our histories are filled with atrocities proving that ordinary people are capable of doing horribly things to each other under certain circumstances. However, our histories are also full of examples of the opposite—of people saving other human beings

in spite of risks to their own lives, and of people resisting participation in or witnessing of atrocities. Focusing exclusively on one or the other is dangerous and will not bring us closer to understanding the complexities of both obedience and resistance.

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