

# Replicating milgram: would people still obey today essay sample



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This essay will offer a critical analysis of the study 'Replicating Milgram' carried out by Jerry M. Burger looking principally at Burger's aims, methods and his subsequent findings and the complexities of extending research on destructive obedience in the context of contemporary ethical guidelines. It will then go on to look what ethical issues that he addresses with regard to Stanley Milgrams' original 1974 experiment. Furthermore the sample will be looked at, were his findings somewhat limited in size.

It will ascertain whether the study replicated the original well enough to accept that obedience levels are almost the same as they were 45 years ago, and did his study have applicability? Jerry M. Burger professor at Santa Clara University carefully designed a replication of the Stanley Milgrams obedience study carried out in 1974. He aimed for the experiment to be as close as possible to Milgrams original study while being modified so it could be fully ethically approved. He advertised for participants in local newspapers, online listing and in other community areas.

Interested individuals went through a series of screening procedures in order to eliminate those who may experience a negative reaction to the experiment. (Burger, 2009) Approximately 30% of applicants were excluded during the initial screening. (Burger, 2009) The final sample consisted of seventy participants, they ranged between the ages of twenty and eighty-one, whereas Milgram limited his sample to those aged fifty or younger. The sample consisted of a more ethnically diverse group of participants all from varying ethnic backgrounds and educational levels.

Volunteers were told that the experiment was looking at the effects of punishment on learning, and that they would receive \$50 for participating in the experiment in contrast to the \$4.50 Milgram offered. Selected individuals were informed on several times (twice in writing) that they could withdraw from the study at anytime and still receive the \$50. (Burger, 2009) The participant played the role of a teacher and the learner was a strooge. Participants were given a sample shock of 15v which is a very low voltage in comparison to Milgrams 45v.

The learner was then strapped to a chair which was connected to a shock generator. The teacher would ask the learner questions, when answered incorrectly they administered electric shocks of increasing voltage (no real shock was administered) up to 150v as apposed to Milgrams maximum of 450v. Burgers finding were very similar to that of Milgrams. Elms argued that the reason Burger did not find lower levels of obedience was because, in his efforts to get IRB approval for the study, he excluded many participants who probably would not have obeyed, they were exactly the type of people who would have disobeyed.

Using 15 instead of 45volts as a sample shock could have also had a significant impact on the findings because, it may have lead people to assume that the shock generator was not really that shocking. For all these reasons, the participant who survived Burger's double screening and who then faced the redefined shock board may have been considerably more obedient on average than an unscreened population. (Elm, 2009: 35)

On a positive note, Burgers sample was representative of the population with regards to the various ethnic backgrounds and educational levels. However the sample only consisted of seventy participants, making the sample somewhat limited in size. Stevenson states that a sample should be representative of the population and all the social groups within it, and that a study should have a large sample in order for results to be generalized in society with confidence.

Does this mean that Burgers sample was unrepresentative because he excluded anybody with a history of psychological or emotional problems in comparison to Milgram, who excluded nobody and his sample consisted of all different types of people and that his sample was representative of all social groups. Excluding people from the experiment was not the only safeguard Burger took in order to seek IRB approval and ensure the welfare of participants.

A clinical psychologist was appointed as the experimenter and was instructed to terminate the experiment if he saw any excessive levels of stress, whereas Milgram had an actor pose as an experimenter and encouraged participants to continue regardless of their mental or emotional state at the time. The clinical psychologist gave all participants a thorough debriefing. After having taken all the above safeguards I believe the study to be justified, Burger did not allow the experiment to psychologically affect any of the participants.

There are simply too many differences between this and the earlier obedience study to permit conceptually precise and useful comparisons”

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(Miller, 2009: 64) Even though some critics believe that Burgers study is not a true comparable to Milgrams due to the ethical issues he was faced with and the modifications he made in order to address them, his study does however have applicability to social psychologist, Burgers 'obedience lite' procedures can be used to explore further some of the situational variables studied by Milgram as well as to look at additional variables, such as situational and personality differences.

Having summarised and evaluated the study, It can be argued that according to the general consensus within the psychology arena, Burger's study faced criticism regarding an over usage of ethical safeguards and unnecessary over protection of the participants, the question remaining is, what would we as a society be more happy with. A psychologist like Milgram who gets excellent undisputable conclusions whilst disregarding the welfare of his participants, or Burger, a researcher who treats his participant's in a humane and ethical manner and puts them before the purity of his findings.

The study was well replicated in terms of methodology, but the process of selecting the sample did somewhat hinder the validity of his findings. All the changes that took place in the replication could arguably make it difficult to accept Burger's findings showing that people in today's society would condone excessive force in order to obtain obedience. But above all else his research has allowed psychologists to explore places they thought not possible.