

Unethical Experiments

Consider the following unethical experiments: the Milgram Study, and the Stanford Prison Experiment. Re-watch the videos if necessary. Respond to the following questions:

- Pick one of the 2 experiments, **briefly** summarize it. Identify: the research question, hypothesis, dependent variable, independent variable, and results.
- How did this experiment breach the APA and/or CPA code of ethics? Be specific.
- How did you feel about the experiment when you watched the video or read the story? What was your reaction to it? Explain.
- Have there been any updates to this experiment? If yes, how do the updates reframe our understanding of the experiment and results? How does this connect to the use of the scientific method?

Your response should be organized into 4 short paragraphs (one for each bullet point). Suggested total length is approximately 400 words. Please type your response in a Google Doc and keep your file safe. **Post your response on your Unit 1 page of your ePortfolio.**

The Milgram Study

The notorious Milgram Study is one of the most well-known of psychology experiments. Stanley Milgram, a social psychologist at Yale University, wanted to test obedience to authority. He set up an experiment with “teachers” who were the actual participants, and a “learner,” who was an actor. Both the teacher and the learner were told that the study was about memory and learning.

The “teacher” was told they the roles had been decided randomly by a piece of paper, when in fact they were not. Both were separated into separate rooms and could only hear each other. The teacher read a pair of words, following by four possible answers to the question. If the learner was incorrect with his answer, the teacher was to administer a shock with voltage that increased with every wrong answer. If correct, there would be no shock, and the teacher would advance to the next question.

In reality, no one was being shocked. A tape recorder with pre-recorded screams was hooked up to play each time the teacher administered a shock. When the shocks got to a higher voltage, the actor/learner would bang on the wall and ask the teacher to stop. Eventually all screams and banging would stop and silence would ensue. This was the point when many of the teachers exhibited extreme distress and would ask to stop the experiment. Some questioned the experiment, but many were encouraged to go on and told they would not be responsible for any results.

If at any time the subject indicated his desire to halt the experiment, he was told by the experimenter, “Please continue. The experiment requires that you continue. It is absolutely essential that you continue. You have no other choice, you must go on.” If after all four orders the teacher still wished to stop the experiment, it was ended. Only 14 out of 40 teachers halted the experiment before administering a 450 volt shock, though every participant questioned the experiment, and no teacher firmly refused to stop the shocks before 300 volts.

In 1981, Tom Peters and Robert H. Waterman Jr. wrote that the Milgram Experiment and the later Stanford prison experiment were frightening in their implications about the danger lurking in human nature’s dark side.

The Stanford Prison Experiment

Famed psychologist Philip Zimbardo led this experiment to examine that behavior of individuals when placed into roles of either prisoner or guard and the norms these individuals were expected to display.

Prisoners were put into a situation purposely meant to cause disorientation, degradation, and depersonalization. Guards were not given any specific directions or training on how to carry out their roles. Though at first, the students were unsure of how to carry out their roles, eventually they had no problem. The second day of the experiment invited a rebellion by the prisoners, which brought a severe response from the guards. Things only went downhill from there.

Guards implemented a privilege system meant to break solidarity between prisoners and create distrust between them. The guards became paranoid about the prisoners, believing they were out to get them. This caused the privilege system to be controlled in every aspect, even in the prisoners' bodily functions. Prisoners began to experience emotional disturbances, depression, and learned helplessness. During this time, prisoners were visited by a prison chaplain. They identified themselves as numbers rather than their names, and when asked how they planned to leave the prison, prisoners were confused. They had completely assimilated into their roles.

Dr. Zimbardo ended the experiment after five days, when he realized just how real the prison had become to the subjects. Though the experiment lasted only a short time, the results are very telling. How quickly someone can abuse their control when put into the right circumstances. The scandal at Abu Ghraib that shocked the U.S. in 2004 is prime example of Zimbardo's experiment findings.