

“Guards” were instructed that they could not harm the prisoners, but they could cause fear, create a sense of arbitrariness and lack of control, and take away their sense of privacy to lead to feelings of powerlessness. The “prisoners” underwent a simulated arrest at their homes.

The first day in the prison was unremarkable, but on the second day the prisoners began refusing to follow orders from the guards. The guards attacked the prisoners with fire extinguishers. Other punishments included excessive exercise, refusing to allow prisoners to use anything but a bucket to urinate or defecate, removing mattresses from the prisoners’ cells, and forcing prisoners to be naked. As the experiment continued, the cruelty of some guards continued to grow. In the end, the study had to be cut short after only six days out of a planned two-week period.

If the Milgram study helped to illustrate our susceptibility to obeying the unjust orders of an authority, the Stanford Prison Experiment illustrated what can happen when one is placed in a position of unjust authority or powerlessness and that role becomes internalized. And yet, like the Milgram study, the “guards” in the Stanford experiment acted as to please their own authority - the researchers who placed them in their role.

What lessons do you take from the Milgram experiment and the Stanford Prison Experiment? Why is it important for both persuaders and the targets of persuasion to be aware of the results of each?

Sample Test Questions

1. Which of the following is not one of the core characteristics of charisma?
 - a. Credibility
 - b. Dynamism**
 - c. Authority
 - d. Social Attractiveness

2. Authority is best understood as influencing others through
 - a. internalization
 - b. personality
 - c. affective processes
 - d. **compliance**
3. Which of the following is not an example of a leader that used charisma to persuade?
 - a. Martin Luther King Jr
 - b. Ronald Reagan
 - c. Adolf Hitler
 - d. **All of the above used charisma to persuade**
4. The results of the 2009 Milgram replication experiment could best be described as
 - a. **Supporting the findings of the Milgram study**
 - b. Failing to replicate the findings of the Milgram study
 - c. Finding strong evidence to oppose the original Milgram study
 - d. Differing so strongly in experimental methods as to be inapplicable to the original Milgram study.
5. Write an essay in which you describe the Milgram experiment, including the components of its experimental design, the purpose of the study, and its findings. In the aftermath, what criticisms of the study emerged? What does the Milgram experiment teach us about persuasion?

Discussion Questions

1. Compare and contrast the classic Milgram experiments with the January 2009 replication study by Jerry M. Burger. What are the key similarities and differences? If you were going to do a replication study, what would you have done the same or differently?
2. If charisma can be used for both good and bad purposes, how can we best protect ourselves against those that would want to use it for ill? How can we recognize it when it is used for good?
3. Can you think of some recent real life examples of the Milgram study in action, wherein people follow orders they know are wrong because they come from an authority? What are they?