



MEEUS AND RAAIJMAKERS (1986)

Aim: To investigate destructive obedience in the everyday situation of a job interview

Wim Meeus and **Quinten Raaijmakers** wanted to replicate Milgram's original study but wanted to improve on two initial problems they saw within the study had they repeated it in exactly the same way:

- ✎ Milgram's participants were assured that there would be no permanent damage to the "learners"
- ✎ The form of punishment would have been 'old-fashioned' according to Meeus and Raaijmakers

The aim of their experiment was to assess how the participants would handle destructive obedience in the everyday situation of a job interview, specifically, to see to what extent people would obey orders to psychologically abuse a job interviewee.

PROCEDURE

- 1 There were three people involved: a university researcher, a "job applicant" (who was an actor, similar to the role of the learner in the Milgram experiment), and a participant, who would issue the abuse
- 2 The applicant was following a script, and had to pass a test of 32 oral multiple-choice questions to "get the job"
- 3 The participants were told the job required ability to handle stress, so they had to cause the applicant stress during the interview by psychologically abusing them. This was essential because it gave the study motive to get the participant involved, had they not been told this information they would have been curious as to why they were being asked to verbally abuse the interviewee
- 4 Participants were also informed that it was part of an investigation to find out the relationship between psychological stress and test success, and the applicant didn't know about the research (of course, none of this was true)
- 5 After the interview had begun, the participant would have to make a series of 15 negative comments about the interviewee's performance and personality during the test, every time they would get an answer wrong
- 6 The applicant would occasionally interrupt the interview to object about the participant's negative comments, but the participant was instructed to ignore these objections and continue with the interview
- 7 The "stress remarks" led the applicant to failing the test and so did not get the job



THE SUBJECT

Altogether, 39 participants were used, which consisted of both males and females between the ages of 18 and 55. These were split into two groups: a control group of 15 and an experimental group of 24. Each of the applicants had at least Dutch High School Education (equivalent education of GCSEs) and were recruited by a newspaper ad, offering \$13 for the 30 minute experiment

THE STRESS REMARKS

A TV monitor instructed participants when to make each stress remark about the job interviewee. The applicant had electrodes stuck on his skull to make the participant believe his stress levels were being measured. If the participant refused to continue making the comments, the experimenter had 4 prods to say to the participant. The questions for the interview were asked in four sets:

1. Set A: no stress remarks made by the participant, to provide baseline measures
2. Set B and C: five stress remarks were made for each of these sets
3. There were ten errors in the last three sets

Participants in the control group chose when to make the comments and when to stop the experiment

The remarks started at question 9 ("your answer is wrong") and went up to the end ("I think you'd be better suited for a lower function job")

The study was conducted at a university, similar to Milgram's study, and the experimenter was a well-dressed man of about 30 years who was friendly but stern, and who was present in the room with the participant, but the applicant was in another room and had to listen to questions via a speaker.

RESULTS OF EXPERIMENT

22 of the 24 participants in the experimental group obeyed until the end, making all 15 stress remarks. Most had some discussion with the experimenter, but continued when ordered to do so. Follow-up questionnaires showed that the participants did not like the experiment and were upset by the procedure

73% of the total participants believed the experiment to be real, and only 4% thought it was a hoax, the remaining 23% were not sure

In terms of who the participants blamed for the applicant not getting the job, 45% blamed the experimenter; 33% blamed themselves, and the other 22% blamed the applicant

Within the control group, who could choose when to make comments and when to stop, *none* of the participants made the stress comments

As with the Milgram experiment, Meeus and Raaijmakers decided to conduct other variations of the original experiment to see how the results were affected by altering some of the variables:

Variation 1 – the experimenter ordered the participants to make the stress remarks and then left the room for the experiment (**22 participants used**)

Variation 2 – two other actor participants (confederates) present, who rebelled – the first quit after the tenth stress remark, and the second then did the same, so the experimenter ordered the real participant to continue alone (**19 participants used**)

The table below shows a comparison of the results from the three experiments:

Number of participants who...	Original Study	Variation 1	Variation 2
Made all 15 stress remarks	56% (22/39)	36% (8/22)	16% (3/19)
Believed the experiment was real	73%	81%	84%
Thought the experiment was a hoax	4%	5%	0%
Were unsure if the experiment was real	23%	14%	16%

CONCLUSIONS

These were the three main conclusions reached by Meeus and Raaijmakers which tried to explain why they achieved higher levels of obedience than Milgram did with his study:

- 1 physical violence has more of an immediate impact than psychological harm** - the participants could hear the cries of the learner in Milgram's study, but the real impact of psychological abuse only tends to become evident later (i.e. after they became upset and did not get the job)
- 2 consent levels were different** - the participants' consent to take part in the experiment carried more weight as they knew they were going to harm the applicant verbally and had agreed to participate; in Milgram's study, the participants had not explicitly agreed to administer physical harm to the learners
- 3 the victim was more dependent on the outcome** - in Meeus' and Raaijmakers' study, the applicant had to continue with the test to get the job, even if they objected to the stress remarks, whilst the learner in Milgram's study could refuse to answer as there was no gain from continuing

EVALUATION OF THE DUTCH STUDY OF OBEDIENCE

The main strengths of the of the Meeus and Raaijmakers experiment were:

- ✓ The study builds on Milgram's study by focusing deliberately on two areas that Meeus and Raaijmakers saw as needing attention. They used similar variations to Milgram to see if the levels of obedience fluctuated in the same way. Their study, therefore, is all the more useful because the findings can be compared with those of Milgram
- ✓ Due to the attention to detail, the study is replicable and can be tested for reliability. There are controls, which mean that the details are clear and the study can be judged carefully. A study with good controls is easier to draw cause-and-effect conclusions from

Some of the weaknesses of the study are shown below:

- ✗ The study is an experiment, and is therefore artificial. The need for controls, such as an applicant taking a test in a laboratory, means that the findings may not be valid. The situation is not very realistic and this might have affected the results
- ✗ Although the findings were compared with Milgram's findings, which is useful, there are differences between the two studies which make such comparisons difficult. One difference is that the studies were in different cultures (even though they are both western cultures); another is that the studies were twenty years apart, which could have affected obedience levels

The table below shows a comparison of the results between the main Milgram and Meeus and Raaijmakers studies to make these comparisons evident:

Type of study	Percentage of people obeying (Milgram 1963 and 1974)	Percentage of people obeying (Meeus and Raaijmakers 1986)
Main study	65%	92%
Experimenter-absent condition	23%	36%
Two peers rebel condition	10%	16%