SCS-285- What Went Wrong

Name

Institution Affiliation

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**1. Stanford Prison Experiment**

**This research study sought to explain how people respond to authority roles. During this study, the researcher, Philip Zimbardo, enlisted students to play the role of either an inmate or a prison guard. This study was planned to take place for two weeks and is referred to as the “Stanford Prison Experiment.” Zimbardo’s goals were to “see what the psychological effects were of becoming a prisoner or prison guard.” In the study, Zimbardo played the role of the prison superintendent. The “guards” were given no training and made up whatever rules they deemed necessary to maintain control of their “prisoners.” The guards used humiliation tactics to control the prisoners by stripping them, delousing them, and subjecting them to repeated rounds of push-ups and “counts” where the prisoners had to call out their prisoner number, as well as solitary confinement and physical confrontations.**

**The prisoners eventually rebelled, but this rebellion was quickly squashed when the guards called in reinforcements and order was restored. Eventually, the guards decided to use the prisoners against each other to help maintain order, and they created a “privilege cell” where the most compliant prisoners were allowed to have additional privileges such as clothing, beds, and special food, all of which the other prisoners were allowed to watch. Then, the guards decided to randomly shift the prisoners around and placed the “good” prisoners back in with the “bad” prisoners, and some of the bad prisoners were selected to enjoy the privileges of the good cell. The purpose of this tactic was to get the prisoners to direct their aggression toward each other and away from the guards. These authoritarian tactics and the psychological abuse sustained by the prisoners had a profound effect, and the prisoners became convinced that they were not free to leave. Zimbardo himself even began to feel as though his role and the situation were real when a fellow researcher questioned what his independent variable was and his response was anger at the question, because he “had a prison break on his hands.” In the end, the experiment was called off after only six days.**

The first instance where Zimbardo went wrong is by relying on the voluntary sample, which cannot be the actual representation of the general populace. Considering the nature of the prison population, which is characterized by diverse individuals, the use of the young male students in the experiment eliminated many of the prison population's qualities. The research also lacked ecological validity, and this means that the participants could not fully reconstruct the prison. The guards showed different behaviors following their difference in personality. For this reason, some guards failed to show their aggressive behaviors in the experiment. Also, some ethical concerns arose from the research, and the first one is the failure to protect the participants from psychological and physical harm. Zimbardo assumed the role of the prison boss and continuously motivated the guards to carry on with their unethical behaviors. He only terminated the experiment after the intervention of an external psychologist. To avoid this situation, the research could have ensured that the participants' emotional and physical well-being was guaranteed. Additionally, selecting the participants would have been re-assessed to ensure that the selected sample is not biased. The research ethics should have been followed to avoid exposing human subjects to harsh conditions.

**2. “Gender Is Learned” Research Study**

**A research study done by Dr. John Money introduced the concept that gender is learned. In this study, unnecessary sexual reassignment surgery was performed on a male infant who had experienced a severely botched circumcision. The psychologist, Dr. Money, told the family that gender identity is primarily learned, and was a proponent of the theory of gender neutrality, in which gender identity is developed as a result of social learning and could be changed. A factor in this experiment was that the baby had a male twin, making it possible for Money to have a control. Eventually, after years of psychological struggle and emotional angst, the boy was informed of what had happened. The child decided to resume life as a male, but he committed suicide at age 38.**

Dr. Money used children participants in the experiment. For the children, they always learn what is exposed to them when they are young, and this means they cannot make any sound decision. The use of children is associated with some ethical issues because informed consent cannot be acquired from such kids. This means that the researcher of this study may not have acquired informed consent from the participants. The other major drawback of this experiment is Dr. Money's failure to obtain permission to carry out a serious operation of the participant because such operation would have a grave impact. The researches failed to consider the psychological and emotional impacts that would come after the study. They did not follow up to help the participant overcome the emotional struggles, which eventually ended up with suicide. Finally, the study was associated with ethical issues because of the psychological torture, and the worst part is that the informed consent was not acquired. For this experiment to be successful, Dr. Money should have used adult participants who could make informed decisions. Probably, the participant could not have committed suicide. Larger sample size would be better to promote generalization.

**“Behavioral Study of Obedience” Research Study**

**Another research study was conducted by Stanley Milgram. His study sought to understand how and why individuals are willing to obey individuals in an authoritative role. Participants and actors were recruited to participate in this experiment, with the actors playing the role of the learner and the volunteers playing the role of the teacher. The teachers thought they were participating in a study looking to examine the effect of physical punishment on learning. The teacher would tell the learner a series of paired words, and when the learner got any of the paired words incorrect, the teacher was supposed to administer an electrical shock. Neither participant could see one another, but they could hear one another**.

**No actual shock was delivered, but the teacher did not know this, and they would hear screams, stomping, banging, and other sounds of pain each time a “shock” was delivered. The learner would intentionally get the word pair incorrect from time to time, and each time the electrical shock was supposedly increased. The highest shock, 450 volts, would have been lethal if actually administered. The teachers would occasionally stop to question whether they should continue, and the researchers would response with four prods to try and get them to continue. Those prods were: “Please continue,” “The experiment requires that you continue,” “It is absolutely essential that you continue,” and “You have no other choice; you must go on.” In the first round of the experiment, 65% of the teachers administered the lethal shock. Subsequent rounds produced ranges from 28% to 91%.**

What went wrong in Milgram's study is that he lied to the participants, thus making this study unethical. He failed to ensure that the human subjects are treated with the respect they deserved. Even though there were no actual shocks, his research is often criticized for the ill-treatment of the human subjects. This experiment contributed to increased stress levels amongst the subjects. This may have affected the participants for the rest of their lives. The selected setting was not very common to the participants. Thus, the rules of conduct were vague for the subjects, who would be more susceptible to obedience than other environmental factors. Further, after disclosing the lie, the participants would feel embarrassed, used, and cynical to the future authority and psychologists in their lives. The success of this experiment depended on the ethical behavior of the researcher (Israel & Hay, 2006). If the researcher informed the participants about the nature and the possible impacts of the experiment, this would be successful. The use of research ethics could have enhanced the procedures and outcomes of the experiment. Recognizing the fact that human subjects needed to be treated and handled with care would have contributed to the effectiveness and success of the research.

Reference

Israel, M., & Hay, I. (2006). *Research ethics for social scientists*. Sage.