Study 10: Milgram (Obedience)

Qs (page 155)
1. Because there was quite a lot for the teacher (the real participant) to get acquainted with – they had to become familiar with the shock machine and administering the shocks, the word list and reading them through the microphone, and doing everything in the right order.

2. (1) Strapping the learner to the chair, (2) testing the shocks on the teacher, (3) saying the shock levels out loud, (4) the learner banging on the wall, and (5) the learner stopping giving answers.

3. I would have because I couldn’t bear to cause someone pain. However, since you couldn’t actually see the learner I might have gone on because I was supposed to.

4. Two reasons: (a) to try to ‘set right’ any anxiety caused by the experiment – the participant was reintroduced to the learner so he could see that the learner was absolutely fine and therefore did not leave the laboratory believing he had harmed someone. (b) To collect data on what the participants thought while they were administering the shocks – in particular to determine whether the participants realised the shock generator was fake or whether they really did believe they were administering real electric shocks.

5. So that Milgram could be sure that the levels of obedience were a result of the situation as a whole, and did not vary as a result of anything else or specific to a particular participant’s experience in terms of what the ‘experimenter’ said. Therefore, it controls potentially extraneous variables.

6. The participant experienced the shocks for himself and the participants’ responses (sweating, trembling, having seizures) suggest that they did believe it was real otherwise why would they have responded like that? Additionally, after the experiment, participants were asked about how painful they believed the administered shocks to be. Participants indicated they believed they were giving very painful shocks.

Qs (page 156)
1. These comments tell us that the participants were most definitely worried about the consequences of administering electric shocks. We might have thought that they administered the shocks thoughtlessly or even cruelly, but these comments tell us that they were worried whether the shocks were ‘humane’ and worried that they might do serious injury to the learner.

2. (a) They thought that they were in a safe, respectable environment in a university. In fact, the participants might have been a bit intimidated by the setting as Yale was (and still is) a top university. (b) The experimenter was dressed in an experimenter’s lab coat and would have appeared to be a very scientific sort of person who ‘knew what he was doing’. (c) This was a new situation to the participants. When people are in new situations, it is more difficult to know how to behave so we are more likely to be guided by what other people tell us to do.

3. Two findings which surprised Milgram were: (a) the strength of the obedient tendencies (the level of obedience) despite relatively gentle coercion and people’s general disposition not to hurt other human beings. (b) The high levels of tension and stress which were apparent in the study with participants becoming nervous wrecks, experiencing trembling, sweating and even seizures.

4. This is a question for you really. My opinion (which you might disagree with) is that a certain amount of obedience (not necessarily 100%) is actually very important. If we did not obey the rules of the road such as traffic lights, driving on the correct side etc, driving a car really would be seriously dangerous. A class full of students who show no obedience to a teacher is less likely to learn than a class which is moderately obedient (e.g. answer questions, do homework, pay attention etc). If the majority of citizens did not obey the laws of personal property and took anything not completely locked down and broke into people’s homes regularly to steal stuff, we would not be able to relax and enjoy watching TV, playing Wii, listening to music on MP3 players, sending mns to our friends etc. (However, 100% unquestioning obedience is probably not a good thing, especially if the authority is bad …) What do you think?

5. Quantitative data: numbers and percentages of participants who reached particular voltage shock levels (e.g. 65% of participants administered the maximum shock level of 450 volts’). Qualitative data: the comments from the participants as they were giving the shocks or thinking of stopping, such as ‘it’s not fair to shock the guy – these are terrific volts’.

Evaluating the study by Milgram

The research method
Strengths: Most of the variables can be controlled so that it is clear what is causing the differences in the DV (obedience); lab and field experiments allow causal conclusions to be reached – in this case that the increased shock levels affected obedience rates, that is people are less willing to obey when they are harming someone else but most people continue regardless.

Limitations: Such control means that the situation may be reduced to something very different from everyday obedience where many other factors affect an individual’s behaviour.

The sample
The participants were unique because they were men. While we might be more or less obedient than women, they were from an individualist culture where people are likely to act more independently than in a collectivist culture, and they were volunteers who would be more willing to continue to obey since they volunteered. All of this reduces the ability to generalise these findings to other people.

Quantitative and qualitative data
Quantitative data: The shock levels at which a participant refused to continue.
Strengths: It is easy to assess whether someone is being obedient or not.

Qualitative data: The things the participants said and descriptions of their tension.
Strengths: It gives insight into why participants made the decisions they did, and might ultimately help us to understand why people obey.

Ecological validity
There were various aspects of the experiment which enhanced the tendency to obey (e.g. the prestigious environment, the lack of time to think about what they were doing or discuss with anyone). This means it doesn’t wholly reflect destructive obedience in everyday life.

On the other hand, similar factors may explain why people do obey authority figures even when asked to do something destructive in everyday life.

Personality versus situation
Personality: The aim of this study is often described as a test of the Germans are different hypothesis – were the Germans ‘obedient during the Second World War because it is part of the Germanic nature or can anyone be made to behave as obediently in the ‘right’ circumstances?

Milgram concluded from his study that people obeyed because certain features of the situation led them to suspend their sense of autonomy (acting independently) and become an agent of the authority figure. The situational factors that lead to such
obedience include the proximity of the authority figure to the participant, and the distance of the victim from the participant. Situation: However, we should remember that not all of the participants obeyed; 35% stopped before the highest shock which suggests that personality factors are important too. For example, one participant (Gretchen Brandt) was a 31-year-old medical technician involved in a later female-only experiment. When the shock level reached 210 volts she said ‘Well, I’m sorry, I don’t think we should continue’. In response to the various prods she said ‘I think we are here of our own free will’ and refused to go further. It transpired that she had spent her youth in Nazi Germany and said ‘Perhaps we have seen too much pain.’ Personality factors may be innate or learned through experience. This suggests that it is not evil people who commit evil crimes but ordinary people who are just obeying orders.

**Ethical issues**

Deception and lack of fully informed consent – Milgram debriefed the participants – debriefing is the only solution. However, by then the harm (or good) has been done.

Psychological harm – debriefing is necessary, also reuniting with the learner to show no harm has been done, and counselling afterwards to deal with any harm.

Right to withdraw – participants were told at the beginning they could stop (and the money would still be theirs), however they weren’t completely free to just withdraw. If they said they wanted to stop giving any more electric shocks, then the experimenter would put a lot of pressure upon them to continue – therefore there was not absolute freedom to withdraw.

**Applications/usefulness**

The usefulness is related to the question of validity. If the study lacks validity then it is not useful but otherwise it may provide important insights into why people obey in certain situations and how they might reduce this where appropriate. Several of the participants later said that participating in the study had changed their lives because it made them think about their own mindless obedience. So people reading about this experiment might also think about obedience.

Many people regard this as one of the most important psychological experiments ever conducted because it showed that obedience was caused by situational rather than dispositional factors.

**What next?**

One change is that the same study could be conducted with women as well as men to see if obedience rates were different.

**Exam-style questions (page 159)**

**Section A questions**

1. **a** Low ecological validity because of demand characteristics such as being conducted in a prestigious institution.
   
   **b** High ecological validity because it was testing what it set out to test, the experimenter was a legitimate authority figure and the demand characteristics are the same as those occurring in everyday life.

2. **(1) Prestigious setting, (2) participant feels obliged not to disrupt the experiment, (3) can’t discuss choices with someone else, and (4) participant assumes discomfort is mild and temporary.**

3. **a** One ethical issue from Milgram’s study is that of harm. Participants believed they were giving another human being extremely strong electric shocks and many showed signs of extreme stress and anxiety about this situation.
   
   **b** Milgram debriefed them afterwards and reunited them with the learner so that they could see the learner was absolutely fine and that they had inflicted no injury upon them.

4. **a** One example of the stress shown by the participants was that they were sweating and trembling, biting their lips etc.

   **b** The participants were stressed because they believed they were harming another human being – and this goes against how we are generally brought up as children – to believe we must never harm anyone.

5. **a** Milgram measured obedience according to the maximum level of electric shock that they administered (or thought they administered). The voltage scale was converted to a 30 point scale (there were 30 different levels of shock). A totally obedient participant was one who administered all the shock levels and therefore scored 30.

   **b** One factor is that they think the experimenter knows what he is doing and has a worthy purpose (collecting scientific evidence). Another factor is that the participant does not have long enough to resolve their internal conflict and so gets swept along with the study.

6. **a** One piece of evidence is that when participants were debriefed after the experiment they were asked ‘How painful did you think the shocks were for the learner?’ and the majority of participants indicated extremely painful, that is they thought they were giving real shocks. Another piece of evidence is the stress the participants exhibited – sweating, trembling, groaning, nervous laughter etc. – which would not have happened had they actually believed the shocks were fake. If they hadn’t believed the shocks were real, they would have been quite blase.

7. **a** One reason the results were considered controversial is that it appears to show that even ordinary Americans might be capable of torture or killing someone (and committing a war crime) just because someone tells them to do so. At the time, this shocked Americans’ belief about themselves and their fellow Americans.

   **b** Milgram’s reason for doing this particular research was originally to pilot a study he wanted to do in Germany in order to help understand the inhumane behaviour of prison camp guards during the Second World War.

**Section B questions**

**a** Milgram’s aim for this study was the first step in investigating the inhumane behaviour of prison camp guards during the Second World War. He wanted to understand the process of obedience and the conditions under which people behaved in an obedient manner.

**b** The sample used by Milgram was 40 male participants. They were all aged between 20 and 50 and were recruited as a volunteer sample from a newspaper advert. There was a wide range of professions and educational backgrounds. For example there was an encyclopaedia salesman, labourers, engineers etc., though none of them were students. One limitation of the sample is that they all came from the New Haven area and therefore might not have been representative of other American males from the rest of the country.

**c** Milgram measured behaviour in two ways. First of all, quantitatively, each participant got a score based upon the maximum level shock they administered. The score was out of 30 (30 representing the maximum voltage 450 XXX shock) and therefore a totally obedient participant was one who gave the maximum shock. Someone who stopped before that was categorised as a defiant participant. Second, Milgram also measured behaviour through observation. Participants were watched, and in some cases filmed, while they were taking part in the experiment and their reactions were noted as well as what they said at the time. This was a more qualitative data collection.

**d** The results of the study found that the majority of participants – 65% – went all the way and administered the maximum electric shock. All the participants administered shocks at 300 volts or above – that is to say that no one had dropped out before this point. Some participants stopped at 300 volts (when the learner first bangs on the wall), but most continued even when the learner had stopped responding at all. Milgram also noted that the participants did not administer these shocks in a cruel and cold way, but were in general, very stressed out by what they were doing – shaking,
Chapter 5 Social psychology

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

Section C questions

a One assumption of the social approach is that people’s behaviour is largely governed by social processes – the influence of other people, for example through conformity, obedience, majority influence and so on.

b The social approach would explain obedience in terms of the interactions between the individuals in the situation. For example, the perception of how legitimate a person appears to be and the orders that they issue will have an influence on the degree of obedience. Also, the social approach would probably say that people are socialised in childhood to become obedient through taking on the values and expected behaviours of significant others such as parents.

c One similarity between Milgram and Piliavin et al. is that both studies had some problems with ethics and could both be accused of inflicting harm on participants. In Milgram, the many participants displayed signs of extreme stress, such as sweating, digging their fingernails into their flesh and so on. And three even had seizures, such was the stress of the situation. Therefore, despite their better instincts, they still felt they had to go on.

e Milgram concluded that the high levels of obedience suggest that even ‘normal’ people will show obedience to such a point that they might seriously harm another human being. Obedience is deeply ingrained in us. Even when it goes against other deeply ingrained behaviours and beliefs (not to harm another human being), obedience is still obviously very strong. Thus, the experiment caused the participants extraordinary tension because of this conflict. Milgram said this study helped to explain why prison camp guards in Nazi Germany committed the atrocities that they did – they were simply being obedient to a ‘legitimate’ authority figure. Milgram offered a number of explanations as to why they did obey, including (i) they felt a sense of obligation because they had been paid; (ii) the participant assumes that any harm is temporary, whereas the scientific gains will be significant and longlasting; (iii) it is a novel situation and the participant does not have time to work out the best way for him to behave; (iv) he gets swept along with the whole procedure and does not have time to think – just to follow orders.

f One change to this study would be to have a different ‘authority figure’. In the Milgram study, the person playing the authority figure was a stern, austere man in his forties. It would be interesting to see what would happen if the experimenter were a woman with a different persona such as friendly, smiling and imploring (rather than a detached factual style). I think this would reduce the amount of obedience – partly because she would be less of a ‘legitimate authority’ figure and also because her persona may not be consistent with a participant’s idea of what a scientist should be like. Thus, two of the features which were responsible for the high levels of obedience in the original study would be removed. Another change to the study could be that different nationalities could take part in order to see whether some nationalities are more obedient than others. There could be collectivist as well as individualist cultures represented. It is difficult to know how it would change the results. Overall there would probably still be quite high levels of obedience though with some evident cultural differences. For example, it might be that collectivist cultures show lower levels of obedience because they are more encouraged to think about other people. However, some individual cultures where questioning and original thought are more encouraged (e.g. Nordic countries) might also show lower levels of obedience. Those nationalities which have a political dictatorship may show particularly high levels as they would be used to having to obey orders.

d One strength of the social approach is that it is not reductionist. Research in the social approach gives high level, complex explanations of behaviour and does not just reduce explanations down to something like a gene or levels of a particular hormone. For example, Milgram explains the high levels of obedience in terms of 13 different situational factors including the location of the study, how the participant views the experimenter, their desire not to disrupt the experiment, their sense of obligation because they had accepted the money for the task.

Another strength is that social research often finds out really important and significant things about how people behave and why they behave in a certain way. This is certainly true of Milgram whose findings have helped us to understand why guards in prison camps such as Auschwitz committed some of the atrocities that they did – they were just following orders and being obedient, which as Milgram found, is a strongly ingrained behaviour. One weakness of the social approach is that, by its very nature, it is culturally specific. Because the social approach focuses upon social interactions and influences, and such behaviours vary hugely across cultures, then the findings from one study can rarely be generalised to other cultures. In Milgram, for example, he only studied Americans from one part of the country (the Northeast). This means that the levels of obedience and the responses to the situation might not be true in other parts of the country or other countries. In fact, later, Milgram and others did study other nationalities using the same basic procedure – and there were some cultural differences in the overall rates of obedience.

Another weakness of the social approach is that it overlooks personality because it focuses too much on the power of the situation. For example, Milgram focuses upon the situation – the surroundings, the laboratory, the prods, the impressive machinery and so on – at the expense of the personality. Personality is still important and could probably explain why some people did stand up to the experiment and did not continue to the maximum shock level. Therefore, the social approach does not give the whole picture.

Qs (page 161)

1 Milgram tells us that the situation is very powerful in our behaviour and influences people to the extent that they would do something so strong against their own natural tendencies – not to harm someone versus obeying a legitimate authority – the situational factors weighed in favour of being obedient.
2. Obedience could be explained in terms of personality. Some people might more naturally be obedient and biddable, wanting to please other people, not take responsibility for their own behaviour and defer to another. It might be that some people have a predisposition to be obedient, whereas others might be more predisposed to be questioning, making up their own minds or even just being plain rebellious.

In Reicher and Haslam, demand characteristics might have played a role, especially as the participants knew about Zimbardo’s study and the results, and because they were being filmed. They may have thought they had to believe in a certain way in order to satisfy the experimenters. For example, they may have thought that they needed to produce a harsh regime in the prison and so, during Phase 2, some of them joined together in order to set up a harsher prisoner–guard hierarchy.

3a. It is difficult to have a sure answer to that. The problem is that the participants (especially because of what had happened in the SPE) really needed to be fully briefed before the study so as to get truly informed consent. However, the briefing will also provide some sort of demand characteristics. One way to possibly reduce them would have been not to tell them it was being filmed for BBC TV, and just that the cameras were there for normal experimental purposes or CCTV purposes. Knowing that their behaviour would be broadcast on prime-time television throughout Britain must have intensified their behaviours.

In the first edition of the book the second part of question 3, and questions 4 and 5 relate to a study by Gergen. Details of this study were removed from this edition of the book for reasons of space but here is some information on the study, so that you can answer these questions: Gergen et al. (1973) investigated the possibility that anonymity need not lead to the anti-social deindividuation described by Zimbardo. In this study for example, people were monitored as to how they would act with strangers.

In one condition, the research participants were asked to spend one hour of their time in a closed room with people they had never seen before, and were not likely to see again. Once in the room, the research participants tended to establish themselves out in the space available and carried out friendly conversations with the other person, from the same position. Most people described the experience as friendly, but not intense.

In the experiment condition, the research participants were given the same instructions, but this time were asked to stay in a room that was completely dark. In this condition, people moved about much more, and the conversation was patchy and usually stopped after a short while. Several people reported developing intimate and deep emotional contact with other people in the room. The researchers suggested that anonymity may reduce some social inhibitions, allowing the person to experience intense positive emotion more readily which is much like the intimacy that some people can develop with a stranger, such as in conversation on a train. They concluded that this was evidence of deindividuation, although the behaviour was very different from the anti-social deindividuation described by Zimbardo. As the participants were in the dark, they felt a greater sense of anonymity and therefore felt less inhibited by social norms that govern social behaviour with strangers.

4. If they had known each other, they probably would have adopted their normal behaviours and level of intimacy towards those people. In other words, it might not change their behaviours whether they were in a light or dark room – especially if they knew each other well.

5. This is one for you to think about! Maybe something in real life has happened to you similar to Gergen’s dark room? For example, have you ever been with strangers somewhere during a powercut? What happened?

Study 11: Reicher and Haslam (BBC prison study)

Qs (page 165)

1. One criticism of the SPE conclusion is that they were misleading. One of the main conclusions was that if people are given power, they will always abuse it (‘the pathology of power’). However, Reicher and Haslam point out that this was a misleading conclusion because (a) not all participants in the guard position became bullying etc., and (b) Zimbardo had actually encouraged the guards to take away the prisoners’ sense of self.

2. Social identity theory says that, as human beings, we belong to groups, for example students, teenagers, football supporters, people who live in a particular part of a city etc., and that these groups are actually an important part of our identity and self-concept, because we identify with the group and also compare ourselves with other groups.

3. It was an experimental study in that many factors were manipulated directly by the researchers – such as allocation to group, permeability, legitimacy, cognitive alternatives. It can also be regarded as a case study because it involved a ‘one-off’ in-depth focus on one particular (set-up) prison.

4. They were concerned about ethics for two main reasons. One was that the SPE had got out of hand and had to be finished early – prisoners had endured bullying, loss of identity and had been quite affected by it. One or two had become very distraught. So Reicher and Haslam had some reason to suspect that some ‘psychological harm’ might occur. Another reason was that the participants were going to effectively be in prison, even if it turned out to be quite a civilised prison. It was inevitable that there would be some hardship to the participants and a denial of their basic rights and freedoms. In order to keep this study as ethical as possible, all participants had to be thoroughly briefed before the study began and warned of possible outcomes. This meant that they could give fully informed consent. Also, Reicher and Haslam had to submit the plan for the research to various ethics committees who considered it carefully and had to give it approval. Finally, Reicher and Haslam were prepared to stop the study if they thought that the situation was becoming too harmful (which they did). After the study was finished all participants were debriefed.

5. One kind of DV was social variables such as the level of social identification in the participants – how much they identified, felt part of the group. This was measured by self-report with items such as ‘I feel strong ties with the other prisoners’, and was also assessed through observation. Another kind of DV was clinical variables such as the authoritarianism of the participants. This was measured by a psychometric self-report test with items such as ‘People should always keep the rules’ and ‘There are two types of people, strong and weak’.

6. The planned interventions were there to explore, in more depth than the SPE, why inequality of power might cause problems, other than just ‘acceptance of role’. They wanted to know how group membership and social identity affected behaviour. All the interventions affect how a person might identify with their group – permeability is whether or not people think they can move from one group to another; legitimacy is whether they think that inequalities between groups are deserved or legitimate; cognitive alternatives is whether participants can think about other ways to deal with the situation.

7. Permeability is whether or not people think they can move between groups. If a group is ‘permeable’ this means that newcomers might join; or current members might move to another group.
Evaluating the study (page 167)

The research method

One strength is that it would have been impossible to conduct this study in the same way in a normal prison so this was a good alternative. Reicher and Haslam needed a controlled environment so that they could make the interventions and ensure that these were responsible for the changes in the participants’ behaviour, and not just something else going on in a normal prison environment which would be out of their control.

Another strength is that it increases the ethical protection of the participants. If the study had been done in a real prison, then the participants would have been exposed to real criminals, possibly some genuine physical harm and bullying.

In a way, this study could be considered a case study – it is a one-off study of one particular situation – a particular set of participants, in a specific location – which is then studied in a huge amount of depth.

The limitations are concerned with the ecological validity of the study. The situation is not like a real prison in a variety of ways – guards are not ‘trained’; everyone basically begins to inhabit the prison at very much the same time, rather than joining people who would have been in the prison for months or years; there are not as many people or as much crowding as in a real prison; in this prison, prisoners were able to break out of their cell – which would be virtually impossible in a real prison.

The sample

These are all people who wanted to take part in a study and so may not be like the sort of people who don’t volunteer to take part (they may be more adventurous, have more time on their hands and so on). The 27 who were selected were also not like the general population as a whole. This is because the 27 were screened for mental health problems such as depression and so on. Therefore, as a group, they were probably psychologically healthier than the general population. This might affect the conclusions drawn, that is group processes in groups of ‘normal’ individuals might be different (e.g., more rational) than group processes in a more diverse population. If this is the case it might take longer for the group to break down than if the group was made up of participants from the normal population. Therefore in real life, tyranny might have established itself sooner.

Quantitative and qualitative data

Examples of quantitative data – many, including ratings of social identification, scores of authoritarianism, awareness of cognitive alternatives, self-efficacy scores.

Examples of qualitative data – description of the general events that took place, for example ‘On day 6, some prisoners broke out of their cell and occupied the guards’ quarters’, observed using video equipment.

The strengths of quantitative data is that the researchers could easily compare the prisoners and the guards. They could also easily monitor changes over time, for example they could see that the prisoners showed increasing social identification, while the guards showed decreasing identification.

The strength of the qualitative data is that it gives us a more in-depth description of the behaviour during the study so we can understand and make sense of what was going on.

Ecological validity

It is really difficult to know whether the participants behaved as they would have done in everyday life. But, it seems doubtful that being filmed in this study felt the same as being filmed for CCT (Reicher and Haslam claimed it was similar). In everyday life, we may become unaware of being recorded by cameras and that is because (unless we are up to no good!) we do not imagine that we will actually have an audience. Much CCTV footage is never viewed by anybody, and certainly little of it shows anybody close up and none of it records conversations. Therefore, with CCTV, we do just get on with our behaviour quite normally. However, in Reicher and Haslam’s prison, the prisoners knew that it would be screened on BBC TV at prime time – they would get an audience of at least 5 million viewers, there would be newspaper articles about them, and they knew that their friends, relatives and work colleagues would probably tune in and watch them. It is hard to imagine that knowing this, this would not affect their behaviour in some way in order to appear more interesting, brave, just, strong, mean, dominant or whatever they thought people would like to see. Therefore, it is unlikely that they did behave as they would do in real life.

However, they probably did take the task seriously – though as an experiment and not necessarily as being part of a prison regime. One other explanation for their behaviour (as well as behaving in a socially desirable way for their loved ones) is that they knew about Zimbardo’s SPE and, towards the end, some of the participants were frustrated that, in comparison, this study had been relatively uneventful due to the guards not identifying with their group or abusing their power. So the action on Day 6 to introduce more inequality into the prison could just have been some participants’ attempt to make this a more memorable study.

Personality versus situation

The study suggests that situation is more powerful in terms of group processes – you cannot understand tyranny just in the context of personality – it has to be in terms of group processes (which is what the SPE found). This study suggests that when groups fail, this is when tyranny may flourish as group members may accept alternatives that run against personal values and norms.

Ethical issues

Reasons for: Participants were fully briefed and knew the likely dangers of the study – that they would lack privacy, be locked up, be unable to lead a normal life etc. The researchers stopped the study on Day 8 when they thought the new regime would contravene protection of the participants.

Reasons against: There was some harm to participants, for example the guards became disorganised and recriminatory and started blaming each other. Participants may have felt out of control, may feel displeased about the ways in which they behaved (e.g., they were unfair or weak), and may regret some of their behaviours especially as the rest of the world knows how they behaved.

Applications/usefulness

This study helps us to understand how tyranny might develop. This can help us to understand why, for example, prisons or other institutions adopt inhuman conditions, and why and how tyranny flourishes in some societies. This can help the relevant agencies (e.g., inspectors of prisons or the UN) to make the right sorts of interventions.

What next?

One change to the study would be not to film it for BBC TV and that if filming did take place, it would just be for the researchers to collect observational data. This would probably change the results quite a lot. For example, people might not ‘act up’, imagining themselves broadcast into everyone's living rooms. So prisoners might not have stormed the guards’ quarters and so on.

Exam-style questions (page 169)

Section A questions

1a Permeability was created by telling the participants in the prisoner group that one or two of them might be moved if they showed the right characteristics for being a guard, i.e. reliability and initiative.

1b One prisoner was ‘promoted’ to guard – but after this, the other prisoners were told that there was no chance of changing group – and so the group had become impermeable.
2 a The legitimacy intervention was not used. Legitimacy is whether or not a group member thinks that differences in power (inequity) is deserved (legitimate) or undeserved (illegitimate). The plan was, after three days (by which point the participants would have thought the guards had legitimacy power), they were all to be told that there were overall no real personality or character differences between the groups, but that it was too late to reassign people to different roles.

b This did not have to be used because, contrary to predictions, the guards did not believe they were legitimate in their roles and power. This was probably due to low group identity among the guards and ineffective leadership. So, there was no evidence of the guards having been selected because of their special leadership/initiative skills and so they did not think they were legitimate in their group.

3 a One conclusion which is the same for both studies was that it is the situation which is more powerful than the individuals in terms of its influence on behaviour. Any account of tyranny must include group processes.

b One conclusion which is different is that Reicher and Haslam saw that group processes are not always toxic and do not always lead to uncontrolled, mindless and anti-social behaviour.

4 a A situational explanation for the behaviour is group processes – the groups people are in, and how unified those groups are, influence how people behave. For example, when the prisoners felt unified, it increased their sense of self-efficacy enough to storm the guards’ quarters.

b One individual explanation for the prisoners is that their unique personalities influenced their behaviours – that they were generally stronger, more authoritarian etc. than the guards. (However, Reicher and Haslam think this authoritarianism was not a personality trait, but something which increased as a result of shared group identity.)

5 a One criticism they identified of the study was that people might say that the participants did not act ‘naturally’ but play-acted for the sake of the cameras, and that they did not really take on the roles etc.

b Their defence to this is that, despite the cameras, the participants’ behaviour changed at the times predicted, for example they got a stronger group identity after the group became impermeable.

6 Authoritarianism, social identification, self-efficacy and depression.

Section B questions

a The aim of this study was to investigate in more detail the process of tyranny which was seen in Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE). Zimbardo’s study concluded that the taking on of roles was inevitable as was the subsequent power inequity which made the prison guards abuse their power. But Reicher and Haslam wanted to look at this in more detail as they thought that inequalities between groups would not automatically lead to tyranny – since not all the guards abused their power. They thought that there was a more complex group process which determined whether people accept tyranny or resist it, and in particular they wanted to look at whether social identity and social categorisation were better explanations.

b The sample used were volunteer males. They were recruited through national newspapers and leaflets. A total of 332 people applied and this was shortlisted to 27 through screening by psychometric tests of authoritarianism, depression, self-esteem etc. Also, they were screened out if they had any history of mental illness. They also looked at medical problems and character. They ended up with 15 men with a range of age, social class and ethnic background (unlike Zimbardo’s study!)

c The IVs included (i) whether they were allocated to the role of guard or prisoner; (ii) permeability – the researchers ‘manipulated’ the prisoners perception of the likelihood that there could be movement between groups. At first, prisoners were told that there was a chance that one of them might be reallocated to the role of a guard if the right characteristics were present (reliability and initiative). This made them think the group was impermeable. When was permeable, prisoners were made a guard, they were told that no one could move roles now – which made the group impermeable. (iii) Legitimacy – whether they thought the inequalities of power were based on something real, deserving and legitimate, or whether they thought the inequalities were just random, unfair and illegitimate. At first, the prisoners were made to believe that allocation to group had been because guards were ‘better’ in some ways (initiative, authoritarianism) and so probably believed that the guards legitimately had more power and as prisoners they were legitimately subordinate. However, on day 3 the researchers told them (the truth) that assignment to groups was not legitimate, it was random (after matching). (iv) Cognitive alternatives – being able to think of alternative ways to behave and respond to a situation. This was increased on day 4 because the researchers introduced prisoner 10 – an individual with a background as a trade union official, who has negotiation and organisational skills.

d The ethical issues included protection from harm – participants were deprived of their normal rights and freedoms for the duration of the study, detained, confined and exposed to stressful situations, deprived of proper food and just given bread and water when they were being ‘punished’. Confidentiality and anonymity were raised as well because all the research was broadcast on television. Also, they were under constant surveillance which may lead to psychological harm. Deception was also an issue because the researchers effectively encouraged them to think things which were not true – such as how they had been allocated to the group of prisoners. The issue of informed consent was also raised by the study. However, Reicher and Haslam went to great lengths to ensure that participants were given informed consent as far as possible – they gave them a lengthy and detailed document to read and sign so that they knew what they were letting themselves in for.

e The conclusions of the study were that tyranny has to be understood not just as a property of an individual, but in terms of group processes. They also concluded that being given power (as in the case of the guards) does not always lead to tyranny – this is different to Zimbardo’s conclusions. In particular, if the subordinate group breaks down, then tyranny is more likely to occur.

f One change which could be made to the study would have been not to film it for BBC TV and that if filming did take place, it would just be for the researchers to collect observational data. This would probably change the results quite a lot. For example, people might not ‘act up’ because they imagined themselves broadcast into everyone’s living rooms. So prisoners might not have stormed the guards’ quarters and so on. Another difference might be how the guards behaved at the beginning. In the study, they did not show that they could control the prisoners and did not adopt a harsh regime. This may partly have been that they knew they were ‘visible’ and ‘accountable’ and they knew that at some point their loved ones, work colleagues etc. and generally people whose opinion of them matter – would watch them on TV and so they did not want to be seen as cruel or unreasonable. So, if the study became private, confidential and anonymous, the guards, not worrying about ‘future contexts’, might have chosen to take on power and behave more brutally.

Another change that they could make would be to not allocate people to roles on a matched participant design. Instead, they could conduct two experiments – one where the more authoritarian people were assigned to guards; and one where the less authoritarian people were assigned to guards.
If Reicher and Haslam were right – that group processes are most important (and that things like authoritarianism change as a result of group membership and processes) – then there would be no difference between the two experiments. However, they may find that there are differences – such as the authoritarian guards do take on their power more rapidly, and that in the authoritarian prisoner condition they refuse to be controlled by the guards. All in all, this would impact upon conclusions about the power of group processes and roles over personality and individual explanations.

Section C questions

a) Quantitative data consists of numbers. These could be, for example, people’s scores on a psychometric test, number of people in a particular condition etc. Qualitative data consists of words, descriptions etc. Examples might be a person’s response to an open question (such as ‘what did you dream last night?’ or ‘what are your views on eating five portions of fruit and vegetables each day?’) or it might be a description of how someone is seen to behave.

b) In this study, quantitative data was collected by self-report and psychometric tests. Participants (and people wanting to be participants) were given a test of authoritarianism with questions such as ‘there are two kinds of people, strong and weak’ (and they had to agree or disagree); ‘people should always keep to the rules’. This gives each participant a score. Another psychometric test was self-efficacy (which questions whether they thought their behaviour could make a difference), self-esteem and depression. They were also tested for social identification with the group (‘I feel strong ties with prisoners/guards etc.’) and again, a score was calculated for each participant. Qualitative data was collected through observation (direct or via cameras). This included things such as what happened, for example when the ‘prison commune’ was established, how the prisoners and guards behaved and responded to each other, whether they were passive and went along with things, what people talked about (e.g. prisoners expressed dislike of being locked up and being deprived of cigarettes).

c) One similarity with the study by Milgram (another social core study) is that both studies find that it is the power of the situation which is most important. Milgram found that ‘normal’ men, when put in a certain situation, would administer potentially electric shocks (or so they thought). For Milgram, the power of the situation far outweighs any personality feature. Equally, Reicher and Haslam conclude that the results of this study cannot be understood by looking at individuals; the account must look at the situation and specifically group processes. One difference between Reicher and Haslam and Milgram is that Milgram was much more ethically dubious. In Milgram’s study, virtually every ethical guideline (by today’s modern standards) was broken (except for debriefing). Participants were totally deceived (about the aims of the study, by the confederates, believing shocks were real), and harmed by the amount of stress experienced by thinking they were administering fatal-level shocks, to the point that a couple of participants had fits. In comparison, Reicher and Haslam’s study was very ethical! There was a small amount of some deception about how people believed they were allocated to groups. Also, some harm may have occurred due to the confinement. However, on the whole, the researchers were very ethically aware and they got fully informed consent from their participants and were prepared to stop the study if they felt it would get out of hand (which they did) – though Milgram let the participants continue until they themselves were defiant.

d) One strength of the qualitative approach is that it gives in-depth, rich data about whatever is being studied. This means that you can get a better understanding of what is being studied. For example, in the Reicher and Haslam study, through capturing the qualitative data of how participants were behaving and what they were talking about, they could form an in-depth view of how the participants were responding to the situation. They knew, for example, that the guards were talking about how seriously they felt about their role and the inequality between them and the prisoners. This helped to give the researchers insight into why the guards behaved as they did.

Another strength of the qualitative approach is that it gives a holistic view of people – a human view and not just a reductionist number. For example, in the Reicher and Haslam study, they knew the personal qualities of the prisoners and guards and this could help them explain what happened as humans in a social situation. So they knew that FCp was normally a mild character and yet became a leading figure among the prisoners because he had a strong sense of shared identity. This qualitative understanding is much fuller than just a number as it helps convey the complex interdependence in this study, between the individual and the group. Thus, it is a much more human and holistic way of capturing data about the world.

One disadvantage of qualitative data is that a huge amount of data is collected which, in the end, can be difficult for a researcher to compile, condense and make sense of. For example, in Reicher and Haslam, they had data on everyone’s behaviour, all of the time, as well as all of their conversations for 24 hours a day for 7 days. There is such a vast amount of data that it becomes difficult to do it justice and give a true picture when trying to communicate the findings in a report. Another disadvantage with qualitative data is that it can be difficult to interpret objectively. For example in Reicher and Haslam, they say that guard TGq was restrained because he was a businessman. But in fact, it might be that he was worried about his friends and family seeing him behave badly when it was to be shown on television.

Qs (page 170)

1. The Loftus and Palmer study makes a useful contribution to our understanding. It is useful because it is now widely accepted by courts in the UK and the US that someone should not be convicted on the basis of eyewitness testimony alone. This means that the risk of sending an innocent person to prison is reduced. Apart from highlighting the fact that our memories are not exact ‘recordings’ of what we have seen, this study has been useful to the police in terms of improving their interviewing techniques so as to avoid leading questions.

2. Milgram’s study certainly could be used to change people’s behaviour. If we think about what makes someone more or less obedient (e.g. state of dress, status/position) etc. of the authority figures, it could help make people more obedient, for example when driving, parking cars etc., preventing people from sitting in someone else’s pre-reserved seat on a train and so on. However, there are some situations when knowing how to make someone more obedient is a bad thing, for example, if the authority figure is trying to get someone to do something bad or illegal such as steal money from someone.

3 and 4 These are questions for you to think about and try and answer.
**Study 12: Piliavin et al. (Subway Samaritans)**

**Qs (page 175)**

1. An opportunity sample.
2. It would seem natural for someone to collapse, and it is certain that someone will be around. The enclosed environment allows relatively careful monitoring of all the bystanders.
3. (a) Passengers help a person carrying a cane more often than they help a person who appears to be drunk. (b) White passengers are more likely to help a white victim than a black victim and vice versa.
4. (a) Because Latané and Darley’s study was conducted in a laboratory and behaviour might have been affected by demand characteristics. (b) Because in this study participants were face to face with the injured person and therefore could see if no one else was responding, so the number of bystanders would have less effect.

**Qs (page 176)**

1. Yes, because it means that you have a smaller sample of how people behave with drunks (though there were still 38 trials).
2. Through the model of response to an emergency situation they explain that for drunks in general, the perceived costs of helping would be high while the costs of not helping would be low. When the bystander is white and the drunk person is black, according to the model, the costs of helping are higher still because there is greater fear of different race as well as less empathy (i.e. leading to reduced arousal).
3. Because in the trials where there had been no help forthcoming after 150 seconds you probably had a fairly unhelpful group of passengers.
4. (a) Because the victim is seen as deserving of help, and (b) because the costs of not helping were high, e.g. self-blame, perceived censure from others.
5. This study did not support the idea of diffusion of responsibility. In fact, the more people that were present in the emergency area, the more likely help was given. This is probably because the study took place in an enclosed setting and the potential helpers could see if the victim was or was not being helped — they could not simply ‘carry on walking’ and tell themselves that someone would help them.
6. A bystander who felt aroused could have reduced this arousal by rejecting the victim as undeserving of help. The arousal also was reduced because they were at some distance from the scene. The costs of helping were high and costs of not helping were low.
7. Because they felt more aroused as a result of not helping and to reduce this arousal they moved.
8. The main source of motivation for helping, according to Piliavin, is not being altruistic (being helpful just for the sake of it), but actually the main source of motivation is a selfish desire to rid oneself of an unpleasant emotional state caused by seeing someone in need.
9. Factors that decrease the likelihood of helping include: if the bystander is some distance away from the victim, if they feel no empathy with the victim, if the perceived costs of helping the victim are high and the rewards of helping are low. Factors which increase the likelihood of helping include: if the bystander is near to the victim, if they feel empathy with the victim, and if the perceived costs of helping the victim are low and the rewards of helping are high.
10. One of the things that is quite unique about this situation is that collapsing on a train is very specific. Other helping situations are likely to be in environments where people are more likely just to carry on walking, or to leave the situation (e.g. in a street, or a shopping centre, a pub etc.). Also, not all helping situations involve strangers. Often, the person who needs help is known to one or more of the bystanders.

However, in other respects, the features could be quite similar to other situations where someone collapses suddenly. So, altogether, the experimental features are not entirely unique and share enough similarities with other helping situations.

**Evaluating the study by Piliavin et al. (page 177)**

NB all answers should be contextualised.

**The research method**

Strengths: A field experiment is conducted in a more natural environment where people may behave more like they would usually, especially if they don’t know their behaviour is being studied.

Limitations: It is much more difficult to control extraneous variables which means we are less likely to be sure that the changes in the DV were due to the IV or to some other variables.

Strengths of observations — you can really see what is going on, observe actual behaviour rather than what people say they would do. This is quite important when investigating helping behaviour because the difference in what people might say they would do in a hypothetical situation of someone collapsing, and what people actually do when someone collapses in front of them.

One weakness of observation in this context is that it must have been difficult to note down all the information (how someone helped, what time, what people said and so on) in the time given and without attracting attention.

**The sample**

Rates of helping are thought to be low for urban people (though this would suggest that other people might be even more helpful). It was an individualist society, again if anything likely to be less helpful. The sample was taken during the day when 9–5 workers wouldn’t be on the subway – they might be a more helpful cross-section of the population.

Overall it seems reasonable to generalise from this study as there were so many participants (about 4450) and a good mix of male/female and ethnicity.

**Ethical issues**

Informed consent cannot be obtained from the participants, nor is it possible to debrief them afterwards. Their privacy is protected but they may experience psychological harm because of not helping, which could distress them, and also just by seeing an emergency.

One way to deal with this is to ask a representative group of people how they would feel if put in this situation to see whether it would be acceptable to them, and presume that the true participants would feel the same (presumptive consent).

**Reliability**

It is better to have two observers than one to verify what each one observes, though in this study each observer had different tasks so they weren’t verifying each other. They had quite a lot to note down and may have made errors.

Reliability could be checked by comparing the observations of the two observers. They could see whether the observers agreed on the information about first helpers such as gender, race. They could also correlate each observers’ recorded time for latency of helping. If the observations are reliable, then these should give a high positive correlation.

**Personality versus situation**

Situation: This study looked at reasons why people do or do not offer help in emergency situations. Rates of helping were high compared to findings from previous laboratory experiments.
This can be explained in terms of situational factors, for example the face-to-face nature of a subway emergency and the lack of escape. Other situational factors were also shown to be important, such as the behaviour of a model or the race of the victim.

Personality: Various dispositional factors such as gender also affect helping rates. Men were more willing to help than women possibly because the costs of helping were lower for them.

**Qualitative or quantitative?**

Quantitative data: Percentage of people who helped in cane and drunk conditions, latency rates, number of people in the carriage, number of people who left the carriage.

Strengths: Easy to analyse such data and make comparisons between the different conditions.

Limitations: It is a reductionist approach because data are reduced to a set of numbers which may lose important information such as why people helped or didn’t help.

Qualitative data: The comments made by passengers sitting near the observers, comments made by the participants in response to the emergency situation.

Strengths: Some interesting insights may be gained into why people helped or didn’t help, and may lead to ideas for further research.

Limitations: Difficult to analyse this data and make general conclusive statements about helping behaviour.

**Ecological validity**

These findings can be generalised to similar situations, for example helping when there is relatively little risk to the helper and where the emergency is obvious. But this doesn’t explain all helping situations.

**Applications/usefulness**

The question of pro-social behaviour is important, though it is difficult to see exactly how these findings would be applied.

Perhaps it might be useful for people to know how they could improve the likelihood of being helped by others by changing the way they present themselves. However, this study only tells us about helping behaviour in certain situations.

**What next?**

One change would be to conduct the study in a situation where escape was possible, for example a park or shopping street. According to the model such a change of setting should reduce helping rates.

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**Exam-style questions (page 179)**

**Section A questions**

1. a. Responsibility is diffused in a large group of people so that the more people there are, the less any individual feels responsibility and therefore the less likely help is to be forthcoming.

   b. Because the effect can only be seen when all but one participant is a confederate. In real life the more people there are, the more potential helpers there are and this would counteract the diffusion effect. Also, it was an enclosed space, so passengers could see if the victim was not receiving help and not just walk away and assume that someone else would help.

2. a. Costs and rewards.

   b. Passengers were more likely to help the cane victim than the drunk one – because the rewards of helping were higher (you should help someone who is ill) and the costs of helping were lower (an ill person is less likely to vomit on you than a drunk person).

3. a. They broke the guideline to seek informed consent because they didn’t ask participants whether they were willing to participate.

b. They could have obtained presumptive consent – this is when researchers tell people from a similar background or cross-section of society about a proposed study, the details, deceptions and so on, and ask whether they would mind taking part in such a study. If overall people don’t mind, the researchers can presume that the actual participants shouldn’t mind either.

4. a. (1) White ill (2) white drunk.

   b. The white ill model received more helping and more quickly than the white drunk.

5. One way to reduce arousal would be to have a victim collapse who elicits less empathy. This could be achieved through the drunk victim openly drinking and perhaps even being rude and saying ‘I don’t care what any of you think!’ before he collapses. He would elicit less empathy than the ill condition. Another way would be to reduce the time that the emergency continues for by ensuring the model helper always intervenes before 60 seconds if no one has done so by then.

6. One practical problem was that the students who took the part of the victim did not like playing the drunk and so ended up with many fewer drunk trials than ill trials. Another practical problem is that it was quite difficult for the observers to see everything they wanted to observe in such a busy situation – people standing up can obscure the observers’ view.

**Section B questions**

a. The aim of the study was to find out, in a field situation, whether people help and what factors influence rates of helping such as ill or drunk and the race (white or black) of the victim.

b. Data was collected on a subway train in New York. In all, 103 trials were conducted whereby a group of 4 researchers (students) got on at a particular station on a particular subway line. 70 seconds into the journey one of the researchers playing the victim (white or black) would collapse, either in the drunk condition (holding a bottle of alcohol) or in the ill condition (holding a cane). Two observers noted down lots of things including:

   i. How long it took for a person to help the victim

   ii. Whether other people also came to offer assistance

   iii. Whether the first helpers were male or female

   iv. Whether no one helped

   v. How many people were in the carriage and the gender and ethnicity of these people

vi. Any other responses to the situation such as comments people made or whether any bystanders left the carriage.

b. One advantage of this method is that it was in a field situation, that is a natural situation. All the previous research on helping had taken place in an artificial environment in a laboratory. This means that this was the first study to have a decent level of ecological validity and therefore was more generalisable to helping behaviour in real life. One disadvantage of the method was that, because of the multiple trials on the same route, bystanders may have witnessed this staged emergency more than once and ‘got wise’ to it and realised that there was something not entirely natural about the set up. This would have altered their responses to the emergency.

d. Reliability could be checked by comparing the observations of the two observers. They could see whether the observers agreed on the information about first helpers such as gender, race. For it to be reliable, there should be very high levels of agreement. They could also correlate each observers’ recorded time for latency of helping. If the observations are reliable, then these should give a high positive correlation, that is if observer one had recorded 50 seconds, then the other observer should have also recorded 50 seconds or very close to it! This is called inter-rater reliability.
Piliavin et al. found that overall there were very high rates of helping. This was much higher than in the previous laboratory studies. The different conditions of the victim did have an effect upon helping – the ill victim received spontaneous help 95% of the time, while the drunk victim only 50% of the time. On most of the trials where helping happened, more than one helper assisted the victim. On 21/103 trials 34 people left the critical area after the victim collapsed and this was more likely to happen in the drunk condition (suggesting greater ‘arousal’). Most of the first helpers (90%) were male, even though only 60% of the passengers were male – indicating that in this set-up males were much more likely to help than females. Piliavin et al. also found that there was no evidence to support the idea of diffusion of responsibility – there was not less helping when more bystanders were present. They thought that it was because this was an enclosed setting and that people could not ‘escape’ and walk away and assume that someone else would help – they could actually see if no one was helping and so were more motivated to have to help. Finally, there was a small, non-significant same race helping effect.

One change to this study would be to have female victims. There could still be the same conditions – white drunk, black ill, black drunk, black ill – but that all the victims would be female. Overall, there might be even higher rates of helping because the perceived costs of helping a female are probably less than helping a male because females are perceived as less aggressive. I think it would still be the case that the ill victim would receive more spontaneous helping than the drunk. However, I think that the difference between the ill and drunk conditions might be more pronounced in this new study. This is because, if it had been conducted in the 1960s, it was very uncommon for women to drink, especially publicy. Therefore, with such strong disapproval, it is less likely she would receive a high level of helping.

Another change would be to conduct the study in a different place. This could be, for example, a shopping centre. The victim conditions could all be the same as in the original study. I think that overall there would be less helping in this study and that it would support the idea of diffusion of responsibility. This is because people in this study would not be in such an enclosed space like in the subway where everyone would be in basically a couple of metres of the victim and with nothing else to distract them or to pretend to be distracted by. So people might not notice in a shopping mall, they might deliberately walk past and think that someone else will help them. The costs of not helping would be lower as there would not be so much censure from other onlookers.

**Section C questions**

**a** One assumption of the social approach is that a lot of our behaviour can be explained in terms of social dynamics such as group membership, group identity, conformity, and the influence of how others help upon us. We are basically social animals and there are strong pressures of ‘fit in’. The social approach would explain how people help in several ways. First of all, it would predict that we are more likely to help someone who we perceive as being in the same ‘group’ as us – same gender, same age, same ethnicity. Secondly, we are more likely to conform to others’ behaviour – so if no one helps, it may be intimidating not to conform and go and help; or if some people do go and help, again, other people will wish to conform to the ‘group’.

**b** One similarity between Piliavin et al. and Reicher and Haslam in research is that complex behaviour is sometimes very difficult to capture neatly. For example, in Piliavin et al., we do not really know why or why not people helped because they were not asked. Even if they had been asked, they might not have enough self-insight and awareness to know exactly what the factors were which motivated them to help.

**c** One strength of the social approach is that it is not a reductionist approach. It explains highly complex behaviour – social interactions and behaviour – in a complex way. It does not just try to explain complex behaviour in a reductionist way such as reinforcement or hormones. For example, in Piliavin et al., they explain whether or not someone helps in terms of his ‘model of response to an emergency situation’ which contains both biological elements (levels of arousal when someone sees an emergency) as well as cognitive elements – decision making whether to help or not, perceptions of costs of helping and costs of not helping. Therefore, this model is quite complex and does help us to understand and predict helping behaviour.

Another strength of the social approach in research is that it gives useful insights into society and events that society gets hung upon or sometimes has trouble understanding about itself. For example, one of the reasons there was so much research into helping was a national outrage about Kitty Genovese. The general public could not understand why no one had helped her despite there being a large number of witnesses. There were many newspaper reports written about it and lots of soul-searching trying to understand the reasons why. Piliavin helps to explain this phenomenon in terms of his model of response – there were lower levels of arousal because the witnesses were some distance from Kitty – upstairs in apartment buildings. Also, the perceived costs of helping would have been very high – they might face danger themselves, it might be some sort of trap and so on. Therefore, this research is helpful for giving insight into important social questions.

One weakness of the social approach is that complex behaviour is sometimes very difficult to capture neatly. For example, in Piliavin et al., we do not really know why or why not people helped because they were not asked. Even if they had been asked, they might not have enough self-insight and awareness to know exactly what the factors were which motivated them to help.

Another weakness of the social approach in research is that it has one of the worst track records in ethics. Much social research, because of the necessary complexity to try and create socially meaningful situations mean that ethical guidelines have been broken through lack of consent or deception etc. Some of the worst studies in terms of ethics have been social studies such as Milgram and Zimbardo and Asch. The Piliavin et al. study also was not ethical – no participants consented or were debriefed. They were deceived.
about the victim and made to believe that someone was ill and really needed help. This may also have caused some stress as participants get worried about their own safety and whether or not they should help etc. Therefore, this study was unethical too.

Qs (page 181)

1. Deception – Milgram is probably the worst for this. Participants were made to believe that they were administering shocks to another participant. In fact, the other participant was a ‘stooge’ and had been hired to act the part of learner. The electric shocks were not at all real and in fact only one electric shock was administered in each trial – the ‘test’ shock to make sure it was working – which was really just a trick to help ensure the participant’s belief in the shocks. Participants were also made to believe that they had randomly selected the role of teacher, rather than learner – but in fact this was also rigged.

Psychological harm – Milgram again is one of the worst studies (ever!) for this. Participants got seriously stressed out because they thought they were administering high level electric shocks to an innocent person. They trembled and dug their fingernails into their hands, groaned, suffered from nervous laughter and three even had seizures. Potentially also, participants left the experiment knowing something quite disturbing about themselves – that they were capable of administering a fatal electric shock – that they did not already know. Therefore, there was a lot of harm in this study.

Invasion of privacy – Reicher and Haslam’s participants had their privacy invaded. It must be noted that the participants had consented to this and knew that they would be monitored at all times throughout the study and throughout the prison. They also knew that their every moment would be recorded for later close analysis and also to be shown on TV. Therefore, any ‘private moment’ they might have had in the prison, such as a personal conversation or some private habit, was observed.

2. Observation of children going to and from school would take place in a public area and therefore, according to the BPS code, does not actually need consent. However, it would probably be a good idea to try and gain some sort of consent from parents – through presumptive consent perhaps – to make sure no one in this particular community of a school feels that trust has been broken. Therefore, there should be no deception either and the participants should be made clear about the aims of the study. They should not be followed or anything else that might make them feel intimidated. The children and their parents should also be reassured that the findings would be reported anonymously and that no one individual (e.g. Katie Smith from class 2B) would be identified.

3. This is one for you to think about … on Facebook, people can alter their privacy settings, so presumably, if no one wants strangers to look at their profile etc., they can prevent it quite easily. However, when someone puts their profile on Facebook, they are not doing it so that a researcher might use it as part of a study – they are doing it for social and networking purposes – in which case, this could be seen to be unethical. People are also perhaps not aware of who might view their profile (in the way that we are aware generally of who can actually observe us in real life), and so we should respect their assumption of a reasonable level of privacy perhaps. How would you feel if your profile or your msn messages to a friend were monitored by a psychologist? Perhaps you wouldn’t mind … but maybe you would?