



# CALIFORNIA STATE SCIENCE FAIR 2010 PROJECT SUMMARY

<b>Name(s)</b> <b>Sarah R. Siskind</b>	<b>Project Number</b> <b>S0324</b>
<b>Project Title</b> <b>Milgram Revisited: The Effect of Communication on Obedience</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Abstract</b></p> <p><b>Objectives/Goals</b> Just how communication contributes to obedience is an underdeveloped area of psychology. One may obey an order due to an enlarged prefrontal cortex or due to societal pressures. It is hard to quantify just what makes a stick in the mud become just another brick in the wall. By understanding the components of compliance we can develop better parenting techniques, explain historical phenomena, and expand our knowledge of social interaction.</p> <p><b>Methods/Materials</b> 3 groups of 20 students were ordered to read a packet of questions to a confederate in an adjoining room via cellphone. The subjects were not told the purpose of the experiment. The confederate insisted she had to leave to create a form of resistance to the subject's task. The number of questions provided a quantifiable measurement of the participant's obedience. I used 3 carefully monitored communication styles as the independent variable: Authoritarian, Authoritative, and Permissive. My demeanor as the experimenter varied from group to group. As the Authoritarian experimenter, I dressed formally and communicated in a commanding tone. As the Authoritative experimenter, I dressed ordinarily and explained details, incorporating the subject. As the Permissive experimenter I dressed informally and gave vague directions. To control all extraneous factors, both the confederate and I acted from a script and I conducted the experiment in relative seclusion with strangers.</p> <p><b>Results</b> The data supported my hypothesis. Ultimately, Authoritarian communication engendered the most obedience with 75% of the group reaching the final question. 55% of the group under Authoritative communication completed the packet, while only 30% of the Permissive group completed the packet.</p> <p><b>Conclusions/Discussion</b> Simple changes in volume, posture, or wardrobe fostered different reactions; after strong eye contact, subjects were prone to obey. Additionally, though the Authoritative group did not complete the packet as frequently as the Authoritarian group, since the subjects required much less insistence, they were more obedient per individual command. From these findings, we can determine the appropriate way to assert authority. Clear Authoritarian dialogue could expedite productivity and effective communication in the classroom would yield educational advantages. Finally, by examining our own propensity to obey, we can learn how to resist.</p>	
<b>Summary Statement</b> This study, a reconstructed version of Milgram's notorious 1961 experiment, determines the effect of various communication types on obedience.	
<b>Help Received</b> Teacher, Mrs. Cota, advised on the format and helped with research; Participants were taken from Mrs. Haugen's history class at Oakland Technical High School.	