How Ideology Shapes What We Teach about Authority: A Comparative Analysis of the Presentation of Milgram's Experiments in Textbooks

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Abstract

Stanley Milgram's experiments in the 1960s, which measured the willingness of participants to obey an authority figure and administer what they thought were electric shocks to a stranger, have contributed greatly to an understanding of power relations, obedience to authority and their potentially devastating consequences. Milgram and other Jewish scholars who lost friends and family in the Holocaust are regarded as pioneers of social psychology, yet they and the context that inspired them are muted within our field. Employing a comparative case analysis, we contrast the representation of Milgram's studies in introductory textbooks in psychology and management and consider how the fields' ideological commitments explain differences in coverage. Given their relevance to contemporary social movements that involve the abuse of authority by those in positions of power, we make the case for the inclusion of Milgram's experiments in the management curriculum. Beyond Milgram, our study encourages critical reflection on what we are teaching, and not teaching, our students about management.

Keywords: Authority; power; Stanley Milgram; management education; textbooks; management history.

"Any curriculum must, by definition, exclude – the question is what is excluded and why, and whether the purpose of our education system should be to perpetuate existing power structures and norms, or equip students with the critical tools to question them."

(Gebrial, 2018: 26)

The business school curriculum comes under scrutiny whenever new social issues in business emerge. Earlier this century, the teaching of business ethics was put under the microscope following the Enron fraud (Ghoshal, 2005) and a global financial crisis (Khurana & Nohria, 2008). In the past decade, as concerns about climate change have intensified, attention has turned to strengthening teaching about responsible management and sustainability (Bunch, 2020). Recently, the emergence of new social movements such as MeToo, Black Lives Matter and others related to marginalization of indigenous peoples have fuelled new debates about business schools' social responsibilities. Also raising concerns are other issues like bullying and the problematic cultures created by narcissistic leaders (Breevaart, Wisse & Schyns, 2021; O'Reilly, Chatman & Doerr, 2020). Stakeholders are increasingly looking to business leaders to make statements on these issues (Gelles & Miller, 2017), and in business schools efforts to refresh and 'decolonise' the curriculum are accelerating (Banerjee, Rodriguez & Dar, 2020; Prieto & Phipps, 2020).

This article encourages further critical reflection on how the management curriculum might evolve to address the pressing social issues of our times. Specifically, we consider what management education might learn from how a related field, social psychology, deals with the dark side of authority – an element that is a root cause of most if not all the issues described above.

Social psychology was pioneered by a group of Jewish scholars, including Kurt Lewin, Solomon Asch, Serge Moscovici, Henri Tajfel and Stanley Milgram, who all lost friends and family in the Holocaust. They sought to understand the social conditions in which people acted in terrible ways that often went against their individual reason and principles. We focus our attention in this article on Stanley Milgram, considered one of the most eminent psychologists of the 21st century (Haggbloom et al., 2002), whose 'obedience' experiments conducted at Yale University during the 1960s are regarded as "the most famous social-psychological research of all time" (Blass, 2004: x).[1] Participants in Milgram's experiments thought they were taking part in a study on the effects of punishment on learning. They were given the role of 'teacher' and ordered by an authority figure to administer electric shocks to a 'learner' strapped to a chair, beginning at 15 volts, and increasing after each incorrect answer to 450 volts. The studies were designed to see how far participants would go before refusing to obey. The results surprised and dismayed Milgram, with 65% continuing to 450 volts in the baseline study. Milgram theorised that such extreme levels of cruelty by otherwise decent people was because of obedience to authority. In his 1974 book by the same name, Milgram described participants as being in an "agentic state" – when a person sees themselves as no longer acting in accordance with their own desires, but "as an agent for carrying out another person's wishes" (1974: 132). This obedience to authority overrode their ethics, sympathy, and moral conduct (Milgram, 1974). The finding that a significant majority of people will administer a potentially lethal electric shock just because a person in authority asks them to, provided an explanation for the atrocities committed

1 They are typically regarded as 'obedience' experiments in the literature, although, as we discuss later, recent research suggests obedience is not the only way to conceptualise the findings. For simplicity we refer to them hereafter as 'Milgram's experiments' and 'Milgram's studies', whilst acknowledging that Milgram disliked this characterisation, since these studies were only one part of his experimental programme.

by the Nazis and enhanced the reputation of social psychology as a field that could make a positive impact on the world.

The impetus for this study came from our experiences as management students and educators. In psychology we learnt that Milgram provides insights into power relations at work, yet we did not encounter his work in the business school. As critical management educators, we recognise the value of Milgram's studies for our teaching yet observed that they were often not mentioned in textbooks. This led us to investigate further. Milgram's experiments are a staple for introductory courses in psychology and social psychology (Griggs, 2017; Griggs & Whitehead, 2015a, 2015b). However, as indicated by Table 1's list of popular management and organizational behaviour textbooks' coverage of Milgram's work, they have not made the same impact on our field. The exceptions to this are textbooks written from sociological or critical perspectives by authors outside the United States (Bratton, 2021; Clegg, Pitsis & Mount, 2021; King & Lawley, 2019; Knights & Willmott, 2017). A similar pattern exists in research, with critical management scholars noting a lack of interest in Milgram, obedience to authority and the Holocaust with mainstream organization theory (Clegg, 2006; Cunha, Rego & Clegg, 2010; Clegg & Ross-Smith, 2003; Stokes & Gabriel, 2010).

Insert Table 1 about here

What is it that makes Milgram essential for social psychology textbooks but of marginal interest to management studies? Why is Milgram included by authors of critical management textbooks, but often not by others? What does our field lose from undervaluing Milgram, as well as the historical context that inspired him: particularly at a time when the issues that concern

management are increasingly focussed on the improper use of power and authority? And how might we incorporate Milgram's studies into the management curriculum? These are questions we set out to explore in this article.

In doing so, we contribute to literature examining the politics of knowledge about management in relation to what is considered to be the historical, foundational ideas of our field (Bridgman & Cummings, 2021; Cooke, 1999; 2006; Cummings, Bridgman, Hassard & Rowlinson, 2017; Hassard, 2012; Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993; Spector, 2016). This is a critical and creative endeavour, as much about the future as it is about the past. It is *critical* in the sense of questioning those assumed historical foundations and *creative* in terms of creating new possibilities for what we consider 'management' to be, now and into the future. It is also a literature that has a practical orientation. By re-examining our field's foundations, there is potential to teach management differently, which might influence the way management is practised as our students develop their careers.

The structure of our article is as follows. First, we locate our study within literature questioning the assumed foundations of management studies as represented in textbooks. We then analyse the coverage of Milgram's studies in a leading textbook in social psychology and organizational behaviour written by the same author, Robert Baron and consider what might explain the differences. We draw on new research into Milgram's findings to discuss the ways in which Milgram could occupy a more central place in the management curriculum in ways that speak to the pressing social issues of our times. And finally, we consider the broader implications of our study for what we teach about students about management.

REFLECTING ON TOPIC CHOICES AND IDEOLOGY IN MANAGEMENT TEXTBOOKS

"Why some topics get attention and others don't and how research questions are framed are themselves important topics for research and theoretical exploration" (Pfeffer, 2010: 40)

In his 2010 article in *Academy of Management Perspectives*, Jeffrey Pfeffer asked why there was relatively little consideration of human wellbeing (what he termed 'social sustainability') in the management literature, compared with the interest in sustainability of the physical environment. Pfeffer (2010:36) concluded that it had much to do with "an ideology of the primacy of markets and shareholder interests", with research emphasising firm performance as a dependent variable and economic objectives taking priority over social ones (Walsh, Weber & Margolis, 2003). Pfeffer's observation about our field's underlying ideological commitments may also be a factor in what we teach about authority and its abuses. And perhaps the best means for exploring this is to examine management textbooks.

Despite a proliferation of pedagogical tools in the social sciences, including cases, simulations and experiential exercises, textbooks remain the primary instrument through which students engage with our field (Stambaugh & Trank, 2010). They socialise students into how they can expect to be managed as employees, and how they manage others later in their careers (Calas & Smircich, 1989). Textbooks reflect the concerns of both researchers and practitioners but are perhaps more influential on practice than management journals, which have a small audience beyond the academy (Aguinis, Ramani, Alabduljader, Bailey & Lee, 2019).

Textbooks also create and maintain disciplinary boundaries (Cramblett Alvarez, Leach, Rodriguez & Jones, 2020; Fineman & Gabriel, 1994, Harding, 2003). These boundaries, which shift over time, are the result of decisions made about what to include and exclude, as well as the way the included content is categorised, organised and presented, relative to other fields (Billig,

2015; Giraud, 2018; Kuhn, 1962; Mir, 2003; Vicedo, 2012). Textbooks, therefore, are histories – they are narratives of particular people, ideas, events, and contexts from the past. As historiographer Keith Jenkins notes, the production of history is always a subjective process. There is "nothing we *have* to be loyal to, no facts we *have* to find, no truths we *have* to respect, no problems we *have* to solve, no projects we *have* to complete: it is we who decide these things" (2003: 29, emphasis in original).

From this perspective, the writing of history in the form of textbooks always has a purpose, it is always for someone, or something – it is never innocent. Ideology "seeps into every nook and cranny of history" (Jenkins, 1993: 24). In their recent review, Seeck, Sturdy, Boncori and Fougère (2020) identified seven different conceptualizations of ideology in our field. The one of greatest relevance for our purpose here is 'ideology as legitimation', defined by (Bendix, 1956: 2) as "all ideas which are espoused by or for those who exercise authority in economic enterprises, and which they seek to explain and justify that authority". Ideology, in this sense, is different to 'false consciousness', or that which prevents us from getting a true understanding. Rather, ideology is a set of ideas, promoted by those in authority, to justify that authority.

Influential management textbook authors accept that their books are ideological. In a 2003 article in *Journal of Management Education* several were asked 'do you see your textbooks as propaganda or ideology?' Stephen Robbins, widely regarded as the world's best-selling author, responded:

> I see my books as supporting an ideology. But, of course, all textbooks sell an ideology. [Organizational Behaviour] books…for the most part, support a managerial perspective. This reflects the market – business schools. We need to genuflect to the Gods of productivity, efficiency, goals, etc…we reflect business school values. (Robbins in Cameron, Ireland, Lussier, New & Robbins, 2003: 714).

A managerial ideology is appropriate, argues Robbins, because the purpose of

management education is to train future managers. Kim Cameron, author of successful leadership textbooks, agreed that management textbooks were propaganda publications (in terms of privileging the managerial worldview), but he saw that as legitimate because textbooks were based on scholarly research (Cameron et al., 2003).

Our study contributes to a growing interest in the idea of textbooks as histories and history as a narrative reflective of present ideology. Studies have examined how textbooks integrate new research (Stambaugh & Trank, 2010), present classic studies (Durepos & Mills, 2012; Foster, Mills & Weatherbee, 2014; Jacques & Durepos, 2015), as well as particular topics: change management (Cummings, Bridgman & Brown, 2016); leadership (Carroll, Firth, Ford & Taylor, 2016), culture (Fougère & Moulettes, 2012) bureaucracy (Cummings & Bridgman, 2011); group dynamics (Pol, Bridgman & Cummings, 2022) and research methods (Bell & Taylor, 2013).

What these investigations have lacked in making their argument, however, is a point of comparison. While they make a variety of cases for a lack of representation or misrepresentations of foundational ideas, the gaps, and misrepresentations they highlight are generally not drawn in relation to anything other. In studying the coverage of Milgram in management, we thought it important to identify a contrast case. Comparative cases are more useful for studying change over time and enable a more effective isolation of reasons for differences and changes, such as contrasting subject ideologies, which is what we are interested in here (Campbell, 2012; Ragin, 2014; Yan & Gray, 1994). We set out to examine Milgram's treatment in management relative to his treatment in psychology – a social science with a related interest in understanding human behaviour. To provide a clearer focus, we examined the sub-field of social psychology, rather than the parent discipline psychology, and to match this chose

organizational behaviour (the sub-field of management closest with regard to its objects of study) as the comparator.

We drew on existing studies of Milgram's experiments in social psychology textbooks (Griggs, 2017; Griggs & Whitehead, 2015a, 2015b; Stam, Lubek & Radtke, 1997). Griggs and Whitehead (2015) examined editions of ten introductory social psychology textbooks. All featured Milgram and devoted 7.4 pages on average to his studies, with a range of 4 to 16 pages.[2] We examined two others (Crisp, 2015; Bordens & Horowitz, 2015), both of which had similarly extensive coverage. This supports Blass' conclusion that "any textbook for those courses that failed to mention those studies would be considered incomplete" (Blass, 2004: 259). As Table 1 shows, only five of the 16 management textbooks we examined included Milgram's experiments, four of which embrace a critical management perspective (Bratton, 2021; Clegg, Pitsis & Mount, 2021; King & Lawley, 2019; Knights & Willmott, 2017). In the following paragraphs, we present a detailed analysis of a unique set of two textbooks, one on social psychology and the other on organizational behaviour, both written by the same author.

COVERAGE OF MILGRAM'S EXPERIMENTS IN ROBERT BARON'S TEXTBOOKS

Robert Baron is rare amongst academics for having a distinguished career in two fields: psychology and management. During his tenure at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Baron led both the Department of Psychology and the Department of Managerial Policy and Organization. He has published research and authored best-selling textbooks in both fields: 14 editions of

[2] The introductory social psychology textbooks were Aronson, Wilson & Akert (2013); Baron, Branscombe & Byrne (2012); Baumeister & Bushman (2014); DeLamater, Myers & Collett (2015); Franzoi (2013); Gilovich, Keltner, Chen & Nisbett (2013); Greenberg, Schmader, Arndt & Landau (2015); Kassin, Fein & Markus (2014); Kenrick, Neuberg & Cialdini (2015); Myers (2012).

Social Psychology and nine editions of *Behavior in Organizations*. The same highly respected academic writing two popular introductory textbooks in multiple editions, in each of the fields we wanted to compare with regard to their treatment of Milgram, presented a unique occurrence in the field for us to observe over time (Pettigrew, 2003).

Coverage of Milgram in Robert Baron's *Social Psychology*

We first analysed the coverage of Milgram's experiments in Baron's *Social Psychology*, which was first published in 1974, the same year as Milgram's book *Obedience to Authority*. Baron's co- or second authors on this book changed over time: Donn Byrne in (editions one to 12); William Griffitt (edition one); and Nyla Brandscombe (editions 11 to 14). Our content analysis of how Milgram's experiments are covered across these editions can be grouped into three main elements.

1. Social Psychology teaches that Milgram pushed ethical boundaries, but for a good reason

Milgram's experiments, like many others of the time, relied on deception – it was vital that the 'teachers' believed that they were actually shocking the 'learner'. The extreme nature of the deception troubled some of Milgram's Yale colleagues and a complaint was made to the American Psychological Association in 1962 (Blass, 2004). Baumrind (1964) wrote a scathing assessment, accusing Milgram of permanently damaging participants' trust in authority. Milgram defended himself vigorously, arguing that most participants reported feeling glad they were involved, but the ethical debate dogged Milgram for the rest of his career (Blass, 2004).

Social Psychology informs readers that while Milgram pushed the ethical boundaries of the time, he did so for good reason. Any harm to participants was outweighed by the public good of understanding the dangers of obedience. In the first edition, Milgram is introduced to readers

in a section on experimental deception. While it acknowledges that Milgram's experiments produced extreme levels of anxiety, readers are reassured that Milgram provided participants "a full explanation of the deceptions employed at the end of the experimental sessions" (Baron, Byrne & Griffitt, 1974: 18). Moreover, he is portrayed as a pioneer of social psychology's ethical treatment of subjects. While "it is probably safe to say that Milgram could not conduct his studies in the United States or many other countries today" (Baron & Byrne, 2003: 377), he is given credit for spurring the adoption of stricter ethical guidelines.

So, while *Social Psychology* does not shy away from the ethical debate involving Milgram's experiments, the coverage may be considered friendly to Milgram, a finding replicated in earlier studies of social psychology textbooks (Griggs & Whitehead, 2015a, 2015b; Stam, Lubek & Radke, 1997).

2. Social Psychology teaches that challenging authority is not just desirable, it is our duty

Baron's social psychology textbook also takes a normative stance on the desirability of resistance vis-à-vis obedience. In the third edition (1981: 257), Baron and Byrne state that if individuals feel responsibility for the consequences of their actions, and have others around them who disobey, they are more likely to disobey themselves. This "provides a ray of hope. The power of authority figures to command obedience is great, but it *can* be countered under certain conditions" (p. 258. emphasis in original).

In the fifth edition (1987), Baron and Byrne go one step further, stating that in the face of unjustifiable commands which will have negative effects "it is our *obligation*, as well as our right, to resist" (1987: 257, emphasis in original). They also ask "How can this type of influence be resisted? Fortunately, several strategies seem effective in this regard" (p. 256). This includes

reminding recipients of orders that they, rather than the authority figure giving the orders, are responsible for any harm caused by their actions. Students are also encouraged to question the motives of authority figures. "Are they really in a better position to judge what is appropriate and what is inappropriate? What motives lie behind their commands – selfish gain or socially beneficial goals?" (p. 256).

Notable in Baron and Byrne's discussion of Milgram's experiments are the case studies they draw on to illustrate the social significance of resistance. In the seventh edition (1994) it is Kurdish resistance to Saddam Hussein. There is also a photo of German students dismantling the Berlin Wall in 1989 with the heading "Resisting sources of authority: The potential benefits are great" (p. 386). In the eighth edition (1997) the political context is the Soviet Union, where Boris Yeltsin defied the authorities and helped bring about the downfall of the Soviet regime and "many other totalitarian communist regimes throughout the world" (p. 348). Each case affirms the stance taken in United States foreign policy at the time and is judged to be justifiable and desirable resistance against an oppressive authority.

3. Social Psychology teaches that we are all susceptible to the dangers of authority at work

Milgram's experiments were not directly concerned with work relations. Whilst participants were paid $4.50 irrespective of whether they continued to the highest shock or not, they were volunteers in a one-off encounter (Blass, 2004). In the first edition of *Social Psychology* Baron et al note it is "somewhat frightening" that the experimenter had no real power over the subjects and that "presumably, obedience would be even greater if the commands came from someone who has some control over the subject's life" (1974: 102). There was much less, therefore, for Milgram's participants to lose by refusing to obey than employees, who put at risk their standing

within the organization, their relationship with colleagues, their chances of career advancement and even, in extreme situations, their jobs. In the sixth edition (1991), this point is made explicit. The demand for obedience "is far from rare – business executives issue many orders to their subordinates" (p. 339).

In sum, Baron's *Social Psychology* portrays Milgram's experiments as a significant step in the development of social psychology that provide important lessons regarding the improved ethical treatment of subjects. Readers are told that when authority is being used inappropriately, it is their duty to resist, to prevent the destructive effects of blind obedience. But this is difficult, especially at work because managers wield significant power over employees. A final notable feature of the coverage is a personal anecdote shared by Baron from the eighth edition onwards, that shows how meaningful the Milgram experiments were for him.

> I (Bob Baron) went to high school with Milgram's niece, and I can remember the shock with which students in my class reacted when she told us about her uncle's findings, several years before they were published. Yet I was dismayed again when as a college student, I read the actual report of this study. (Baron & Byrne, 1997: 346)

The extensive and positive treatment of Milgram in Baron's social psychology textbook is replicated in another best-seller, *Social Psychology* by David Myers, which was first published in 1983 and is now in its 14th edition (2021). Myers was sole author on the first eleven editions and co-authored the 12th, 13th, and 14th editions with Jean Twenge. As with Baron's social psychology text, Milgram received extensive coverage in all of Myers' 14 editions and the same three themes were emphasised.

Like Baron, Myers is staunch in his defence of Milgram. Whilst he provides a detailed account of criticisms of Milgram, Myers counters those criticisms by highlighting the valuable lessons to be learnt from the experiments. He also notes Milgram's rebuttal that most participants reported being glad they took part. Like Baron, Myers takes an overt stance on the desirability of

resisting authority. Noteworthy is the inclusion of this quote from C.P Snow: "When you think of the long and gloomy history of man, you will find more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than in the name of rebellion" (Myers, 1990: 216). And like Baron, Myers refers to foreign policy arenas to make his point – the Nazi Holocaust, Saddam Hussein's suppression of the Kurds and the Serbian conflict.

Myers is also clear about the relevance of Milgram's experiment to work organizations. In the eighth edition (2005) he presents a table comparing three classic studies of obedience: those by Asch (conformity), Sherif (norm foundation) and Milgram (obedience) along with 'real life examples' of each. For Asch it is "fads such as tattoos", for Sherif "appreciating a tasty food that others love", and for Milgram "soldiers or employees following questionable orders" (Myers, 2005: 227).

Coverage of Milgram in Robert Baron's *Behavior in Organizations*

Baron was sole author of the first two editions of the *Behavior in Organizations* textbook (1983, 1986) and had Jerald Greenberg as co-author for the subsequent seven editions. Much of the material on Milgram's studies in the first edition of *Behaviour in Organizations* is a direct replication of text and photographs from the already-published early editions of *Social Psychology*. Milgram appears in a section on group processes, in a chapter "Influence and Power: Tactics for getting our way", under a subheading "Power: testing its limits". Baron describes a hypothetical scenario where you are asked by your boss to dump a load of dangerous chemicals into a river under the cover of darkness.

> What would you do in this situation? Would you obey your boss's orders? If you did this would be understandable, if not totally defensible. After all, he has great power over you. He controls your salary, your promotions, and even your very job. Thus, if you knuckled under and followed his directions, there would be strong reasons for doing so. (1983:

445)

What is notable in this quotation is that the reader is positioned as an employee, rather than as a manager. This is unusual, since most management textbooks are written in a way that puts students 'in the shoes' of a manager, providing them with frameworks, models and theories to solve managerial problems. This preference for a managerial perspective is encapsulated well by Stoner (1982), author of the world's best-selling textbook at that time. Addressing the reader as a manager "is done intentionally: I want to encourage the reader to start thinking like a manager as soon as possible" (Stoner, 1982: xv).

In this first edition, Baron, like he does in *Social Psychology*, takes the view that resisting "pseudo-authorities" is desirable and achievable: "All that is needed is some means of putting holes in their aura of legitimacy" (1983: 449). Baron note that in some situations, it might only need one or two people to refuse to obey. However, his optimism is tempered with a warning that challenging the authority of powerful managers can be severe: "Deal with such persons cautiously – the career you save may be your own!" (1983: 449-50).

The first edition of *Behavior in Organizations* would be the last to mention Milgram's experiments. Despite Baron's personal connection with Milgram's niece, his dismay at the findings of the experiments, his insistence of their relevance to work organizations and the benefits to students and society from understanding this, Milgram no longer featured in his organizational behaviour textbook.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MILGRAM AND OTHER JEWISH SCHOLARS TO THE CREATION AND EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Shortly, we consider possible reasons for Milgram's disappearance from Baron's organizational

behaviour text. First, we reflect on the reasons why Milgram and his contemporaries are considered more important to social psychology, and thus more worthy of inclusion within the boundaries of that curriculum, than they are to management.

The primary figure in social psychology is Kurt Lewin. When Hitler came to power, the Polish-born Lewin anticipated the coming social changes in Germany in the 1930s and left his job at the prestigious University of Berlin. He headed to the US and started again as a Professor at the University of Iowa. Lewin thought people would thrive better under democratic conditions than the dictatorial leadership he had left behind, and he created an experiment where two different rooms were set up for groups of children to do crafts. One room was led by an aloof, autocratic manager who barked instructions, and the other by a manager who allowed them to make decisions collectively and gave friendly encouragement. While the autocratic groups were more productive in basic tasks, they turned on one another when the manager was absent and the democratic groups were substantially less aggressive, more cooperative, and more fulfilled (Allport, 1954; Cartwright, 1979).

Solomon Asch, Milgram's "most important scientific influence" (Blass, 2004: 26), was also born to a Polish-Jewish family. They arrived in the United States in 1920 but many other relatives and friends remained in Eastern Europe. Asch was working as a graduate assistant for Gordon Allport at Harvard's social relations department in 1955. Allport brought in Asch as a visiting lecturer and assigned Milgram to be his assistant for the year. Asch's research challenged the prevailing behaviourism of the time, arguing that its over-emphasis on individual behaviour and its belief that subjective experience, context and social phenomena were beyond scientific inquiry (Blass, 2004). He demonstrated this in a famous experiment (1958) that, like Milgram's, involved deception. Participants, who had been told the study was about perceptual

judgment, were seated at a table with seven others, who were all accomplices of the experiment. The group was presented with four vertical lines and asked which two lines were of equal length. When the accomplices all gave a clearly incorrect answer, one-third of the time participants agreed with the group rather than trust their own judgment. Asch's finding helps us understand how extremist groups can influence others to go along with their views or, more trivially perhaps, how groupthink can occur in organizations, where individuals decide to support decisions they do not initially agree with.

Serge Moscovici grew up in a Jewish orthodox household in Romania. Antisemitic laws forced him to leave school in 1941 and in the same year he witnessed the Bucharest Pogrom, where a fascist paramilitary group massacred 135 Jews. He was a forced labourer until the end of the War and after that went to study psychology in France. While Asch was interested in the power of the majority over a minority, Moscovici, thinking that the majority might still not agree with Nazi policies, wondered if a minority could influence a majority to act against their reasoning or principles. In one of Moscovici's experiments, subjects were asked whether a slide was green or blue. Two actors in some of the groups of six subjects gave some obviously wrong answers – saying green when slides were blue. Moscovici found that the majority were not influenced. But he then introduced another set of slides included blue and green but also ambiguous turquoise shades. Those subjects who had seen the earlier accomplices declare the blue slides to be green, tended to classify more of the ambiguous slides as green. They might have ignored the actors in the first experiment, but they were nonetheless still influenced by them. Moscovici thus theorised that under a brutal dictatorship, a minority might still influence a majority – in subtle, difficult to detect, ways over time. His experiments also showed how a smaller group of activists could change the mind of majorities, even though those changes may

happen gradually, as in the case of the suffragette or civil rights or MeToo movements (Moscovici & Markova, 2006).

Henri Tajfel's parents, brother and much of his extended family died in the Holocaust in Poland. He was interested in group dynamics and in his best-known experiment groups of boys were asked to judge slides of paintings by Kandinsky and Klee. The boys were then told they had been allocated into either in the Kandinsky or Klee group based on the paintings they liked. In fact, the two groups were randomly generated. The boys were not aware of the ruse because they did not know which paintings were done by which painter. Each boy was then given a sum of money to distribute as they wished to those who had taken part. The astonishing finding was that despite the groups being random, on average the boys gave far more money to the members of their own group. The experiment showed that the mere act of categorising people into different groups leads them to discriminate. This helped explain how the Nazis could have set one group of citizens against another; how seemingly arbitrary choices about what football team to support could have real, seemingly irrational, behavioural consequences; and how different groups in an organization or business (e.g., marketing people, or people based in a particular region), may be biased towards others they consider 'their own' (Sewell, 1989).

With these scholars central to the formation of social psychology as a field, it is unsurprising that Milgram receives such extensive and positive coverage in social psychology textbooks. Social psychology's origins are investigating the 'science of evil' (BBC, 2020) and this historical context provided it a defining value – individual self-determination in the face of authority. Social psychology textbooks promote and reinforce this value and downplay criticisms that Milgram's deception was unethical. As Stam et al (1997) have noted, social psychology textbooks also take a somewhat hypocritical stance on resistance of authority. They inform

students that rebellion against authorities (especially Communist and Fascist states) is heroic, but they do not encourage students to reflect critically on the authority of the textbooks themselves.

WHY HAS MILGRAM NOT BEEN CONSIDERED AN IMPORTANT FIGURE IN THE MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM?

It might be expected that Milgram would feature prominently in management textbooks. Milgram's studies involved a hierarchy of authority between the experimenter and participant. Hierarchy is a pervasive feature of organizations and a foundation of management thought, a debt owed, according to management textbooks, to the pioneering ideas of Max Weber. Milgram was also interested in the division of labour, just like other famous names in management, Adam Smith, and Frederick Taylor. Milgram modified his baseline study so that the 'learner' had only to administer the test, whilst another person delivered the shock. With this greater division of labour, where participants were further removed from the consequences of their actions, 92.5% of subjects continued to the maximum voltage (Milgram, 1974).

Consequently, in this section of our article we ask why, given Milgram's experiments concern key concepts in management, are not they not seen as foundational to how our subject is taught? One simple answer may be that textbooks, even those hundreds of pages long, cannot include everything. Boundaries need to be drawn somewhere and studies that some might deem important, like Milgram's, get left out. While this is a reasonable explanation it still begs the question – why is Milgram usually not considered worthy of inclusion?

A potential reason is that his studies were not focused specifically on work, or the duties of managers. While true, many well-known theorists in management were not researching managers either. Social psychology provides many of the names that we consider to be the

founders of our field - Lewin, Asch, Irving Janis, Albert Maslow, and Frederick Herzberg to name a few. None considered themselves 'management theorists' or even took organizations as their primary phenomena of study. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs was developed by studying monkeys and talking to people about their sex lives, while Irving Janis's popular theory of 'groupthink' (1972) was developed by studying US foreign policy fiascos. However, in the period following World War II, when management was under attack for its flimsy academic credentials (McLaren, 2020), they gave the fledging field much needed credibility.

Relatedly, it might be argued that genocide is an exceptional phenomenon that has little relationship to management. Yet, many researchers in management have argued that we can learn much from extreme cases (Chen, 2015; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2014). While we do not want to trivialise, the heightened experience of seeking to comprehend the extreme evil of the Nazi party and the Holocaust stimulated the scholars we have described above and their extremely useful research into group dynamics, organizational behaviour and leadership. Consequently, while some may claim that the conditions that inspired them are no longer applicable to management students today, we are not alone in believing that they may miss significant insights should we see Milgram and his forebears as not part of our subject matter (Clegg, 2006; Cunha, Rego & Clegg, 2010; Stokes & Gabriel, 2010).

A third possibility is that Milgram's experiments are not sufficiently scientifically robust to warrant inclusion. Recent research questions Milgram's claims about the harm done to participants (Nicholson, 2011) as well as the findings themselves (Brannigan, Nicholson & Cherry, 2015; Perry, 2012). However, a lack of solid empirical support for a theory is often not a deal-breaker for being included in management textbooks. Studies to validate Maslow's hierarchy of needs ended in disappointment (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976), as they did with Janis'

groupthink (Park, 1990). Kotter's eight steps for successfully managing change are based on his experience as a consultant rather than rigorous research (Kotter, 1995).

We contacted Robert Baron to seek an explanation for the absence of Milgram's experiments from all but the first edition of his organizational behaviour text. Remember, in *Social Psychology* he was clear that Milgram's findings illuminated power relations between managers and employees that led to excessive and harmful obedience to authority. And he was insistent that students should understand these dangers – to help them navigate their own careers but also to contribute to greater public understanding and the public good. Baron informed us that following his inclusion of Milgram in the first edition of *Behavior in Organizations*, "feedback from reviewers and the publisher said: 'Not needed – off target for our field'. So, I followed their advice" (Baron – personal communication).

While Baron's views on Milgram were a perfect fit for social psychology's ideological commitment to self-determination and resistance to authority, they were judged to be an ill-fit with 'business school values' (to use Robbins' 2003 phrase) that have dominated our field, where obedience to authority is desirable because it reinforces management prerogative and provides clarity around roles and responsibilities. Sadly, seen through this light, it is unsurprising that textbooks committed to a managerial worldview, like Baron's, would look past Milgram in constructing the history and boundaries of the field.

When best-selling management textbooks do include Milgram, their coverage tends to be critical of him. In Robbins' *Organizations: Concepts, Controversies and Applications*, which has been through eight editions since it was first published in 1979, coverage of Milgram's experiments is sparse, with no mention in the first three editions. They do appear from the fourth edition onwards, but in a way which questions their value rather than seeks the lessons to be

learned from them. Robbins's fourth edition of *Organizations* (1989), does not mention Milgram by name, referring to his research as being done by "a researcher" (p. 24) in a section comparing laboratory experiments and field experiments as approaches to studying organizational behaviour. Robbins concludes that while laboratory experiments enable a precise control and measurement of variables, "the artificial laboratory rarely duplicates the intricacies and nuances of real organizations. Additionally, many laboratory experiments deal with phenomena that cannot be reproduced or applied to real-life situations" (p. 25). From the sixth edition (1993) onwards Milgram is at least mentioned by name, but the emphasis on the limitations of his studies remain.

But, if best-selling textbooks generally ignore Milgram for ideological reasons, why do they still acknowledge the dangers of conformity? After all, Asch's conformity experiment described earlier appears in nearly all the management textbooks we looked at. Like Asch, Milgram was interested in studying the influence of group dynamics in generating conformity, but believed that to understand the group effect, it was first important to understand how people acted in the absence of group pressure. This was the aim of what became known as his obedience experiments. This is an important difference between Asch and Milgram's studies, which helps explain their different appeal to management textbooks. Asch's experiment was about conformity within the group, or what is commonly referred to as peer pressure. Milgram was interested in conformity to authority, a far more confronting issue for the managerial perspective.

It is also important to note that Asch had an optimistic view of human nature and saw conformity as valuable for creating social order. In contrast, Milgram could see conformity's darker side. Whilst Asch's experiment shows the pitfalls of peer pressure (making wrong decisions), the findings are often given a positive spin by management textbooks. People are

susceptible to conforming to the group's norms because they desire social acceptance and want to develop and maintain positive social relationships. The lessons from Asch's experiment are consistent with the managerial perspective of most textbooks, with peer pressure being part of a manager's toolkit. Robbins and Judge (2015: 254) state that "if you do use peer pressure to encourage individuals to work towards team goals and behave consistently with organizational values, it can enhance ethical performance". Robbins and Judge highlight "deviant workplace behaviour", where employees violate organizational norms to the detriment of the organization – the implication being that organizations perform better when their members conform.

The other study of conformity that appears in all the management textbooks we examined is Janis' groupthink (1972), the idea that a collective desire for consensus overrides the realistic appraisals of alternatives and leads to poor group decision making. Janis was a colleague of Milgram in Yale's psychology department and became a "wise and reliable friend" (Blass, 2004: 133). Like Asch, Janis was interested in peer pressure and how individuals find it easier to agree in group situations than be a disruptive force. Janis' groupthink gels with a managerial perspective (Pol et al., 2022). He provides a list of eight symptoms of groupthink for managers to be on the lookout for, as well as a series of remedies they can apply for treating it, such as playing the devil's advocate and seeking advice from experts outside the group.

Our argument that the different ideological commitments of social psychology and management explain differences in textbooks' coverage of Milgram's experiments, explains why critical management scholars like Clegg, Knights and Willmott include Milgram in their textbooks. The domain statement of the critical management studies division at the Academy of Management views "organizations as instruments of domination and exploitation" and is "driven by a shared desire to change this situation". Teaching students about the importance of

challenging authority, as shown by Milgram's experiments, is consistent with these values.

DISCUSSION: CREATING A NEW MILGRAM FOR MANAGEMENT TODAY

While 60 years old, the place of Milgram's experiments in popular culture continues to evolve and grow. There has been a widely distributed feature film (*Experimenter*, 2015), and producers of reality television programmes *The Heist* (UK) and *The Game of Death* (France) have performed their own re-enactments of the experiments. Broad academic interest in the experiments is also high, as illustrated by four recent special issues[3] on them in leading journals and rising rates of citation (Griggs, 2017; Haslam, Reicher & Birney, 2016). Moreover, Milgram's findings have been replicated in contemporary studies which accommodate the higher ethical treatment of participants required these days (Burger, 2009; Dolinski et al., 2017; Navarick, 2009).

There is some evidence that best-selling management textbooks might be warming to Milgram's experiments (a recent edition of Robbins and Judge (2015) mentions them in the context of ethical dilemmas). We believe that further embracing Milgram would help students recognise and deal with the power imbalances that contribute to a wide range of important concerns in our field today. In this section we outline how this might be done, drawing on recent research that provides new interpretations of Milgram's data.

In the management curriculum, the conventional view is that resistance is a negative force to be overcome by management. In change management, for example, a staple is Kotter

[3] The special issues appeared in *Theory & Psychology* (2015); *Journal of Social Issues* (2014); *The Psychologist* (2011) and *American Psychologist* (2009).

and Schlesinger's (1979) classic framework, reprinted in *Harvard Business Review* in 2008 because of its continued influence. Resistance by employees is theorised as the product of psychological deficiency, a lack of ability to adjust, or because of politically motivated self-interest. Students are presented with approaches for diagnosing for overcoming resistance – the assumption being that resistance is bad and therefore eradicating it is desirable.

We can draw on Milgram's experiments to encourage students to question this one-sided view of resistance. When combined with even basic ethical frameworks: for example, a Utilitarian perspective where the moral good of leadership or a management practice is determined by its utility in providing well-being among all peoples; Kant's 'categorical imperative', where one might assess an action by the maxim of 'what would ensue if that action were to become a universal law?'; or even Isocrates' 'Golden Rule' ("Do not do to others what would anger you if done to you by others"); being cognizant of the Milgram experiments can help students to look at whether the authority of leadership or management practice is not right. And, by looking in this way, assess when it should be questioned or resisted.

Milgram is useful for teaching students *how* to challenge authority. Through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood; in the home, at school and at work, we are encouraged to respect authority figures and be compliant followers. We generally get rewarded for this, through good grades and performance appraisals. Drawing on Milgram's studies, Chaleff (2015) argues there are situations where 'intelligent disobedience' is required. Disobedience is 'intelligent' when it is in the interests of the leader (to stop them from acting unethically, for example) and the organization. Useful strategies include addressing authority figures, reminding them of their responsibilities and repeated refusals to obey (Hollander, 2017).

We are not, however, advocating for management studies the often-uncritical coverage

that Milgram receives in psychology textbooks or the media (Ferguson, Brown & Torres, 2018). Milgram's treatment of his subjects was unacceptable then and not just today, and we would not wish management students to think, as some who defend Milgram might, that 'the ends justify the means'. Instead, we would welcome coverage along the lines of King & Lawley (2019) who incorporate Milgram's insights in their textbook alongside the controversies and limitations of the research. And we agree with Tavris (2014:1) on why we should continue to teach Milgram despite the problems with his methods. She notes that "Milgram's work spurred investigation into the fuller human story: the bleak *and* the inspiring, the conformist *and* the rebel" and we should not let the controversy undermine the positive side of his experiments: particularly the courage of the minority, who despite the set-up, despite the institutional power relations pitched against them, refused to follow orders.

We believe that new interpretations of Milgram's data present fresh possibilities for how they could be incorporated into the management curriculum, in ways that go beyond the narrow focus on obedience to authority. Milgram's own explanation of his experimental data shifted over time. In his first publication of the findings in 1963, he emphasised the dilemma experienced by participants in choosing between competing obligations to the experimenter and the learner. This is a quite different explanation to that of blind obedience outlined in his 1974 book, in which participants are focused solely on their obligation to the experimenter.

There was a good reason for Milgram to shift his conceptual ground. On May 11, 1960 Adolf Eichmann, architect of the Nazi Holocaust, was arrested in Argentina by Mossad agents and charged with war crimes. His deportation to Israel and trial, which resulted in a conviction and execution by hanging, brought the horrors of the extermination of six million Jews to the forefront of public consciousness once again. Arendt (1963: 276) observed Eichmann's trial and

concluded that he was a "terribly and terrifying normal" individual who blindly followed orders – a typical bureaucrat rather than an evil monster. Eichmann's trial provided Milgram both an explanation of his data as well as the perfect platform for publicising his work: "I must conclude that Arendt's conception of the *banality of evil* comes closer to the truth than one might dare imagine" (1974: 6, emphasis in original).

The agentic state thesis is the foundation of the celebratory accounts offered by Baron's and Myers' social psychology textbooks. However, there is now broad agreement amongst scholars of Milgram's experiments that on its own, the agentic state thesis is a weak explanation (Blass, 2004; Haslam & Reicher, 2017; Reicher, Haslam & Miller, 2014; Russell, 2014; Russell & Gregory, 2005). Two developments have stimulated this rethink – historical analysis of the Holocaust which highlights that much of the killing by Nazi soldiers was willing and hate-filled rather than blind following of orders; and new archival analysis of Milgram's papers at Yale, Harvard and the History of American Psychology in Akron, Ohio.

Haslam, Reicher, Millard and McDonald's (2014) re-examination of Milgram's papers in the Yale archive argues that the most prevalent response by participants to their involvement in the study was happiness rather than distress. Milgram's agentic state theorised that participants lacked identification with the learner but missing is participants' identification with the experimenter and with the scientific goals that underpinned the experiment. Rather than passive, blind following, this new interpretation has participants as engaged, committed followers:

> They continued shocking precisely because these consequences were ones they supported and identified with, and because their actions were construed to be contributing to a moral, worthy, and progressive cause (Haslam et al., 2014: 60).

This conclusion is supported by analysis of transcript data which highlights how Milgram emphasised the scientific credibility of his experiments to generate participants' identification

with it (Russell, 2011, 2014; Russell & Gregory, 2015).

How might these fresh insights be incorporated into the management curriculum? An ideal of the 'engaged follower' underpins much contemporary management theory. Leader-centric leadership theories such as charismatic leadership (Klein & House, 1995), transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) are aimed at generating high levels of engagement amongst followers, which leads to increased trust, commitment and performance. These theories are closely connected with the concept of strong organizational cultures, where employees internalise the values promoted by leaders, leading to heightened performance (Schein, 2010).

While inspirational leaders and highly cohesive cultures can of course be beneficial to followers and organizations, research into the 'dark side' of leadership has highlighted the destructive potential of charismatic (House & Howell, 1992), transformational and authentic leaders (Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Tourish, 2013; Willmott, 1993), through dominating and authoritarian behaviour and the relentless pursuit of, power, status and their self-interest at the expense of what is best for the organization. Thoroughgood et al's (2018) holistic definition of *destructive leadership* recognise that harmful consequences for followers and organizations are not just the result of bad leaders, but also susceptible followers and conducive environments (see also, Kellerman, 2004). For example, the fraud at Enron combed corrupt leaders, conforming followers, weak internal and external oversight, and a strong organizational culture of greed. Understanding the potential dangers of engaged following, as well as its potential benefits, would provide students with a deeper and more balanced understanding.

As the quote from Gebrial (2018) at the head of this article argues, we have a professional duty as educators to help our students recognise when and how and why bad actors

and actions can emerge in organizations, so that they may more effectively question power structures in management practices and society. We argue that these are exactly the lessons we and our students can, and should, gain from reconsidering Milgram's studies and the context and tradition they grew from. Discussing Milgram's work can help people to see how authority can be misused, but also, and importantly (if we focus not just on those who 'followed orders', but on the many who did not), how we might effectively resist such abuses (Bregman, 2020).

CONCLUSION

We began by observing that the emergence of social issues within society can be spurs for positive change in the business school curriculum. Business school teaching today is better for the increased emphasis on ethics following Enron and the GFC, and the growing importance of sustainability and responsible management in response to climate change. In a similar vein, we have argued that exploring Milgram's experiments can be a valuable resource for gaining insights into increasingly salient organizational issues, such as bullying, whistle blowing and destructive leadership, as well as social movements born from an abuse of authority. Of course, Milgram provides us just one of many perspectives on these issues, but we believe it is a valuable perspective.

Beyond this, we hope that our article stimulates further critical reflection on the assumed historical foundations of our field. Across multiple disciplines, there is growing interest in re-examining established foundations. In management studies, critical historical research is flourishing, such as the recent special issue in this journal on new histories of business schools and the futures they can inspire (McLaren et al, 2021). Far from experiencing despondency with the realisation that there may be no singular, objective, evidentially based, truthful account of

'management studies', and the topics it covers, we should consider this thought-provoking and liberating. Our field is not fixed for all time. It can and should evolve as the world around us changes.

Our focus has been on the significance of textbooks in constructing what we and our students take 'management studies' to be. We have argued that the decisions of what ideas to include and which to exclude are shaped by ideological commitments – to the free market, financial performance, and the primacy of management prerogative. Also influential is the assumed purpose of management education, which is to train students to be future managers. Textbooks are written from the perspective of the manager and theories are presented as 'tools' that managers can utilise to solve problems and improve organizational performance (which although largely unstated is generally assumed to relate to financial performance).

This is a legitimate perspective, but its narrowness does students a disservice. Socializing students into a singular ideological position is not what a university education should be about. As educators we should be encouraging our students to understand the phenomenon of management from multiple perspectives, including critical perspectives (which have been influential in our academic development). This provides students a richer management education than the standard managerial lens. And, given emergence of new social movements and the pressing environmental and economic challenges the world faces today, now is a good time to try and think more creatively about people, organizations and how we work.

While our focus has been on textbooks, our study has implications that extend beyond the small network of textbook authors, reviewers, and publishers. It has been argued that textbooks are dead, or at least in the end-stages of their life cycle, the equivalent of encyclopaedias in family homes that got usurped by the internet. Whether open access digital resources kill off

expensive textbooks remains to be seen, but the shift does have the potential to provide faculty with greater control over the curriculum and the resources provided to students. It is timely therefore for us all to reflect thoughtfully on what we are teaching, and not teaching our students about management and how we could teach differently in the future.

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Textbook	Description of Milgram coverage	Extent of coverage
Bateman, Snell & Konopaske,12th ed, 2017	None	None
Bratton, 4th ed, 2021	Subheading 'group cohesiveness' in chapter 'group and team dynamics Subheading 'groupthink' in chapter 'group and team dynamics	4 pages
Buchanan & Huczynski, 10th ed, 2019	None	None
Clegg, Pitsis & Mount, 6th ed, 2021	Subheading 'positive psychology of leadership' in chapter 'managing leadership' Subheading 'surveillance and total institutions' in chapter 'managing power, politics and decision-making'	3 pages 2 pages
Griffin, 10th edition, 2022	None	None
King & Lawley, 3rd ed, 2019	Subheading 'obedience to authority' in chapter 'power and politics'. Includes key criticisms of Milgram's experiments	3 pages
Kreitner, 11th ed, 2009	None	None
Knights & Willmott, 3rd ed, 2017	Subheading 'critical approaches to ethics at work' in chapter 'Ethics at work'	4 pages
McShane, Olekalns, Newman & Martin, 6th ed, 2019	None	None
Nelson & Quick, 8th ed, 2013	None	None
Robbins, Bergman & Coulter, 8th ed, 2018	None	None
Robbins, DeCenzo, Coulter & Woods, 3rd ed, 2016	None	None
Robbins & Judge, 15th ed, 2013	Appendix 'research in organizational behavior', subheadings 'laboratory experiments' and 'ethics in research'	3
Samson, Donnet & Daft, 7th ed, 2021	None	None
Schermerhorn, Davidson, Woods, Factor, Simon, McBarron & Junaid, 7th ed, 2020	None	None
Williams, 2022	None	None

Table 1: Coverage of Milgram in introductory management and organizational behaviour textbooks

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