

SHOCK ROOM

We do as we're told. Or do we?

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In the early 1960s psychologist Stanley Milgram, in seeking to understand the Holocaust, ran a series of controversial experiments on obedience. An authority orders you to inflict painful shocks on another person. Most of us will obey, claimed Milgram. But will we? And were Milgram's experiments as much art as science? In dramatising previously un-filmed versions of the world's most famous psychology experiment, *Shock Room* turns a light on the dark side of human behavior and forces us to ask ourselves: what would I do?

SYNOPSIS

A compelling new feature documentary, *Shock Room* breaks open Stanley Milgram's dramatic 'Obedience to Authority' experiment and forces us to re-evaluate its conclusions.

In the wake of the Holocaust, Milgram wanted to understand why people inflict harm on others. In 1962, he staged his experiment. Under the guise of participating in a study on memory and learning, participants were asked to inflict apparently lethal shocks on a fellow human being. Milgram later famously claimed that 65% of us will blindly follow orders.

My Lai, Rwanda, Enron, Abu Graib, the Deep Horizon Oil Spill, the News of the World phone hacking – 'I was only following orders' is a defence threaded through history.

But extensive research from Sydney filmmaker and self-professed Milgram obsessive, Kathryn Millard, reveals that although Milgram ran more than 25 versions of his experiment, he filmed only one. Overall, the majority of people actually resisted.

In *Shock Room*, Millard contends that while Milgram's experiment is a rich source of insights about the conditions under which people not only obey but also resist the dictates of their consciences, Milgram's experiment was much drama as laboratory study. Milgram himself described his experiments as a fusion of art and science.

Fifty years after Milgram's original experiments, Millard, with a team of filmmakers and psychologists, re-staged Milgram's experiments in Sydney, Australia, with actors using director Millard's unique immersive realism technique. *Shock Room* combines dramatisations, animation, archival film and interviews with psychologists Alex Haslam and Steve Reicher. It provides new insights about how and why people refuse to inflict harm and questions the conclusions of the world's most famous psychology experiment.

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I first came across the work of Stanley Milgram as a student in Psychology 101—or 'Rats and Stats' as we called it. More interested in the behaviour of humans than rodents, I found Milgram's black-and-white footage of ordinary people grappling with their consciences compelling. So much so that *Obedience* was one of the films that set me on the path to becoming a filmmaker. But I was always uneasy with Milgram's conclusions. Were we really programmed to obey?

Fast-forwarding, I worked for screen culture organisations, wrote and directed documentaries and feature dramas, and completed postgraduate degrees in film and history. As an academic I combined—and continue to combine—creative practice with scholarship. For many years, revisiting Milgram's dramatic experiment sat on my list of 'One Day' projects. In the meantime I read everything about it I could get my hands on. As well as the participants who disobeyed, I was particularly interested in Milgram's work as a filmmaker: How did it shape his experiments? How did his film *Obedience* shape public understanding of his psychological work? After all Milgram himself acknowledged that his controversial experiment was as much art as science.

In 2008 I began ordering materials from Yale University's Stirling Library where Milgram's extensive archive of documents are held. I watched the out-takes of *Obedience* and read his notes. I remember the excitement of looking at new pieces of the puzzle—from script notes and film budgets to recordings and transcripts. Amongst his papers were lists of scrawled figures as he worked out how to make a film with a shoestring budget. As an independent filmmaker this was a scenario I knew only too well.

Finding the groundbreaking work of social psychologists Steve Reicher and Alex Haslam was an important step. Like me, they did not accept the conventional explanation for harmful behaviour, which goes: 'I was just following orders'. I asked them to contribute their professional expertise to a film project I had in the pipeline.

From my 2012 micro-budget film, *Random 8*, I had developed a method of working with actors to restage social science experiments as drama. In 2013 I was awarded an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant (Arts and Humanities Panel) to make a film revisioning Milgram's landmark experiment. To this end, we built a contemporary version of Milgram's laboratory set complete with shock machine. As Partner Investigators, Steve Reicher and Alex Haslam advised on psychology.

Fascinating as they are to watch, it is easy to dismiss the participants in Milgram's 1965 film as historical figures from another era. Not like us. I wanted to bring the Obedience experiments alive for audiences now. In *Shock Room*, we follow nine fictional characters through contemporary dramatisations. Men and women of different ages, different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. I cast actors with experience in theatre as well as film, skilled actors capable of sustaining long improvisations. The actors agreed to participate in the project without knowing its storyline. I assured them that they would be safe (and that no nudity was involved). As a director, I consider the trust that the actors placed in me a great privilege. I sketched

the characters in collaboration with the individual actors to ensure a representative mix of contemporary citizens. The actors then did their own detailed research to bring those invented characters to life. My brief to the actors was that we would be covering them with multiple cameras and shooting extended takes. They were responsible for responding in the scenario moment-by-moment. I cast Simon London as The Experimenter and Martin Crewes as The Learner. I shared my research with them and we spent some time interrogating all things Milgram.

When Director of Photography, Calvin Gardiner and I first talked about the film, we decided it was important to capture each character's session as a complete entity. We needed a lot of cameras to get angles. We shot with three main cameras behind a one-way mirror to convey the sense of looking in through a window in the laboratory. Six Gro-Pros were placed in the set. The most important camera was on the shock machine itself to capture the drama between the teacher and the experimenter.

Sound Recordist James Currie wired everyone for sound. Alex Haslam and Steve Reicher advised on psychology. We shot interviews with them drawing on their own interpretations of the dynamics of obedience and resistance.

Editor Karen Johnson and I shaped the film with an eye to the human drama. At assembly edit stage, Craig Deeker and The Gingerbread Man post-production house came on board. Tess Boughton's hand-drawn animation brought some of the film's big ideas to life. Phillip Johnston contributed an inventive jazz score. While Lawrence Horne's sound design and mix treated the shock machine as a character in the drama.

Fifty years after Milgram's film, we made *Shock Room* to tell a different story, a new story, about his famous experiment. A story that is as much about resistance as obedience. When I began researching this film, most laypeople and many psychologists accepted Milgram's findings that two-thirds of us will obey orders to inflict harm on another person when ordered to do so by an authority figure, as gold standard. Incontrovertible. But now, more and more researchers around the world are questioning that. New eyes, new evidence, new insights. *Shock Room*.

THE PSYCHOLOGISTS: Alex Haslam and Steve Reicher

ALEX Haslam and Steve Reicher go back a long way. They both had the same PhD supervisor, developed similar professional interests and are frequent collaborators, as well as friends, exploring intellectual passions about topics like social identity, leadership, resistance, obedience and power.

Clearly, Stanley Milgram's classic "Obedience to Authority" experiment of the early 1960s is grist to both their intellectual mills. "I was never convinced by the standard obedience line," says Haslam, now with Australia's University of Queensland. "It just didn't ring true," adds Reicher, based at the University of St Andrews in Scotland.

When Australian filmmaker and academic Kathryn Millard contacted them a few years back about teaming up on a documentary on Milgram and his famous experiment, both Haslam and Reicher were intrigued. Not only were the pair already curious about Milgram's findings, in 2002 they had collaborated on a BBC series called *The Experiment*, inspired by Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo's 1972 "Stanford Prison Experiment".

Following on from Milgram's "Obedience to Authority" experiment, Zimbardo investigated tyranny, rebellions and abusive behaviour in a simulated prison environment. Like Milgram, Zimbardo filmed the experiment. In their BBC series, Haslam and Reicher reran the project, finding that people do not mindlessly brutalise others, as Zimbardo concluded. Instead, tyranny results from what they call the "engaged followership" of subordinates rather than blind conformity to roles or rules.

For Haslam and Reicher, social sciences such as psychology can only advance if ideas are challenged, rejected, refined or created. When findings like Milgram's are entrenched that can be hard to do. "It's a real challenge to get people to think again about what these studies are about and what they show," Haslam notes.

Given the influence of Milgram's work within academic circles and the wider society -- "I was just following orders" is the conventional explanation of and excuse for brutal behaviour -- Haslam and Reicher were looking for ways to generate public debate on the nature of obedience and the potential for disobedience.

Evidence suggests scholarly articles alone would have little impact. "We've got to get out there and communicate," argues Haslam, who has long believed in spreading ideas and igniting public discourse about important ideas.

Reicher agrees. "So when Kathryn contacted us and proposed that we work together on a project to revision Milgram -- what became *Shock Room* -- it seemed simply ideal. A partnership made in heaven."

It was also a lot of fun. According to Reicher it was a "joy" to watch Millard, the cast and the crew apply their skills to the intellectual challenge. "I'm so looking forward to seeing how audiences react to the film and so keen to use it to engage people in debate."

‘SHOCK ROOM’: When Art Met Science

THE 1951 film *When Worlds Collide* dramatised the catastrophic consequences of an impact between Earth with the rogue star Bellus. Some 50 years later the feature length documentary *Shock Room* reveals the creative consequences of the impact of art on science... and science on art.

This collaboration, initiated by filmmaker Kathryn Millard who approached psychologists Alex Haslam and Steve Reicher, made it possible to put Stanley Milgram’s influential “Obedience to Authority” experiments to the test – and to find the conventional understanding of the results wanting.

Shock Room contends that the experiments do not ‘prove’ that people blindly follow orders, as widely believed. Instead, Milgram’s work reveals that people ‘obey’ if they believe in the goal. Obedience is a choice, as is disobedience.

Milgram’s himself described his experiments as a fusion of art and science. In *Shock Room*, filmmaker Millard contends that he devised a scenario, designed its theatrical setting, rehearsed his accomplices, and cast randomly selected citizens in a long-running structured improvisation.

“This was ensemble drama on an epic scale as much as it was science,” Millard says. “Influenced by Greek tragedy, the morality plays of medieval century Europe, early reality television (*Candid Camera*) and the improvised happenings of the 1960s. The experimental design and dramaturgy combined to elicit dramatic behaviour.”

Most psychologists saw no reason to review Milgram’s work. They argued the findings were loud, clear and indisputable. Those who did believe reconsideration was worthwhile could not do so for ethical reasons. “Milgram was as infamous for the unethical nature of his work as he was famous for the scientific and social importance of his work, says Reicher. “You could never do what he did nowadays.”

Haslam agrees. Asking participants to administer progressively stronger – though fictitious – electric shocks to another person would never get past an Ethics Review Panel, keen to protect participants from emotional as well as physical harm. Enter Immersive Digital Realism, the technique Millard developed for the project.

Here, 14 actors worked with the director, Millard, to create characters who have volunteered to participate in a psychology experiment. They explored how the character would act in a range of situations and then brought the character to life in a realistic setting – including a replica of Milgram’s impressive ‘shock machine’. The actors were debriefed after filming, first by Millard and then by Haslam and Reicher who collected data.

One of the 14 actors describes the experience: “I don’t remember exactly when my character bailed out. I do remember afterwards a feeling of regret that I hadn’t bailed out sooner and a determination to investigate my responses. Was it my character who kept going, or me as an actor wanting to prolong the experience? I’m not sure.”

Haslam believes that Kathryn Millard's groundbreaking method with actors has the potential to make powerful psychology, as well as compelling films.

All three claim collaborating beyond their expertise enhanced their skills, along with their individual appreciation of the "Obedience to Authority" experiments. Working together clarified Milgram's intellectual strengths and weaknesses. "Milgram was a brilliant experimentalist and a pretty average theorist," says Haslam. '

Above all, their multi-disciplinary approach enabled them to communicate their new views of Milgram's profound legacy in a medium as powerful as his own. Clearly, the sum was greater than the parts, concludes Haslam. "It's three circles: film, psychology and the space in between."

CAST & CREW

Cast

**Experimenter
Learner**

Simon London
Martin Crewes

Accomplices of Experimenter

Brandon Burke
Paige Gardiner

**David G.
Lana A.
Helena B.
Justin T.
Harry L.
Tom S.
Ian R.
Sarah R.
Mark D.
George M.**

Caleb Alloway
Alice Ansara
Jeanette Cronin
Martin Harper
Graeme McRae
Johnny Nasser
Richard Sydenham
Ling-Hsueh Tang
Stephen Wilkinson
Christian Willis

**Writer/Producer/Director
Psychologists
Director of Photography
Sound Recordist
Editor
Lead Artist, Illustration & Animation
Composer
Co-Producer
Executive Producer
Narrator
Production Designer
First Assistant Director/Associate Producer
Boom Operator
Camera Operator/Digital Imaging Technician
Production Coordinator
Stills (New Haven)
Additional Music
Shock Machine Design/Build
Post Production Coordinator (Macquarie
University)**

Kathryn Millard
Alex Haslam and Steve Reicher
Calvin Gardiner
James Currie
Karen Johnson
Tess Boughton
Phillip Johnston
Tom Murray
Craig Deeker
Kathryn Millard
Emma Kingsbury
Iqbal Barkat
Josh Williams
Marcus Eckermann
Julia Scott-Stevenson
Christopher Sims
Pat Irwin and Ed Tomney
David Mitchell

Marcus Eckermann

The Gingerbread Man Post Production

Creative Director

Craig Deeker

Lead Artist

Tess Boughton

Post Production Coordinator

Melina Maraki

Additional Motion Graphics

Jasmin Danic

Visual Effects

Dan Durao

Colourist

Natalia Gubareva

Assistant Colourists

Simon Sdrigotti

Chloe Tse

Legals

Michael Frankel, Greg Duffy

Frankel Lawyers

Production Accounting

Moneypenny

Transcripts

Holly Robinson

Production Interns

Robbie Fatt

David Scro

Holly Robinson

Chadielle Fayad

Madeleine Day

Voiceover Animation

Christian Charisiou

Matthew Edgerton

Ryan Gibson

KEY PERSONNEL

Kathryn Millard: Writer/Producer/Director

Kathryn Millard is a writer, filmmaker and dramaturg. Her films are internationally recognised and much awarded. Psychology, mental health, popular fallacies and the afterlife of images are recurring themes in Kathryn's body of work which spans award-winning feature dramas, documentaries and hybrids. Her films have been selected for dozens of major festivals including Chicago, Sao Paulo, Mill Valley, Pordenone, Astra, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, and have screened at Brooklyn Art Museum and on the Sundance Channel. Major credits include the feature documentary *The Boot Cake* (2008) the feature dramas *Travelling Light* (2003) and *Parklands* (1996) and the arts documentary *Light Years* (1991). Kathryn is Professor of Screen and Creative Arts at Macquarie University, Sydney.

Alex Haslam: Psychologist

Alex Haslam is Professor of Psychology and ARC Laureate Fellow at The University of Queensland. He has published widely on leadership, organisational psychology and issues of identity, power, and well being. He is a recipient of the European Association of Social Psychology's Kurt Lewin medal and the British Psychology Society's Award for excellence in teaching psychology.

Steve Reicher: Psychologist

Steve Reicher is Professor of Social Psychology at the University of St. Andrews. His research focuses on group processes such as leadership, crowd behaviour, and tyranny, challenging the popularly-held notions of crowds as places of irrationality and loss of identity. He is the Chief Editor (with Margaret Wetherell) of the British Journal of Social Psychology.

In 2002, Haslam and Reicher's BBC Prison Studies were broadcast by the BBC as a series, *The Experiment*. The studies challenged our understanding of how groups and power work.

Calvin Gardiner: Director of Photography

Calvin Gardiner is one of Australia's most experienced cinematographers. His credits include the telemovies *I Spy* (2010), *The Prime Minister is Missing*, (2008) *Who Killed Dr. Bogle and Mrs. Chandler* (2006), winner of a Logie Award for 'Outstanding Documentary, and *Silent Storm* (2006) nominated for an Australian Film Institute Award for 'Best Cinematography'.

James Currie: Sound Recordist

James Currie has three decades experience in the film industry in location recording and post-production sound. He has worked on many feature films with Rolf de Heer including *Charlie's Country* (2013) *Dr. Plonk* (2007), *Ten Canoes* (2006), *Alexandra's Project* (2003), *The Tracker* (2002), *Bad Boy Bubby* (1993) and *Dingo* for which he won an AFI award for 'Best Sound Track' in 1991. James was awarded 'The Golden Clapper Award for Artistic and Technical Excellence' at the 1993 Venice Film Festival for *Bad Boy Bubby*.

Karen Johnson: Editor

One of Australia's most highly regarded film and television editors, Karen Johnson works across drama and documentary. Her credits include the documentary, *The Last Impresario* (2013), the award-winning documentary *Ochre and Ink* (2012), the feature *Griff the Invisible* (2010), the television documentary series *The First Australians* (2008), the feature *Beneath Clouds* (2002) and the musical drama-documentary *One Night the Moon* (2001).

Tess Boughton : Illustrator/Animator

Tess is an Animator/Illustrator and 3D specialist, based at The Gingerbread Man. Since graduating from UTS with an M.A. in Animation, Tess has worked on television series and feature films including *Captain America*, *Thor*, *Avengers*, *Iron Man 2* and *Tomorrow When the War Began*.

Emma Kingsbury: Production Designer

Emma works across theatre, film, television and music video. Her recent credits include *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe* (Belvoir), *Return To Earth* (Griffin Theatre Company), *I Have Had Enough* (Sydney Chamber Opera), *Nightbook* (Can You See Me? Theatre), *The Criminals* (Old 505) and *Two By Two* (45 Downstairs).

Keith Thompson: Script Consultant

Keith Thompson is an eight-time (Australian Writers' Guild) AWGIE Award winning screenwriter. His recent credits include the features *The Sapphires* (2012) and *Clubland* (2006) which screened at Cannes and Sundance respectively. ABC TV Script Executive for the first series of Geoffrey Atherden's *Grass Roots*, Keith has written extensively for television. Keith has been a script editor on over 25 produced feature films. He is currently Head of Creative at Goalpost Pictures, Australia.

Craig Deeker: Executive Producer

Craig began his career as a human to computer interface designer before moving into the advertising industry. He then set up The Gingerbread Man post-production house which works across feature films, television, advertising and music video. Craig, who was Head of Creative for The Gingerbread Man and Executive Producer on *Shock Room*, was Executive Producer for *The Last Impresario (2013)*, awarded the Film Critic's Circle of Australia 'Best Feature Documentary'.

Tom Murray: Co-Producer

Tom Murray is an award-winning filmmaker. His feature documentaries, which include *Love In Our Own Time (2012)*, *In My Father's Country (2008)* and *Dhakiyarr Versus The King (2004)* have been selected for major festivals including Sundance and IDFA, Amsterdam. Amongst the awards they have won are the NSW Premiers' History Award and the Dendy Award, Sydney Film Festival. Tom is a Senior Lecturer in Screen production at Macquarie University.