

The Man Who Shocked The World: The Life And Legacy Of Stanley Milgram
 Thomas Blass
 Basic, £9.99
 (368pp, pbk)

In 1961, an advert appeared in a US newspaper asking for volunteers for a scientific study of memory. The study was not what it seemed, however. The volunteers found themselves in a lab delivering increasingly strong electric shocks to a man whenever his memory failed him. And 65 per cent of them carried on increasing the shocks until the screams had been replaced by an ominous silence.

Only once the experiment was over were the volunteers told the truth: the man had been acting throughout. But the experiment had proved its point: that ordinary people can be persuaded to abuse a stranger – if they believed they could pass responsibility on to those in authority. It also made its designer, psychologist Stanley Milgram, one of the most controversial scientists of the 20th century.

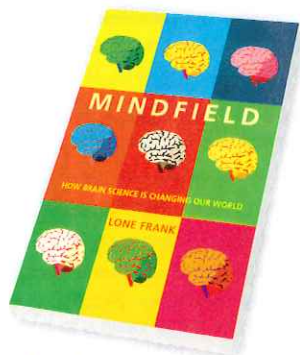
Milgram's notorious study forms the centrepiece of this outstanding biography – and rightly so, given its continued importance in understanding such horrors as the torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. But as author Thomas Blass makes clear, Milgram pioneered other major areas of research, including the famous 'Small World' effect, by which everyone is linked to everyone else by around six intermediaries.

Blass does a fine job of weaving together Milgram's life and science, revealing a portrait of a genius who, ironically enough, had real problems with authority. ●●●●●

Robert Matthews is visiting reader in science at Aston University

Mindfield

Professor Susan Blackmore finds out how brain science is changing the world



Lone Frank
 Oneworld, £10.99
 (320pp, pbk)

Staring into bottles of preserved human brains, Lone Frank, a tough Danish journalist, wants to cry. "All the thoughts, feelings and unconscious desires of this person were electrical impulses ceaselessly leaping between individual cells," she muses.

In *Mindfield* (subtitled 'How Brain Science is Changing our World'), Frank sets out to examine the increasingly rich evidence relating brain function to conscious experiences: to our moral sense, how we make choices, exert self-control, and even who we think we are.

To this end she jets off to the Canadian lab of neuroscientist Michael Persinger to be fitted with his 'God Helmet'. It's a contraption that has induced alien abduction experiences, unseen presences, and

full-blown religious experiences using oscillating electromagnetic fields across the brain.

Knowing that Richard Dawkins experienced nothing at all under the same helmet, she expected nothing to happen. But instead she felt an eerie, threatening creature in the room with her, and her hands seemed to be wrenched at right angles to her arms. I found this fascinating since I, too, have worn the device and found my legs feeling stretched and twisted, and a horrible nameless fear overcoming me.

How can changes in brain activity do this? How can they underlie all our experiences? This is what

Mindfield is all about. Although Frank was trained as a neuroscientist (and her expertise shows) this is very much a journalist's book. It is written as a series of almost breathless stories, but it does a great job of exploring the impending neuro-revolution and the sometimes scary consequences of neuro-technology. Frank's conclusion is encouraging; with greater self-knowledge you will find that "your personal biology is not a prison, but a lump of playdough you can help form." ●●●●●

Professor Susan Blackmore is visiting psychologist at the University of Plymouth



Lone Frank tries on 'the God Helmet'