Obedience to authority

Description

The Milgram experiment on obedience to authority figures was a series of social psychology experiments conducted by Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram. They measured the willingness of study participants, men from a diverse range of occupations with varying levels of education, to obey an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts conflicting with their personal conscience.More at Wikipedia

Further References

Gridley, M., & Jenkins, W. J.. (2017). Obedience to authority: An experimental view. Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View

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“Nature reviews genetics 10, 669 (2009). doi:10.1038/nrg2641”
Milgram, S.. (1965). Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority. Human Relations

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1177/001872676501800105
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“Variables that affect subjects refusing to continue in the milgram experiment.”
Blass, T.. (1999). The milgram paradigm after 35 years: Some things we now know about obedience to authority. Journal of Applied Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1111/j.1559-1816.1999.tb00134.x
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“Guided by the belief that we cannot make broad extrapolations from the obedience studies without first firmly establishing what has and has not been found using the paradigm itself, this article draws on 35 years of accumulated research and writings on the obedi-ence paradigm to present a status report on the following salient questions and issues sur-rounding obedience to authority: (a) how should we construe the nature of authority in the obedience experiment? (b) do predictions of those unfamiliar with the obedience experi-ment underestimate the actual obedience rates? (c) are there gender differences in obedi-ence? and (d) have obedience rates changed over time?”
Tyler, T. R., & Lind, E. A.. (1992). A relational model of authority in groups. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60283-X
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“This chapter focuses on one particular aspect of authoritativeness: voluntary compliance with the decisions of authorities. social psychologists have long distinguished between obedience that is the result of coercion, and obedience that is the result of internal attitudes. opinions describe ‘reward power’ and ‘coercive power’, in which obedience is contingent on positive and negative outcomes, and distinguish both of these types of power from legitimate power, in which obedience flows from judgments about the legitimacy of the authority. legitimate power depends on people taking the obligation on themselves to obey and voluntarily follow the decisions made by authorities. the chapter also focuses on legitimacy because it is important to recognize, that legitimacy is not the only attitudinal factor influencing effectiveness. it is also influenced by other cognitions about the authority, most notably judgments of his or her expertise with respect to the problem at hand. the willingness of group members to accept a leader’s directives is only helpful when the leader knows what directives to issue. © 1992 academic press inc.”

Russell, N. J. C.. (2011). Milgram's obedience to authority experiments: Origins and early evolution. British Journal of Social Psychology

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"Stanley milgram's obedience to authority experiments remain one of the most inspired contributions in the field of social psychology. although milgram undertook more than 20 experimental variations, his most (in)famous result was the first official trial run – the remote condition and its 65% completion rate. drawing on many unpublished documents from milgram's personal archive at yale university, this article traces the historical origins and early evolution of the obedience experiments. part 1 presents the previous experiences that led to milgram's conception of his rudimentary research idea and then details the role of his intuition in its refinement. part 2 traces the conversion of milgram's evolving idea into a reality, paying particular attention to his application of the exploratory method of discovery during several pilot studies. both parts illuminate milgram's ad hoc introduction of various manipulative techniques and subtle tension-resolving refinements. the procedural adjustments continued until milgram was confident that the first official experiment would produce a high completion rate, a result contrary to expectations of people's behaviour. showing how milgram conceived of, then arrived at, this first official result is important because the insights gained may help others to determine theoretically why so many participants completed this experiment. beyond the fabric there is not only the loom and the weaver but also the weaving. beyond the social pattern there is the play of forces emanating from the endless interaction of group and environment. by studying the fabric alone we could never understand the process of weaving, and we will never come to grips with the problem of social causation by studying its contemporary resultant patterns. – robert maciver (1933, p. 145, as cited in van krieken, 1998, p. 27)."

Milgram, S.. (1974). Obedience to authority : an experimental view. American Psychologist

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"Milgram s. obedience to authority – an experimental view. london: tavistock, 1974. the experiments described in this book were carried out while milgram was in the dept of psychology at yale university 1960-63. an act carried out under command is, psychologically, of a profoundly different character than action that is spontaneous. obedience is the psychological mechanism that links individual action to political purpose. milgram's focus on obedience and authority starts by the nazi extermination of european jews – the most extreme instance of abhorrent immoral acts carried out by thousands of people in the name of obedience. yet, in lesser degree this type of thing is constantly recurring: ordinary citizens are ordered to destroy other people, and they do so because they consider it their duty to obey orders. in order to take a close look at the act of obeying, milgram set up a simple experiment where a person comes to the laboratory and is told to carry out a series of acts that come increasingly into conflict with conscience. the main question is how far the participant will comply with

the experimenter's instructions before refusing to carry out the ctions required of him. two people particppate – one as a 'teacher' and the other as a 'learner'. the experimenter explains that the study is concerned with the effects of punishment on learning. the learner is seated in a chair with his arms strapped and an electrode attached to his wrist. he is told that he is to learn a list of word pairs; whenever he makes an error, he will receive electric shocks of increasing intensity. the real focus of the experiment is the teacher, who is seated before an impressive shock generator, designated from 'sligh shock' to 'danger – severe shock'. when the learner gives and incorrect answer, the teacher is to give him an electric shock. (the learner, or victim, is an actor who actually receives no shock at all. the point of the experiment is to see how far a person will proceed in a concrete and measurable sitation in which he is ordered to inflict increasing pain on a protesting victim. at what point will the subject refuse to obey the experimenter? many subjects will obey the experimenter no matter how painful the shocks seem to be. this was seen time and again in these studies. it is the extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority that constitutes the chief finding of the study. a commonly offered explanation is that…"
Passini, S., & Morselli, D.. (2009). Authority relationships between obedience and disobedience. New Ideas in Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1016/j.newideapsych.2008.06.001
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"Recent episodes of public dissent (such as the demonstrations against g8 policies) raise the issue of the psychological processes triggered in obeying and disobeying the authority. even if obedience to authority is an important aspect of social life and it plays a key role in maintaining social order, the concept of obedience has been studied in social psychology mainly in terms of its destructive aspects. besides, most of the studies have overlooked the role of disobedience in the authority relationship. disobedience may be conceived of as a protest that undermines the legitimacy of the authority or it can represent an instrument for controlling the legitimacy of the authority's demands, becoming a factor protecting against authoritarianism. in this article, a new perspective on the study of the relationship between the individual and the authority is put forward, considering obedience and disobedience as parallel concepts, each having constructive and destructive aspects. © 2008 elsevier ltd. all rights reserved."
Brief, A. P., Dietz, J., Cohen, R. R., Pugh, S. D., & Vaslow, J. B.. (2000). Just Doing Business: Modern Racism and Obedience to Authority as Explanations for Employment Discrimination. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes

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"In two experiments, we investigated the effects of prejudice (in the form of modern racism) and business justifications by authority figures (i.e., organizational superiors) to discriminate against minorities (blacks in our research) in hiring situations. as expected, business justifications by legitimate

authority figures led to participants' obedience in the form of discrimination relative to a no-justification condition and, in the second experiment, also relative to a condition in which the business justification came from an illegitimate authority figure. moreover, in both experiments, as expected, modern racism did not have a main effect on discrimination, but interacted with business justifications such that modern racism predicted discrimination when a legitimate authority figure provided a business-related justification for such discrimination but not in the absence of such a justification. these results are discussed in terms of their theoretical implications for understanding prejudice and obedience to authority in organizations and in terms of their practical implications for addressing the problem of discrimination in the workplace. © 2000 academic press."
Milgram, S.. (2003). The Perils of Obedience. In The Phenomenon of Torture

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"'The perils of obedience' as it appeared in harper' s magazine. abridged and adapted from obedience to authority by stanley milgram. copyright 1974 by stanley milgram."
Elms, A. C.. (2009). Obedience Lite. American Psychologist

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1037/a0014473
DOI URL
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"Jerry m. burger's partial replication of stanley milgram's (1963, 1965, 1974) classic experiments on obedience to authority is considered from the viewpoint of a contributor and witness to the original obedience experiments. although burger's replication succeeded in terms of gaining the approval of his local institutional review board, it did so by removing a large portion of the stressful circumstances that made milgram's findings so psychologically interesting and so broadly applicable to instances of real-world destructive obedience. however, burger has provided an initial demonstration that his 'obedience lite' procedures can be used to extend the study of certain situational and personality variables beyond those examined by milgram."
Frimer, J. A., Gaucher, D., & Schaefer, N. K.. (2014). Political Conservatives' Affinity for Obedience to Authority Is Loyal, Not Blind. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

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"Liberals and conservatives disagree about obeying authorities, with conservatives holding the more positive views. we suggest that reactions to conservative authorities, rather than to obedience itself,

are responsible for the division. past findings that conservatives favor obedience uniformly confounded obedience with conservative authorities. we break down obedience to authority into its constituent parts to test the divisiveness of each part. the concepts of obedience (study 1) and authority (study 2) recruited inferences of conservative authorities, conflating results of simple, seemingly face valid tests of their divisiveness. these results establish necessary features of a valid test, to which study 3 conforms. conservatives have the more positive moral views of obedience only when the authorities are conservative (e.g., commanding officers); liberals do when the authorities are liberal (e.g., environmentalists). the two camps agree about obeying ideologically neutral authorities (e.g., office managers). obedience itself is not ideologically divisive."
Haslam, S. A., & Reicher, S. D.. (2012). Contesting the "Nature" Of Conformity: What Milgram and Zimbardo's Studies Really Show. PLoS Biology

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"Understanding of the psychology of tyranny is dominated by classic studies from the 1960s and 1970s: milgram's research on obedience to authority and zimbardo's stanford prison experiment. supporting popular notions of the banality of evil, this research has been taken to show that people conform passively and unthinkingly to both the instructions and the roles that authorities provide, however malevolent these may be. recently, though, this consensus has been challenged by empirical work informed by social identity theorizing. this suggests that individuals' willingness to follow authorities is conditional on identification with the authority in question and an associated belief that the authority is right."
Bègue, L., Beauvois, J. L., Courbet, D., Oberlé, D., Lepage, J., & Duke, A. A.. (2015). Personality Predicts Obedience in a Milgram Paradigm. Journal of Personality

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1111/jopy.12104
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"This study investigates how obedience in a milgram-like experiment is predicted by interindividual differences. participants were 35 males and 31 females aged 26–54 from the general population who were contacted by phone 8 months after their participation in a study transposing milgram's obedience paradigm to the context of a fake television game show. interviews were presented as opinion polls with no stated ties to the earlier experiment. personality was assessed by the big five mini-markers questionnaire (saucier, 1994). political orientation and social activism were also measured. results confirmed hypotheses that conscientiousness and agreeableness would be associated with willingness to administer higher-intensity electric shocks to a victim. political orientation and social activism were also related to obedience. our results provide empirical evidence suggesting that individual differences in personality and political variables matter in the explanation of obedience to authority."
Meyer, J., & Jesilow, P.. (1997). Obedience to authority: Possible effects on children's testimony.

Psychology, Crime & Law

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1080/10683169608409797
DOI URL
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“This article reviews research done on children’s testimony and suggests that obedience to authority may be one factor that future studies should address. the manner in which suggestibility and authority may influence youngsters’ accounts is discussed. suggestions for improving the accuracy of children’s testimony are presented.”
Slater, M., Antley, A., Davison, A., Swapp, D., Guger, C., Barker, C., … Sanchez-Vives, M. V.. (2006). A virtual reprise of the Stanley Milgram obedience experiments. PLoS ONE

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0000039
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“BACKGROUND: stanley milgram’s 1960s experimental findings that people would administer apparently lethal electric shocks to a stranger at the behest of an authority figure remain critical for understanding obedience. yet, due to the ethical controversy that his experiments ignited, it is nowadays impossible to carry out direct experimental studies in this area. in the study reported in this paper, we have used a similar paradigm to the one used by milgram within an immersive virtual environment. our objective has not been the study of obedience in itself, but of the extent to which participants would respond to such an extreme social situation as if it were real in spite of their knowledge that no real events were taking place.nnmethodology: following the style of the original experiments, the participants were invited to administer a series of word association memory tests to the (female) virtual human representing the stranger. when she gave an incorrect answer, the participants were instructed to administer an ‘electric shock’ to her, increasing the voltage each time. she responded with increasing discomfort and protests, eventually demanding termination of the experiment. of the 34 participants, 23 saw and heard the virtual human, and 11 communicated with her only through a text interface.nnconclusions: our results show that in spite of the fact that all participants knew for sure that neither the stranger nor the shocks were real, the participants who saw and heard her tended to respond to the situation at the subjective, behavioural and physiological levels as if it were real. this result reopens the door to direct empirical studies of obedience and related extreme social situations, an area of research that is otherwise not open to experimental study for ethical reasons, through the employment of virtual environments.”
Wiltermuth, S.. (2012). Synchrony and destructive obedience. Social Influence

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“Studies demonstrated that cultural practices involving synchrony can make people more likely to engage in destructive obedience at the behest of authority figures. participants instructed to follow a leader while walking in-step with him felt closer to him and were more willing to kill sow bugs at the leader’s request in an ostensibly different experiment than were participants in other conditions. the findings are the first to indicate that synchronous activities may be used to influence leader–follower relations.”
Weber, M.. (2016). The types of legitimate domination. In Social Theory Re-Wired: New Connections to Classical and Contemporary Perspectives: Second Edition

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“Three types of authority: 1)rational grounds/legal authority- a) any given legal norm may be established by agreement; b) every body of law consists in a consistent system of abstract rules; c) the superior is subject to an impersonal order; d) the person who obeys authority does it as a member and only obeys the ‘law’; e) the members of the organization do not owe obedience to the superior himself, but to the order (p.217-26)n2) traditional grounds- traditional if legitimacy is claimed for it and believed in by virtue of the sanctity of age-old rules and powers based on personal loyalty (p.226-41)n3) charismatic grounds- applied to a certain quality of individual by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural/superhuman/exceptional powers & qualities (p.242-54nfeudalism – …n”
Dambrun, M., & Vatiné, E.. (2010). Reopening the study of extreme social behaviors: Obedience to authority within an immersive video environment. European Journal of Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.646
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“In this study, we used a paradigm similar to the one used by milgram in his classic obedience study, using an immersive video environment. we manipulated the victim’s degree of visibility and his ethnicity. when the victim was hidden, the level of obedience we obtained was similar to milgram’s. replicating previous findings observed in real environments, participants were more obedient when the victim was hidden than when he was visible, and the more obedient participants negated their own responsibility by projecting responsibility on both the victim and the experimenter. state-anger and right-wing authoritarianism (rwa) emerged as two significant predictors of the level of obedience. illustrating an underlying process of racial-dehumanization, participants reported less anxiety and distress when the victim was a north african than when the victim was of the same racial origin as the participant. these results underscore the usefulness of using immersive environments when studying ex”

Darling, N., Cumsille, P., & Loreto Martínez, M.. (2007). Adolescents' as active agents in the socialization process: Legitimacy of parental authority and obligation to obey as predictors of obedience . Journal of Adolescence

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2006.03.003
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"Adolescents' agreement with parental standards and beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority and their own obligation to obey were used to predict adolescents' obedience, controlling for parental monitoring, rules, and rule enforcement. hierarchical linear models were used to predict both between-adolescent and within-adolescent, issue-specific differences in obedience in a sample of 703 chilean adolescents (m age=15.0 years). adolescents' global agreement with parents and global beliefs about their obligation to obey predicted between-adolescent obedience, controlling for parental monitoring, age, and gender. adolescents' issue-specific agreement, legitimacy beliefs, and obligation to obey predicted issue-specific obedience, controlling for rules and parents' reports of rule enforcement. the potential of examining adolescents' agreement and beliefs about authority as a key link between parenting practices and adolescents' decisions to obey is discussed. © 2006 the association for professionals in services for adolescents."
Nicholson, I.. (2011). "Torture at Yale": Experimental subjects, laboratory torment and the "rehabilitation" of Milgram—s "Obedience to Authority". Theory & Psychology

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"Stanley milgram's experiments on 'obedience to authority' are among the most criticized in all of psychology. however, over the past 20 years, there has been a gradual rehabilitation of milgram's work and reputation, a reconsideration that is in turn closely linked to a contemporary 'revival' of his obedience experiments. this paper provides a critical counterpoint to this 'milgram revival' by drawing on archival material from participants in the obedience study and milgram himself. this material indicates that milgram misrepresented (a) the extent of his debriefing procedures, (b) the risk posed by the experiment, and (c) the harm done to his participants. the archival record also indicates that milgram had doubts about the scientific value of the experiment, thereby compromising his principal ethical justification for employing such extreme methods. the article ends with a consideration of the implications of these historical revelations for contemporary efforts to revive the milgram paradigm."
Ludeke, S., Johnson, W., & Bouchard, T. J.. (2013). "Obedience to traditional authority:" A heritable factor underlying authoritarianism, conservatism and religiousness. Personality and Individual Differences

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“Social attitudes, political attitudes and religiousness are highly inter-correlated. furthermore, each is substantially influenced by genetic factors. koenig and bouchard (2006) hypothesized that these three areas (which they termed the traditional moral values triad) each derive from an underlying latent trait concerning the tendency to obey traditional authorities. we tested this hypothesis with data from a sample of twins raised in different homes. we assessed social attitudes with altemeyer’s (1988) right-wing authoritarianism scale, political attitudes with wilson and patterson’s (1968) conservatism scale, and religiousness with wiggins’ (1966) religious fundamentalism scale. the best-fitting model identified the three tmvt domains as different manifestations of a single latent and significantly heritable factor. further, the genetic and environmental bases for this factor overlapped heavily with those for the multidimensional personality questionnaire traditionalism scale, supporting the conception of traditionalism as the latent factor represented by the three scales in contemporary western societies. © 2013 elsevier ltd.”

Category

1. General

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1. diffusion of responsibility
2. nazi germany
3. role expectations
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