Video Guide

OBEDIENCE

bw, 40 minutes

I. Overview of Obedience

Obedience is an essential element of social life. Without obedience to authority, group action would be seriously hindered. Our survival has often depended on group action with obedience to authority as an essential component. This film is about obedience. In general terms, an authority commands a subordinate to take some action. One type of obedience which has interesting psychological implications is that obedience which puts the subordinates in a situation where they are asked to take action which they would not do on their own. For instance, if an authority says to hurt someone, under what conditions will we hurt the other and under what conditions will we refuse to hurt? Milgram translated this general concept into a specific experimental situation. The experimental situation involves an experimenter who asks a subject to hurt another person. Under what conditions will the subject be obedient and under what conditions would he be disobedient? If the subject follows the command of the experimenter to hurt another, he is considered to have obeyed or been obedient. If he fails to carry out the command of the experimenter, he disobeyed or was disobedient. These research studies used as measures of obedience and disobedience whether shock was given to another. No inferences about internal states or what subjects were thinking are involved in this concept of obedience.

II. Milgram's Study

Stanley Milgram (1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1974) did research at Yale University to determine what a person does when he is asked to carry out orders that conflict with his conscience. Assume for a moment that you are the subject. You notice in the newspaper one night that you can earn $4.50 for arriving a few moments early for the study, you meet another subject who has come for the same research. Both of you are soon taken into an impressive room by the researcher who is dressed in a scientist-type lab coat. The researcher gives both of you a check for $4.50 and says that the money is simply for coming to the laboratory so that no matter what happens you can keep the money. The researcher explains that the study is on the effects of punishment on learning, which has not been studied very much, but is important. One person is to learn a list of words but will get a shock every time he does not learn. The question being studied is how quickly will he learn to avoid getting punished? You each are given a piece of paper to see who will teach and who will learn. You luck out and are the teacher, the person who gives the shocks. The other subject is taken into another room, strapped into place, told how to show he has learned by pulling one of the four switches, and given electrode paste so that burns from the shocks are avoided. The subject asks if there is any danger. The researcher says: "Although the shocks can be extremely painful, they cause no permanent tissue damage. " The learner indicates he had a heart problem a few years earlier. You and the researcher leave the other subject, close the door to his room, and go back into the first room where there is an impressive shock generator. There are 30 lever-type switches with a little red light above each lever. Under the levers you notice these labels: fifteen volts for the first one, 30 volts for the second one, 45 volts for the third, and so on up to 450 volts. Under the numbers are these words in order: slight shock, moderate shock, strong shock, very strong shock, intense shock, extreme intensity shock, danger, severe shock, and several red xs for the last two levers.

You are given a sample shock at 45 volts which is painful. Your first task is to read pairs of words for the other subject to learn. After one run through the list you read one word and then four choices. The learner is to pick out the correct choice. If he is right, you continue on. If he is wrong, you are to give him a shock and tell him the right answer. The next time he is wrong, you move one lever up the scale and give him a stronger shock. You soon find that the other subject is very unhappy with his shocks. However, the researcher urges you to continue giving shocks. What would you do? If you were obedient and followed the researcher's total instructions, you would push down 30 levers (to 450 volts). If you did not agree to push any down, you would have pulled down no levers. How many levers would you have pulled down? (zero to 30) _____.

How many levers do you feel the average person would pull down?

Prediction of forty psychiatrists when told how the study was done.

1. Most would not go beyond 150 volts (10 levers).
2. Only 4 % would continue after 300 volts (20 levers).
3. Only . 1% would go to 450 volts (30 levers).

The film is based on Milgram's research. Subjects shown on the film are real subjects who gave their permission to be used in a film for educational purposes. Watch carefully what happened. Mr. Williams was the experimenter.

III. Examples of destructive obedience.
Spanish Inquisition, Salem witch hunts, Nazi war crimes, massacre of Vietnam civilians at My Lai. What others can you think of?

IV. A quote: "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 have been committed in the name of rebellion." (C.P. Snow, 1961) What do you think?

V. **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

A. Describe the psychological fact which comes from this film: researcher and year, the sample, how the study was done (the procedure), the research results.

B. What might subjects have thought would happen if they disobeyed the experimenter? What might subjects have thought at 345 volts (the learner stopped responding)?

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C. Why do you think so many people were obedient?

D. Some critics believe this study should have been stopped when it was clear that some subjects were experiencing high stress. What is your view and your reasons?

E. What do you see as the implications for society of this research?

F. (After the mini-lecture.) Describe at least five factors which would decrease obedience. Cite the research results to back up the factors (variables). Write answers here.

Film Guide

TOYS

7 minutes, color,

A group of children are looking at some toys. Their excitement is easily observed as the colorful toys move around. What is your reaction to what happens next? What is the film saying? Do you agree?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the various aggressive acts.

2. Describe your reactions to “Toys. "

Result of Research on Obedience

Mini-lecture for use after viewing the video *Obedience*

The description of Milgram's study is given in the study guide on the film Obedience. Here are some of the research results:

	Variables	Obedience: Probability Tag
1.	Voice feedback, learner said he had a heart condition, responses stopped after 300 volts (the condition shown on the film). In the remaining studies the learner did not say he had a heart condition.	50 % obeyed
2.	Distance of the learner from the teacher.	
	a. Learner is down the hall but his complaints can be clearly heard.	a. 65%
	b. Learner is in the same room and can be heard and seen.	b. 40%
	c. Teacher had to hold down the learner's hand on the shock plate.	c. 30%
3.	Distance of the authority (the experimenter).	
	a. Authority in the same room.	a. 65%
	b. Authority is on the telephone giving instructions.	b. 23%
4.	Additional teachers taking part in the study (two additional teachers show up and are given tasks, they are paid to play a certain role).	
	a. One teacher drops out at 150, teacher 2 stops at 2 15.	a. 10%
	b. Two teachers follow the authority ' s instructions.	b. 73%
	c. Real subject isn't giving the shocks but is helping.	c. 92%
	d. Experimenter leaves and one of the confederates suggests going up.	d. 20%

	Variables	Obedience: Probability Tag
5.	Location of the study.	
	a. At Yale.	a. 65%
	b. In a rundown office building in Bridgeport with no apparent connection to Yale.	b. 48%
6.	Change in subjects.	
	a. Men.	a. 65%
	b. Women.	b. 65%
	c. High school students.	c. 85%
	d. German subjects tested in Germany.	d. 85%
7.	Under ordered shock levels versus selecting their own.	
	a. Pushed by the authority.	a. 65%
	b. Allowed to select own shock level for 30 trials.	b. overall average Was 4 levers

Other Results of Research on Obedience

Other research has shown extensive obedience.

Hofling, Brotzman, Dalrymple, Graves, and Perice (1966) had an unfamiliar doctor call a nurse at a hospital and tell her to give a patient a drug that was not in normal use at the hospital. The doctor told the nurse to give a dosage which was twice the maximum dose stated on the drug. Twenty-one of 22 nurses followed the doctor's orders even though such action was against hospital policy and could have been harmful to the patient. (An experimental study in nurse-physician relationships. ***The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 1966,*** 142, pp. 171-180)

Ethical Questions About Research

Do the results justify the stress on the subjects? Should the research have been done?

1. Subjects experienced a lot of stress participating in the study. Milgram (1963, p. 377) in his description of the study said the following: "I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse. He constantly pulled on his earlobe, and twisted his hands. At one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered: 'Oh, God. Let's stop it.' And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experimenter, and obeyed to the end. "

2. Subjects learned something about themselves which may have been unpleasant: that they would shock someone so severely that the person might have been seriously hurt or killed.

3. Milgram argues that the topic of obedience is extremely important to understand and that the results should caution all of us about the power of authority. These results could not have been discovered if people had not been put into a real situation where they thought harm was being done. In addition, Milgram debriefed subjects at the end of the session. Debriefing means that Milgram explained to each subject exactly what had taken place and that the learner had not been given any shocks. He also tried to help people not feel bad about what they had done. Milgram (1977) reported that he had a psychiatrist interview people a year after the study and no harm was found. Also a survey was done which indicated that 84% of the subjects were glad to have participated, 15 % had neutral feelings, and only 1% said they were unhappy with the experiment.

The Tenth Level (a TV film done by CBS in 1975)

The film revolves around the life of the researcher who is working on the topic of obedience. The study itself is reasonably portrayed but the personal experiences of the experimenter are meant to highlight the ethical issues of doing the research. A young friend of the researcher finally persuades the researcher to let him be a subject and he ends up as the teacher. However, he stops at a low level and decides to check on the learner. However, there is no learner, just a tape. The young friend destroys the equipment and runs away.

In fact, not one of over a 1000 subjects ever went in to check to see if the learner was all right!