

Social Psychology

Lecture 6: Conformity and Obedience Part 2

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Our previous discussion on Conformity and Obedience (Part 1) focused on the dynamics of social norms and group alignment. We now turn to the 'darker side' of influence. This lesson investigates why individuals often succumb to extreme social pressures, leading to behaviors that are as profound as they are disturbing. The lesson will cover the following topics: Principles of Compliance, Compliance Techniques, Milgram's Study of Obedience and Reactance.

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

1. Identify the factors leading to compliance.
2. Differentiate the various compliance techniques.
3. Examine the methodology and empirical results of Milgram's study on obedience.
4. Analyze the psychological mechanisms that trigger reactance.

SIX PRINCIPLES OF COMPLIANCE

(Robert Cialdini)

1. Friendship or liking

- we are more likely to comply with requests from people we like than with those from people we don't like or don't know.
- Even just a sense of familiarity can affect degrees of compliance.
- **Experiment:** Burger and his colleagues (2004) conducted four experiments to explore how "incidental similarities" can influence our willingness to agree to requests from strangers.
 - **Study 1: Birthdays**
 - This study tested whether sharing a birthday could increase compliance.
 - **Similarity condition:** confederate's birthday matched the participant's

- **Control condition:** confederate's birthday did not match the participant's
 - **Request:** Read an eight-page essay and provide one page of written feedback.
 - **Result:** Only 30% of the control group agreed to help, while 62.2% of those who shared a birthday agreed.

- **Study 2: Names**
 - A requester wore a nametag that either matched or differed from the participant's name.
 - **Request:** Donation to charity.
 - **Result:** Those with matching names donated more than twice as much money as the control group.

- **Study 3: Fingerprints**
 - Participants had their fingerprints taken.
 - They were told they had a "Type E" fingerprint.
 - **Condition A:** Participants were told that Type E is very rare (only 2% of people have it) and that the confederate *also* had it.
 - **Condition B:** Participants were told that Type E is common (80% of people have it) and that the confederate also had it.
 - **Condition:** No similarity was mentioned.
 - **Request:** To provide a written critique of a shared essay.
 - **Result:** The "Rare" group was the most likely to comply.

- **Study 4: Direct vs. Indirect Similarity**
 - Participants were again told they were part of a study on "biological markers" and fingerprints.
 - **Group A (Direct Similarity):** The participant was told they shared a rare fingerprint type with the person asking for a donation.
 - **Group B (Indirect Similarity):** The participant was told they shared a rare fingerprint type with someone else in the lab, but then a *different* stranger asked them for a donation.

- **Group C (Control):** No similarity was mentioned.
- **Result:** Only Group A (Direct Similarity) showed increased compliance.

2. Commitment or consistency

- Once you're already committed to a position, you are more willing to comply with requests that reflect that position.
- Example: If a classmate approaches you with a petition to stop animal testing, your response is often dictated by your past stances. If you have previously spoken out against animal testing, you will feel a strong psychological pressure to sign the document to remain consistent with your established position.

3. Scarcity

- When items are rare or running out, they become more desirable.
- We comply because we fear missing out.
- **Experiment:** Worchel et al. (1975) tested how different types of scarcity affect how we value objects, using cookies as the medium.
- **Result:**
 - Cookies in scarce supply (2 in a jar) were consistently rated as more desirable and "costlier" than those in abundant supply (10 in a jar).
 - Cookies that became scarce (moving from 10 down to 2) were valued more highly than cookies that were always scarce.
 - Scarcity driven by "high demand" from other people made the cookies more attractive than scarcity caused by a researcher's "accident".

4. Reciprocity

- Individuals are generally more willing to comply with a request from someone who has previously complied with a request from them.
- **Experiment:** Regan (1971) tested whether we comply with people because we like them or because we feel indebted to them.

Participants: 77 male undergraduates

Method: A "confederate" (an actor) was made to be either likable or unlikable.

The confederate either:

- Brought the participant a soft drink (the favor).
- The experimenter brought the drink (control).
- No drink was given at all (control).

The confederate later asked the participant to buy raffle tickets.

Result: Participants who received a soda from the confederate bought twice as many raffle tickets as those who received no favor. It didn't matter if the participant liked the confederate or not. Even those who found the confederate unpleasant felt compelled to buy tickets if they had accepted the soda.

5. Social validation

- We go along with requests that seem to match up with what others are doing.
- Examples:
 - Marketing claims that a product is the "best-selling" or "most popular" on the market
 - Restaurants often highlight specific dishes with a "Chef's Choice" or "Best Seller" icon.

6. Authority

- We are generally more likely to comply with requests from people who appear to have authority.
- This influence often comes from the perception that authority figures are experts.
- Examples:
 - After an appointment with a physician, individuals are highly likely to follow the medical advice provided or fulfill the prescribed medication.
 - Upon seeing a police car with flashing lights, drivers are highly likely to pull over immediately.

COMPLIANCE TECHNIQUES

A. Foot-in-the-Door

- First asked to comply with small request, then bigger requests
- Effective because most want to behave in consistent manner – compliance reduces dissonance
- **Experiment:** Freedman & Fraser (1966) conducted a study to determine if inducing a person to comply with a small, initial request would increase their likelihood of complying with a much larger, more demanding request later.

Method: Researchers asked homeowners to place a tiny, 3-inch sign in their window that said "Be a Safe Driver." Nearly everyone agreed. Two weeks later, those same residents were asked to place a massive, poorly lettered "Drive Carefully" billboard on their front lawns.

Result: 76% of those who agreed to the small sign complied with the massive billboard request. Of those who were never asked to display the tiny sign, only 17% agreed to the billboard.

B. Door-in-the-Face

- Large request followed by smaller request
- High rates of compliance subtly
- Effective for many reasons: perceptual contrast, reciprocity, guilt
- **Experiment 1:** Guéguen et al., (2011) conducted an experiment to see if a rejected "large" request would make customers more likely to accept a "smaller" one.

Method:

- **Experimental Group:** The server first asked if the customers would like to order dessert. After the customers refused dessert, the server immediately offered coffee or tea.
- **Control Group:** The server offered only coffee or tea directly, without mentioning dessert first.

Result:

- **Experimental Group:** Customers who were first "rejected" on the dessert offer were significantly more likely to order tea or coffee.
 - **Control Group:** Compliance was notably lower when the offer for tea or coffee stood alone.
- **Experiment 2:** Guéguen and Pascual (2003) tested the Door-in-the-Face technique in a private setting involving 90 bar patrons.

Method:

- **Experimental Group:** A female confederate asked patrons to buy her a drink (large request); after the inevitable refusal, she asked for only 2 or 3 coins (small request).
- **Control Group:** Patrons were only asked for the coins directly.

Result: The "Door-in-the-Face" condition led to a dramatic increase in both the compliance rate and the average donation amount.

C. That's-not-all

- An initial request is followed by adding something that makes the offer more attractive.
- **Experiment:** The effectiveness of this technique was illustrated in an experiment with a bake sale (Burger, 1986).
 - **Experimental Condition:** Passersby asked the price of a cupcake. The seller stated it was 75 cents, but before the customer could respond, the seller added, "and it comes with two cookies for free" employing That's-not-all.
 - **Control Condition:** Passersby were simply told that the price for the cupcake and two cookies together was 75 cents.

Results: 73% of people bought the treats when the cookies were "added" at the last second, compared to only 40% when they were presented as a single package from the start.

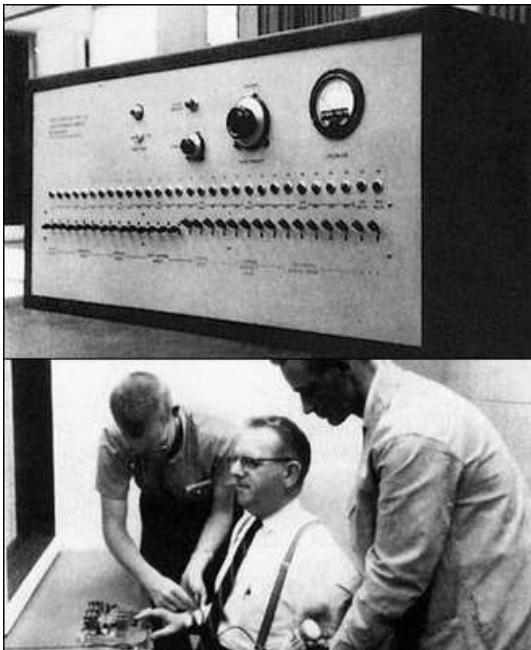
D. Low-Balling

- A strategy in which a target accepts a "low-cost" offer, only then to be told that there are additional hidden costs.

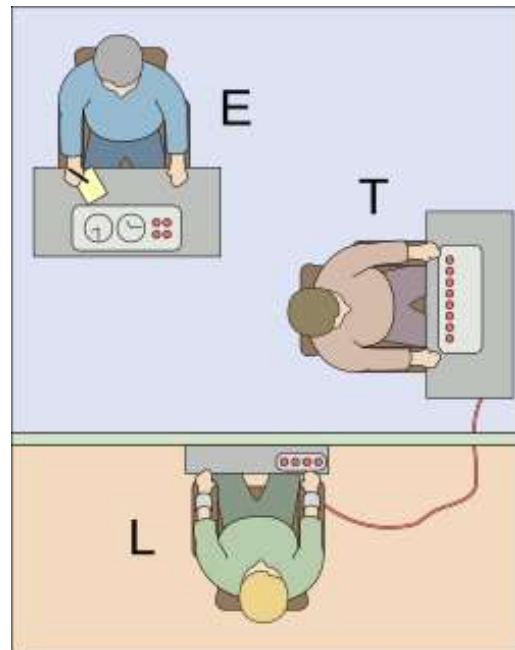
- Example: A dealer offers you a car for 1.2 million pesos. After you spend an hour doing paperwork and falling in love with the car, they return from the office and say, "I'm so sorry, my boss won't let me sell it for that. It's actually 1.25 million pesos. Because you've already spent the time and effort, you're likely to pay the extra 50,000 pesos.
- Relies on post-decision dissonance

MILGRAM'S STUDY OF OBEDIENCE

- **Research question:** Is it possible that the average person could be influenced to hurt others if an authority figure gave order to do so?
- Milgram recruited 40 male participants through newspaper ads for what was advertised as a "study of learning" at Yale University. The group was diverse, ranging in age from 20 to 50 and including a mix of unskilled laborers, skilled workers, and professionals. Each participant was paid \$4.50 for their time.
- Milgram created a fake electric 'shock generator' with 30 switches, marked clearly in 15 volt increments (15 to 450 volts) and labeled 'moderate', 'strong' and 'danger: severe shock'. The 'shock generator' only produced sounds, but no electric shocks.



Source: <https://jamie-kohn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/milgram.png>



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment

- The experimenter then met with each participant and a man posing as a participant asked them to draw straws to see who would play the role of 'teacher' and who would be the 'learner'. This was arranged so that the real participant always got the role of 'teacher'. The 'learner' was placed in a room and strapped in a chair with electrodes attached to his body.
- The 'teacher' was asked to teach word pairs to the 'learner' and instructed to deliver an electric shock each time the learner made a mistake, increasing the voltage for every new mistake.
- Milgram did more than one experiment – he carried out 18 variations of his study. All he did was alter the situation (IV) to see how this affected obedience (DV).
- Result: 65% of subjects shocked up to the 450-volt mark (even when confederate appeared injured)

Limitations of Milgram's Experiments

1. Ethical Violations

- a. **Deception** – participants were lied about the true nature of the study and believed they were actually hurting (or killing) another human being.
 - b. **Right to Withdraw** – although Milgram said they could leave, the "prods" used by the experimenter (e.g., *"You have no other choice, you must go on"*) made participants feel they were forced to continue, violating the ethical principle of voluntary participation.
2. **Lack of Ecological Validity** – since the experiment was conducted in a laboratory setting, it may not be applicable to real-life, everyday behavior.
 3. **Gender Bias** - the sample Milgram used was not representative of the general population (they were all male participants); it is unknown if the experiment findings could be transferred to females.
 4. **Cultural Bias** – Milgram's experiment was replicated in several cultures and the conclusions have been the same as those of the original study. However, most of these studies were conducted in industrialized western cultures, therefore it may be wrong to conclude that the study identified a universal human trait.

FACTORS THAT BREEDS OBEDIENCE

1. Commands were given by an authority figure.

- In Milgram's study, this was reinforced by several factors: one is the use of expert uniform. The experimenter in Milgram's experiment wore a grey lab coat. This served as a visual cue of expertise and high status.
- When the "experimenter" was replaced by someone in ordinary clothes, obedience levels dropped significantly. When the "clerk" decided that the shock should be increased one level for each wrong answer and instructed the teacher accordingly. Result: 80% of the "teachers" refused to fully comply.

2. The experiment was done at a prestigious institution.

- In postexperimental interviews, many participants said that had it not been for Yale's reputation, they would not have obeyed.

3. The authority figure was present in the room with the subject.

- When Milgram's experimenter gave the commands by a telephone, full obedience dropped to 21%

4. Timing of request came quickly; there is little time to think.

- When an authority figure creates a sense of urgency, it forces you to react with your "gut" rather than your logic.

5. Psychological distances (don't see consequences of actions)

- When the victim was remote and the "teachers" heard no complaints, nearly all obeyed calmly to the end.
- Throughout history, executioners have often depersonalized those being executed by placing hoods over their heads.
- The ethics of war allow one to bomb a helpless village from 40,000 feet but not to shoot an equally helpless villager.
- As the Holocaust began, some Germans were left shaken by the experience of face-to-face killing.

- That led Heinrich Himmler, the Nazi “architect of genocide” to devise a more humane killing, one that would visually separate the killers and their victims.

FACTORS THAT CAUSE PEOPLE TO CARRY OBEDIENCE TO EXTREMES

1. The desire to avoid conflict, rudeness, or offending the person in charge.
2. Obeying small initial requests makes it harder to refuse increasingly difficult ones later.
3. Viewing harmful actions as just "part of the job" or standard procedure to normalize the behavior.
4. People justify their behavior by assigning responsibility to the authority rather than to themselves. (“I was just following orders”)

“To explain is not to excuse. To understand is not to forgive. You can forgive someone whose behavior you don’t understand, and you can understand someone whom you do not forgive”

“When we understand the ordinariness of extraordinary evil, we will be less surprised by evil, less likely to be unwitting contributors to evil, and perhaps better equipped to forestall evil.” – James Waller, 2002

LESSON OF THE EXPERIMENT: “Ordinary people can do shocking things.”

THE POWER OF THE SITUATION

- The most terrible evil evolves from a sequence of small evils.
- An evil situation produced evil behavior.
- Example: The Stanford Prison Experiment
- In an experiment conducted by Swim and Hyers (1999), participants were asked to **imagine** themselves discussing with 3 others whom to select for survival on a desert island.
- They were asked to imagine one of the others, a man, injecting three sexist comments, such as, “I think we need more women on the island to keep the men satisfied.”

- **Imaginary group:** Only 5 % *predicted* they would ignore each of the comment or wait to see how others reacted.
- **Reality group:** When Swim and Hyers (1999) engaged other students in discussions where such comments were actually made by a male confederate, **55%** (NOT 5%), said nothing.

DO WE EVER WANT TO BE DIFFERENT?

Reactance

- A motive to protect or restore one's sense of freedom.
- It arises when someone threatens our freedom of action.
- Attempt to restrict a person's freedom often produce an anticonformity "**boomerang effect**"

Asserting Uniqueness

- In individualistic western cultures they feel uncomfortable when they appear exactly like everyone else.
- In a group, we are most conscious of how we differ from the others.

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The shock panel (top), and the Learner being connected to the electric shock machine by the Teacher and experimenter. Retrieved from <https://jamie-kohn.com/2012/01/21/milgram/>

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