

The Man He killed

Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!

But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

I shot him dead because –
Because he was my foe,
Just so.; my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although.

He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand - just as I –
Was out of work - had sold his traps –
No other reason why.

Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown.

THOMAS HARDY

"I Was Just Following Orders"

By Rory O'Day

The main theme of the articles in this section is reflected in the poetry by Thomas Hardy at the beginning. All of them have shown ways in which the demands of the Situation influenced and shaped the attitudes and behavior of the individuals involved. To what extent are we in control of the situation, and to what extent is the situation in control of us - our best intentions and principles aside?

Hypotheses About Conformity

In discussing the readings and their implications, we will consider a number of "explanations" that are often advanced to account for conformity or obedience.

The Situation involves unimportant issues.

One commonly utilized explanation is that people will give in on unimportant matters but that when it comes to really important issues they will stick to their values and principles. In other words, people will not compromise their basic beliefs. Thus in the Kiesler and Corbin study, it could be argued that one's opinion about abstract paintings is not very important or crucial. Therefore, it would make sense to change one's opinion under pressure because it does not matter all that much. But what about inflicting pain on another person or going to the aid of someone who needs help? It would seem that these situations invoke "important matters." Also, it is important to remember that

when Milgram's experimental situation was simply described to hypothetical subjects, none said they would administer anywhere near maximum shock. In fact, three said they would not administer even the lowest shock on the scale. Likewise, psychiatrists predicted much lower levels of shock than subjects later gave. It seems likely that nobody likes to think of himself - or for that matter any "normal" person - as being so obedient to authority that he would act in inhuman ways.

The Situation involves punishment.

Another reason that people might change their beliefs or act in a way that violates their principles is that they are coerced to do so. By conforming or obeying, the individual avoids the aversive consequences of not doing so. An example would be a soldier who obeys an order because he might be shot or court-martialed if he did not.

But none of the studies here involved any extreme punishment or threat of it. The Kiesler and Corbin experiment did present the individual - in the extremely disliked, committed condition - with a somewhat uncomfortable predicament. But in the Milgram obedience studies, the experimenter did not threaten the subjects in any way for failure to comply. The only message was "You must go on. The experiment requires it." Surprisingly, that was enough to induce most subjects to continue the experiment.

How, then, to account for high obedience in the Milgram Situation? Perhaps something akin to generalized or nonspecific fear about the consequences of disobeying an authority figure is operating. Remember that when the subjects thought the experimenter did not know what shock level they were administering, they would lie to him about how much shock they were giving: in this situation some subjects did not proceed beyond the lowest level on the dial. Also, there is the case where subjects would refuse to continue with the experiment when the experimenter was out of the room but would comply when he returned to give his commands in person. In fact, Milgram found that the proximity of the authority was the most powerful factor in getting subjects to obey and that obedient stooges did not significantly increase the power of the experimenter to induce compliance. This notion of a nonspecific fear of the consequences of disobeying an authority figure seems supported by Milgram's later disobedience studies. Disobedient stooges who were not punished for refusing to continue with the experiment were most effective in getting subjects to quit. This Situation apparently weakened the power of the experimenter sufficiently that the individual was able to disobey. Observing that disobedience did not lead to aversive consequences seems to have allayed to some extent the subjects' fears (whatever they might have been) of what the experimenter would do to them if they refused his commands.

The Situation offers reward.

Perhaps people conform or obey for rewards - for some positive payoff for themselves. Other ways of stating this are: "Every man has his price." or "He knows which side his bread is buttered on." It is possible to interpret Lieberman's findings in this light. Maybe workers who become foremen become more pro-company and more anti-union in order to keep their jobs and perhaps get a promotion. Similarly, maybe those workers who become union shop Stewards become more pro-union in order to get re-elected or move on to a higher position in the union hierarchy. In both cases, attitudes are brought into line in a way that supports the particular role one is occupying. The consequence, however, is that a group of individuals can be divided and polarized in their attitudes so that they become less able to understand and communicate with one another. Again, however, the Milgram situation does not support this hypothesis because there was no high reward for punishing the other person - only \$4.50. This does not seem like a lot of money for violating one's basic beliefs. For some subjects, of course, the reward could have been the belief that they were making some important contribution to scientific knowledge - which is a high ideal in our culture.

The Situation offers new information.

Perhaps a person changes his opinion or behaves in a way inconsistent with his previous professed beliefs because a new Situation in which he finds himself gives him access to information that he did

not have before; as a function of this new information, he revises his attitudes because he realizes that his previous position was inadequate or un-realistic. This is a "rational man" kind of explanation and could account for the attitudinal changes Lieberman found in the workers. New foremen and new shop Stewards would be exposed to the company's and the union's positions, respectively, on a variety of issues and so could become more convinced of the rightness of those positions.

Likewise, in the Darley and Latane study, when the subject thought that there were other witnesses to the emergency, he might not have intervened because he assumed that someone else would do so or had already done so. In this case, he might have seen intervention on his part as redundant and unnecessary.

In the Milgram Situation, however, all the information gained as the experiment went on was that the other person was experiencing more and more pain until he himself refused to participate any more. While this information would have been expected to argue against compliance, the majority of the subjects continued right up to the maximum shock level when urged to do so by the experimenter. One of the functions the disobedient stooges might have served for the subject was to give him the idea of disobeying as well as support for not complying.

Again in the Darley and Latane study, the only information the subject received over time was that someone was in very serious trouble: nonintervention would be inconsistent with this knowledge. Yet the occurrence of nonintervention on the part of individuals increased as the number of perceived other bystanders increased.

Particular personality type.

The explanation perhaps most often given to account for behavior which is inconsistent with accepted values is in terms of some kind of personality type which predisposes certain people to behave in an "inhuman" or amoral fashion. This explanation is quite typical when we seek to explain human activities of which we personally disapprove.

For example, since World War II and the revelation of the Nazi atrocities in which 6 to 9 million people were systematically murdered, much of the thinking about obedience to authority has been from an individual psychology point of view. The research on the "authoritarian personality" (Adorno et al. 1950) attempted to account for obedience in terms of particular personal characteristics that distinguished individuals who would unquestioningly follow superiors' orders from those who would not. The problem was thought to lie in the personality of the obedient one, and it was assumed that the authoritarian, patriarchal structure of German institutions - primarily the family - had produced individuals for whom legitimate authority was a more powerful determinant of behavior than the dictates of conscience or moral imperatives.

In this way, it was thought that the Germans who participated in the genocidal activities were a different breed of human beings and that the Germans in general were different from other nationalities because their culture emphasized obedience to authority,

As comforting as this analysis was and is to non-Germans, however, who can then say "I wouldn't have done that," or "it couldn't happen here," the research we have cited in this section indicates that it is a fallacious assumption and smacks of an attempt to divide the world into "good" people (us) and "bad" people (them). We must examine the social context in which obedience or conformity occurs and not assume that the issue can be resolved by resorting to simplistic categories of compliers versus noncompliers or high-authoritarian versus low-authoritarian individuals.

Milgram points out that none of the subjects in his study were sadistic or cruel. Rather, they were a representative sample of American men from College to middle age, from a variety of backgrounds, involved in various occupations. Similarly, none of the personality questionnaire measures (Machiavellianism, anomie, authoritarianism, social desirability, and social responsibility) utilized by Darley and Latane correlated with whether or not the subject would go to the assistance of someone in distress. And all the subjects in both the obedience and emergency studies exhibited extreme tension, expressed concern for the welfare of the other person, and verbalized doubts about what they were doing. In the Kiesler and Corbin experiment, the subjects were randomly assigned to the various conditions and the workers examined by Lieberman were initially no different from each

other in their attitudes. It is hard to imagine that just by chance these particular workers and subjects were any more "conformist" or "susceptible to social pressure" than the others.

All the readings in this section demonstrate that the demands of the immediate Situation are often very powerful in inducing individuals to change their attitudes, conform to group pressure, or behave in ways that are discrepant with their professed values. Further, the obedience and emergency experiments show that what people say they will do in a situation and what they actually do may be quite different. Remember Milgram's hypothetical subjects, the psychiatrists' ratings of how much shock people would give, and the fact that none of the subjects in the emergency study thought that the number of other bystanders had had any effect on his own behavior.

Conscious and Unconscious Learning

In discussing the quite common disparity between self-perception (how one sees oneself) and actual behavior in ongoing situations, Leary (1957) uses the concept of *interpersonal reflexes*. These are responses acquired in our daily interactions with others which become automatic and involuntary. They are ongoing and are therefore difficult to observe and measure by any participant in any social interaction. The individual may not even be conscious of them. The following example illustrates the operation of interpersonal reflexes: *How the Professor and Student Train Each Other to Be Professor and Student*.

The teacher-student relationship, obviously loaded with power implications, serves to illustrate some details of reflex communication. Professors are so addicted to the stereotyped *teaching reflex* that they often cannot inhibit the didactic response. We recall the psychology professor who had developed at some length in a lecture the thesis that teachers or psychotherapists should not give answers but should stimulate the student or the patient to seek answers himself. "Don't let them become dependent on you; make them think for themselves." As soon as the lecture was over, a graduate student (well trained to the dependency reflex) rushed up with a question: "In my undergraduate teaching section the students are continually asking me to solve their personal problems and demanding answers. What shall I do?" Pausing only to clear his throat, the professor reflexly responded: "Yes, you'll always find your students tending to trap you into solving their problems for them - the problems that they should work out for themselves. Now what I'd do if I were you is, first, I'd get them to . . ." The verbal content of an interaction can be quite divorced from the interpersonal meaning. (p. 94)

The point is that there is no simple, direct relationship between what we say our values and beliefs are and how we behave in any given situation. It is necessary to distinguish between the level of values and the level of behavior in ongoing social situations and realize that we may not always act in accord with our best image of ourselves because the learning that goes on at the two levels occurs under different circumstances.

In summary, consider an issue that has particular relevance to those of us who profess democratic, egalitarian beliefs - namely, the extent of obedience to authority that Milgram found. I say "us" because had the study been conducted in our College or town, we could have been subjects and behaved just as compliantly. But how can this be in a democratic society which abhors totalitarianism and fights for freedom all over the world?

Let us return to Leary's example of interpersonal reflexes. There he was using the classroom situation (familiar to us all) in which, just after expounding on freedom and the need for people to be independent, the teacher, quite unaware of what he is doing, assumes a superior, expert stance when approached by a Student with a problem. In effect, he is teaching the Student to be dependent on him, reinforcing the student's dependent behavior. It is to this kind of social situation that we must direct our attention if we are to account for obedience to authority in our society.

Despite our implicit assumption that most of our behavior is under our conscious control, it may be that a conditioned obedient response to authority occurs in any society in which there is a hierarchical structuring of power and influence - parents over children, teachers over students, superiors over subordinates in any organization. Consider the long educational career of people in our society during which there is little or no freedom or tolerance for self-expression in work, self-determination of work activities, or effective participation in decision-making, and certainly none for the questioning of legitimate authority. Increasingly, America has become bureaucratized in education, business, and government, with the consequence that we have all learned and lived in situations where the power was centered at the top and directed downward.

The fact that we learn the values of our society in a conscious, deliberate (verbal) fashion does not guarantee that these conscious, professed values will then be the most powerful determinants of our behavior or that they will protect us from behaving in ways that violate them. We need to restructure many social organizations so that people can learn to live out humanitarian and egalitarian values in their everyday lives. Freedom breeds freedom. Social psychologists can play a role in this kind of change process by conducting research that, like that of Milgram and of Darley and Latane, critically examines our "sacred cows" about what kind of people we are.

Concurrently there is a need to create experimental situations that lead individuals to behave in accordance with their professed values. Milgram has done this with his disobedience studies. But it is only a beginning and time is running short. Our society may already have produced a citizenry which believes in freedom and holds the conviction that the members enjoy autonomy and independence when in fact, at the behavioral level, there is a high proportion of obedience (a very sophisticated 1984?).

When we think of Nazi Germany, images of goose-stepping soldiers, people being herded on-to cattle cars, fanatical haranguing by Hitler, and the massive Propaganda machine of Goebbels come to mind. The following excerpt from a speech given by Hitler in Hamburg in 1932 gives a sense of how the Nazis started and reminds us once again of how subtly history can repeat it-self.

The streets of our country are in turmoil. The universities are filled with students rebelling and rioting. Communists are seeking to destroy our country. Russia is threatening us with her might. And the republic is in danger. Yes, danger from within and without. We need Law and Order. Yes, without law and order our nation cannot survive. . . . We shall restore law and order.

Quelle:

Michael Wertheimer (Ed.): Confrontation – Psychology and the Problems of Today; Scott, Foresman and Co., Glenview /Ill. 1970, p. 92 ff.