

OBEDIENCE



Adolf Eichmann
War criminal
WWII

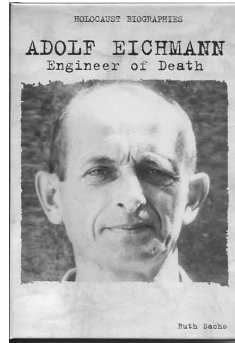


Nazi Germany
WWII



Tiananmen Square
China, 1989

Are the people who commit such acts inherently evil?



Adolf Eichmann

- supervised the deportation of 6,000,000 Jews to Nazi gas chambers
- Were Germans generally evil?
- Was Eichmann an evil sadist or merely a cog in the wheel?
- How would you have behaved in his situation?

Extreme Obedience



Jonestown, Guyana, 1978

- Jim Jones, cult leader of The People's Temple, persuaded his followers to drink Kool-Aid laced with cyanide
- 913 died, including >200 children poisoned by their parents

• Factors

- cult members felt alienated from American society
- cult members were in an isolated location
- Jones was very charismatic
- Jones promised life "in a better place"



Waco Texas, USA, 1993

- David Koresh, cult leader of the Branch Davidians, maintained an armed standoff with the government for 51 days until he and cult members died in a fire of unknown origin

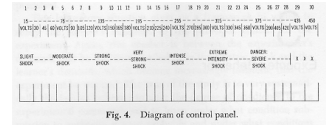
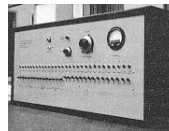
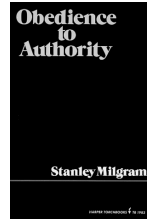
- over 80 adults and children died



Milgram's Obedience Experiment



Stanley Milgram
1933-1984



Extreme Obedience



Nazi Holocaust
Germany & Poland
(Europe)
1941-1945
6,000,000



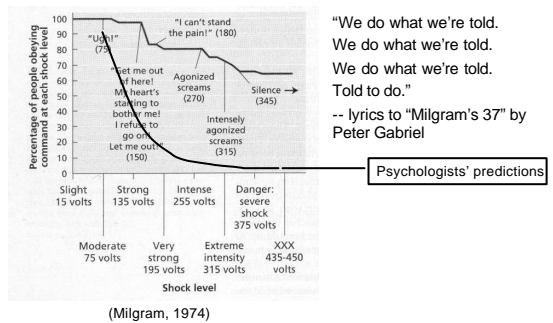
Cambodia
(Asia)
1975-1979
4,000,000



Rwanda
(Africa)
1994
800,000

An estimated 210 million people were killed by genocide in 20th century.

We do what we're told



Factors that affect obedience

1. Remoteness of the victim
 - teacher and learner in separate rooms: 65% obedience
 - teacher and learner in same room: 40% obedience
 - teacher and learner in physical contact (teacher had to put learner's hand on apparatus): 30% obedience
2. Closeness and legitimacy of authority figure
 - "ordinary person" confederate instead of experimenter: 20% obedience
3. Cog in a Wheel
 - "another subject" confederate does the dirty work and real subject assists: 93% obedience
 - "another subject" confederate disobeys: 10% obedience
 - subjects told they are responsible for learner's welfare: 0% obedience
4. Personal characteristics
 - no significant differences based on sex (though women reported feeling more guilty), politics, religion, occupation, education, military service, or psychological characteristics

Shifting to the Agentic State

- Antecedent Conditions to Obedience:
 - family, institutional setting, rewards, perception of authority, ideology
- Maintaining Obedient Behaviour:
 - loss of responsibility, sequential nature of action, situational obligations, anxiety

Why Obedience? Milgram's Views

- Large numbers of people were observed obeying a "malevolent" authority. Why?
- **Evolutionary factors:** obedience has survival value, allows for division of labour, promotes social harmony.
- **"Cybernetic" factors:** organisms capable of autonomous function must also be able to inhibit the impulse to act against one another. Ceding control to a coordinator allows for an effective hierarchy.

Disobedience

- While many of the participants in Milgram's experiments obey an authority, a number disobey. Why?
- The experiment produced strain - participants did not enjoy shocking an innocent person and reported high levels of tension.
- Milgram: reducing strain promotes obedience. When strain is too great, participant is more likely to disobey.

The "Agentic State"

- Milgram believed that the presence of certain psychological and environmental factors promote obedience to authority.
- When obeying authority, humans shift into a different state, the "agentic state", where they become an agent for carrying out the wishes of another person.
- In this state, behaviour is modified to allow functioning within a hierarchy.

How is strain reduced?

- Remoteness of victim
- Division of labour
- Avoidance
 - withdrawing attention from victim, denial, delivering shocks as briefly as possible
- Physical conversion
 - nervous laughter, trembling
- Dissent
- Disobedience

The Banality of Evil

From *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 1963



Hannah Arendt
1906-1975

- [Eichmann] remembered perfectly well that he would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been ordered to do-- to ship millions of men, women, and children to their death with great zeal and the most meticulous care.

- Half a dozen psychiatrists had certified him as "normal" -- 'more normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him,' one of them was said to have exclaimed, while another had found that his whole psychological outlook, his attitude toward his wife and children, mother and father, brothers, sisters, and friends, was 'not only normal but most desirable.'

- It was though in those last minutes [of Eichmann's life] he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us-- the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil.

Why Genocide?

- Psychology of Genocide (Ervin Staub, 1989, 2000)

1. starting point: severely difficult life conditions
 - harsh economic circumstances, political upheaval
 - example: Germany was struggling greatly after WWI defeat
 - counter-example: US Marshall plan after WWII
 - economic contributions to post-WWII Europe helped prevent repeat
2. in- vs. out-group definitions become particularly strong
 - out-groups become scapegoats for society's ills
 - example: Germans blamed Jews for their economic hardships
3. violence begins against out-group; people believe that the out-group deserved it
 - belief in a just world, "blaming the victim"
 - example: Germans believed the Jews deserved their fate
4. violence comes to justify itself
 - stopping would be admitting it was wrong to begin with
 - counter-example: Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa
 - lack of opposition from allies strengthens resolve
 - example: lack of opposition to massacres in Yugoslavia in 1991 condoned action

Milgram Video: Questions

- How did Milgram make the situation seem realistic?
- What was the task for the learner and for the teacher?
- How did the learner protest?
- What sorts of things did the experimenter say to encourage the teacher to obey? What made the experimenter seem like an authority?
- How far did subjects go before stopping?
- Did the real subjects enjoy shocking the learner? Were they sadists?
- Did the subjects obey just because Yale researchers had legitimate authority?

... and a few things to think about...

- Was the study ethical? Were the results worth it?
- Why did so many people obey? What would you have done in that situation?

Stanford Prison Experiment



(Zimbardo, 1975)

- How did Zimbardo make the roles of prisoner and guard realistic?
- What happened? How did prisoners react? How did guards react?
- Was the experiment ethical? Why did it finish earlier than planned? Were there any negative long-term effects? How did subjects feel years later about their participation?