

## A Behavioral Study on Obedience

### Abstract

Some facts regarding the role that obedience plays when performing acts that is in contrast to the conscience of a person (1961). Theories offer a suggestion that people who are utterly disturbed are able to administer pain to a regular person if they are asked to do so. This experiment tested the obedience of people towards authority. The results provide evidences that most people obey all of the orders provided by someone with authority, despite being unwilling. This leads to a conclusion that in contrast to what is commonly believed, personal ethics may not mean a thing when compared against authority.

### Introduction

Existing theories typically focus on specific personal characteristics that explains wrong-doing, and how a person can harm others intentionally. In a specific survey, career-driven people such as psychologist, doctors and laymen have assumed that a small portion of a population, about 1-3%, would end up harming others if they are told to do so. In a recent trial with Adolph Eichmann, he gave a reason which involves "following orders". This claim is what the author wanted to test. Is it really possible for people to harm others because they are told to do so? Can people be told to act against what they believe as moral? This study will test whether an individual can continue giving painful electric shocks on another person simply because they are ordered to do so. It is expected that very few will continue giving shocks, and that most of the individuals will end up disobeying the order.

### Methods

#### Participants

30 male participants were selected, recruited through advertisement in a newspaper. Each individual was paid \$4.50.

#### Instruments

A "shock generator" is used in order to trick the participants, thinking that they are actually administering an electric shock to a person in a different room. This shock generator had labels switched with various voltages, beginning at 30 volts, going up in increments of 15-volts, with a maximum voltage of 450. The switches were labeled

using terms that reminded participants how these electric shocks are dangerous.

### Procedures

A participant met another supposed participant in the waiting room before starting the experiment. The other participant was only an actor. Every participant received the role as the “teacher”, delivering a shock to the “learner”, the actor. This happens each time an incorrect answer is given by the learner. In this way, the participant thought that he was giving actual shocks to the learner. The learner would then pretend and act to be shocked. During the progress of the experiment, the teacher would be hearing the learner ask for release, even complaining about a heart condition. After reaching the 300-volt level, the learner banged himself on the wall, demanding for a release. After this point, the learner turns silent, refusing to answer more questions. The person conducting the experiment then told the participant to consider silence as an incorrect answer, delivering more shock. When they ask if they should stop, they were told to go on.

### Results

Out of the 40 individuals who participated in the study, 26 reached the maximum shocks. 14 disobeyed the experimenter, stopping before they reached the maximum levels. All of the 40 participants reached up to 300 volts.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Most of these participants end up feeling extremely angry, stressed and agitated at the experimenter. A lot went on following orders even though they were not comfortable about it. This study only shows that people can intentionally harm other people if they are told to do so. It also provides proof that this is more important than what has been believed previously, and that personal ethics are actually less predictive with such attitude.