

Milgram’s Experiment: “The Perils of Obedience”

Essential Question: In what ways has the abuse of power contributed to a climate of fear within society?

Directions: Read the two textbook excerpts about “The Perils of Obedience” below. Then answer the questions.

Artifact	A: Textbook Excerpt	B: Textbook Excerpt
Excerpt	<p>Obedience is as basic an element in the structure of social life as one can point to. Some system of authority is a requirement of all communal living, and it is only the person dwelling in isolation who is not forced to respond, with defiance or submission, to the commands of others. For many people, obedience is a deeply ingrained behavior tendency, indeed a potent impulse overriding training in ethics, sympathy, and moral conduct.</p>	<p>Interview</p> <p>EXPERIMENTER: At what point were you most tense or nervous?</p> <p>MR. BRAVERMAN: Well, when he first began to cry out in pain, and I realized this was hurting him. This got worse when he just blocked and refused to answer. There was I. I'm a nice person, I think, hurting somebody, and caught up in what seemed a mad situation ... and in the interest of science, one goes through with it.</p>
		<p>C: Video Clip</p> <p style="text-align: center;">https://drive.google.com/a/roberson.k12.nc.us/file/d/0B-ADKko4vSNtZFIFdWZLVWJwZUE/view?usp=sharing</p> <p>“Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process”-- Milgram</p>
Context	<p>In 1963, a Yale psychologist conducted one of the classic studies on obedience. Stanley Milgram designed an experiment that forced participants either to violate their conscience by obeying the immoral demands of an authority figure or to refuse those demands. Surprisingly, Milgram found that few participants could resist the authority's orders even when the participants knew that following these orders would result in another in another person’s pain. Were the participants in these experiments incipient mass murderers? No, said Milgram. They were “ordinary people, simply doing their jobs.” The implementation of Milgram’s conclusions are immense—and enduring.</p>	
Word Bank	<p>Zeal-passion Electorate- voters Ratified-passed</p>	<p>Favorable-agreeable Indignation-anger Grievances- concerns tyranny- control</p>

Source: Ward, K. M. (2006). *History in the Making: An Absorbing look at how American History has changed in the telling over the last 200 years*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Historical Inquiry Questions

Question 1. Why do those who are oppressed allow people in power to utilize tactics to maintain control?

- the superior power of the dominant group;
- the social production of meaning in the service of legitimating oppression;
- the self-fulfilling prophecies arising from oppression; and
- the distorted relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor.

Question 2: How does Excerpt A provide evidence that obedience is a trained response?

Last sentence: "...obedience is a deeply ingrained behavior tendency, indeed a potent impulse overriding training in ethics, sympathy, and moral conduct."

Question 3: How does Excerpt B provide evidence that obedience is a trained response?

Last sentence: "I'm a nice person, I think, hurting somebody, and caught up in what seemed a mad situation....and in the interest of science, one goes through with it."

Question 4: Watch the video clip on Milgram's The Perils of Obedience. In respect to what is morally right or wrong, which is to be preeminent: the law or one's own conscience?

Answers will vary according to opinion. 1) Should one man suffer for the greater good of society/science? 2) Is conscience merely a part of religious beliefs or ethics? 3) Just because something is immoral does not make it illegal and just because something is illegal it does not make it immoral.

Things that are illegal but are thought to be moral (for many)!

Drinking under age.

Driving over the speed limit.

Smoking marijuana.

Cheating on a tax return.

Splitting a cable signal to send it to more than one television.

Things that are immoral (for many) but are not illegal.

Cheating on your spouse.

Breaking a promise to a friend.

Using abortion as a birth control measure.

Question 5: Read the following quote by Michel Foucault. Then decide whether this quote could or could not be used to support Milgram's findings. Explain why or why not.

"The strategic adversary is fascism... the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us."

We have to fight our own interests/selfishness/thirst for power which may cause us to "do" things that may cause others to suffer, or continue our own suffering.

Ex. "Uncle Tom", the happy slave?

Ex. Gayatri Spivak's "The SubAltern" - those native Indians (in India) who served as translators/servants for the British colonists and received special treatment and favors, yet were despised by their own people. They became an isolated faction of Indian society - a despised middle class never accepted by those considered above or below them in power.