

Behavioral study of obedience essay examples

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



Introduction

Notionally, it is believed that discipline is paramount and should be applied to all social aspects of our daily lives. All laws, whether statutory or religious, reckon that obedience to others is an ultimate way of enhancing social conformity and co-existence. This is viewed as the best way of interacting with other people, especially those close to us and or even strangers.

Asch's Social Conformity

Asch (1955) in his article, Opinions and Social Pressure, attempts to outline all the phases of social conformity. He analyzes how other people's views can influence our own. He argues that a person's social nature is usually shaped by influences from other people. Just like a child masters the native culture, every person's social nature is affected by different social structures of the society members. For instance, psychologists believe that an individual's curiosity is driven by specific pressures from his or her social group. Asch points out that a person's attitude and opinion is constrained by certain social forces, but only in a specific way and to a specific limit. He believed that besides the fact that other people have different opinions, there are a lot of reasons to study social conditions as well as how people form their opinions.

Darley and Latane (1968) argue that a person's decision to take responsibility is often directed by both rational and irrational fears about the outcome. They pointed that a person's decision to intervene in a dangerous or frightening incident is usually directed by a particular conflict. People are likely to assume such events for the fear of job regulations, filing a case with

the police, public reaction or attack by others. However, those same people would just intervene if they are not aware of the dangers involved in reporting. While fear is seen as the primary factor, a person's decision to intervene may also be derailed by other factors. For instance, a witness may decline to intervene if he or she knew that there are also other onlookers. If they are assured of privacy they can simply take the responsibility and intervene.

Milgram (1963) believes that obedience is a requirement and a vital component of an individual's social life. He argues that any community is governed with a set of authority, which requires the members to respond in one way or another. Since obedience directs a person's behavior, it is relevant to how people should respond to authorities. He used some inhumane activities to illustrate the importance of obedience. Those activities included the murdering of innocent people and torturing people in gas chambers, among other activities. Milgram believes that while it might just be one person's decision to delegate the orders, it took the obedience by others to implement the orders. Therefore, it is right to say that obedience is a psychology tool that connects activities to a system of authority.

The Experiments

In order to illustrate their arguments, the aforementioned researchers used various mechanisms. They used different experiments to give clear illustrations of the different arguments they were supporting.

Asch's Experiments

Asch carried out a number of experiments to investigate various influences of peer pressures. He asked a group of young men to compare the length of lines. The experiment involved using two white cards with vertical lines. One card had just a single line that was to be used for matching, while the other had a set of three vertical lines of different lengths.

The subjects were asked to choose a line that had the same length as the single line on the other card. The other card had three lines, only one with the same length while the rest had varying lengths. The other lines only had a slight variance of three quarters inch a factor intended to challenge the subjects.

After some time the subjects announced their answers in order of their sitting arrangement. They recorded same results on the first and second trials before attempting the third test. On the third time, one person disagreed with the group and gave a different answer. The same applied on the fourth trial when he also gave a different answer from the rest of the group.

Darley and Latane's Experiments

In an experiment to investigate a person's intervention, Darley and Latane sent a student to a laboratory in which he would use a communication system to interact with other participants. They asked him to discuss some of the personal problems he had experienced at the college. In the process of the discussion, one of the other subjects underwent a panic attack. The situation, however, made it difficult for the subject to continue with the discussion since he did not know what step to take. He could not talk or ask

the others what action to take about the emergency. Similarly, he was confused about reporting the matter to the researcher or letting the other subjects to do the reporting.

In another exercise, Darley and Latane used a group of 59 girls and 13 boys as the subjects of an experiment. The main subject was directed to a corridor with several doors opened before he met the researcher, who took him to a room. He was given a set of headphones and allowed to talk about college problems over the intercom.

Milgram's Experiment

Just like the other researchers, Milgram conducted an experiment to investigate obedience among people. It involved asking a naïve subject to electrocute a victim with a generator. The generator was marked in thirty voltage levels with a range of 15 to 450 volts.

The level of danger increases with an increase in the number of shocks from the generator's voltage. However, the victim had been properly trained to cooperate with the naïve subject as the experiment goes on. The naïve subject was consistently commanded to adjust the shock voltage to higher marks. High voltage of the shock generator exposes the victim to severe outcomes of the experiment, which may even result to death.

Findings

Asch

Asch used the person who had a different answer as the primary subject of the experiment. Despite having the correct answer, the subject found himself segregated from the majority. As the trials continued, the subject

grew naïve and less confident about his answer.

Through the experiment, Asch found out that the majority members of the group often give correct reports in attempts to eliminate the chances of the naïve subject suspecting opposition against him. He also noticed that in many cases, the minority often yield to the majority's pressure even if the latter are wrong. This implies that the minority would drop their findings to swing along with the group.

Darley and Latane

In their experiment, they simulated a fire during a discussion to test the interventions during an emergency. However, they later learnt that nearly all the subjects had perceived the fire as a real occurrence. Similarly, the size of the group must have also influenced the subject's readiness to inform his experimenter. A person's fast or slow responses to different events also affect their decision to report incidences. The authors also believed that the subject must have been waiting for assistance from other members of the group. That the group consisted of both males and females also influenced the subjects' decisions. For instance one girl could not report because she was not sure whether the other witness was male or female.

Milligram

Even though the shock generator was not actually powered on, the subject was convinced that he was administering the shock. He was also convinced that the higher voltages inflicted extreme pains to the victim. Similarly, the subject was also nervous during the administration of the shock, especially as the voltage level increased.

Limitations of the Experiments

A close examination to Asch's experiment reveals certain errors that can hinder the outcomes. Foremost, all the group members could record the same answer such that there is no opposition. Secondly, the minority often choose to swing along with the crowd and hide their findings for the fear of pressure. If the minority decides to hide his results then the outcomes will be wrong if the majority were all wrong (Asch, 1955).

Just like Asch, Darley and Latane's experiment was also prone to some errors. The small number of males in the group must have influenced their responsiveness. While using intercom reduces embarrassment, it equally increases uncertainty and may hinder the subject from opening up. The imbalance would cause the minority to feel reluctant about reporting the emergency even if they witnessed before the majority.

Whereas Milgram chose a different criterion of conducting his experiments, his was still equally prone to some errors. For instance, the use a generator to administer shock raises a lot of doubts since many people do not readily associate educational experiments with brutality. While he used force to command naïve subjects to do the experiments, he could equally face opposition from them due to the fear of the outcome. If the subjects doubt the experiment then they may give a wrong result.

Suggestions

While these experiments are riddled with a number of disadvantages, they can be applied if certain corrections are incorporated. For instance, Asch would rather separate the minority from the rest of the group before during the experiment. If he conducts the experiment on his own and he is

convinced that the minority has a correct answer, then he could be allowed to join the rest and observed as he gives his opinion in a crowd.

Darley and Latane could also consider conducting the tests separately before having a joint experiment. Given the imbalance, the males should be tested on their own before combining with the females. The subjects are likely to have different records after having a collective experiment.

While electric shock portrays danger, Milgram should consider giving the subjects more chances out of their volition rather than forcing them. He could also try to switch roles between the subject and the victim and observe the outcomes. Perhaps he could use low voltage figures that do not scare away the subjects.

References

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