

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ Understanding obedience and destructive obedience
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- ☰ Outcomes of the experiment
- ☰ Outcomes of the experiment (continued...)
- ☰ Significance of Milgram's experiments
- ☰ Social psychological basis of destructive obedience

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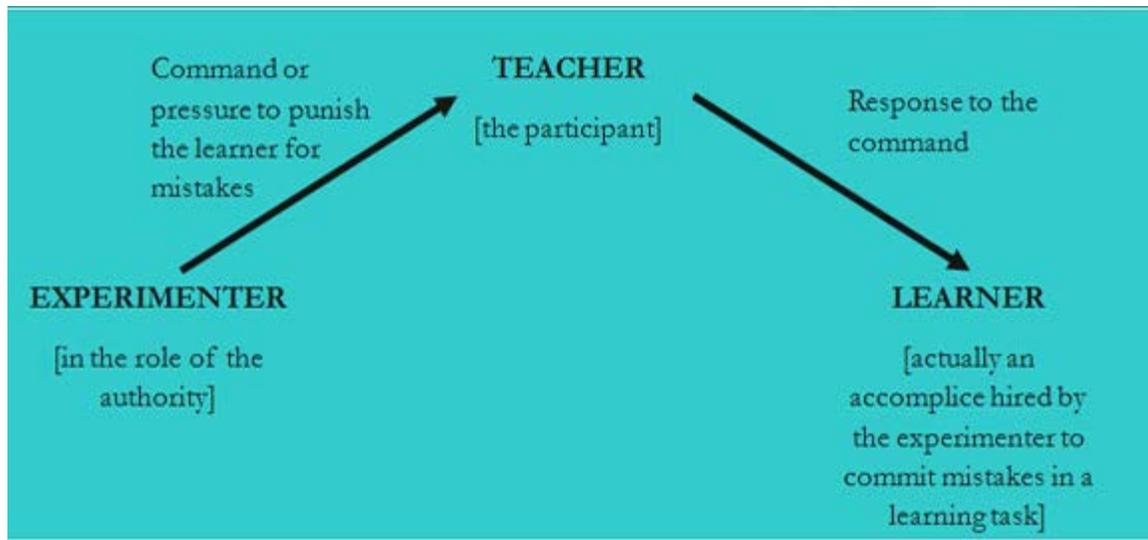
Understanding obedience and destructive obedience

- Besides, conformity and compliance, social psychologists have also explored another type of social influence known as obedience. People obey the commands or orders from others who are in authority.
- It is lesser in frequency than conformity and compliance. However, in our daily life, we do find the examples of obedience that may harm others or in other words, obedience that may prove to be destructive. For example, soldiers and mobs do obey commands to harm innocent people. Particularly, in ethnic violence or communal riots in India, we may see the role of authority figure who may demand destructive response from their obedient followers.
- One of the most famous and controversial figures in social psychology is Stanley Milgram who became interested in understanding destructive obedience. He wanted to know whether people can obey the command of an authority figure in harming strangers.

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Classical Experiments on obedience

- Stanley Milgram's series of (1963, 1965, 1974) on destructive obedience were planned in the following manner given in Figure 7.4 :

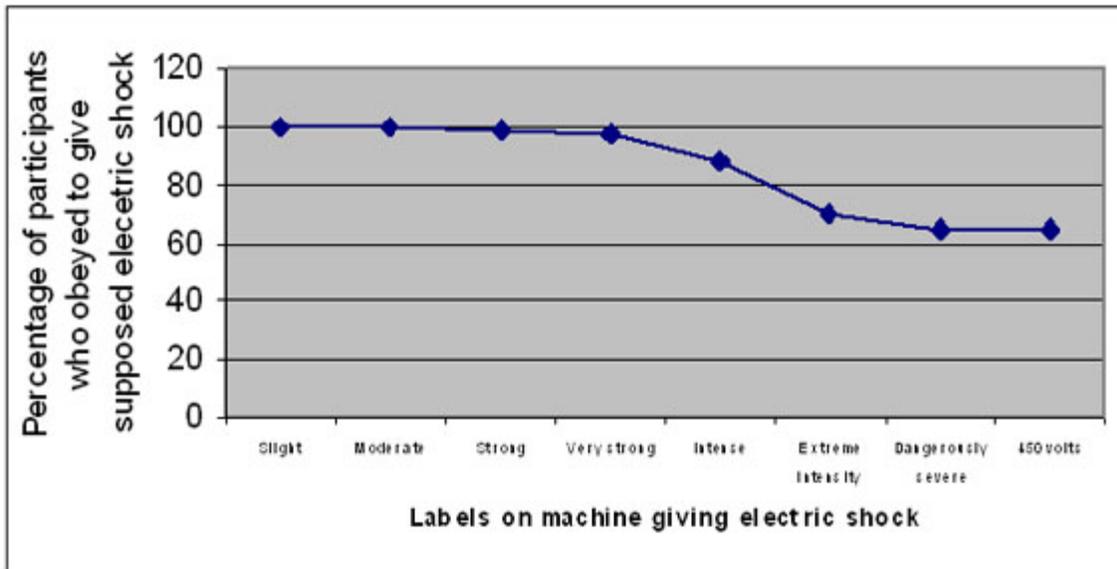


Classical Experiments on obedience (continued...)

- The learner, who actually was the accomplice to the researcher, deliberately committed mistakes in the learning task (of learning a pair of words). Then the participant, in the role of the teacher, had to give punishment in terms of electric shock (ranging from 15 to 450 volts) as commanded by the authority figure (the experimenters). On each subsequent mistake, the strength of electric shock had to be increased by the participant. If the participant hesitated to give shocks, initial has told in milder tone to continue to punish the learner upon mistakes but the nature of command became harsher to the extent of telling the participant that giving punishment was 'absolutely essential' or that he had 'no other choice'. Figure 7.5 shows the outcomes of the experiment.
- It must be noted that the participant was made to believe that shocks being given by him was reaching the learner. In reality, it was just an experimental arrangement and no real shock was actually being received by the learner.



Figure 7.5: Outcomes of the experiment



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Outcomes of the experiment (continued...)

- A total of 65% of the participants followed the command of the experimenter to give the electric shock up to 450 volts given the fact that :
 1. When the 'very strong' shock was given to the learner, the learner pounded on the wall as he started protesting, and
 2. When the 'intense' shock was given, the learner pounded on the wall and didn't give an answer to the learning task any further.

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Significance of Milgram's experiments

- Milgram's experiment made it clear through his experimental findings that people do obey the command of an authority figure in harming strangers. One might wonder, if for mistakes in a learning task, a majority of people can give shocks to the tune of 450 volts, what might happen in case the command for destructive obedience is given to punish people who are believed to be much worse culprits in social situations.
- Milgram's experiments, however, were also taken to be controversial for the apparently inhuman treatment of electric shock to the learner. Although he debriefed the participants after each session about the fact that in reality, it was just an experimental arrangement and no real shock was actually being received by the learner, he was criticized for forcing people to give extreme intensity of electric shocks to the learners in an experiments.



Social psychological basis of destructive obedience

- Following are the social psychological basis of destructive obedience :
 - It is believed by the followers that authority relieve those who obey
 - Authority carrying sign of their status has an influence in terms of reminders about facing an authority figure
 - There is a gradual escalation in authority's order which makes it difficult for the followers to resist following extreme demands that are received later
 - In reality, for example, in case of a communal riot, events move very quickly and before the followers can think of resisting the command, the damage is done.