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Social Psychology: Obedience

*If Hitler Asked You to Electrocute a Stranger, Would You? Probably*

1. What are the biggest lessons from this experiment?

I think that one of the main conclusions that can be drawn from this experiment is that human beings can be obedient to a fault. Though Milgram tested his theories only in America, I’m sure obedience is not limited to this country. Not only are we obedient, but also we will blindly follow anyone we believe to be an authority. I also believe that this experiment is also an excellent illustration of human delusion, and how we can trick ourselves into not taking responsibility for our actions. Even after participants in the experiment were made to feel as if they may have possibly killed an innocent man, they did not place any blame on themselves, and showed little remorse after the fact.

1. Talk about a time in your life when you followed authority, even though you didn’t necessarily agree with what they were telling you.

I follow authority every day, most of the time without even realizing that I’m doing so. From the time I was a small child, I’ve been conditioned to respect and obey my elders simply because they are “older” and “wiser.” I also obey my parents on a daily basis, because they are my guardians and have raised me my entire life. Often, I find myself disagreeing with my parents about freedoms and things of that nature, because their decisions are based on their desire to protect me. Still, I respect them, because that is what I’ve been taught to do.

1. What do you think would need to happen for more people to resist authority? What would need to happen for YOU to resist authority more often?

In order for there to be an increase in resistance to authority, I believe the entire nature of the way we are socialized would need to change, and even then, I’m not sure it would entirely change the scale at which obedience occurs. Ultimately I believe that obedience is almost an instinctual, animalistic part of a human being. Even in the animal kingdom, a hierarchy exists in which the alpha is the leader and the rest of the pack or herd obeys them. Such an integral part of our basic nature would be difficult to change. As far as a personal change, it would take a great deal to push me to resist authority. I don’t necessarily find obedience as a bad thing, as without it, there would be very little order. We obey the law and the social rules and conventions of our world and that is something that I don’t think needs to be changed.

1. How does this connect to genocide?

During the genocide, the different aspects of social psychology such as conformity and obedience played a major role in the events that occurred. Many people that participated in the genocide did so in order to not make waves against the Hutus that were responsible for the slaughters. So as not to put a target on their own backs, they conformed and obeyed the instructions that were being given to them by the Hutu leaders. Essentially, in the case of the genocide, it was either obey the instructions and participate, or be killed yourself.