Obedience

Hypothetical scenario
• You’re assistant manager at a restaurant
  – Police officer calls
  – Describes a theft there, and the perpetrator
  – The description matches an employee
  – Officer asks you to confiscate the employee’s clothing and do a strip search
• What do you do?

Milgram’s obedience experiments
• Three roles: Teacher, learner, experimenter
• The teacher was the participant
• The learner was a confederate
  – Looks like a participant, to the actual participant
• The experimenter was the authority figure
• Cover story: The teacher was to teach words to the learner, observed by the experimenter

Milgram’s obedience experiments
• The teacher:
  – First read all the word pairs: blue → girl
  – Then tested them: blue → boy, girl, grass, hat
• If the learner made an error:
  – The teacher gave the right answer, for next time
  – Then administered an electric shock, increasing the shock level after each error
• Shocks and learner’s responses were fake

Discussion points
• Foot-in-the-door technique?
• Ethical issues?
• Effects of time and place?
• Effects of demographics?

Effects of psychological distance
Predicted rates of obedience

• Milgram asked 40 psychiatrists to predict obedience
  – Average prediction: that 0.1% would obey up to 450 V (the max)
• Actual: About 60% obeyed up to 450 V
  – Example of the fundamental attribution error

Discussion points

• Foot-in-the-door technique?
  – Obedience at high shock levels might have been less without the low shock levels initially
• Ethical issues?
  – Participants were under a lot of stress
  – An obedient participant learns they’re capable of inflicting great harm

Discussion points

• Effects of time and place?
  – Little effect of moving experiment away from Yale
  – The early 1960s were a different time
    • Science, education were held in higher regard?
• Effects of demographics?
  – Sample had diverse occupations, education levels
    • Unclear whether these variables had an effect
  – Tested only men, in all three roles