

Crimes of Obedience and Conformity in the Workplace: Surveys of Americans, Russians, and Japanese

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One outgrowth of Milgram's (1974) research is the study of public opinion about obedience norms. Extending Kelman and Hamilton's (1989) research on crimes of obedience in the military, this article explores crimes of obedience and crimes of conformity in the workplace. Random samples of the residents of Washington, DC, Moscow, Russia, and Tokyo, Japan were presented four vignettes about organizational wrongdoing. Manipulations included the influence situation (autonomy, conformity, or obedience) and the actor's position in the hierarchy (subordinate vs. midlevel authority). As expected, the actor's responsibility was greatest when he acted autonomously or was an authority. In addition, authorities were excused less than subordinates for having conformed or obeyed. Impacts of both influence situation and hierarchy were larger in Japan and Russia than in the United States.

Introduction

Milgram's obedience research raises questions not only about destructive obedience itself, but also about how members of the public think a person should

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act in situations governed by authority. Milgram's (1974) own research is testimony to the fact that attitudes about obedience should not be taken as simple or direct predictors of obedient vs. disobedient action (see Milgram, 1974, chap. 3). However, public attitudes are a set of guidelines, or normative standards, that provide clues to how individuals will act, how they will attempt to justify or excuse their acts, and how they will judge others (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Given that the Milgram experiment has become an allegory about authority in the modern world, it is appropriate to ask how the public interprets allegories about wrongdoing in the workplace.

Overview of the Research

What happens to responsibility when workers' daily obedience and conformity become, in Milgram's sense, *destructive* obedience and *destructive* conformity? At the societal or macro level, the economic and legal systems influence how citizens conceptualize responsibility for bureaucratic wrongdoing (or any other form of wrongdoing). At the micro level, both the particulars of an individual case and the life situation of its judge—the restrictions and freedoms experienced during work lives within particular organizations—affect the allocation of responsibility and punishment. For example, existing research in the United States and Japan confirms that individual responsibility judgments are influenced by both macro and micro processes, yielding different patterns of judgment across societies (Hamilton & Sanders, 1992a; Miyazawa, 1987; Tanase, 1990; Upham, 1987).

This paper addresses both levels of analysis. At the macro level, we ask, Do individuals who come from societies that vary in their social structures, legal cultures, and economies also vary in their judgments of wrongdoing in organizations? To investigate this issue, we compared results of surveys of random samples of citizens in the capital cities of three nations: Moscow (Russia), Tokyo (Japan), and Washington, DC (United States). We chose these sites in part because their citizens were likely to be well informed about and sensitive to issues involving wrongdoing in organizational hierarchies. The surveys were conducted in 1993 in collaboration with Russian and Japanese colleagues.

Within the surveys, we presented experimentally varied vignettes to explore micro-level determinants of responsibility. This tactic combines the experiment's advantage of clear causal inference with the survey's advantage of wider generalization. Variables included the social influence situation depicted (an actor behaving autonomously, conforming to peers, or obeying orders from a superior) and the actor's role in the organizational hierarchy was also varied (subordinate vs. midlevel authority).

Micro-Level Effects: The Influence Situation

Implicating others: Obedience and conformity. Accusations of wrongdoing elicit a wide variety of excuses. Some, such as “I didn’t do it,” only involve the actor. Others, such as “I had to defend myself,” involve the actor and the victim. Still others, such as “The teacher told me to do it” (Obedience) or “Everybody else was doing it” (Conformity), attempt to deflect responsibility by implicating others.

At heart, what distinguishes organizational wrongdoing from other forms is the actor’s ability to implicate others in the crime. More research attention has been devoted to obedience than to conformity as an excusing condition (cf. Hamilton & Hagiwara, 1992), and often social scientific discussions do not even clearly distinguish between the two (Miller, Collins, & Brief, introduction to this issue). Of course, where authorities supervise numerous subordinates, pressures toward obedience and conformity can coexist and reinforce one another. Lutsky (this issue) reminds us that people obey authorities for many reasons. One of them, surely, is the pressure—voiced or unvoiced—of their peers. As Arendt (1971) put it,

The point of the matter is that the defendants at Frankfurt, like almost all other Nazi criminals, not only acted out of self-protection but showed a remarkable tendency to fall in line with whoever happened to constitute their surroundings—to “coordinate” themselves, as it were, at a moment’s notice. It is as though they had become sensitized not to authority and not to fear but to the general climate of opinion to which they happened to be exposed. (pp. 489–490)

Thus, because organizational actors have peers as well as bosses, both conformity and obedience may underlie destructive outcomes in the workplace. *Crimes of conformity* may supplement and reinforce crimes of obedience.

Obedience vs. conformity: Hypotheses. Suggestions about how obedience and conformity differ can be found in both the social scientific and legal literatures. Although *Obedience to Authority* (Milgram, 1974) is fundamentally a paradigm for understanding authority and subordination, Milgram had a long-standing interest in conformity, growing out of his early work with Solomon Asch. Empirically, Milgram found that conformity pressure from two other “teachers” increased naive subjects’ tendency to give shocks (Milgram, 1964, 1965); conversely, when two other “teachers” chose to break off after the “learner” strongly protested the shocks, naive subjects generally went along with them (Experiment 17, Milgram, 1974; see also Miller, 1986). Conceptually, Milgram (1974, pp. 114–115) noted four ways in which obedience and conformity differ:

1. *Hierarchy.* Obedience to authority occurs within a hierarchical structure in which the actor feels that the person above has the right to prescribe

- behavior. Conformity regulates the behavior among those of equal status; obedience links one status to another.
2. *Imitation.* Conformity is imitation but obedience is not. Conformity leads to homogenization of behavior, as the influenced person comes to adopt the behavior of peers. In obedience, there is compliance without imitation of the influencing source
 3. *Explicitness.* In obedience, the prescription for action is explicit, taking the form of an order or command. In conformity, the requirement of going along with the group often remains implicit
 4. *Voluntarism.* The clearest distinction between obedience and conformity, however, occurs after the fact—that is, in the manner in which subjects explain their behavior. Subjects *deny* conformity and *embrace* obedience as the explanation of their actions because conformity is a response to pressures that are implicit, the subject interprets his own behavior as voluntary In obedience the opposite is true.

The law's view of wrongdoing in interpersonal contexts mirrors Milgram's (Hart & Honore, 1959). Obedience sometimes plays a prominent exculpatory role; in military law, it can serve as a full justification for otherwise punishable acts. Conformity is an excuse, and a relatively weak one at that, rather than a justification. Evidence of conformity can serve as an indicator of the "reasonable person" standard for a particular situation, but conformity is more likely to mitigate punishment than to lead to acquittal. To obey can be a duty; to conform never is.

Hypothesis 1. We hypothesize that in a three-way comparison of actors who act autonomously, who conform, and who obey, obedient actors are seen as the least responsible and autonomous actors as the most responsible; conforming actors are intermediate. It is an open question whether the responsibility of a conforming actor is closer to that assigned to an obedient actor or to an autonomous actor.

Micro-Level Effects: Hierarchy in Organizations

Fundamental to any study of responsibility in hierarchies is the relationship of authority to subordinate. Responsibility can be described as a joint function of a person's actions (or omissions) and the person's social role, with its attendant obligations (Hamilton, 1978; cf. Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, & Doherty, 1994). Studies show that authorities are held to higher standards for untoward behavior than are either subordinates or actors who are equal to those they harm (Hamilton, 1986; Hamilton & Sanders, 1992a,b; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Similarly, corporate actors are held to higher standards than are actual

persons who commit the same wrongful act (Hans & Ermann, 1989; Sanders, Hamilton, & Yuasa, 1994). One issue not addressed yet is the question of whether it makes a difference *where* in the hierarchy a particular subordinate stands. Because much of the literature on white-collar and corporate crime concerns midlevel personnel who have some access to corporate resources, this question is of practical as well as theoretical importance.

Hypothesis 2. The previous literature suggests that the higher in any hierarchy (i.e., the more authoritative) the actor is, the more responsible this actor will be seen to be for any given negative outcome. Thus, we hypothesize that a midrange authority is more responsible, on average, than a pure subordinate for any given outcome.

Hypothesis 2a. As a corollary, an authoritative actor is seen as less susceptible to influence from peers (conformity) or higher-ups (obedience). Therefore, either of these social influence situations is hypothesized to make less difference in judging an authority.

Macro-Level Effects: Cultural Differences

The three societies we have chosen to study offer a window into different social, legal, and economic systems. The term *culture* serves as a proxy for—and accretion from—the legal, economic, and social history and social structure of a United States, a Japan, a Russia. Culture is the context within which organizations operate; in turn, organizations are the setting for the actions and the misdeeds of their individual members. The social scientific literature points to the importance of cultural differences along at least two axes: a first dimension extending from *individualism* to *collectivism* (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis, 1989, 1995); and a second ranging from *egalitarianism* to *hierarchicalism* (Dumont, 1970). Russia and Japan have each been argued to be both more collectivistic and more hierarchical than the United States. Similar conclusions are drawn by scholarly and popular commentators, and by both citizens of these societies and Western commentators upon them. In Russia, the traditional tendency toward obedience in hierarchies runs counter to the official egalitarian ideology of socialism, which until recently dominated public discourse. (Regarding Japan, see Nakane, 1970; Hamilton & Sanders, 1992a; R. Smith, 1983. For discussions of the changing face of Russia, see Bronfenbrenner, 1970; McFarland, Ageyev, & Abalakina, 1993; H. Smith, 1976, 1991).

Prior research has suggested that macro-level factors such as a cultural inclination toward collectivism or hierarchy can influence perceptions of organizations and the actors within them (Damaska, 1986; Hamilton & Sanders, 1992a,b; Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1990; Markovits, 1989; R. Smith, 1983; Syp-

nowich, 1990; Upham, 1987). This paper focuses on how members of the three cultures use information about influence situations and hierarchy in attributing responsibility. The remarkable consistency in the literatures on cultural differences among the countries suggests two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3. Both situations that involve conformity and those that involve obedience are more likely to excuse the actor of responsibility in relatively collectivistic cultures (Japan, Russia) than in more individualistic cultures (United States).

Hypothesis 4. In cultures with greater emphasis on hierarchy or more rigid authority structures (Japan, Russia), the impact of the actor's position (midlevel authority vs. subordinate) on responsibility will be larger than in less hierarchical cultures (the United States).

Scope Limitations

Space limitations prevent us from exploring certain issues in detail. First, individual differences, including personality differences (e.g., Blass, 1991), are an important microlevel issue that we do not address here (see Hamilton & Sanders, 1995). Second, organizational variation can be important, for organizations stand in an intermediate, *meso* level between the macro level of society and the micro level of individuals. In general, the literature suggests that actors in more bureaucratic settings and roles are perceived as less responsible for their actions than actors in professional settings and roles (Blau, 1968; Kohn, 1977; Kohn & Schooler, 1983). We treat the organizational setting of the wrongdoing as an exploratory variable and address it mainly in the Discussion section.

Methods

Surveys and Sampling

The surveys were conducted in the spring, summer, and fall of 1993. The Washington, DC, survey ($N = 602$) was done over the telephone in the spring and summer. A standard random digit dialing method was used to ensure that we reached a random sample of residential phones in the Washington, DC, Metropolitan Statistical Area (which includes both Maryland and Virginia suburbs). The Moscow survey ($N = 597$) was administered face-to-face in the summer, and the Tokyo survey ($N = 600$), also face-to-face, was administered in the summer and fall. The face-to-face surveys were probability samples of the respective metropolitan areas. In Moscow, the unit is the Oblast, an administrative unit in which the city of Moscow predominates; similarly, surrounding suburban communities were included in the sample in Tokyo.

As we have noted, these samples were selected precisely because they were unusual in one sense: Citizens of these capital cities should be relatively experienced in dealing with bureaucratic hierarchies and comfortable judging the kinds of stimuli presented. These surveys probably tap basic trends in responsibility judgments in each country, but with a somewhat more informed, experienced, and educated sample than would be obtained in nationwide studies. (For a more detailed discussion of sampling procedures and sample characteristics in each city, a Sampling Appendix is available from the senior author.)

Vignettes

A core set of four vignettes was constructed according to a 3×2 factorial design (Social Influence by Hierarchy). The vignettes were drafted in English; the three research teams then met in Tokyo for a week to discuss the choice of vignettes, their suitability across the three cultures, and possible translation problems that might arise. Brief pilot surveys were carried out in all three cities, and the Russian and Japanese instruments were backtranslated for a final check on wordings prior to the actual field period.

Each of the four vignettes replicated the basic design in a different organizational setting. Two stories depicted environmental pollution and two involved defective products. They are described below briefly with reference to the nature of the harm caused.

1. *Factory (Factory Dumps Waste)*: A foreman (or manager) of a fertilizer factory is under pressure to cut costs; his actions (or orders) lead to a toxic waste spill. This story was inspired by numerous cases involving corporate pollution, both intentional (e.g., Hooker Chemical at Love Canal) and unintentional (e.g., Exxon Valdez oil spill).
2. *Auto (Company Creates Faulty Auto Design)*: A design engineer (or the head of the design team) for a new car fails to carry out (or order) adequate testing because of time pressures. The car has a defect that causes several accidents in which people are injured. This story was inspired by the civil and criminal trials regarding the Ford Pinto's defective gas tank.
3. *Drug (Company Develops Dangerous Drug)*: A lab technician (or scientist) working on a new drug fails to carry out adequate tests for side effects in the animals being tested (or order the tests), because of time pressures. A serious side effect (blindness) occurs among a few purchasers of the drug. This story was inspired by numerous product liability cases involving the pharmaceutical industry, and especially by the example of the drug MER-29 (Stone, 1975).
4. *Paper (Newspaper Fails to Publicize Pollution)*: A newspaper reporter

(or editor) suppresses (or orders suppression of) information about a company's toxic waste, because the economy is poor and he is concerned that the company might close down. The waste problem goes unexposed, and a later increase in birth defects is traced to the pollution. This story had no specific source in news accounts or court cases.

There are potentially important differences between the fourth story, Paper, and the others, insofar as it involves a secondary rather than primary harm. The newspaper is not the organization that initiates the toxic waste. We anticipated that the average responsibility of the actor in this vignette might be lower for this reason. Yet wrongdoing in information transmission by media organizations characteristically involves secondary injury. We were interested in this situation because we expected the actor (even in the subordinate version) to be perceived as relatively autonomous, minimizing the impact of Influence, Hierarchy, and their interaction.

Independent Variables

Hierarchy (subordinate/authority). This manipulation was accomplished by varying the actor's described role. In the vignette descriptions above, the subordinate role was listed first, followed in parentheses by its alternative, midlevel authority.

Influence situation (autonomy, conformity, obedience). This manipulation was more complex to introduce. For example, a Subordinate/Autonomy version of the Factory Waste story read as follows:

Nick is the foreman in charge of waste disposal at a fertilizer plant. For several months, the plant's expenses have been running over budget. [*One time, in order to save money Nick decides to dump some of the waste into the river next to the plant instead of having it shipped away.*] The pollution causes a few people who live downriver to get sick.

For the Obedience version, the italicized sentence in brackets above was replaced by "*One time, in order to save money, the plant manager tells Nick to dump chemical waste into the river next to the plant instead of having it shipped away.*" Conformity versions of each story necessitated adding to the introduction in order to set up the conditions for conformity. For example, the Authority/Conformity version of Factory Waste read as follows:

Nick is the manager of a fertilizer plant and head of the committee that makes production decisions. For several months, the plant's expenses have been running over budget. One time, in order to save money the committee decides to order that some of the waste be dumped into the river next to the plant instead of having it shipped away. The pollution causes a few people who live downriver to get sick.

An appendix with all story versions is available from the first author.

Other design features. It should also be noted that the full design was more complex than the portion of results to be analyzed in this paper. (1) We also

varied the actor's *mental state* (accident vs. negligence/intent). Overall, the $3 \times 2 \times 2$ design yielded 12 versions of each story. For brevity, this paper collapses across the mental state variable. Vignette versions reproduced in text are high mental state stories. (2) Order of presentation of the four vignettes followed a Latin Square design to guard against order effects. (3) Each respondent also heard a fifth story randomly selected from among three alternatives (thus N for each of these stories is approximately 200); each was a 2×2 factorial design. (4) Each core story had an extra (13th) cell: a high mental state version in which a subordinate initially disagrees but eventually goes along with the group. These design elaborations will be reported elsewhere (e.g., Sanders et al., 1994).

We briefly summarize the impact of mental state, because its impact could affect inferences drawn about the variables under study. Overall, mental state had a robust main effect on responsibility judgments; the actor whose deed was more negligent or intentional was always more responsible. Mental state, hierarchy, and nation interacted, more weakly; in Japan, mental state made more of a difference in the judgment of actors who were authorities, whereas in the other samples no difference was observed. Most importantly, when we ran models that included mental state as a variable, none of the results reported here changed substantially, and no new results emerged except those involving mental state. Hence we collapse across mental state to simplify the presentation.

Dependent Variables and Manipulation Check

Following each vignette the respondents were asked a number of questions. First, we asked respondents to rate the actor's responsibility—the dependent variable—on a 100 point scale, where 0 means that the actor is not at all responsible, 50 that the actor is somewhat responsible, and 100 that the actor is fully responsible. The same question was later asked about other participants in the vignette (the actor's co-workers, the actor's boss, and the company itself). We also assessed whether and how the actor and other participants should be punished. Items about punishment and about other actors' responsibilities are analyzed elsewhere (Sanders & Hamilton, 1995). Finally, respondents judged the perceived seriousness of the consequences (where 0 = not at all serious and 100 = extremely serious), and whether the actor "acted on his own" or not (1 = yes, 2 = no). Seriousness provided a check on whether vignettes were comparable in severity, and "on his own" was a manipulation check for Influence Situation.

Data Analysis

An initial repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the actor's responsibility showed that the four vignettes differed significantly among themselves, and that Story, as a variable in the model, interacted with Influence.

Essentially, as will be evident in reviewing results, the major between-vignette difference was that Paper differed from other stories in the impact of Influence. Further analyses (reported here) were therefore carried out for each story separately in a three-way between-subjects ANOVA: Influence (3) \times Hierarchy (2) \times Country (3). We further broke down results into separate analyses by country, in a 3 \times 2 (Influence by Hierarchy) ANOVA for each vignette.

Results

Micro Level: Conformity and Obedience

Figures 1–3 show responsibility attributed to the actor by Influence in each of the 4 vignettes. United States (Washington, DC) results appear in Fig. 1, followed by Russia (Moscow; Fig. 2) and Japan (Tokyo; Fig. 3). Across the X-axis, the experimental conditions are arrayed from the anticipated highest responsibility (Autonomy) to the lowest (Obedience). As predicted, responsibility assigned to the actor declines from left to right in each figure. Statistically, this result was reflected in a significant Influence effect for 3 stories (all except Paper) in three-way ANOVAs (Influence by Hierarchy by Country).

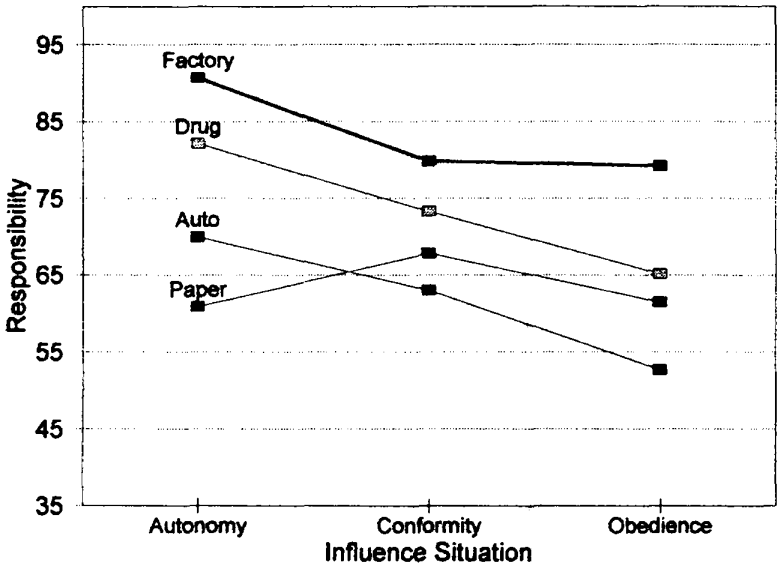


Fig. 1. Washington, DC, data on actor's responsibility for wrongdoing in four stories about organizations: Autonomy vs. Conformity vs. Obedience.

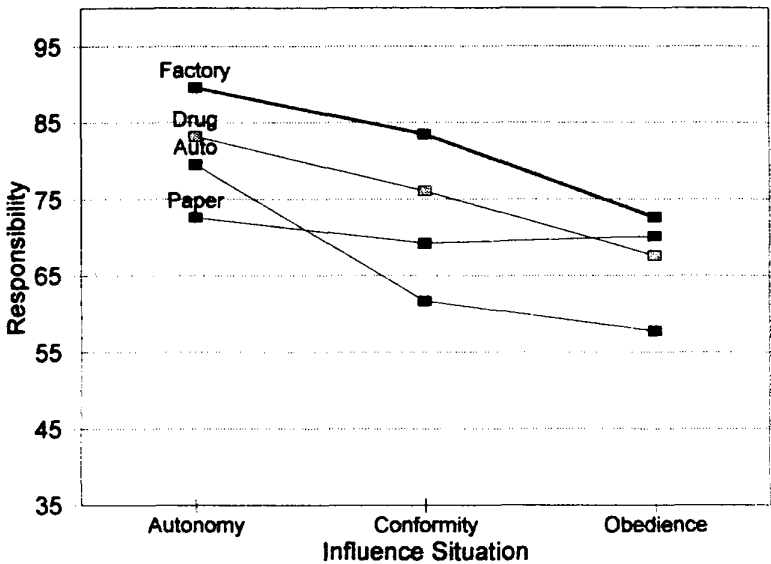


Fig. 2. Moscow data on actor's responsibility for wrongdoing in four stories about organizations: Autonomy vs. Conformity vs. Obedience.

To provide an overview of the pattern of effects, Table 1 presents F statistics from the 3×2 ANOVAs run by country, for each vignette. Table 1 illustrates that the impact of Influence was consistently significant, except for the Paper vignette. Consistent with our expectation that Paper depicted the most professional role and setting (see Method), responsibility is less affected by Influence Situation. Grand means at the bottom of Table 1 also show that overall ratings of responsibility of the actor in Paper (the reporter/editor) are relatively low, consistent with the notion that what has been committed is a secondary harm.

Micro Level: Authorities and Subordinates

Hypotheses 2 and 2a asserted that midlevel authorities would be more responsible than subordinates, overall, and that their responsibility would be less affected by having conformed or obeyed others. Table 2 decomposes the results into the responsibility attributed to subordinates vs. midlevel authorities, separately by vignette, country, and condition of social influence. Together, Tables 1 and 2 show that Hierarchy virtually always had a main effect on responsibility and in the predicted direction: Authorities were more responsible than subordinates. In addition, a significant interaction of Hierarchy with Influence emerged

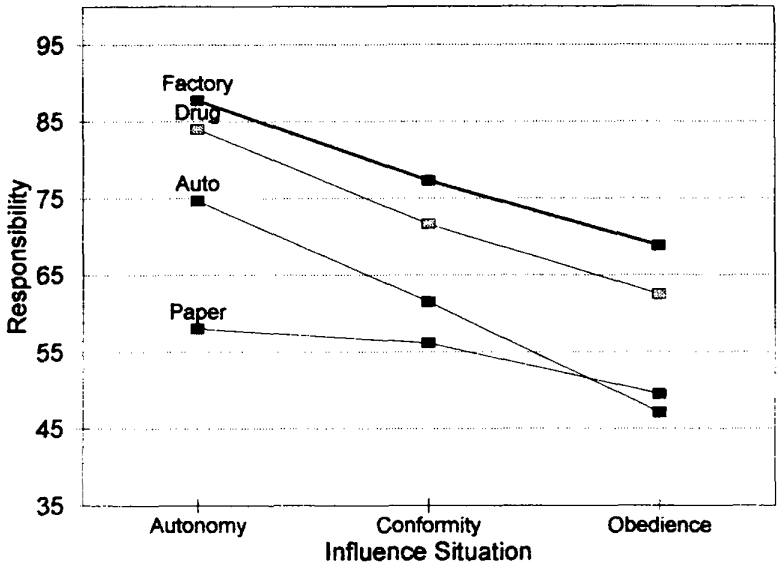


Fig. 3. Tokyo data on actor's responsibility for wrongdoing in four stories about organizations: Autonomy vs. Conformity vs. Obedience.

in every country in almost all stories. (Again, the Paper story was the exception.) As predicted, authorities who conformed to the group or obeyed their bosses were not excused of responsibility; indeed, conforming authorities were sometimes held somewhat *more* responsible than authorities who acted autonomously. In contrast, both conformity and obedience significantly reduced subordinates' responsibility.

This interaction can also be described by post hoc tests between (a) the Autonomy and Conformity condition and (b) Conformity and Obedience, tested overall and separately for Authority actors. Overall, across nations, all post hoc differences were highly significant except in the Paper story [where Autonomy vs. Conformity ($M = 63.9$ and 64.4), t ns; Conformity vs. Obedience ($M = 64.4$ and 60.1), $t(1071) = 2.07$, $p = .039$]. When analyses were restricted to the Authority condition, all differences were substantially smaller and several others failed to reach significance (those for Conformity vs. Obedience in the Factory, Drug, and Paper cases).

The Issue of Autonomy

In all stories, the intended manipulation check for Influence Situation, a question about whether the protagonist did or did not "act on his own," yielded

Table 1. Responsibility of Actor by Country (*F* Values)

Effect	U.S. (<i>N</i> = 602)				Russia (<i>N</i> = 597)				Japan (<i>N</i> = 600)			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Hierarchy (H)	ns	14.2 ^c	16.0 ^c	21.3 ^c	30.1 ^c	32.1 ^c	32.3 ^c	15.7 ^c	44.6 ^c	23.7 ^c	42.6 ^c	9.3 ^b
Influence (I)	12.8 ^b	16.1 ^c	12.5 ^c	ns	22.2 ^c	28.3 ^c	11.3 ^c	ns	30.8 ^c	40.4 ^c	30.4 ^c	3.3 ^a
H × I	5.0 ^b	4.2 ^a	6.3 ^b	ns	4.9 ^b	4.5 ^a	10.7 ^c	ns	5.0 ^b	5.2 ^b	11.4 ^c	ns
Grand Mean	83.2	62.2	73.5	63.4	82.3	66.3	75.4	70.7	78.1	61.1	72.7	54.5
<i>N</i>	555	549	554	550	548	531	546	532	552	546	549	535

Note. Story 1 = Factory, 2 = Auto, 3 = Drug, and 4 = Newspaper. Story order was varied according to a Latin Square design; order of presentation here reflects a rough ordering from relatively bureaucratic to professional.

^a*p* < .05.

^b*p* < .01.

^c*p* < .001.

Table 2. Responsibility in the Workplace: Impacts of Country, Hierarchy, and Influence Situation

Factory Story: Foreman/Manager						
Influence	U.S.		Russia		Japan	
	Subordinate (Foreman)	Authority (Manager)	Subordinate (Foreman)	Authority (Manager)	Subordinate (Foreman)	Authority (Manager)
Autonomy	91.7	89.7	87.9	91.3	84.7	91.0
Conformity	80.8	78.7	75.5	89.2	71.1	83.1
Obedience	73.2	85.1	63.6	82.4	58.4	79.9
Auto Story: Design Engineer/Head Engineer						
Influence	U.S.		Russia		Japan	
	Subordinate (Engineer)	Authority (Head)	Subordinate (Engineer)	Authority (Head)	Subordinate (Engineer)	Authority (Head)
Autonomy	70.2	69.8	77.3	81.8	74.0	75.4
Conformity	53.0	70.3	53.4	69.8	54.1	68.3
Obedience	44.5	58.9	45.1	68.4	36.6	57.5
Drug Story: Laboratory Technician/Scientist in Charge ^a						
Influence	U.S.		Russia		Japan	
	Subordinate (Tech.)	Authority (Scientist)	Subordinate (Tech.)	Authority (Scientist)	Subordinate (Tech.)	Authority (Scientist)
Autonomy	81.1	82.8	79.6	86.3	80.0	88.0
Conformity	70.5	76.5	73.3	78.9	68.7	74.9
Obedience	54.9	77.6	52.5	83.1	47.3	77.5
Paper Story: Reporter/Editor						
Influence	U.S.		Russia		Japan	
	Subordinate (Reporter)	Authority (Editor)	Subordinate (Reporter)	Authority (Editor)	Subordinate (Reporter)	Authority (Editor)
Autonomy	54.5	66.4	64.7	80.1	51.9	64.2
Conformity	61.1	74.8	64.1	74.3	55.2	57.2
Obedience	54.7	68.6	65.7	73.5	43.8	55.5

Note. Responsibility was scored on a 0–100 point scale (“not at all responsible”–“fully responsible”).

^aIn Russia and Japan, where drug development is less likely to be done in private companies, the word “Institute” was used instead of the word “Company” in the Drug vignette.

large effects (results not shown). The Autonomy condition evoked the highest percentage saying the actor was “on his own,” the Obedience condition evoked the lowest, and Conformity was intermediate.

This item is more than a manipulation check insofar as it also offers insight into how respondents perceived hierarchy. Because differences in personal auton-

omy underlie authority and subordination, we were not surprised to find that in two vignettes (Factory and Drug), the authority was rated as having "acted on his own" to a significantly greater extent than the subordinate. In these vignettes, the subordinate role was not a professional one (i.e., factory foreman and lab technician, respectively); in the Auto and Paper stories, in contrast, subordinate and authority were each professionals (design engineer/head engineer and reporter/editor, respectively).

Results for "acted on his own" reinforce Milgram's (1974) ideas about differences between conformity and obedience, quoted earlier. The conforming actor is seen as more autonomous—his action more voluntary—than the obedient actor. In addition, in at least some settings, subordination in and of itself carries with it an implication of loss of volition.

Macro Level: Cultural Differences

Regarding Hypotheses 3 and 4, results have already suggested that the impact of Influence and Hierarchy is greater in both Russia and Japan than it is in the United States. The question is how much greater. Regarding Hypothesis 3, the three-way ANOVAs did *not* show a significant interaction of Country with Influence for any story. (For F values within country, see Table 1.) Borderline ($p < .10$) interactions of Country with Influence emerged in the Factory, Auto, and Paper vignettes. Regarding Hypothesis 4, only the Factory story showed a significant interaction of Hierarchy with Country [$F(2,1637) = 7.9, p < .0001$]. Overall, given that all significant or marginal findings were consistent with hypotheses and other trends were consistently in the predicted directions, Hypotheses 3 and 4 are weakly confirmed.

Discussion

Perhaps the most commonplace acts of destructive obedience and conformity occur when people go to work and try to do their jobs. The consequences of these acts can be pernicious indeed (see also Miller, this volume). This study begins to offer a road map of the normative climate that differentiates among offenses—or fails to do so—on such bases as the fact that it was "boss's orders" (Obedience) or "we all agreed to it" (Conformity). In particular, we wanted to explore and expand upon the notion of *crimes of obedience* (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). This paradoxical phrase refers to acts in which subordinates obey authority (as they usually should) by doing acts the larger community finds illegal or immoral (which they should not do). But subordinates in hierarchies do more than obey. They chat, they gossip, they compare notes, they watch the performance (and the back) of their fellow subordinates. The world of organizational obedience is also a world of organizational conformity. Often, conformity is an overlay that makes obedience easier, quicker, and snappier because the

obedience of others is evident around us. Here, we explore pure *crimes of conformity*—acts of going along with the crowd, without the added impetus of orders—as compared to autonomous and obedient actions.

Micro-Level Results

We had two hypotheses about the social influence situation—Autonomy vs. Conformity vs. Obedience. First, obedient actors are judged to be least responsible, actors who have not been influenced as the most responsible, and conforming actors are in between. Second, the higher in any hierarchy (i.e., the more authoritative) the actor is, the more responsible this actor will be seen to be for any given negative outcome. We also suggested a corollary to the second hypothesis: An authoritative actor is seen as less susceptible to influence from peers (conformity) or higher-ups (obedience); therefore, the introduction of either of these forms of pressure makes less difference in judging an authority.

These hypotheses were confirmed across diverse cultures and organizational examples. Conformity was intermediate between autonomy and obedience, and peer pressure had less power than orders to minimize or eradicate an actor's responsibility. Authorities were more responsible than subordinates for actions in organizational hierarchies, and the impact of social influence was more substantial for subordinates than for authorities. It mattered whether a subordinate acted on his own, or under pressure from peers, or under orders; but for an authority, the type and even the fact of social influence from another made little or no difference. Results involving hierarchy are consistent with the argument that an authority tends to be seen as more autonomous than a subordinate; he is less of a pawn pushed around on the corporate stage, regardless of who is doing the pushing.

Threats to Validity

One alternative interpretation of the subordinate–authority difference in the Obedience condition deserves attention. Subordinate and Authority stories differed in one important respect. Whereas high-level authorities announced *policies* to midlevel authorities, midlevel authorities gave *orders* to subordinates. For example, in the Authority/Orders version of the Factory story, the manager was told by the vice president to take steps to save money; in the Subordinate/Orders version, the foreman was told by the manager to dump waste into the river. Hence our finding that authorities are more responsible than subordinates could be questioned on the grounds that authorities here did not do precisely the same things as the subordinates; they presumably acted with somewhat greater discretion by carrying out policies rather than carrying out orders. Yet this difference reflects the actual operation of authority hierarchies. As orders ascend a hier-

archy, they become more general. It is not usually realistic to depict a subordinate and a midlevel authority who do, or are ordered to do, exactly the same thing (Hamilton & Sanders, 1992a,b; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). A person's position in the hierarchy and freedom of action on the job are confounded in real organizations. Given the choice, we preferred to depict tasks that actually characterize authorities and subordinates. Future research should attempt to pull apart the role of authority from the actions of authority (Schlenker et al., 1994).

A second difference between Authority and Subordinate vignettes may provide an alternative explanation for the differing response to Conformity in the two. The conformity manipulation in Authority stories was difficult to introduce: in the versions we arrived at, the Authority may have been seen more as a superior than a peer of the "others" to whom he conformed. For example, as quoted earlier, in the Factory story Nick the manager was *head* of the committee that made production decisions; his conformity to that committee's opinion might be seen as more reprehensible than excusable. In this case, the difference in versions reflects a practical aspect of hierarchy. Because organizational structures are triangular, as a person moves up a hierarchy it is less and less likely that a group of equals exists to exert influence. Since we wanted to avoid introducing odd fact situations in a study carried out in three quite different languages, we developed vignettes in which the facts were reasonably typical for authority and subordinate in each setting. Future research should explore this issue of "conformity to whom" for authority vs. subordinate in organizations.

Macro-Level Results

Two other hypotheses concerned anticipated differences between the American data, gathered in Washington, DC, and data gathered in the capital cities of Russia and Japan. According to the third hypothesis, both conformity and obedience are more likely to excuse the actor of responsibility in relatively collectivistic cultures (Japan, Russia) than in more individualistic cultures (United States). According to the fourth hypothesis, in cultures with greater emphasis on hierarchy or more rigid authority structures (Japan, Russia), the impact of the actor's role (midlevel authority vs. subordinate) on responsibility is larger than in a less hierarchical culture (the United States). Both of these hypotheses were weakly confirmed.

In reviewing these results, we have two reactions. On the one hand, it is gratifying that the realities of responsibility attribution in Moscow, Tokyo, and Washington conformed to predictions. It is possible to envision numerous future studies where investigators might examine cultural variation in judgment of organizational wrongdoing. On the other hand, it is also striking how similar the results were across cultures. Broadly speaking, the same variables worked in the same ways; hypothesized differences emerged as subtle trends rather than mas-

sive gaps. The same story (Paper) even represented something of an exception everywhere (discussed below). This commonality of response may reflect the fundamental similarity of life in modern industrialized societies, and work in organizational settings.

Future Directions: The Meso Level

The organization is the meso level, standing between the society and the individual. In this study, variation in workplace organization was exploratory. In the future, two overlapping distinctions among types of organizations may be useful in studying the responsibility of actors within them: (a) *professional vs. bureaucratic* authority (Blau, 1968) and (b) organizational decision making, which is relatively *tightly vs. loosely coupled* (e.g., Perrow, 1984). Professional authority tends to be associated with loose coupling, and bureaucratic authority with tight coupling. In general, professionals and actors in loosely coupled organizations are less closely supervised and more "self-determined" (Kohn, 1977; Kohn & Schooler, 1983) in their performance of daily tasks. Thus, it is plausible that actors in settings dominated by professional authority and/or in loosely coupled organizations should be judged more responsible, in general, for their wrongdoing. Similarly, conformity and obedience should be less exculpatory in loosely than in tightly coupled organizations or bureaucratic contexts.

Exploratory analyses of differences across the vignettes provided limited evidence for these ideas, mainly in the response to the Paper story. It is at least arguable that the professional nature of the actor's role (reporter/editor) was "honored" by relative failure to relieve the conforming or obedient actor of responsibility. Future research on organizational variation could help to test the notion that some settings foster more autonomous action than others.

Independence from the Authority via the Group

Future research can also take heart from the fact that conformity, especially, can play a dual role: as a force that supports authority, or as a force that undermines it. Sometimes, however rarely, conformity can serve the cause of disobedience, as when people take courage from observing others who walk out, sit in the front of the bus, or commit whatever act of autonomy is necessary to counter unjust authority (cf. Gamson, Fireman, & Rytina, 1982). In the light of these results, a next step may be explore systematically when conformity and obedience intertwine and when they counteract one another.

Research on this interplay of conformity and obedience has particularly potent implications in applied fields. For example, it may have practical implications for understanding such phenomena as corporate crime, white-collar crime, and whistleblowing. Space considerations prevent our developing these themes

here, but interested readers can find discussions of corporate crime and the difficulties in adjudicating disputes or redressing offenses that involve corporate actors in the following: Braithwaite (1984); Braithwaite and Fisse (1985); Ermann and Lundman (1982); Fisse (1983); Fisse and Braithwaite (1993); Hawkins (1984); Huber (1988); Lederman (1985); Lempert and Sanders (1986); Moore (1987); Nader, Green, and Seligman (1976); Perrow (1984); Pitt and Groskaufmanis (1990); Stone (1975); and Vaughan (1983). For discussion of white-collar offenders and their deterrence, see Clinard (1983), Fisse and Braithwaite (1983), and Shapiro (1990). For whistleblowing in organizations, see Graham (1986), Miceli and Near (1985); and Near and Miceli (1987).

Conclusions. Most of the organized ways in which people do wrong happen when they go to work. It is part of Milgram's (1974) legacy that psychologists realize no question is more important for the next millennium than that of how human social organization can be made more humane. We need to learn, literally, who in the world really expects organizational actors to be autonomous moral beings. Perhaps then we may better understand when and why they are not.

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