

FRST 101: Freshman Studies II Winter 2012
Instructor: Stoneking
Handout #1: MILGRAM, OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY

Monday 2 January 2012

After some preliminaries we will launch into a discussion of Stanley Milgram's work, perhaps covering some of the topics listed below. We will certainly return to some of these topics in subsequent discussions as we work our way through the book:

- What is your general reaction to *Obedience to Authority*? Had you heard of Milgram's experiment(s) before? If so, did the book reflect what you had heard? If not, do the results surprise or shock you? Why or why not?
- What is the nature of the results of Milgram's experiments? Does he reveal a hidden monster in many of us, waiting for the opportunity to inflict harm on our fellow humans? Or is there some other sinister aspect to obedience that Milgram's work reveals?
- What is the motivation for studying *obedience*? What purpose does obedience serve in society? Is it the same thing as *conformity*? Do you think Milgram had an agenda (political, moral, ...) in performing the experiments described in this book and in publicizing the results?
- Describe the overall organization of the book. What are the most important elements?
- Briefly describe the design of the experiment(s). What are the important roles? Who takes on those roles? What actions does each participant engage in?

Wednesday 4 January 2012

For class on Wednesday re-read chapters 1-5. Come to class prepared to discuss the questions and topics listed below:

- What role does the Holocaust play in motivating Milgram's work? What other historical examples might he have used to motivate a study of obedience? Are there more recent examples you can think of that illustrate Milgram's motivation in conducting these studies?
- Find in chapter 1 succinct statements of
 1. The experimental question,
 2. The results of the experiments, and
 3. An interpretation or explanation of the results
- Identify Milgram's use of the following terms *binding factors* and *counteranthropomorphism* in chapter 1 and be prepared to explain them. Also, what role does the *division of labor* play in Milgram's chapter 1 summary of his work?
- What are the two opposing "forces" on the subjects of Milgram's experiments that are set in opposition to one another?
- Is it important how the subjects were recruited and how their ages, occupations, classes, etc. were distributed? Likewise, are the appearances of the "learner/victim" and of the "experimenter" important?
- Describe the experiment that the subjects think they are conducting? What is your reaction to the deception used by Milgram on his subjects?
- After conducting some pilot tests Milgram altered the design of the experiment. How was the experiment altered and why?
- Discuss the design of the experiment. What is being measured? How is it measured?
- What elements of your understanding of obedience in the larger world does Milgram's experiment test? What aspects of obedience does it not test?
- Why does Milgram feel it is necessary to conduct surveys on the expected results of his experiments? Why does he present the expectations before presenting the experimental results?
- Look carefully at the results of experiments 1 – 4 as shown in Table 2 (p. 35). Why are these four experiments presented together in chapter 4? Are there interesting details in the results that ask for an explanation?
- What are the two "unexpected behaviors" that Milgram extracts from the proximity experiments?
- Why does Milgram include a sample of subject profiles and quotations from post-experiment interviews? Does this small sample give you any insights into the factors that might lead a person to disobey? What do you make of Milgram's descriptions of the subjects?