Do Unto Others…?
Self- vs. Other-Attentive Resistance in Milgram’s “Obedience” Experiments

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Abstract

We examine language and social interaction in one of the most influential and controversial social psychological experiments of the 20th century: Stanley Milgram’s 1961-62 studies of “obedience to authority.” To investigate social psychological processes responsible for his findings, we decompose his categorical outcomes of “obedience” versus “defiance” into their concrete interactional routes. Data are 117 audio recordings of Milgram’s original experimental sessions. We use Conversation Analysis to examine two kinds of resistance to directives enacted by both “obedient” and “defiant” participants. They may orient to how continuation would be troublesome primarily for themselves (self-attentive resistance), or for the person receiving shocks (other-attentive resistance). Additionally, defiant participants mobilize two other-attentive practices almost never used by obedient ones: Golden Rule accounts, and “letting the Learner decide.”

Despite the recent renaissance of interest in social psychologist Stanley Milgram’s classic “obedience to authority” experiments (Haslam et al. 2015), the role of resistance to directives in these groundbreaking studies remains unclear. Starting with Milgram himself (1963), the dominant interpretation of participants’ behavior has emphasized what seem to be appalling levels of conformity. As Miller (2009:22) notes, however, “[i]ndividual differences within many of the experimental variations are one of the most striking features of [Milgram’s] results, but they are an exceedingly underreported and ignored feature as well.” That is, although roughly two-thirds of participants across all conditions ended “obediently,” virtually all resisted continuation to some extent (Hollander 2015), with one-third doing so in ways that successfully stopped the experiment and earned Milgram’s “defiant” categorization.

Recall that the experimental design involved three parties in a supposed study of learning and memory. The cover story called for an authority figure (the confederate “Experimenter”) to direct a volunteer (the actual research subject “Teacher”) to teach a peer volunteer (the confederate “Learner”) a list of word pairs. Milgram had pre-arranged for the Learner to respond with mostly wrong answers, for which the Teacher was to shock him with a series of increasingly strong electroshocks (in reality no shocks were felt). If the Experimenter encountered resistance from the Teacher, he was to use verbal “prods” such as “Please continue” and “The experiment requires that you continue” to pressure Teacher to continue. However, if the Teacher resisted four of such prods, the Experimenter was to stop the experiment. Operationalizing the Teacher’s response in this situation of constrained choice as either “obedient” or “defiant” (“disobedient”), Milgram believed he had demonstrated that situational variables under experimental control can cause heightened or lowered rates of obedience to authority. The variables include proximity of Learner to Teacher, number of Teachers and their hierarchical relationship, and gender of Teacher (Blass 2009; Milgram 1974).

Taking the fact of widespread participant resistance to continuation seriously raises a crucial theoretical question about studying social behavior in Milgramesque situations. Instead of asking why obedient or disobedient behavior happens, what if we shifted to the question of how the behavior is produced? What are the interactional social psychological dynamics by which some participants heroically succeed (by being “defiant”) in a situation in which most others fail (by being “obedient”)? Also, are these dichotomous groups, or are there features of resistance common to both groups? Once we answer these questions, perhaps we can also ask how people can apply successful resistance techniques in real-world situations to challenge authoritarian abuses of power.

In answering these questions, we show how Conversation Analysis (CA) helps to present new and different
phenomena for our social psychological understanding of authority relations and, in particular, the structuring of resistance. The basic message is that, when participants challenge the directives of an Experimenter, they may display self- or other-orientation. Resistance is self-attentive when Teachers egotistically attend to how continuation is difficult and troublesome primarily for themselves. Alternatively, resistance is other-attentive when Teachers altruistically orient to how continuation is problematic primarily for the Learner.

Data

The data are 117 recordings from the Stanley Milgram Archive maintained by the Manuscripts and Archives Department at Yale University Library. (Yale was where Milgram conducted his experiments in 1961-62.) With a grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation (#1103195), the first author of the present paper purchased copies of 117 Milgram recordings, hired undergraduates to make preliminary transcripts, and then edited them according to the conventions of CA. There were two units of analysis for our study. One was the directive-response sequence (Craven and Potter 2010; Goodwin and Cekaite 2013). These are two turns of talk whereby (in our data), the Experimenter issues a turn of talk that asks or tells the Teacher to continue with the experiment, which often meant repeatedly shocking the Learner. The other unit of analysis was the complaint-remedy sequence. When a Learner cried out in pain, or verbalized discomfort, this initiated a complaint, whose proper or preferred response is some kind of remedy (e.g., stopping the experiment). These different kinds of sequences created a dilemma for Teachers, in that if they complied with the Experimenter’s directive, it meant non-compliance with the tacit imperative to remedy a complainable situation for the Learner. To study this situation, we collected as many instances of directive and complaint sequences as possible. Working with such a collection affords insight into general features of interactional practices (Maynard 2013:12).

Self- and Other-Attentive Resistance

Our research reveals that both obedient and defiant subjects marshal self- and other-attentive resistance to the Experimenter’s directives to continue the experiment. At the outset, we wish to introduce a distinction between “positional” and “compositional” other-attentiveness. Any form of resistance to the Experimenter’s directives is other-attentive in a positional (sequential) sense. That is, by orienting to problems with continuation due to the Learner’s (hereafter, “L’s”) reactions to receiving shocks, or to the fact of his receiving shocks, resistance disrupts the progressivity of the experiment at least in part on L’s behalf. Proceeding to the next higher shock level is temporarily postponed; the respite represents a momentary benefit to the Learner. So when we discuss self- and other-attentiveness, this sense of positional other-attentiveness is assumed, while we focus on self- and other-attentiveness in the compositional design of the Teacher’s (“T’s”) talk.

Developing this point, it is common for there to be positional other-attentiveness—that is, resistance to the Experimenter’s (“E’s”) directives—but no display of self- or other-orientation in the compositional design of T’s utterances. This point also addresses our methodological concerns to explicate the Milgramesque setting as one of three-party interaction with an interactional dilemma for T. In extract (1), T announces the shock level (line 1), then administers it (line 3):

(1) [0219 dis obed, 135V, 26]²

1 T: One thirty five volt.
2 (1.2)
3 T: ((flips shock switch))
4 (0.3)
5 L: Ooh:::
6 (2.1)
7 → T: We con[ti]nue:?=
8 E: =Hr::m ((clears throat))
9 (0.2)
10 E: Please continue.=
11 T: =Uh,
12 (0.3)
13 T: Correct answer, (0.5) woman.
At line 5, L issues a “pain cry” (cf. Goffman 1981, on “response cries”). This is a form of complaining and, as such, implicates remedy. T, however, is also operating under the auspices of the experimental mandate to follow protocol and therefore to obtain a correct answer and continue with further items. But T remains silent for over two seconds (line 6), and thus deals with the pain cry by this momentary delay in continuation. He nevertheless shows his orientation to the experimental mandate by addressing E and asking for confirmation (line 7), which suggests deference to E’s “epistemic status” (Heritage 2012) or domain of knowledge regarding what should occur next, and also to E’s “deontic” authority (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012) or right to determine the Teacher’s next action. E, after clearing his throat (lines 8-9), provides a confirming response at line 10, directing T to continue, which T then does after some delay (lines 11-13). In sum, T’s query at line 7 orients to L’s negative reaction to receiving shocks as problematic for continuation and for that reason is resistive and other-oriented in a positional sense. But in terms of its compositional design, the query exhibits neither self- nor other-orientation in any explicit sense.

**Obedient Participants’ Use of Self- and Other-Attentive Resistance**

We will decompose Milgram’s categories of “obedience” and “defiance” into routes by which these outcomes are achieved through concrete displays of resistance. Here, we show how obedient subjects use both self- and other-attentive forms of resistance in their talk, and discuss what happens in the subsequent interaction.

**Self-Attentive Resistance among Obedient Participants**

By self-attentive resistance, we mean that participants provide an ego-involved, “my world” reason for postponing experimental continuation or for projecting discontinuation. The practice typically accounts for their just-prior resistance, which is often a “stop try” (an utterance that explicitly projects imminent experimental discontinuation). In the example below, L has been refusing to answer the questions, and E has directed T to treat no response as a wrong answer to be punished with the next shock. At line 1, T reads the next word list:

(2) [0216 obed, 315V, 390]

```
1  T: Rich boy, (.) cake (.). ma:n (.). girl.
2
3    → T: hhhh >eh< My nerves aren’t very good mac=I’m sorry.=I don’t
4    wanna give this fella any more.
5  (1.8)
6  E: Please continue.
7  (1.6)
8    → T: I’d much rather have you take this check back and just let me go
9    home.
10  (3.8)
11  E: It’s absolutely essential that you continue.
12  (0.7)
13  E: Please go on.
14  (1.6)
15  T: Rich boy, ...
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As indicated by the long silence (a strong positional type of resistance) at line 2, no response is forthcoming from L. T then sighs and addresses E with an account for the silence and his own non-continuation that references his “nerves,” and he issues an apology and stop try formulated in terms of disinclination to administer more shocks (lines 3-4). The format of the stop try is **account + apology + marker of action disaffiliation** (“I don’t want to”), such that T could be characterized as building the vocal resistance here as a dispreferred type of action. After a silence (line 5), E’s issues a directive to continue, which, as it does not respond to T’s account as such, and although prefaced with a politeness term (“please”), displays high entitlement to have the directive complied with. T responds with silent delay (line 7), then sustains the earlier resistance with an offer to return the check in a further stop try that states his preference to “go home” (lines 8-
9). After more delay (line 10), E counters T’s resistance with prod 3 (line 11, “It is absolutely essential that you continue”). T performs further resistive silence (line 12), and E delivers prod 1, “Please go on” (line 13). T postpones a bit further (line 14), then complies with E’s directives (line 15). Although a concern for L’s suffering may be implicit, particularly in a positional sense, T’s displayed orientation to the troublesomeness of continuation emphasizes how that course of action is difficult for himself: he formulates his own “want” and “desire,” rather than articulating something about L’s situation. Although T’s introduction of stop tries here resembles defiant participants’ practices, when E insists on continuation he backs down (line 15). Also, the episode occurs after 315 volts have been (purportedly) delivered; most defiant participants mobilize repeated stop tries earlier in the progression of shocks and never reach this point in the experiment. Although T occasionally offers further resistance in the subsequent interaction, example 2 is his last use of stop trying.

Other-Attentive Resistance among Obedient Participants

Resistance may be compositionally other- rather than self-attentive by displaying an orientation to ways in which continuation is troublesome primarily for L rather than for T. As discussed earlier, other-attentiveness as a feature of resistance is more common than self-attentiveness in both outcome groups. This fact may indicate a favored, asymmetrical ordering of altruistic over egoistic accounts for providing remedy, an ordering attended to by both groups. Here, we discuss other-attentive resistive practices as used in the “obedient” group and their relation to compliant outcomes.

One practice that shows other-attentiveness is for T to report to E something problematic about L’s reaction to receiving shocks:

(3) [2310 obed, practice 75V, 2]

1 T: Seventy five volts.
2 (0.7)
3 T: ((flips shock switch))
4 L: Ow!
5 (1.6)
6 → T: Ow=Sir I heard him say ow that time.
7 (0.7)
8 E: Please continue.
9 (0.6)
10 T: Uh: the (fig-) the correct answer is ...

Seated in the adjoining room, L utters a pain cry upon receiving 75 volts in the practice lesson (line 4). T monitors the situation with resistive silence (line 5). At line 6, reporting on what he “heard,” T explicitly brings the cry to E’s attention in an other-attentive way. The report suggests the relevance of remedying action by E, who is seated in the same room as T and presumably heard it just as clearly (participants wear no headphones). E does not, however, immediately respond (line 7). At line 8 E directs T to continue, thereby treating the pain cry as unproblematic for continuation. Following further resistive silence and hesitation, T complies (line 10). Although the excerpt occurs earlier (75 volts in the practice lesson) than most other instances of non-silent resistance in both the obedient and defiant collections, this T offers no further non-silent resistance until 150 volts in the experiment proper. Whereas many defiant participants upgrade resistance to stop tries at 150 volts in the shock series, this T queries E as to what he should do next (“Continue?”). When E then directs him to go on, T does so after a pause, offering only minimal resistance as he ascends the shock series. He does not perform a stop try until 300 volts, well past the middle range of shocks where almost all the defiant participants successfully stop the experiment. So, although example 4 occurs relatively early in the shock series, this T’s overall performance conforms to the “obedient” pattern: resistance is relatively unassertive, and if assertive practices such as stop tries are mobilized, they come relatively late, and finally are abandoned as the subject complies with E’s directives.

Disobedient Participants’ Use of Self- and Other-Attentive Resistance
In contrast to the situation with resistive but ultimately compliant participants, when E counters resistive responses to his directives to continue, “defiant” subjects offer counters of their own. They sustain noncompliance with accounts for their earlier resistance and with iterated stop tries (again, utterances that explicitly project imminent experimental discontinuation; see above). As the experiment progresses, these “defiant” subjects rapidly upgrade to the most explicit forms of resistance found in the corpus such as the stop try. By contrast, “obedient” subjects upgrade more slowly and use the most explicit form far less frequently (19 percent in the corpus use at least one stop try, as compared to fully 98 percent among the “defiant”). Although “defiant” accounts do include self-attentive statements of the sort analyzed with regard to obedient subjects, they are more frequently other-oriented, demonstrating concern for L’s welfare and projecting experimental discontinuation as the appropriate remedy for his complaining. To further our methodological goal in this paper of decomposing Milgram’s categorical outcomes in terms of constitutive practices performed in real-time interaction, we now examine examples of both self- and other-oriented forms of resistance in the trajectories toward “disobedience” among the defiant subjects in order to draw further conclusions about what distinguishes noncompliant from compliant practices.

**Self-Attentive Resistance among Disobedient Participants**

Self-attentive resistance among defiant subjects can look very much like that among the obedient ones. Yet one kind of self-attentive statement that disobedient subjects make far more commonly is that which refers to legal repercussions of continuation. Of the 53 defiant participants in the corpus, eleven (21 percent) resist by self-attentively referring to legal consequences; in contrast, only 4 of the 64 obedient participants (6 percent) do so.

Example 4 below is from experimental condition 3, in which Milgram has moved L from an adjacent room (condition 2) to the same room as T and E. L has been refusing to continue, and at lines 1-2 T asks E about having “any responsibility.” This formulation, with its reference to “any responsibility,” is negatively polarized (Heritage 2002:78; cf. Horn 1989) and, in that way, structurally projects disconfirmation (a “no”). A silence develops (line 3) and T adds an increment to this turn (line 4), showing how he may be implicated. After a slight delay (line 5), E at line 6 asks to clarify the “responsibility” as “legal” (which interpretation T confirms in overlap at line 7). Beyond the overlap (line 6), E denies that T’s responsibility would ensue:

(4) [0310 disobed, 195V, 126]

1 T: Sir I- I would like to inquire at this point, (0.2) Do I have any
   responsibility in case anything happens to this man,
   (0.7)
2
3 T: As I am (. ) operating these switches,
   (0.3)
4 E: Legal responsi[bility?] = No sir.
5 T: [Yes. ]
6
7 (0.8)
8 T: Uh how do I know th(h)at. heh
9
10 (1.0)

The self-attentiveness is palpable in the “responsibility” issue, and T does not immediately continue after E completes the question-answer sequence, but sustains resistance with silence (line 8). At line 9, T’s resistance becomes more explicit: whereas the prior query had presumed E’s epistemic entitlement or stance (Heritage 2012)—his knowledge and right to pronounce on experimental matters—this one downgrades or critiques it. The laugh tokens (line 9) resemble those that have been documented in patients’ responses to a physician’s directive, which “are recurrently produced with laughter” (Haakana 2001:191). Following the excerpt, T sustains resistance in several more exchanges with E. Though in time he decides to continue, he later achieves a “defiant” outcome by using stop tries.

**Other-Attentive Resistance among Disobedient Participants**
Members of both outcome groups tend to initiate resistance upon first hearing L cry out in pain at 75 volts. Noncompliance at this point is not very forceful, in both groups typically taking the form of silent monitoring of the situation that delays continuation, and/or reporting to E that something is problematic about L’s reaction to the shocks. Between 75 and 120 volts both groups also commonly address queries to E that similarly display other-oriented concern for L’s welfare. For instance, Ex.5 shows a “defiant” participant performing a first non-silent attempt at resistance with an other-attentive query (line 3):

(5) [0235 disobed, 105V, 7]

1  T: The correct answer is (0.4) number two. (0.4) Har:d head.
2 (1.2)
3 → T: °(Y’know) this: is not gonna ↑hurt him ↑is it doc?°
4 (0.3)
5 E: No ↑this is not dangerous.
6 (.)

T’s negatively polarized (“not gonna hurt him”) question asks for confirmation, and shows concern for L’s welfare (Jefferson 2004; Raymond 2003). After slight delay (line 4), E provides confirmation. Following more conferral with E that further delays continuation, T resumes his experimental tasks (transcript not shown). He soon, however, achieves a “defiant” outcome at 150 volts with a series of other-attentive accounts (e.g., “I believe him, they hurt”; “He’s tired, he wants to stop”) and stop tries (“Well, I won’t continue with endangering a man’s life”).

Although both outcome groups use such other-attentive inquiries, defiant participants tend to swiftly mobilize additional forms of other-attentive resistance. Two such additional forms—(1) Golden Rule accounts and (2) “letting L decide”—are almost never used by obedient participants. Both practices account for prior or accompanying stop tries, and are crucial means by which defiant subjects distinguish themselves from obedient ones.

Golden Rule accounts. Both in everyday and theoretical ethics, a typical formulation of the Golden Rule is, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The maxim enjoins moral actors to behave charitably and beneficently by empathetically identifying with “how the world looks” to others (cf. Heritage 1998:313). When T shows such empathetic identification, we refer to the practice as a “Golden Rule account”. T justifies (accounts for) resistance in terms of empathetic identification with L. The practice thus contrasts with the merely sympathetic other-attentiveness of examples 6 and 7 above. Golden Rule accounts occur in the dilemmatic situation we described earlier, in which T is caught in the middle of two opposing and competing projected courses of action. L has typically emitted some kind of protest, which suggests remediating the putatively painful administration of shocks, but E nevertheless directs T to continue. Of 17 instances of the practice in the corpus, all account for prior stop tries. Moreover, all but two occur with ultimately “defiant” participants, such that the technique is one of the signatures of this outcome group. The two Golden Rule “obedient” cases occur at 300 volts (subject 0216) and 330 volts (0220), whereas the “defiant” cases typically occur below 270 volts—that is, earlier in the progression of shocks.

One of the “obedient” instances, though highly unusual for that outcome group, is nevertheless a perspicuous example of the practice:

(6) [0216 obed, 300V, 348]

1  L: AH::::::! ((scream))=
2  T: =That didn’t stay  down. h:
3 (1.3)
4  E: (°Uh put the °)=
5  L: =I REFUSE TO ANSWER ANYMORE!
6 (0.9)
7  T: Look mac,=I don’t wanna get up into any higher ‘an this.=I’m
8    sorry.
9 (2.7)
Here, T, responding to earlier directives to pursue experimental tasks, tries to stop the experiment at lines 7-8 with a "look"-prefaced turn addressed to E, which redirects the course of action towards the alternative of discontinuation (Sidnell 2007). The stop try has the marker of action disaffiliation ("I don't wanna"), and features a postpositioned apology. No response from E is forthcoming at line 9, and T (line 10) pursues a response with a Golden Rule account for his just-prior stop try. The turn justifies the prior try by empathetically identifying the speaker with L, and projects discontinuation. Golden Rule accounts have a proverbial flavor; for this reason the account may, like idiomatic expressions accompanying complaints (Drew and Holt 1988), solicit alignment in a particularly strong way after it has not been otherwise forthcoming. Nevertheless, after some delay E directs him to continue (line 12). The directive treats T's empathetic identification with L as irrelevant to continuation, and renews the relevance of that course of action. Though T does not immediately comply, at line 14 he does so grudgingly with a sigh.

**Letting L decide.** In the course of resisting and especially accounting for stop tries, some participants try to negotiate with E the terms under which they would be willing to continue the experiment (cf. Gibson 2014). One other-attentive way this is done is "letting L decide," which is a second distinctive practice by which "defiant" subjects account for their attempts to stop. By letting L decide, they treat L, rather than themselves or E, as the party who should decide whether to go on. This practice can account for trying to stop and/or can counter E's directive to continue. Participants typically follow it up, not by backing down, but with insistence that L be allowed to make his decision known. E, for his part, uses Special Prod 2 to counter such concerns that L is being forced to continue ("Whether the learner likes it or not, you must go on until he has learned all the word pairs correctly. So please go on.").

Letting L decide is usually performed as follows. T addresses E with a stop-try account or other counter to E's directive that tasks E with demonstrating that L is willing to go on:

(7) [0208 disobed, 120V, 26]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Turn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>T: I don’t think I wanna: (. ) be a part of this anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>E: Please continue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>T: °No. °</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>(11.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>E: It’s absolutely essential that you go o:n,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>(2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>→ T: Well if he says it’s alright it’s alright with me.=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>=Will you ask him if he wants to go on?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>(3.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By letting L decide, T accounts for trying to stop by treating L as the relevant authority on the matter of continuation, the party with primary rights and entitlement to decide. By contrast, in Golden Rule accounting participants typically treat themselves as knowing that L is being forced to act against his will, and that it is up to them alone to decide whether or not to continue.

**Conclusion**

We have introduced Conversation Analysis as an innovative approach in the study of Milgramesque behavior, one capable of raising new phenomena for social psychology. Methodologically, CA is innovative as a response to Reicher and Haslam's (2011) call for a rethinking of Milgram's dichotomization of action in the experiments as either "obedient" or "defiant." CA allows us to see recurrent directive-response and complaint-
remedy types of sequence organization occurring in the three-party interactions of the Experimenter, Learner, and Teacher. The juxtaposition of these conversational sequences creates an interactional dilemma for research participants, as they find themselves caught in the middle of two mutually opposed and competitive proposals for what next action they should take. Comparative analysis of a large number of “obedient” and “defiant” experimental sessions makes possible a better understanding of the lived, temporal experience of Milgram’s participants by illuminating the generic structure of their dilemma and the recurrent practices by which they attempt to resolve it.

Substantively, we have analyzed self- versus other-oriented techniques for resisting experimental directives, practices hitherto undocumented in the Milgram literature. Participants from both outcome groups commonly use both styles, either alone or in combination. The evidence, however, suggests that successful, “defiant” resistance can involve both styles, with other-attentive resistance appearing more often than the self-attentive variety. Moreover, successful resistance can feature two recurrent other-attentive techniques that are “signatures” of the “defiant” group: (1) *Golden Rule accounts* justify stop tries (prior and ongoing attempts to bring the experiment to an end) in terms of empathetic identification with the Learner. And by (2) *letting the Learner decide*, participants negotiate with the Experimenter, treating the Learner—the man receiving shocks—rather than the Experimenter or themselves, as the appropriate party to decide whether or not to continue. Our analysis of these structured techniques sheds light on generic patterns by which successful defiance in the Milgramesque situation is achieved in real time.

With this methodology and substantive analysis, not only do we understand Milgram’s “obedience” experiments better. We also suggest that an agenda has been set whereby the methodology of CA, with its detailed explication of interactional practices, can be used in efforts at understanding the social organization of other social scientific methods, including experiments (as here) and survey interviews (Maynard and Schaeffer 2000). CA could also improve understanding of authority-subordinate relations as they imbue non-Milgram settings such as police-citizen encounters, military command structures, work relationships, and more.

Further research taking the sequential and comparative approach of the present article is needed to elucidate more fully how Milgram’s two outcome groups—obedient and defiant—take different trajectories from the point of initial resistance onwards. Defiant participants owe their success to their practical competence at resourcefully weaving together diverse forms of resistance. The archived Milgram recordings display the structured practices by which they resist more frequently, more assertively, and with more heterogeneous resistance techniques than do obedient ones. With respect to self- versus other-oriented resistance, defiant participants use both techniques more frequently and earlier in the shock series, and may also mobilize Golden Rule accounts and Letting L decide. Such findings contribute to what is known about the background of shared resistance practices—what defiant and obedient subjects may have in common. They also add to our understanding of how some people succeed in putting a stop to inducements to engage in immoral actions (Zimbardo 2007), whereas others do not. In short, our methodological innovation in the social psychology of “obedience to authority” has important substantive implications for the better understanding of Milgramesque situations.
NOTES

1. Social psychologists currently disagree as to whether Milgramesque behavior is in fact best described as obedience to authority. Although the present article contains descriptions of participants as “obedient” and “disobedient/defiant,” we do not thereby imply support for Milgram’s interpretation.
2. The data excerpt heading refers to “0219 disobed” (Subject 19, Condition 02, disobedient outcome) and “135 V, 26” (excerpt starts at line 26 of the original transcript; 135 volts is the highest shock delivered at that point). Analogous headings appear in all excerpts below. See above for more on each experimental condition.
3. Also, in early experimental conditions such as Condition 2, E sometimes uses the “forgotten prod” (Gibson 2013) to counter this practice.

Bios

Matthew M. Hollander is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His dissertation, on directive-response conversational sequences in the Milgram Obedience Experiment, uses as data detailed transcripts of a large number of Milgram’s audio-recordings to shed new light on the social psychology of resistance to authority. He has also collaborated on publications on the social psychology of speed dating and of survey interviewing.

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References


