



FAST FOOD STEEP SEARCH

NARRATOR: A series of strange events recently confirmed Milgram's theories about obedience.

Targeting fast-food restaurants across the country, a con man telephoned restaurant managers, and convinced them to strip-search and sometimes sexually abuse their employees. The mystery is not in the con man, but in the victims. Why would they obey?

M: This person was so convincing. People saw him as a legitimate authority. I think we have a, uh, probably the closest thing that we have to [a] Milgram experiment today, in the uh, in these strip searches.

NARRATOR: The most famous of these incident took place at a McDonald's in Mount Washington, Kentucky.

M: There was a videotape security camera; it had film. We didn't hear what the instructions were, but [do], to do the actions that were t-, uh, had taken place; what the victim was doing in, in the video and stuff. And it was...uh, pretty evident what each instruction was.

NARRATOR: An anonymous caller, pretending to be a police officer, told the assistant manager that an employee had stolen some money.

DONNA SUMMERS: He said, I'm Officer Scott. And he said, I'm with the police department. I'm investigating...a complaint. It went directly from a theft into a drug thing. So I was asked to search her clothing. You know, he would tell me: take her shoes, click 'em; take her shirt; check it out.

I know how it seems to people. But you weren't on the phone with him. The man has convinced seventy to a hundred other places [of] the very same thing. He's very good at what he does. Very good. He sounded like a police officer. And um, I'm thinkin', okay. You know, I'm doin' what I'm supposed to do.

M: He was gettin' some kind o' satisfaction by bein' an [authoritative] figure, and tellin' people what to do. And then realizing, by the phone conversation, that they were actually doin' what he said.

DONNA SUMMERS: He's tellin' me that I needed to get someone to sit with her while he goes and gets somebody to come in to pick her up.

M: The caller then asked the manager if she was married or had a boyfriend. She said that she had a fiancé. Then the caller asked if she could have her fiancé, uh, come to the restaurant, and assist, uh, her with the, the strip search of the victim.

DONNA SUMMERS: He says, well, why don't you have him come up and sit there. I mean, you can trust him. So, um, I called Wes, my fiancé; we were gonna get married — to ask him if he would come up.

M: The manager goes about doin' her duties, uh, of runnin' the, uh, restaurant. And uh, leaves the fiancé there in the office. And then the caller starts givin' instructions over the phone of, of things that he wants, uh, the victim to do. And uh, what he wants the, uh, fiancé to tell her to do. Have her remove her apron, and, and uh, instruct her to do jumpin' jacks, and jog in place, a-, and uh...several more things.

She was still in high school. Uh, the kind of person she was, she was actually graduated in the top ten in her class. And uh, she was scared of being in trouble with the police, so she sorta just went along, and uh, did whatever, uh, the fiancé t-, told her to do, because, uh, she didn't want to be in trouble for anything.

DONNA SUMMERS: Durin' all this time, I'm workin'. I'm runnin' the floor; I'm gettin' change; and then, when I would walk into the office to get the change or whatever I had to get, Wes would be sittin' where he was when I left. And she was settin' where she was. And no one said anything.

NARRATOR: After over two and a half hours, Summers's fiancé, Walter Nicks, did something that was unthinkable. Complying with the instructions of the caller, he ordered Louise to perform a sexual act.

DONNA SUMMERS: And there's no way that I could, uh, take away from what happened to [her]. A lot of people, you know, look atcha, and go, and you're, you know, you're [UI]; you should be strung up. I've had it even said to me. And it's really hard, because you weren't there.

F: The Milgram study showed us that most people would do that. If you structure the environment such that, you know, you provide all the authority, and, and, you know, the commands, just anybody might do this.

M: [UI].

F: But I do think this sounds worse.

M: You think this is worse than [with] Milgram [did]?

F: With the Milgram, there was somebody, like, right, sitting right there, and instructing them. If they hesitated, they could turn, and then somebody could encourage them, and, and they could sort of maybe psychologically leave that responsibility on that other person. But in this case, the police officer's on the phone. He's not standing there.

M: [That actually] is a very good point.

DONNA SUMMERS: You know, you look back on it, and you say, I wouldn't-a done it. But unless you're put in that situation, at that time, how do you know what you would do? You don't. You don't.

NARRATOR: Over 70 other people did exactly as Donna Summers did. Why is it so easy for us to obey orders, even when we know they are wrong? Why are we so willing to inflict pain on others if someone else takes responsibility?

M: There's nothing more difficult [than for] people to violate a social structure which all participants have initially accepted. It reminds me of a situation that once occurred in South America. I was in an airplane. The pilot came into the plane. He was drunk. He was reeling toward the cockpit. Passengers looked at each other, but no one got up. No one said to the pilot, you're drunk; we can't fly in this plane.

There are a set of pressures that keep you in the role that you have initially accepted.