

Argumentative synthesis

Linguistics, English



The paper "Obedience as a Type of Social Influence" is a good example of an essay on sociology. Obedience constitutes a type of social influence whereby a person carries out an action, as a response to an order from another person, who is normally a figure of authority. The principal assertion, as can be discerned from this definition is that, without the issued order, the respondent would not have taken the action in question. Obedience makes up a crucial part of the societal foundation since without it there would be prevalent chaos and disorderliness. This social influence, therefore, fosters stability within diverse environs hence sustaining productivity and overall welfare of citizens. However, obedience is not devoid of weaknesses and potential adverse effects. Key among these concerns is the possibility of people losing their individuality and independence in decision making. In the event of such a loss of autonomy, society would be characterized by mindless people, blindly executing orders issued to them by superiors without considering the consequences of their actions. Studies, carried out by Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo, clearly show how human individuality and independence is often undermined by blind obedience to people in positions of authority. For people to uphold their individuality, while maintaining societal stability there should be a proper balance between noncompliance and obedience, within diverse sectors. One of the most recognized studies on obedience and its effects was conducted by Stanley Milgram between the early 1960s to mid-1970s. Over this period, Milgram carried out several experiments, testing his subjects on the extent of their obedience to authoritative figures. The researcher's study primarily focused on the moral dilemma that subjects experienced, when faced with the

difficult decision to choose between following orders and taking the moral highway. Even though the investigational methods used by the scientist were unorthodox in nature and most likely to raise serious moral concerns in the modern environment, results obtained were germane and important to a better comprehension of obedience. This is because the researcher was able to establish that people are capable of obeying their superiors, even if this translates to violation of their ethical values and prompts them to cause harm to others. The tendency of individuals to inflict harm or pain on others, in accordance with issued instructions is rather startling. The study, which entailed giving instructions to participants to progressively deliver an electric shock to test subjects, is an exemplary illustration of the adverse effects of blind obedience. Milgram intentionally pushed the study's subjects past the tolerable point of compliance, successfully showing that even individuals that hate harming others would do so if instructed to by people in authority. This is perhaps due to fear of punishment or the perception that people in superior positions are always right and their instructions cannot be undermined (Milgram 358-370).

The other study that provides insight into the concept of obedience is Philip Zimbardo's. The latter's research involved mock prisoners' mistreatment by guards after episodes of disobedience. The prisoners, therefore, made efforts to remain obedient for fear of punishment by guards. Despite being obedient, guards would still abuse the prisoners verbally and physically, including ordering them to perform degrading tasks such as cleaning toilets with unprotected hands. This shows that the guards started abusing their authority, even though the prisoners were obedient. They seemed to derive

some sense of demented satisfaction from degrading the prisoners and watching them suffer. The prisoners got to a point of revolting against the guards, thus showing that excessive obedience can instigate violence or psychological harm to involved parties (Zimbardo 389-400).

The preceding studies serve to show that extreme obedience is not suitable for society. This is not only because of the danger or harm it poses but also due to its tendency to impede rational and independent thinking of individuals. Excessive obedience to superiors further forces individuals to ignore their moral standards and resort to causing harm to fellow human beings. The torture cases at the Iraqi Abu Ghraib form an excellent illustration of the danger that extreme obedience poses to society. Media reports highlighted cases of soldiers torturing prisoners. After being questioned, most of the suspected violence instigators reported that they were following the instructions of their superiors. Some stated that the senior officers did not question the abusive acts, prompting them to conclude that their actions were okay. The documented incidents of psychological, sexual and physical abuse were not only inhuman but also tending towards being sadistic. It is said that such soldiers, deemed role models and heroes by many, blindly followed their superiors' authority, overlooked their moral responsibilities and chose to torture prisoners, some of whom were innocent civilians (Hersh 2-5).

In conclusion, society's welfare is hinged on people's morality and humanity towards others. Extreme obedience, therefore, undermines these fundamental elements of life and forces people to engage in heinous acts against others, for fear of being punished by the authority. Additionally, such

obedience prevents people from being assertive, thus negating their individuality. As a result, people become incapable of making rational decisions regarding basic aspects of life. This is detrimental to the physical, psychological, mental and social well being of the entire society.