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Obedience to Authority

Stanley Milgram's Obedience to Authority study and the Stanford Prison Experiment both show that everyday people react in ways we find unimaginable when put in certain situations. The Stanley Milgram's Obedience to Authority study tested how people would respond to an authority figure who told them to do something that conflicted with their personal beliefs. The Stanford Prison Experiment studied the effects of being a prison guard or prisoner. While both studies may be very unethical today, I believe they both show that everyone is likely to act, possibly, in an unethical manner depending on the situation. These studies, in current society's views, would be extremely unethical; especially the Prison Experiment. While not forcibly controlling the participants' actions or thoughts, the administrators of the studies still caused them much mental distress because of the situations they were placed in. I don't believe that the information gained was worth the amount of suffering some of these people went through. Yes, knowing that everyone would act in the same manner put into certain situations is interesting to know but where does that get us? Do we just allow people to commit murder because we would most likely do the same thing if we were in their shoes? Maybe we can empathize more with people because of the information gained. However, I don't see it as being worth the damage it did to others' lives. The results of the studies I find to be interesting. Many people believe they are different than everyone else. We are even raised that way so we don't feel bad about all of our physical and occasional mental differences; even to the extent that people start to deny that they would act in a way they find unethical when put in the same or similar situation as another person who acted in an unethical manner. These studies showed that people act in a possible set manner, no matter who they are. Now this doesn't prove

that everyone would act in a set way, just a majority. There will be those very few people who would never go against what they feel is right or wrong; but a majority, no matter what they think, would. In example, if the leader of a group decides to do something the other people in the group tend to follow, no matter what the decision may be. So, all it takes is one person in a position of power to change the mindset of the group. When this happens it becomes even harder to resist doing something unethical because everyone else is doing it so the thought might be 'It can't be that bad right?' That is for you to decide, not me. I can't tell you what is right and what is wrong. It's all a matter of opinion. In conclusion, I feel that Stanley Milgram's Obedience to Authority study and the Stanford Prison Experiment, while being unethical, both showed that people are not necessarily as different as we are brought up to believe. In fact, people are quite similar. I don't believe that these tests will be conducted again now or in the near future because of the distress it can cause people, so we have to hope the studies weren't just a matter of chance.

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