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English 101

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Stanley Milgram’s- Perils of Obedience: An Analysis

In the story “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson in 1948, Jackson's representation of the villager's close-mindedness shows that they do not see their wrongdoing from the exordium of their actions. In the story, people use Lottery as a fun activity but in reality, it is a matter of life or death if anyone gets picked out of the box with the black dot. In the story, villagers of a small town gather in the square on June 27 for the town Lottery. What is the lottery you ask, The Lottery is based on a black box Mr. Summers mixes up the slips of paper in the box. He and Mr. Graves make the papers the night before and then locked up the box at Mr. Summers’s coal company. Before the lottery can begin, they make a list of all the families and households in the village, long ago they would use wood chips instead of slips of paper with names on them that Mr. Summers convinced the villagers to change their tradition to the slips of paper.

“The Lottery” in my point of view is related to “No Name Woman” by Maxine Hong Kingston. In her story, the ambiguity and complexity of *talk-story,* the place of women in traditional Chinese society, and the difficulty of growing up as a Chinese- American are discussed. “The struggle of Kingston's aunt”, a woman who gives in to a dangerous sexual passion and then is exiled out by her village is another story. These two stories relate as in the first sentence of the first paragraph in “No Name Woman” Maxine writes ‘you must not tell anyone’ my mother said, what I am about to tell you. In China, your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born.” They are she's showing that obedience needs to be shown by the daughter because she is not supposed to have knowledge that her father had a sister who had killed herself, but it also shows disobedience as well because the mother is not supposed to give knowledge of the sister of her husband. And in “The Lottery” Shirley shows that the villagers follow orders as well. For example, when someone receives the black dot, the villagers become savages and stone the poor victim to death. In “Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones.” The kids are disciplined and obedient that they do not see it as wrong to kill people with stones.

In "The Lottery," the moral lesson or theme is that one should not blindly follow traditions simply because they're traditions. The following of obedience is the same as the following of traditions because it is what everyone expects you to do and follow, and in the lottery, it was a tradition annually to kill someone to death with stones, so therefore they are showing obedience just because it is a tradition.

In "The My Lai Massacre" by Seymour M. Hersh/St. Louis post-dispatch talks about the US Army killing people and showing obedience just because the government says it's okay. "Ga., Nov 13-LL William L Calley Jr., 26 years old, is a mild-mannered, boyish-looking Vietnam Combat veteran... deliberately murdered 109 Vietnamese civilians in a search-and-destroy mission in March 1968 in a Viet Gong stronghold known as 'Pineville." "The park village area, about six miles northeast of Quang Ngai, A third attack was quickly mounted and it was successful.” Seymour Hersh shows the massive amounts of death that the government allows and says it’s the right thing to do to keep safety in place. "This series consisted of four experimental conditions. In each condition, the victim was brought ‘psychologically’ closer to the subject giving him shocks. In the first condition (Response Feedback) the victim was placed in another room and could not be heard or seen by the subject, except that, at 300 volts, he pounded on the wall in protest.” Hersh’s experiments show that the subjects listen and obey even though they are hurting the victim.

In the early 1960s, Stanley Milgram, a professor at Yale University published his research about Obedience titled "Perils of Obedience". In the research, he examined an individual's level of obedience toward different authorities, in family and their affairs in society. Although, his research was specifically related to the Holocaust experience, however, many analysts and researchers consider the scope of this research broader (Milgram and Gudehus). Milgram arose the interest of people in the research by putting an ad in the newspaper which called that each participant would be paid $5 for participating. Milgram developed switches that were designed in increasing order of Voltages and the participants had to behave like a teacher, who was supposed to make the learner (an Irish woman) learn new things. Milgram’s experiment was based on fake aspects where each participant was behaving in an artificial and fake manner. This experiment teaches that fake research leads to judging the true aspects of an individual's personality.

Milgram’s conceptualization of “Obedience” suggests that each person of society considers him or herself an instrument of fulfilling another person's wishes. For example, in his experiment, it remained obvious that the teacher considered himself as an instrument for fulfilling the wishes of the learner. Milgram's research is related and quite linked to the stories mentioned above. In the story "My Lottery", Mr. Summer is acting as an instrument of fulfilling other people's wishes. Like Milgrim, his lottery was fake, but still, he had the urge to become a source to spread happiness. Similarly, Maxine Hong's "No Name Woman" is related to obedience, as in "the Lottery". No one is caring for the result, rather each one is in pursuit of satisfying their wishes, which in the real-world would have been impossible. Lastly, Seymour Hersh’s social experiments are like that of Milgram which are fake, yet appeasing people (Blass). These stories along with Stanley Milgram's "Perils of Obedience" suggest that people don't care for what they might lose, rather they feel comfortable in the shell which they call "Obedience".

Works Cited:

Blass, Thomas. *Obedience to Authority: Current Perspectives on the Milgram Paradigm*. Psychology Press, 1999.

Milgram, Stanley, and Christian Gudehus. *Obedience to Authority*. Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 1978.