

Conformity

A change in a person's behavior or opinions as a result of real or imagined pressure from a person or group of people.

Is it in the wording and context?

- In a culture that values free will and individualism, a conformist can equate to being an inadequate person.
- It could also equate to being a "team player"
- A nonconformist could be an individualist or a deviate.



Are conformist better-liked?

- Schacter (1951). Subjects read a description of a delinquent and then had to discuss a decision of leniency in treatment.
- Confederates took 3 roles: modal person, deviate, and slider (initially was deviate but changed).
- After discussion, participants rated who they liked most in the group

Are conformist better-liked?

- Conformist liked the best.
- Deviates liked the least.
- Kruglanski & Webster (1991). If the group has a deadline and a deviate voices dissent near the deadline, they are liked even less than if they voiced their dissent early on.





Not always a good thing...

- Nazis
- Watergate
- Space shuttle Challenger explosion

Groupthink

- “The mode of thinking that persons engage in when concurrence seeking becomes so dominant in a cohesive group that tends to override realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action.”



- Janis (1971)

Groupthink

- Cohesive groups isolated from dissenting opinion.
- Very optimistic and perceive the group as invulnerable.
- Dissent is discouraged to the point that individual members doubt themselves and refrain from expressing their dissenting views.
- Mindguards may develop—members who seek to squelch troublesome dissenting information.

Asch (1951)

- X _____
- A _____
- B _____
- C _____

Asch (1951)

- Cover story—test of perception.
- Confederates answered first and agreed on incorrect answer.
- Perceptual judgment itself was easy.
- 35% of judgments conformed to the incorrect answer.

Asch (1951)

- Pratkanis (1997) replicated and found same results.
- Subjects conformed even when there were no constraints against individuality.
- No explicit rewards for conformity nor punishment for deviance.

Goals of Conformity

- The goal of being correct—the majority convinced them that they were wrong.
- The goal of saying in the good graces of others and living up to their expectations.
- Most people believe that they themselves are motivated by the desire to be correct and that others are motivated by a desired to stay in the good graces of others.

Factors That Increase or Decrease Conformity

- Unanimity: if even one person is an ally to the dissenter, conformity to the erroneous judgment of the majority drops.
- Even if unanimity is broken by a non-ally, conformity is diminished.
- If there is unanimity, the size of the group doesn't have to be big to exert pressure. A group of 3 is the same as a group of 16.

Factors That Increase or Decrease Conformity

- Commitment: can reduce conformity by inducing the individual to make a commitment to his or her initial judgment.
- Accountability: accountability to the group increases conformity.
- Quinn & Schlenker (2002). The people who showed the most independence made the best decisions were those who were oriented toward being accurate and had to explain their non-conformity to the confederates whose influence they resisted.

Factors That Increase or Decrease Conformity

- The Person and the Culture: people with low self-esteem are more inclined to yield to group pressure than those with high self-esteem.
- If you have no prior success with a task or lack ability for a task, you are more inclined to conform to the group.
- Conformity is more prevalent in collectivist societies (Japan, China) than individualistic societies (US).

Factors That Increase or Decrease Conformity

- Small gender differences with women conforming more than men.
- Gender differences greatest when the researcher was male or the group was male task-oriented.

The Group Exerting Pressure

- A group is more successful at exerting conformity if... it is comprised of experts.
- If the members of the group are important to the individual.
- If the members are comparable to the individual in some way.
- Exception—conformity among children: white children exert more conforming power on both white and black children.

Dittes & Kelley (1956)

- College men were invited to join a prestigious and attractive group and given information about how secure their position was in that group.
- For those who valued their position in the group and were led to feel they were only moderately accepted were more likely to conform to the standards of the group than those who felt totally accepted.
- It is easier for someone who is securely accepted in a group to deviate from that group.

Conforming to an Individual
Instead of a Group

- Most factors are the same—we are more likely to conform to the behavior of someone who is similar or important to us or who has expertise or authority.
- People are more willing to comply with a demand from someone in a uniform.

Gladwell (2000) “Tipping Points”

- Major social trends often change dramatically and suddenly through conformity.
- A limited number of respected people “in the know” or “connectors” say and do things in the right place at the right time until it reaches a “critical mass” or “tipping point.”

Reasons for Conformity

- Conform to avoid punishment (social rejection or ridicule) or to gain rewards (social approval, acceptance).
- Conform for information.
- When you don’t know what to do in a given situation, you take your cues from others.
- Festinger (1954) as physical reality becomes more uncertain, people rely more and more on social reality.

When Conforming for Information...

- More likely to follow the lead of a person who has expertise or trustworthiness or who seems to have high status.
- Ramifications of conforming for gaining information are greater than conforming for rewards or punishment.

Schacter & Singer (1962)

- People will conform even in interpreting their own emotions.
- Subjects injected with epinephrine under the pretense it was a supplement.



Schacter & Singer (1962)

- Confederates modeled either angry or euphoric behavior.
- Subjects attributed their physiologic arousal to the same emotion as model.

Schacter & Singer (1962)

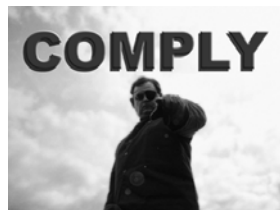
- Of particular importance for psychologists.
- Children, especially of clinical populations, have difficulty interpreting their arousal.
- Thus it is important for therapist and significant adults to model appropriate coping and expression of emotions.

3 Responses to Social Influence

- Compliance: motivated by rewards and punishment; little difference between human and animal behavior.
- Identification: desire to be like the person who has influence over you; come to believe the values and opinions, but not strongly
- Internalization: most permanent and deeply rooted.

Compliance

- Least enduring.
- Important component is power.
- The person complying understands the circumstances and can easily change their behavior when the circumstances change.



Compliance

- Since they are complying for rewards and avoidance of punishment, the rewards or threats of punishment need to be constantly present to have effect.



Identification

- Motivated by desire to be like a person.
- Important component is attractiveness.
- You will continue to hold your changed beliefs as long as the admired person remains important to you and he doesn't change.
- If your beliefs are challenged by more convincing things that counter yours, you will change.

Internalization

- Motivated by a desire to be right.
- Important component is credibility.
- Intrinsically reinforcing.
- If we see someone as trustworthy and as having good judgment, we accept their belief and integrate it into our own value system.
- Once it is part of our value system, it becomes independent of its source and is extremely resistant to change.

Increasing Permanence of the Effects of Compliance or Identification:

- Compliance itself does not produce long-lasting behavior, it can set the stage for more permanent effects.
- Individual makes a firm commitment to continue to interact with a person or group that induced the original act of compliance.
- If when complying, we discover something worthwhile about the belief.
- Secondary gain.

Obedience as a Form of Compliance

- Milgram (1963).
- Cover story: study on the effects of learning and memory.



Obedience as a Form of Compliance

- Learner (confederate) learns a list of words.
- Subjects instructed by researcher to administer increasingly intense shocks when the "learner" gets something wrong.



Stanley Milgram/From the film "Obedience" (©1965 by Stanley Milgram, distributed by Penn State Media Services. Permission granted by Edwards & Kelcey, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Milgram (1963)

- 65% of the participants continued to administer shocks at the instruction of the researcher even when the “learner” asked to be freed.
- No psychological difference in the subjects.
- Study replicated over the years in several countries and with women.

Aspects of the Milgram Study That Affected Obedience

- Subjects willingly consented and volunteered, and thus it was reasonable to assume the “learner” also consented.
- Felt obligated to not disrupt the experiment.
- The subjects were alone with the researcher.
- When the subject was joined by two other teachers who defied the experimenter, compliance dropped to 10%.

Aspects of the Milgram Study That Affected Obedience

- Researcher was from a prestigious university.
- Subsequent studies found compliance to decrease to 48% when researcher was stated to be from a less prestigious university.
- When a substitute stepped in for the researcher, compliance dropped to 20%.

Aspects of the Milgram Study That Affected Obedience

- When the researcher was not physically present and issued orders by phone, obedience dropped to below 25%.
- Distance between the subject and “learner” also had an effect.
- When the subject saw the “learner” get shocked, 40% continued to shock, compared to the 62% that continued when they only heard the “learner’s” screams.

Aspects of the Milgram Study That Affected Obedience

- When the subject had to physically force the “learner’s” hand on the shock generator, 30% complied.
- Physically witnessing the pain makes it harder to inflict the pain.
- Important to note in modern warfare which can be done at long distance.

Aspects of the Milgram Study That Affected Obedience

- Similarly, temporal proximity had an effect. Meuss & Raaijmakers (1995) successfully replicated original study in the Netherlands.
- Also showed 90% compliance in saying negative things about a person that would prevent them from getting hired at a later date.
- Because their behavior did not have a negative effect until later there was a high compliance rate.

Aspects of the Milgram Study That Affected Obedience

- Despite the facts, participants predict that they would discontinue the shocks beyond the moderate level.
- Most people think they are invulnerable to obedience pressures.
