

Conformity

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

Do People Know Why they Conform?

- Asch era – it's a decision based on reward history
- Lewin era – it's pressure from the psychological field
- "Adaptive unconscious" era – it's overlearned and unconscious

Asch: What Caused the Conformity?

Asch asked participants why they conformed, got two general reasons:

1. I conformed to be **accurate**:
 - I must have misunderstood the instructions; maybe it was line width, or something like that.
 - Maybe my eyesight's been going.
 - I didn't want to be wrong and everyone else seemed right
2. I conformed to be **maintain social relationships**:
 - I wanted to help the experiment
 - I wanted to go along with the group.

Influence Sources

- Deutsch and Gerard later described these as two **influence sources** promoting conformity:
 1. **Informational Influence** – following group responses can increase your accuracy in making decisions, gets at objective reality
 2. **Normative Influence** – following group responses can increase your social status, promote group cohesiveness

Normative Influence: Johnny Rocco Study

- **Group debate about how to deal with teenage repeat offender.**
- Prison and Punishment vs. Counseling
- Group consisted of several real participants and three confederates:
- “Modal” always agreed with group majority
- “Deviate” always disagreed with majority
- “Slider” initially disagreed with majority, then slowly began to agree
- **Results:**
 - Modal – liked best
 - Deviate – liked least, communicated with a lot, but then eventually ignored or ostracized
 - Slider – liked, communicated with a lot

Normative Influence: Cyberostracism

- Normative influence online: how do you increase your status when you're an outsider?
- Williams, Cheung, and Choi (2000)
- Participants in chatroom research: mostly confederates, one real participant.
 - Overincluded (received more than average amount of responses)
 - Included (average number of responses)
 - Partial Ostracism (lower than average number)
 - Full Ostracism (nobody responds to you)
- Then participants took part in an Asch – style conformity study
- Ostracized participants conformed most – to try to increase status

Individual Differences and Conformity

- Information – related characteristics:
 - Hi expertise reduces conformity
 - Hi induced incompetence increases conformity
- Norm – related characteristics:
 - Strong security in group reduces conformity
- Personality Characteristics:
 - High self-esteem reduces conformity
 - Social anxiety increases conformity

Demographic Characteristics and Conformity

- Gender
 - Alice Eagly: meta-analysis indicates women conform more, and change internal responses more (but expertise problem with studies).
- Age
 - Conformity higher in grades 5-6, lower in grades 11-12
 - Conformity higher among college age than over 70

Culture and Conformity

- **Early Stanley Milgram study:**
- Re-did Asch study in 1961; Norwegians conformed more than French
 - Many replications have been done:
 - Individualistic (mostly Western) societies conform less
 - Collectivistic societies (mostly Eastern) conform more
 - But group must be one that's important to Eastern society person's social niche
 - They won't conform to a group of strangers' opinions

Behavioral Study of Obedience

Stanley Milgram

- In standard condition (Yale, Lab Coat, in person) 65% shocked to XXX stage. What conditions reduced obedience?
- Learner in the same room: 45% obeyed
- Place learner's hand on shock plate: 30% obeyed
- Bridgeport instead of Yale: 48% obeyed
- Peer teachers (confederates) who disagreed: 10% obeyed
- Is this informational or normative influence, or something else?

Measuring The Pressure to Conform or Comply: Social Impact Theory

- Social Impact Theory (Latane):
- Measuring the effect on the individual of social pressure:
- Effect on individual =
 - (strength X immediacy X number) of the sources of social pressure.
 - **Strength** of social pressure source: its status, credibility, power, attractiveness
 - **Immediacy** of social pressure source: proximity to the target (e.g., in person or on the phone or TV)
 - **Number**: number of people constituting source of social pressure.



Automatic Unconscious Conformity Part I

- Some aspects of conformity may be automatic, occurring without conscious awareness
- Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner)
- **Social Identity / Self Category:**
 - A set of beliefs about ourselves that come from our knowledge and feelings about our different group memberships.
 - Race/Ethnicity, gender, age
- Mental activation of category membership seems to produce conformity to category
 - Acceptance of group norms
 - Stereotype threat
 - Accent

Automatic, Unconscious Conformity
Part II

- **Situational norms:** represent generally accepted beliefs about how to behave in particular situations
 - Aarts & Dijksterhuis (2003): situational norms may be mentally activated by situations, and affect our behavior unconsciously
