

Introducing Psychology



Social Influence

Majority Influence

Compliance: a response to a direct attempt to influence someone by means of a request e.g. one person explicitly asks (not commands or exercises authority) another to act in a certain way. **Factors affecting compliance are:**

- (a) **Self-esteem:** Apsler found lowering of self-esteem, by getting people to say and do foolish things, resulted in high levels of compliance; this occurs, he suggested, in an attempt to recover loss of face.
- (b) **Transressions:** Wallace & Sadalla found people caught in the act of doing something wrong complied more when subsequently asked, than people who had done something wrong but had not be caught e.g. if you have been caught smoking in your bedroom (against your parents' wishes), you are more likely to vacuum the house when requested, than if you had not been caught smoking!
- (c) **Reciprocation:** Regan demonstrated reciprocation by finding greater compliance from people who had previously been done a favour than a control group not done a favour.
- (d) **Foot-in-the-door technique:** if a person makes a small request followed by a large request this is often effective in getting people to comply with the large request.

Conformity: differs from compliance in two ways; it involves (a) a change of behaviour *towards* a group or social norm, and (b) pressure from a *group of people* rather than a request from an individual. Conformity is defined as a "*change in behaviour or belief toward a group as a result of real or imagined group pressure.*". This implies that the change in behaviour is *approved* by the group (you would not be confirming to a punk group if you got a shore "back and sides" and started to wear granny's knitted cardigans). Also the person has a choice in how to respond to group pressure . Three responses are possible:-

- Conformity (change in direction that group would favour)
- Independence (individual does what he/she would do in absence of group pressure)
- Anti-conformity (individual deliberately does the opposite to group expectations)

Autokinetic effect: Sherif (1936) demonstrated people conform to group norms when they find themselves in highly ambiguous, novel situations. When placed in a dark room with a spotlight projected onto a screen, the stationary spot of light appears to move. Subjects asked to make judgements about the extent of the movement show great variability in their answers when alone. The influence of group norms was investigated by putting 3 subjects together (2 whose range of answers was similar, and one whose answers were different) and asked them to say out loud what their answers were. Over a number of trials, all the answers seemed to converge, in the direction of the dominant view. The "deviant" person had conformed to the group norm. Sherif found that conformity to the majority group answer more quickly if the subjects had no previous experience of the task and so had not developed a *frame of reference*. Generally the *more ambiguous* the situation, and the *less experience* the person has had of the situation, the more powerful the influence of the group with established norms will be.

The Asch Paradigm: Asch (1955) investigated the effect of group pressure in a relatively unambiguous situation involving line judgements. The subject had to judge which comparison line (choice of 3 lengths) was closest to the standard line in length and verbally give the response in front of the rest of the group. It was found that a unanimously incorrect majority exerts considerable influence over an individual, but that this influence decreases when the majority is not unanimous or if credible social support is provided.

Crutchfield devised an experiment allowing many subjects to be tested at once (Asch Paradigm is time consuming, and the stooges have to be very good actors!) Whereas Asch procedure requires *public* expression of opinion, the Crutchfield procedure allows subjects to express their opinions *privately*. Conformity using this procedure was found to be *lower* (50% conformed to a wrong judgement).

It has been suggested that two different processes are operating in the Asch and Crutchfield procedure:

- (i) **Public compliance** (Asch procedure) is where somebody publicly conforms to group norms but privately maintains a different opinion; the individual is under **normative pressure** to conform.
- (ii) **Internalisation or private acceptance** is where the person believes the group to be correct and believes those opinions himself. Conformity here is due to **informational pressure** - the group provides information about how reality is to be interpreted.

Other factors affecting conformity:

- (i) Normative social influence is greater in *face to face* situations rather than situations where individuals give responses in private.
- (ii) *Attractiveness of group* for the individual; the more attractive the greater the conformity to group norms.
- (iii) *Reference groups* - groups who we both like and compare ourselves to - are particularly powerful sources of social influence.
- (iv) *Self-esteem* - subjects with high self-esteem conform less than those with low self-esteem, on the Crutchfield procedure (Stang 1973)
- (v) *Reinforcement* - Endler demonstrated that conformity was greatest when subjects were rewarded for agreeing with an incorrect majority, especially if rewards were given every time, instead of every other time.

Cultural pressures on and within ethnic minorities

Q. IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE A STUDENT FROM A STRICTLY RELIGIOUS MOSLEM FAMILY LIVING IN HERTFORD AND ATTENDING HAILEYBURY COLLEGE. WHAT PRESSURES WILL THERE BE FOR YOU TO CONFORM TO (A) YOU ETHNIC GROUP (B) MAJORITY SOCIAL NORM

Group Polarization

Both the Asch and Crutchfield techniques involve individuals making judgements, expressing opinions, and becoming aware of what others think in the absence of social interaction. Discussion is not permitted which is unrealistic, since discussions is an important means of social influence. It is therefore important to look at the effects of group discussions.

The Polarization phenomenon:

Stoner investigated risk taking in groups and found that groups take riskier decisions than the average group member; this became known as the *risky shift* effect. It is typically measured by giving 6 individuals a number of dilemmas where they have to choose a risky or cautious alternative. The risky alternative would be desirable if successful, but a disaster if unsuccessful. Each individual indicates the lowest probability of success acceptable before taking the risky option, and then the 6 subjects discuss the dilemma in a group and reach a group decision.