Social Psychology

Social Influence: Conformity

What We Will Cover in This Section

- Overview
- Conformity
- Compliance
- Obedience

The Abilene Paradox

- Hot, windy day in Coleman, Texas.
- Father-in-law says, ‘Let’s get into the car and go to Abilene and eat at the cafeteria.’
- Everyone agrees.
Conformity

Change in behavior as a result of real or imagined group pressure.

Level 1.

COMPLIANCE

Acting in accord with social pressure while privately disagreeing.

Level 2.

OBEDIENCE

Behavior change in response to demands of authority.
Level 3.

ACCEPTANCE

Acting AND believing in accord with social pressure.

Normative Influence

Conformity, compliance, or obedience due to a desire to gain rewards or avoid punishments.
– Depends on the outcome.

Informational Influence

Conformity, compliance, or obedience due to a desire to gain information.
– Information dependent.
– Occurs when we doubt our own judgment.
Conformity Continuum

Acceptance
Obedience
Compliance

Independence
Assertiveness
Defiance

Sherif Studies

• Subjects in a dark room.
• Shown a pinpoint of light on a dark screen.
• Asked to determine how far the light moved.
• Eventually the people would settle on one stable guess.
• Actually no movement (AUTOKINETIC EFFECT).

Sherif Findings

• Subjects in groups would converge on a single group norm.
• These results would be stable over time.
Asch Studies

- Participants and five confederates are seated at a horseshoe table.
- Participant always is given position 6.
- Group is asked to select the line that best matches a reference line.
- First several trials all agree.
- Later the first five all agree on the wrong line.

Conformity Studies #2

Reference line

Which line is the same as the reference line?

A _______________________
B _______________________
C _______________________

Asch Findings

- Results
  - 37% always conformed.
  - 25% never conformed.
  - 50% went along at least half the time.
- Note.
  - Privately the person would write the correct response.
  - Alone later would give the correct response.
  - This represents public COMPLIANCE.
When People Conform

Situational Characteristics

- Unanimity.
  - One person breaking the group norm.
  - Someone outside the group has less effect.
- Group cohesiveness.
  - Social support.

Group Size

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<th>Number in group</th>
<th>% of conforming responses</th>
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Personal Factors

- Status.
  - Higher status people in the group have more impact.
- Public vs. Private response.
- Group cohesiveness.
- Level of prior commitment.
  - Once people have made a public commitment they stay with it.
- Demographics
  - Gender.
  - Personality.

Minority Influence

*Process by which dissenters produce change within a group.*

- Dissenters should be consistent and confident.
- The degree of difference between the dissenters and the majority should be small.
- Dissenters should be consistent with changing norms.

Anticonformity

- Opposition to social influence on all occasions.
  - Persistent.
  - All occasions.
  - Often caused by psychological reactance.
COMPLIANCE

Acting in accord with social pressure while privately disagreeing.

Influencing Compliance

1. How the request is made.
   - Surprise.
   - Speed of talking.
2. Positive Mood.
3. Norm or Reciprocity.

Two-step Request Strategies #1

Foot-in-the-door.
   Agree to small request, then comply to a bigger one.

Low balling.
   Gain agreement to a request then reveal other commitments.
Two-Step Request Strategies #2

Door-in-the-face.
Preface real request with one so large that it is rejected.
That's not all.
Influencer makes a large request then offers a discount or bonus before the request is refused.

OBEDIENCE

Behavior change produced by the demands of someone in authority.

Obedience: Milgram Studies

Background.
Milgram Studies

• Design
  – S and confederate draw slips: teacher and learner.
  – Teacher gets mild example of a 'shock'.
  – Learner strapped in chair with electrodes.
  – Learner mentions heart condition.
  – Teacher has a 'shock generator' with switches from 15 to 450 volts.
  – When shocked the learner twitches, groans, screams, then is silent.

Milgram Results

• 63% went to 450 volts.

• One said, “OK professor, what do we do next?”

Overall Results

[Bar chart showing results]
Conditions That Lead to Obedience

- Closeness and legitimacy of the authority.
  - Physically present.
  - Be a legitimate authority.
- Distance from the victim.
  - Far away and not heard...all obeyed.
  - Same room 40% obeyed.
  - Hold hand: 30% obeyed.

Conditions That Led to Obedience

- When others objected, this broke the obedience chain.
Summary

- Foot-in-the-door entrapment.

- Dissonance.
  - If I am doing this of my own free will (Insufficient Justification) then it must be OK.
- Power of the situation.