

## CONFORMITY

1 Conformity is the act of matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to group norms. Norms are implicit, unsaid rules, shared by a group of individuals, that guide their interactions with others. This tendency to conform occurs in small groups and/or society as a whole, and may result from subtle unconscious influences, or direct and overt social pressure. Conformity can occur in the presence of others, or when an individual is alone. For example, people tend to follow social norms when eating or watching television, even when alone. As conformity is a group phenomenon, factors such as group size, unanimity, cohesion, status, prior commitment, and public opinion help determine the level of conformity an individual displays.

### Social responses

2 According to Donelson Forsyth, after submitting to group pressures, individuals may find themselves facing one of several responses to conformity. These types of responses to conformity vary in their degree of public agreement versus private agreement. First, when individuals find themselves in a position where they publicly agree with the groups' decision yet privately disagree with the groups' consensus they are experiencing compliance or acquiescence. In turn, conversion, otherwise known as private acceptance, involves both publicly and privately agreeing with the groups' decision. Thus, this represents a true change of opinion to match the majority. Another type of social response, which does not involve conformity with the majority of the group, is called convergence. In this type of social response the group member agreed with the groups' decision from the outset and thus does not need to shift their opinion on the matter at hand.

3 In addition, Forsyth shows that nonconformity can also fall into one of two response categories. First, an individual who does not conform to the majority can display independence. Independence, or dissent, can be defined as the unwillingness to bend to group pressures. Thus, this individual stays true to his or her personal standards instead of the swaying toward group standards. Also, a nonconformist could be displaying anticonformity or counterconformity which involves the taking of opinions that are opposite to what the group believes. This type of nonconformity is motivated by a need to rebel against the status quo instead of the need to be accurate in one's opinion.

### Specific predictors

#### *Culture*

4 Stanley Milgram found that individuals in Norway (from a collectivistic culture) exhibited a higher degree of conformity than individuals in France (from an individualistic culture). Similarly, Berry studied two different populations: the Temne (collectivists) and the Inuit (individualists) and found that **the former** conformed more when exposed to a conformity task. Bond and Smith compared 134 studies in a meta-analysis and found that Japan and Brazil were two nations that conformed a lot whereas Europe and the United States of America did not as much. Bond and Smith also reported that conformity has declined in the United States over time.

#### *Gender*

5 Societal norms often establish gender differences and researchers have reported differences in the way men and women conform to social influence. For example, According

to Eagley, Wood, and Fishbaugh, women are more concerned than men about the quality of interpersonal relationships and comply more. Women take greater responsibility for establishing and maintaining interpersonal bonds, whereas men do not. Also, women are more empathetic and more accurate at decoding nonverbal communication than males. Male gender roles also claim that men should remain independent and not agree closely with others, while it is seen as acceptable for women to conform to group behaviors.

6 The composition of the group plays a role in conformity as well. In a study by Reitan and Shaw, it was found that men and women conformed more when there were participants of both sexes involved versus participants of the same sex. Subjects in the groups with both sexes were more apprehensive when there was a discrepancy amongst group members, and thus the subjects reported that they doubted their own judgments.

### *Age*

7 Research has noted age differences in conformity. For example, research with Australian children and adolescents ages 3 to 17 discovered that conformity decreases with age. Another study examined individuals that were ranged from ages 18 to 91. The results revealed a similar trend – older participants displayed less conformity when compared to younger participants.

8 Researchers have also reported an interaction of gender and age on conformity. Eagly and Chrvala examined the role of age (under 19 years vs. 19 years and older), gender and surveillance (anticipating responses to be shared with group members vs. not anticipating responses being shared) on conformity to group opinions. They discovered that among participants that were 19 years or older, females conformed to group opinions more so than males when under surveillance (i.e., anticipated that their responses would be shared with group members). However, there were no gender differences in conformity among participants who were under 19 years of age and in surveillance conditions. There were also no gender differences when participants were not under surveillance. In a subsequent research article, Eagly suggests that women are more likely to conform than men because of lower status roles of women in society. She suggests that more submissive roles (i.e., conforming) are expected of individuals that hold low status roles. Still, Eagly and Chrvala's results do conflict with previous research which have found higher conformity levels among younger rather than older individuals.

### **Social impact theory**

9 Social impact theory was created by Bibb Latané in 1981 and consists of three basic rules. The first rule is that social impact is the result of social forces including the strength of the source of impact, the immediacy of the event, and the number of sources exerting the impact. The second rule is the psychosocial rule that says the amount of impact tends to increase as the number of sources increases. However, the most significant difference in impact exists between having 0 sources and having 1 source. The third rule is that the number of targets also affects social impact. The more targets of impact that exist, the less impact each individual target feels.

10 The first rule, that of social forces, claims that when social forces function within a social structure, the result is social impact. Latané explained this interaction as  $I = f(SIN)$ . That is, social impact is affected by strength (S), immediacy (I) and number of people (N). This theory postulates that the greater the number of sources of social impact in a social situation,

the greater the impact would be. Thus, the equation  $I = f(SIN)$  describes social impact as a multiplicative function based on the number of people acting on the target. Within this equation, the strength (S) is a measure of how much influence, power, or intensity the target perceives the source to possess. The amount of influence, power, or intensity is often determined through factors such as age, social class, whether or not a previous relationship had existed, or anticipation of a future relationship existing. Immediacy (I) takes into account how recent the event occurred and how close the group are to you (in space and time) at the time of the influence attempt. The closer the group, the more the social impact anticipated. The number of people (N) is the number of sources exerting social influence on the target. The  $I = f(SIN)$  equation illustrates that there is more social impact when higher status individuals are the source, when the action is more immediate, and when there are a greater number of sources.

11 The second rule that governs social impact is psychosocial law. The psychosocial law states that the most significant difference in social impact will occur in the transition from 0 to 1 source and as the number of sources increases, this difference will level out. The equation Latané uses for this law is  $I = sN^t$ . That is, some power (t) of the number of people (N) multiplied by the scaling constant (s) determines social impact. Latané applied his law to imitation, using Milgram's gawking experiment. In this experiment various numbers of confederates stood on a street corner in New York craning and gawking at the sky. The results showed that more confederates meant more gawkers, and the change became increasingly insignificant as more confederates were present. In a study Latané and Harkins conducted on stage fright and embarrassment, the results also followed the psychosocial law showing that more audience members meant greater anxiety and that the greatest difference existed between 0 and 1 audience members.

12 The third rule states that the number of targets plays a role in social impact. That is, the greater number of targets in a social situation causes the social impact to be divided amongst all of the targets. This rule relates to diffusion of responsibility, in which individuals feel less accountable as the number of people present increases. In emergency situations, the impact of the emergency is reduced when more people are present. If you are one of two people you have a fifty percent responsibility, but if you are one of fifty people around you have a two percent responsibility to the situation at hand. Each individual in a group puts in less effort than if he or she were acting alone.

### **Contemporary research**

13 In 1985 Mullen analyzed two of the factors that Latané associated with Social Impact theory. Mullen conducted a meta-analysis that examined the validity of the source strength and the source immediacy. The studies that were analyzed were sorted by the method of measurement used with the self-reported in one category and the behavior measurements in the other category. Mullen's results showed that the source strength and immediacy were only supported in cases in which tension was self-reported, and not when behavior was measured. He thus concluded that Latané's source strength and immediacy were weak and lacked consistency. Critics of Mullen's study, however, argue that perhaps not enough studies were available or included, which may have skewed his results and given him an inaccurate conclusion.

14 A study conducted by Constantine Sedikides and Jeffrey M. Jackson took another look at the role of strength, immediacy and size within social impact theory. This study was

conducted in a bird house at a zoo. In one scenario, an experimenter dressed as a bird keeper walked into the bird house and told visitors that leaning on the railing was prohibited. This was considered the high-strength scenario because of the authority that a zookeeper possesses within a zoo. The other scenario involved an experimenter dressed in ordinary clothes addressing the visitors with the same message. The results of the study showed that visitors responded better to the former scenario, with fewer individuals leaning on the railing after the zookeeper had told them not to. The study also tested the effect that immediacy had on social impact. This was done by measuring the incidences of leaning on the rail both immediately after the message was delivered and at a later point in time. The results showed that there were fewer people leaning on the rails immediately after the message. The visitors in the bird house were studied as members of the group they came with to determine how number of targets would influence the targets' behavior. The group size ranged from 1 to 6 and the results showed that those in larger groups were less likely to comply with the experimenter's message.

15 Kipling D. Williams, and Karen B. Williams theorized that social impact would vary depending on the underlying motive of compliance. When compliance is simply a mechanism to induce the formation of a positive impression, stronger sources should produce a greater social impact. When it is an internal motive that induces compliance, the strength of the source shouldn't matter. Williams and Williams designed a study in which two persuasion methods were utilized, one that would evoke external motivation and one that would evoke internal motivation. Using these techniques, experimenters went from door to door using one of the techniques to attempt to collect money for a zoo. The foot-in-the-door technique was utilized to evoke the internal motive. In this technique, the experimenter would make an initial request that was relatively small, and gradually request larger and larger amounts. This is internally motivated because the target's self-perception is altered to feel more helpful after the original contribution. The door-in-the-face technique, on the other hand, involves the experimenter asking for a large amount first; and when the target declines, they ask for a much smaller amount as a concession. This technique draws on external motivation because the request for a concession makes one feel obliged to comply. The experiment was conducted with low-strength and high-strength experimenters. Those who were approached by higher-strength experimenters were more likely to contribute money. Using the different persuasion approaches did not produce statistically significant results; however, it did support Williams and Williams hypothesis that the strength of the experimenter would heighten the effects of the door-in-the-face technique, but have minimal effect on the foot-in-the-door technique.

## QUESTIONS

- 1- Match the given types of social responses with the situations given. Which type of response does each situation exemplify? (two are extra)

*Types of social responses:*

- a. Compliance
- b. Conversion
- c. Convergence
- d. Independence
- e. Anticonformity

*Situations:*

1. Galileo defended heliocentrism; while the Church and the majority of educated people subscribed to the Aristotelian geocentric view that the earth was the center of the universe and that all heavenly bodies revolved around the Earth. The Catholic Church persecuted Galileo for abandoning the geocentric view of the solar system; however, Galileo would not give up his view as he believed he was right. [.....]
2. Some minority parents in the USA attending a parent-school association meeting stated that they agreed with other parents on the negative effects using their native language, Spanish, at home would have on their kids' academic achievement- only because they did not wish to stand out. In fact they believed being bilingual would stimulate academic achievement [.....]
3. When asked why he supported Obama-care, Roberts said he had always been in total agreement with Obama's ideas, and that was the reason why he volunteered to work for Obama campaign. [.....]

2-

2a- Based on the results reported by Bon and Smith; Eagley, Wood, and Fishbaugh; and Reitan and Shaw, which scenario below do you think would produce the highest degree of conformity by the person involved?

- a) A Japanese woman interacting with an all-female group
- b) A European man interacting with a group that involves participants from both sexes
- c) A woman from the USA interacting with a group that involves participants from both sexes
- d) A Brazilian woman interacting with a group that involves participants from both sexes

2b- Based on the results reported by Eagly and Chryala, in which of the following research designs would you expect to find gender differences in conformity to group opinions?

- a) 30-year-old women and 30-year-old men, not under surveillance
- b) 30-year-old women and 30-year-old men, under surveillance
- c) 15-year-old women and 15-year-old men, under surveillance
- d) 15-year-old women and 15-year-old men, not under surveillance

3- Answer the following questions (3a and 3b) based on social impact theory proposed by Bibb Latané.

3a- Which of the statements below are true and which are false based on social impact theory?

All other things being equal...

- a) a professor will have more social impact on a student than a friend of him. T / F
- b) if a student must perform in front of a professor and another professor is added the social impact is twice what it was with only one professor. T / F
- c) if a teacher gives instructions through e-mail, he has more social impact than when he gives instructions in the classroom. T / F

3b- "Some students have the task of working collectively on a paper for a course. They will receive one grade for the paper. Some students in the class do not make much of an effort working on the group paper even though they made an effort on other assignments in which they worked alone."

What term used in the text explains students' making little effort on the group paper?

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4- Which parameter(s) in Latané's social impact theory were confirmed by Sedikides and Jackson's study? Put a ✓ across the parameter if it is supported; if put a ✗ if it is not.

- a) Strength [ ]
- b) Immediacy [ ]
- c) Size [ ]

5- Which of the persuasion techniques used in William and William's experiment is the student in the following conversation using?

**Student:** Ms Martı, could you postpone the due date to Friday, because none of us thinks he will have finished by Friday.

**Instructor (smiling) :** I think, I can. I expect you to come up with exceptional papers after all.

**Student:** It would be perfect if we could have the weekend, too. We have other classes and assignments on weekdays.

**Instructor:** OK, then, but if you do not submit them next Monday, I will not accept any late assignments and will give 0 (zero).

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**REFERRALS**

6- the former (par. 4) .....

7- it (par 15) .....

