New directions in research on well-being: psychological process in everyday contexts

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What is Conformity?

- **Conformity** is a type of social influence involving a change in belief or behaviour in order to fit in with a group.

- This change is in response to real (involving the physical presence of others) or imagined (involving the pressure of social norms / expectations) group pressure.
Varieties of Conformity

- Compliance
- Obedience
- Acceptance
Compliance

- Conformity that involves publicly acting in accord with an implied or explicit request while privately disagreeing.
Obedience

Acting in accord with a direct order or command

Differences:

Conformity: when individuals change their behavior to go along with the group even if they do not agree with the group.

Obedience: change of behavior to please an authority figure or to avoid aversive consequences.
Acceptance

- Conformity that involves both acting and believing in accord with social pressure.
Classic Conformity and Obedience studies

1. Sherif’s Studies of Norm Formation
2. Asch’s Studies of Group Pressure
3. Milgram’s Obedience Experiments
• Group pressure may take different forms, for example bullying, persuasion, teasing, criticism, etc.

• **Conformity** is also known as majority influence (or group pressure).

• The term **conformity** is often used to indicate an agreement to the majority position, brought about either by a desire to ‘fit in’ or be liked (normative) or because of a desire to be correct (informational), or simply to conform to a social role (identification).
Sherif (1935) Autokinetic Effect Experiment

• **Aim:** Sherif conducted an experiment with the aim of demonstrating that people conform to group norms when they are put in an ambiguous (i.e. unclear) situation.

• **Method:** Sherif used a lab experiment to study conformity. He used the autokinetic effect – this is where a small spot of light (projected onto a screen) in a dark room will appear to move, even though it is still (i.e. it is a visual illusion).
• When participants were individually tested their estimates on how far the light moved varied considerably (e.g. from 20cm to 80cm).

• The participants were then tested in groups of three.
• Sherif manipulated the composition of the group by putting together two people whose estimate of the light movement when alone was very similar, and one person whose estimate was very different.

• Each person in the group had to say aloud how far they thought the light had moved.
Results: Sherif found that over numerous estimates (trials) of the movement of light, the group converged to a common estimate.

- The person whose estimate of movement was greatly different to the other two in the group conformed to the view of the other two.
- Sherif said that this showed that people would always tend to conform.
- Rather than make individual judgments they tend to come to a group agreement.

Conclusion: The results show that when in an ambiguous situation (such as the autokinetic effect), a person will look to others (who know more / better) for guidance (i.e. adopt the group norm).

- They want to do the right thing, but may lack the appropriate information.
- Observing others can provide this information.
- This is known as informational conformity.

Conformity!
Initially, they differ; but over trials, they converge
TAKE HOME MESSAGE: Guard against group member conformity
Solomon Asch (1951) - experiment

- Solomon Asch conducted an experiment to investigate the extent to which social pressure from a majority group could affect a person to conform.

- He believed that the main problem with Sherif’s (1935) conformity experiment was that there was no correct answer to the ambiguous autokinetic experiment.

  *How could we be sure that a person conformed when there was no correct answer?*

- Asch devised what is now regarded as a classic experiment in social psychology, whereby there was an obvious answer to a line judgment task.

- If the participant gave an incorrect answer it would be clear that this was due to group pressure.
Experimental Procedure

Asch used a lab experiment to study conformity, whereby 50 male students from Swarthmore College in the USA participated in a ‘vision test.’

Using a line judgment task, Asch put a naive participant in a room with seven confederates/stooges.

The confederates had agreed in advance what their responses would be when presented with the line task.

The real participant did not know this and was led to believe that the other seven confederates/stooges were also real participants like themselves.
• Each person in the room had to state aloud which comparison line (A, B or C) was most like the target line.

• The answer was always obvious.

• The real participant sat at the end of the row and gave his or her answer last.

• There were 18 trials in total, and the confederates gave the wrong answer on 12 trails (called the critical trials).

• Asch was interested to see if the real participant would conform to the majority view.

• Asch's experiment also had a control condition where there were no confederates, only a "real participant». 
• Asch measured the number of times each participant conformed to the majority view. On average, about one third (32%) of the participants who were placed in this situation went along and conformed with the clearly incorrect majority on the critical trials.

• Over the 12 critical trials, about 75% of participants conformed at least once, and 25% of participants never conformed.

• In the control group, with no pressure to conform to confederates, less than 1% of participants gave the wrong answer.

Conclusion

• Why did the participants conform so readily? When they were interviewed after the experiment, most of them said that they did not really believe their conforming answers, but had gone along with the group for fear of being ridiculed or thought "peculiar.

• A few of them said that they really did believe the group's answers were correct.

• Apparently, people conform for two main reasons: because they want to fit in with the group (normative influence) and because they believe the group is better informed than they are (informational influence).
THE LIBERATING EFFECTS OF GROUP INFLUENCE

• Perhaps you can recall a time you felt justifiably angry at an unfair teacher but you hesitated to object. Then one or two other students spoke up about the unfair practices, and you followed their example, which had a liberating effect.
# Summary of the Classic Conformity and Obedience Studies

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What’s predicts Conformity?

• Group size
• Unanimity
• Cohesion
• Status
• Public response
• Prior commitment

«We feeling»
Types of conformity

- Compliance. Publicly acting in accord with social pressure while privately disagreeing. This term best describes the behavior of a person who is motivated to gain reward or avoid punishment. On the level of compliance, many experimenters see little difference between animals and humans, because all organisms respond to rewards and punishments.

- Identification. As with compliance, we do not behave in a particular way because such behavior is intrinsically satisfying. Rather, we adopt a particular behavior because it puts us in a satisfying relationship to the person or persons with whom we are identifying. We do come to believe in the opinions and values we adopt, though not very strongly. We want to be like some particular person.

- Internalization (or acceptance). Both acting and believing in accord with social pressure. This is the most permanent, deeply rooted response to social influence. Internalization is motivated by a desire to be right. If the person who provides the influence is perceived to be trustworthy and of good judgment, we accept the belief he or she advocates and we integrate it into our belief system.
Why conform?

- **Normative influence** is **conformity** based on one's desire to fulfill others' expectations and gain acceptance.

- **Informational influence** is **conformity** under acceptance of evidence about reality which has been provided by others.

(Myers, 2009)
Who conform?

- Personality
- Culture
- Social roles
Do we ever want to be different?

Reactance

- A motive to protect or restore one’s sense of freedom. Reactance arises when someone threatens our freedom of actions.
- The theory of psychological reactance— that people act to protect their sense of freedom—is supported by experiments showing that attempts to restrict a person’s freedom often produce an anti-conformity “boomerang effect”.

Asserting Uniqueness

- Individual who have the highest “need for uniqueness” tend to be the least responsive to majority influence.
• I usually sabotage myself when...