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## Social psychology experiment conformity

President John F. Kennedy and some of his main advisers met in March 1961 to discuss a plan of the Central Intelligence Agency for the invasion of Cuba. The group's consent was to proceed with the invasion. At least one councilman, Arthur Schlesinger, had serious doubts about the wisdom of the plan, but did not strongly support for his position. In a laboratory experiment, Solomon Asch brought together university students and told them they would attend a study on visual perception. Their task was to match the length of a standard line against three lines of comparison. This was easy to do, since only one of the comparison lines was the same length as the norm. Each group actually contained only a real participant. The other members of the group were confederates that they were responsible for unanimity giving incorrect answers to most tests. The real participant responded later and was then exposed to group pressure with the incorrect majority about 33% of the time, while the control participants made mistakes less than 1% of the time. Both Schlesinger and Asch experiment participants opposed a unanimous group of peers. They were placed in a conflict between saying what they really and agree with the other members of the group. They solved this conflict by conforming to the group. Definition of Conformity Conformity occurs when a person changes his behavior or attitude to make him more similar to the behavior or attitude of a group. It is important to note that compliance can occur without the group that wishes to exert influence on, or monitor, the individual, until the person knows the position of the group and wants to agree with it. In fact, it is not even necessary that the group be aware of the existence of the individual. (For these reasons, the pressure of the term group is used to indicate only that an individual perceives that a group does not agree with its position). Types of compliance and non-compliance Define compliance as change to a group is useful, because it implies that group influence has actually occurred. I mean, we'd probably feel confident that a person was influenced by a group if he initially disagreed with the group and then moved towards it. This would be particularly true if other people who have maintained the same initial position, but who were not exposed to group pressure, did not move towards the group position. On the contrary, if we only knew that an individual currently agrees with a group, we would not be sure that group influence was the reason. The individual may have arrived independently of the group's position without knowing that the group members have thought or wished to be similar to them. Obviously, we wouldn't want to widespread practice of wearing coats in winter as conformity, if, as it seems most likely, people independently decide to wear coats to keep warm. Although it is generally a good idea to define compliance in terms of change, this criterion may cause problems in some cases. For example, a person may independently agree with a group position, be tempted to abandon this position, but keep it due to group pressure. Here, compliance would be manifested by the refusal to change. The change criterion is also problematic when people show a delayed compliance (which moves towards a group position long after group pressure occurs). In this case, it is difficult to detect the relationship between group pressure and response to this pressure, even if the report exists. Another important problem in defining compliance concerns the distinction between public and private agreements. The public agreement (or compliance) refers to the individual's behavioral change towards the group's position. For example, if the individual initially opposed abortion rights, he learned that the group supported abortion rights, and publicly went with the group, the person would show compliance. The private agreement (or acceptance) refers to the attitude change of the individual towards the position of the group. For example, if the private opinion of the person towards abortion rights became more favorable after learning the group's position, the person would show acceptance. The distinction between the public and private agreement is important, because it has implications for how a person will behave if the group is not present to monitor its behavior. Consider the case of an individual who conforms to the group at a public level but does not agree with its position at a private level. Since this response model is often produced by the desire for acceptance of the group, we do not expect the person to continue to support the position of the group if he was not present to monitor his behavior. On the contrary, consider the case of an individual who conforms both at public and private levels. This person, who apparently really believes in the position he is doing, should continue to support this position even if the group was not present, just like there are different forms of conformity, so there are different forms of non-compliance. Two of the most important are independence and anti-conformity. Independence occurs when a person perceives group pressure, but does not respond to it at a public or private level. Thus, an independent person "is fast" in the face of disagreement, does not move towards or far from the position of the group. On the contrary, anti-conformity occurs when a person perceives the pressure of the group and responds by moving away from it (at public, private, or both). Thus, an anti-conformist becomes more extreme in its initial position when faced with disagreement, in a true sense, than is susceptible to group pressure as is the conductor. The only difference is that the anticonformer moves away from the group, while the conductor moves towards it. Reasons Underline Conformity Why do people respond to group pressure? Two main reasons have been proposed. The first is based on the desire of people to hold the correct convictions. Some beliefs can be verified by comparing them with an objective physical standard. For example, we can verify our belief that the water boils at 100 degrees Celsius by putting a thermometer in a water pan, heating the water and reading the thermometer when the water begins to boil. On the contrary, other beliefs (for example, the United States should reduce its nuclear supply) cannot be verified against objective physical standards. To determine the validity of such convictions, we must compare our beliefs with those of other people. If others agree with us, we trust in the validity of our convictions; if others do not agree, we lose confidence. Since disagreement frustrates our desire to verify our beliefs, we are motivated to eliminate it whenever it occurs. One way to do this is to change our position towards the position of others, that is, to conform. This analysis suggests that when people are not sure about the validity of their beliefs and think that the group is more likely to be correct than them, they conform to reduce uncertainty. By doing so, they will show the informative influence, which is generally assumed to produce public acceptance and compliance. The informative influence is more common in some conditions than others. For example, people show more compliance when they are working on a difficult or ambiguous task, when they have doubts about their task competence, and when they think that other members of the group are highly competent on the task. In such cases, it is not surprising that people feel dependent on others to validate their beliefs and conform accordingly. A second objective at the basis of conformity is the desire to be accepted by other members of the group. When people want to be welcome and believe that other members will respond favorably to compliance (and unfavorably to non-compliance), they conform to win approval. By doing so, they will show the normative influence, which is generally assumed to produce public compliance but not private acceptance. In accordance with this idea, evidence indicates that people who deviate from group consent generally anticipate rejection from other members of the group. And they're often right. The members of the group do not love and refuse people who refuse to conform. Not all must arouse the same amount of hostility, however. The amount of such hostility depends on several factors, including the end and content of the position of the deviate, the reasons that presumably submit the behavior of the deviate, the state of the deviate and the group norms relating to how the deviates should be treated. As the informational influence, the regulatory influence is more common in some conditions than others. For example, people working for individual goals are more likely to assume that other members will be angry (and therefore punish) their deviance. It should be noted, however, that if members of groups of common objectives believe that compliance will harm the possibilities of their group to achieve its goal, they conform very little. A second factor which increases the regulatory influence is the monitoring of other members of the group. Since others can only provide rewards and punishments based on their own behavior if they observe this behavior, people should be more concerned about the reactions of others (and therefore more likely to show the regulatory influence) when their behavior is public rather than private. In accordance with this reasoning, people conform more when their answers are known to other members of the group than when they are not known. Reduce compliance: The role of social support Asch has found that it could drastically reduce compliance (i.e. increase independence) in its experimental situation with a simple change of procedure. In having only one confederate, which responded before the naive participant, distorting from the wrong majority by correct answers. The presence of this social supporter has reduced the total number of return responses from 33% to 6%. Asch's additional research indicated that the participants were much more independent when opposed by a majority of eight people and had a supporter who when opposed to a majority of three people and had no supporter. The next work by others has shown that social support reduces compliance for many different types of people, including male and female adults and normal and mentally retarded children. Moreover, the ability of a social supporter to reduce compliance to group pressure continues even after the person leaves the situation, until participants judge the same type of stimulus after the leaves of the supporter and this person does not explicitly repudiate his dissent position. Why are social supporters so effective in giving resistance to group pressure? The answer seems to be that it reduces the probability of informational influence and/or legislation. As for informational influence, social supporters can reduce the dependence of group participants to validate their beliefs. Therefore, a supporter who is supposedly competent for the task of group is more effective in reducing compliance with what is a supporter who is supposedly incompetent. This presumably occurs because the competent supporter provides a more credible support for the participant's position. With regard to the regulatory influence, social supporters can lower participants that they will be punished by deviance. As mentioned above, people who distinguish themselves from group consent (i.e., without a supporter) expect to be rejected. However, this fear is reduced by the presence of a supporter who publicly accepts their position. The fear of retaliation may decline because participants believe that the supporter will absorb a part of hostility that would otherwise be directed only to them. A warning is in order, however. If participants believe that members of the group are hostile to the supporter (for example, because they are prejudiced against members of his race), they can be reluctant to "accept" his support and can continue to conform to a high level. This presumably occurs because participants expect an alliance with a stigmatized supporter to eliminate more, rather than less, the punishment from the group. Individual differences: The role of culture This discussion so far has implicitly assumed that a given pressure situation of the group has approximately the same impact on all those who meet the situation. That is, it is assumed that people who differ on such dimensions as age, race, sex and cultural background respond the same way when facing group pressure. In fact, this is not the case, and individual differences can sometimes have powerful effects on the amount and type of compliance that people expose. To illustrate these effects, we consider how people's cultural background affects their responses to group pressure. People in different cultures have different socialization experiences, which can influence how they respond to group pressure. Researchers interested in the impact of culture on behavior often distinguish between two types of cultures: those who emphasize individualism and those who call for collectivism. Individualistic cultures emphasize independence, autonomy and authority. Collective cultures emphasize interdependence, cooperation and social harmony. With regard to the impact of culture on conformity, the evidence indicates that people in collective cultures are more conformist than to individuals in individualist cultures. This presumably occurs because people in collective cultures place more emphasis on joint goals and are more concerned and affected by how others see their behavior than individuals in individualist cultures. Conformity: bad or good? The consequences of conforming to group pressure are worthy of considering, in the light of the common belief that conformity is invariably harmful. In fact, however, compliance can have positive and negative consequences for the individual and group. From the individual's point of view, compliance is often a rational and adaptive response. A person who wishes to respond accurately to a complex and changing environment can be wise to rely on others' opinions, especially when they are more aware of the problem in question. Similarly, a person who wishes to be loved/accepted (regardless of an unusual goal for most people) will often find that compliance is a useful tactic to get acceptance. Of course, compliance can also have negative consequences for the individual. In some circumstances, the individual is more likely to be correct by keeping his position than going with the group. Moreover, even if conformers are generally better liked than deviated, conformers can be rejected if they are considered as strictly accepting to obtain acceptance, and deviates can be rejected for their courage in dissenting by group consent. Conformity can also be disadvantageous if the individual wishes to differentiate him- or herself from others to feel unique. Finally, a person who succumbs to group pressure can come to believe that he or she is weak and without backbone, which in turn can reduce the self-esteem of the person. Not only from their individual but also from the group's point of view, compliance can have both advantages and disadvantages. All groups develop rules, or rules of correct behavior. Although the content of these standards varies between groups, no group can tolerate routine violation of its norms. Compliance with basic standards is essential if the group members must interact predictably and if the group must survive and achieve its objectives. As in the case of the individual, however, compliance is not always beneficial to the group. Sometimes the rules that a group embraces do not change even if which originally produced the norms have changed. In such cases, continuous compliance can be harmful to the group, reducing its ability to achieve its objectives and also threatening its existence. Under circumstances such as these, the group is best served by the deviance directed to meet its real needs than by compliance with obsolete standards. In accordance with this reasoning, groups sometimes recognize the usefulness of deviance and "innovators" reward, which seem motivated to help the group and facilitate the achievement of group objectives. As this discussion suggests, the question whether compliance is bad or good is complex. The answer depends on the knowledge of many specific factors that may vary from situation to situation, as well as value judgments about the relative importance of contrasting and often equally valid objectives. Conformity research is not enough on its own to solve value issues. However, such research provides information that helps us to ask these questions intelligently. References: Allen, V. L. (1965). Situation factors in accordance. A. L. Berkowitz (Ed.), Advanced in experimental social psychology (Vol. 2, pp. 133-175). New York: Academic Press. Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and subjugation to group pressure: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority. Psychological monographs, 70 (9, Whole n. 416). Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). Social influence: compliance and compliance. Annual Report55, 591-621. Deutsch, M. & Gerard, H. B. (1955). A study on social influences and information on individual judgment. 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