Chapter 8- Conformity, Compliance and Obedience

Objectives

1) knowledge about various forms of social influence, such as social facilitation, social loafing, conformity, compliance, and obedience.

2) An explanation for social loafing.

3) An understanding of why people conform and obey.
Objectives, continued

4) Knowledge about tactics used to gain compliance

5) An understanding of the dangers of excessive conformity, such as groupthink

6) An understanding of how social influence occurs unintentionally

7) An examination of nonconformity and innovation
Putting common sense to the test
True or False?

• When all members of a group give an incorrect response to an easy question, most people most of the time conform with that response

   False.

• In Asch’s classic conformity experiments, respondents conformed only about a third of the time.
Putting common sense to the test
True or False?

• As the number of people in a group increases, so does their impact on an individual.

False.

• Increasing group size boosts the impact on an individual only up to a point, beyond which further increases have very little effect.
Putting common sense to the test
True or False?

• In experiments on obedience, most participants who were ordered to administer severe shocks to an innocent person refused to do so.

False.

• In Milgram’s classic research, 65% of all participants obeyed the experimenter and administered the maximum possible shock.
Putting common sense to the test
True or False?

• Conformity rates vary across different cultures and from one generation to the next.

True.

• Research shows that conformity rates are higher in cultures that are collectivistic rather than individualistic in orientation, and values change over time even within specific cultures.
Putting common sense to the test
True or False?

• An effective way to get someone to do you a favour is to make a first request that is so large the person is sure to reject it.

True.

• This approach, known as the door-in-the-face technique, increases compliance by making the person feel bound to make a concession.
Chapter 8 Outline - Conformity, Compliance, & Obedience

Part 1 - The effects of mere presence
• Social Facilitation
• Arousal
• Social Loafing

Part 2 - Conformity
• Studies by Asch and others
• Why do people conform?
• Does group size make a difference?

Part 3 - Compliance and Obedience
• Compliance Without Pressure
• Obedience - Milgram’s Research
• Groupthink
Outline Part 1

The effects of mere presence

• Social Facilitation

• Arousal

• Social Loafing
Everyday example:

Marshall Applewhite:

- Heaven’s Gate cult convinced 38 people to commit mass suicide in April, 1997

- What social influences could have operated to produce such destructive behavior?

- One member explained “All of us at this time are finding ourselves aligning with others of common mind.”

- On the other hand, a cult expert argued that Applewhite had controlled their minds:

- “These people were pawns in his personal fantasy.”
• Individuals influence one another in a variety of ways

• most basic form of social influence is due to the mere presence of others

Social facilitation

• Any increment of individual activity resulting from the presence of others

• can result in improved or impaired behavior

• people can perform a simple task or well-learned task better in the presence of others, but the presence of others interferes with learning a new or novel task.
Arousal

- Presence of others may increase arousal (i.e. heightened state of physiological activity that enhances general reactivity that enhances general reactivity of the individual)

- Can either facilitate or interfere depending on the situation

Social Loafing

- decrease in individual effort due to the presence of others
Social Loafing

Sound Pressure vs. Group Size

- Cheering
- Clapping
Summary

1) presence of others heightens physiological arousal only if the individual is performing a complex task

2) The presence of others increases the speed of simple task performance and decreases the speed of complex task performance

3) the presence of others impairs the quality of complex performance and slightly facilitates the quality of simple performance

4) social facilitation effects are unrelated to the performer’s evaluation apprehension
Outline Part 2 - Conformity

Conformity:

• Studies by Asch and others

• Why do people conform?

• Does the size of the group make a difference?
Conformity

• The outcome of interpersonal influence accompanied by a reduction in the variability of the behavior in question

• autokinetic effect - a stationary light begins to move

• Sherif (1936, 1937)

• subjects’ estimates of light movement started out quite different, then became similar

• Studies of Asch
Study of Conformity using the Autokinetic Effect (Sherif, 1936)
Conformity

• Asch
Conformity applied to work…

- Conformity as the outcome of interpersonal influences

![Graph showing conformity over time](image)

**Time 1 (Early)**

- Number of Workers
  - Low
  - Mean production
  - High

**Time 2 (Late)**

- Number of Workers
  - Low
  - Mean production
  - High
Why do people conform?

• Need for social approval and disapproval

• need for information

• social validation

• self-esteem
Group size and Conformity
Latene (1981)

• social influence increases with the immediacy and size of the group

• “social impact theory”

• but there are diminishing increments with increasing numbers: the second person has less social impact that the first, etc.
Does the size of the group make a difference?

• There appears to be a limit.

Sex differences?

• Inconsistent results

Cultural Differences?

• Some cultural differences (collectivistic versus individualistic)

• Original Asch studies
Crowd Effects

Size of stimulus crowd

Percent Passersby

0 1 2 3 5 10 15

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90
Effects of Others on Task Performance
Competition and coacting
(Carment, 1970)
Outline Part 3

Compliance Without Pressure
• The foot-in-the-door technique
• The door-in-the-face technique
• The low-ball technique

Obedience
• Milgram’s Research

Dangers of excessive conformity
• Groupthink
Compliance without pressure

• Compliance = acquiescent behavior in response to a direct request

• 4 tactics employed to enhance performance

1) The foot-in-the-door technique

• an individual who agrees to carry out a small request is subsequently more likely to agree to carry out a larger request
2) The door in the face technique

• variation of the foot in the door technique

• first request is made so extreme that the target is almost certain to refuse…

• second request is considerably smaller and more reasonable and thus more likely to comply

3) The low-ball technique

• a means of inducing someone to carry out a requested act by first requesting him/her to carry out the act, and only then increasing the cost of fulfilling the request

4) Guilt
Obedience

- When the request is a command, and the requester is a figure of authority, the resulting influence is called *obedience*

Milgram’s Research: Forces of Destructive Obedience

- In a series of experiments, participants were ordered by an experimenter to administer increasingly painful shocks to a confederate

- Sixty-five percent obeyed completely, but felt tormented by the experience.
• Obedience levels are influenced by various situational factors, including a participant’s physical proximity to both the authority figure and the victim.

• Two aspects of Milgram’s procedure also contributed to the high levels of obedience:
  1) participants did not feel personally responsible, and
  2) the orders escalated gradually

• In more recent studies, people exhibited high rates of obedience when told to inflict psychological harm on another person
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immediacy Level</th>
<th>Characterization</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>No feedback at all from victim</td>
<td>M = 450V 100% STL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Victim pounds on wall at 300 volts</td>
<td>M = 405V 65% STL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Baseline: Audible protests from next room</td>
<td>M = 370V 63% STL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Like Baseline plus victim visible in same room</td>
<td>M = 310V 40% STL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher forces victim’s hand down onto shock plate</td>
<td>M = 265V 30% STL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Experimenter gives directions by telephone</td>
<td>M = 270V 20.5% STL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No orders from experimenter; teacher has free choice in choosing shock levels</td>
<td>M = 45V 2.5% STL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immediacy describes how ‘socially close’ the victim appears to the subject. M is the mean maximum shock level for subjects in this group. STL means ‘shock to limit’ and the limit is 450 volts.
Dangers of excessive conformity

“Groupthink”

• tendency of a highly cohesive and elitist group to achieve a rapid consensus without dissent or outside influences