

# Conformity assignment

Psychology



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This is just whom we are as individuals- how we are wired. We don't want to risk standing out and being ridiculed or singled out. Sure, we want to be unique and remembered, but not in any way that makes people think we are "weird." Conformity has been tested for several decades in several different experiments. The one we are most familiar with and read in our textbooks is Asch's line experiment. His results showed that 75% of participants conformed at least once during the study. Even when the subject knew the rest of the group was wrong they still gave the wrong answer!

The reason being possibly being because they were afraid to speak up since they were the only one who knew the right answer. There are many different factors that are linked to why people conform such as group size, group unanimity (like in the Asch example), and the desire to be liked to name a few. People often conform out of fear of being rejected or criticized. Well, I decided to come up with my own experiment to see for myself the power that conformity has on different people.

It took me a while to figure out what I wanted to do because I can be a bit shy so I knew it would be hard for me to be serious and not laugh while performing a certain behavior that isn't exactly normal. I finally thought of something that wasn't going to be so "out-there" for me. I decided that I would put up a couple signs on doors that say "Please take off shoes before entering." I put them on doors of our library here on campus (Drinks), the entrance of my church, and an AT&T store in Teats Valley. I brought along a few of my friends so I wouldn't be the only one making a fool of myself!

I made two signs that I was able to laminate that actually looked pretty legitimate. Before we started, I made sure to go inside each place and let the one of the employees know what I was doing. They all thought it was pretty funny and I'm sure they were glad for some entertainment. The first place for my experiment was Drinks library. I decided to go over on a Monday afternoon when I knew there would be plenty of people going in and out but not so many where some might catch on to the experiment. I put up the signs while no one was really watching and then waited until several people were walking towards it.

I started walking in front of a couple who were on their way in along with one of my accomplices and when we approached the sign, we gave a little look of confusion but proceeded to take off our shoes and head inside. Our first trial run was surprisingly successful. The couple looked absolutely dumbfounded as they watched us take off our shoes but after we went in what did they do? They took off their shoes as well! As soon as they walked in we told them what we were doing and they couldn't believe they actually fell for it.

I asked them why they did it and they said they didn't even know. They were just afraid they would be the only ones who didn't have their shoes off. We did a few more trial runs at the library and every single time but once the students took off their shoes because they watched my friends and I do it first. The one instance in which we didn't get a response was when two upperclassmen guys followed behind us and said they didn't care if they got in trouble or not- they were not going to take off their shoes to go in the library! I had to give them credit for not going along with us.

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Everyone that did take off their shoes said that they were really confused and knew that this might be some sort of joke but they still did it anyways just because two or three people did it with no shame first. Call it peer pressure or whatever you want, but the power of conformity certainly proved itself powerful at our college campus, which is exactly what I expected. The next place I took everyone was at my church (Gateway Christian) in SST. Albany. We did this experiment on Wednesday evening when we had people coming in for small groups.

My dad is the senior minister so I made sure he was in on it. I wouldn't let him participate though because I knew his high authority would definitely influence people whether they believed it or not. So instead, we all waited in our cars in the parking lot for people to start coming in. I wanted to see if me being the preacher's daughter would have any influence on whether or not people followed my behavior. Well, they did. In fact my first "victims" happened to be three older women that have known me basically my whole life and when they saw me take off my shoes they went ahead and did too!

I almost stopped them because I felt bad but I waited until they were inside and could sit down to put them back on. I was afraid they would be upset but they actually thought it was pretty funny (thankfully). I did it again by myself and a whole family with two small children all took off their shoes as well. I didn't even know these people all that well. The next time we waited until a bunch of people were coming in at the same time and I stayed in my car and watched as three of my friends went before them and took off their shoes.

This time, it took them a little while longer to join in but after discussing it with each other, they eventually all did. There was not one person that didn't take off their shoes. I knew being at church might be a factor in whether or not people conformed or not. Since most people were regular attendees, they probably just thought it was something they were doing as part of the service. The last place I took this experiment was to an AT store in Teats Valley. I picked this place because I knew there would most likely only be one or two people entering at a time.

We actually waited in the parking lot for about thirty minutes before anyone even showed up. I went by myself for the first run and I was actually pretty nervous this time. It was a mom and her young teenage daughter and I was already taking my shoes off right when they were stepping out of the car so they would just see me do it without having to feel awkward with me standing right in front of them. I was sneakily watching them from inside and they paused at the door and waited a few seconds before they walked right on in without taking their shoes off.

I was a little surprised but I think the fact that I wasn't right there with them made a difference. The second run I had two of my friends do it with me and we waited even longer for another person to come along. When a man finally did, the three of us got out of my car just as he was and went along with the act just as normal. We gave a little confused face and kind of talked among ourselves asking what the deal was and then finally took off our shoes and went inside. The man almost immediately took his off just as we did. It was definitely the funniest one yet.

The poor guy was so completely confused and you could just tell he did not want to take his shoes off. But even so, he did it without even saying a word. When we talked to him after he said he wanted so badly to just get back in his car and leave but he was afraid we would have made fun of him and he said he wouldn't have went in there with his shoes on if we didn't. So this was a good example we saw of group unanimity. Obviously this guy was outnumbered 3 to 1 and was feeling that pressure building up until finally he gave in and went along with us. Overall, I was pleased with the results I saw.

I did enough trials to see several different results and was able to confirm the reasons I already knew about why or why not people will conform to such unusual behavior. For the library especially, being on a college campus automatically puts you in an environment where you are more likely to go along with everyone else for fear of criticism or ridicule. With the church, people might have been apt to conform to my behavior knowing that my dad is their preacher so whatever I do must be right, right?! Any sense of authority people feel from another in a situation makes them more likely to conform.

Finally, with the AT&T store, the fact that there were three of us and only one of him made him feel the pressure of group size which was why he ultimately gave in. When I was the only one, however, the mother and daughter didn't quite feel as pressured to give in. The very few people that chose not to conform either just didn't care if they were criticized or not or they were on to the whole experiment thing. The guys at the library said that if they hadn't been together, they probably would have followed along and taken off their shoes with us.

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So having a reined to back you up definitely makes a difference. When it comes down to it, taking your shoes off to enter a public place such as a library and cell phone store is just unheard of and if the people would have really thought it through instead of being concerned about what we would think of them, they might have resisted the pressure to conform. This proves that it doesn't really matter how strange a behavior is; if other people do it first, you are most likely going to do the same. We will put ourselves in some of the most uncomfortable, awkward situations just to feel accepted and liked.