

Research findings into conformity



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Conformity is a form of social influence where a person adopts the behaviors, attitudes and values of other members of a reference group. Conformity is a normal process in which everybody adopts to fit in and be liked and many psychologists have completed research into these fields. Deutsch and Gerard claimed that there were two types of conformity. Normative influence is motivated by a desire to fit in with a group and be liked, and informational influence is motivated by a desire to be correct and certain.

A study conducted on conformity was by Asch in 1951 to see if participants would conform to majority social influence and give incorrect answers in a blatantly obvious scenario, in a situation where all but one of the 'participants' were confederates. The participants were shown a vertical line and were asked to call out which other 3 lines was the same as the first line. Asch found that 74% of participants conformed at least once to the unanimous incorrect answer, however 26% of participants never conformed.

Participants conformed even the answer was blatantly because of real or imagined pressures. Criticisms of Asch's study has been that Asch deceived the participant with all the confederates, the study lacks ecological validity as it was conducted in a lab and mundane realism, its also difficult to generalise the findings of the study to real life situations. Also, some have suggested that the participants were conforming to the expectations of the experimenter and not the group.

Possible reasons for the participant's conforming could've been lack of confidence in one's own judgment, believing others to have more knowledge than you. Moreover, another study conducted on conformity to social roles is a

notorious study conducted by Zimbardo in 1973. Zimbardo wanted to investigate how readily people would adopt the roles of guard and prisoner in a role play simulation of prison life.

Zimbardo was curious to find out if the brutality and sadistic behaviour often reported about prison guards is due to situational or dispositional factors. Participant's were arrested and blindfolded in their own homes and taken to Stanford university basement, there was a random allocation of roles. Prisoners were given smocks and were only referred to by their number. Zimbardo found that guards humiliated and harassed the prisoners. The study had to be stopped after six days, although it was originally planned for two weeks.