

Group influence on self

Psychology, Psychotherapy



Group Influence on Self from a Classical and Contemporary View Elizabeth H. Dixon PSYCH/555 September 3, 2011 Kelly Topp, Ph. D. Group Influence on Self from a Classical and Contemporary View Human behavior is often strongly affected by other people and groups of people as well as the groups to which a person may belong. Groups usually have established norms that tell its members how they are expected behave as members of the group.

According to Baron, Branscombe, and Byrne (2009), “ Perhaps much more surprising is the fact that often, we are strongly affected by the mere presence of others, even if we are not part of a formal group” (Chapter 11, Effects of the Presence of Others, para. 1). Individuals can also withdraw from groups if they believe that the group is no longer providing their needs or has changed to a point where the group no longer reflects their desires, beliefs, needs, or values. Both of the above-mentioned styles of interactions can greatly affect an individual and how he or she may come to terms within their role of self.

These norms and expectations are a part of group influence and what is known as conformity and obedience. The subject of this paper will compare and contrast the concepts of conformity and obedience, analyze a classical and contemporary study concerning the effect of group influence on the self, and analyze individual and societal influences that lead to deviance from dominant group norms. A Comparison and Contrast of the Concept of Conformity and Obedience Group influence is a result of changes that result from indirect or direct interaction with groups of people.

According to Fiske (2010), “ Social influence broadly encompasses any changes in beliefs, attitudes, or behavior that result from interpersonal <https://assignbuster.com/goup-influence-on-self/>

interaction” (Social Influence: Doing What Others Do and Say, Conceptual Definitions, para. 1). As such, the main influence of social influence is that of norms and roles in interactive settings. Key concepts aid in describing and analyzing the concept of social influence. For the purpose of the subject of this paper, conformity and obedience are two of the concepts that will be discussed. Conformity and obedience are similar in context and meaning; however, each affects an individual differently and has distinct differences when one is to define each concept. Conformity When one defines conformity, he or she must not forget to note that conformity exists in diverse types concerning individuals who are trying to fulfill their needs, wants, and desires. “ Conformity is a form of social influence in which individuals change their attitudes and/or behavior to adhere to a group or social norm” (Shiraev & Levy, 2010, Social Interaction, Conformity, para. 1). Conformity is taught at very early ages. Parents place expectations of behavior on children as early as pre-kindergarten years.

As children begin to socialize with other groups of people, they continue to learn that conformity is the baseline of norms and is “ the unwritten rules of behavior. ” Sometimes conformity happens as a motivation to gain rewards or avoid forms of punishment. This form of behavior is known as compliance, and tends to bring hope to individuals in need. For example, if people are desperate because of a lack of a need, or poverty, they may comply because of what may seem to be a convincing solution to their problems. Another reason that conformity exist is to escape sanctions administered by a group of people.

For example, a person who does not conform to the expectations and rules of a group may receive sanctions, such as fines, against him or her and becomes at risk of ostracism from the group. Along the line of sanctioning, another reason that a person might conform is to remain in the good graces of others by living up to the expectations of others. In this case it is usually true that the "others" represent a majority of people. For example, people visit other countries that have different cultural norms, such as a woman wearing a scarf to cover her face.

As a way to show respect for the culture, a woman may conform to the norms while a visitor within that particular country. Finally, a person may practice conformity because he or she is forced to comply. For an example, if a store is in the process of a robbery, the cashier and store clerk may do whatever the robber tell them to do. Both workers could also be compliant because they may be in a situation in which they are held at gunpoint and does not want to put themselves at a higher risk of being hurt or killed. Obedience People tend to try to interchange to use of the term conformity and obedience.

Although obedience is very similar to conformity, the main difference between the two concepts is the source of the influence, or authority upon each term. Conformity has more to do with social expectations within a group or society, whereas obedience has more to do with influence from authority given by others or figures of authority. "Obedience is a form of conformity when a person simply follows orders given by others. Obedience to authority is defined as following orders given by an authority figure" (Shiraev & Levy, 2010, Social Interaction, Following Orders, para. 1).

When obedience is shown toward another person or group of people, there is a belief that the authority figure has the right to demand actions, give orders, or issue requests. When a daycare worker wants compliance from the children in the daycare, obedience is the term used to describe what the worker wants from the children. When a police officer says to an individual “ stop and put your hands up! ” obedience is about a demand of action from a figure of authority. One way to define the difference of obedience and conformity is by noting that obedience is the result of a deliberate or active form of social influence (Shiraev & Levy, 2010).

In other words, conformity involves more personal choices than obedience, which involves an authority figure telling an individual or others how to behave in a particular way. Studies and research confirm that the concepts of conformity and obedience are similar in that each concept is driven by social interaction and social influences that greatly affect the concept of self. A Classical Study Concerning the Effect of Group Influence on the Self A historically well-known study of the self and the effect of group influence was that of an experiment conducted by a 1950s psychologist named Solomon Asch.

Asch hypothesized that individual judgment is influenced by norms. Asch was interested in the extent that a person may follow or rebel against group expectations and norms. In Asch's experiments, a group of students were informed that they were to participate in a vision test. One subject was not told that the other participants were assistants of the experimenter (confederates). In the beginning of the experiment, the confederates were

answering questions correctly, but eventually began to answer the questions incorrectly.

The test subject knowingly had the correct answers but eventually began to answer the questions incorrectly. It became obvious that the individual was trying to conform to the participants who answered the question incorrectly. Findings of the Classical Study Nearly 75 % of the participants in these experiments went along with the other participants of the group at least once. The results indicated, along with the trial experiments, conformity approximately one-third of the time. Asch also found that the size of the opposing participants affected conformity as well.

If the opposing is the majority, regardless of the number in the group, subjects conform just as easily as they would if the group is much larger in number. The experiments also showed the effect of group number and conformity. In the experiment when there was a presence of three or more confederates, the level of conformity was more significant and obvious than the presence of one or two confederates. When more confederates was given the incorrect answer, while one confederate gave the correct answer, the level of conformity was dramatically lowered to between 5 to 10 %.

Later studies have also supported this finding suggesting that social support is a valuable tool in decreasing or combating conformity (Morris & Miller, 1975). Limitations or Shortcomings with the Study The Asch experiments was criticized and believed to have limitations because critics of the experiment believed that participants had specific reasons in choosing to conform. According to some critics, the individuals may not have had a

desire to conform to the group and that conformity could have occurred because of motivation to avoid any conflict.

Critics also believed that the lab experiments may not have been an accurate reflection of the situations of the real-world. A Contemporary Study Concerning the Effect of the Influence of Obedience on the Self The January 2009 issue of American Psychologist discusses a more contemporary, new study that replicated Milgram's classic obedience experiment (Schaefer, 2011). In Milgram's 1960 experiment, participants were asked to deliver electrical shocks to a person who was known as the " learner" whenever an incorrect answer was given. Realistically, the learner was pretending to be shocked, as was a confederate in the experiment.

The experiment was to prove and determine the willingness of people to obey the commands of a figure of authority. Despite that the learner seemed to be in serious distress, 65% of participants displayed a willingness to deliver the maximum level of shocks to the " learner. " Recently, a psychology professor at Santa Clara University, by the name of Jerry Burger, performed an experiment that replicated Milgram's famous study (Schaefer, 2011). Under the same hypothesis of Milgram's experiment, using modifications and safeguards to protect participants' welfare, Burger repeated areas of the Milgram's experiment with college undergraduates.

Burger's maximum shock level was 150-volts instead of the original 450-volts, and also participants were carefully screened to find whether or not the participants might experience negative reactions to the experiment. Burger also ensured through a screening process that students did not have knowledge of Milgram's study. Findings of the Contemporary Study The <https://assignbuster.com/goup-influence-on-self/>

results of the replication of the experiments showed surprisingly and startlingly similarities to Milgram's original 1960 experiment. The participants, just as in the original experience, showed a high level of willingness to shock the learner.

The most comparable point in the two studies revealed a full obedience measured rate of 70 %, not significantly high, compared to the rate of 82.5 % measured more than 40 years ago. The results of Burger's experiment were high enough to reveal that participants obeyed at the same rate as in Milgram's original study. Limitations or Shortcomings with the Study Critics of Burger's experiment believe there are too many differences and lack of connections between his study and the earlier studies of obedience research to allow precise and useful comparisons within the study.

The extreme differences in the maximum voltage are an example of what the critics view as conceptually unacceptable. However, supporters indicate that it is true that direct comparisons cannot be made when there is a significant difference between the 150-volt maximum of Burger's research and Milgram's 450-volt maximum; however, Burger's procedures can be used to further the exploration of some of the situational variables studied by Milgram, along with other possible additional variables. This further exploration of variables would assist in explanations when analyzing contemporary examples of group influence on the self.

A Contemporary Example of the Effect That Group Influence Has on the Self

A contemporary example of the effect that group influence has on the self is an approach that reminds this writer of a friend that she once had in college. This friend was a freshman that had never been away from home or her

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parents, and for the first time ever, was making decision about her life on her own. This friend, who will be referred to as “ Angela” was bright and ambitious. Angela was so eager to fit in that she was willing to be a friend to anyone.

Although Angela came from a richfamily, she was not the type of person who would “ look down” on others or prejudge others. Angela became friends with a girl that she met in one of her classes. Initially, the newfound friend seemed to like Angela, and both of them liked some of the same things. The new friend who will be referred to as “ Jeannie” was a sophomore, and also from a rich background and quite preppy. Jeannie dressed a certain way, and carried herself a certain way, which was one of the true opposites between her and Angela.

As time went by, including the school summer break, Jeannie and Angela became the best of friends. Upon their return to school, Jeannie introduced Angela to the girls in her sorority. Angela thought that it was a privilege that this prominent sorority seemed to have an interest in her. Angela immediately “ took to” the group of young ladies. Eventually she pledged the sorority and became a member. During this time, this writer was still a friend of Angela; however, this writer noticed that Angela really did change.

Angela altered her behavior and attitude to that of the group members. Angela bought expensive clothing and gadgets just so that she could be just like everyone in her group. Angela started to “ look down” on other students by openly referring to them as “ wanna-be’s” and other terms. Angela would be disrespectful toward members of the other sororities and always seemed to act as if she were better than everyone else. Angela acted as if she had

very much power and authority, and within a year's time, had conformed totally to the behaviors of her sorors.

Angela had other friends, just like this writer, but eventually lost their friendship because of her "snooty" ways. Angela's Transformation and the Conformity Theory This writer's story is an example of the conformity theory in psychology. When Angela altered her behaviors and attitudes to that of the sorority members, she displayed one of the key aspects of the conformity theory known as the normative social influence. Angela openly referred to other people as "wannabe's" and began to "look down" on others, as she continued to follow the aspects of normative social influence.

When normative social influence is exhibited, the influence of others leads one to conform to be accepted and liked by members within the group. The social impact theory is also displayed in this story because Angela became physically closer to the members within the sorority. According to the social impact theory the more important the group is, the closer a person's physical distance becomes to that group. Angela found acceptance of the group's mentality as her behaviors appeared to come naturally. Referent power was another factor in Angela's transformation.

Even though this sorority was not the most likeable, the group was perceived as rich girls from powerful and prominent backgrounds. Eventually Angela became just like the other members of her sorority and therefore, made other friends an outcast in her life. A long time after becoming a member of the sorority, Angela realized how her actions were and how unbecoming it caused her to be. After realizing the true friends she had were out of her life,

and cared to have nothing to do with her, she chose to deviate from her sorority and became an inactive status within her sorority.

The Individual and Societal Influences that Lead To Deviance Sociologists, define the term deviant as “ exhibiting behavior that violates the standards of conduct or expectations of a group or society” (Schaefer, 2011, Chapter 7, Deviance and Social Control, What Is Deviance, para. 1). In the United States, the behaviors of drug users, alcoholics, and mentally ill people are examples of what society views as deviant behaviors. However, there are positive deviations that exist as well.

Some people deviate from the norm to become more of an individual, and different because they may feel like standing up for what they believe versus that of belonging to a group that may seem opposite of the person’s beliefs. If one were to ask one of these people, how they became who they are, there is a strong likelihood that both individual and societal influences lead that person to these deviant behaviors. Individual Influences and Deviance Individual influences that promote deviance may stem from other factors that play a role in how individuals become defiant and deviant.

When it is concerning society being the group in question, researchers agree that the offspring’s actions stem from the individual influences that start from within the home. Within the family, if there is divorce, abuse, and deviant parental behaviors, there becomes a link to delinquency as juveniles and deviance as adults. Genetics and individual abnormalities also have been proven as reasons for deviance toward societal and group norms. It is generally acceptable practice to believe that genetic influences are

significant in producing deviant behavior(s) in society (Carson, Butcher, & Mineka, 1996).

Some people who deviate are not mentally ill or unhealthy, but have higher levels of self-actualization. Self-Actualization is " the highest level of the hierarchy, the level represents the need to be what one potentially is" (Goodman, 1968, p. 2). It is also generally accepted practice to believe that societal influences cause people to deviate from group norms and expectations. Societal Influences and Deviance Expectations such as cultural norms and values could cause a person to deviate from within a group.

A deviant behavior clarifies moral boundaries, facilitates changes in society, encourages social unity, and affirms, as mentioned earlier, cultural norms and values (Carson, Butcher, & Mineka, 1996). Deviance is viewed by sociologists as a behavior engaged in a person by having common sociocultural backgrounds or the same experiences within a culture. In other words, deviant and nondeviant behavior is learned in the same way in that they both are behaviors that are a learned from others who engage in and encourage violation of cultural norms and values.

Another form of a more common societal influence is that of peer pressure. Research has proven that deviant behavior is influenced by the presence or absence of a peer group. Example of Individual and Societal Influences and Deviance An example individual influence of deviant behavior is about the life of a son who became deviant because of behaviors that stemmed from within the home. This boy's deviant mother practiced ineffective parenting and began teaching her son at the early age of five, to be criminally deviant.

Kimes taught Kenny, the younger of two sons, to steal, murder, and commit scams.

Fortunately, Kenny's oldest brother did not follow in his mother's footsteps. Kenny was graduated from high school and enrolled into college. It was in 1998 that Kenny dropped out of college to begin with his mother, a nationwide journey that initially seemed to have no particular purpose. The two made huge purchases using bad checks and fake identifications and were scamming even more to have money. The two of them murdered the victims of their biggest scams, and in July 1998, landed in New York City, where they murdered Irene Silverman.

Mrs. Silverman would be their last victim, after the two of them were infiltrated by the FBI, through a friend who sold Mrs. Kimes the illegal gun that was used to murder Irene Silverman. Sante and Kenny were tried in the spring of 2000 and found guilty of 58 different crimes (Sante) and 60 for Kenny. Sante received a sentence of 120 years and Kenny was sentenced to 125 years. A few months later, during an interview by Court TV reporter, Maria Zone, Kenny attempted to escape by pressing a ballpoint pen into Ms.

Zone's throat and holding her hostage for three hours before being subdued by authorities. Conclusion Many styles of group interaction exist among people. The subject of this paper had discussed the styles of conformity and obedience. There are both classical and contemporary studies that explain the importance of these styles when it concerns the concept of self and group influence. Finally, the discussion of this paper was to analyze individual and societal influences that lead to deviant behavior and deviance from the dominant group norms.

In conclusion, it is safe to state that groups or authority figures have powerful influence on an individual; however, although this may be a fact, there are still individuals who become nonconforming because individual influences and social influences will deviate from society and group expectations and norms. References Baron, R. A. , Branscombe, N. R. , & Byrne, D. (2009). *Social Psychology* (12th ed.). Retrieved from <https://ecampus.phoenix.edu/content/eBookLibrary2/content/eReader.aspx?assetid=dcc36fe5-a546-43aa-a98f-7f22b00d6213&assetmetaid=0e66697f-8e59-426a-9e81-0f11d551f5ad#ch11>. Carson, R.

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