

Example of experiments in social psychology essay

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Milgram's and Asch's Experiments on Conformity and Obedience

Understanding how society impacts individual behavioral patterns is the key to understanding human psychology because it is evident that external influences shape human behavior, opinions, beliefs, and values. Social psychology experiments are designed to clarify the correlations between social influences, such as conformity and obedience, and human behavior. For example, Asch (1951) aimed to show how the majority influences individuals through conformity while Milgram (1963) analyzed how obedience influences personal behavior and moral values. However, it is evident that social psychology research should be careful when constructing the experiments because Asch's experiment lacks a representative sample to derive a valid conclusion while Milgram's experiment is replicable, universal, and can be used in practice.

Introduction to Social Psychology

Social psychology is a field of social psychology that investigates and explains human behavior as a result of both individual mental states and external social situations. Social psychology measures thoughts, emotions, and behavioral patterns in various scenarios to understand how those internal processes change under social influence. In summary, social psychology considers both social and individual processes as determinants of human behavior, but it mainly focuses on how social influence changes individual behavior.

Social influence is a process that affects an individual's emotional, behavioral, or cognitive processes. Conformity and obedience are some of the most dominant areas of social influence research. Conformity is a process that occurs when individuals change their beliefs or behaviors to integrate within a social group. On the other hand, obedience is an imposed form of behavior that derives from authority. Conformity is a personal choice because people decide to integrate within a certain group or submit to peer pressure while obedience is the act of following specific orders from a legitimate authority.

The Asch Study Analysis and Evaluation

Asch (1951) investigated how conformity influences personal opinions and leads to the formation of group norms. The study was an extension of Sherif's study in 1935 because Asch wanted to change the research method. In Sherif's study, there was no correct answer to the question the participants had to answer. Although Sherif noted that a group norm formed and replaced personal judgments when the participants were tested in groups, it was not possible to determine the correct answer and it was not possible to illustrate the full extent of the majority influence in that experiment. Asch (1951) aimed to understand how conformity would influence personal judgment when the answer is obvious.

The study was conducted with 35 naïve participants (NPs) who were told that the experiment is about vision accuracy, and each participant was placed in a group confederates who knew the true aim of the assignment. Asch (1951) used methodological triangulation, so the groups varied in size. The groups

were shown a straight line on one card and three lines on the other. They had to identify which of the three lines is the same in length as the line on the first card, and the NPs answered last to measure their level of conformity with the confederates. Out of 35 NPs, only one NP always chose the wrong answer when the confederates provided the wrong answer. Furthermore, 32 percent of NPs provided a high percentage of incorrect answers while 75 percent provided at least one incorrect answer.

However, the Asch experiment does not appear to be valid, so it is not possible to draw an absolute conclusion or understand its implication in practice. Asch (1951) used an unrepresentative sample because all participants were male sociology students, and other researchers could not repeat the experiment successfully when they used a wider sample in their studies. For example, science and math students showed a low degree of conformity while juvenile offenders showed a high degree of conformity when the confederates were probation officers (Perrin and Spencer, 1981). Apparently, Asch's study did not account for a wide sample and the variety of their backgrounds, so it is not possible to consider the experiment valid and useful in clarifying conformity.

Milgram's Experiment Analysis and Evaluation

Inspired by the extent of the Nazi leadership and influence over the majority of the German population, Milgram (1963) decided to carry out an experiment focused on obedience. He considered that external pressure from a legitimate authority influenced the participants in the holocaust. The

aim of the experiment was to prove that individuals will dismiss their moral values and beliefs when they are required to follow orders from the authority

The NPs were the teachers in the experiment who were required to administer electrical shocks to learners when they failed to answer their questions correctly. All of the 60 NPs believed that they were involved in a learning experiment and that they were teachers by accident while all confederates were the learners. The electrical shocks started at 15 V and increased by 15 V each time the shock was administered. However, in reality, the learners did not experience any shocks, and they were only required to act as if they are receiving those shocks.

Although the NPs began questioning the methods of the experiment at approximately 135 V, 68 percent of them proceeded to shock the learners at 450 V. After debriefing and psychological testing, the NPs understood the true purpose of the assignment and did not show evidence of psychological trauma. In fact, 84 percent of them considered the experiment eye-opening, and they were glad they participated. The methods used in the research suggest that Milgram (1963) combined a variety of triangulation methods to cross-examine the results and obtain a strong finding. As the conclusion of the experiment, Milgram (1963) explained that authorities wield a large amount of power over individuals because social norms and situations can influence individual behavior and moral values through obedience.

The research is considered valid because it is applicable in all societies world-wide. Several replications of the experiment were carried out, and they

showed consistent results in various cultures and societies (Blass, 1991). Even though the percentages varied, it is possible to notice that breaking social norms creates too much anxiety individuals can cope with, and it is possible to understand how events such as the holocaust can occur.

Research by Milgram (1963) explains the scope of the authority's power over individuals, and his findings explain the nature and consequences of obedience. In practical application, educational institutions should focus on developing stronger individuality in people while the authorities should be aware of their power over society and exercise caution in creating social stereotypes to avoid similar situations in the future.

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