

# Group influence

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A group is a combination of more than one individual sharing some values, beliefs, or a set of behaviors. Many individuals together sharing a common goal or need is a group of people. People in a group sharing these common things tend to have interdependent behaviors. Each of the members of a group influences the behavior of another. Individuals will tend to react to situations or have specific behaviors in specific situations guided by a reference group view to those situations.

Groups of people that influence the self are members of the same religion, roommates, school friends, workmates, etc. Groups influence the self in two ways. A group may influence the identity through conformity or obedience. Group influence has many effects on the self. Some of them are positive while others are negative and damaging to the personality.

The aim of this paper is to evaluate group influence and its effect on individual. Group Influence Analysis A group tends to influence the self through conformity, compliance or both. The concepts of conformity and obedience are similar in many ways. Conformity refers to change of behavior by an individual or a group of people so that the behaviors can match that of their peers. Obedience refers to the act of following orders or commands from a person or a group of people.

Both conformity and obedience push people to change their behaviors. Both of them enable people to live harmoniously in the reference group.

Obedience and conformity allow all the people in the society to follow the norm by obeying and conforming to issues that the society considers normality (Milgram, 1963). Although conformity and obedience push people

to change behaviors in favor of a certain group, the concepts work differently. In the case of obedience, a leader or leaders of a certain group gives orders and expects everyone in the group to follow. An individual who does not obey the orders from the leaders may face punishment or face expulsion from the group.

Individuals in a group have no choice but to obey the orders from their leaders. The group expects members to behave and respond in a certain way in specific situations. Many groups have constitutions. A constitution is a set of rules and regulations that guide the values, behaviors, and responses of individuals. It spells out the way members of the group should interact with one another. Once an individual becomes a member of a certain group, the group expects him or her to follow the constitution of the group.

The constitution will thus force the individual to change his or her behavior to remain in the group (Milgram, 1963). The group thus influences the self by requiring the individual to obey the rules in the group's constitution. In the case of conformity, unlike in obedience, no one spells out orders that individuals should follow. The concept of conformity is the case where the individuals in the group feel that they should change their behaviors so that they can match with the behaviors of the majority in the group. Individuals tend to aspire to be like the majority. They tend to follow the crowd other than think in their own way.

Individuals tend to change their behaviors through conformity in two ways. One is compliance and the other one is public acceptance (Milgram, 1963). Individuals want to comply with the norms of the group so they tend to

behave the way most of the members of the group do. To gain public acceptance, an individual should behave in a normal way. A normal way of behaving is the way most people tend to behave. A person who joins a group but has different beliefs, behaviors, and values will tend to change these things so that the members of the group can accept him or her as a member of their group.

One of the classical studies on group influence is the study by Gustave Le Bon. In 1895, Le Bon developed a theory on the effects of group on self. He argued that when people are in a group, they tend to lose their self-thinking and act according to the thinking of the group. Le Bon observed that people in a crowd have an emotionally and intellectually weak behavior. In this case, the group influences people to change their self and act like a group (Abrams, 1989). People in a crowd develop common goals and act in a similar way.

If individuals were acting on their own, then each one of them would act in a different way. A crowd causes people to lose personal responsibility.

Therefore, the loss shifts the attention from self to the group. Individuals thus tend to behave in the mentality of the group influencing the self. Every group attracts individuals due to particular aspects of the group. The aspects attracting people make them emphasize less on self and more on the group.

The individual will act according to the norms of that particular group. A contemporary example of the effect a group has on self is students in a college. When students join college, they make friends and form a group.

The group of youngsters will tend to behave in a way so that they can look cool to others. Youngsters will therefore indulge in alcohol, partying and drug use.

A new student may join the group through another student maybe from home. So that the new student can fit into the group, he or she must behave in the same manner as the other members. The newcomer does not feel any comfortable while in the group if he or she does not take alcohol and drugs or party. The new students will have to do these things so that he or she can feel comfortable in the group. The other members may even force the new one to start behaving in the similar manner to continue being a member of the groups.

In that case, the group will have influenced the self (Aronson, 2008). Gender norms, religion and age norms are some of the individual and societal influences that lead to dominant group norms (Aronson, 2008). A group with majority members of one gender will tend to develop norms that the gender considers normal. For example, if female is the dominant gender in a group, the group will act in a certain way different from the way a male dominated group will act. The society expects a specific gender to behave in a particular way. An influential individual from a certain group might influence others to act according to his or her religious group.

The group thus adopts the religious beliefs of the individual and the beliefs might become a dominant norm in the group. People of a certain age tend to behave in a particular way. A group with majority young people will act according to what the society expects of the young. Such behavior may

become a dominant pattern in the group. Conclusion A group influences the self in many ways.

While communicating and sharing some definite norms, people from the same group tend to behave similarly. The group influences the self through either obedience or conformity. This influence has many effects that are both positive and negative but mostly negative.