

14 - Conformity & obedience

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© SPMM Course 4. Leadership, social influence, power and obedience
Conformity & obedience
Conformity is a process where no explicit requirement is made to do a certain task, but peer influence, and the need for acceptance pushes one to carry out the task. Obedience refers to conditions where the individual is explicitly asked to do a task, and this instruction comes from an authority. Conformity can be either true internalisation of values or compliance externally without changing one's private beliefs. Men conform less than women; people with lower intelligence, poorer ego strength, poor leadership abilities and having inferiority feelings conform more often. Sherif used an autokinetic effect (the apparent, false perception of movement of a pinpoint of light in a dark room, aka Phi Phenomenon) to study conformity. Individuals initially provided idiosyncratic responses (individual norms) when asked about the distance moved by the light source. But when subjects were grouped together, individuals compromised on their assessments and gave modified answers, so as to conform to the rest (group norms emerged). Asch used an unambiguous paradigm (length assessment test) to study conformity. It was noted that the size of group majority up to 3 to 5 people influenced conformity; a much larger majority did not influence individual decisions. Further, the more unanimous/consistent the majority was, the more the conformity of the rest. Giving opinions privately reduced conformity. Collectivist cultures showed more conformity than nuclear cultures. Can minorities effectively influence the majority? This is possible if the minority is consistent, perceived to be autonomous and having real interest in the issue at hand, appear to have CONFORMITY OBEDIENCE No explicit instruction given Instructed explicitly Peer influence is the source Authorities are the source of pressure Mutually a subject can influence Mutuality absent as it is one Need for acceptance Need for compliance Done by 'example' Done by 'directions.' Factors increasing obedience Factors reducing obedience Authority figure providing instructions Administering by proxy Relieving the subject from responsibility for actions Achieving 'agentic state.' Authoritarian personality of subjects (they obey more!)

Proximity to shocked victim Remoteness of authority Peer rebellion against instructions Increased sense of responsibility for plight of the victim

Revision #1

Created 2026-01-04 20:01:59 UTC by Omar Ayman

Updated 2026-01-04 20:01:59 UTC by Omar Ayman