Obedience and Conformity

Conformity
Changes in perceptions, opinions, or behaviors in ways that are consistent with group norms.

Norms – explicit or implicit “rules” of conduct in a given context.

Two Types of Conformity

Informational – influence due to the belief that others are behaving correctly

Normative – influence due to the fears of negative social consequences of appearing deviant

Informational Influence

Occurs in the presence of ambiguity
You assume that other people are behaving or thinking correctly
Does not involve arousal or discomfort.
You may not even know you’re doing it.

Leads to private conformity

The Sherif (1935) Study (Informational Influence)

Subjects brought into a lab to judge a visual effect involving a moving light
Asked to judge distance light travels

On day 1 they make judgments alone
On days 2 - 4 they make judgments in group
On day 5 they make judgments alone again

Perceived Distances
**Normative Influence**

You think other people are wrong and it is unambiguous.
Involves arousal and discomfort.
Does not lead to private conformity.

**Asch (1956) Study (Normative Influence)**

Subject walks into a room of other subjects (actually all are confederates)
Told it was a visual perception task – they would be judging the lengths of lines
Everyone goes around the room and makes the wrong judgment
It is up to the subject to conform, or give the correct answer and stand apart from the group

**Asch Study Results**

75% had at least some trials where they went along with the group
Only 25% never conformed on a single trial
In a variation where subjects privately wrote down their answers, or in which one confederate said the correct answer, almost no one conformed.

**What were the diff. between the Asch and Sherif studies?**

The Sherif study had an ambiguous phenomenon. It is an example of informational influence
The Asch study had an unambiguous phenomenon. It is an example of normative influence.

**Factors that make people less likely to conform**

Size of group
Awareness of group norms
Allies in dissent
Factors that make people less likely to conform

- Individuals differences
- Age
- Sex
- Culture
- Status

Obedience and Conformity

Obedience is an extreme example of conformity

Obedience

When behavior is influenced due to the direct commands of an authority figure.

The Milgram Study

(A participant’s perspective)

You sign-up for a learning experiment.

Another participant shows up and you are “randomly” assigned to be the teacher.

The learner (a confederate) is led to another room. You get to see the learner being hooked up to an electro-shock machine.

You are given a mild shock as a demonstration.

Before you leave the shock room you overhear the learner say that he has a history of heart problems.

You are told by the experimenter, a man in a lab coat, that you will give the learner shocks when they miss problems (the more they miss, the more severe the shock).

You sit down in front of a machine with 30 switches (from 15 volts to 450 volts which is labeled X X X)

The learner starts out ok, but begins to make more and more errors. VIDEO

As the level of shock goes up the learner begins to protest, asks to leave the study, and screams in pain and agony

At some point you probably suggest ending the experiment.

The experimenter responds by saying, “Please continue”, “You must go on.”, “It is absolutely essential that you continue”, or “You have no other choice; you must go on.”

You are confronted with the decision to walk out of the experiment, or to continue on up the dial…
### Basic Results

Everyone went until at least 300 volts before they stopped (the learner complains of heart problems at 150 volts).

About 65% of participants continued to the end of the dial.

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Milgram had surveyed his colleagues before running the experiment—on average they thought only 1 in a 1000 people would go all the way to the end of the dial.

The actual results shocked the psychological community.

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#### % Who Went All the Way

- **2-3%** - The control condition with no instructions to continue
- **65%** - The basic findings in Milgram’s initial experiment

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#### Variations on the experiment

Most variations were tried to determine if the effects were due to situational factors.

As a community, psychologists thought that obedience would not be as common as it was, so they needed to test the boundary conditions.

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#### Variation Experiments

Do you think that experimenters found gender differences?

What happened when the experiment was in an office building (not a laboratory)?

- **47%** - When study was performed in office building
  - Participants are in a familiar context

What happened when the victim was in the same room?

- **40%** - When victim was in the same room
  - Learner is humanized

What happened when the participants had to touch the “learner”?

- **30%** - When the participant touched the learner
  - Learner is humanized
Variation Experiments

What happened when the experimenter was far away?
20% - When experimenter was in a remote location
Authority is not as imposing

What happened when the experimenter was an ordinary person?
19% - When experimenter was ordinary person
Authority is not as imposing

Variation Experiments

What happened when two confederates rebelled?
10% - When two confederates rebelled
Role-models for defiance – norms are changed

Obedience

Since the Milgram study and variations, there has been little research on the topic of obedience due to ethical concerns.

MAIN POINT – Milgram demonstrated that we all have the potential to be influenced by authority figures to do things we never thought we would be capable of.

According to Milgrim…

People obeyed because:
- The socialization of obedience
- Gradual escalation of voltage

People disobeyed because:
- Interpersonal processes that jam up momentum
- Early resistance prevents rationalization