**Introduction**

Imagine that Jeff attended a play. Although the play was good, it wasn’t remarkable. To Jeff’s great surprise, the audience members began to give the actors a standing ovation. What do you think Jeff would do? If Jeff were like most people, he would also stand, rather than be different from everyone else. This is an example of social influence, in which people behave differently than they normally would due to real or imagined pressure from others.

One type of social influence is conformity. When people conform, their behavior is changed to match the behavior of the group (or the behavioral expectations of the group). By matching the group, we are trying to fit in with the group. For example, if you showed up at a party wearing jeans when everyone else was more dressed up, you may feel embarrassed or even go home to change so that you will conform to the group’s appearance.

Past experimental studies of conformity have demonstrated two possible reasons for conformity. The first reason is because you simply gather information about an unknown situation. Muzafer Sherif (1935, 1937) demonstrated the idea of informational influence in a classic study investigating the autokinetic phenomenon. The autokinetic phenomenon is an optical illusion in which a stationary point of light will appear to move in a completely dark room. Sherif wondered if people’s estimates of the size of the movement of the light could be influenced by the estimates of others. As he predicted, people’s estimates of the length the light were greatly influenced by others. Because it was difficult for people to accurately estimate the amount of movement, participants began to rely on the estimates of others. This is an example of informational influence, in which an individual conforms in order to gain correct information. For example, you may ask your friends what they plan to wear to a party to gain information about what you should wear.

Although we sometimes conform because we are uncertain about the correct way to behave or the correct answer to give, we sometimes conform simply to fit into the group. Going back to the standing ovation example, Jeff knew the play was not worthy of a standing ovation, but wanted to fit in with the audience. This is an example of normative influence. With normative influence, individuals behave like the group in order to be accepted or to fit in.

To create an experimental test of the idea of normative influence, Solomon Asch (1956) designed a laboratory study in which people were put in a situation in which they could either conform to the group (by giving an obviously incorrect answer) or deviate from the group (by giving a correct answer). Asch had a number of confederates (individuals who are secretly trained by and working with the experimenter) and one participant sit around a table, with the participant at the end of the table. Starting at the other end of the table, each person was asked to match a standard line to one of three comparison lines. The
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task was very easy and when participants completed the task alone, they were nearly always able to correctly identify the matching line. However, when Asch had all confederates give the same clearly incorrect answer, many of the participants also gave the incorrect answer. The reason? The participants wanted to fit in with the group and not appear deviant.

In today’s experiment, you will have the opportunity to examine social influence by replicating an opinion survey study by Glenn White (1975). In White’s study, he found that reading the opinions of others influenced people’s opinions. To experimentally manipulate the opinions of others, White used the paper-stooge paradigm. The paper-stooge paradigm uses fictitious data to make participants believe that other people have already answered a questionnaire. The paper-stooge paradigm is similar to using confederates in an experiment; both methods allow the experimenter to standardize the information the participant receives.

Objectives
- To examine the factors that affect conformity
- To introduce the concepts of normative and informational social influence
- To gain familiarity with questionnaire design and administration

Terms
- Conformity
- Normative influence
- Informational influence
- Anchor values
- Confederates
- Paper-stooge paradigm
- Experimental participant
- Control participant
- Hypothesis
- Independent Variable
- Dependent Variable
- Replication study

Study Questions before class
1. What was White’s main hypothesis?
2. What was the general method used by White to test his hypothesis?
3. Why did White do more than one study?
4. What were the factors that might increase the amount of social influence exhibited in White’s paradigm?
Activity I: Hypothesis Generation

The instructor will help the class come up with variables to measure or manipulate and with the dependent variable for our replication of White’s study. Write down the specific hypotheses and variables that the class selects in your lab notebook. Also, write down WHY the class has generated its hypotheses (what is the explanation of the hypothesis?).

**What is your independent variable? What is your dependent variable?**

Activity II: Data Collection

**Method**

**Participants**
During data collection you will work in pairs. Each pair will collect data from 5 participants. Participants will be recruited on campus during the lab session. To be eligible for the study, the participant must be alone somewhere on campus and must be a college student.

**Why do the participants need to be alone?**

**Materials**
Lab members will help the preceptor create the lab materials before the data collection period. You will be creating a number of false surveys, complete with papers-stooges (bogus names and opinions). Be sure to write the names and opinions in a standard pen or pencil color preferably all the same color and the same color as the pen you hand them. (no RED ink please!) Your preceptor will supply you with the surveys and tell you what to write on them.

**Why would having a paper-stooge write in red ink potentially create problems?**

**Procedure**
1. The whole lab should decide on the places teams should go for data collection. This should be noted in lab notebooks.
2. Be sure you place the survey on something hard, such as a clipboard or a notebook, so people can easily write on it. Also, be sure to bring a pen! Select individuals who are alone on campus. For example, select people sitting at a table alone or walking out of the library alone.
3. Randomly assign the participant to a condition. Select the proper survey. Each participant will write on a different survey (make sure you understand the logic behind this procedure).
4. Once you have found a potential participant, walk up to the person and say, “Hi, my name is X. I was wondering if you would mind taking a quick survey for me. It should take less than a minute.”
   If the person says no, say, “Okay. Thanks for talking to me.”
If the person says yes, say, “Thanks! You haven’t already filled out this survey have you?” If the person says yes, say, “Oh, then you don’t need to do it again. Thanks for offering.”

If the person says no, say, “Please read this paragraph carefully and then answer the survey question.” Hand the survey to the participant. Once the participant completes the survey, say, “Thanks for helping me with this project. I really appreciate it!”

If the participant reads the survey and then decides he or she doesn’t want to answer the question, say, “That’s okay. Thanks for looking at the survey for me.”

*If the participant has a question, try to repeat the information written on the sheet—don’t elaborate. Simply read the statement at the top of the sheet.*

**Why are you supposed to read the original statement rather than giving participants an additional verbal explanation?**

5. When you are done collecting data, vigorously cross out the name of the participant to protect anonymity. (Be sure to keep the data, however!)
6. Return to the laboratory to complete the data analysis.
7. Give your data to the instructor, who will collate it.
8. Note any observations you made during data collection in your lab notebook.

**Activity 3: Data Analysis**

**Analysis**
1. If there is time in lab, you can calculate means and do a T-test on the data. If not, you will need to do this outside of lab.
2. Report your results *in a regular sentence* rather than just copying the SPSS tables. Remember the format: X (M = ?, SD = ?) was larger than Y (M = ?, SD = ?) (t(df) = ?, p<.0?).

**Discussion Questions**
1. Describe the result in a more general sentence, and connect it to the hypothesis of the lab.
2. What were some problems with this study? If you could run the study again, what would you do differently?
3. What type of social influence do you think was observed in this study? Why?

**References**

**Required Lab Reading**

If You Want to Know More: Consider taking Psychology 249, Social Psychology

Suggested Readings


Web Links