Contradictory views of conformity

- Is conformity good or bad? Is it adaptive or maladaptive?
- Positive - team player
- Negative - lacking individuality or originality or inadequate
- Nonconformists are often praised by historians after the fact of their conformity, but not at the time by the people whose demands they are refusing to conform to.

Contradictory views of conformity (cont.)

- Adaptive - driving on the correct side of the road
- Maladaptive - Nazi Germany, Nixon’s Whitehouse staff, NASA prior to Challenger accident
- What about peer pressure in high school? Is it adaptive or maladaptive?
- Rebellious teen smoking, staying out late, getting a tattoo, and dating someone parents don’t approve of is not manifesting independence as much as anticonformity because not thinking independently for self, but rather automatically acting contrary to the desires/expectations of others.

Avoiding the groupthink trap

- Note: this is not in your text
- Remain impartial
- Seek outside opinions
- Create subgroups
- Seek anonymous opinions

Definition of Conformity

➢ A change in a person’s behavior or opinions as a result of real or imagined pressure from a person or group of people
Motivation for conformity

- Avoid punishment
- Gain acceptance
- (Fear of punishment or rejection)

Influences on conformity: normative and informational

- Note: this is not in your text
- Normative influence
  - Desire for acceptance
  - Obeying social “rules”
  - I.e. Asch
  - I.e. Milgram—wanting authority approval
- Informational influence
  - In ambiguous situations, look to others for information on how to respond
  - I.e. Milgram—accepting authority view of reality

Social influence

- Change in behavior that one person causes in another, intentionally or unintentionally, as a result of the way the changed person perceives themselves in relation to the influencer, other people and society in general

3 types of social influence

1. Conformity
   - Changing how you behave to be more like others
   - I.e. I notice others are using salt and passing it to the person their left without comment. I conform by doing the same thing

2. Compliance
   - A person does something that they are asked to do by another
   - May choose to comply or not, but the thought of social punishment may lead them to be compliant when really they don’t want to comply
   - I.e. You ask me to pass the salt. I comply by giving it to you

3. Obedience
   - Obeying an order from someone that you accept as an authority figure. Have some choice in compliance, but with obedience believe you don’t have a choice
   - I.e. You tell me to pass the salt. I obey by giving it to you
Asch’s research on conformity

- Subjects asked to judge which of three lines (A–C) matched another line (X)
- The correct answer was obvious
- Others in the room (confederates) selected the wrong answer
- Approx. ¾ or 75% of participants conformed to incorrect judgment at least once

Asch’s research (continued)

- Situation contained no explicit rewards for conformity and no explicit punishments for deviance
- Why did they conform?:
  - Either they became convinced, in the face of judgment of the unanimous majority, that their own opinions were wrong, or
  - They just “went along with the crowd” to be accepted by the group or avoid being disliked by them for disagreeing

Asch’s research (continued)

- Two opposing goals:
  - The goal of being correct
  - The goal of staying in the good graces of other people by living up to their expectations (acceptance)
- In Asch’s experiment, these two goals were placed in conflict.
- Most people believe that they are motivated primarily by a desire to be correct but that others are motivated primarily by a desire to stay in the good graces of other people (acceptance).

Factors that impact conformity

1. Unanimity
2. Commitment
3. Accountability
4. Individual characteristics/The person
5. Cultural differences
6. Composition of the group exerting pressure
1. Unanimity
- Whether or not the majority opinion will be unanimous
- Conformity maximized by unanimity even if group size is only 3 people
- Conformity decreases if even one other person agrees with dissenting opinion (ally)

2. Commitment
- Conformity decreases when prior commitment is made to initial judgment
- Deutsch and Gerard experiment
  - When there was no prior commitment 25% conformed to erroneous judgment of majority
  - When individuals publicly committed themselves before hearing the judgment of others, only < 6% conformed

3. Accountability
- Conformity increases when decision must be justified to the group at the end
- Conformity decreases when pressure applied to be “accurate” and to justify decision

4. Individual characteristics/The person
- Conformity higher among people with low self-esteem
- Conformity increased by task-specific self-esteem (individuals led to believe they have no aptitude for the task)
5. Cultural differences

- In America, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease”; in Japan, “the nail that stands out gets pounded down”
- Conformity is higher in “collectivist” societies like Japan, Norway, and China than in individualistic societies like the US and France
- Conformity is slightly higher among women

6. Group composition exerting pressure

- A group is more effective at inducing conformity if:
  1. It consists of experts,
  2. The members (individually or collectively) are important to the individual, or
  3. The members (individually or collectively) are comparable to the individual in some way
- In children, conformity increases if whites comprise the majority in the group
- Conformity increases if people believe the group only moderately accepts them vs. totally accepts them
  - It’s easier for an individual who is securely ensconced in a group to deviate from that group

Rewards and punishments vs. information

- Asch’s experiment motivated by rewards and punishments—little conformity when responding privately vs. more when public
- We conform to the behavior of others when their behavior is our only guide to appropriate action
- Festinger—when physical reality becomes uncertain, people rely more on social reality—conform to what others are doing because other’s behavior provides valuable information about what is expected
- Examples: no gender restroom signs (distinguished-looking gentleman walks out), jaywalking (seemingly high-status person jaywalks/refrains from jaywalking), conserving water (model turning off water while soaping up) (Aronson) or avoiding littering (model picks up discarded fast-food bag and throws in garbage) (Cialdini)

Responses to social influence

1. Compliance
2. Identification
3. Internalization
1. Compliance

- Conformity due to desire to **gain reward** or **avoid punishment**
- Often temporary as long as the promise of reward or threat of punishment exists
- Based on the **power** of the influencer to dole out reward for compliance and punishment for noncompliance
- I.e. rat will run maze efficiently as long as there is food at the end

2. Identification

- Conformity based on the **desire to be like** the influencer
- We come to believe in the opinions and values we adopt, but not very strongly
- Based on the **attractiveness** of the person with whom we identify
- I.e. good-old-Uncle-Charlie phenomenon
- I.e. peer pressure going along with

3. Internalization

- Complete **acceptance** of a new belief
- Relatively **permanent—persists the longest**
- Desire to be **right**, therefore, **intrinsic reward**
- Based on **credibility** of person who supplies the information

Secondary gain

- The positive consequences of compliance that may lead to a continuation of behavior after the original reason for compliance (reward or punishment) is gone
- I.e. may stop smoking because forced to, but may discover liking breathing fresher air, more free time that was consumed with smoking breaks, etc.
Groupthink

- The model of thinking that persons engage in when concurrence seeking becomes so dominant in a cohesive ingroup that it tends to override realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action.

- Challenger disaster
  - Contributing factors:
    - Had completed 2 dozen successful launches with basically the same equipment.
    - NASA officials were caught up in the enthusiasm of launching the 1st civilian—schoolteacher.
    - NASA needed to secure congressional funding by displaying its efficiency and productivity.
    - No one at NASA wanted to be reminded that any kind of accident was possible.

- 12 Angry Men (original version)