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 (continued)

• 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.

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)

Note: this is not in your text
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
   ➢ Seeking approval
   ➢ 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
### The Tipping Point

- Malcolm Gladwell’s theory
- Suggests that major social trends often change dramatically and suddenly when certain respected people (“connectors”) are in the right place at the right time to support it
- Mechanism of conformity
- Connectors don’t have to be experts; they are simply people who seem to be “in the know” and are talking about appropriate topics in appropriate places
- *I.e.* recent example on NPR—people crying while eating webpage—bloggers spread the word

### 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)

### Social influence and emotion or life and death

- Schachter and Singer’s manipulation of attribution of emotion in chemically stimulated volunteers
  - Injected volunteers with epinephrine or placebo
  - When not informed about possible side-effects (physiological), interpreted (cognitive) based upon behavior and feelings of others around them
- Haney’s study of jurors imposing the death penalty
  - Remaining jurors more likely to see death penalty as an option after witnessing jurors excused for opposing the death penalty

### 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.
### Milgram and Obedience as a form of compliance

- Ground-breaking research conducted at Yale in the 1950s
- Participants acted as the teacher; the “learner” was a confederate
- “Teacher” administered increasingly intense shocks as instructed by experimenter when learner gave wrong answer
- 65% of participants continued to the end of the experiment—severe shocks of 450 volts (labeled “XXX”)

### Milgram and Obedience (continued)

Milgram's research scenario maximized obedience:

- Participants were volunteers
- Participants were alone with experimenter
- Experimenter was highly credible authority figure
- Setting was highly credible university

### Obedience

- Obedience decreased if authority figure not present in the room or was scientist was replaced by someone else
- Obedience decreased if experiment conducted in rundown commercial bldg
  - Experiment comparing Yale with rundown building downtown yielded reduced obedience downtown at 48% vs. 65% at Yale
- Obedience decreased if “teacher” required to hold “learner’s” arm on the shock plate
  - The closer the subjects were to the victim, the less they shocked them

### Obedience (continued)

- People predict that others will obey to a greater degree than they do
- People predict that they themselves will obey much less than they actually do
The Uninvolved Bystander As Conformist

- In 1964, Kitty Genovese was killed in New York City while at least 28 people watched without intervening or calling police.
- This led to many research studies on when and why people help others.
- Emily Bradley with broken leg on Fifth Avenue—lay there for 40 minutes with no one helping.
- Likelihood of receiving help is greater in non-urban than urban areas—with small requests for help.
- “Lady in distress” study.
  - People are more likely to help if waiting alone in the next room than if others are waiting with them.

Bystander Effect/Apathy

- Presence of another bystander **diffuses responsibility** and inhibits action.
  - People less likely to help if a large number of people are watching—nonintervention as an act of conformity.
  - Or, the more witnesses there are to an emergency situation, the less likely anyone is to help.
- People help less when the costs of helping are high.
**Reasons/influences why help or not help**

- **Not help**
  - Physical risk to self
  - Unsure of what to do
  - Could get sued
  - Others aren’t helping
  - Too scared to think
  - Lots of people around—someone else will help
  - Negative or indifferent response to reporting
    - e.g., LA cell phone re-accident—can’t get through or negative reaction to report—many people have already reported

- **Help**
  - Know what to do in situation—Dr., EMT, etc.
  - I would want someone to help me
  - Feeling a relationship to the victim
  - It’s the right thing to do
  - I’m the only one—I must help

**Increasing helping behavior**

- Situation seems like an emergency
- The cost of helping is perceived as low
- Individual has face-to-face contact with victim
- Individual believes he/she is the only one able or available to help
- Individual perceives that he/she has the real ability to help
- Clarify the ambiguity of the situation by pointing to a particular bystander and asking them to help in a particular way