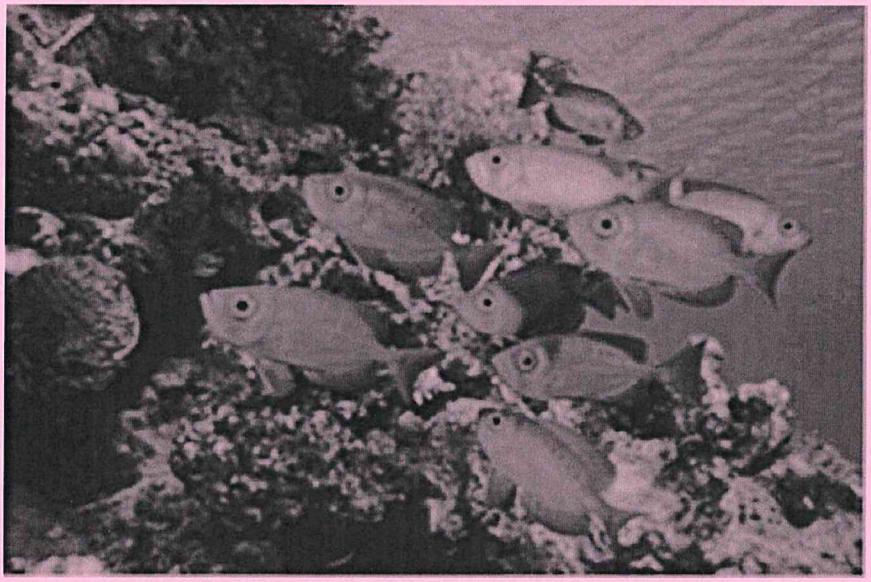
Chapter 8
Conformity and Obedience
Influencing Behavior



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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Revel Interactive

Survey What Do You Think?

SURVEY RESULTS

Have you ever participated in the social media phenomenon known as the ALS ice bucket challenge?

○ Yes

○ No

Pete Frates grew up in Beverly, Massachusetts, where he was a high school honor roll student and three-sport varsity athlete. He went on to Boston College, where he double-majored in communications and history and played on the baseball team. By his senior year, the 6'2", 225-pound left-handed outfielder was named captain. In the summers he played baseball in Connecticut, Maryland, and Hawaii. After graduation he spent time in Germany, playing professionally and coaching German youth on the sport.

If the name Pete Frates is familiar to you, though, it likely isn't for his exploits in college baseball. In 2012, just 5 years after he graduated, Frates suddenly started having trouble hitting in the rec league in which he was playing, his batting average tumbling from .400 to .250. One game he was hit by a pitch on his wrist, and the hand never seemed to get better. This led to a series of medical appointments, culminating in a neurologist diagnosing the 27-year-old Frates with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Two summers later, Frates' Tweets and online posts helped inspire the "ice bucket challenge," which went viral on social media.

Pete Frates, inspiration for the ALS ice bucket challenge.

You remember the ice bucket challenge, right? Though variations on the phenomena occurred before and since, the summer of 2014 was its heyday, as Facebook exploded with videos of people dumping ice water on themselves and challenging specific friends to do the same. In one version of the challenge, those who were called out by name were supposed to donate $10 to the ALS Association if they agreed to a public soaking within 24 hours, $100 if they didn't. By August 2014, the ice bucket challenge was everywhere, with celebrity participants including LeBron James, Bill Gates, Kerry Washington, Lady Gaga, and George W. Bush joining in. Then-President Barack Obama was challenged but didn't soak himself, opting instead to donate $100. Justin Bieber took the challenge, though he had to do it twice after his first effort was widely criticized for leaving out one critical detail … ice.

According to the ALS Association website, that summer more than 17 million people uploaded ice bucket videos, which were watched by 440 million people a total of 10 billion times. Some critics derided the phenomenon as a narcissistic exercise in "slacktivism," suggesting that people were more interested in having fun online than saving lives. But it's hard to argue with the numbers: the ALSA reports that donations during the height of the craze totaled more than $115 million, up from less than $3 million during the same time period the year before (ALSA, 2014).

What would compel millions and millions of individuals—including, according to our opening survey question, many of you reading this—to dump ice-cold water on themselves or watch videos of other people doing so? Sure, it was for a good cause, but there are a lot of good causes out there. Something about the ice bucket challenge seemed to be contagious. Something about seeing other people douse themselves in frigid water made people want to do this too, to conform

In August 2014, the "ice bucket challenge" exploded on social media, capitalizing on processes related to conformity to raise unprecedented amounts of money in the battle against ALS. Here, one of millions of participants takes her turn with the challenge, with a little help from an overeager friend and photographer.

to the behavior in front of them. Later in this chapter we will revisit the ice bucket challenge and consider what specific aspects of it made it particularly likely to "go viral" and elicit conformity.

More generally, every day, we make decisions about whether to conform to the behavior of others or strike out on a more independent path. On a regular basis, people try to get us to do what they want—to conform to their influence—sometimes through direct requests and sometimes through more subtle processes. A subtle version of this social influence occurs when others indirectly indicate to us what is appropriate, and we come to sense that it is in our best interest to conform, or go along with them, such as decisions about what clothes, hairstyles, or slang terms are fashionable. An even more powerful and direct type of social influence comes in the form of obedience, and occurs when an authority figure gives an order that we feel pressure to follow. In this chapter, we will focus on the potentially positive and negative effects of these social influence processes, beginning with more subtle examples of conformity and moving on to obedience to authority.

Conformity: When and Why

LO 8.1 Define conformity, and explain why it occurs.

American culture often stresses the importance of not conforming (Cohen & Varnum, 2016; Kim & Markus, 1999; Kitayama et al., 2009, 2010). Americans picture themselves as a nation of rugged individualists, people who think for themselves, stand up for the underdog, and go against the tide to fight for what they think is right. This cultural self-image has been shaped by the manner in which the nation was founded, by a system of government, and by this society's historical experience with western expansion—the "taming" of the Wild West (Kitayama et al., 2006; Turner, 1932).

American mythology has celebrated the rugged individualist in many ways. For example, one of the longest-running and most successful advertising campaigns in American history featured the "Marlboro Man." As far back as 1955, the photograph of a lone cowboy on the range was an archetypal image. It also sold a lot of cigarettes. Clearly, it told Americans something about themselves that they want and like to hear: that they make up their own minds and that they're not spineless, weak conformists (Cialdini, 2009; Pronin, Berger, & Molouki, 2007). More recently, consider the example of Apple Computer, one of the most valuable publicly traded

companies in the world (Gaffen, 2016). For several years, Apple's advertising slogan captured a similar sentiment of nonconformity: "Think different."

But are we, in fact, nonconforming creatures? Are the decisions we make always based on what we think, or do we use other people's behavior to help us decide what to do? Despite Apple's advertising telling customers to "think different," take a careful look around the lecture hall next time you're in class and count how many glowing Apple logos stare back at you from the laptops of your fellow students. The computer of the nonconformist is now everywhere.

On a far more sobering note, as we saw in Chapter 6, the mass suicide of the Heaven's Gate cult members suggests that people sometimes conform in extreme and astonishing ways—even when making as crucial a decision as whether to take their own lives. But, you might argue, surely this is an extremely unusual case. Perhaps the followers of Marshall Applewhite were disturbed people who were somehow predisposed to do what a charismatic leader told them to do. There is, however, another, more chilling possibility: Maybe many of us would have acted the same way had we been exposed to the same long-standing, powerful conformity pressures as were the members of Heaven's Gate.

If this statement is true, we should be able to find other situations in which seemingly ordinary people, placed under strong social pressures, conformed to a surprising degree. And, in fact, we can. For example, in 1961, activists in the American civil rights movement incorporated Mohandas Gandhi's principles of nonviolent protest into their demonstrations to end segregation. They trained their "Freedom Riders" (so named because they boarded buses and disobeyed "back of the bus" seating rules) in the passive acceptance of violent treatment. Thousands of southern African Americans, joined by a smaller number of northern Whites, many from college campuses, demonstrated against the segregationist laws of the South. In confrontation after confrontation, the civil rights activists adhered to the principles of nonviolence that others had taught them; they remained stoic as they were beaten, clubbed, hosed, whipped, and even killed by southern sheriffs and police (Nelson, 2010; Powledge, 1991). New recruits conformed to the nonviolent

During the American civil rights movement, informational social influence was used to train people in the art of nonviolent demonstration. Experienced protestors modeled for new protestors how to remain calm in the face of harassment including cigarette smoke, threats, racist language, and actual violence.

responses the existing members modeled, and this contagious commitment to nonviolent protest helped usher in a new era in America's fight for racial equality.

But just a few years later, social pressure resulted in a tragic rather than heroic course of events. On the morning of March 16, 1968, American soldiers in Vietnam boarded helicopters that would take them to the village of My Lai. One pilot radioed that he saw enemy soldiers below, and so the Americans jumped off the helicopters, rifles blazing. They soon realized that there were no enemy soldiers—only women, children, and elderly men cooking breakfast over small fires. Inexplicably, the leader of the platoon ordered one of the soldiers to kill the villagers. Other soldiers began firing too, and the carnage spread, ending with the deaths of approximately 500 Vietnamese civilians (Hersh, 1970). Similar processes of social influence have been implicated in more recent military atrocities, including the humiliating abuse of Iraqi captives at the Abu Ghraib prison starting in 2003 (Hersh, 2004) and American soldiers urinating on the corpses of Taliban fighters in Afghanistan in 2011 (Martinez, 2012). Social pressures like these have also been implicated in concerns about teenage "suicide clusters," when a school or community experiences multiple deaths in a short period of time (Rosin, 2015).

In all these examples, people found themselves caught in a web of social influence. In response, they altered their behavior to conform to the expectations of others (O'Gorman, Wilson, & Miller, 2008). For social psychologists, this is the essence of **conformity**: changing one's behavior due to the real or imagined influence of other (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1969; Sorrentino & Hancock, 2014). As these examples show, the consequences of conformity span a wide range, from bravery to tragedy. But why did these people conform? Some conformed because they did not know what to do in a confusing or unusual situation. The behavior of the people around them served as a cue as to how to respond, and they decided to act in a similar manner. Other people conformed because they did not wish to be ridiculed or punished for being different from everybody else. They chose to act the way the group expected so that they wouldn't be rejected or thought less of by group members. Let's see how each of these reasons for conforming operates.

Conformity
A change in one's behavior due to real or imagined influence of other people

Under strong social pressure, individuals will conform to the group even when this means doing something immoral. In 2004, American soldiers' degrading abuse of Iraqis held at the Abu Ghraib prison sparked an international scandal and a great deal of soul-searching back home. Why did the soldiers humiliate their captives? As you read this chapter, you will see how the social influence pressures of conformity can contribute to decent people committing indecent acts.

Review Questions

1. Which of the following is the most direct and powerful example of social influence?
   - **a.** Complying with a polite request made by a friend
   - **b.** Conforming to a group norm
   - **c.** Obedience to an order from an authority figure
   - **d.** Emotion-based attitudes
2. Which of the following statements best captures the relationship between cultural beliefs and conformity?
   - **a.** There is little variability in how people from different cultures think about conformity.
   - **b.** Compared to many cultures, Americans tend to have relatively negative attitudes toward conformity.
   - **c.** Compared to many cultures, Americans tend to have relatively positive attitudes toward conformity.
   - **d.** Americans' beliefs about conformity have become more and more negative over the years.
3. Conformity always includes
   - **a.** positive and moral behavior.
   - **b.** negative and immoral behavior.
   - **c.** the real or imagined influence of other people.
   - **d.** an authority figure.

Informational Social Influence: The Need to Know What's "Right"

LO 8.2 **Explain how informational social influence motivates people to conform.**

Life is full of ambiguous and confusing situations. How should you address your psychology professor—as Dr. Aronson, Professor Aronson, Mr. Aronson, or Elliot? Do you cut a piece of sushi or eat it whole? Did the scream you just heard in the hallway come from a person joking with friends or from the victim of a mugging? In these and many other scenarios, we feel uncertain about what to think or how to act. We simply don't know enough to make a good or accurate choice. Luckily, we have a powerful and useful source of knowledge available to us—the behavior of other people.

Sometimes we simply ask directly about the appropriate way to act. Many times, though, we watch others, observing their behavior to help us achieve a better definition of the situation (Kelley, 1955; Thomas, 1928). When we subsequently act like everyone else, we are conforming, but this doesn't mean we are spineless individuals lacking in self-reliance. Instead, the influence of others leads us to conform because we see those people as a valuable source of information to guide our behavior. We conform because we believe that others' interpretation of an ambiguous set of circumstances is accurate and will help us choose an appropriate course of action. This is called **informational social influence** (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Smith & Mackie, 2016).

Informational Social Influence
Relying on other people as a source of information to guide our behavior, which leads to conformity because we believe that others' interpretation of an ambiguous situation is correct

As an illustration of how other people can be a source of information, imagine that you are a participant in the following experiment by Muzafer Sherif (1936). In the first phase of the study, you are seated alone in a dark room and asked to focus your attention on a dot of light 15 feet away. The experimenter asks you to estimate in inches how far the light moves. You stare earnestly at the light, and, yes, it seems to move a little. You say, "about 2 inches," though it is not easy to tell exactly. The light disappears and then comes back; you are asked to judge again. The light seems to move a little more this time, and you say, "4 inches." After several of these trials, the light seems to move about the same amount each time—somewhere in the neighborhood of 2 to 4 inches.

The interesting thing about this task is that the light is not actually moving at all. It looks as if it was because of a visual illusion called the autokinetic effect: If you stare at a bright light in a uniformly dark environment (e.g., a star on a dark night), the light will appear to waver a bit back and forth. This occurs because you have no stable visual reference point with which to anchor the position of the light. In Sherif's

Eight thousand pumpkins meet the Eiffel Tower. While the holiday is based on ancient British and Irish traditions surrounding All Hallows' Eve, Halloween as we know it is a completely American phenomenon—until October 1997, that is, when "Ah-lo-ween" was introduced to the French public by retailers in an effort to boost consumer spending to spark a sagging French economy (R. Cohen, 1997). Informational social influence is how the French literally learned what this holiday is about. As of Halloween 1997, they had no idea of what "treek au treeting" was. However, just a few years later, French shops were decorated in Black and orange, carved pumpkins were displayed, and nightclubs held costume competitions.

(Associated Press, 2002)

experiment, the participants arrived at their own stable estimate during the first phase of the study, but these estimates differed across people. Some thought the light was moving only an inch or so; others thought it was moving as much as 10 inches.

Sherif chose the autokinetic effect because he wanted a situation that would be ambiguous—where the correct definition of the situation would be unclear to his participants. In the second phase of the experiment, a few days later, the participants were paired with two other people, each of whom had had the same prior experience alone with the light. Now the situation became a truly social one, as all three made their judgments out loud. Now the autokinetic effect is experienced differently by different people: Some see a lot of movement, and some see not much at all. After hearing their partners give judgments that were different from their own, what did people in Sherif's study do?

Over the course of several trials as a group, people converged on a common estimate, and each member of the group tended to conform to that estimate. These results indicate that people were using each other as a source of information, coming to believe that the group estimate was the correct one (see Figure 8.1). An important feature of informational social influence is that it can lead to **private acceptance**, when people conform to the behavior of others because they genuinely believe that these other people are right.

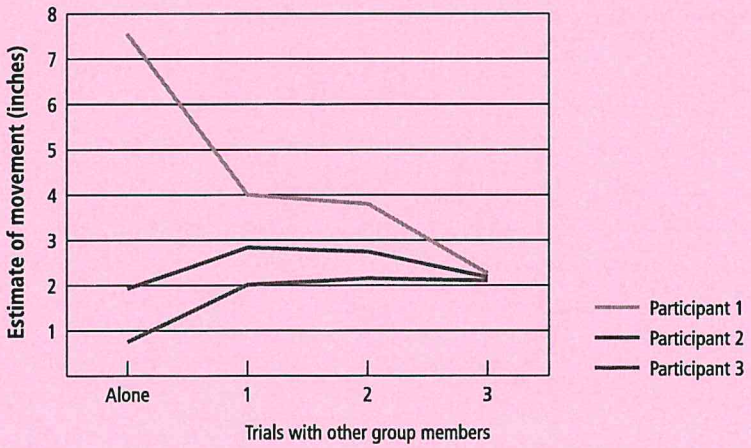
Private Acceptance
Conforming to other people's behavior out of a genuine belief that what they are doing or saying is right

It might seem equally plausible that people publicly conformed to the group but privately maintained the belief that the light was moving only a small amount. For example, maybe someone privately believed that the light was moving 10 inches but announced that it had moved 3 inches, the group consensus, in an effort to avoid

Figure 8.1 One Group's Judgments in Sherif's (1936) Autokinetic Studies

People estimated how far a point of light appeared to move in a dark room. When they saw the light by themselves, their estimates varied widely. When they were brought together in groups and heard other people announce their estimates, people conformed to the group's estimate of how much the light moved, adjusting their private beliefs based on the information other group members provided.

(Data from Sherif, 1936)



standing out from the crowd or looking foolish. This would be a case of **public compliance**, conforming publicly without necessarily believing in what the group is doing. Sherif cast doubt on this interpretation of his study, however, by asking people to judge the lights one more time, this time back on their own. Even though they no longer had to worry about how they looked in front of other participants, they continued to give the answer the group had given earlier. One study even found that people still conformed to the group estimate when they participated individually a full year later (Rohrer, Baron, Hoffman, & Swander, 1954). These results suggest that people were relying on each other to define reality and came to privately accept the wisdom of the group estimate.

Public Compliance
Conforming to other people's behavior publicly without necessarily believing in what the other people are doing or saying

The power of conformity to produce private acceptance has been demonstrated in several areas of life, including energy conservation. In one study, Jessica Nolan and her colleagues (2008) gave a sample of California residents information urging them to conserve electricity. The household members received one of four messages. Three of these presented basic reasons to conserve: to protect the environment, to benefit society, or to save money. The fourth message contained information designed to promote conformity: The participants were told that the majority of their neighbors conserved electrical energy. The researchers then measured actual energy usage from the homes' electrical meters. They found that the fourth message, the one containing information about the behavior of one's neighbors, caused people to conserve more energy than did the other three messages (Nolan et al., 2008). Similarly, Goldstein, Cialdini, and Griskevicius (2008) managed to increase hotel guests' compliance with a "reuse your bath towels" request, a widely used hotel management technique that hasn't always proved popular with guests. The researchers found that an informational sign in the bathroom stating that the majority of guests in this very room had reused their towels, was more effective than the general "Help the Environment" appeal usually used by hotels.

The Importance of Being Accurate

Later research extended Sherif's classic study on informational conformity in interesting ways (Baron, Vandello, & Brunsman, 1996; Levine, Higgins, & Choi, 2000; Muchnik, Aral, & Taylor, 2013). This research employed judgment tasks that are more like real life than the autokinetic effect. It also revealed another variable that affects informational social influence: how important it is to be accurate at the task.

For example, in one study, research participants were given an involving but ambiguous task: eyewitness identification (Baron et al., 1996). Just like eyewitnesses of a real crime, the participants were asked to pick a "perpetrator" out of a lineup, though in this instance they were asked to do it several times. For each of the 13 lineups, the participants were first shown a slide of a man—the perpetrator. Next, they saw a slide of a lineup composed of four men, one of whom was the perpetrator (he was sometimes dressed differently than he had been in the prior slide). The participant's job was to pick him out. The task was made difficult (and ambiguous) by presenting the slides extremely quickly: Participants saw each slide for only half a second. The study took place in a group consisting of the participant and three confederates. Each of the four said their answers out loud after viewing each pair of slides. On the critical seven trials, where informational social influence would be measured, the three confederates answered before the participant—and all the confederates gave the same wrong answer.

The researchers also manipulated how important it was to the research participants to be accurate at the task. In the high-importance condition, they were told that the upcoming task was a real test of eyewitness identification ability and that police departments and courts would soon be using it to differentiate good eyewitnesses from poor ones. Participants' scores would therefore establish standards against which future eyewitness performance would be judged. In addition, those who were most accurate at the

Even for judgments of the utmost importance—such as when an eyewitness to a crime later tries to identify the culprit—informational social influence influences our perceptions.

task would receive a $20 bonus from the experimenters. In contrast, in the low-importance condition, the research participants were told that the study was a first attempt to study eyewitness identification and that the slide task was still being developed. Thus, as the participants began the task, they were in two very different states of mind. Half thought their performance was very important and would have ramifications for real-life legal proceedings. They were motivated to do well. The other half saw this as just a basic research study like any other. Their performance didn't seem like it was all that important.

The high-importance condition mirrors the concerns of many situations in everyday life—your judgments and decisions have consequences, and you're motivated to "get things right." Does that make you more or less susceptible to informational social influence? The researchers found that it makes you *more* susceptible. In the low-importance condition, participants conformed to the confederates' judgments and gave the same wrong answers on just 35% of the critical trials. In the high-importance condition, participants conformed to the confederates' judgments on 51% of the critical trials.

But relying on other people as a source of information is a strategy that also comes with risks. In a different eyewitness study, pairs of eyewitnesses each watched separate videos of what they believed to be the exact same event (Gabbert, Memon, & Allan, 2003). Unbeknownst to participants, each member of the pair viewed a slightly different video. Among pairs that were allowed to discuss the video before each eyewitness took an individual memory test, 71% of witnesses went on to mistakenly recall personally having seen items that only their partner had actually seen. This experiment illustrates the major risk of using other people around you for information: What if those other people are wrong? Indeed, this is why most police procedures require that when there are multiple eyewitnesses in a case, each one is to be interviewed individually by investigators and view a lineup individually as well. Informational social influence among eyewitnesses is not welcome in the courtroom (Levett, 2013).

When Informational Conformity Backfires

A dramatic form of informational social influence occurs during crises, when an individual is confronted with a frightening, potentially dangerous situation to which he or she is ill equipped to respond (Killian, 1964). The person may have no idea of what is really happening or what he or she should do. When one's personal safety is involved, the need for information is acute—and the behavior of others is very informative.

Watch INFORMATIONAL CONFORMITY

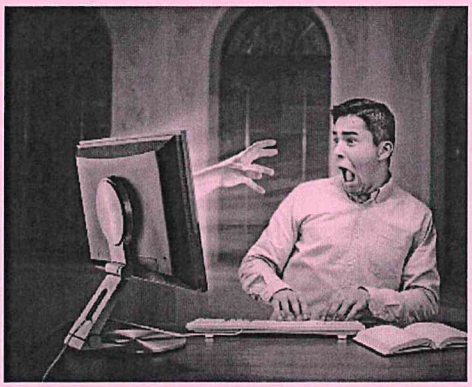
Consider what happened on Halloween night in 1938. Orson Welles, the gifted actor and film director, and the Mercury Theater broadcast a radio play based loosely on H. G. Wells's science fiction fantasy *War of the Worlds*. Remember, this was the era before television; radio was a primary source of entertainment, and it was the only source for fast-breaking news. That night, the drama that Welles and his fellow actors broadcast—portraying

INFORMATIONAL SOCIAL INFLUENCE GONE AWRY

Revel Interactive

Orson Welles, renowned actor and director, whose War of the Worlds radio broadcast in 1938 sparked a public scare that spread, in large part, due to informational social influence. When listeners tried to figure out whether an attack was really happening, the anxious responses of those around them added to their own sense of panic.

Quito, Ecuador. In 1949, radio producers put on their own version of Welles's War of the Worlds broadcast, and once again, many listeners became convinced that an alien attack was imminent. When they discovered that the program was fiction, angry crowds stormed the radio station, set fires, and at least six people were killed in the rioting.



In contemporary society, misinformation spreads easily from person to person via social media and email. Internet hoaxes, erroneous updates about ongoing news stories, and email urban legends are all examples of informational social influence that fails to get us any closer to the "right" answer about the issues in question.

"That's fake news" has become a common argument that politicians use to try to discredit unflattering media coverage, even when the investigation in question seems based on solid and well-sourced reporting. But there is no doubt that during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, numerous factually inaccurate stories—some deliberate efforts at misinformation—were posted and spread widely. The degree to which these problematic stories influenced voter attitudes and behavior is difficult to quantify.

the invasion of Earth by hostile Martians—was so realistic that untold numbers of listeners became frightened and alerted the police; many were so panic stricken that they tried to flee the "invasion" in their cars (Cantril, 1940).

Why were Americans convinced that what they heard was a real news report of an actual invasion by aliens? Hadley Cantril (1940), who studied this real-life "crisis," suggested two reasons. One was that the play parodied existing radio news shows very well, and many listeners missed the beginning of the broadcast (when it was clearly identified as a play) because they had been listening to a popular show on another station. The other culprit, however, was informational social influence. Many people were listening with friends and family. As the *War of the Worlds* scenario became increasingly frightening, they naturally turned to each other, out of uncertainty, to see whether they should believe what they heard. Seeing looks of concern and worry on their loved ones' faces added to the panic people were beginning to feel. "We all kissed one another and felt we would all die," reported one listener (Cantril, 1940, p. 95).

Of course, this was decades ago, when people were much less savvy about differentiating reality from fiction—today, informational social influence rarely backfires in such a widespread fashion. Right? Well, maybe not.... Most of us have seen friends or family members post, tweet, or e-mail stories that send up red flags regarding their accuracy. Urban legends and unfounded conspiracy theories run rampant on social media. And the 2016 U.S. presidential election witnessed a record-breaking number of "fake news" stories that spread like wildfire, from baseless claims about Hillary Clinton and violent criminal behavior to allegations that Democrats sought to impose Islamic Law in Florida to claims that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump (Holan, 2016). None of these stories were remotely true, but that didn't stop people from posting and sharing them, providing very recent examples of informational social influence gone awry. Orson Welles would have been proud (or perhaps a bit horrified).

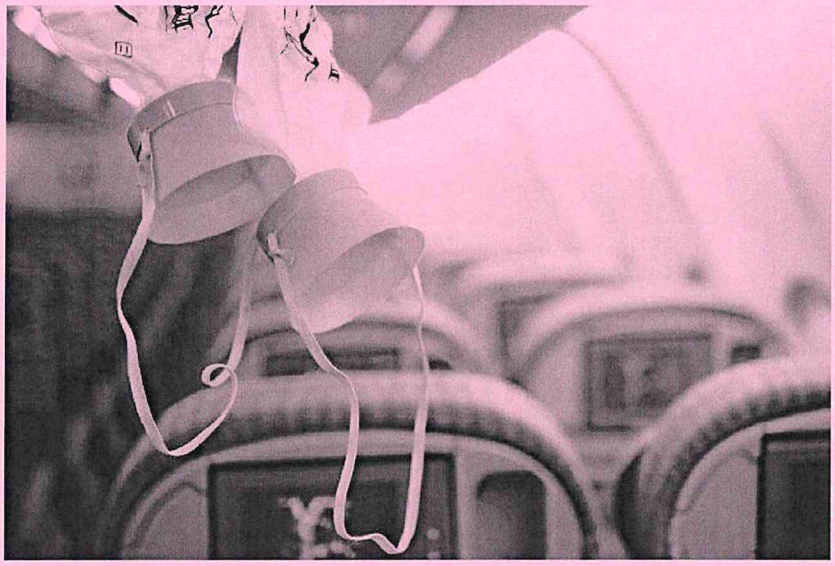
When Will People Conform to Informational Social Influence?

Let's review the situations that are the most likely to produce conformity because of informational social influence.

WHEN THE SITUATION IS AMBIGUOUS Ambiguity is the most crucial variable for determining how much people use each other as a source of information. When you are unsure of the correct response, the appropriate behavior, or the right idea, you will be most open to influence from others. The more uncertain you are, the more you will rely on others (Huber, Klucharev, & Rieskamp, 2014; Tesser, Campbell, & Mickler, 1983; Walther et al., 2002). Situations such as the military atrocities discussed earlier were ambiguous for the people involved—ideal circumstances for informational social influence to take hold. Most of the soldiers were young and inexperienced. When they saw other soldiers shooting at the villagers or humiliating prisoners, many of them thought this was what they were supposed to do, and they joined in.

WHEN THE SITUATION IS A CRISIS Crisis often occurs simultaneously with ambiguity. In a crisis situation, we usually do not have time to stop and think about exactly which course of action we should take. We need to act—immediately. If we panic and are uncertain what to do, it is only natural for us to see how other people are responding and to do likewise. Unfortunately, the people we imitate may also panic and not be behaving rationally.

Soldiers, for example, are undoubtedly on edge during their tours of duty. Further, in many wars, it is not easy to tell who the enemy is. In the Vietnam War, civilians who were sympathizers of the Vietcong were known to have laid mines in the path of U.S. soldiers, fired guns from hidden locations, and thrown or planted grenades. Similarly, in Iraq and Afghanistan, it was (and remains) difficult to tell if people were civilians or combatants, allies or enemies. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that these soldiers often turned to others around them to gauge the proper course of action. Had these individuals not been in the midst of a chronic crisis situation and instead had more time to think about their actions, perhaps tragedy and scandal would have been avoided.



Consider a passenger who sees smoke coming out of an airplane engine or the sudden appearance of oxygen masks and wishes to determine if she is in the midst of a true emergency. Informational social influence suggests that she will probably look first to the reactions of the flight attendants, those with more expertise, rather than the reactions of her fellow seatmates.

WHEN OTHER PEOPLE ARE EXPERTS Typically, the more expertise or knowledge a person has, the more valuable he or she will be as a guide in an ambiguous situation (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Williamson, Weber, & Robertson, 2013). For example, if you're visiting a foreign city and come across an unfamiliar street sign, you will probably check out the reactions of the locals rather than those of your fellow tourists. However, experts are not always reliable sources of information. Imagine the fear felt by the young man listening to the *War of the Worlds* broadcast who called his local police department for an explanation, only to learn that the police too thought the events described on the radio were actually happening (Cantril, 1940)!

Review Questions

1. Informational social influence occurs
   - **a.** when we believe that other people's reactions can help us arrive at an accurate reading of a situation.
   - **b.** through public but not private conformity.
   - **c.** only in a crisis.
   - **d.** autokinetically.
2. Which of the following statements regarding Sherif's (1936) study of perceptions of the autokinetic effect is true?
   - **a.** Participants conformed publicly but not privately.
   - **b.** Participants did conform, but the effects of this conformity were short lived as they reverted to their previous, individually given responses once they were no longer part of a group.
   - **c.** Participants conformed because they were in a group with their friends, and they simply wanted to fit in with the group.
   - **d.** Participants conformed because they believed the other people's responses were accurate.
3. The more important it is to people to make an accurate decision,
   - **a.** the less likely they are to conform to informational social influence.
   - **b.** the more likely they are to conform to informational social influence.
   - **c.** the more they seek to make that decision on their own, uninfluenced by what the people around them have to say.
   - **d.** the more they will prefer public to private conformity.
4. Which of the following statements best captures the relationship between informational social influence and eyewitness performance in legal proceedings?
   - **a.** Because the stakes are so high in a criminal trial, eyewitnesses do not conform to informational social influence.

b. Eyewitnesses are encouraged to use informational social influence in providing their testimony at trial.
c. The legal system takes steps to prevent conformity to informational social influence among eyewitnesses.
d. Informational social influence always makes eyewitnesses more accurate.

5. Informational social influence is most likely to occur when
a. a situation is unambiguous and not a crisis.
b. the other people around are not experts and the situation is not a crisis.
c. the other people around are experts and the situation is ambiguous.
d. a situation is a crisis but also unambiguous.

Normative Social Influence: The Need to Be Accepted

LO 8.3 **Explain how normative social influence motivates people to conform.**

They're called polar plunges, and they started out as charity fund-raisers: sanctioned events in which people take a quick swim in ice-cold water to attract donations and attention to a worthwhile cause. Groups like the Special Olympics carefully planned and organized them, limiting the amount of time people spent in the cold temperatures and making sure that medical personnel were on hand in case of complications. But a few years ago, school districts across New England (and other cold-climate locales) began e-mailing parents to warn them about polar plunge dares that were spreading among adolescents via social media (Wilson, 2014). Teenagers were challenging each other to jump into freezing water without life vests, with no adult supervision, and often at night—when temperatures were even lower and visibility was poor. Many accepted the dares, filming their dangerous feats and then posting them online. But some weren't so lucky, with multiple injuries and at least one death reported in New Hampshire, where melting snow increased water levels and the speed of river currents (Phillip, 2014).

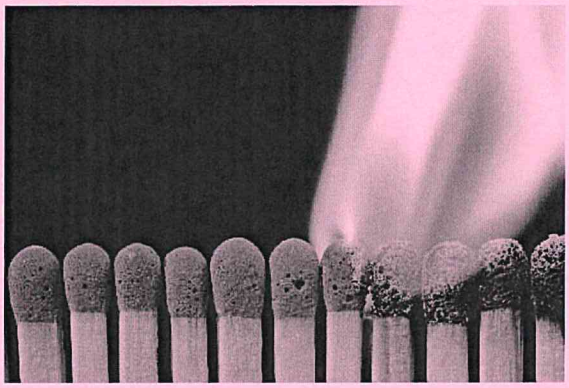
Why do people engage in such risky behavior? Why does anyone follow the group's lead when the resulting behavior is far from sensible and may even be fatal? We doubt that the do-it-yourself polar plungers risked their lives due to informational conformity. It is difficult to argue that a high school student staring at a rushing winter river filled with ice and other debris would say, "Gee, I don't know what to do. I guess jumping in there makes sense." This example suggests that there must be something else besides the need for information that can explain conformity. And there is: We also conform so that we will be liked and accepted by other people (Maxwell, 2002). We conform to the group's **social norms**—implicit (and sometimes explicit) rules for acceptable behaviors, values, and beliefs (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Kelley, 1955; Miller & Prentice, 1996; Sanfey, Stallen, & Chang, 2014). Groups have certain expectations about how their members should behave, and members in good standing conform to these rules. Members who do not are perceived as different, difficult, and eventually deviant. In the social media era, these norms are transmitted faster than ever.

Social Norms
The implicit or explicit rules a group has for the acceptable behaviors, values, and beliefs of its members

Of course, conformity to social norms isn't always dangerous. It isn't even always a bad thing—after all, as discussed earlier, the ice bucket challenge raised enough to money to improve and even save lives. What was it about this particular challenge that led conformity to spread so far and wide, and so quickly? Research indicates that a critical predictor of what "goes viral" is that we are most likely to share content that leads to emotional arousal (Berger, 2011). Watching people dump icy water on themselves produces a variety of emotions including surprise and amusement, rendering it precisely the type of video we are most likely to share. Also, the challenge provided people with an opportunity to post visible evidence of themselves as they were "doing good." And one of the most critical aspects of the challenge is that it required people to identify specific friends by name, calling them out individually and placing pressure (albeit a fun kind of pressure) on them to respond. It is, of course, easier to resist a generic call for help than it is to sit quietly when someone asks you by name—publicly—to take action.

CONFORMITY GONE VIRAL

Revel Interactive



"Going viral." The phrase itself has become a ubiquitous way to describe the dramatic and sudden popularity of certain videos, memes, stories, or ideas. Indeed, every day seems to bring with it a new example of something that people just can't resist forwarding, posting, sharing, or tweeting. What factors predict which ideas reach "viral" status? Any effort to answer this question certainly draws upon issues related to social influence, contagion, and the general focus of this chapter, conformity.

One factor underlying many examples of "going viral" is emotional response. For example, Rosanna Guadagno (2013) and colleagues found that students reported a greater likelihood of sharing videos that led them to feel happiness or surprise–perhaps some of the very emotions you experienced the first time you saw a clip of people freezing in place in response to the once-popular "mannequin challenge."

Not all of the emotions associated with the viral spread of ideas are positive ones. Sometimes we share a story or adopt a cause because of arousal inducing anger or outrage (Berger, 2011). Consider the quick spread of knitted pink hats among anti-Trump protesters in the wake of Election Day 2016, in response to vulgar comments he had made about women years earlier.

In short, while multiple psychological factors can help us understand ideas that "go viral," many times the popularity of a video or meme catches most of us off guard. What do you think, can you come up with any hypotheses to help account for the sudden popularity of bottle flipping videos among youth in the past few years?

More generally, why is normative conformity like that demonstrated by polar plungers and ice bucket challengers so powerful? Primarily because acceptance by others is incredibly important to us. Rejection hurts. Keep in mind that we human beings are by nature a social species. Few of us could live happily as hermits, never seeing or talking to another person. Other people are extraordinarily important to our sense of well-being. Research on individuals who have been isolated for long periods of time indicates that being deprived of human contact is stressful, traumatic, and psychologically painful (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Schachter, 1959; Williams & Nida, 2011). We seek to avoid isolation or anything else that might cause a group to reject us.

Indeed, deviant group members—those who go against the flow—are often punished, ridiculed or even rejected by other group members (Abrams et al.,

2014; James & Olson, 2000; Miller & Anderson, 1979). For example, in Japan, a whole school will sometimes turn against one student perceived as different, alternately harassing and shunning the individual—treatment that can have tragic results. Another phenomenon in Japan is the *hikikomori*, teenagers (mostly male) who have withdrawn from all social interaction. They spend all their time alone, in their bedrooms in their parents' homes, some for over a decade. Japanese psychologists believe that many *hikikomori* were the victims of severe bullying before their withdrawal (M. Jones, 2006). Recently, researchers in various countries have begun to study cyberbullying in middle and secondary schools. This form of bullying, using cell phones and the Internet, is increasingly frequent, affecting anywhere from 10% to 35% of school children surveyed in nations including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia (Kowalski et al., 2014; Wilton & Campbell, 2011).

Given this fundamental human need for social companionship, it is not surprising that we often conform to gain acceptance from others. Conformity for normative reasons occurs in situations where we do what other people are doing, not because we are using them as a source of information but so that we won't be made fun of, get into trouble, or be ostracized. Thus, **normative social influence** occurs when the influence of other people leads us to conform in order to be liked and accepted. This type of conformity results in public compliance with the group's beliefs and behaviors but not necessarily in private acceptance (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Huang, Kendrick, & Yu, 2014).

Normative Social Influence
Going along with what other people do to be liked and accepted by them, which leads to public conformity with the group's beliefs and behaviors but not always private acceptance of them

You probably don't find it too surprising that people sometimes conform to be liked and accepted by others. You might be thinking, where's the harm? If the group is important to us and wearing the right clothes or using the right slang will gain us acceptance, why not go along? But when it comes to more important kinds of behaviors, such as hurting another person, surely we will resist such conformity pressures. And, of course, we won't conform when we are certain of the correct way of behaving and the pressures are coming from a group that we don't care all that much about. Or will we?

Conformity and Social Approval: The Asch Line-Judgment Studies

Solomon Asch (1951, 1956) conducted a series of now-classic studies exploring the power of normative social influence. Asch devised the studies assuming that there are limits to how much people will conform. Naturally, people conformed in the Sherif studies, he reasoned, because the situation was highly ambiguous—trying to guess how many inches a light was moving. But when a situation was wholly unambiguous, Asch expected that people would act like rational, objective problem solvers. When the group said or did something that contradicted an obvious truth, surely people would resist social pressures and decide for themselves what was going on, he figured.

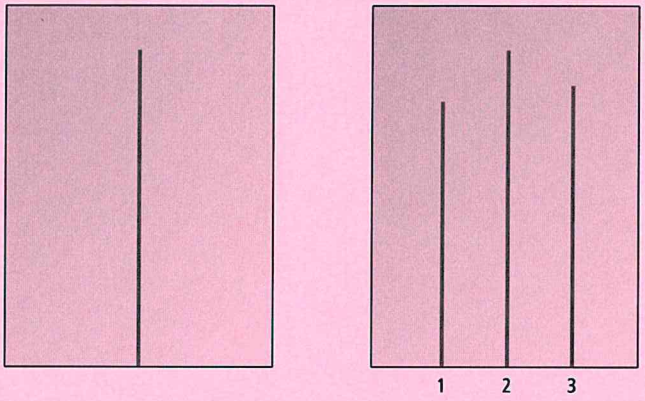
To test his hypothesis, Asch conducted the following study. Had you been a participant, you would have been told that this was an experiment on perceptual judgment and that you'd be taking part with seven other students. Here's the scenario: The experimenter shows everyone two cards, one with a single line on it and the other with three lines labeled 1, 2, and 3. He asks each of you to judge and then announce out loud which of the three lines on the second card is closest in length to the line on the first card (see Figure 8.2).

It is crystal clear that the correct answer is the second line. Not surprisingly, each participant says, "Line 2." Your turn comes next to last, and, of course, you say, "Line 2" as well. The last participant concurs. The experimenter then presents a new set of cards and asks the participants again to make their judgments and announce them out loud.

Figure 8.2 Asch's Line-Judgment Task

In a series of studies of normative social influence, participants judged which of the three comparison lines on the right card was closest in length to the standard line on the card on the left. The correct answer was always obvious (as it is here). However, members of the group (actually confederates) sometimes gave the wrong answer out loud. Now the participant faced a dilemma: Give the right answer and go against the whole group, or conform to their behavior and give an obviously wrong answer?

(Adapted from Asch, 1956)



Again, the answer is obvious, and everyone gives the correct answer. At this point, you are probably thinking, "What a waste of time. I've got a paper due tomorrow. I need to get out of here."

As your mind starts to wander, though, something surprising happens. The experimenter presents a third set of lines, and again the answer is obvious; line 3 is clearly the closest in length to the target line. But the first participant announces that the correct answer is line 1! "This guy must be so bored that he fell asleep," you think. Then the second person announces that line 1 is the correct answer. The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth participants all agree; it's now your turn. Startled at this point, you are probably looking at the lines very closely to see if you missed something. But no, line 3 is clearly the right answer. What will you do? Will you stand up for what you believe to be the truth, blurting out, "Line 3," or will you go along with the group and give the obviously wrong answer, "Line 1"?

As you can see, Asch set up a situation to discover if people would conform even when the right answer was absolutely obvious. In each group, all the individuals except for the actual participant were confederates of the research team who had been instructed to give the wrong answer on 12 of the 18 trials. What happened? Contrary to what Asch expected, a considerable amount of conformity occurred: 76% of the participants conformed and gave an obviously incorrect response on at least one trial. On average, people conformed on about one-third of the trials on which the accomplices gave an incorrect answer (see Figure 8.3).

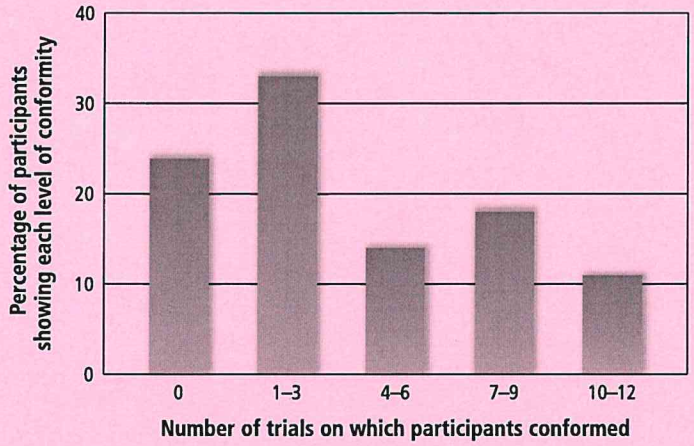
Why did people conform so often? Participants couldn't have needed information from others to help them make a decision, as they did in the Sherif study, because the situation was not ambiguous. The right

Participants in an Asch line study. The real participant is seated in the middle. He is surrounded by the experimenter's accomplices, who have just given the wrong answer on the line task.

Figure 8.3 Results of the Asch Line-Judgment Study

Participants in the Asch line study showed a surprising level of conformity, given how obvious it was that the group was wrong in its judgments. Seventy-six percent of the participants conformed on at least one trial; only 24% of participants never conformed at all (see bar labeled zero). Most participants conformed on one to three of the 12 trials in which the group gave the wrong answer. However, a sizable number of participants conformed to the group's incorrect response nearly every single time (see the two bars on the right).

(Adapted from Asch, 1957)



answers were so obvious that when people in a control group made the judgments by themselves, they were accurate more than 98% of the time. Instead, normative pressures came into play. Even though the other participants were strangers, the fear of being the lone dissenter was so strong that most people conformed, at least occasionally. One participant explained, "Here was a group; they had a definite idea; my idea disagreed; this might arouse anger ... I was standing out [like] a sore thumb ... I didn't want particularly to make a fool of myself ... I felt I was definitely right ... [but] they might think I was peculiar" (Asch, 1956).

These are classic normative reasons for conforming: People go along so as not to feel peculiar or look foolish. Notably, in contrast to informational social influence, normative pressures usually result in *public compliance without private acceptance*; people go along with the group even if they think it is wrong or do not believe in what they are doing.

What was especially surprising about Asch's results is that people were concerned about looking foolish even in front of complete strangers. It is not as if the participants were in danger of being ostracized by a group that was important to them. Yet decades of research since the original Asch study have indicated that conformity for normative reasons can occur simply because we do not want to risk social disapproval, even from complete strangers we will never see again (Bond & Smith, 1996; Chen, Wu, et al., 2012; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

Watch ASCH'S LINE STUDY

In a variation of his study, Asch (1957) demonstrated just how powerful social disapproval can be in shaping behavior. As before, the confederates gave the wrong answer 12 out of 18 times, but in this version the actual participants were the only ones allowed to write down their answers instead of saying them out loud. Now people did not have to worry about what the group thought of them because the

group would never find out what their answers were. Conformity dropped dramatically, occurring on an average of only 1.5 of the 12 trials (Insko et al., 1985; Nail, 1986). As psychologist Serge Moscovici (1985) observed, the Asch studies are "one of the most dramatic illustrations of conformity, of blindly going along with the group, even when the individual realizes that by doing so he turns his back on reality and truth" (p. 349).

Research by Gregory Berns and colleagues has provided neural evidence for just how unpleasant and uncomfortable it is to resist normative social influence (Berns et al., 2005). Berns and his research team used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to examine the changes in brain activity of research participants as they either normatively conformed to a group's judgment or maintained their independence and disagreed with the group.

Instead of judgments of line length, the task in this study involved mental rotation. While in the fMRI scanner, participants were shown a three-dimensional figure and then asked if a second figure (rotated in a different direction) was the same as the first figure or different. They indicated their answers by pushing a button. The task was slightly more difficult than Asch's line-judgment task; the baseline error rate, when participants made judgments alone, was 13.8%, compared to Asch's (1951, 1956) baseline error rate of 2%.

Before being placed in the fMRI scanner, participants met and interacted with four other participants who were, as you've probably guessed, actually confederates. These four would be doing the same mental rotation task, but only the participant would have his or her brain activity monitored. During the task, the participant completed one-third of the trials with no knowledge of the answers of the other four people. On the remaining two-thirds of the trials, the participant saw the other four group members' answers on a visual display. Half of the time, the group had all chosen the wrong answer, and the other half of the time, they had all chosen the right answer.

Now, what did the participants do, and, most important, what areas of their brains were more active when they did it? First, as with the original Asch study, participants conformed to the group's wrong answers a fair amount of the time (41% of the trials, to be exact). On the baseline trials, when the participants answered alone, the fMRI results indicated increased activity in the posterior brain areas dedicated to vision and perception. When the participants conformed to the group's wrong answers, activation occurred in the same areas; however, when participants chose to give the right answer and thus disagree with the group's unanimous wrong answer, the visual/perceptual areas of the brain were not activated. Instead, different areas of the brain became more active, in particular the amygdala, an area associated with, among other functions, negative emotional states and modulating social behavior (Berns et al., 2005). Thus, more recent research has continued to explore the same issues Asch first examined six decades ago and has provided support for the idea that normative social influence occurs because people feel arousing emotions, such as discomfort and tension, when they go against the group (Gaither et al., 2017; Hatcher et al., 2016; Shestakova et al., 2013).

The Importance of Being Accurate, Revisited

Now, you may be thinking, "Okay, so we conform to normative social influence, but hey, only when it's something minor. Who cares whether you give the right answer on a line-judgment task? It doesn't matter, nothing is at stake—I'd never conform to the group's wrong answer if something important were involved!" And this would be a very good criticism. Recall our discussion of importance in connection with informational social influence; we found that in ambiguous situations, the more important the decision is, the more someone will conform for informational reasons. What about in nonambiguous situations? Maybe the more important the decision

is, the less the person would conform? When it's important to you to be right, are you strong enough to withstand group pressure and disagree with the group?

Recall the first study of eyewitness identification that we discussed earlier, in which participants viewed pairs of slides, one of the perpetrator alone and one of the perpetrator in a lineup (Baron et al., 1996). When studying informational conformity, the researchers made the task fiendishly difficult and ambiguous—the slides were projected for only half a second. To study normative social influence, however, the researchers made the same task easy: The participants viewed each slide for a full 5 seconds, and they were shown each pair of slides twice. Now the task became analogous to Asch's line-judging task; basically, if you were awake, you'd get the right answer. Indeed, when individuals in a control group viewed the slides alone, they answered correctly on 97% of the trials.

Baron and colleagues again manipulated the importance of the participants being accurate, in the same ways we discussed earlier. Half were led to believe that it was very important that they give the right answers, and half were told it really didn't matter how they did. How did participants respond when the confederates give the obviously wrong answer? Did they conform to the group on at least some of the trials, as the participants in the Asch study did? Or did the participants who believe accuracy is very important give the correct answers every time, standing up to the group and ignoring the normative pressure to agree with them?

The researchers found that participants in the low-importance condition conformed to the group on 33% of the critical trials—very close to the rate in Asch's line-judgment task. What happened to the participants in the high-importance condition? Rather than standing up to the group across the board, they caved on at least some trials. They did conform less to the obviously wrong answers of the group; on only 16% of the critical trials did they echo the group's blatantly wrong answer. But they still conformed sometimes! These findings underscore the power of normative social influence: Even when the group is wrong, the right answer is obvious, and there are strong incentives to be accurate, some people still find it difficult to risk social disapproval, even from strangers (Baron et al., 1996; Hornsey et al., 2003).

Normative social influence most closely reflects the negative stereotype of conformity we referred to earlier: the belief that those who conform are spineless and weak. Ironically, while this type of social pressure can be difficult to resist, people are often quick to deny that they've been influenced by normative considerations. Recall the energy conservation study by Nolan and colleagues (2008) described previously. In this study, researchers assessed the effectiveness of different arguments for reducing electricity use among Californians. The most effective persuasive message was telling consumers that their neighbors were conserving energy. But participants *believed* that this message had little effect on them, especially compared to participants who received information regarding protecting the environment or saving money. As Nolan and her coauthors conclude, we often underestimate the power of normative social influence.

Fads are a frivolous example of normative social influence. By 2007, the Crocs fad was in full force as kids (and parents) everywhere could be found out and about in these plastic clogs with Swiss-cheese holes. Just a few years later, reviews were already decidedly more mixed: quite quickly, anti-Croc pages with more than a million followers sprouted up on Facebook and Twitter.

But your denial that normative pressures affect you doesn't stop others from trying to exert influence through such processes. How else to explain why some television producers hire professional laughers to sit in the studio audience to make their comedies seem funnier (Warner, 2011)? Or why some sports teams pay abnormally enthusiastic fans to rile up fellow spectators at their home games (Sommers, 2011)? Clearly, the desire to fit in and be accepted is part of human nature, whether or not we're willing to admit it. Just think of the role normative social influence plays in daily decisions

about what to wear. Normative social influence is at work whenever we notice a particular look shared by people in a certain group, and helps explain why, no matter what it is, it will look outdated just a few years later until the fashion industry revives it in a new trend.

The Consequences of Resisting Normative Social Influence

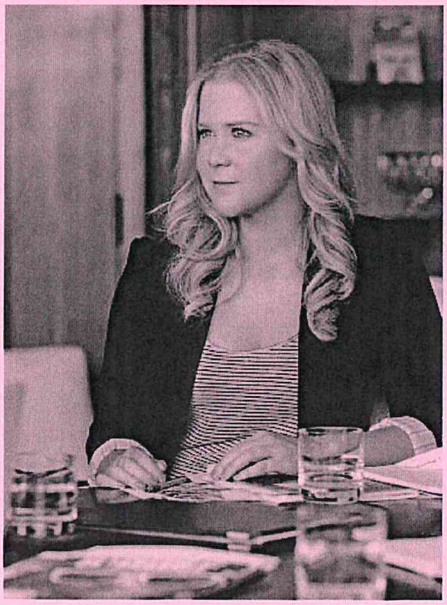
One way to observe the power of normative social pressure is to examine the consequences when people manage to resist it. Indeed, entire television empires have been built around this very premise, that violating norms has consequences, and those consequences can be entertaining—at least when it's someone else suffering them and not you. *Curb Your Enthusiasm, Broad City, Louie, Inside Amy Schumer*, and other shows that inspire a potent mixture of laughter and cringing among viewers have become cult (and sometimes mainstream) classics by mining the comedic landscape that is resisting normative social influence.

In your own life, if a person refuses to do as the group asks and thereby violates its norms, what happens? Think about the norms that operate in your group of friends. Some friends have an egalitarian norm for making group decisions. For example, when choosing a movie, everyone gets to state a preference; the choice is then discussed until agreement is reached. What would happen if, in a group with this kind of norm, you stated at the outset that you wanted to see only *Rebel Without a Cause* and would not agree to watch anything else? Your friends would be surprised by your behavior; they would also be annoyed with you or even angry. If you continued to disregard the friendship norms of the group by failing to conform, two things would most likely happen. First, the group would try to bring you "back into the fold," chiefly through increased communication. Teasing comments and long discussions would ensue as your friends tried to figure out why you were acting so strangely and tried to get you to conform to their expectations, and if these tactics didn't work, your friends would most likely say negative things to you and about you and start to withdraw from you (Festinger & Thibaut, 1951; Packer, 2008b). Now, in effect, you've been rejected (Abrams et al., 2000; Jetten & Hornsey, 2014).

Stanley Schachter (1951) demonstrated how the group responds to an individual who ignores normative influence. He asked groups of college students to read and discuss a case history of "Johnny Rocco," a juvenile delinquent. Most of the students took a middle-of-the-road position about the case, believing that Rocco should receive a judicious mixture of love and discipline. Unbeknownst to the participants, however, Schachter had planted an accomplice in the group who was instructed to disagree with the group's recommendations. The accomplice consistently argued that Rocco should receive the harshest amount of punishment, regardless of what the other group members argued.

How was the deviant treated? He became the target of the most comments and questions from the real participants throughout most of the discussion, and then, near the end, communication with him dropped sharply. The other group members had tried to convince the deviant to agree with them; when it appeared that it wouldn't work, they started to ignore him altogether. In addition, they punished him. After the discussion, they were asked to fill out questionnaires that supposedly pertained to future discussion meetings of their group. The participants were asked to nominate one group member who should be eliminated from further discussions if the group size had to be reduced. They nominated the deviant. They were also asked to assign group members to various tasks in future discussions. They assigned the unimportant or boring jobs, such as taking notes, to the deviant. Social groups are well versed in how to bring a nonconformist into line. No wonder we respond as often as we do to normative pressures! You can find out what it's like to resist normative social influence in the following Try It!

Whether through stand-up routines in which she explores taboo topics and embarrassing revelations that most of us would never address in public or via her provocative show *Inside Amy Schumer*, Amy Schumer is one contemporary comedian who produces many of her laughs by exploring the consequences of norm violation.



Try It!

Unmasking Normative Social Influence by Breaking the Rules

Every day, you likely talk to a wide range of people—friends, professors, coworkers, strangers. When you have a conversation, whether long or short, you follow certain interaction "rules" that operate in your culture. These rules for conversation include nonverbal forms of behavior that others consider "normal" as well as "polite." You can find out how powerful these norms are by breaking them and noting how people respond to you; their responses demonstrate the power of normative social influence.

For example, in conversation, we stand a certain distance from each other—not too far and not too close. About 2 to 3 feet is typical in mainstream U.S. culture. In addition, we maintain a good amount of eye contact when we are listening to the other person; in comparison, when we're talking, we look away from the person more often.

What happens if you break these normative rules? Try having a conversation with a friend and stand either too close or too far away (e.g., 1 foot or 7 feet). Have a typical, normal conversation with your friend—only the spacing you use with this person should be different. Note how your friend responds. If you're too close, your friend will probably back away; if you continue to keep the distance small, he or she may act uncomfortable and even end your conversation sooner than usual. If you're too far away, your friend will probably come closer; if you back up, he or she may think you are in a strange mood. In either case, your friend's response will probably include looking at you a lot, having a puzzled look on his or her face, acting uncomfortable, and talking less than normal.

You have acted in a nonnormative way, and your conversational partner is, first, trying to figure out what is going on and, second, responding in a way to get you to stop acting oddly. From this one brief exercise, you will get the idea of what would happen if you behaved oddly all the time—people would try to get you to change, and then they would probably start avoiding or ignoring you.

When you're finished, "debrief" your friend, explaining the exercise, so that your behavior is understood. Note the tremendous relief you feel on revealing why you were acting so peculiarly. This is yet one more demonstration of the strength of normative pressure and the challenge inherent to resisting it!

When Will People Conform to Normative Social Influence?

Social Impact Theory
The idea that conforming to social influence depends on the group's importance, immediacy, and the number of people in the group

Although conformity is common, people don't always cave in to peer pressure. After all, we certainly do not all agree on many major issues, such as abortion, affirmative action, or same-sex marriage. And if 75% of participants in Asch's line-judging studies conformed during the course of the study, that means that 25% never did—indeed, 95% of participants disagreed with the rest of the group at least one time. Exactly when are people most likely to conform to normative pressures? Some answers to this question are provided by Bibb Latané's (1981) **social impact theory**. According to his theory, the likelihood that you will respond to social influence depends on three variables regarding the group in question:

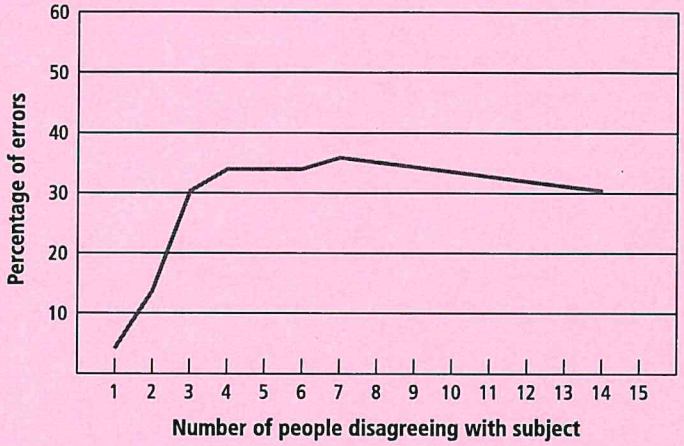
1. ***Strength:*** How important to you is the group? The more important a group is to us, the more likely we will be to conform to its normative pressures, according to social impact theory.
2. ***Immediacy:*** How close is the group to you in space and time during the attempt to influence you? Conformity is also predicted to increase the closer group members are to us physically.
3. ***Number:*** How many people are in the group? As the size of the group increases, so does the normative pressure it exerts, but each additional person has less of an influencing effect. That is, going from three people to four makes much more of a difference than going from 53 people to 54. In short, it does not take an extremely large group to create normative social influence, but the larger the group, the stronger the social pressure (see Figure 8.4 for a depiction of this conclusion in Asch's conformity research).

Latané constructed a mathematical model that captures these hypothesized effects of strength, immediacy, and number and has applied this formula to the results of many

Figure 8.4 Effects of Group Size on Conformity

Asch varied the size of the unanimous majority in his study and found that once the majority numbered four, adding more people had little influence on conformity.

(Based on Asch, 1955)



conformity studies (Bourgeois & Bowen, 2001; Latané & Bourgeois, 2001; Wolf, 2014). For example, gay men who live in communities highly involved in AIDS awareness activities (where strength, immediacy, and number would all be high) report feeling more social pressure to avoid risky sexual behavior and stronger intentions to do so than gay men who live in less involved communities (Fishbein et al., 1993). Similarly, a recent study of heterosexual dating couples (a relationship typically high in strength and immediacy) reveals that an individual's own tendency to engage in heavy drinking is significantly predicted by the norm set by his or her partner's drinking tendencies (Mushquash et al., 2011).

Let's see in more detail what social impact theory says about the conditions under which people will conform to normative social pressures.

WHEN THE GROUP IS IMPORTANT The strength of the group—defined as how important the group is to us—makes a difference. Normative pressures are much stronger when they come from people whose friendship, love, and respect we cherish because there is a large cost to losing this love and respect (Abrams et al., 1990; Guimond, 1999; Nowak, Szamrej, & Latané, 1990). One consequence of this conclusion is that it can be dangerous to have policy decisions made by highly cohesive groups because they care more about pleasing each other and avoiding conflict than arriving at the best, most logical decision. We will see several examples of this phenomenon in Chapter 9.

We should note, however, that the very act of conforming normatively to important groups *most* of the time can earn you the right to deviate occasionally without serious consequences. This interesting observation was made by Edwin Hollander (1960, 1985), who stated that conforming to a group over time earns you **idiosyncrasy credits**, much like putting money in the bank to save for future use. It's as if your past conformity allows you, at some point in the future, to deviate from the group (to "make withdrawals") without getting into too much trouble. Let's say, for example, that your friends are all in agreement that they want to go out for Chinese food. You, however, feel like Mexican food tonight, and rather than simply going along with group consensus, you decide to stick to your guns and lobby for burritos. If you have typically followed their friendship norms in other areas in the past, your friends will be less likely to become upset with you for your current nonconformity, for you've earned the right to deviate from their normative rules in this area on this occasion (Hornsey et al., 2007; Jetten & Hornsey, 2014).

Idiosyncrasy Credits
The tolerance a person earns, over time, by conforming to group norms; if enough credits are earned, the person can, on occasion, deviate from the group without retribution

WHEN ONE HAS NO ALLIES IN THE GROUP Normative social influence is most powerfully felt when everyone in the group says or believes the same thing—for example,

when your group of friends all believe that *The Lord of the Rings* was the greatest movie trilogy ever made. Resisting such unanimous social influence is difficult unless you have an ally. If another person disagrees with the group—say, by nominating the original *Star Wars* movies as the best trilogy ever—this behavior will help you buck the tide as well.

To test the importance of having an ally, Asch (1955) conducted another version of his conformity experiment. He had six of the seven confederates give the wrong answer, while one confederate gave the right answer on every trial. The participant was no longer alone. Although still disagreeing with the majority of the group, having one ally dramatically changed the situation, helping the participant resist normative pressures. People conformed on an average of only 6% of the trials in this study, compared to 32% when all of the confederates gave the wrong answer. Several other studies have found that observing another person resist normative social influence emboldens the individual to do the same (Allen & Levine, 1969; Morris & Miller, 1975; Nemeth & Chiles, 1988).

The difficulty of being the lone dissenter is apparent even in the U.S. Supreme Court. After hearing a case, the justices first determine, informally, whether they are unanimous or split in their decision. Some justices then write opinion drafts and others decide which draft they will sign. There are informal attempts at influence, and eventually all make a decision. A content analysis of all the Supreme Court decisions from 1953 to 2001 (4,178 decisions, involving 29 different justices) indicated that the most common decision was 9–0, the unanimous one (35% of all decisions). And the least common decision? The one that required one justice to disagree with all of his or her colleagues, the 8–1 split, which accounted for only 10% of decisions over 48 years (Granberg & Bartels, 2005).

WHEN THE GROUP'S CULTURE IS COLLECTIVISTIC "In America, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. In Japan, the nail that stands out gets pounded down" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 224). Indeed, the society in which one is raised seems to predict the frequency of normative social influence (Milgram, 1961). In a cross-cultural study of normative social influence, people in Brazil, Hong Kong, and Lebanon conformed to a similar extent (both to each other and to the American sample), whereas participants from the Bantu tribe of Zimbabwe conformed to a much greater degree (Whittaker & Meade, 1967). As the researchers pointed out, conformity has a very high social value in Bantu culture.

Although Japanese culture tends to be more conforming than American culture in many areas, two Asch-type studies found that when the group unanimously gave the incorrect answer, Japanese students were less conformist in general than North Americans (Frager, 1970; Williams & Sogon, 1984). In Japan, cooperation and loyalty are directed to the groups to which one belongs and with which one identifies; there is little expectation that one should conform to the behavior of strangers, especially in such an artificial setting as a psychology experiment. Similarly, conformity was much higher in a British sample when the participants thought the other group members were psychology majors like themselves rather than art history majors (Abrams et al., 1990). Similarly, German research participants have shown less conformity in the Asch experiment than North Americans (Timaeus, 1968); in Germany, conformity to strangers is less valued than conformity to a few well-defined groups (Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993).

A more systematic review of the role of culture in conformity is provided by a meta-analysis of 133 Asch line-judgment studies conducted in 17 countries (Bond & Smith, 1996). Participants from more collectivistic cultures showed higher rates of conformity on the line task than participants from more individualistic cultures. In collectivistic cultures, conformity is seen as a valued trait, not as a somewhat negative one. Agreeing with others is viewed not as an act of submission or cowardice in collectivist cultures but as an act of tact and sensitivity (Hodges & Geyer, 2006; Smith & Bond, 1999). Because the emphasis is on the group and not the individual, people in collectivistic cultures value normative social influence because it promotes harmony and supportive relationships in the group (Kim et al., 1994; Markus et al., 1996; Zhang et al., 2007).

The extent to which conformity is valued varies across cultures. In the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, a worldwide television audience was mesmerized by the sight of 2,008 drummers performing in perfect synchronization.

#trending

Social Norms and Bigotry

According to FBI data, hate crimes in the United States increased by almost 7% from 2014 to 2015. Though most hate crimes continue to be motivated by race (over half are targeted toward Black or African Americans), much of the recent increase is from attacks against Muslims. In the days and weeks following the 2016 U.S. presidential election, reports of hate crimes and other forms of racial and religious harassment also spiked. It may be years before we have precise data on hate crimes for 2016 and 2017, and the causes of such an uptick in overt acts of bigotry are likely multiple and complex. But some social psychologists have argued that one relevant factor is normative social influence.

Keith Payne, a social psychologist at the University of North Carolina, has suggested that when people—especially those in positions of influence and authority—fail to condemn episodes of bias, a social norm is reinforced by which these biases become seen as more acceptable. In one study, for example, research participants—none of whom were Black—were given a measure of unconscious or implicit racial biases (a topic covered in more detail in Chapter 13; Payne, Burkley, & Stokes, 2008). Some of these participants were told by the experimenter in charge of the study that everyone is vulnerable to subtle prejudice, but that one way we can overcome it is to be vigilant against bias. Other participants were told that they should express their attitudes in the study as honestly as possible, even if they aren't "politically correct."

Payne and colleagues found that in a follow-up task, those participants who had been told that they shouldn't worry about political correctness expressed more negative feelings toward African American faces than did other participants. In other words, when the experimenter indicated that their biases were acceptable, the participants felt liberated to act on them. Creating a norm that tolerates or even encourages bigotry seems to allow bigotry to spread, much as research on social influence would predict.

This brings us back to the most recent presidential election. The 2016 campaign and its aftermath were marked by many instances of bias. Donald Trump campaigned on the premise that Mexican immigrants are a primary source of social and economic problems in America. He also promised to ban Muslims from entering the country and within weeks of taking office signed a controversial executive order that placed a travel ban on citizens from several predominantly Muslim nations. In August 2017, many criticized President Trump for failing to more explicitly blame Neo-Nazis and White supremacists for violence at a rally and counter-protest in Charlottesville, Virginia. As the research reviewed above indicates, when people in prominent and powerful positions sanction (or fail to criticize) biased ideas about certain groups, it can embolden others to voice and act on such bias as well. The trickle-down effect ultimately serves to normalize—there's that word "norm" again—hate and divisiveness, as can be seen by the Ku Klux Klan feeling emboldened enough to put out a full-page endorsement of Trump days before the election and by the maskless, tiki torch-bearing marchers in Charlottesville 10 months later.

Indeed, as Payne himself has written, "Maintaining social norms against prejudice means consciously rejecting our own implicit biases. Then it means speaking up, regardless of who you voted for, to say loudly and clearly in personal conversations and on social media that bias is not our way, and bigotry is unacceptable. Rejecting prejudice is not, and cannot be, a partisan issue." Like they do for so many other aspects of daily life, when it comes to bigotry and bias, social norms matter.

Minority Influence: When the Few Influence the Many

We shouldn't leave our discussion of normative social influence with the impression that groups affect individuals but the individual never has an effect on the group. As Serge Moscovici (1985, 1994; Moscovici, Mucchi-Faina, & Maass, 1994) says, if groups always succeeded in silencing nonconformists, rejecting deviants, and persuading everyone to go along with the majority point of view, how could change ever be introduced into the system? We would all be little robots, marching along with everyone else in monotonous synchrony, never able to adapt to changing reality. Clearly, this is not the case (Imhoff & Erb, 2009).

Minority Influence
The case where a minority of group members influences the behavior or beliefs of the majority

Instead, an individual or minority of group members can indeed influence the behavior or beliefs of the majority (Horcajo, Briñol, & Petty, 2014; Mucchi-Faina & Pagliaro, 2008; Sinaceur et al., 2010). This is called **minority influence**. The key is consistency: People with minority views must express the same view over time, and different members of the minority must agree with one another. If a person in the minority wavers between two different viewpoints or if two individuals express different minority views, the majority will dismiss them as people who have peculiar and groundless opinions. If, however, the minority expresses a consistent, unwavering view, the majority is more likely to take notice and even adopt the minority view (Moscovici & Nemeth, 1974). For example, in the 1970s, a minority of scientists began to call attention to evidence of human-caused climate change. Today, despite some vocal exceptions, the majority is paying attention, and political leaders from most industrialized nations have met to discuss possible worldwide solutions.

In a meta-analysis of nearly 100 studies, Wendy Wood and her colleagues describe how minority influence operates (Wood et al., 1994). People in the majority can cause other group members to conform through normative influence. As in the Asch experiments, the conformity that occurs may be a case of public compliance without private acceptance. People in the minority, however, can rarely influence others through normative means. Majority group members may be hesitant to agree publicly with the minority; they don't want anyone to think that they side with those unusual, strange views. Minorities therefore exert their influence on the group via the other principal method: informational social influence. The minority can introduce new and unexpected information to the group and cause the group to examine the issues more carefully. Such careful examination may cause the majority to realize that the minority view has merit, leading the group to adopt all or part of the minority's view. In short, majorities often obtain public compliance because of normative social influence, whereas when minorities are persuasive, it is more likely to be through private acceptance because of informational social influence (De Dreu & De Vries, 2001; Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001; Wood et al., 1996).

Review Questions

1. Societal rules regarding acceptable behavior are known as
   - **a.** conformity.
   - **b.** social norms.
   - **c.** minority influence.
   - **d.** convergence.
2. Asch's line-judgment research indicated that
   - **a.** participants demonstrated public conformity without private acceptance.
   - **b.** every single participant conformed at least one time.
   - **c.** conformity was greater when participants wrote down their responses rather than said them aloud.
   - **d.** conformity occurs only on a task that is of personal importance to the individual.
3. Compared to informational social influence, normative social influence
   - **a.** leads to more internalized, private attitude change.
   - **b.** is more consistent across different cultures.

c. has less to do with being accurate and more to do with fitting in.
d. is a tendency about which most Americans hold positive attitudes.

4. A 12-person jury is deliberating on a murder trial. Eleven members of the jury want to vote guilty and convict the defendant; only one juror wants to vote not guilty. The holdout juror, Henry, digs in and will not change his mind. According to research, what is the best prediction for how the rest of the group will react to Henry's deviance?
a. They will eventually come to ignore him and try to punish him by being generally unpleasant toward him.
b. They will come to appreciate his principled stand the longer he holds out in defiance of their position.
c. They will seek to change his opinion by using idiosyncrasy credits.
d. They will try to use minority influence to change his mind.

5. Which of the following conclusions is consistent with the predictions of social impact theory?
a. Conformity is more likely among groups of strangers than within established groups that are important to us.
b. Social influence increases in a linear fashion as a group grows in size; in other words, each new member added to a group adds the same amount of social influence as the previous member added.
c. The more immediate a group is, the more social influence it tends to exert.
d. Conformity is less prevalent in collectivist cultures than it is in individualistic cultures.

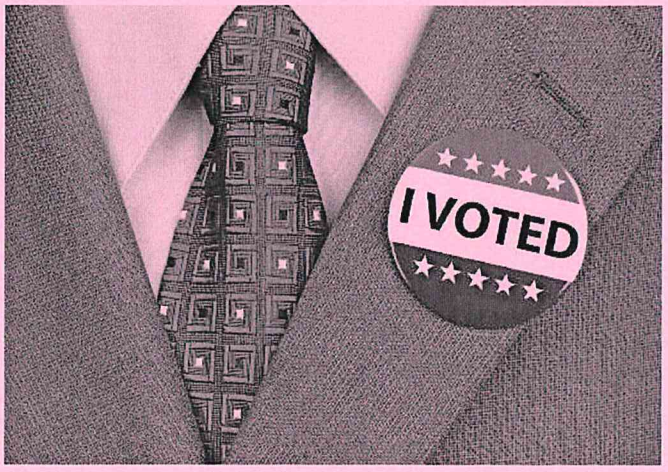
6. The key to minority influence is
a. normative social pressure.
b. immediacy.
c. creativity.
d. consistency.

Conformity Tactics

LO 8.4 **Describe how people can use their knowledge of social influence to influence others.**

We have seen how informational and normative conformity occurs. Even in a highly individualistic culture such as the United States, conformity of both types is common. Are there ways that we can put this tendency to productive use? Can we capitalize on conformity to change behavior for the common good? The answer is a resounding yes.

Consider a "61-million-person" experiment conducted via Facebook during the 2010 U.S. congressional elections (Bond et al., 2012). On Election Day, researchers arranged for millions of Facebook users to receive either an informational or a social message about voting (a control group received no message at all). The informational message appeared at the top of their "News Feed" and provided a link for finding their local polling place as well as an "I Voted" button they could click to update friends with the news that they had voted. The social message included this same information but with one addition: It told users how many of their own Facebook friends had also voted, showing them a randomly selected set of six photos of these voting friends. Compared to the control condition, the informational message had little impact on users' own likelihood of voting. But Facebook users who received the social message were significantly more likely to vote, as measured by their likelihood of clicking the site's "I Voted" button as well as actual voting records (Bond et al., 2012). These findings highlight just how powerful it can be to learn what others are up to—in fact, Bond et al. (2012) found that even seeing the social message posted to a friend's News Feed (not by one of *your* friends but by someone else your friend knows) was enough to have an indirect influence on a Facebook user's own voting behavior.



We can capitalize on the tendency to conform to change behavior for the common good, as in the effort to use social media messages to increase voter turnout.

The Role of Injunctive and Descriptive Norms

Robert Cialdini, Raymond Reno, and Carl Kallgren have suggested that social norms are particularly useful for subtly inducing people to conform to positive, socially approved

behavior (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Jacobson, Mortensen, & Cialdini, 2011; Kallgren, Reno, & Cialdini, 2000). For example, we all know that littering is wrong. But when we've finished enjoying a snack at the beach or in a park, what determines whether we toss the wrapper on the ground or carry it with us until we come to a trash can? Let's say we wanted to decrease littering (or increase recycling or blood donations or contributions to other worthwhile causes). How would we go about doing it?

Cialdini and colleagues (1991) suggest that first we need to focus on what kind of norm is operating in the situation. A culture's social norms are of two types.

Injunctive Norms
People's perceptions of what behaviors are approved or disapproved of by others

Injunctive norms have to do with what we *think* other people approve or disapprove of. Injunctive norms motivate behavior by promising rewards (or punishments) for normative (or nonnormative) behavior. For example, an injunctive norm in our culture is that littering is wrong and that donating blood is a good thing to do. In other words, injunctive norms have to do with what people believe they *should* do in a given situation.

Descriptive Norms
People's perceptions of how people actually behave in given situations, regardless of whether the behavior is approved or disapproved of by others

Descriptive norms concern our perceptions of the way people actually behave in a given situation, regardless of whether the behavior is approved or disapproved of by others. Descriptive norms motivate behavior by informing people about what is effective or adaptive behavior. For example, while we all know that littering is wrong (an injunctive norm), we also all know that there are situations when people are likely to do it (a descriptive norm)—for example, dropping peanut shells on the ground at a baseball game or leaving trash at your seat in a movie theater. Descriptive norms also tell us that relatively few people donate blood and that only a small percentage of registered voters actually vote. In other words, descriptive norms have to do with what people actually do in a given situation (Crane & Platow, 2010; Kallgren et al., 2000; White et al, 2009).

In a series of studies, Cialdini and colleagues explored how injunctive and descriptive norms affect people's likelihood of littering. For example, in one field experiment, people were returning to their cars in the parking lot when a confederate approached them (Reno, Cialdini, & Kallgren, 1993). In the control group, the confederate just walked by. In the *descriptive norm condition*, the confederate dropped an empty bag from a fast-food restaurant on the ground before passing the participant. By littering, the confederate was subtly communicating that "this is what people do in this situation." In the *injunctive norm condition*, the confederate was not carrying anything but instead picked up a littered fast-food bag from the ground before passing the participant. By picking up someone else's litter, the confederate was subtly communicating that "littering is wrong." These three conditions occurred in one of two environments: Either the parking lot was heavily littered (ahead of time by the experimenters), or the area was clean and unlittered (previously cleaned up by the experimenters).

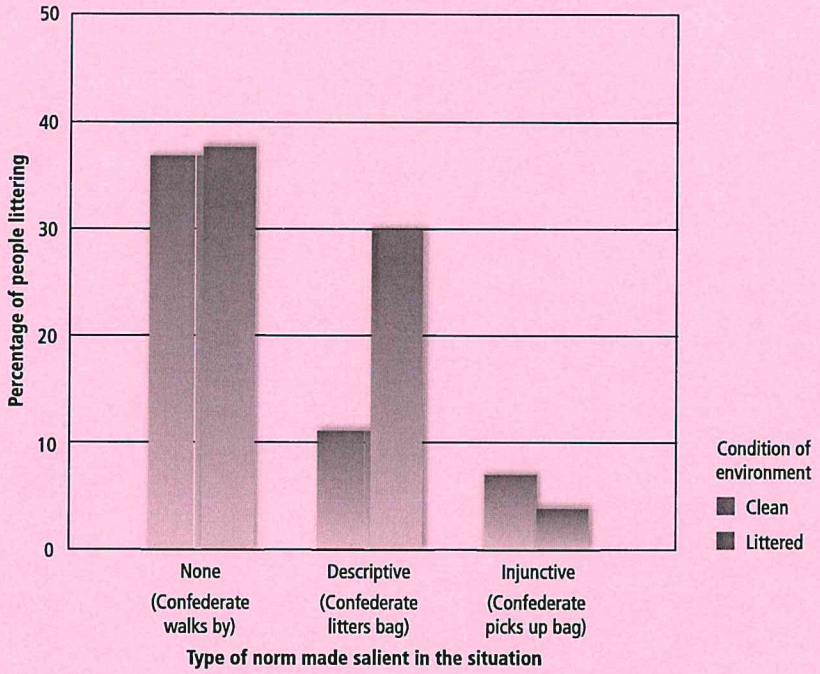
Infomercials, those long, late-night advertisements for zany inventions and wild, new products, used to end as follows: "Operators are waiting; please call now." These days, they're more likely to instruct viewers: "If operators are busy, please call again." This new call to action has led to increases in calls from new customers. Can you use the concept of descriptive norms to explain why this new wording seems to be so effective?

At this point, research participants have been exposed to one of two types of norms about littering. And all this has happened in a littered or a clean environment. How were participants' own littering tendencies affected? When they got back to their cars, they found a large flyer that the experimenters had left on their windshield. The participant had two

Figure 8.5 The Effect of Injunctive and Descriptive Norms on Littering

The data for the control group (left) indicate that 37% to 38% of people litter a flyer found on their car windshield whether the environment (a parking lot) is littered or clean. When a descriptive norm is made salient, littering decreases significantly only in the clean environment (middle). When an injunctive norm is made salient, littering decreases significantly in both types of environment, indicating that injunctive norms are more consistently effective at changing behavior.

(Adapted from Reno, Cialdini, & Kallgren, 1993)

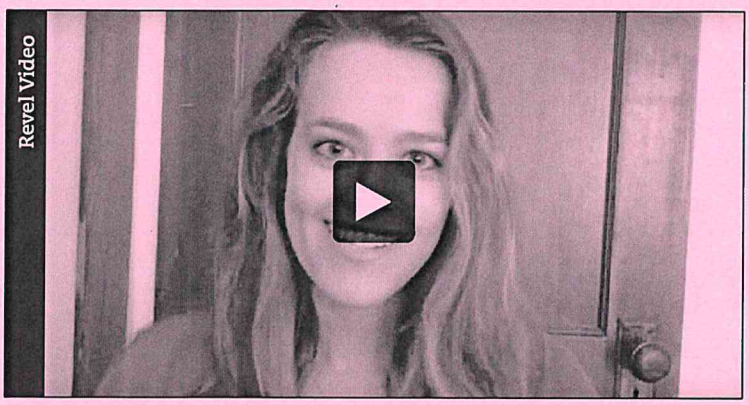


choices: throw the flyer on the ground, littering, or bring the flyer inside their car to dispose of it later.

The control group indicates that slightly more than one-third of people threw the flyer on the ground, regardless of whether the area was already littered or clean (see Figure 8.5). In the descriptive norm condition, the confederate's littering communicated two different messages, depending on the condition of the parking lot. In the littered lot, the confederate's behavior reminded participants that people often litter here—the confederate served as just one salient example of the type of behavior that had led to such a mess in the first place. In the clean parking lot, however, the confederate's behavior communicated a different message. Now, the behavior stood out as unusual—it reminded participants that most people don't litter in this area. Hence, we would expect the confederate's littering behavior to remind participants of a descriptive norm against littering, and this is what the researchers found. Finally, what about the injunctive norm condition? This kind of norm was less context dependent: Seeing the confederate picking up someone else's litter invokes the injunctive norm that littering is wrong in both the clean and the littered environments, thereby leading to the lowest amount of littering in the study (Reno et al., 1993).

In light of studies such as this one, researchers have concluded that injunctive norms are more powerful than descriptive norms in producing desirable behavior (Kallgren et al., 2000). This should not surprise you because injunctive norms tap into normative conformity; we conform (e.g., refraining from littering) because someone's behavior reminds us that our society disapproves of littering. We will look like selfish slobs if we litter, and we will feel embarrassed if other people see us litter. Although

Watch SURVIVAL TIPS! KEEPING PARTIES CLEAN

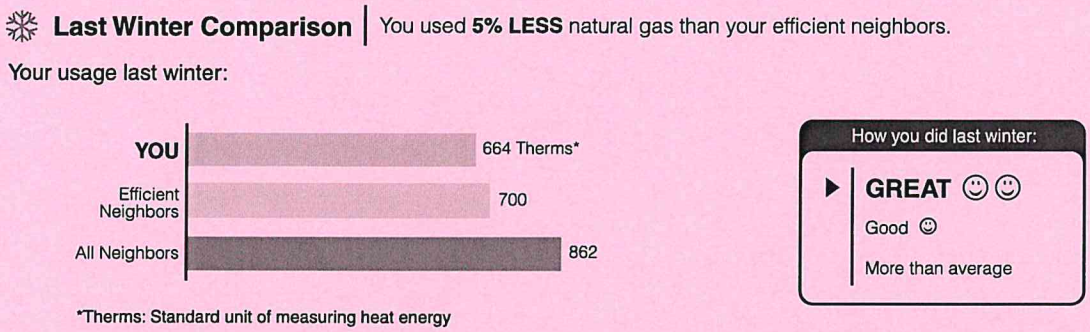


norms are always present to some extent—we *know* that littering is bad—they are not always *salient* to us (Jonas et al., 2008; Kallgren et al., 2000). To promote socially beneficial behavior, something in the situation needs to draw our attention to the relevant norm. Thus, anything that highlights injunctive norms can be used to create positive behavioral change (Bodimeade et al., 2014). Injunctive norms are particularly good predictors of behavior when the sense of approval/disapproval in question comes from close others (e.g., family and close friends) versus more distant sources (e.g., "the average person") (Napper, Kenney, & LaBrie, 2015; Pederson et al., 2017).

Using Norms to Change Behavior: Beware the "Boomerang Effect"

Efforts to change behavior by using norms have a downside, however. As one example, in recent years, university administrators have tried a new technique for decreasing alcohol binge drinking on their campuses. The idea is that students typically overestimate how much their peers drink (Lewis et al., 2007; Perkins, 2007). Thus, telling them that "students at your school, on average, consume only X number of drinks a week" should lead them to decrease their own alcohol intake as they conform to this lower level. But researchers have noted a problem with this approach: Sometimes, it backfires, or "boomerangs." That is, for students who already drink very little (or not at all), finding out that the average student on campus drinks more than they do leads them to *increase* their own alcohol intake to be more like everyone else! In short, the public service message meant to decrease alcohol consumption can actually have the effect of increasing it (Perkins, Haines, & Rice, 2005). Accordingly, your efforts to change others' behavior through processes of conformity must consider that there are different types of people receiving your message: those performing the undesirable behavior at an *above-average* level (whom you want to convince to decrease the behavior) and those already performing the undesirable behavior at a *below-average* level (who you want to continue doing what they're doing rather than to boomerang by increasing the undesirable behavior).

P. Wesley Shultz and colleagues tested this idea by focusing on a desirable behavior we've already discussed in this chapter: conserving electricity (Shultz et al., 2007). Residents of a California neighborhood agreed to take part in the study. Their baseline energy usage was measured, and they were divided into two groups: those whose energy consumption was above the neighborhood average and those whose energy consumption was below the average. The households were then randomly assigned to receive one of two kinds of feedback over several weeks. In the *descriptive norm condition*, they were told how much energy they had used that week, told how much energy the average household in their neighborhood had used, and given suggestions for energy conservation. In the *descriptive norm plus injunctive norm condition*, they received all of the above information plus one subtle but important addition: If they had consumed less energy than the average household, the researcher drew a smiley face next to the information. If they had consumed more energy than the average household, the researcher drew a sad face instead. The happy or sad face communicated the *injunctive* part of the message—the recipients were receiving either approval or disapproval for the amount of energy they had used.



Smiley faces aren't just for texting. In this case, they're part of an effort from a utility company to use injunctive norms to convince consumers to cut down on their energy use.

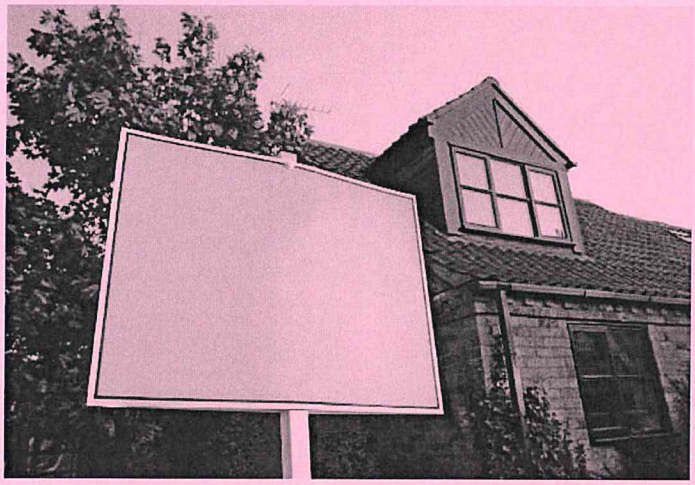
Weeks later, researchers measured energy usage again. Did the messages help convince people to conserve energy? Did those who already used low amounts stray from the path of conservation righteousness and boomerang, deciding that it would not be so bad for them to be a little less efficient just like their wasteful neighbors? First, the results indicated that the descriptive norm message had a positive effect on those who consumed more energy than average; they cut back and conserved. However, the descriptive norm message had a boomerang effect on those who consumed less energy than average. Once they learned what their neighbors were doing (using electricity like crazy), they felt liberated to increase their own usage!

On the other hand, the "descriptive norm plus injunctive norm" message was uniformly successful. Those whose consumption was more than average decreased their usage when they received this message. Most important, those whose consumption was below average to begin with did not boomerang; they maintained their same, low level of energy use as before the study started. The smiley face reminded them that they were doing the right thing, and they kept on doing it (Schultz et al., 2007). This study has had a major impact on energy conservation strategies in the United States. The use of smiley and sad faces to give injunctive norm feedback, combined with descriptive norm energy-usage information, is now being used by utility companies in various major metropolitan areas in the United States, United Kingdom, and elsewhere (National Energy Study, 2014).

Other Tactics of Social Influence

The savvy practitioner of social influence has more than one trick up his or her sleeve. Using norms is not the only way to change other people's behavior. Indeed, anyone who has ever tried to buy a car, join a gym, or negotiate with any of a variety of salespeople, door-to-door petitioners, or telemarketers knows that there is a wide range of techniques that people use to try to get you to go along with what they'd like you to do.

Indeed, many of the most effective techniques for changing other people's behaviors psychologists have catalogued have been identified after observing masters of social influence at work—the successful salesperson, marketer, and negotiator. One important lesson that researchers have learned is that the sequence in which a series of requests is made contributes to its effectiveness. Consider the following scenario: You are approached by someone identifying himself as a member of a group called Citizens for Safe Driving. His hope is that you'll be willing to support his group's campaign by placing a sign in your front yard for a week. He then shows you a photo of the sign in question. It's huge! It blocks much of the house in the picture, completely concealing the front door. To be honest, it's not a particularly attractive sign either; the "Drive Carefully" lettering even looks a bit crooked. Oh, and did we mention that it will probably require making holes in your lawn?



Would you agree to put a big sign in your yard, blocking the front of your house? Research on the foot-in-the-door technique suggests that your answer might depend on whether or not you have already agreed to a smaller request first.

Our guess is that you aren't too excited at the prospects of adding this sign to your property, even on a temporary basis. Indeed, when Jonathan Freedman and Scott Fraser (1966) made this very request of homeowners in Palo Alto, California, they found just 17% willing to put the sign in their yard. But the researchers also figured out a way to make the same request seem much more agreeable: by first getting people to comply with a smaller request. Specifically, in another condition, the researchers first asked participants if they would place in their window a small, 3-inch sign that read, "Be a safe driver." Then, 2 weeks later, these participants were asked about putting up the larger (and uglier) yard sign, and a whopping 76% now agreed (Freedman & Fraser, 1966). This increase in compliance based on an earlier, smaller request is the **foot-in-the-door technique** in action—so named for the traveling salesman whose underlying strategy is to get at least one foot inside your house so you can't slam the door shut on him.

Foot-in-the-Door Technique
Social influence strategy in which getting people to agree first to a small request makes them more likely to agree later to a second, larger request

Door-in-the-Face Technique
Social influence strategy in which first asking people for a large request that they will probably refuse makes them more likely to agree later to a second, smaller request

Why does this work? Think about what happens when you get people to agree to any request, even a small one. They start to see themselves as agreeable people. They feel committed to a helpful course of action. To say no to a follow-up request—even if it comes from a different person—could trigger uncomfortable feelings of inconsistency or dissonance (Cantatero, Gamian-Wilk, & Doliński, 2017; Cialdini, 2009; Pascual et al., 2013).

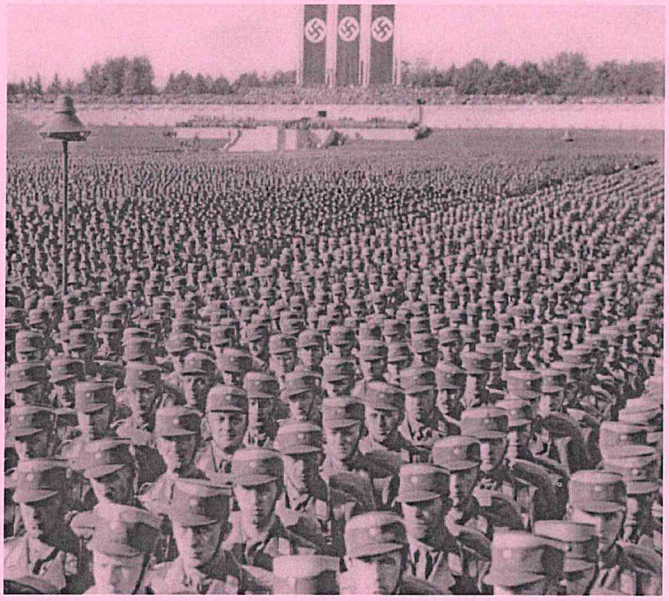
Interestingly, the opposite tactic also works. That is, another way to get people to agree to a request is first to ask them for a much larger commitment, one to which you know they'll say no. This is the **door-in-the-face technique**. In one study, Cialdini and colleagues (1975) approached college students and asked if they would be willing to spend 2 hours chaperoning a group of troubled children on a field trip to the local zoo. Only 17% of students agreed to this request. But consider the experience of other participants who were first asked about their willingness to volunteer every week for a minimum of 2 years at a local juvenile detention center. Every single one of the students refused this large request. But when they were then asked about chaperoning the 2-hour zoo trip, 50% agreed.

In short, people are also more likely to agree to the request you really care about when you first hit them up for a bigger favor that forces them to say no. One reason is that the first, bigger request makes the second "ask" seem less daunting by comparison. Another reason has to do with feelings of reciprocity (Chan & Au, 2011). After all, it seems like you—the requestor—have made some concessions here, coming down from your initially huge favor to a more much manageable later request. To the target of your requests, it feels as if the least they can do is negotiate a bit as well, meeting you halfway and agreeing to something smaller. Of course, little do they know that it was this second, smaller request that you really cared about all along.

Watch TACTICS OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Are these strategies for social influence ones you can envision using in your own life? Or maybe you bristle at the thought of such conscious efforts to manipulate others? At the very least, newly aware of their existence, perhaps now you'll be on the lookout for those times when other people attempt to use them on you. The ethics of such tactics make for an interesting discussion. Less debatable, though,

is the conclusion that social influence *can* be used to pursue illegal, immoral, and unconscionable aims. Consider the extraordinary example of **propaganda**, especially as perfected by the Nazi regime in the 1930s. Propaganda has been defined as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1999, p. 6).



Nazi propaganda permeated all facets of German life in the 1930s and 1940s. Here, huge crowds attend the 1934 Nuremberg rally. Such large public gatherings were a technique frequently used by Goebbels and Hitler to promote loyalty and conformity to the Nazi party.

Propaganda

A deliberate, systematic attempt to advance a cause by manipulating mass attitudes and behaviors, often through misleading or emotionally charged information

Adolf Hitler was well aware of the power of propaganda as a tool of the state. In 1933, he appointed Joseph Goebbels head of the newly created Nazi Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. It was a highly efficient agency that permeated every aspect of Germans' lives, controlling all forms of media, including newspapers, films, and radio. The Nazis also disseminated their ideology through the extensive use of posters and "spectacles"—lavish public rallies that aroused powerful emotions of loyalty and patriotism among massive crowds (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1999). Nazi propaganda was taught in schools and further promoted in Hitler Youth groups. It always presented a consistent, dogmatic message: The German people must act to protect their racial purity and to increase their *Lebensraum* (living space) through conquest (Staub, 1989).

The concerns with *Lebensraum* led to World War II; the concerns with racial purity led to the Holocaust. How could the German people have acquiesced to the destruction of European Jewry? A major factor was prejudice (which we will discuss further in Chapter 13). Anti-Semitism was not a new idea; it had existed in Germany and the rest of Europe for hundreds of years. Propaganda is most successful when it taps into an audience's preexisting beliefs. Thus, the German people's anti-Semitism was strengthened and expanded by Goebbels's ministry. Jews were described in the Nazi propaganda as destroyers of Aryan racial purity and thus a threat to German survival. They were "pests, parasites, bloodsuckers" (Staub, 1989, p. 103) and were compared to "a plague of rats that needed to be exterminated" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1999, p. 242). Still, anti-Semitism alone is not a sufficient explanation for the Holocaust. Germany was initially no more prejudiced against Jews than were its neighbors (or even the United States) in the 1930s, but none of these other countries came up with the genocidal concept of a "final solution" as Germany did (Tindale et al., 2002).

One answer to the question of what made the Holocaust possible is propaganda, which operated in the form of persuasive messages leading to attitude change. But the propaganda also initiated social influence processes, persuading many Germans through informational conformity. They learned new "facts" (which were really lies) about the Jews and new solutions to what the Nazis had defined as the "Jewish question." The propaganda did an excellent job of convincing Germans that the Jews were a threat. As we saw previously, people experiencing a crisis—in this case, runaway inflation and economic collapse in Germany—are more likely to conform to information provided by others.

But surely, you are thinking, there must have been Germans who did not agree with the Nazi propaganda. Yes, there were, but it certainly wasn't easy to be one of them. The Nazi ideology so permeated daily life that children and teenagers in Hitler Youth groups were encouraged to spy on their own parents and report them to the Gestapo if they were not "good" Nazis (Staub, 1989). Neighbors, coworkers, store clerks, or passersby on the street—they could all turn you in if you said or did something that indicated disloyalty. This situation is ripe for normative conformity, through

which public compliance can occur even without private acceptance. Rejection, ostracism, and even torture or death were strong motivators for normative conformity, and many ordinary Germans conformed to Nazi propaganda. Whether they did so for informational or normative reasons, their conformity permitted the Holocaust to occur.

Review Questions

1. A ____ norm involves perceptions of which behaviors society approves of; a ____ norm involves perceptions of how people actually behave.
   - **a.** public; private
   - **b.** private; public
   - **c.** descriptive; injunctive
   - **d.** injunctive; descriptive
2. ____ norms are most powerful for changing people's behaviors.
   - **a.** Informational
   - **b.** Normative
   - **c.** Injunctive
   - **d.** Descriptive
3. Which of the following provides an illustration of how the use of norms to change behavior can backfire and produce a "boomerang effect"?
   - **a.** Jerry finds out that everyone in his building is conserving water by installing a low-flow shower head, so he decides that he doesn't need to worry about conserving, and he begins taking even longer showers than usual.
   - **b.** Elaine notices that the new, attractive guy at the office brings a reusable cup instead of bottled water, so she goes out of her way to show off her reusable cup whenever he is in the vicinity in order to win his affection.
   - **c.** Kramer finds out that he is using more electricity than most people in the neighborhood, so he cuts down on his usage by shutting off his computer, lights, and hot tub every time he leaves his apartment.
   - **d.** George finds out that all of his neighbors are stealing cable television, so he decides that he will get an illegal cable hookup as well.
4. The foot-in-the-door technique
   - **a.** works only when the second request comes from the same person as the first request.
   - **b.** capitalizes on people's desire for self-consistency.
   - **c.** is an example of propaganda.
   - **d.** works only when the requests come from someone in a position of authority.
5. The door-in-the-face technique
   - **a.** is an example of informational social influence.
   - **b.** illustrates the importance of people's desire to be accurate.
   - **c.** relies at least in part on norms of reciprocity.
   - **d.** is more likely to work during a time of crisis.

Obedience to Authority

LO 8.5 Summarize studies that have demonstrated people's willingness to obey authority figures.

On April 9, 2004, a man called a McDonald's restaurant in Mount Washington, Kentucky, and identified himself as a police detective. He told the assistant manager she had a problem: One of her employees had stolen from the restaurant. He said he had talked to corporate headquarters and to the store manager, whom he named correctly. The policeman gave the assistant manager a rough description of the perpetrator, a teenage female, and she identified one of her employees (whom we will refer to as Susan, to protect her identity). The police detective told the assistant manager that she needed to search Susan immediately for the stolen money, or else Susan would be arrested, taken to jail, and searched there (Wolfson, 2005).

You might be thinking that this all sounds a bit odd. The assistant manager said later that she was initially confused, but the caller was very authoritative and presented his information in a convincing manner. And, after all, he was a policeman—we're supposed to obey the police. During the phone call, she thought she heard police radios in the background.

So she called Susan into a small room and locked the door. The man on the phone told the assistant manager what to do and what to say. Following his instructions,

she ordered Susan to take off her clothing, one item at a time, until she was standing naked. She put all the clothes in a bag and put the bag outside the room, as instructed by the caller. Susan was now crying, fearful of the allegations and humiliated by the strip search.

Susan was not the first fast-food employee to be victimized in this manner. Phone calls to restaurant managers, ordering them to abuse their employees, had been occurring around the country for years. It just took law enforcement time to put the picture together. In all, managers of 70 restaurants, representing a dozen different chains in 32 states, received these phone calls and obeyed the caller's instructions (Barrouquere, 2006; Gray, 2004; Wolfson, 2005). The caller, as you have probably guessed, was not actually a policeman but was perpetrating a horrible hoax.

After Susan had been standing naked in the small, locked room for an hour, the "policeman" told the assistant manager to find someone else to guard Susan. She called her fiancé, who agreed to come to the restaurant and locked himself in the room with the naked and increasingly terrified teenager. At this point, the events become even more disturbing. This man also believed the caller was who he said he was, and in a series of escalating demands over 3 hours, the "detective" told him to force Susan to acquiesce to various sexual demands. The caller also talked directly to Susan, threatening her with what would happen if she didn't obey. "I was scared because they were a higher authority to me. I was scared for my safety because I thought I was in trouble with the law," she said (Wolfson, 2005, p. 3).

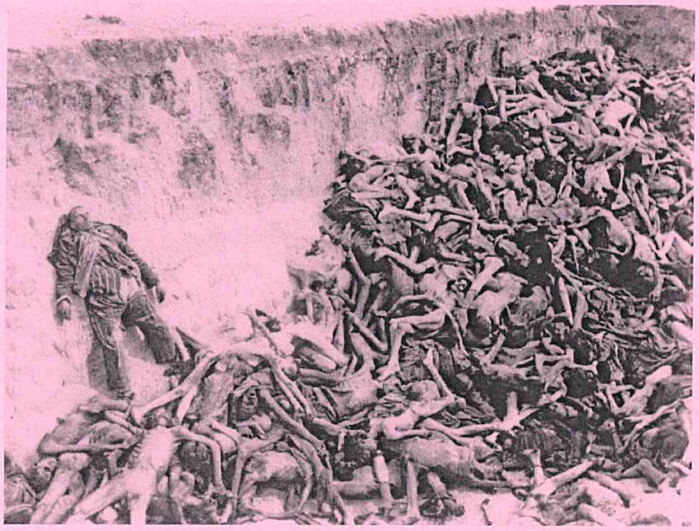
After an investigation that involved several states, a 38-year-old Florida man was ultimately arrested and charged as the telephone hoaxer. The assistant manager and her (no longer) fiancé pleaded guilty to various charges. Susan, who now suffers from panic attacks, anxiety, and depression, sued the McDonald's corporation for failing to warn employees nationally after the first hoaxes occurred at their restaurants. She was awarded $6.1 million in damages by a Kentucky jury (Barrouquere, 2006; Wolfson, 2005).

What could lead seemingly ordinary people to behave in this manner, following the orders of a complete stranger to humiliate and abuse an innocent teenager? We have explored different types of social influence in this chapter, from internalized pressures of group norms to direct requests. But to understand the fast-food restaurant hoax, we must consider one of the strongest forms of social influence: **obedience** to authority. Indeed, from a young age, we are socialized to obey authority figures whom we perceive as legitimate (Blass, 2000; Staub, 1989). We internalize this norm of obedience such that we usually adhere to rules and laws even when the authority figure isn't present—you stop at red lights even if the cops aren't parked around the corner—and this isn't necessarily a bad thing. However, as you've discovered in this chapter, obedience can have tragic consequences too.

Obedience
A change in one's behavior due to the direct influence of an authority figure

The Milgram Study

As with many eras, the past century was marked by repeated atrocities and genocides—in Germany, yes, but also the rest of Europe, Armenia, Ukraine, Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia, Sudan, and elsewhere. One of the most important questions facing the world's inhabitants, therefore, becomes, where does the role played by social influence end and personal responsibility begin? The philosopher Hannah Arendt (1965) was particularly interested in understanding the causes of the Holocaust. How could Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany carry out the murder of millions based on religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical disability, and political beliefs? Arendt argued that most participants in the Holocaust were not sadists or psychopaths who enjoyed mass murder but rather ordinary citizens subjected to complex and powerful social pressures. As a journalist, she covered the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi official responsible for the transportation of Jews to the death camps, and concluded that he was not the



Multiple geopolitical, economic, cultural, and psychological factors contributed to the Nazi genocide of World War II, some of the horrific results of which are depicted above in a scene from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, 1945. But the Holocaust would not have been possible without obedience to authority, as Nazi soldiers as well as ordinary citizens went along with and facilitated a regime led by individuals who promoted mass deportation, internment, and extermination of millions of people.

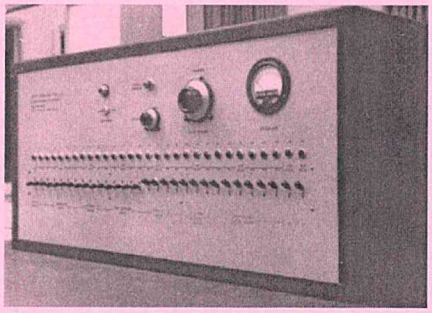
bloodthirsty monster that many people made him out to be but rather a common bureaucrat who did what he was told without questioning his orders (A. G. Miller, 1995).

Our point is not that Eichmann—or the soldiers at My Lai or the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia or the Serbs in Bosnia—should be excused for the crimes they committed. The point is that it is too easy to explain their behavior as the acts of madmen. It is more fruitful—and more frightening—to view much of their behavior as the acts of ordinary people exposed to extraordinary social influence. How can we be sure that these atrocities were not caused solely by evil, psychopathic people but also by powerful social forces operating on people of all types? The way to find out is to study social pressure with an empirical research eye under controlled conditions. We could take a sample of ordinary citizens, subject them to various kinds of social influence, and see to what extent they will obey. Can an experimenter influence ordinary people to commit immoral acts, such as inflicting severe pain on an innocent bystander? Stanley Milgram (1963, 1974, 1976) decided to find out in what has become the most famous series of studies in social psychology.

Imagine that you were a participant in one of Milgram's studies. You answer an ad in the newspaper, asking for participants in a study on memory and learning. When you arrive at the laboratory, you meet another participant, a 47-year-old, somewhat overweight, pleasant-looking fellow. The experimenter, wearing a White lab coat, explains that one of you will play the role of a teacher and the other the role of a learner. You draw a slip of paper out of a hat and discover that you will be the teacher. It turns out that your job is to read to the other participant a list of word pairs (e.g., *blue–box, nice–day*) and then test him on his memory for the list. The experimenter instructs you to deliver an electric shock to the learner whenever he makes a mistake because the purpose of the study is to examine the effects of punishment on learning.

You watch as the other participant—the learner—is strapped into a chair in an adjacent room and electrodes are attached to his arm. You are seated in front of a shock generator whose 30 switches deliver varying levels of shock in 15-volt increments, starting at 15 volts and going all the way up to 450 volts. There are labels accompanying these switches, from "Slight Shock" to "Danger: Severe Shock" to an ominous "XXX" next to the highest levels (see the photos below). The experimenter tells you that the first time the learner makes a mistake, you should give him a shock of 15 volts, and then you will increase that amount by 15 volts for each subsequent mistake he makes. So that you will know what the shocks are like, the experimenter gives you a sample shock of 45 volts, which proves surprisingly painful.

You read the list of word pairs to the learner and then begin the testing phase. After announcing the first word of each pair, you give four possible answers; the



Left: The shock generator used in Milgram's research. *Right:* The learner (an accomplice of the experimenter) is strapped into the chair, and electrodes are attached to his arm.

(Adapted from Milgram, 1974)

Figure 8.6 Milgram Transcript and Prompts

Transcript of the learner's protests in Milgram's obedience study and of the prods used by the experimenter to compel people to continue giving shocks.

(Based on Milgram, 1963, 1974)

Learner's Protests

75 volts: Ugh!

90 volts: Ugh!

105 volts: Ugh! (louder)

120 volts: Ugh! Hey this really hurts.

135 volts: Ugh!!

150 volts: Ugh!!! Experimenter! That's all. Get me out of here. I told you I had heart trouble. My heart's starting to bother me now. Get me out of here, please. My heart's starting to bother me. I refuse to go on. Let me out.

165 volts: Ugh! Let me out! (shouting)

180 volts: Ugh! I can't stand the pain. Let me out of here! (shouting)

195 volts: Ugh! Let me out of here. Let me out of here. My heart's bothering me. Let me out of here! You have no right to keep me here! Let me out! Let me out of here! Let me out! Let me out of here! My heart's bothering me. Let me out! Let me out!

210 volts: Ugh! Experimenter! Get me out of here. I've had enough. I won't be in the experiment anymore.

225 volts: Ugh!

240 volts: Ugh!

255 volts: Ugh! Get me out of here.

270 volts: Ugh! (agonized scream) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out. Do you hear? Let me out of here.

285 volts: Ugh! (agonized scream)

300 volts: Ugh! (agonized scream) I absolutely refuse to answer anymore. Get me out of here. You can't hold me here. Get me out. Get me out of here.

315 volts: Ugh! (intensely agonized scream) I told you I refuse to answer. I'm no longer part of this experiment.

330 volts: Ugh! (intense and prolonged agonized scream) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. My heart's bothering me. Let me out, I tell you. (hysterically) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. You have no right to hold me here. Let me out! Let me out! Let me out of here! Let me out!

Instructions Used by the Experimenter to Achieve Obedience

Prod 1: Please continue *or* Please go on.

Prod 2: The experiment requires that you continue.

Prod 3: It is absolutely essential that you continue.

Prod 4: You have no other choice; you must go on.

The prods were always made in sequence: Only if prod 1 had been unsuccessful could prod 2 be used. If the subject refused to obey the experimenter after prod 4, the experiment was terminated. The experimenter's tone of voice was at all times firm but not impolite. The sequence was begun anew on each occasion that the subject balked or showed reluctance to follow orders.

Special prods. If the subject asked whether the learner was likely to suffer permanent physical injury, the experimenter said:

Although the shocks may be painful, there is no permanent tissue damage, so please go on. [Followed by prods 2, 3, and 4 if necessary.]

If the subject said that the learner did not want to go on, the experimenter replied: Whether the learner likes it or not, you must go on until he has learned all the word pairs correctly. So please go on. [Followed by prods 2, 3, and 4 if necessary.]

learner responds by pressing one of four switches, illuminating a light on the answer box in front of you. Everything begins smoothly as the learner gets the first few right. Then he gets some wrong, and, as instructed, you deliver a shock each time. At this point, you are probably getting concerned about the number and severity of the shocks you will have to give. When you get to the 75-volt level, the learner, whom you can hear over an intercom, emits a painful "Ugh!" Perhaps you pause and ask the experimenter what you should do. "Please continue," he responds without hesitation. As the learner continues to make mistakes, you deliver more shocks. The learner protests, shouting, "Ugh! Experimenter! That's all! Get me out of here!" You look at the experimenter with concern. He tells you calmly, "It is absolutely essential that you continue" (see Figure 8.6).

What would you do? How many people do you think would continue to obey the experimenter, increasing the levels of shock all the way up the shock panel until they had delivered the maximum amount of 450 volts?

Watch MILGRAM STUDY FOOTAGE

When this question was posed to psychology majors at Yale University, they estimated that less than 1% of the population would go to this extreme. A sample of middle-class adults and a panel of psychiatrists made similar predictions. Based on our discussion of conformity thus far, however, perhaps you are not as optimistic. Indeed, most of Milgram's participants succumbed to the pressure of the authority figure. The average maximum shock delivered was 360 volts, and 62.5% of the participants went all the way to the end of the panel, delivering the 450-volt shock. A full 80% of the participants continued giving the shocks even after the learner, who earlier had mentioned that he had a heart condition, screamed, "Let me out of here! Let me out of here! My heart's bothering me. Let me out of here! … Get me out of here! I've had enough. I won't be in the experiment any more" (Milgram, 1974, p. 56).

It is important to note that the learner was actually an accomplice of the experimenter who was acting rather than suffering; he did not receive any actual shocks. It is equally important to note that the study was very convincingly done so that people believed they really were shocking the learner. Here is Milgram's description of one participant's response to the teacher role:

> I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse. He constantly pulled on his earlobe, and twisted his hands. At one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered, "Oh God, let's stop it." And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experimenter, and obeyed to the end. (Milgram, 1963, p. 377)

These research participants ranged in age from the twenties to the fifties and included people with a variety of occupations. Although participants in the original 1963 study were all men, in a follow-up Milgram found nearly identical obedience rates among women. Why did so many of these individuals obey the experimenter, to the point where they genuinely believed they were inflicting great pain on another human being? Why were the college students, middle-class adults, and psychiatrists so wrong in their predictions about what people would do? In a dangerous way, a variety of factors contributed to cause Milgram's participants to obey—just as many Germans did during the Holocaust and soldiers have done during more recent atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan. Let's take a closer look at Milgram's research.

The Role of Normative Social Influence

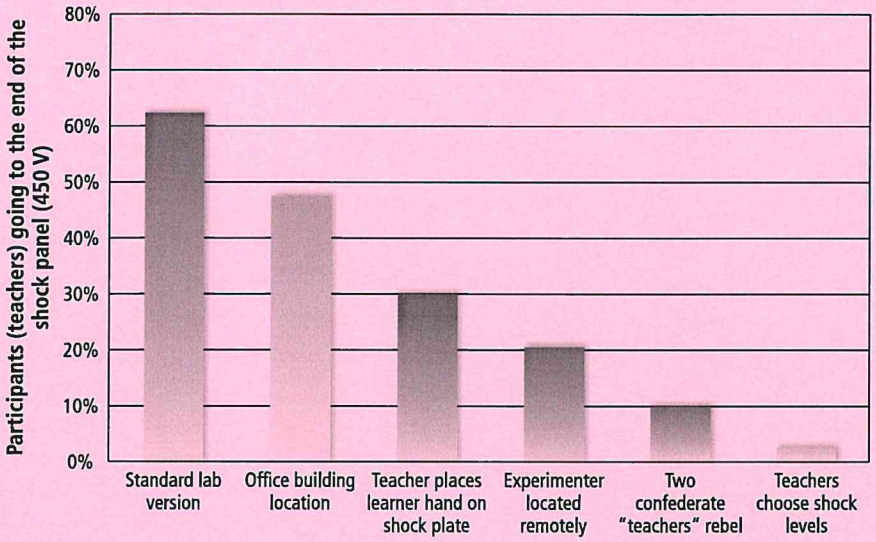
First, it is clear that normative pressures made it difficult for people in Milgram's studies to refuse to continue. As we have seen, if someone really wants us to do something, it can be difficult to say no. This is particularly true when the person is in a position of authority. Milgram's participants probably believed that if they refused to continue, the experimenter would be disappointed or maybe even angry—all of which put pressure on them to continue. It is important to note that this study, unlike the Asch study, was set up so that the experimenter actively attempted to get people to conform, giving commands such as "It is absolutely essential that you continue." When an authority figure is so insistent that we obey, it is difficult to say no (Blass, 2000, 2003; Doliński & Grzyb, 2016; Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1995).

The fact that normative pressures were present in the Milgram study is clear from a variation that he conducted. This time, there were three teachers, two of whom were

Figure 8.7 Results of Different Versions of the Milgram Study

In the standard version of Milgram's study, obedience was 62.5%. This rate dropped when the study took place in a nondescript office location rather than the Yale Psychology Department. It dropped further when the teacher had to physically place the learner's hand on a shock plate, when the experimenter issuing commands was located remotely, and when two other "teachers" (actually confederates) refused to continue with the study. Finally, when participants were left on their own to determine the level of shock, almost none of them went to the end of the shock panel. The variation in these bars demonstrates just how context-dependent obedience to authority can be.

(Data from Milgram, 1974)



confederates. One confederate was instructed to read the list of word pairs and the other to tell the learner whether his response was correct. The (real) participant's job was to deliver the shocks, increasing their severity with each error, as in the original study. At 150 volts, when the learner gave his first vehement protest, the first confederate refused to continue despite the experimenter's command that he do so. At 210 volts, the second confederate refused to continue. The result? Seeing their peers disobey made it much easier for the actual participants to disobey too. Only 10% of the participants gave the maximum level of shock in this version of the study (see Figure 8.7). This result is similar to Asch's finding that people did not conform nearly as much when one accomplice bucked the majority.

The Role of Informational Social Influence

Despite the power of the normative pressures in Milgram's original study, they are not the sole reason people complied. The experimenter was authoritative and insistent, but he was hardly pointing a gun at participants and telling them to "conform or else"; the participants were free to get up and leave anytime they wanted to. Why didn't they, especially when the experimenter was a stranger they had never met before and probably would never see again?

As we saw previously, when people are in confusing circumstances and unsure what they should do, they use other people to help define the situation. Informational social influence is especially powerful when the situation is ambiguous, when it is a crisis, and when the other people in the situation have some expertise. All three of these characteristics describe the situation Milgram's participants faced. The scenario—a study of the effects of punishment on learning—seemed straightforward enough when the experimenter explained it, but it quickly turned into something else altogether. The

learner cried out in pain, but the experimenter told the participant that the shocks did not cause permanent damage. The participant didn't want to hurt anyone, but he or she had agreed to be in the study and to follow the directions. When in such a state of conflict, it was only natural for the participants to use an expert—the experimenter in the scientific-looking white lab coat—to help them decide what was the right thing to do (Krakow & Blass, 1995; A. G. Miller, 1986; Miller, Collins, & Brief, 1995).

Another version of Milgram's study supports the idea that informational influence was operative. This version was identical to the original except for three critical changes: First, the experimenter never said which shock levels were to be given, leaving this decision up to the participant. Second, before the study began, the experimenter received a telephone call and had to leave the room, telling the participant to continue without him. Third, there was a confederate playing the role of an additional teacher, whose job was to record how long it took the learner to respond to each word pair. When the experimenter left, this other "teacher" said that he had just thought of a good system: How about if they increased the level of shock each time the learner made a mistake? He insisted that the real participant follow this procedure.

Note that in this situation, the person giving the commands has no expertise: He was just a regular person, no more knowledgeable than the participants themselves. Because he lacked expertise, people were much less likely to use him as a source of information about how they should respond. As seen in Figure 8.7, in this version, only 20% of participants went to the end of the shock panel. (The fact that 20% still gave the maximum shock suggests that some people were so uncertain about what to do that they used even a nonexpert as a guide.)

An additional variation conducted by Milgram underscores the importance of authority figures as experts in eliciting such obedience. In this variation, two experimenters gave the real participants their orders. At 150 volts, when the learner first cried out that he wanted to stop, the two experimenters began to disagree about whether they should continue the study. At this point, every single one of the participant-teachers stopped responding. Note that nothing the victim ever did caused all the participants to stop obeying; however, when the authorities' definition of the situation became unclear, the participants broke out of their obedient role.

Other Reasons Why We Obey

Both normative and informational social influences were very strong in Milgram's research; however, these reasons for complying still fall short of fully explaining why people acted in a manner that seems so inhumane. They account for why people initially obeyed the experimenter's instructions, but after it became increasingly obvious what was happening to the learner, why didn't participants realize that what they were doing was terribly wrong and stop? Just as the fast-food restaurant managers continued to abuse their employees long after the demands of the "policeman" on the phone shifted from merely bizarre to obviously illegal, many of Milgram's participants pressed the shock levers time after time after time despite the cries of anguish from a fellow human being.

ADHERING TO THE WRONG NORM To understand this continued obedience, we need to consider additional aspects of the situation. We don't mean to imply that Milgram's participants were completely mindless or unaware of what they were doing. As video of the sessions clearly shows, they were terribly concerned about the plight of the victim. The problem was that they were caught in a web of conflicting norms, and it was difficult to determine which ones to follow. At the beginning of the study, it was perfectly reasonable to heed the norm that says, "Obey expert, legitimate authority figures." Moreover as Alexander Haslam and colleagues have argued, Milgram's participants were not merely following an authority figure's orders—they were also engaged in what they believed to be a just and worthwhile scientific

endeavor (Haslam, Reicher, & Birney, 2016). After all, the teacher had been deputized as a de facto member of the research team, suggesting that participants believed that they were doing something good in the name of science and on behalf of a fellow researcher. In short, the experimenter was confident and knowledgeable, and the study seemed like a reasonable test of an interesting hypothesis. So why not cooperate and do as you are told?

But, gradually, the rules of the game changed, and these norms of "obey authority" and "all in the name of science" became less and less appropriate. The experimenter, who seemed so reasonable before, was now asking people to inflict great pain on their fellow participant. But once people follow a norm, it can be difficult to switch midstream, to realize that this norm is no longer appropriate, or to recognize that another norm—in this instance, "Do not inflict needless harm on a fellow human being"—should be followed. For example, suppose the experimenter had explained, at the outset, that he would like people to deliver possibly fatal shocks to the other participant. How many people would have agreed? Very few, we suspect, because it would have been clear that this violated an important social and personal norm about harming others. Instead, the experimenter pulled a kind of "bait and switch" routine, whereby he first made it look like an "obey authority" norm was appropriate and then only later gradually revealed just how he planned to use his authority in this situation (Collins & Brief, 1995).

It was particularly difficult for people to abandon the initial norms in the Milgram study because the study was fast paced, preventing the participants from stopping to reflect on what they were doing. They were busy recording the learner's responses, keeping track of the word pairs, and determining whether the learner's responses were right or wrong. Given that they had to attend carefully to these details and move along at a fast pace, it was difficult for them to realize that the initial norms guiding their behavior were, after a while, no longer appropriate (Conway & Schaller, 2005; Modigliani & Rochat, 1995). We suspect that if, halfway through the study, Milgram's participants had been told to take a break or had been left in the room by themselves for a period of time, many more would have successfully redefined the situation and refused to continue.

SELF-JUSTIFICATION Another important aspect of the situation in the Milgram study is that, as alluded to above, the experimenter asked people to increase the shocks in small increments. The participants did not go from giving a small shock to giving a potentially lethal one. Instead, at any given point, they only faced a smaller decision about whether to increase by a meager 15 volts the amount of shock they had just given. As we saw in Chapter 6, every time a person makes an important or difficult decision, dissonance is produced, along with resulting pressures to reduce it. An effective way of reducing dissonance produced by a difficult decision is to decide that the decision was fully justified. But because reducing dissonance provides a justification for the preceding action, it can make a person vulnerable to further escalating a now-justified activity.

Thus, in the Milgram study, the participants' initial agreement to administer the first shock created internal pressure on them to continue to obey. As the participants administered each successive level of shock, they had to justify it in their own minds. After they had justified a particular shock level, it became very difficult for them to decide on a place where they should draw the line and stop. How could they say, in effect, "Okay, I gave him 200 volts, but not 215—never 215!" Justifying one level of shock then laid the groundwork for the next level of shock, and quitting would have produced dissonance: 215 volts is not *that* different from 200, and 230 is not *that* different from 215. Those who did break off the series did so against enormous internal pressure to continue (Darley, 1992; Gilbert, 1981; Miller et al., 1995). The incremental nature of the shock task was essential to the level of obedience Milgram observed, much in the

Self-justification can also help explain why people sometimes go along with an increasingly humiliating and even dangerous sequence of hazing activities when trying to join an organization. New members might tell themselves that since they just went along with one embarrassing or degrading act, how can they now say no to the next request? And in this manner, their loyalty to the group is reinforced.

same way that incrementally increasing a series of requests allows the foot-in-the-door technique to operate, as described earlier.

THE LOSS OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY Sometimes when you are the research participant (or the employee) and the other person is a legitimate authority figure (the experimenter, the boss, the military commander, the police officer), you become the "puppet," with them pulling the strings. They can define what it is you are supposed to do, and they are responsible for the end results—after all, it was their idea, and you were "just following orders." Milgram (1974) stressed that the loss of a sense of personal responsibility for one's actions was a critical component explaining the results of the obedience studies.

When faced with the prospect of acting in unpleasant or unseemly ways, it becomes easier to do so when you can offload personal responsibility for those actions to someone else. An example of a particularly disturbing job is that of prison guards who must carry out a capital punishment sentence. How do these guards respond to a job in which they are told to kill another person? Clearly, they need to reduce their cognitive dissonance. Taking a life is a supremely problematic and disturbing act, so they often need to engage in self-justification in order to do it. Michael Osofsky, Albert Bandura, and Philip Zimbardo (2005) studied guards on the execution teams of three southern state prisons and compared them to their fellow guards who did not conduct executions. All the guards responded anonymously to a questionnaire that asked them to rate their level of agreement with statements such as "Because of the nature of their crime, murderers have lost the right to live" and "Those who carry out state executions should not be criticized for following society's wishes."

The researchers found a significant difference in the attitudes of the two types of guards. The execution-team guards demonstrated much more "moral disengagement" from their work than did the other guards. The execution-team guards denied all personal responsibility for the executions. They felt they were just implementing orders—in this case, those of a judge and jury. They also engaged in justification in other areas. Compared to the regular prison guards, they dehumanized the prisoners more, seeing them as lacking important human qualities. They perceived the prisoners as more of a threat to society, such that it was necessary that they be killed. All these attitudes helped the execution guards reduce their qualms about the morality of what they did at work. As one guard put it, "I had a job to do, that's what we did. Our job was to execute this man and we were going to do it in a professional manner" (Osofsky, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2005, p. 386).

The Obedience Studies, Then and Now

Stanley Milgram's study of obedience is widely considered to be one of the most important contributions to the field of psychology (Benjamin & Simpson, 2009). His work, conducted in the early 1960s, was replicated in the following years by researchers in 11 countries, involving approximately 3,000 research participants (Blass, 2000). However, Milgram's research paradigm also ignited a storm of protest (and soul-searching) in the research community over the ethical treatment of research participants.

Milgram's research has been criticized as unethical on several different levels. First, the study involved *deception*. Participants were told it was a study on memory

and learning, when of course it was not; participants were told the electric shocks were real, when of course they were not. Second, there was not fully *informed consent* on the part of participants. When they agreed to be in the study, they were not informed as to its true nature, and thus they never really consented to take part in the scenario they eventually experienced. Third, their role as teacher caused them *psychological distress* during the course of the study. Fourth, it was not made clear to participants that they had the *right to withdraw* from the study at any time; in fact, the experimenter stated the exact opposite—for example, that they "had to continue." Fifth, the participants experienced *inflicted insight*. When the study ended, some of them had learned unpleasant things about themselves that they had not agreed to beforehand (Baumrind, 1964, 1985; A. G. Miller, 2009). More recent critiques have focused on disturbing allegations that Milgram misrepresented his debriefing methods in his published papers and that many research participants actually left the study unaware that the learner had been a confederate and the shocks had been fake (Nicholson, 2011; Perry, 2013).

Although the ethical issues surrounding Milgram's study were not, as is often suggested, the reason that formal ethical guidelines for research participants were created in the United States in 1966 (they were created primarily to protect participants in medical research), these new guidelines made conducting obedience research such as Milgram's increasingly challenging (Benjamin & Simpson, 2009). Indeed, decades would pass without researchers conducting follow-up studies of obedience using Milgram's procedure (Blass, 2009), and many students learned in their psychology courses that such studies could never be run again. But that all changed when Jerry M. Burger (2009) conducted the first Milgram-style obedience study in the United States in decades.

In order to conduct this study under modern ethical guidelines, Burger (2009) made a number of changes to the procedure. First, he reduced the psychological distress experienced by participants by stopping the study after 150 volts, when the learner is first heard yelling that he wants out and refuses to go on. Analysis of data from eight of Milgram's study versions indicated that when disobedience occurred, it was most likely to happen at this point in the study; most previous participants who passed the 150-volt mark tended to go all the way to end of the shock panel anyway (Packer, 2008a). Second, participants were prescreened by a clinical psychologist, and those who were identified as even slightly likely to have a negative reaction to the experience were excluded from the study. Finally, Burger explicitly and repeatedly told his participants that they could leave the study at any time, as could the learner.

In most respects, though, Burger's (2009) study was like the original. His experimenter used the same basic verbal "prods" that Milgram's used (e.g., "It is absolutely essential that you continue") when participants began to waver. Burger's participants, like Milgram's, were adult men and women recruited through newspaper advertisements and flyers. Their age range of 20 to 81 years was broader than Milgram's, though their average age of about 43 years was similar. They were more ethnically diverse than Milgram's participants, and they were also more highly educated. Finally, because the Milgram obedience studies are quite well known, Burger excluded participants who had taken more than two college-level psychology courses.

What did Burger find? Are people more disobedient today than they were in Milgram's time? The answer is no. Burger found no significant difference in obedience rates between his participants and Milgram's. After the critical 150-volt shock had been delivered, 70% of Burger's participants obeyed and were ready to continue. A few years later, Dariusz Doliński and colleagues (2017) used Burger's modified procedure in a study in Poland and found that 90% of their participants were obedient through the 150-volt level. These recent rates of obedience observed among American

and Polish samples are not statistically different than the 82.5% rate Milgram himself reported at the 150-volt mark.

Note that Burger's ethically necessary changes in methodology also complicate a direct comparison to Milgram's results (A. G. Miller, 2009; Twenge, 2009). Stopping the study after 150 volts may have made the procedure more ethical, but it also means we have no idea how many participants, today, would go all the way to the 450-volt level. Much of the extraordinary power of the Milgram obedience studies came from participants' choices after 150 volts, as they continued step by small step to the last switch on the shock generator. It is during this part of the study that participants felt the most conflicted and anxious. It is here that they revealed their response to a pressing moral conflict (Miller, 2009). This information is lost in the recent replications. And, as such, it reminds us that scientific inquiry has two sometimes competing aims: to discover new knowledge and to do no harm.

Review Questions

1. Which of the following was a goal of Milgram's obedience research?
   - **a.** To identify the abnormal personality characteristics associated with sadistic behavior
   - **b.** To justify and exonerate the behaviors linked to genocide and other inhuman acts
   - **c.** To better understand the social forces that contribute to destructive and immoral behavior
   - **d.** To identify cultural differences in aggression
2. Which of the following illustrates the role played by normative social influence in the obedience of Milgram's participants?
   - **a.** When other "teachers" (actually confederates) refused to continue with the study, participants' obedience rates declined significantly.
   - **b.** Men and women exhibited similar levels of obedience in the research.
   - **c.** The "learner" (actually a confederate) announced before the study began that he had a preexisting heart condition.
   - **d.** Many participants showed signs of nervous laughter during the course of the study.
3. Which of the following was *not* one of the instruction prods used by the experimenter in the Milgram studies?
   - **a.** "The experiment requires that you continue."
   - **b.** "Please continue."
   - **c.** "It is absolutely essential that you continue."
   - **d.** "If you do not continue, you will not be paid for your participation."
4. Which of the following is a common ethical concern raised about the Milgram study?
   - **a.** Participants' compensation was low.
   - **b.** Participants were forced to learn unpleasant things about themselves without agreeing to that ahead of time.
   - **c.** Participants were never given the chance to serve in the role of learner.
   - **d.** Participants had to receive a sample shock of 75 volts before the study began.
5. Which of the following is a change that Burger (2009) made from the original Milgram study when he replicated the research several decades later?
   - **a.** He examined only female participants.
   - **b.** The study was stopped once participants went past 150 volts.
   - **c.** He told participants that the study was part of research on the effects of punishment on learning.
   - **d.** He paid participants for their involvement.

Summary

LO 8.1 **Define conformity, and explain why it occurs.**

- **Conformity: When and Why** Conformity occurs when people change their behavior due to the real (or imagined) influence of others. There are two main reasons people conform: informational and normative social influences.

LO 8.2 **Explain how informational social influence motivates people to conform.**

- **Informational Social Influence: The Need to Know What's "Right"** *Informational social influence* occurs when people do not know the correct (or best) action to take. They look to the behavior of others

as an important source of information, using it to choose appropriate courses of action for themselves. Informational social influence usually results in *private acceptance*, in which people genuinely believe in what other people are doing or saying.

- **The Importance of Being Accurate** In situations where it is important to be accurate, the tendency to conform to other people through informational social influence increases.
- **When Informational Conformity Backfires** Using other people as a source of information can backfire when they are wrong about what's going on.
- **When Will People Conform to Informational Social Influence?** People are more likely to conform to informational social influence when the situation is ambiguous, when they are in a crisis, or if experts are present.

LO 8.3 **Explain how normative social influence motivates people to conform.**

- **Normative Social Influence: The Need to Be Accepted** *Normative social influence* occurs when we change our behavior to match that of others because we want to remain a member of the group in good standing and continue to gain the advantages of group membership. We conform to the group's *social norms*, implicit or explicit rules for acceptable behaviors, values, and attitudes. Normative social influence usually results in *public compliance* but not private acceptance of other people's ideas and behaviors.
  - **Conformity and Social Approval: The Asch Line-Judgment Studies** In a series of classic studies, Solomon Asch found that people would conform, at least some of the time, to the obviously wrong answer of the group.
  - **The Importance of Being Accurate, Revisited** When it is important to be accurate, people are more likely to resist normative social influence and go against the group, giving the right answer. But public conformity still occurs.
  - **The Consequences of Resisting Normative Social Influence** Resisting normative social influence can lead to ridicule, ostracism, and rejection by the group.
  - **When Will People Conform to Normative Social Influence?** *Social impact theory* specifies when normative social influence is most likely to occur by referring to the strength, immediacy, and size of the group. We are more likely to conform when the group is one we care about, when the group members are unanimous in their thoughts or behaviors, when the group has three or more members, and when we are members of collectivist cultures. Past conformity gives people *idiosyncrasy credits*, allowing them to deviate from the group without serious consequences.
  - **Minority Influence: When the Few Influence the Many** Under certain conditions, an individual (or small number of people) can influence the majority. The key is consistency in the presentation of the minority viewpoint.

LO 8.4 **Describe how people can use their knowledge of social influence to influence others.**

- **Conformity Tactics** Knowing about the tendency to conform can inform our strategic efforts to change the behavior of others
  - **The Role of Injunctive and Descriptive Norms** Communicating *injunctive norms*, expectations regarding the behaviors that society approves of, is a more powerful way to create change than communicating *descriptive norms*, expectations regarding how people actually behave.
  - **Using Norms to Change Behavior: Beware the "Boomerang Effect"** One must be careful that descriptive norms do not create a boomerang effect, making an undesirable behavior more likely than it previously was.
  - **Other Tactics of Social Influence** Other efforts to change people's behavior via direct request, include the *foot-in-the-door technique*, in which the requestor first secures agreement with a small favor before following up with a larger request, and the *door-in-the-face technique*, in which the requester first asks for a large favor that will certainly be rejected before following up with a smaller, second request. *Propaganda*, as used in Nazi Germany, is yet another, often nefarious strategy.

LO 8.5 **Summarize studies that have demonstrated people's willingness to obey authority figures.**

- **Obedience to Authority** In the most famous series of studies in social psychology, Stanley Milgram examined *obedience*, when people change their behavior in response to an authority figure. He found chilling levels of obedience, to the point where a majority of participants administered what they thought were potentially lethal shocks to a fellow human being.
- **The Milgram Study?**
  - **The Role of Normative Social Influence** Normative pressures make it difficult for people to stop obeying authority figures. They want to please the authority figure by doing a good job.
  - **The Role of Informational Social Influence** The obedience studies created a confusing situation

for participants, with competing, ambiguous demands. Unclear about how to define what was going on, they followed the orders of the expert.

- **Other Reasons Why We Obey** Participants conformed to the wrong norm: They continued to follow the norms of "obey authority" and "all in the name of science" even when it was no longer appropriate to do so. It was difficult for them to abandon these initial norms because of the fast-paced nature of the study, the fact that the shock levels increased in small increments, and their loss of a feeling of personal responsibility.
- **The Obedience Studies, Then and Now** Milgram's research design was criticized on ethical grounds, involving deception, informed consent, psychological distress, the right to withdraw, and inflicted insight. A recent U.S. replication found that the level of obedience in the early 21st century was not significantly different from that found in the classic study in the 1960s.

Revel Interactive

Shared Writing **What Do You Think?**

In what ways do you think conformity was a key motivator for the millions of people who have participated in the ALS ice bucket challenge? What other factors that you've read about in this chapter might have influenced the movement?

Test Yourself

1. All of the following are examples of informational social influence *except*
   a. you are running a race, but because you are unsure of the route, you wait to check which of two roads the other runners follow.
   b. you've just started work at a new job, and a fire alarm goes off; you watch your coworkers to see what to do.
   c. when you get to college, you change the way you dress so that you "fit in" better—that is, so that people will like you more.
   d. you ask your adviser which classes you should take next semester.

2. Which of the following is true, according to social impact theory?
   a. People conform more to others who are physically close than to others who are physically distant.
   b. People conform more if the others are important to them.
   c. People conform more to three or more people than to one or two people.
   d. All of the answers are true.

3. In Asch's line studies, participants who were alone when asked to report the length of the lines gave the correct answer 98% of the time. However, when they were with the confederates who sometimes gave an obviously wrong answer, 76% of participants gave the wrong answer at least once. This suggests that Asch's studies are an illustration of
   a. public compliance with private acceptance.
   b. public compliance without private acceptance.
   c. informational influence.
   d. private compliance.

4. Which of the following is most true about informational social influence?
   a. When deciding whether to conform, people should ask themselves whether the other people know more about what is going on than they do.
   b. People should always try to resist it.
   c. People are most likely to conform when others have the same level of expertise as they do.
   d. Often, people publicly conform but do not privately accept this kind of influence.