

The Lecture Contains:

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Types of Social Influence

- In social psychology, conformity, compliance and obedience as social behaviours have been studied under the umbrella concept of social influence. Beginning from this this chapter, the next few chapters will be devoted to these three types of social influence:
 - Conformity : pressures to go along with the crowd
 - Compliance : efforts to get others to say “yes” to your direct request
 - Obedience: following the orders by person in command

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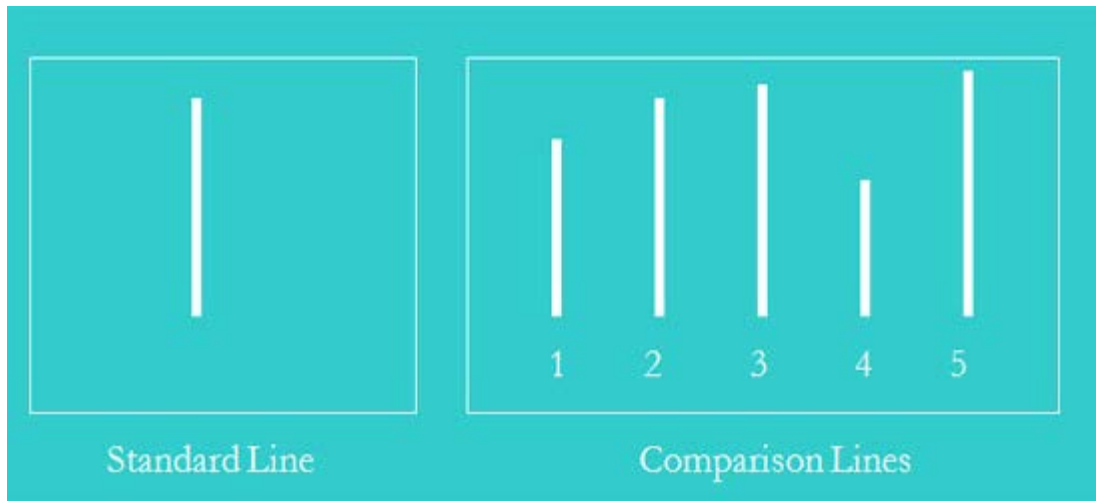
Understanding conformity

- Conformity is the behaviour of a person to go along the social norms which may be explicit or implicit. It may come as a surprise to us but the social norms are generally adhered to by the people. These social norms could range from hairstyle, nature of clothes, and preference of game on one hand to career choices, marriage choices on the other. It is therefore not surprising to find in Indian society, the high school passed students opting for engineering and medicine programmes rather than social sciences in their college or university education.

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Experiment One on conformity

- A series of experiments were conducted by a renowned social psychologist, Solomon Asch (1951, 1955) to establish conformity as a response to social norms.
- The planning in Solomon Asch's Experiment One :
 1. He asked the participants in the experiments to consider the standard line and the comparison lines as given below in Figure 7.1



Experiment One on conformity (continued...)

2. But, before asking the participants to choose among the comparison lines the one that matched the standard line, Asch asked his accomplices (persons who were hired by Asch to give a wrong answer to the line-matching problem) to give wrong answer.
3. All the accomplices gave the wrong answer (say '1') when asked to respond to the line-match problem.
4. To Asch's surprise, 76% of the participants went along with the group norm of wrong answer. On the other hand only 5% of the participants did so in another group where no such group norm of giving wrong answer was created.

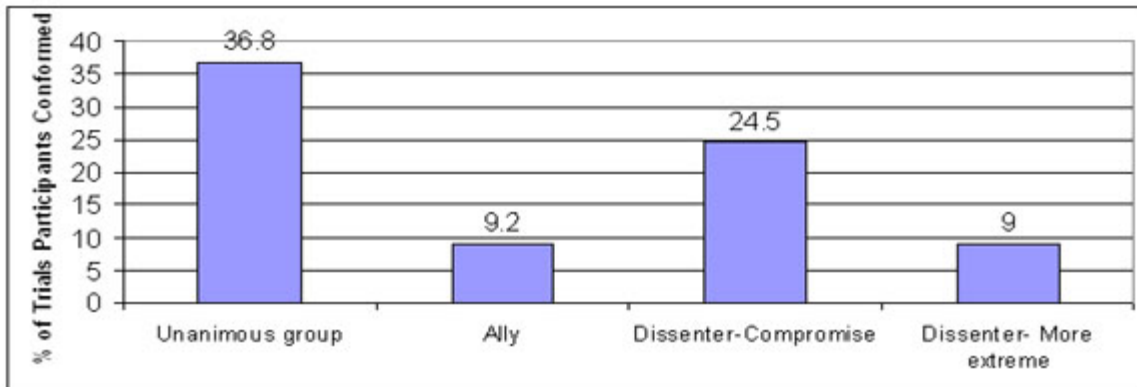
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Experiment Two on conformity

- Where his Experiment 1 mentioned above, was designed to assess the impact of group norm on conformity, he designed Experiment 2 to understand the impact of group unanimity on conformity. Asch created four experimental group :
 - Unanimous group (all the accomplices the same wrong answer)
 - Ally (all the accomplices gave the same wrong answer except one who gave the right answer)
 - Dissenter-compromise (all the accomplices gave the same wrong answer except one who gave another wrong that was closes to the right answer)
 - Dissenter-more extreme (all the accomplices gave the same wrong answer except one who gave another wrong that was further different from the right answer)
- Figure 7.2 provides the outcomes of the experiment in terms of the percent of the participants who showed conformity to the group norm of giving wrong answer.

Figure 7.1: Outcomes of Experiment Two

- According to the concept of cognitive deficit, when a person is extremely angry, his/her capacity to process information regarding the consequences of his/her action gets reduced. In order to avoid that, one can, while visiting a potentially irritating person or setting, may pre-attribute one's anger to the other person's unique ways of communication rather than his malicious intentions.



Interpreting the outcomes of Experiment Two

- Experiment Two was designed to understand the impact of group unanimity on conformity. As evident from the outcomes, conformity is greatly reduced in the 'Ally' and 'Dissenter-more extreme' groups. Also, in case of 'Dissenter-compromise' group, conformity is reduced in comparison with the 'Unanimous' group. It is clear that a lack of unanimity in creating the group norm results in decreased conformity. Furthermore, a varying degree of reduction in unanimity had its impact reflected in the varying degree of decrease in conformity.

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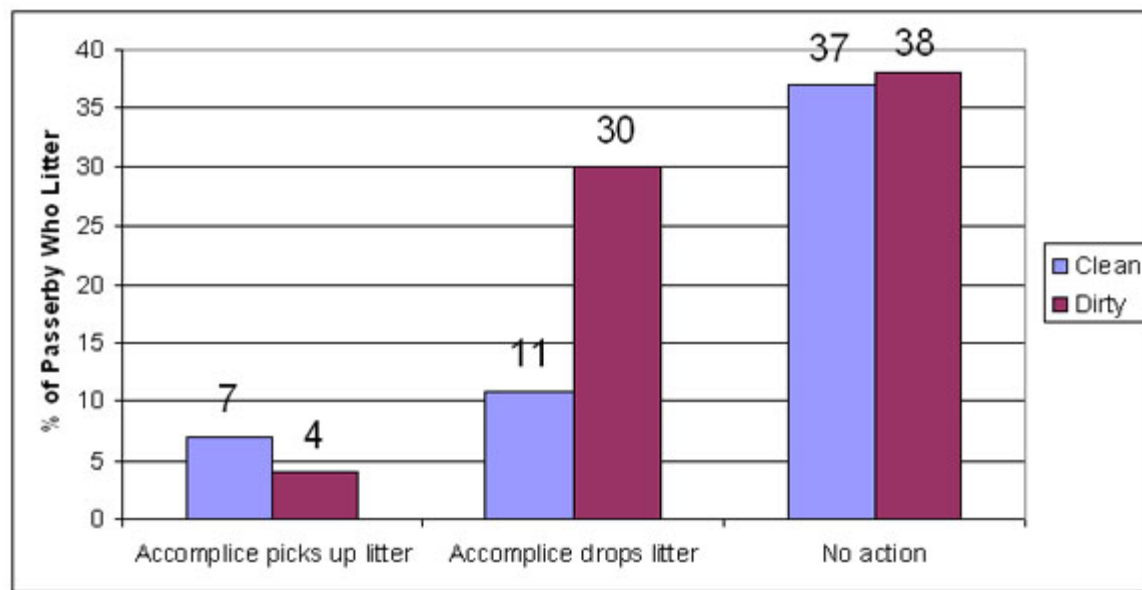
Experiment Three on conformity

- In Experiment Three, Asch tried to understand the impact of public display of group's opinion on conformity. In this experiment he found out that there was a decrease in conformity when 'written' responses given in comparison with the group where verbal response was given.

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Factors affecting Conformity

- Research has shown that three important factors affect conformity. These are cohesiveness, group size and type of social norm.
- Cohesiveness : In his study on the relationship between cohesiveness and conformity towards eating habits (binge eating) Crandall (1988), found that in a group of college students, friends became like one another over a period of one academic year as far as binge eating goes.
- Group size: Asch (1955) and other social psychologists have found out that conformity reaches maximum by group size three and then it levels off.
- Type of group norm: Reno, Cialdini, and Kallgren (1993) studied the impact of descriptive versus injunctive norms ('what should be done' versus 'what ought to be done' respectively). They created two experimental conditions :
 - In one condition where descriptive norm was induced, an accomplice (to the experimenters) was observed by the participant throwing litter in the park.
 - In another condition where and injunctive norm was induced, an accomplice was observed by the participant picking up litter from the park.
 - Both these conditions were repeated in clean and dirty parks.
 - The outcomes of the experiment as shown Figure 7.3 clearly indicated the greater conformity towards not littering in case of injunctive norm that too when the park was dirty.

Figure 7.3: Impact of type of norms on conformity[<< Previous](#) [Next >>](#)

Reasons for conformity

- On the basis of research on the reasons for people to conform, the following has been noted :
 - Normative social influence: The desire to be liked by others is one of the important stakes when one conforms to the norms.
 - Informational social influence: Another important thing that is at stake while one conforms is the desire to be correct vis-à-vis the group's responses.

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