

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ Critiquing the theories of social influence
- ☰ After we conform: Do we stick to the norms or resist it?
- ☰ Outcomes of the experiment
- ☰ Interpretation of outcomes of the experiment
- ☰ Resisting effects of destructive obedience

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Critiquing the theories of social influence

- Social psychologists have always faced the questions of merit and social relevance of their theories. Without any doubt, the theories of conformity, compliance and obedience provide us some useful insights about human behaviour in social situations. Several social psychologists have also raised their concerns about complementing these theories with research endeavours to locate human behaviour in their socio-cultural contexts.
- While the efforts to make the entire social psychology more relevant to the socio-historical context may not over-emphasized, this lecture orients us towards the contributions the theories of social influence can make in understanding or changing the future of human society.
- For this purpose, we will take a look at what happens to human behaviour after one has conformed to the social norms. Do people remain rigid about their resolve to follow the norms, or do they resist?
- Further we will also try to understand how the influence of destructive obedience may be resisted.



After we conform: Do we stick to the norms or resist it?

- Two social psychologists, Buehler and Griffin (1994) became interested in addressing the question of whether people resist the norms or continue to follow that after they have conformed. For this purpose, they planned an experiment.
- He instructed the participants to read a story in which the protagonist was facing the puzzle of deciding to join a medical school or a conservatory of music (music school). After reading the story, the participants had to write about the lowest probability of the protagonist being successful as a concert performer.

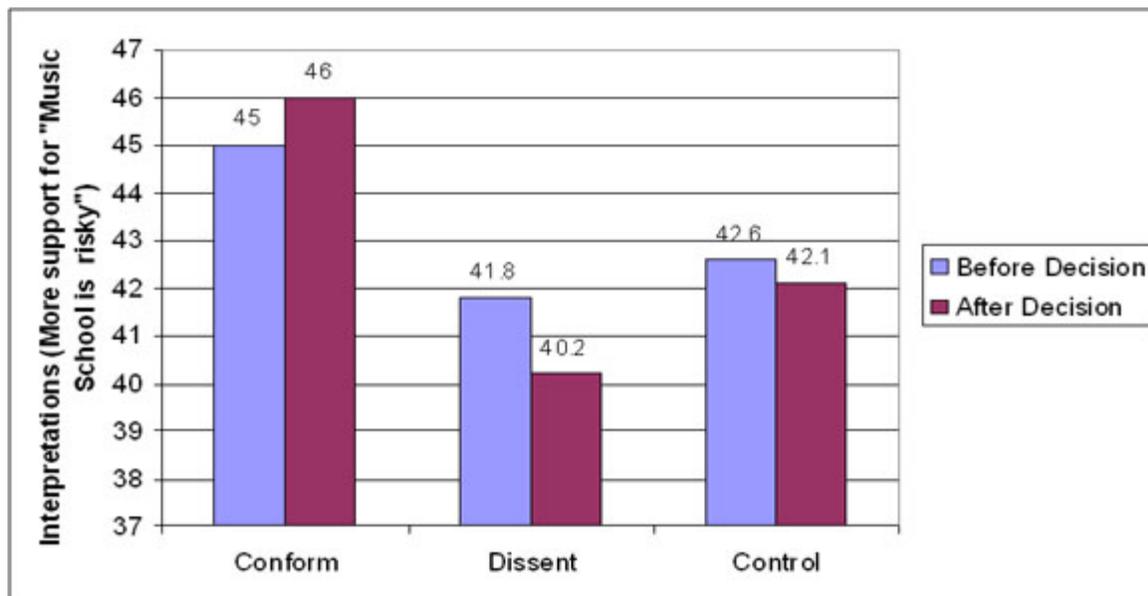


After we conform (continued...)

- In the experimental group, before the participants could share their take on the chance of success of the protagonist as a concert performer, they came to know that three other participants of their group had indicated the protagonist's success to be very low (20%). In the control group, no such information was provided.
- Furthermore, all the participants had to write their interpretation of the story before and after sharing the probability of the protagonist's 'success'. These interpretations were analyzed by the experimenters in terms of whether the choice of music school was viewed as risky. Figure 7.6 provides the outcomes of the experiment.



Figure 7.6: Outcomes of the experiment



Interpretation of outcomes of the experiment

- It becomes clear from the results that in the experimental group, whether the participant conformed to the group norm (of music school being a 'risky choice' created by their three group members) or not, their interpretation of the story was in the direction of their decision only. One can notice that the conforming participants' interpretation of music school being a 'risky choice' increased after their decision of conforming. However, dissenting participants' interpretation of 'risky choice' further decreased after their decision of not conforming.
- This outcomes of this experiments is of ample importance as far as people's tendency to support their decision of conforming within a social setting goes. On important social matters, it may be unfortunate if people keep justifying their stand of supporting the norms even if the norms are divisive in nature. The silver line in the cloud is that the non-conforming people also justify their stand of not following the divisive norms.



Resisting effects of destructive obedience

- A study of ways of resisting the effects of destructive obedience may go a long way in resisting a harmful consequences for a society. Here are some of the ways to resist that social psychologists studying obedience have arrived at :

1. One needs to be reminded that we, and not authority, are responsible for harm that may be caused to the innocent people. In reality, when the processes of law and order begin, the authority might not be in a position to save one if he/she is the perpetrator of violence.

2. It is also important to point out to the followers that submission beyond a point is inappropriate. In fact, as human beings with a rational mind and conscience, one must be reminded to ask oneself whether the important ethical or human concerns are violated while following the commands of the authority figure.



Resisting effects of destructive obedience (continued...)

3. One may not generally do so but one must learn to question the expertise or motives of authority figure. Such an attitude change is important because any human figure can not be above the ethical or humanitarian concerns and one must cheque whether expertise or motives of the leader matches these concerns or not.
4. It has also been noted that knowing about power of authority behind command in itself helps. Such an awareness puts a question mark over whether our decisions are based on some rationale and ethics.

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