

SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND GROUP PROCESSES

What is Social Influence?

- Groups and individuals exert influence on us. This influence may force us to change our behaviours in a particular direction.
- The term ‘social influence’ refers to those processes whereby our attitudes and behaviors are influenced by the real or imagined presence of other people.
- Social influence is a part of our life. It is very strong as a result of which we tend to do things which we otherwise would not have done.

Three Important Group Influence Processes

CONFORMITY

Behaving according to the group norm.

People who do not follow group norm are called non-conformists.

Most indirect form .

COMPLIANCE

Refers to behaving in a particular way in response to request made by someone.

External conditions that force the individual to accept the influence of the other person.

Less direct than obedience.

OBEDIENCE

Behaviour is in response to a person in authority .

Different from conformity as there is presence of an authority figure.

Most direct form of social influence.

CONFORMITY

- **Conformity** means behaving according to the group norm, i.e. the expectations of other group members. Persons who do not conform (called '*deviants*' or '*non-conformists*') get noticed more than those who do conform.

DETERMINANTS OF CONFORMITY

1. Size of the group: Conformity is greater when the group is small than when the group is large.

2. Size of the minority : When the deviating minority size increases, the likelihood of conformity decreases.

3. Nature of the task : Conformity is more when there are objective type questions.

4. Public or private expression of behaviour : More conformity in public and less in private expression.

5. Personality: Conforming personality tend to change according to what others do . On the other hand , there are individuals who are independent, confident of themselves and have a high self-esteem who do not conform easily.

COMPLIANCE

- Refers simply to behaving in response to a request from another person or group even in the absence of a norm.
- This generally happens because it is an easy way out of the situation.

Techniques of Compliance

1. Foot-in-the-door technique

- The person begins by making a small request that the other person is not likely to refuse. Once the other person carries the request, a bigger request is made.
- Simple because the other person has complied with the smaller request, he or she may feel uncomfortable refusing the second request.
- For example, imagine one of your friends missed the last psychology class and asked to borrow your notes. This is a small request that seems reasonable, so you lend the notes to your friend. A week later, the same friend asks to borrow all of your psychology notes. This is a bigger request – would you agree or not?

2. Deadline technique

- In this technique, a last date is announced until which a particular product or an offer will be available. The aim is to make people hurry and make the purchase before they miss the rare opportunity.

3. Door-in-the-face technique

- In this technique ,you begin with a large request and when this is refused a later request for something smaller, the one that was actually desired, is made which is usually granted by the person.

OBEDIENCE

- When compliance is shown to an instruction or order from a person in authority such as parents, teachers, leaders or policemen, that behaviour is called Obedience.
- People show obedience because if we disobey, punishment might follow or because we believe the persons in authority must be obeyed.

Why Do People Obey ?

People obey because they feel that they are not responsible for their own actions, they are simply carrying out orders from the authority .

Authority generally possesses symbols of status (for example, uniform, title) which people find difficult to resist.

Authority gradually increases commands from lesser to greater levels and initial obedience binds the followers for commitment.

Many times , events are moving at such a fast speed, for example in a riot situation , that one has no time to think, just obey orders from above.

Experimental Studies in Social Influence

- **Solomon Asch (1951)** Majority influence

Group Pressure and Conformity: the Asch Experiment

- **Muzafer Sherif (1935)** Autokinetic effect

(How groups form norms?)

- **Stanley Milgram (1963)** Obedience study

(Why people obey orders from authority?)