



2025-26 FALL

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

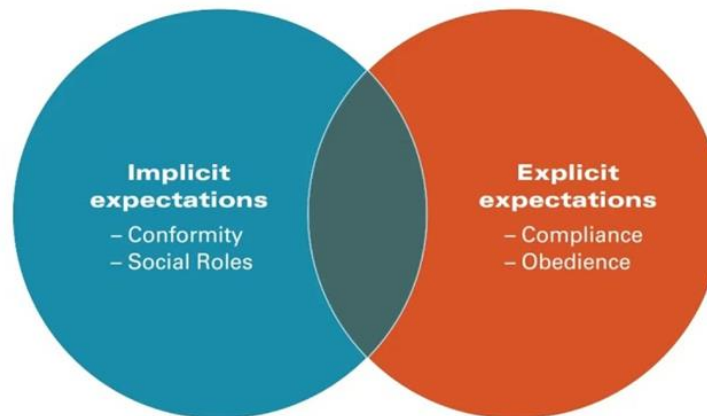
Faculty of Arts & Sciences

WEEK 11

Social Influence, Conformity & Obedience The Holocaust

Social influence

- **Social influence:** How an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors **respond** to their social world, including tendencies to **conform** to others, **follow** social rules, and **obey** authority figures.
- Sometimes, these four forms of social influence overlap.



Social influence

► FIGURE 7.1

Continuum of Social Influence

Social influences vary in the degree of pressure they bring to bear on an individual. People may (1) conform to group norms or maintain their independence; (2) comply with requests or be assertive; and (3) obey or defy the commands of authority.



Social influence

- the exercise of social power by a person or group to change the attitudes or behavior of others in a particular direction

1. Conformity

- change one's beliefs or behaviors to match others; yield to perceived group pressure

2. Compliance

- publicly performing an act at another's request (even if we prefer not to)

3. Obedience to Authority

- compliance with a legitimate authority; perform an action to a direct order/request

Social Power

- the force available to the influencer to motivate attitude or behavior change
- can originate from:
 - having access to certain resources (rewards, punishments, information)
 - social position in society

Social Power

➤ Six bases of social power:

1. **Rewards:** providing + outcomes
2. **Coercion:** providing - outcomes
3. **Expertise:** special knowledge
4. **Information:** message content
5. **Referent power:** identifying with others
6. **Legitimate authority:** right to make requests

What Types of Social Influence Exist?

- **Conformity:** A type of implicit social influence where individuals voluntarily change their behavior to imitate the behavior of others.
- **Social roles:** A type of implicit social influence regarding how certain people are supposed to look and behave.
- **Implicit expectations:** Unspoken rules enforced by group norms that influence an individual's behavior.
- **Explicit expectations:** Clearly and formally stated expectations for social behavior.
- **Compliance:** A type of explicit social influence where an individual behaves in response to a direct or indirect request.
- **Obedience:** A type of explicit social influence where individuals behave in a particular way because someone of higher status ordered them to do so.

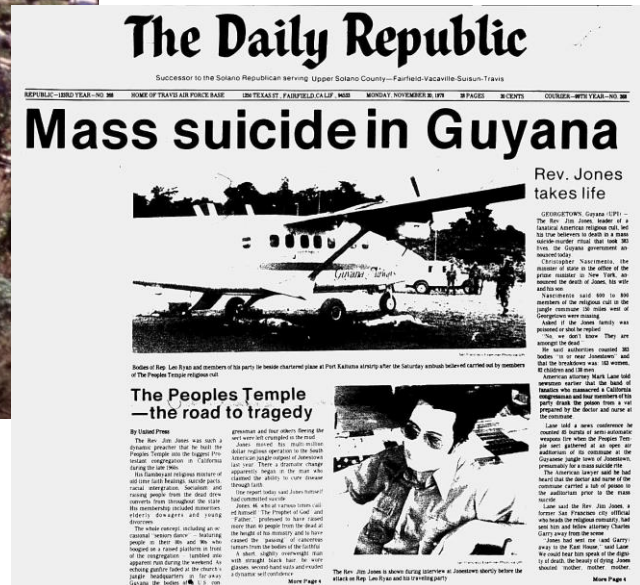
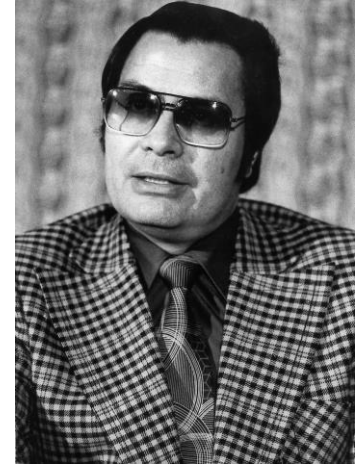
Social Norms and the Herd Mentality



13 June 1936 Hamburg August Landmesser

Social Norms and the Herd Mentality

The psychological massacre: Jim Jones and Peoples



<https://twitter.com/realolaudah/status/1504117876378288136>

Anonymity and Deindividuation

- **Deindividuation:** A psychological process that occurs when self-awareness is replaced by a social role or group identity, resulting in the loss of individuality.
- **Anonymity:** The self behind the mask.



Social Norms and the Herd Mentality

- **Social norms:** Rules that indicate how people are expected to behave in particular social situations, which, in combination with attitudes and perceived control, often predict intended behavior.
- **Herd mentality:** The tendency to blindly follow the direction your group is moving toward; when group norms encourage individuals to conform to those around them, especially when it comes to their beliefs.
- **Social contagion:** The spontaneous distribution of ideas, attitudes, and behaviors among larger groups of people.

Conformity

change one's beliefs or behaviors to match
others; yield to perceived
group pressure

Why and When Do We Choose to Conform?

- Most of us perform these actions because we both
 - (1) are **uncertain** about what the correct behavior is, and
 - (2) have **anxiety** about fitting in.
- **Theory of informational and normative influence:** The idea that there are two ways that social norms cause conformity (informational social influence and normative social influence).

Theory of informational and normative influence

- **informational social influence:** voluntarily conforming to group standards when we are uncertain about the correct answer or behavior. (Conformity occurring when people accept evidence about reality provided by other people.)
- **normative social influence:** conforming publicly to gain social acceptance and avoid rejection. (Conformity based on a person's desire to fulfill others' expectations, often to gain acceptance.)

TABLE 7.1

Two Types of Conformity

A comparison of Sherif's and Asch's studies suggests different kinds of conformity for different reasons. Sherif used an ambiguous task, so others provided a source of information and influenced the participants' true opinions. Asch used a task that required simple judgments of a clear stimulus, so most participants exhibited occasional public conformity in response to normative pressure but privately did not accept the group's judgments.

Experimental Task	Primary Effect of Group	Depth of Conformity Produced
Sherif 's ambiguous autokinetic effect	Informational influence	Private acceptance
Asch's simple line judgments	Normative influence	Public conformity

What Are the Classic Conformity and Obedience Studies?

- Three classic sets of experiments illustrate how researchers have studied conformity.
- **Muzafer Sherif (1935) Autokinetic Effect Experiment:** He observed that others' judgments influenced people's estimates of the movement of a point of light that actually did not move.
- **Norms for “proper” answers emerged** and survived both over long periods of time and through succeeding generations of research participants.

What Are the Classic Conformity and Obedience Studies?

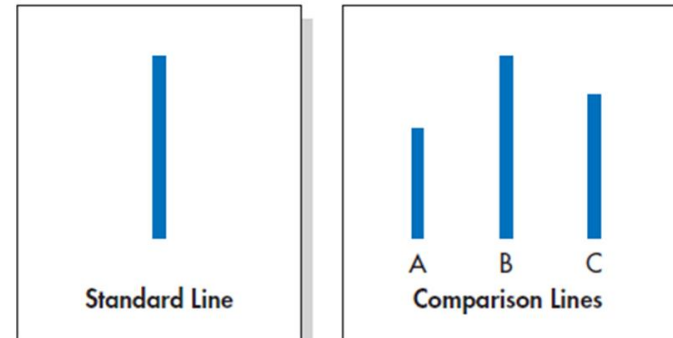
- Asch believed that the main problem with Sherif's (1935) conformity experiment was that there was **no correct answer** to the **ambiguous autokinetic experiment**.
- **Solomon Asch (1951)** devised a classic experiment whereby there was an **obvious answer** to a line judgment task. He had people listen to others' judgments of which of three comparison lines was equal to a standard line and then make the same judgment themselves.
- When the others unanimously gave a wrong answer, the participants conformed 37 percent of the time.

► **FIGURE 7.4**

Line Judgment Task Used in Asch's Conformity Studies

Which comparison line—A, B, or C—is the same in length as the standard line? What would you say if you found yourself in the presence of a unanimous majority that answered A or C? The participants in Asch's experiments conformed to the majority about a third of the time.

Asch, 1955.



The Asch Studies

- **Unanimous Majority**
- wrong answer 37% of the time
- **76% conformed** to incorrect answer at least once
- Asch's sample consisted of **50 male** students from Swarthmore College in America, who believed they were taking part in a vision test.
- Asch used a line judgement task, where he placed on real naive participants in a room with **seven confederates** (actors), who had agreed their answers in advance.



What Are the Classic Conformity and Obedience Studies?

- He wanted to investigate whether Germans were particularly obedient to authority figures as this was a common explanation for the Nazi killings in World War II.
- **Stanley Milgram's (1963)** obedience experiments elicited an extreme form of compliance. Milgram did more than one experiment – he carried out 18 variations of his study. All he did was alter the situation (IV) to see how this affected obedience (DV).
- Under optimum conditions—a legitimate, close-at-hand commander, a remote victim, and no one else to exemplify disobedience—65 percent of his adult male participants fully obeyed instructions to deliver what were supposedly traumatizing electric shocks to a screaming, innocent victim in an adjacent room.

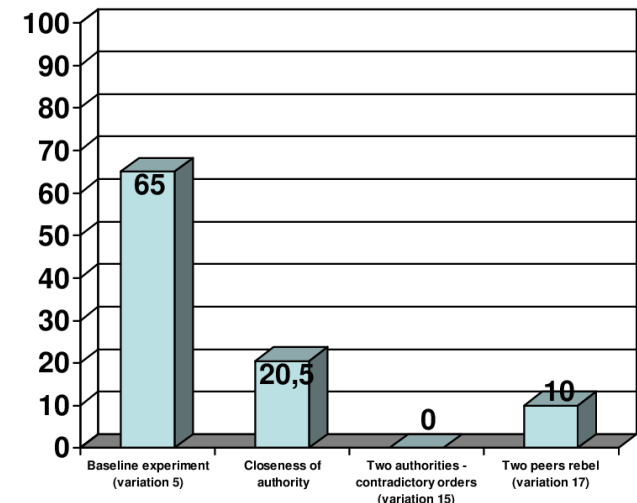
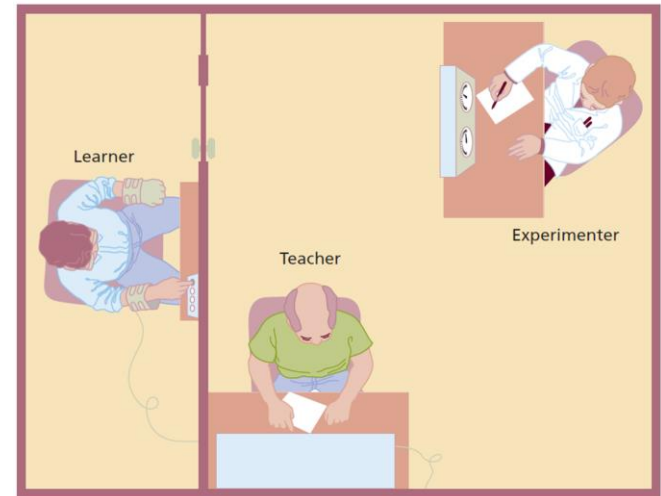


TABLE :: 6.1 Summary of Classic Obedience Studies

Topic	Researcher	Method	Real-Life Example
Norm formation	Sherif	Assessing suggestibility regarding seeming movement of light	Interpreting events differently after hearing from others; appreciating a tasty food that others love
Conformity	Asch	Agreement with others' obviously wrong perceptual judgments	Doing as others do; fads such as tattoos
Obedience	Milgram	Complying with commands to shock another	Soldiers or employees following questionable orders

Why Conform?

- Experiments reveal two reasons people conform:
 - **Normative influence:** results from a person's **desire for acceptance**. We want to be liked.
- The tendency to conform more when responding publicly reflects normative influence.
- **Informational influence:** results from others' providing **evidence about reality**. We want to be right.
- The tendency to conform more on difficult decision-making tasks reflects informational influence.

Why Conform?

➤ Informational influence:

- desire to be right,
- the need to reduce uncertainty
- following others for useful information

➤ Normative influence:

- desire to be liked,
- need to be approved
- following others for gaining acceptance

Who Conforms?

- The question “Who conforms?” has produced few definitive answers.
- **Personality** scores are poor predictors of specific acts of conformity but better **predictors of average conformity**.
- **Trait effects are strongest** in “weak” situations where social forces do not overwhelm individual differences.
- Although conformity and obedience are universal, **different cultures** socialize people to be more or less **socially responsive**.
- **Social roles** involve a certain degree of conformity, and conforming to **expectations** is an important task when stepping into **a new social role**.

What Predicts Conformity?

- Using conformity testing procedures, experimenters have explored the circumstances that produce conformity.
- Certain situations appear to be especially powerful.
- For example, conformity is affected by the **characteristics of the group**.
- People conform most when three or more people, or groups, **model the behavior or belief**.
- **Conformity is reduced** if the modeled behavior or belief is **not unanimous**.

What Predicts Conformity?

- Conformity is **enhanced** by **group cohesion**.
- The higher the status of those modeling the behavior or belief, the greater likelihood of conformity.
- People also **conform most** when their responses are **public** (in the presence of the group).
- A prior commitment to a certain behavior or belief increases the likelihood that a person will stick with that commitment rather than conform.

Culture Matters

- Cultural context is also important:
 - **Individualistic** cultures emphasize freedom and independence
 - Conformity = loss of control
 - **Collectivistic** cultures emphasize ties to social group
 - Conformity = maturity and inner strength
 - Need for approval vs. need for autonomy

Do We Ever Want to Be Different?

- Social psychology's emphasis on the **power of social pressure** must be **joined** by a complementary emphasis on the **power of the person**.
- **We are not puppets.**
- When social coercion becomes blatant, people often experience **reactance** —a motivation to defy the coercion in order to **maintain** their **sense of freedom**.
- We are **not comfortable** being too **different** from a group, but neither do we want to appear the **same** as everyone else.
- Thus, we act in ways that preserve our **sense of uniqueness and individuality**. In a group, we are most conscious of how we differ from the others.

Do We Ever Want to Be Different?

- **Reactance:** A motive to protect or restore one's sense of freedom. Reactance arises when someone threatens our freedom of action.
- **Asserting our uniqueness.** Though not wishing to be greatly deviant, most of us express our distinctiveness through our personal styles and dress.

Compliance

publicly performing an act at another's
request (even if we prefer not to)

Compliance: 3 factors

1. More likely to comply if in a **positive mood**
 - more active, more likely to grant requests
 - pleasant thoughts and memories; feel positive towards requesters
 - less likely to critically analyze events

Compliance: 3 factors

2. **Reciprocity**: the expectation that you need to return a favor

- commonly used for sales (e.g., free samples)
- feel obliged to comply with request

3. **Giving reasons**:

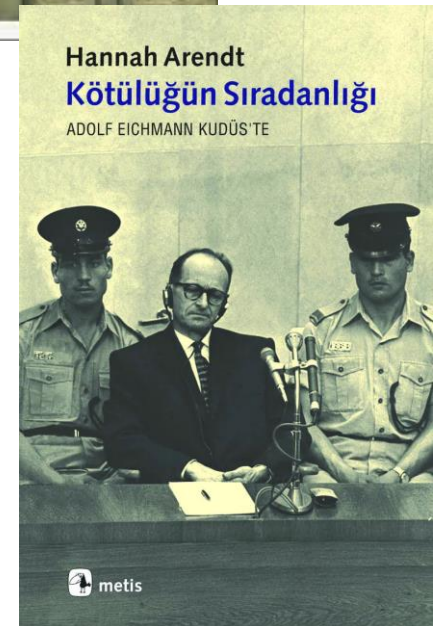
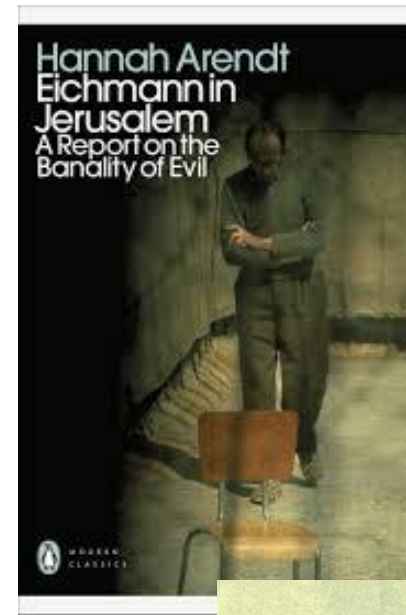
- habit to explain others' behavior
- believe it's worthy of exception

Obedience

compliance with a legitimate authority;
perform an action to a direct order/request

Obedience

- based on the belief:
“**authorities have the right to make requests**”
- Crimes of obedience:
 - when demands of authorities **immoral or illegal**
 - e.g., Eichmann defense
- “**normality**” or “**banality**” of **evil** and the power of the social situation



Obedience

*" Obedience as a behavioral determiner is particularly important. It was found that between 1933 and 45 millions of innocent people were systematically killed under command. Gas chambers were built, death camps were established, daily body quotas were produced. These inhuman policies may have resulted from the **mind of a single person**, but they have been carried out on **a large scale as a large number of people** followed orders. "* (Stanley Milgram, 1963)

The Holocaust

The most disturbing, early observations about social influence were connected to World War I and then again to World War II and the Holocaust.

A common defense for the mass torture and murder of Jews, Communists, homosexuals, the disabled, and others was simply, **“I was just following orders”** and **“I didn’t do anything unique; everyone else did the same thing.”**

The Holocaust

- The patterns of behavior and thought seen in human groups during the genocide are **not different from the social dynamics** that can be observed **in normal times**.
- They follow specific cognition, principle, social and political conditions in terms of quality. But what makes the Holocaust unique is related to **how groups interpret these social structures** in relation to the current situation.

The Holocaust

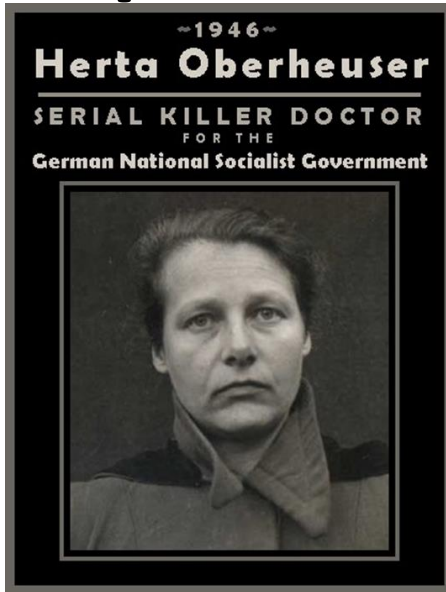
- Individuals are more likely to participate if a **strong authority figure orders their followers** to support the genocide. Thus, genocide violence is turned into a **legal** and non-perverted social behavior.
- Human behavior is always subject to situational forces. Evil, like heroism, is not something that people are born with, but can be learned later depending on the circumstances.

Final Solution



The Wannsee Conference was a high-level meeting of German officials to discuss and implement the so-called “Final Solution of the Jewish Question”

Ordinary Women: Female Perpetrators of the Nazi Final Solution



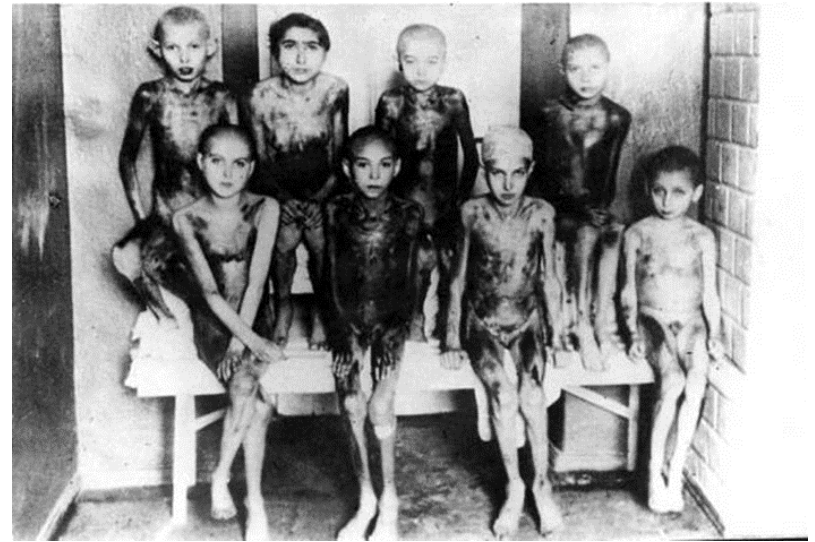
- killed healthy children and removed their vital organs
- performed disgusting and painful medical experiments on prisoners
- “Beautiful Beast”, “Yellow Angel of Death”, “Auschwitz Hyena”
- Irma Grese : responsible for approximately 30,000 female workers in the Ravensbrück, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps.
- Ilse Koch: "The Witch of Buchenwald".
- She is known for his fondness for tattooed bodies. She cut the tattoos on the skins of the prisoners she had killed and made bags, gloves, night lamps, and even embroidered underwear.



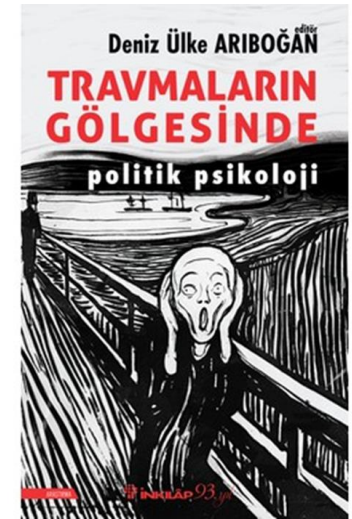
669 children and adults



THE NAZI DOCTORS







MOVIES

- Schindler's List
- The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas
- The Pianist
- Inglorious Basterds
- Judgment at Nuremberg
- Turkish Passport
- Sophie's Choice
- Downfall
- Amen
- Night and Fog
- Defiance
- Life Is Beautiful
- Black Book
- In Darkness
- Jojo Rabbit
- Woman in Gold
- The Zookeeper's Wife
- Korczak
- The Devil's Arithmetic
- Memories of Anne Frank

