Chapter 13: Social Psychology
Module 13.3: Social Influence: Conformity, Compliance, Obedience
Psychology 100
Introduction to Psychology

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Other Social Influence: Overview

• How does the presence of others affect performance?
• Social influences on altruism
• The power of the group
  • Conformity
  • Group decision-making
• The power of authority: Obedience
  • Milgram’s obedience experiment
• The role of culture

How Does the Presence of Others Affect Performance?

• In the presence of others, performance can be affected in several ways:
  • Social facilitation: Performance enhanced
  • Social interference: Performance impaired
• Interacts with task difficulty
  • Others help spur performance of easy tasks, but they hinder performance of new or difficult ones
• May happen because presence of others raises arousal
  • Recall: Performance is best when arousal is not too low (as for easy tasks) or too high (as for difficult ones)

Social Influences on Altruism

• Altruism: Acting in a way that shows unselfish concern for the welfare of others
• Bystander effect: Reluctance to come to someone’s aid when others are present
  • Famous example: Kitty Genovese case
• Diffusion of responsibility: Allowing sense of responsibility to spread out among those present
  • Derives from belief that others have already done something to help or soon will
    • The more witnesses, the less likely any single one will help

The Power of the Group

• Social loafing: Tendency to put in less effort when working in a group than when working alone
  • May be connected to the bystander effect, diffusion of responsibility
• Deindividuation: Loss of individuality that comes from being in a group
  • Example: People might do things when in a large, rowdy group that they would never do alone
  • May also relate to diffusion of responsibility

Conformity

• Tendency to comply with the wishes of the group
  • Opinions, feelings, behaviors generally move toward the norm
• Especially likely when pressure comes from in-group, or individuals with whom you identify
  • Can be extreme, as in Asch’s (1951, 1955) studies:
    • Confederate subjects lied about easy visual judgments
    • Many subjects conformed to these wrong judgments
Group Decision-Making

- Group polarization: Tendency for a group’s dominant point of view to become stronger, more extreme with time
  - May relate to conformity, wish to be liked by other group members
  - Groupthink: Tendency for members to become so interested in seeking consensus that they ignore, suppress, dissenting views
  - Can be countered by encouraging dissent, awareness of the tendency

Compliance: Getting Others to Respond to Requests

- Foot-in-door (small req. followed by larger one; self-perception)
- Door-in-face (large req. followed by moderate one; reciprocity)
- Attraction/liking (thus similarity, attractiveness, etc.)
- Low-ball (changing the rules of the game after it starts; similar to “bait and switch”)

The Power of Authority: Obedience

- Form of compliance that occurs when people respond to orders of an authority figure
  - Why do people often carry out extreme or horrifying orders, for example during war?
  - Milgram (1963) designed an experiment to test the resistance of average people to authority when demands are extreme
    - Experimenter ordered participants to administer increasing levels of shock to an unwilling “victim”
    - IMPORTANT: “Victim” was a confederate; all shocks were fake

Obedience

E = Experimenter (originally, Milgram himself)
S = The Subject
L = The Learner (actually a confederate of E)
Results of the Milgram Experiment

- Over half delivered “shocks” up to the maximum level, despite realistic protests and screams of the “victim.”
- Ethical concerns:
  - Participants clearly distressed
  - Were debriefed, however, and long-term effects were minor
- What we learn from it: Under certain circumstances, average people will obey extreme orders

The Role of Culture

- Western cultures promote an independent view of the self
  - Leads to devaluing conformity, obedience, altruism
- Many non-Western cultures promote an interdependent view
  - Example: Japanese culture strongly emphasizes belonging to, contributing to a collective