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Chapter 26: Conformity and Group Influence.

Venturing into social psychology, this investigates how individuals' thoughts, feelings and behaviours are influenced by the presence of others. Social influence acting as a key component can be deliberate and explicit or passive and subtle, which may appear in overt forms such as obedience, persuasion, social facilitation and inhibition. This means that an individual can perform better or worse simply because others are watching. Social influence revolves around the concept of a social norm. A social norm is a rule or standard shared by a group of people prescribing acceptable behaviour.

With several interpretations, majority influence has often been closely linked to conformity and thoroughly studied. According to Crutchfield (1955), conformity is yielding to group pressure. On the other hand, Zimbardo and Leippe (1991) stated that conformity is a response to real or imagined pressure by change in belief or behaviour. The method of how conformity operates was stumbled.

Early experimental investigations into social influence, particularly the work of Muzafer Sherif in 1935, were instrumental in mapping the basic architecture of conformity. Sherif's pioneering experiment leveraged the autokinetic effect—a perceptual illusion where a stationary point of light appears to move in a dark room. In this ambiguous environment, he observed that individual estimations of the light's movement gradually converged to create a shared group standard. Sherif interpreted this phenomenon as informational social influence (ISI), positing that in situations devoid of objective answers, individuals naturally look to others for cues to reality, ultimately adopting the group's judgment as their own (Sherif, 1935).

Solomon Asch's seminal experiments (1951-1956) served as a powerful counterpoint to Sherif's work by eliminating situational ambiguity. Through his straightforward line-judgment task, Asch demonstrated that approximately 32% of participants would yield to a group's clearly incorrect consensus, though a significant minority (26%) consistently resisted conformity pressures. These studies revealed that social influence peaked under conditions of unanimous majority opinion, sharply declined with the introduction of even a single dissenter, and diminished substantially when responses were given privately. These patterns highlighted what Asch termed normative social influence (NSI), where conformity is motivated primarily by the desire for social acceptance rather than informational uncertainty (Asch, 1951–1956).

Cross-cultural research further illuminated conformity's contextual nature. Bond & Smith's (1996) meta-analysis established that collectivist societies exhibit significantly higher

conformity rates than individualistic cultures, reflecting fundamental differences in cultural values regarding group harmony versus personal autonomy. This work established conformity as a socially conditioned behaviour rather than a fixed psychological trait. Subsequent replications, including Mori & Arai's (2010) adaptation of Asch's paradigm, confirmed that while conformity remains a universal psychological phenomenon, its expression is moderated by specific historical and social contexts (Mori & Arai, 2010).

Moscovici's (1969) research on minority influence demonstrated that consistent, committed minorities could eventually sway majority opinions, as shown in his blue-green slide experiments. His conversion theory (1980) further proposed that while majorities produce public compliance, minorities stimulate deeper cognitive processing that can lead to genuine private acceptance and belief change (Moscovici, 1969; 1980).

Research on group dynamics revealed additional social processes, including group polarization (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969) - where discussion intensifies members' initial attitudes - and groupthink (Janis, 1971, 1982), where cohesive groups prioritize consensus over critical evaluation, often with disastrous consequences as seen in the Bay of Pigs invasion (Janis, 1971, 1982).

Modern perspectives, particularly Turner's (1991) concept of referent social influence, reframe conformity as an identity-based process where individuals align most strongly with groups they psychologically identify with. Digital environment research by Rosner & Kramer (2016) demonstrates how online anonymity fosters deindividuation and conformity to group norms, including increased aggressive behaviours (Rosner & Kramer, 2016).

In final analysis, conformity emerges not as a simple negative or positive trait, but as a fundamental and paradoxical social force. Its potential for harm is well-documented; it can propagate errors, suppress individual thought, and catalyse disastrous groupthink. Yet, to solely condemn it is to ignore its indispensable role in forging the social order, predictability, and cooperative foundations that allow any society to function. The true complexity of conformity lies in this very duality: it is the psychological glue that maintains societal stability, but also the mechanism that, when harnessed by a persistent and strategic minority, can be disrupted to break from the status quo and propel innovation and transformative social change.

Article 1: Why We Cheat

The article *Why We Cheat* by Hank Rothgerber explores the psychology of ethics and moral values in relation to widespread cheating. He emphasises how humans, in both high and low level events, plummet into moral hypocrisy and self-deception (Rothgerber, 2023, para.12). He investigates dishonest behaviour through cognitive and behavioural psychology (Rothgerber, 2023, para.9). Furthermore, he emphasizes on how people want to appear moral without committing to the effort, wanting the benefits of cheating while protecting their self-image without the due diligence of actually truly being morally abiding (Rothgerber, 2023, para.12-13). This involves deceiving oneself—fooling oneself into believing they are righteous (Rothgerber, 2023, para.14). Moreover, the article highlights psychological experiments, including Ariley's Matrix task studies, Batson's coin flip experiments, Kandul and Nikolaychuk's Dictator games, and Shalvi's Dice Rolling experiments (Rothgerber, 2023, para.17, 27, 37, 40). Across these, the author states that people feel inclined to deceive with boundaries as cheating with limits allows for the reduction of one's guilt (Rothgerber, 2023, para.24). Lastly, he discusses moral outrage as self-protection, where individuals judge others' failings more harshly than their own (Rothgerber, 2023, para.43, 46). The article concludes that humans are inclined to want to appear moral by deceiving themselves and encouraging the justification of their selfish behaviours while avoiding the price of being truly morally abiding (Rothgerber, 2023, para.47).

Article 2: Workplace Friendships

The article *Can Workplace Friendships be Good for You?* by Ana Sandoiu explores the psychology of workplace relationships in relation to their benefits and potential setbacks. According to the article, workplace friendships are defined as voluntary, connections built on mutual interests, values, trust, and enjoyment (Sandoiu, 2023, para.2). In relation to her research, she investigates their socioemotional and instrumental functions, highlighting how such relationships can enhance wellbeing, resilience, collaboration, strengthening organisational commitment and overall work ethic (Sandoiu, 2023, para.4-5). In addition, she highlights how such friendships contribute to job satisfaction and a sense of one's belonging within the community, thus serving as a hidden support system within professional environments (Sandoiu, 2023, para.6). In pursuit of assessing the pros and cons of workplace friendships, she emphasizes on risk factors such as, favouritism, conflicts of interest, unclear professional boundaries, and potential stress when friendships are estranged (Sandoiu, 2023, para.7). Hence, she concludes that while workplace friendships have value, their success is dependable on human effort and precise management to ensure these relationships align with goals that steams towards professional success. (Sandoiu, 2023, para.21).

Article 3: Gender. How stubborn are the Stereotypes?

The article *Gender: How Stubborn Are the Stereotypes?* by Hutchings and Sullivan explores the persistence of gender stereotypes within the past fifty years. The authors discuss two types of gender stereotyping: Descriptive Stereotypes and Perspective Stereotypes. Descriptive stereotypes are when people describe how men and women behave based on their belief, such as *women are more submissive* and *men are more dominant*. For Perspective Stereotypes, they are the beliefs of how *they should* behave in regard to societal expectations, for example: *women should be more submissive* and *men should be more dominant* (Hutchings & Sullivan, 2023, para.3-4). In correlation to such, the authors gather historical research, from Broverman et al.'s (1972) findings which associate men with competence and women with warmth, to Williams and Best's (1990) cross-cultural study that confirms similar global patterns (Hutchings & Sullivan, 2023, para.6-7). In regard to other studies such as Rudman and Glick (2001), depict that women still receive harsh criticism for violating the prescriptive of societal's norms of "niceness" (Hutchings & Sullivan, 2023, para.10). The article also explores the examination of the Towards *Gender Harmony* project, which surveyed 33,000 participants in 62 countries, finding enduring stereotypes, precarious manhood beliefs, and the "Nordic paradox" of persistent violence in highly equal societies (Hutchings & Sullivan, 2023, para.11-15). Hence, the authors conclude that while progress has been made in regards to gender equality, the problem remains to be on a global scale, and prescriptive stereotypes remain deeply ingrained. It is only with considerable effort of changes through cultural, educational, and policy-level arrangements that gender equality can start to form. (Hutchings & Sullivan, 2023, para.40-44).

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