

Video Guide

THE SOCIAL, ANIMAL

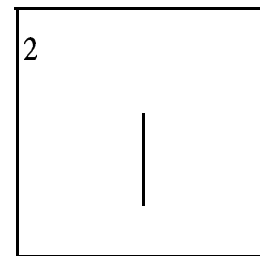
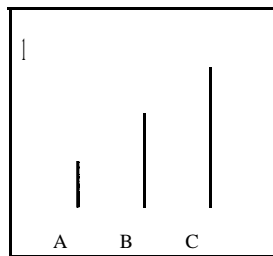
20 minutes, bw, 1959

I. Introduction

- A. Social psychology is that field of psychology which studies the influences that people have upon the beliefs and behaviors of others. We will be viewing three experiments dealing with conformity, rejection of a deviate, and cognitive dissonance theory.
- B. Besides learning about the three topics just mentioned, view this film to learn about psychological research. Try to apply what you have been learning from the handout entitled: Getting the Facts.

II. Conformity

- A. Should we follow the thinking of the group or should we make up our own mind? Each of us continually must deal with the conflict between being an individual and being a member of a group. If we follow our own thinking, we might be called an individualist, a nonconformist, or a deviate. If we follow the group, we might be called a conformer, weak-willed, or a team player. Under certain circumstances conforming is valued while under other circumstances conforming is not valued. How do you decide when the group disagrees with your view?
- B. Conformity is a change in a person's behavior or beliefs which results from pressure from another person or a group of people. We don't see conformity; we see a person conforming. Conformity is a construct. A construct is a broad term which includes a variety of specific behaviors. Conformity covers a wide range of behaviors and situations. How have social psychologists studied conformity?
- C. Asch's research (1951)
 1. Put yourself in this situation. You are with seven other college students who have been asked to judge the length of some lines. Which line on Card 1 is equal in length to the line on Card 2. The experimenter asks you to state your judgment last. On the first two trials things go smoothly as the other seven all agree on which lines are similar and you agree that their judgment is correct. On the third trial something different happens. All of the other subjects state that A is the most similar in length. Printed below are the two cards. What would be your answer?



2. Procedure - How did Asch study conformity?

- a. Eight subjects were asked to judge the length of some lines. Each subject was asked in turn to state which of the three lines was equal in length to a fourth line. Unknown to the real subject the other seven subjects had been told to give the right answer on six trials but to all give the wrong answer on twelve trials. Would the real subject go along with the group or call the lines as he/she saw them?

- b. Control condition ▪ **Asch** chose lengths of lines which he thought were easy to match. Thirty-seven control subjects individually judged the lines and only rarely made a mistake. Consequently, **Asch** knew the subjects could correctly match the lines.

3. Results

- a. Seventy-five percent of the subjects conformed on at least one trial.
- b. Thirty-five percent of the total responses were conforming.

4. Further research by **Asch**:

- a. Number of persons giving the wrong responses.
 - 1) Extremely little conformity if there was only one other.
 - 2) Fourteen percent conformity if there were two giving the wrong answer.
 - 3) Thirty-two percent conformity if there were three giving the wrong answer.
 - 4) Around 35 % conformity whether the group had four, seven, or fifteen giving the wrong answer.
- b. If the majority had one dissenter (who gave the correct answer) conformity dropped to under 10%.
- c. If the subject was able to privately write his judgment rather than publicly answer, conformity decreased. This result has been found by other researchers for stimuli such as counting the number of metronome clicks and judging the aesthetic value of examples of modern art.

D. Two important reasons people conform:

- 1. They believe that others have information about the situation which needs to be considered. Consequently, subjects come to believe that the others are correct.
- 2. They do not want to give up the rewards of the group or receive punishment from the group.

III. Treatment of a Deviate (1951)

Schachter demonstrates what happens to the person who refuses to conform. In his experiment, seven people discuss the case of Johnny Rocco, a hypothetical 12 year old juvenile delinquent. Unknown to the others, two members of this discussion group are actually Schachter's assistants and have received explicit instructions as to their behavior. One is always to agree with the group; the other is to disagree constantly. The majority of the group recommend rehabilitation through kindness and affection, but the non-conformist insistently argues that Johnny Rocco be sternly punished. How did the group treat the deviate? What is a deviate?

IV. Cognitive Dissonance Theory (1959)

When a person publicly says something which is contrary to his/her real belief, he/she begins to believe what he/she is saying. This startling result, Dr. Leon Festinger tells us, can be explained by his theory of cognitive dissonance.

According to the theory, whenever an individual says something he/she does not believe, he/she is in a state of dissonance. He/she has two inconsistent thoughts. The only way to reduce this uncomfortable state is to change one of the thoughts so that both are consistent. Since the individual cannot change what he/she has said, he/she must change what is believed and bring it into harmony with what he/she said. Dr. Festinger demonstrates the experiment with which he tested his theory. College students were given a very dull task. When their tasks were completed, each subject was separately asked to tell the next subject waiting outside that the task was very enjoyable. Some were told that they will receive \$20 .00 for doing this and to be available to help in the future. Others were offered only \$1.00. Subjects paid \$1 .00 and those paid \$20.00 then lied that the task was enjoyable.

However, when interviewed later by Dr. Festinger, the \$20.00 subjects maintained that the task was very monotonous. The \$1 .00 subjects, however, had altered their original opinion and now said that they found it quite interesting. And this, Dr. Festinger, points out, is precisely what dissonance theory predicts. Both know the task was dull, but the \$20.00 subjects know they can find a rationalization for telling the perspective subject it was enjoyable. They were paid \$20.00 and anyone would lie for \$20.00. The \$1 .00 subjects, on the other hand, have no rationalization for saying this. They have two discrepant thoughts and are in a state of dissonance. They reduce dissonance by actually changing their opinion about the dullness of the task. They come to believe the task was not dull. Consequently, they did not lie.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES. There are 3 objectives.

1. Describe a psychological fact for each of the topics of conformity and rejection of a deviate (identify the researcher, the procedure and the research results).
2. Describe the theory of cognitive dissonance (dissonance, dissonance reduction, justification, choice) using the \$1.00 and \$20.00 study.
3. Analyze the \$1 .00 and \$20.00 study as a research study. Cite the researcher, describe the sample, describe how the study was done, label the cause and behavior variables, identify two controlled variables, describe the two comparison groups.

A further explanation of cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance theory applies when a decision has been made. A person decides to do one thing rather than another or a person decides to say something which is inconsistent with one of his/her beliefs or does something which is inconsistent with previous behaviors or beliefs. In each case, the individual made a commitment (decided) which is inconsistent with other of his/her beliefs (cognitions). This inconsistency is termed cognitive dissonance and is uncomfortable. This psychological state doesn't feel good to the individual who then attempts to reduce the dissonance through a process called dissonance reduction. The reduction of dissonance often turns out to be rationalizing behavior rather than rational behavior.

Dissonance occurs after the decision or action, not before. Dissonance reduction is a way to keep our world consistent but at the price of deceiving ourselves. We bend reality to fit our decision or action, which can be dangerous.

Cognitive dissonance occurs when:

- (1) making a decision (this implies the person believes he/she had a choice)
 - (a) more dissonance is produced when the decision involves much time, money, or effort the alternatives are about equal
- (2) saying one thing and doing another (only if the person believes he/she had a choice)

Note: If a person doesn't have a choice, there is no dissonance!

 - (a) more dissonance is produced when there are few external reasons for the actions
 - (b) there is potential harm to the self concept

Example:

Joyce likes rock music concerts. She found out that a concert was being given near Harrisburg and decided to go. She worked overtime for two weeks to pay for her ticket and transportation to Harrisburg. She also had to talk an unpleasant co-worker into covering for the day she was missing of work. The day of the concert arrived. Unfortunately, the main group never showed, the ones that did play played poorly, and the sound system was working less than half of the time. It rained during most of the concert and Joyce ruined her shoes in the mud. On the ride back she was kept up all night by a too friendly seatmate.

The next day you ask Joyce how the concert was and was it worth all of her extra effort. Joyce answers:

- a. "I really didn't go to any particular extra effort. "
- b. "It was worth it. The concert was great. "
- c. "Some of the big names didn't show but the rest of it was rather good."
- d. "It was a lousy concert, trip, and not worth the effort. "

Which answer indicates dissonance reduction?

Example:

Oscar cheated on a take-home examination. Since he considered himself an honest person, he experienced dissonance. He rationalized that no one was hurt by his getting help and that probably others in the class did the same thing. He further rationalized that he would have known the material if he hadn't helped in an emergency situation the night before the test was due. Oscar continues to believe he is honest and that getting a "little" help is OK now and then.

Example:

Zimbardo (1965) did an experiment in which subjects were persuaded to eat fried grasshoppers which at first they did not like. Attitudes toward eating grasshoppers were measured and then half of the subjects received persuasion from the experimenter acting friendly and positive while the other half received persuasion from the experimenter acting unfriendly and unpleasant. Fifty percent of all subjects ate the grasshoppers and again rated how much they liked eating grasshoppers. Subjects who had the unpleasant experimenter said they liked grasshopper more than the subjects with the pleasant experimenter. Can you explain this result by cognitive dissonance theory?