Multiple-Choice Questions

1. What do we call the tendency for observers to underestimate the impact of the situation and overestimate the impact of personal disposition?
   a. Peripheral route persuasion
   b. Social psychology
   c. Attribution theory
   d. Fundamental attribution error
   e. Central route persuasion

2. Which of the following best describes a feeling, often influenced by a belief, that predisposes one to respond in a particular way to people and events?
   a. Central route persuasion
   b. Anger
   c. Emotion
   d. Foot-in-the-door phenomenon
   e. Attitude

3. Which of the following best explains why we act to reduce the discomfort we feel when two of our thoughts are inconsistent?
   a. Cognitive dissonance theory
   b. Power of the situation
   c. Foot-in-the-door phenomenon
   d. Role theory
   e. Fundamental attribution error

Practice FRQs

1. Explain the fundamental attribution error.

Answer

1 point: The fundamental attribution error occurs when we are analyzing someone's behavior.

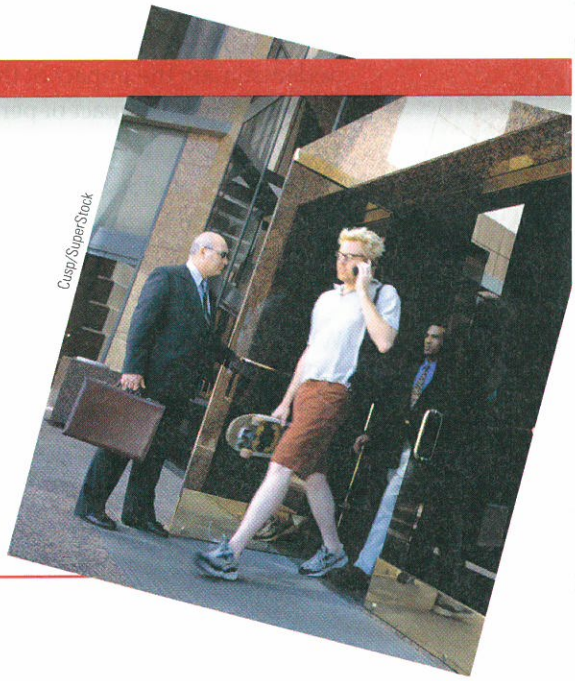
2 points: In order for the fundamental attribution error to occur, the person analyzing must underestimate the role of the situation and overestimate the disposition of the person whose behavior is being analyzed.

2. Explain the difference between peripheral route persuasion and central route persuasion.

(4 points)

Module 75

Conformity and Obedience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Module Learning Objectives

75-1 Describe automatic mimicry, and explain how conformity experiments reveal the power of social influence.

75-2 Describe what we learned about the power of social influence from Milgram's obedience experiments.

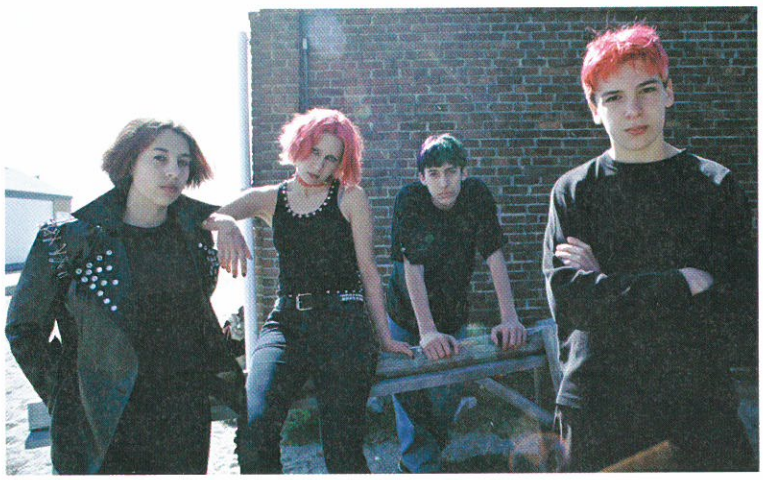
"Have you ever noticed how one example—good or bad—can prompt others to follow? How one illegally parked car can give permission for others to do likewise? How one racial joke can fuel another?" -Marian Wright Edelman, *The Measure of Our Success*, 1992

Social psychology's great lesson is the enormous power of social influence. This influence can be seen in our conformity, our obedience to authority, and our group behavior. Suicides, bomb threats, airplane hijackings, and UFO sightings all have a curious tendency to come in clusters. On most high school campuses, jeans are the dress code; on New York's Wall Street or London's Bond Street, dress suits are the norm. When we know how to act, how to groom, how to talk, life functions smoothly. Armed with social influence principles, advertisers, fundraisers, and campaign workers aim to sway our decisions to buy, to donate, to vote. Isolated with others who share their grievances, dissenters may gradually become rebels, and rebels may become terrorists. Let's examine the pull of these social strings. How strong are they? How do they operate? When do we break them?

Conformity: Complying With Social Pressures

75-1 What is automatic mimicry, and how do conformity experiments reveal the power of social influence?

Conforming to nonconformity
Are these students asserting their individuality or identifying themselves with others of the same microculture?



Automatic Mimicry

Fish swim in schools. Birds fly in flocks. And humans, too, tend to go with their group, to think what it thinks and do what it does. Behavior is contagious. Chimpanzees are more likely to yawn after observing another chimpanzee yawn (Anderson et al., 2004). Ditto for humans. If one of us yawns, laughs, coughs, stares at the sky, or checks a cell phone, others in our group will soon do the same. Like the chameleon lizards that take on the color of their surroundings, we humans take on the emotional tones of those around us. Just hearing someone reading a neutral text in either a happy- or sad-sounding voice creates "mood contagion" in listeners (Neumann & Strack, 2000). We are natural mimics, unconsciously imitating others' expressions, postures, and voice tones.

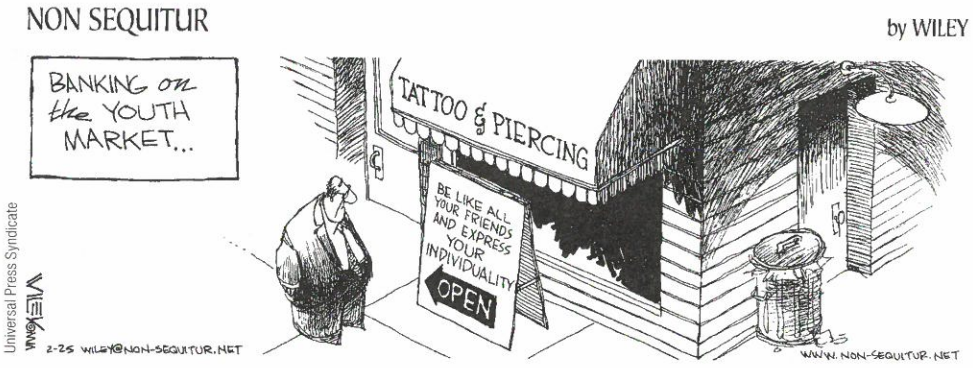
Tanya Chartrand and John Bargh captured this mimicry, which they call the *chameleon effect* (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). They had students work in a room alongside another person, who was actually a confederate working for the experimenters. Sometimes the confederates rubbed their own face. Sometimes they shook their foot. Sure enough, the students tended to rub their face when with the face-rubbing person and shake their foot when with the foot-shaking person. Other studies have found people synchronizing their grammar to match material they are reading or people they are hearing (Ireland & Pennebaker, 2010). Perhaps we should not be surprised then that intricate studies show that obesity, sleep loss, drug use, loneliness, and happiness spread through social networks (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). We and our friends form a social system.

"When I see synchrony and mimicry—whether it concerns yawning, laughing, dancing, or aping—I see social connection and bonding." -Primatologist Frans de Waal "The Empathy Instinct," 2009

Automatic mimicry helps us to *empathize*—to feel what others are feeling. This helps explain why we feel happier around happy people than around depressed people. It also helps explain why studies of groups of British nurses and accountants have revealed *mood linkage*—sharing up and down moods (Totterdell et al., 1998). Empathic people yawn more after seeing others yawn (Morrison, 2007). And empathic mimicking fosters fondness (van Baaren et al., 2003, 2004). Perhaps you've noticed that when someone nods their head as you do and echoes your words, you feel a certain rapport and liking?

Suggestibility and mimicry sometimes lead to tragedy. In the eight days following the 1999 shooting rampage at Colorado's Columbine High School, every U.S. state except Vermont experienced threats of copycat violence. Pennsylvania alone recorded 60 such threats (Cooper, 1999). Sociologist David Phillips and his colleagues (1985, 1989) found that suicides, too, sometimes increase following a highly publicized suicide. In the wake of screen idol Marilyn Monroe's suicide on August 5, 1962, for example, the number of suicides in the United States exceeded the usual August count by 200.

What causes behavior clusters? Do people act similarly because of their influence on one another? Or because they are simultaneously exposed to the same events and conditions? Seeking answers to such questions, social psychologists have conducted experiments on group pressure and conformity.



Conformity and Social Norms

Suggestibility and mimicry are subtle types of **conformity**—adjusting our behavior or thinking toward some group standard. To study conformity, Solomon Asch (1955) devised a simple test. As a participant in what you believe is a study of visual perception, you arrive in time to take a seat at a table with five other people. The experimenter asks the group to state, one by one, which of three comparison lines is identical to a standard line. You see clearly that the answer is Line 2, and you await your turn to say so. Your boredom begins to show when the next set of lines proves equally easy.

conformity adjusting our behavior or thinking to coincide with a group standard.

Now comes the third trial, and the correct answer seems just as clear-cut (**FIGURE 75.1** on the next page). But the first person gives what strikes you as a wrong answer: "Line 3." When the second person and then the third and fourth give the same wrong

Figure 75.1
Asch's conformity experiments
Which of the three comparison lines is equal to the standard line? What do you suppose most people would say after hearing five others say, "Line 3"? In this photo from one of Asch's experiments, the student in the center shows the severe discomfort that comes from disagreeing with the responses of other group members (in this case, accomplices of the experimenter).

answer, you sit up straight and squint. When the fifth person agrees with the first four, you feel your heart begin to pound. The experimenter then looks to you for your answer. Torn between the unanimity voiced by the five others and the evidence of your own eyes, you feel tense and suddenly unsure. You hesitate before answering, wondering whether you should suffer the discomfort of being the oddball. What answer do you give?

In Asch's experiments, college students, answering questions alone, erred less than 1 percent of the time. But what about when several others—confederates working for the experimenter—answered incorrectly? Although most people told the truth even when others did not, Asch was disturbed by his result: More than one-third of the time, these "intelligent and well-meaning" college students were then "willing to call white black" by going along with the group.

Later investigations have not always found as much conformity as Asch found, but they have revealed that we are more likely to conform when we

- are made to feel incompetent or insecure.
- are in a group with at least three people.
- are in a group in which everyone else agrees. (If just one other person disagrees, the odds of our disagreeing greatly increase.)
- admire the group's status and attractiveness.
- have not made a prior commitment to any response.
- know that others in the group will observe our behavior.
- are from a culture that strongly encourages respect for social standards.

Why do we so often think what others think and do what they do? Why in college residence halls do students' attitudes become more similar to those living near them (Cullum & Harton, 2007)? Why in college classrooms are hand-raised answers to controversial questions less diverse than anonymous electronic clicker responses (Stowell et al., 2010)? Why do we clap when others clap, eat as others eat, believe what others believe, say what others say, even see what others see?

Frequently, we conform to avoid rejection or to gain social approval. In such cases, we are responding to **normative social influence.** We are sensitive to *social norms*—understood rules for accepted and expected behavior—because the price we pay for being different can be severe. We need to belong. To get along, we go along.

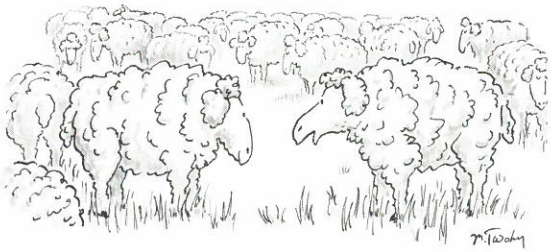
At other times, we conform because we want to be accurate. Groups provide information, and only an uncommonly stubborn person will never listen to others. "Those who never retract their opinions love themselves more than they love truth," observed Joseph Joubert, an eighteenth-century French essayist. When we accept others' opinions about reality, we are responding to **informational social influence.** As Rebecca Denton demonstrated in 2004, sometimes it pays to assume others are right and to follow their lead. Denton set a record for the furthest distance driven on the wrong side of a British divided highway—30 miles, with only one minor sideswipe, before the motorway ran out and police were able

normative social influence
influence resulting from a person's desire to gain approval or avoid disapproval.

informational social influence
influence resulting from one's willingness to accept others' opinions about reality.

to puncture her tires. Denton, who was intoxicated, later explained that she thought the hundreds of other drivers coming at her were all on the wrong side of the road (Woolcock, 2004).

Is conformity good or bad? The answer depends partly on our culturally influenced values. Western Europeans and people in most English-speaking countries tend to prize individualism. People in many Asian, African, and Latin American countries place a higher value on honoring group standards. In social influence experiments across 17 countries, conformity rates have been lower in individualist cultures (Bond & Smith, 1996). American university students, for example, tend to see themselves, in domains ranging from consumer purchases to political views, as less conforming than others (Pronin et al., 2007). We are, in our own eyes, individuals amid a crowd of sheep.



"I love the little ways you're identical to everyone else."

Obedience: Following Orders

75-2 What did Milgram's obedience experiments teach us about the power of social influence?

Social psychologist Stanley Milgram (1963, 1974), a student of Solomon Asch, knew that people often give in to social pressures. But how would they respond to outright commands? To find out, he undertook what became social psychology's most famous, controversial, and influential experiments (Benjamin & Simpson, 2009).

Imagine yourself as one of the nearly 1000 people who took part in Milgram's 20 experiments. You respond to an advertisement for participants in a Yale University psychology study of the effect of punishment on learning. Professor Milgram's assistant asks you and another person to draw slips from a hat to see who will be the "teacher" and who will be the "learner." You draw the "teacher" slip and are asked to sit down in front of a machine, which has a series of labeled switches. The learner, a mild and submissive-seeming man, is led to an adjoining room and strapped into a chair. From the chair, wires run through the wall to "your" machine. You are given your task: Teach and then test the learner on a list of word pairs. If the learner gives a wrong answer, you are to flip a switch to deliver a brief electric shock. For the first wrong answer, you will flip the switch labeled "15 Volts—Slight Shock." With each succeeding error, you will move to the next higher voltage. The researcher demonstrates by flipping the first switch. Lights flash, relay switches click on, and an electric buzzing fills the air.

The experiment begins, and you deliver the shocks after the first and second wrong answers. If you continue, you hear the learner grunt when you flick the third, fourth, and fifth switches. After you activate the eighth switch ("120 Volts—Moderate Shock"), the learner cries out that the shocks are painful. After the tenth switch ("150 Volts—Strong Shock"), he begins shouting. "Get me out of here! I won't be in the experiment anymore! I refuse to go on!" You draw back, but the stern experimenter prods you: "Please continue—the experiment requires that you continue." You resist, but the experimenter insists, "It is absolutely essential that you continue," or "You have no other choice, you *must* go on."

If you obey, you hear the learner shriek in apparent agony as you continue to raise the shock level after each new error. After the 330-volt level, the learner refuses to answer and falls silent. Still, the experimenter pushes you toward the final, 450-volt switch. Ask the question, he says, and if no correct answer is given, administer the next shock level.

Would you follow the experimenter's commands to shock someone? At what level would you refuse to obey? Milgram asked that question in a survey before he started his experiments. Most people were sure they would stop playing such a sadistic-seeming role soon after the learner first indicated pain, certainly before he shrieked in agony. Forty psychiatrists agreed with that prediction when Milgram asked them. Were the predictions accurate? Not even close. When Milgram conducted the experiment with men aged 20 to 50, he was astonished. More than 60 percent complied fully—right up to the last switch.

AP® Exam Tip

Three of the most famous research projects in psychology were done by social psychologists, and you've now read about them all. Milgram, Asch, and Zimbardo (from the last module) are all likely to appear on the AP® exam.

Stanley Milgram (1933–1984)
This social psychologist's obedience experiments "belong to the self-understanding of literate people in our age" (Sabini, 1986).

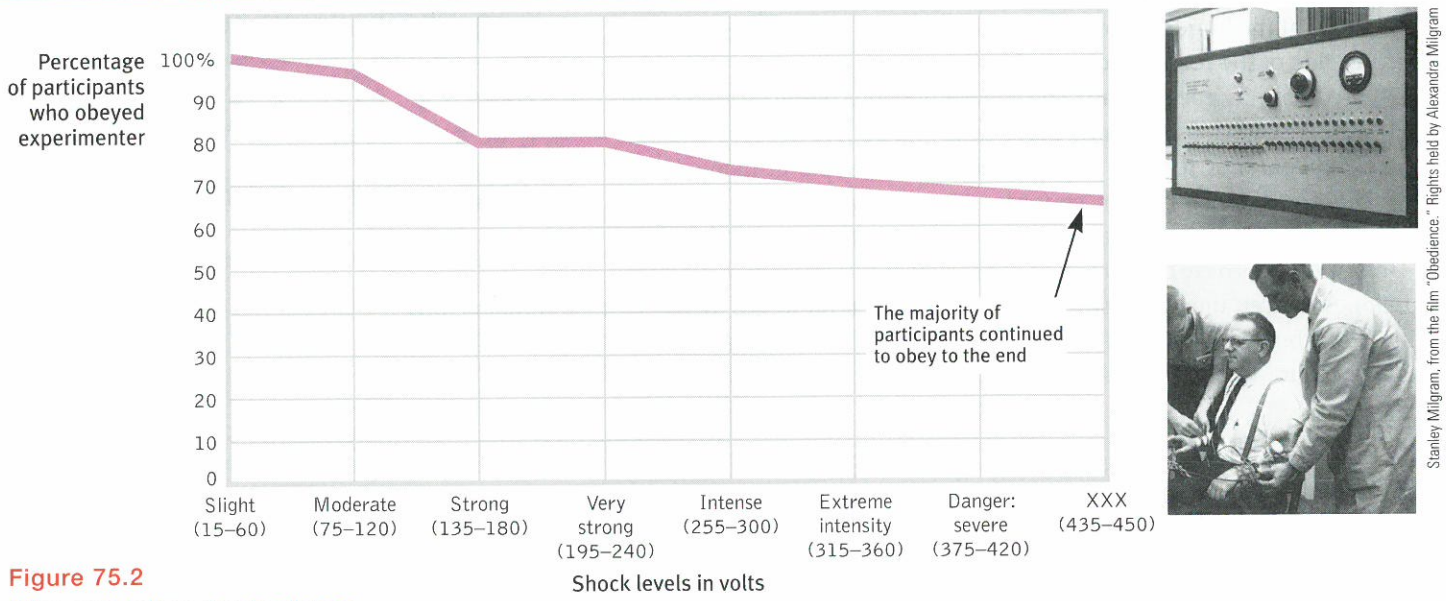


Figure 75.2

Milgram's follow-up obedience experiment In a repeat of the earlier experiment, 65 percent of the adult male "teachers" fully obeyed the experimenter's commands to continue. They did so despite the "learner's" earlier mention of a heart condition and despite hearing cries of protest after they administered what they thought were 150 volts and agonized protests after 330 volts. (Data from Milgram, 1974.)

Even when Milgram ran a new study, with 40 new teachers, and the learner complained of a "slight heart condition," the results were similar. A full 65 percent of the new teachers obeyed every one of the experimenter's commands, right up to 450 volts (**FIGURE 75.2**).

Cultures change over time. Are people today less likely to obey an order to hurt someone? To find out, Jerry Burger (2009) replicated Milgram's basic experiment. Seventy percent of the participants obeyed up to the 150-volt point, a slight reduction from Milgram's result. And in a French reality TV show replication, 80 percent of people, egged on by a cheering audience, obeyed and tortured a screaming victim (de Moraes, 2010).

Could Milgram's findings reflect some aspect of gender behavior found only in males? *No.* In 10 later studies, women obeyed at rates similar to men's (Blass, 1999).

Did the teachers figure out the hoax—that no real shock was being delivered and the learner was in fact a confederate who was pretending to feel pain? Did they realize the experiment was really testing their willingness to comply with commands to inflict punishment? *No.* The teachers typically displayed genuine distress: They perspired, trembled, laughed nervously, and bit their lips.

Milgram's use of deception and stress triggered a debate over his research ethics. In his own defense, Milgram pointed out that, after the participants learned of the deception and actual research purposes, virtually none regretted taking part (though perhaps by then the participants had reduced their dissonance). When 40 of the teachers who had agonized most were later interviewed by a psychiatrist, none appeared to be suffering emotional aftereffects. All in all, said Milgram, the experiments provoked less enduring stress than university students experience when facing and failing big exams (Blass, 1996).

In later experiments, Milgram discovered some things that do influence people's behavior. When he varied the situation, the percentage of participants who fully obeyed ranged from 0 to 93 percent. Obedience was highest when

- *the person giving the orders was close at hand and was perceived to be a legitimate authority figure.* (Such was the case in 2005 when Temple University's basketball coach sent a 250-pound bench player, Nehemiah Ingram, into a game with instructions to commit "hard fouls." Following orders, Ingram fouled out in four minutes after breaking an opposing player's right arm.)
- *the authority figure was supported by a prestigious institution.* (Compliance was somewhat lower when Milgram dissociated his experiments from Yale University.)

- *the victim was depersonalized or at a distance, even in another room.* (Similarly, many soldiers in combat either have not fired their rifles at an enemy they can see, or have not aimed them properly. Such refusals to kill were rare among soldiers who were operating long-distance artillery or aircraft weapons [Padgett, 1989].)
- *there were no role models for defiance.* (Teachers did not see any other participant disobey the experimenter.)

The power of disobedience. The American civil rights movement was ignited when one African American woman, Rosa Parks, was arrested after spontaneously refusing to relinquish her Montomery, Alabama, bus seat to a White man.

The power of legitimate, close-at-hand authorities was apparent among those who followed orders to carry out the Holocaust atrocities. Obedience alone does not explain the Holocaust. Anti-Semitic ideology produced eager killers as well (Mastroianni, 2002). But obedience was a factor. In the summer of 1942, nearly 500 middle-aged German reserve police officers were dispatched to German-occupied Jozefow, Poland. On July 13, the group's visibly upset commander informed his recruits, mostly family men, of their orders. They were to round up the village's Jews, who were said to be aiding the enemy. Able-bodied men would be sent to work camps, and all the rest would be shot on the spot.

The commander gave the recruits a chance to refuse to participate in the executions. Only about a dozen immediately refused. Within 17 hours, the remaining 485 officers killed 1500 helpless women, children, and elderly, shooting them in the back of the head as they lay face down. Hearing the victims' pleas, and seeing the gruesome results, some 20 percent of the officers did eventually dissent, managing either to miss their victims or to wander away and hide until the slaughter was over (Browning, 1992). In real life, as in Milgram's experiments, those who resisted did so early, and they were the minority.

Another story was being played out in the French village of Le Chambon. There, French Jews destined for deportation to Germany were sheltered by villagers who openly defied orders to cooperate with the "New Order." The villagers' Protestant ancestors had themselves been persecuted, and their pastors taught them to "resist whenever our adversaries will demand of us obedience contrary to the orders of the Gospel" (Rochat, 1993). Ordered by police to give a list of sheltered Jews, the head pastor modeled defiance: "I don't know of Jews, I only know of human beings." Without realizing how long and terrible the war would be, or how much punishment and poverty they would suffer, the resisters made an initial commitment to resist. Supported by their beliefs, their role models, their interactions with one another, and their own initial acts, they remained defiant to the war's end.

The "Birkenhead drill" To calm and give priority to passengers, soldiers obeyed orders to line up on deck as their ship sank.

Lest we presume that obedience is always evil and resistance is always good, consider the obedience of British soldiers who, in 1852, were traveling with civilians aboard the steamship *Birkenhead.* As they neared their South African port, the *Birkenhead* became impaled on a rock. To calm the passengers and permit an orderly exit of civilians via the three available lifeboats, soldiers who were not assisting the passengers or working the pumps lined up at parade rest. "Steady, men!" said their officer as the lifeboats pulled away. Heroically, no one frantically rushed to claim a lifeboat seat. As the boat sank, all were plunged into the sea, most to be drowned or devoured by sharks. For almost a century, noted James Michener (1978), "the Birkenhead drill remained the measure by which heroic behavior at sea was measured."

Lessons From the Obedience Studies

What do the Milgram experiments teach us about ourselves? How does flicking a shock switch relate to everyday social behavior? Recall from Module 6 that psychological experiments aim not to re-create the literal behaviors of everyday life but to capture and explore the underlying processes that shape those behaviors. Participants in the Milgram experiments confronted a dilemma we all face frequently: Do I adhere to my own standards, or do I respond to others?

In these experiments and their modern replications, participants were torn. Should they respond to the pleas of the victim or the orders of the experimenter? Their moral sense warned them not to harm another, yet it also prompted them to obey the experimenter and to be a good research participant. With kindness and obedience on a collision course, obedience usually won.

"I was only following orders." -Adolf Eichmann, Director of Nazi deportation of Jews to concentration camps

These experiments demonstrated that strong social influences can make people conform to falsehoods or capitulate to cruelty. Milgram saw this as the fundamental lesson of this work: "Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process" (1974, p. 6).

Focusing on the end point—450 volts, or someone's real-life reprehensible deceit or violence—we can hardly comprehend the inhumanity. But we ignore how they get there, in tiny increments. Milgram did not entrap his teachers by asking them first to zap learners with enough electricity to make their hair stand on end. Rather, he exploited the foot-in-the-door effect, beginning with a little tickle of electricity and escalating step by step. In the minds of those throwing the switches, the small action became justified, making the next act tolerable. In Jozefow and Le Chambon, as in Milgram's experiments, those who resisted usually did so early. After the first acts of compliance or resistance, attitudes began to follow and justify behavior.

So it happens when people succumb, gradually, to evil. In any society, great evils sometimes grow out of people's compliance with lesser evils. The Nazi leaders suspected that most German civil servants would resist shooting or gassing Jews directly, but they found them surprisingly willing to handle the paperwork of the Holocaust (Silver & Geller, 1978). Milgram found a similar reaction in his experiments. When he asked 40 men to administer the learning test while someone else did the shocking, 93 percent complied. Cruelty does not require devilish villains. All it takes is ordinary people corrupted by an evil situation. Ordinary students may follow orders to haze initiates into their group. Ordinary employees may follow orders to produce and market harmful products. Ordinary soldiers may follow orders to punish and then torture prisoners (Lankford, 2009).

"The normal reaction to an abnormal situation is abnormal behavior." -James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, 2007

Before You Move On

▶ ASK YOURSELF

How have you found yourself conforming, or perhaps "conforming to nonconformity"? In what ways have you seen others identifying themselves with those of the same culture or microculture?

▶ TEST YOURSELF

What types of situations have researchers found to be most likely to encourage obedience in participants?

Answers to the Test Yourself questions can be found in Appendix E at the end of the book.

Module 75 Review

75-1 What is automatic mimicry, and how do conformity experiments reveal the power of social influence?

- Automatic mimicry (the chameleon effect), our tendency to unconsciously imitate others' expressions, postures, and voice tones, is a form of *conformity.*
- Solomon Asch and others have found that we are most likely to adjust our behavior or thinking to coincide with a group standard when (a) we feel incompetent or insecure, (b) our group has at least three people, (c) everyone else agrees, (d) we admire the group's status and attractiveness, (e) we have not already committed to another response, (f) we know we are being observed, and (g) our culture encourages respect for social standards.
- We may conform to gain approval *(normative social influence)* or because we are willing to accept others' opinions as new information *(informational social influence).*

75-2 What did Milgram's obedience experiments teach us about the power of social influence?

- Stanley Milgram's experiments—in which people obeyed orders even when they thought they were harming another person—demonstrated that strong social influences can make ordinary people conform to falsehoods or give in to cruelty.
- Obedience was highest when (a) the person giving orders was nearby and was perceived as a legitimate authority figure; (b) the research was supported by a prestigious institution; (c) the victim was depersonalized or at a distance; and (d) there were no role models for defiance.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which of the following is an example of conformity?

a. Malik has had a series of dogs over the years. Each has learned to curl up at his feet when he was watching television.
b. Renee begins to buy the same brand of sweatshirt that most of the kids in her school are wearing.
c. Jonah makes sure to arrive home before his curfew because he knows he will be grounded if he doesn't.
d. Yuri makes sure to arrive home before her curfew because she does not want her parents to be disappointed in her.
e. Terry cranks it up a notch during volleyball practice because the team captain has been on her case for not showing enough effort.

2. Groundbreaking research on obedience was conducted by

a. Albert Bandura.
b. Solomon Asch.
c. Philip Zimbardo.
d. Stanley Milgram.
e. John Bargh.

3. Classic studies of obedience indicate that about _____ of the participants were willing to administer what they believed to be 450-volt shocks to other humans.

a. one-tenth
b. one-half
c. one-third
d. one-fourth
e. two-thirds

4. Obedience to authority when the authority figure is asking someone to shock another person is highest when

a. the person receiving orders has witnessed others defy the authority figure.
b. the person receiving orders wonders whether the person giving orders has legitimate authority.
c. the victim receiving the shocks is physically near the person receiving orders.
d. the authority figure is from a prestigious institution.
e. the person receiving the orders is female.

Practice FRQs

1. Define conformity and obedience. Then, provide an example of each.

Answer

1 point: Conformity is adjusting our behavior or thinking to coincide with a group standard.

1 point: Obedience is following the orders of an authority figure.

1 point: Any correct example of conformity. Answers will vary.

1 point: Any correct example of obedience. Answers will vary.

2. Stanley Milgram's research on obedience triggered a debate over ethics. Explain the concern and Milgram's defense.

(2 points)