CHAPTER 7

Social Influence

Think back to your first couple of weeks of college. You were in a new place and likely did not know where to go or what to do or who your new friends might be. How did you get by? How did you move from being an unsure person seeking direction to finding your way? Chances are you relied quite heavily on other people to help you navigate through this sea of novelty. You learned what the norms and expectations were; you used other people as a source of information (e.g., what are the fun clubs to go to); maybe you did activities, like rushing a fraternity or sorority, to fit in and make friends; you followed the commands of those in authority (e.g., teachers, dorm leaders).

A new situation like being at college brings to the fore psychological processes of social influence, the effects of other people on an individual’s beliefs, attitudes, values, or behavior. This will be the focus of this chapter and the next two chapters. We already noted many ways in which we humans are profoundly influenced by the individuals and culture around us. Our views of ourselves, our world, and other people are shaped initially by our parents and soon after by other relatives, peers, and the mass media. In a sense, the adult human is largely a product of social influences; however, we are never finished products, and we are subject to social influence not just over the course of childhood but throughout the life span.

In the next two chapters we will cover direct forms of social influence, first through persuasion, and then through the effects of social groups. In this chapter we begin our coverage of social influence with the following foundational topics:

- Basic and pervasive ways in which people learn specific behaviors and views of the world from others
- The formation of social norms and conformity, involving altering one’s attitudes or behavior to fit a majority view
- Minority influence, situations in which a single individual ends up influencing the majority instead
- Compliance techniques, which are strategies one uses to get others to do what one wants them to do
- Obedience, following explicit commands from an authority figure
- The appeal of charismatic leaders

Social influence The effects of other people on an individual’s beliefs, attitudes, values, or behavior.
Learning from Others

Like other animals, humans learn by experiencing associations between stimuli (classical conditioning), such as the bell and the food for Pavlov’s dogs (Pavlov, 1927). If every time we see Tim, we have a good time, our association of Tim with good feelings may lead us to develop a positive attitude toward Tim and seek out his company. We also learn to repeat behaviors that in the past have been followed by favorable outcomes and avoid behaviors that have had unfavorable outcomes (operant conditioning). If every time we tell a joke, our friends praise us, we will become more likely to tell additional jokes. In addition to these forms of learning, we humans also learn a great deal by getting information from others and from observing others and imitating their behaviors.

Social Learning Theory

An old expression captures the basic idea of social learning: “Monkey see, monkey do.” Plenty of animals besides monkeys learn this way. Birds learn songs from other birds. Untrained dogs learn faster if they are taught behaviors alongside dogs who are already trained (Adler & Adler, 1977). Even octopi are faster at learning how to open a jar to get food if they first had an opportunity to observe another octopus do it (Fiorito & Scotto, 1992). However, we humans are probably the species most reliant on social learning. The renowned teacher of psychology Henry Gleitman put it this way:

In the course of a lifetime, human beings learn a multitude of problem solutions that were discovered by those who came before them. They do not have to invent spoken language or the alphabet; they do not have to discover fire or the wheel or even how to eat baby food with a spoon. Other people show them. (Gleitman, 1981, p. 498)

From driving a car and hitting a tennis ball to eating sushi or doing the tango, we learn largely from watching others model those behaviors. In fact, we saw in chapter 4 that certain neurons, called mirror neurons, are activated both when one does an action oneself and when one simply observes another person perform that action (Uddin et al., 2007). As the neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni notes, “When you see me perform an action—such as picking up a baseball—you automatically simulate the action in your own brain” (Blakeslee, 2006). Albert Bandura (1965) developed social learning theory and an associated research program to better understand factors that affect how people are influenced by observing others.

In Bandura’s seminal studies (Bandura et al., 1961, 1963a, 1963b), mildly frustrated nursery school children (between ages three and six) watched a film of a young woman punch and kick a large inflated Bobo doll and hit it with a mallet. Children readily imitated this behavior (see FIGURE 7.1) when they were later given an opportunity to play with the Bobo doll; they punched and kicked the doll and hit it with the mallet in a manner eerily similar to the model’s behavior, right down to repeating the same aggressive remarks the model had made (e.g., “Pow, right in the nose, boom, boom.”). But observing and learning a behavior doesn’t necessarily mean we will imitate it. According to social learning theory, we can either be encouraged to engage or discouraged from engaging in both new and known behaviors, depending on whether the actions we observe lead to positive or negative consequences. Thus, children were more likely to imitate the Bobo doll—bashing model if the model was rewarded for the actions (e.g., supplied with a soda and candy) but were less likely to do so if the model...
was punished for the actions (e.g., a second adult spanked the aggressive model with a rolled-up magazine) (Bandura, 1965). Learning is also influenced by our sensitivity to social cues and motivations. For example, imitation was also more likely when the model seemed likable and similar to the children. Finally, social learning is more likely if the behavior observed is consistent with the motivational state of the observer. So frustrated kids are more likely to imitate a violent model. But rewarded models tend to be imitated regardless of the motivational state of the observer.

Does the tendency to imitate also occur in adults? The next time you find yourself at a restaurant, take a look at the people at other tables. How often do you see people mirroring each other’s posture—two people both leaning in on their elbows, or a group that all have their arms folded across their chests? Tanya Chartrand and John Bargh (1999) documented this chameleon effect—the tendency to mimic unconsciously the nonverbal mannerisms of someone with whom you are interacting.

In one study, the researchers paired each participant with a partner and had them take turns telling a story about a photograph. The participants did not know that these partners actually were confederates of the experimenters and had been trained ahead of time either to rub their faces or shake one of their feet at certain times during the interaction. The interactions were videotaped and later coded by judges, according to how often the participants rubbed their faces or shook a foot. As expected, when doing the task with a face-rubbing confederate, participants were more likely to rub their faces; when doing the task with a foot-shaking confederate, participants were more likely to shake a foot. None of the participants reported having any conscious awareness of the other person’s mannerisms or that they might have mimicked them.

This kind of mimicry isn’t limited to casual, nonverbal behaviors. People also automatically shift their attitudes toward what they think another person’s opinions might be, especially when they are motivated to get along with that person. To show this, one study (Sinclair et al., 2005) had White participants complete an implicit association test (the IAT, which we introduced in chapter 3) to measure their automatically activated attitudes toward African Americans in the presence of an experimenter who was wearing a T-shirt that either was blank or said “Eracism” (a play on words that suggests the eradication of racism). The researchers also had the experimenter act in either a friendly or rude way.

The researchers predicted that people would shift their attitudes toward the attitude of the experimenter, but only if they liked her. Compared with the blank T-shirt, the Eracism shirt communicated that the experimenter might have more positive attitudes toward minorities. So when the experimenter wore the latter shirt and was likable, participants indeed exhibited more positive implicit attitudes toward African Americans in their IAT responses. But participants did not shift their attitudes when they did not like the antiracism experimenter. Similarly, the chameleon effect occurs mainly when the other person is likable (Cheng & Chartrand, 2003; Lakin & Chartrand, 2003).

Figure 7.1
The Bobo Doll Studies
Albert Bandura’s classic Bobo doll studies illustrate how we learn our behaviors by watching others. Here we see that the adult’s (top panel) aggressive actions are subsequently modeled by both boys and girls. [Courtesy of Albert Bandura]

Chameleon effect The tendency to mimic unconsciously the nonverbal mannerisms of someone with whom you are interacting.

Like father like son? People often mirror the posture and mannerisms of those they are talking to. Sometimes mirroring conveys warmth and contentment, but other times it conveys shared animosity. [Holloway/The Image Bank/Getty Images]
The role of liking suggests that mimicry often happens because most social interactions involve a general goal of trying to get along. Our group-living ancestors were probably more successful at propagating their genes by being able to interact with each other smoothly and thereby coordinate behavior to achieve shared goals. Given our general sociability as a species, then, we shouldn’t be surprised that people have an unconscious tendency to mimic others’ mannerisms and attitudes.

**APPLICATION**

**Harmful Media-Inspired Social Learning**

Although the human aptitude for social learning is generally adaptive, there can be downsides. The sociologist David Phillips (1974, 1979) discovered that media portrayals of celebrity suicides are associated with subsequent increases in suicides and car accidents among the general public. Phillips also showed that the more media coverage suicides get in a particular region of the country, the more people tried the act themselves. Feature films also often inspire unfortunate examples of social learning. The award-winning 1978 film *The Deer Hunter* showed soldiers playing the game of Russian roulette (Cimino et al., 1978). In the following weeks, many instances of teenagers playing this dangerous game were reported. In 1993 another film, *The Program*, had a scene in which teenagers were shown lying down on the median between car lanes (Goldwyn et al., 1993). Within days of the film’s appearance in theaters, numerous teens tried this, sometimes with tragic consequences. We’ll examine other unsavory examples of social learning in our coverage of aggression in Chapter 12.

**Social Priming**

Observing others perform an action does much more than provide a model. Such exposure also communicates information about our social world. Thus, another basic way that people influence us is by priming ideas, norms, and values. For instance, watching someone engage in aggression makes aggressive concepts more accessible (Bushman, 1998). As we saw in chapter 3, when concepts are made salient or more accessible, they are more likely to influence our behavior. When other people remind us of the norm to be fair or to be charitable, for example, often we are more likely to act in accord with those norms. Consider a bunch of drivers at a busy intersection. While stopped at a traffic light, some were approached (or not) by a passerby who asked for directions to a well-known store (Guéguen et al., 2016). The light turned green, but the researchers, positioned ahead of the drivers at the intersection, pretended to stall their car. Those who had been primed with being helpful (i.e., by giving directions to the passerby) were less likely to honk their horn at the stalled driver than were those who had not been asked directions.

Robert Cialdini’s (2003) focus theory of normative conduct emphasizes the important role that salience plays in enhancing the influence of norms. This theory distinguishes between two types of norms. **Injunctive norms** are beliefs about what behaviors are generally approved of or disapproved of in one’s culture. **Descriptive norms** are beliefs about what most people typically do. Often the two norms align. For instance, people generally think motorists should stop at red lights and that most of them do. However, norms can also diverge. People also think others should not litter but believe that most people do. In studies directed toward decreasing littering and increasing energy conservation and
recycling, Cialdini and colleagues have found that reminding people of either type of norm regarding these behaviors, whether through exposure to another person’s behavior or to a posted sign, tends to increase adherence to the norms (Cialdini, 2003).

**APPLICATION**

**Using Norms to Preserve**

There is a tricky aspect to using norms to change behavior. Cialdini (2003) has noted that well-intentioned efforts to get people to do the right thing, such as public service announcements, sometimes make salient a descriptive norm that turns out to be counterproductive. For instance, in 2000, visitors to the fascinating Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona were greeted by a sign saying, “Your heritage is being vandalized every day by theft losses of petrified wood of 14 tons a year, mostly a small piece at a time.” Although this sign surely communicates the injunctive norm that it is wrong to take the wood, it also implies the descriptive norm that many people do take the wood. In such a case, the injunctive and descriptive norms being made salient are working at cross-purposes. Cialdini and colleagues (2006) ran a study in which they created and posted signs at two different spots in the park. One sign emphasized only the injunctive norm: “Please don’t remove the petrified wood from the park.” The other sign emphasized only the descriptive norm: “Many past visitors have removed the petrified wood from the park, changing the state of the Petrified Forest.” The researchers were able to measure theft by tracking the disappearance of subtly marked pieces of wood placed throughout the park. Compared with the park average of just under 3% of the (specially marked) wood being stolen, the injunctive sign led to only 1.67% of the wood being stolen, but the descriptive sign led to a disturbing theft rate of 7.92%. So when you’re trying to get people not to do bad things, be careful not to make salient the idea that many or most people do those bad things.

**Social Contagion**

The ideas of both mimicry and social priming may help explain a phenomenon that Gustave Le Bon (1897) labeled social contagion: that ideas, feelings, and behaviors seem to spread among people like wildfires. Le Bon noted that people in crowds come to behave almost as if they were of one mind. Since his time, studies have shown that everything from yawns, laughter, and applause to moods, goals, and depression seems to be contagious, spreading easily from person to person (e.g., Aarts et al., 2004; Hatfield et al., 1993; Provine, 2004). For instance, when participants were given the goal of remembering an emotionally neutral speech, they became happier if the voice was slightly happy and sadder if the voice was slightly sad (Neumann & Strack, 2000). Contagion also affects our anticipatory actions. When participants observed another person wrinkling his or her nose (but not yet scratching it), they were more likely to scratch their own noses (Genschow & Brass, 2015). Even obesity seems to be contagious. The medical researchers Christakis and Fowler (2007) analyzed data on body-mass index for more than 1,200 adults over a 32-year period. They found that if a particular person becomes obese, the chances that a friend of theirs subsequently also will become obese increases by 57%.
One particularly remarkable form of social contagion is called mass psychogenic illness (Colligan et al., 1982). This phenomenon occurs when an individual develops physical symptoms with no apparent physical cause, which then leads other people to feel convinced that they too have the same (psychologically generated) symptoms. Instances of this phenomenon seem to date back to at least the Middle Ages (Sirois, 1982). In one fairly well-documented case that occurred in 1998, a high school teacher in Tennessee reported a gasoline smell in her classroom and developed headaches, dizziness, and nausea. As word got out, others in the school soon began reporting similar symptoms. In fact, once the idea of the gas leak and its supposed effects began to spread, more than 170 students, teachers, and staff members searched internally and, thanks to confirmation bias, ultimately found such symptoms in themselves, and the entire school was evacuated. Careful investigation by the Tennessee Department of Health determined that there was no physical cause of the symptoms (Jones et al., 2000). Eventually, the authorities convinced everyone there was no gas leak, and the symptoms disappeared.

**The Social Construction of Reality**

We have seen that our great reliance on social learning and our susceptibility to concepts that are brought to mind make us very open to social influence. Considered from the cultural perspective, these two forms of social influence play a large role in how people are socialized as children into a cultural worldview (see chapter 2). The title of sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s 1967 book *The Social Construction of Reality* nicely captures the point. Many of our beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors are taught to us in the first years of our life, when we are virtually totally dependent on our parents for sustenance, security, and knowledge. As we mature, educational, religious, and social institutions further reinforce our own culture’s way of viewing the world. The version of the cultural worldview we have internalized over the course of childhood becomes a form of social influence that is both profound and largely taken for granted. The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge put it this way:

> The great Fundamental . . . doctrines . . . are . . . taught so early, under such circumstances, and in such close and vital association with whatever makes or marks reality for our infant minds, that the words ever after represent sensations, feelings, vital assurances, sense of reality—rather than thoughts, or any distinct conception. Associated, I had almost said identified, with the parental Voice, Look, Touch, with the living warmth and pressure of the Mother on whose lap the Child is first made to kneel, within whose palms its little hands are folded, and the motion of whose eyes its eyes follow and imitate—(yea, what the blue sky is to the Mother, the Mother’s upraised Eyes and Brow are to the Child, the Type and Symbol of an invisible Heaven!)—from within and without, these great First Truths, these good and gracious Tidings, these holy and humanizing Spells, in the preconformity to which our very humanity may be said to consist, are so infused, that it were but a tame and inadequate expression to say, we all take them for granted. (Coleridge & Fenby, 1825/1877, p. 207).

From this cultural worldview, we learn scripts for how to behave in different situations and different social roles.
Culturally Defined Social Situations

For an illustration of the influence of culturally defined situations, think of instances in which the norm is to be quiet. You may have come up with these: a library, a tennis match, or a funeral. But this same norm doesn’t apply at a playground, a hockey game, or a wedding reception. As a child, you had to learn which norms apply in which situations, but once you’ve internalized those rules, you don’t need to decide consciously to be quiet or loud. Instead, the context itself automatically activates the norm, which then guides your behavior.

To demonstrate this, Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2003) presented participants with a picture of a library or a train station and told them they would be going to that location later in the session. A third group was shown a library but had no expectation of going to a library. Participants then had to make judgments in a lexical decision task (a task in which participants have to decide whether a presented string of letters is a word or a nonword). Only the group that expected to be going to a library showed evidence of activating the concept of silence. Specifically, they were faster than either of the other groups to recognize silence-related words as being actual words. In a second study, participants who expected to go to a library also pronounced words more softly in what they thought was an unrelated communication task. For them, the anticipation of entering a library automatically activated a norm of being quiet that then affected their speaking volume even before they left the lab!

As you read this, what also might come to mind are the instances when people break social norms. Have you ever been studying at the library when someone walked in, talking loudly to a friend? From such casual observations, it is clear that some individuals are more likely to toe the line than others. Some seem to go out of their way to break every norm they can think of, whereas others seem to follow norms as if their very lives depended on it. Most of us fall somewhere in between. How do these tendencies end up affecting behavior? Does everyone activate the same norms, but the nonconformists merely ignore these cues? Or do they not activate the norms in the first place? Although it’s probably a little of both, some research suggests that nonconformists show less automatic activation of norms. Consider the library study we just described. Aarts and colleagues (2003) followed up on this study and showed that nonconformists (those who responded on a questionnaire that adhering to social norms was not that important to them and that they didn’t always try to do so) were less likely even to activate a concept of silence when expecting to visit a library. If people don’t have the goal of fitting in, situations might not have the same power to activate norms that influence their behavior.

Culturally Defined Social Roles

Along with learning social situations, at an early age we also learn social roles and generalized beliefs, or stereotypes, associated with those roles. We learn about being female and being male in our society, about doctors, lawyers, nurses, firefighters, basketball players, and so forth. This knowledge is transmitted by our parents, by experiences with people in these roles, and in large
part by books, television, movies, and the Internet. When we are subsequently placed in such a role, we tend to enact fairly elaborate schemas to fulfill the particular role.

This adherence to social roles was most vividly illustrated in one of the most famous of all social psychology experiments, the Stanford prison experiment. Philip Zimbardo and colleagues (Haney et al., 1973) used newspaper ads to recruit young men. The researchers created a mock prison in the basement of a building on the campus of Stanford University. They randomly assigned half the young men to be guards and the other half to be prisoners. Guards were given prison guard–style uniforms, whistles, and nightsticks. Prisoners were dressed in loose-fitting, inmate-style clothing. Zimbardo essentially served as prison warden and gave the “guards” some basic instructions and routines to follow in maintaining the incarceration of the “prisoners.” Within days, the guards were treating the prisoners poorly, inflicting punishments that bordered on sadistic. Meanwhile, the prisoners either became rebellious or fell into bouts of depression. The effects were so powerful that this famous experiment actually never was completed! Although it was planned to last two weeks, it had to be stopped after only six days for the sake of the participants’ well-being.

How do you think you would have reacted if placed in one of these two roles? Keep in mind that participants were randomly assigned to be guards or prisoners, meaning that we cannot conclude that the guards acted the way they did simply because they were inherently sadistic or the prisoners were inherently submissive. Rather, their behavior was due to their assigned roles. There is no way to determine how much of this impact was a result of the self-perception and self-justifying dissonance processes activated by fulfilling the basic requirements of these roles and how much was determined by enactment of cultural schemas for these roles. It was probably a combination of both types of processes. Regardless, the conclusion we can draw is that clearly the roles and associated trappings and routines profoundly altered the behavior of both the guards and the prisoners, attesting to the power of culturally defined roles to alter attitudes and behavior. Zimbardo (2007) and others have noted clear parallels between what he found in his experiment and phenomena such as the well-publicized abuses of detainees by American soldiers in the Iraqi detention center known as Abu Ghraib during the American occupation of Iraq.

This research, along with insights from anthropology and cross-cultural psychology, teaches us that many of our concepts of situations and roles, beliefs about right and wrong, and views of historical and current events are influenced by the cultural milieu in which we were raised and in which we live. But does this social influence truly extend to the basic ways we perceive the world? Starting way back in the 1930s, pioneering work on how conformity influences perception suggests that it does.
SECTION REVIEW  Learning from Others

Humans learn a great deal by observing and imitating others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Learning</th>
<th>Social Priming</th>
<th>Social Contagion</th>
<th>Social Construction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• We learn to do something new from watching others model the behavior.</td>
<td>• Reminders of norms and values can influence behavior.</td>
<td>• Ideas, feelings, and behaviors can spread among people like wildfire.</td>
<td>• Cultures prescribe particular norms for particular situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We unconsciously tend to mimic the nonverbal mannerisms of others.</td>
<td>• Injunctive norms and descriptive norms can have different influences on behavior.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• These norms influence our behavior as the situation activates associated schemas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We also shift our attitudes toward those of people we like.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Similarly, our cultures teach us the generalized beliefs that accompany particular roles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conformity

Conformity is a phenomenon in which a given individual alters her beliefs, attitudes, or behavior to bring them in accordance with the behavior of others. Muzafer Sherif (1936) sought to study the possibility that even basic perceptions of events can be affected by efforts to bring one’s own perceptions in line with those of others. To do so, he took advantage of a perceptual illusion first noted by astronomers. If a small, stationary point of light is shown in a pitch-black room, it appears to move. This false perception of movement is known as the autokinetic effect.

Sherif sought to determine whether other people could influence an individual’s perceptions of how much the point of light moves. First, he had people individually judge how much the point of light moved. He got various estimates (see FIGURE 7.2). Then he put two or three people together in a dark room and had them call out estimates of how much the light was moving. He made the quite remarkable finding that people started out with varying estimates, but after only a few trials they came to agree on a particular estimate of how much the light moved. He also showed that if he planted a confederate in the group who made a particularly large assessment of the distance moved, that person could move the group norm to a higher estimate. Furthermore, if the confederate was replaced by new, naive participants, the remaining group members would sustain the group norm and bring the new participants on board with them (Jacobs & Campbell, 1961). This “tradition” continued over five “generations” of participants.

Of course, it is reasonable to ask whether the participants’ agreed-on estimate of the light’s movement was just an effort to get along with others rather than a real shift in perception. Did people conform merely to agree with the group, a form of social influence called public compliance? Or did their own sense of what they were seeing actually change, a form of social influence referred to as private acceptance? Subsequent research has shown that it was the latter. One year after replicating the Sherif study, Rohrer and colleagues (1954) brought people back individually to judge the movement of the light. Those who had come to a group norm about the distance the light moved stuck to the same estimate they originally formed when part of the group: They really saw the

Learning Outcomes

• Differentiate between informational and normative influence.
• List the personality and situational factors that influence our willingness to conform.
• Identify how the brain responds when we fail to conform and, thus, stick out from the crowd.

Conformity The phenomenon whereby an individual alters his or her beliefs, attitudes, or behavior to bring them in accordance with those of a majority.

Public compliance Conforming only outwardly to fit in with a group without changing private beliefs.

Private acceptance Conforming by altering private beliefs as well as public behavior.
light moving the distance the group had decided it moved, a compelling example of the social construction of reality.

This body of research demonstrated conformity to a group norm on the basis of informational influence. The participants were not just trying to get along; they were trying to figure out how much the light was moving and used other people’s estimates as information. Similar findings have been shown for a wide variety of tactile, perceptual, numerical, and aesthetic judgments (Sherif & Sherif, 1969). Generally, informational influence leads to private acceptance—a genuine belief that the attitude expressed or the behavior engaged in is correct. People most often seek others as information sources when they aren’t sure what to think or how to behave. This was clearly the case for the ambiguous task that Sherif gave his subjects. Judging how much a point of light moves in a dark room can be tricky, especially when it’s actually not moving at all! But would people be so influenced by others if the task being judged was less ambiguous? What if they could rely on their own senses to make a judgment? This is what Solomon Asch wanted to find out.

Asch Conformity Studies

Imagine that you show up to a classroom to participate in a psychology experiment on visual judgment. With you are seven other students. As you settle around a table, an experimenter explains that he will display a series of pairs of two large, white cards. On one card in each pair are three vertical lines of varying lengths, labeled A, B, and C; the other card has a single vertical line (see Figure 7.3). Your task is to state out loud which line length best matches the single line. The first trial begins, and the experimenter starts with the first student to your left. The student says Line C. The next person also says Line C, and so forth, until it’s your turn to respond. You respond Line C and quickly settle in to what appears to be a super boring (and totally easy) experiment. After a few such trials, however, something unexpected occurs. On presentation of the lines like those displayed in Figure 7.3, the first student responds with Line A. You probably stifle a chuckle and think this person needs to have his eyes checked. But then the next person also says Line A. And so does the next and the person after that. All of the other seven students say Line A; you begin to think that maybe it is you who needs your eyes checked. What could be going on here? Now it is your turn. How do you think you would respond?

This is the situation students faced in one variant of Asch’s (1956) classic conformity studies. In contrast to Sherif, who presented people with an ambiguous situation, Asch was interested in how people would respond in situations where there was little ambiguity about what they perceived. Indeed, when judging these line lengths alone, participants made errors on fewer than 1% of the trials. Thus, Asch (1956) presented each participant with two opposing forces: on the one hand, the evidence of his senses, and on the other, the unanimous opinion of a group of his peers (who actually were confederates in the experiment and instructed to respond in a set manner). This situation enabled Asch to address several questions: What would people do when their physical senses

**Figure 7.2**

Sherif Conformity Studies on Norm Formation

The ambiguity of the estimation task reveals an informational influence on conformity and the formation of a group norm. When participants got into a group, their individual judgments converged to a common norm over the course of three days. [Data from Sherif (1936)]

**Informational influence** The process of using others as a source of information about the world.
Conformity indicated an answer that was in conflict with the views of the majority? Would people go with the answer they knew was correct? Or would they deny their own perceptions to agree with the group? Asch discovered that in situations such as the one just described, 75% conformed to the group opinion on at least one trial, and overall, participants conformed on 37% of the trials.

What the Asch Conformity Studies Teach Us About Why People Conform

Take a moment to think about what this study teaches us beyond what we learned from Sherif’s work. What did you come up with? If you started to think about why people conform, you’re in the right ballpark. Whereas Sherif’s studies show how our view of the world is shaped by information we get from other people, Asch’s studies point to a different—but very potent—pressure toward conformity. Because the stimulus being judged was not ambiguous, participants had sufficient perceptual information to make a confident judgment. It is unlikely in this study that people conformed to others because they were a source of information. Rather, Asch teaches us that people will also conform to the norms of the group even if it means discounting what they know to be true. This is referred to as normative influence and can be contrasted with the power of informational influence, which we saw demonstrated in Sherif’s studies (Crutchfield, 1955; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Normative influence occurs when we go along with the group because we want to be liked and accepted by that group or because we want to avoid rejection. Examples of normative influence abound, as when we see teenagers dyeing their hair, getting tattoos, or pining away for the hot brand of jeans or sneakers simply because that is what everyone else is doing. (Of course, this is not to say that some people don’t adorn themselves in these styles as expressions of their individuality.)

But the objecting reader might be thinking, “Wait a minute! How do you know that people in Asch’s study were not really convinced by the group? Maybe they did think the others were informing them about the actual lengths of the lines.” And indeed, in postexperimental interviews, Asch found that some participants did question their own perceptions and thought that the majority might be correct. Some questioned their viewing angle, others their eyesight. However, they were in the minority. The rest acknowledged that they made choices they didn’t believe were right simply to go along with the group. These participants reported feeling anxious, fearing the disapproval of others, and going along with the group to avoid sticking out. When we stick out, we run the risk of looking foolish, and many people are reluctant to face that possibility (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

To probe this issue further, Asch conducted a number of variants of this study. He found that when people did not have to give their responses in public but could instead write down their responses privately after hearing others’ judgments, they almost never went along with the group opinion. Thus, having to give a public response, and thus publicly going against the group, played a pivotal role in participants’ tendency to conform.

Did the Asch participants really have a reason to worry about publicly deviating from the group? Nonconformers do in fact risk social rejection and ostracism. A classic study by Stanley Schachter (1951) showed that when one
confederate planted in a group stubbornly disagrees with the unanimous opinion of the group, that person is taunted, verbally attacked, and rejected. As we discussed in chapter 6, people find social rejection and ostracism highly upsetting. So the negative reaction that nonconformers so frequently receive helps explain why people often submit to the norms of the group. Interestingly, Schachter also found that an initial nonconformer who subsequently steps in line is warmly received. After all, when someone who deviates from the rest of the group sees the light, it validates the group's norms.

Although most participants in Asch's studies publicly adjusted their responses to support the group perception at least once, it was not necessarily the case that all, or even most, were blindly punting away their own individualism to succumb submissively to the group opinion. Asch recognized this as well, noting that in postexperimental interviews, many subjects expressed considerable concern for the solidarity and well-being of the group. Thus, the participants' responses can also be interpreted as a result of valuing positive social relations (Hodges & Geyer, 2006). From this perspective, then, participants' conformity to the group norm despite their own perceptions can be seen as an adaptive means of productively and harmoniously coexisting with others. It is no surprise that people who come from more collectivistic cultures, which strongly value group cohesion, generally are more likely to conform than people who come from individualistic cultures, which strongly value unique self-expression (Bond & Smith, 1996).

What Personality and Situational Variables Influence Conformity?

Despite this more positive view of conformity, in many contexts, such as deciding whether a defendant is guilty or whether an aircraft design is safe, it would be rather alarming if individuals went along with the group despite what they know to be true from their physical perceptions. From Asch's studies, it's tempting to agree with Mark Twain, who noted, "We are discreet sheep; we wait to see how the drove is going, and then go with the drove." But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that 25% of participants never conformed to the group. These results also provide compelling evidence that some people do resist social pressure.

Unfortunately, not a great deal is known about the personality characteristics of those who tend to conform as opposed to those who do not. Early studies found some indications that people who have such traits as a high need to achieve (McClelland et al., 1953) and a propensity to be leaders (Crutchfield, 1955) are less likely to conform. People who have a greater awareness of self and high self-esteem (Santee & Maslach, 1982) are also less likely to conform because they are more confident in their own judgments and less in need of other people's approval. Indeed, self-esteem appears to be especially likely to help one resist conformity when those feelings of self-worth are based on who one thinks one really is, as opposed to self-esteem based on achievements that others may value (Arndt, Schimel, et al., 2002).

For years, psychologists also thought that women conformed more than men, but any such differences are actually quite small. It turns out that people will more readily conform on topics they don't know much about. Thus, whereas women are
more likely to conform on stereotypically masculine topics such as sports or cars, men are more likely to conform on stereotypically feminine topics such as fashion or family planning (Eagly & Carli, 1981).

In addition to self-awareness, self-esteem, and gender, aspects of a situation also can influence the likelihood of conformity. In further variants of his paradigm, Asch discovered a number of factors that influence the rate of conformity. For example, larger groups of unanimous opinions elicit more conformity, but only up to a point. Asch (1956) repeated his line-judgment conformity experiment but manipulated the number of confederates who announced the incorrect answer. Figure 7.4 shows the percentage of participants who conformed to the unanimous majority.

Participants were more likely to conform when three confederates gave unanimous wrong answers than when two confederates gave unanimous wrong answers. Interestingly, however, further increases in majority size above three did not lead to significantly more conformity. It appears, then, that at least in the Asch paradigm, a unanimous majority of three is maximally influential.

This effect of diminishing returns for group size also is apparent with more subtle instances of conformity. Imagine walking down the street and seeing someone looking up and maybe even pointing at the sky. It’s an almost reflexive response to follow that person’s gaze to see what might be so interesting. Stanley Milgram and colleagues (1969) carried out a classic study to capture this simple phenomenon. On Forty-Second Street in Manhattan, research confederates stopped and stared up at a sixth-floor window. The researchers varied the number of assistants, and a key finding was that the greater the number of confederates who looked up, the greater the percentage of passersby who stopped to look up as well. Forty-two percent looked up if only one confederate was gazing up at the building. This increased to about 80% with a group of five but rose to only about 85% when the number of confederates was 15. Thus, although larger numbers do increase pressure to follow the group, after a certain point, the effect of increasing numbers levels off. Perhaps this analogy will be helpful: Think of the sound of 10 people applauding. It’s a lot more rousing than the sound of 3 people applauding. Yet the difference between 43 people and 50 people applauding is far less noticeable.

More important than the number of others is their unanimity. Even one dissenting voice in a group of nine confederates appears to disrupt the pressure of the majority view and decreases conformity such that participants conform to the group on fewer than 5% of the trials in the line-judging paradigm (Asch, 1956). Interestingly, this other dissenting voice need not indicate the correct answer or appear to be especially competent or intelligent. As long as one other person breaks from the majority view, a participant feels more empowered to express his or her own view (Allen & Levine, 1969). Knowing that one is not a lone wolf seems to bring some comfort and encouragement.
Many organizations seem to understand this and deal harshly with the first person who steps out of line in order to prevent one dissenting voice from licensing others to buck the majority view.

The study by Milgram and colleagues (1969) of passersby looking up is also interesting because it highlights the often reflexive nature of conformity. Although the people unwittingly participating in the study might briefly have had the conscious thought, “I wonder what’s going on,” it’s also likely that they were already following the gaze of the others even as this thought was still forming in their heads. Some instances of conformity do not involve deliberative thought but rather are responsive to social cues that may influence us without our awareness (Epley & Gilovich, 1999). Such cues can also include particular mind-sets that prior activities have put us in. For example, if we’ve been acting in a way that encourages synchronicity with others—such as dancing at a country-Western bar—this might activate a mind-set of behaving like others and foster more conformity (Dong et al., 2015).

Another variable that contributes to conformity is the extent to which the individual identifies with the majority. Strongly identifying with a large group, known as a reference group, is likely to have a substantial influence on the individual’s attitudes and behavior (Turner, 1991). Reference groups are generally a source of both informational and normative influence. We trust them more than we trust other groups, and we want their approval more. Theodore Newcomb (1943) conducted a unique longitudinal study of conformity by tracking the political and economic attitudes of new students who enrolled in Bennington College, a private college for women, in the 1930s. The students came from wealthy, conservative backgrounds, but the staff and senior students at the college were quite liberal. He found that most of the students became increasingly liberal over their years at the college. Furthermore, a follow-up study in 1960 showed that the former students had retained the liberal attitudes they had acquired in college for 25 years or more (Newcomb et al., 1967).

An interesting finding was that a minority of the young women who did not become very socially involved on campus retained their conservative attitudes throughout college. Newcomb discerned that the difference was that the young women who became liberal used the campus community as a reference group, whereas the young women who remained conservative maintained their families and friends from home as their reference group.

**APPLICATION**

**Conformity in Juries**

One context in which conformity probably plays a large role is in criminal jury trials. In the United States, juries typically have 6 to 12 members and usually have to come to a unanimous verdict. If they don’t, the result is a hung jury, and the defendant is either released or retried. Because the goal is a unanimous verdict of either guilty or not guilty, there is likely a lot of pressure to go along with the majority verdict. Indeed, research supports the role of conformity caused by normative pressure in juror decisions. In a survey study of former jurors from 367 jury trials, Waters and Hans (2009) asked their participants what their verdict would have been if they had decided the verdict alone. For 38% of the juries, at least one person reported that he or she would have chosen a different verdict if he or she had decided alone! This percentage of juries in which at least one private dissenter conformed to the majority of jurors is...
Conformity

strikingly similar to the finding in the Asch study that participants conformed to the wrong answer on 37% of the line-judging trials. In addition, Waters and Hans (2009) found that hung juries were more likely when there were two or more private dissenters than when there was only one, consistent with the Asch finding that a fellow dissenter makes it much easier to hold one’s ground and not conform. This pattern of findings suggests that conforming to the majority due to normative pressure contributes to decisive verdicts that profoundly affect people’s lives.

Neural Processes Associated with Conformity

Research using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) of the brain provides some insight into the neural processes that may be associated with conformity. Recall that Sherif’s work suggests that a majority group opinion sometimes changes the way we actually perceive stimuli in our environment. Are these changes in perception reflected in how our brain processes perceptual stimuli? It appears so. Berns and colleagues (2005) scanned participants’ brains while they made judgments about the spatial orientation of three-dimensional geometric figures. Participants were given feedback about how other people who were purportedly in the session thought the figures were oriented. In another condition, participants were given the same type of feedback but were told it was computer generated. When participants conformed to the opinions of others, the areas of the brain implicated in spatial perception and mental rotation (the occipital-parietal areas) were more active. However, this effect did not occur when the feedback was said to be from the computer. Berns and colleagues argue that peer opinion—in contrast to other forms of information—exerts an especially potent influence on how we perceive objects in our world.

This research also informs how the brain responds when we go against the grain, fail to conform, and thus stick out. Brain scans of the nonconformists showed increased activation of the amygdala in the brain’s right hemisphere, an area commonly associated with fear. This fits with the negative feelings nonconformists report when they are socially rejected (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004) and the idea that people conform as a way to avoid such feelings.

The neuroscience perspective also teaches us that conformity may occur in part because people view going against the group as akin to making a mistake. In a study conducted in the Netherlands, Klucharev and colleagues (2009) had participants make judgments about how attractive they found pictures of people’s faces while their brains were being scanned. After each rating, participants were informed of the average European rating of each face. About a half hour after this, participants were unexpectedly asked to re-rate the attractiveness of the faces. When participants learned that their ratings diverged from those of the group, areas of the brain commonly associated with detecting errors in learning tasks (the rostral cingulate cortex and the nucleus accumbens) were more active. In perhaps the most interesting finding, the more active these areas were, the more participants later changed their ratings to conform more closely to those of the group. Thus, people may perceive disagreeing with the group as a mistake and may seek to conform to correct what their brain registers as an error. However, in this study, the task was a relatively ambiguous and complex judgment, so it’s still an open question whether going against a group judgment that is clearly wrong, as in the Asch paradigm, also would activate regions of the brain associated with error detection.
SECTION REVIEW  Conformity

People conform both to get along with others and because others are a source of information.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Sherif and Asch Conformity Studies</th>
<th>Personality and Situational Influences</th>
<th>Neural Processes</th>
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<td>fMRIs provide evidence that:</td>
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<td>• They want to be right (informational influence).</td>
<td>conform have:</td>
<td>• People are more sensitive to peer</td>
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<td>• They want to fit in (normative</td>
<td>• A high need for achievement</td>
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<td>influence).</td>
<td>• Leadership qualities</td>
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<td>• Confidence in their own judgment</td>
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Minority Influence

Social psychologists have long considered how the numerical majority could influence people. But in the mid- to late 1960s, amid the discontent and protests surrounding the Vietnam War, and with the civil rights movement escalating, open dissent became prevalent. Partly as a consequence, this period also saw the dawn of research into how the voice of one could influence the views of the many. Leading this charge was Serge Moscovici (Moscovici, 1980; Moscovici et al., 1969). He pioneered work on minority influence—the process by which dissenters (or numerical minorities) produce attitude change within a group, despite the extraordinary risk of social rejection and disturbance of the status quo. It’s vital to understand these processes, for without this knowledge we would have little understanding of how social change occurs.

Ralph Waldo Emerson famously wrote, “All history is a record of the power of minorities, and of minorities of one.” Indeed, single individuals and small movements in philosophy, science, the arts, religion, and politics often have profoundly altered the course of history: Plato, Confucius, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Sojourner Truth, Thomas Edison, Susan B. Anthony, Sigmund Freud, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Adolf Hitler, Rosa Parks, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez—the list could go on and on. Thus, the study of minority influence is a window into the agents of cultural and social changes through scientific or artistic achievements, political movements, horrific wars, advances in racial or gender equality, or other historical trends. Toward the end of this chapter, we’ll consider how individuals can influence others by holding a position of authority or rising to a leadership position. But for now, we’re going to focus on how individual dissenters can influence the majority even without the advantage of being in a position of authority.
How Minorities Exert Their Influence

In their initial study of minority influence, Moscovici and colleagues (1969) developed their own perceptual judgment paradigm but with some interesting twists. Instead of confronting participants with majority pressure, Moscovici presented them with a minority view and examined how that view influenced their perceptions. In what they were told was a study of color perception, groups of six participants were asked to view slides, all varying shades of blue, and name the color in each. In the control conditions, all participants indicated that they saw the slides were blue. As in the Asch studies, confederates were involved in the experimental conditions. In the inconsistent condition, each group had four actual participants and two confederates, who described two thirds of the slides as green and the other third as blue. In the consistent condition, the two confederates described all the slides as green. Did this minority view change what the participants reported? It did, but primarily when the minority was consistent. When the confederates were consistent in saying a slide was green, 32% of the participants indicated at least once that they too thought the slide was green, compared with only 8% in the inconsistent condition and less than 1% in the control condition.

That a minority can have an influence over the majority was a shocking finding in a field that had previously considered only how the majority could pressure the individual. Armed with these findings, Moscovici also studied how such historical figures as Galileo and Freud succeeded in thwarting the consensus of their times. Moscovici (1980) proposed his conversion theory to explain how and why being influenced by a minority differs from being influenced by the majority. According to Moscovici, because people generally want to fit in with the majority group, they often go along with the majority position without deeply considering the message the majority is delivering. They tend just to accept it. The minority position, however, is by definition more distinctive. Although Moscovici reasoned that people generally don’t want to identify with the minority, the distinctiveness of the minority’s position better captures their attention. As a result, they tend to consider it more thoroughly; this deeper consideration can lead to a genuine change in attitude. Can you think of an example where after initially reacting to a minority opinion negatively, you were eventually influenced by it?

You may have noticed that the dual processes specified by Moscovici’s conversion theory sound quite similar to the dual automatic and controlled processes we described in our presentation of social cognition (see chapter 3). If you did, you’re right. The majority often influences us in a relatively automatic fashion. Especially when we’re not invested in an issue, we tend to give the majority the benefit of the doubt and accept its position without thinking too deeply about it. But because we don’t give those in the minority the benefit of the doubt, minorities often exert their influence only by provoking carefully elaborated thought (e.g., Crano & Chen, 1998; De Dreu & De Vries, 1993; Maass & Clark, 1983).

Now think back to what you learned about the influence of attitudes on behavior. If being convinced by a minority involves more elaborate processing of
the message, it should lead to a stronger and more enduring attitude that will be a more potent guide to behavior. In contrast, if one is convinced by a majority and this involves more superficial processing, the resulting attitude should be weaker and have less influence on one’s behavior.

To test this idea, Martin and colleagues (2007) presented students with arguments, attributed to either a minority or a majority, recommending that students be required to pay membership fees to join the student union. The researchers also measured how relevant students felt this issue was to them personally, because earlier research had suggested that people process information more thoroughly when it is highly relevant (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Consistent with this prior finding, when personal relevance was high, all participants, regardless of minority or majority influence, processed the message thoroughly. Yet when the issue was low in personal relevance, participants persuaded by a minority to pay membership fees developed a stronger attitude than those who were persuaded by a majority. In fact, those who received the message from a minority source were actually more likely to sign a petition supporting membership fees than were those who received the message from a majority. Martin and colleagues explain that when the argument was attributed to the minority, it was processed more deeply; as a consequence, it led to stronger and more enduring attitudes that had a greater influence on behavior.

Part of the reason that minorities exert their influence by provoking more elaborate processing of their position is that people want to understand why the minority sees a given issue so differently from the majority. Adopting a minority decision is risky (Erb et al., 2015). Among other problems, the minority group or individual courts negative reactions from others (Nemeth, 1979), and those who adopt the minority position may in fact be aware that they are flirting with such disdain. This helps explain the minority slowness effect. When people are asked about their attitudes on various topics such as sports, politics, celebrities, and social issues, those who adopt the minority position take longer to express their opinions (Bassili, 2003).

The minority position presents a distinctive and interesting puzzle that people want to figure out. In so doing, people can derive considerable benefits. As people think extensively about the minority’s argument, they often think about different perspectives themselves, which allows for the consideration of novel and creative possibilities (Kenworthy et al., 2008; Nemeth, 1986). As one example, Mucchi-Faina and colleagues (1991) had students from Perugia, Italy, try to think of ways to enhance the international reputation of their city. The students were shown pictures of two historic landmarks in Perugia, the Palazzo dei Priori (FIGURE 7.5, TOP) and the Arco Etrusco (FIGURE 7.5, BOTTOM), and were told that marketing these sites to enhance the city’s reputation was advocated by either a majority or a minority of citizens surveyed. When students were presented with what they thought was the minority opinion on how to enhance the city’s
Minority Influence

They offered more creative and unique ideas about how to do so.

**APPLICATION**
How Minorities Can Be More Influential

Earlier we noted that in addition to conforming for normative reasons, people also conform because of informational influence. We tend to trust others as sources of information. Heading to hear a presidential candidate speaking on campus some years ago, but not knowing where to go, your current author and family followed droves of people making their way to a particular location: We assumed that these other people knew where to go and followed their lead. We used others as a source of information. Of course, we certainly would have been less likely to follow only a few people heading in a particular direction. This example illustrates the types of issues for which majorities can have greater influence: questions of fact. And indeed, research based on quiz shows that allow contestants to consult an audience suggests that when it comes to facts, majority opinions usually are accurate sources of information (Surowiecki, 2004). Consequently, minorities are not especially influential concerning issues for which there is an objective answer. Rather, minorities tend to have their greatest influence on matters of opinion. In one study, for example, minorities had less influence when Italian students were asked, “From which country does Italy import most of its raw oil?” than when the students were asked, “From which country should Italy import most of its raw oil?” (Maass, Volpato, et al., 1996).

Research also has identified a number of other qualities that enhance the likelihood that a minority can successfully sway the majority. These are important tips to keep in mind the next time you find yourself in a minority position and want to convince others:

- It is important for the minority to project self-confidence and be consistent in its advocacy (e.g., Moscovici et al., 1969; Wood et al., 1994). When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. endeavored to convince a nation of the need for racial equality, he did so with unwavering consistency, even though it meant that he was hated by many.

- Although consistency and self-confidence are important, they can backfire if the minority person or group is perceived as rigid and inflexible. In these cases, the attributions will shift, and the minority position will be dismissed. (“He’s just a quack with nothing important for me to consider.”) Rather, studies show that a flexible and open-minded behavioral style, indicating a willingness to compromise, is an effective complement to consistency in promoting persuasion by either a minority or a majority (Moscovici et al., 1985).

- Getting members of the majority to defect, or cross over, and adopt the minority view is one of the most potent ingredients of minority influence. In fact, in studies of jury decision making, a minority is more influential when it can achieve a defection from the majority than when it starts with someone already on its side (Nemeth & Wachtler, 1974). Part of the reason that this can lead to a snowball effect and influence the rest of the majority is that it undermines an “us versus them” mentality.

- Finally, as with all other forms of social influence, the more people identify with the person attempting to persuade them, the more likely they are to be persuaded. In other words, we are more likely to be convinced if the minority (or majority) is part of our ingroup because we are more likely to be influenced by those who are like us (Maass & Clark, 1984).
CHAPTER 7  Social Influence

SECTION REVIEW  Minority Influence

Despite disturbance of the status quo, minorities can produce attitude change and throughout history have been agents of cultural and social change.

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<tr>
<th>How Minorities Exert Influence</th>
<th>Factors That Increase Minority Influence</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The distinctiveness of the minority position captures attention and prompts deeper consideration. This can lead to lasting attitude change.</td>
<td>• Minority advocates being consistent and confident yet flexible</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Minorities are generally disliked, so those holding a minority position may take longer to express their opinions.</td>
<td>• A defection from the majority</td>
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<td>• The majority finds the minority position puzzling, which may lead to original thinking and diversified strategies in figuring out solutions.</td>
<td>• The minority advocate being seen as part of the ingroup</td>
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Learning Outcomes

• Describe methods people use to get others to do what they want them to do.
• Identify factors that increase our willingness to comply.

Compliance: The Art and Science of Getting What You Want

Conformity often involves implicit pressure. But there are many situations in which one person’s explicit goal is simply to change the other person’s behavior outright. Salespeople just want you to buy their product, parents want their kids to do the right things, and so forth. This brings us to compliance and obedience. In the case of obedience, you simply tell people what to do. It turns out this works quite well when you have authority over someone else, as you’ll see in our

SOCIAL PSYCH AT THE MOVIES

12 Angry Men

The classic 1957 film 12 Angry Men (Fonda et al., 1957), starring Henry Fonda and directed by Sidney Lumet, portrays in great detail one riveting example of minority influence while also illustrating other factors in social influence. The film opens with 12 jurors who have just heard the murder trial of a boy accused of killing his father. The jurors settle into the deliberation room, muttering that it appears to be an open-and-shut case. Soon after, an initial vote is taken by a show of hands. Ten hands rise in favor of a guilty verdict, quickly followed by another, tentative hand. Immediately, we see elements of both normative and perhaps informational social influence as the initially tentative juror looks to the others for what might be the correct verdict. When the foreman asks for votes of “not guilty,” only one hand is raised.

What follows is a compelling portrayal, filmed exclusively in the confines of this one room, of the process by which 1 man succeeds in changing the minds of 11 other jurors. Demonstrating how art can anticipate scientific insight, the film highlights a number of factors that subsequent research has shown increase the likelihood of minority influence. Fonda’s character takes some time to ponder his initial vote
next section. But without the power of authority over someone, what techniques can you use to gain compliance with requests?

The study of compliance has revealed a handy toolkit of methods to bring someone else’s behavior in line with a request. As you learn about these methods, notice how they are used all the time by advertisers, salespeople, and others who are in the business of influencing your consumer behavior. In fact, many of these methods were discovered when the social psychologist Bob Cialdini spent a few years undercover, going into car dealerships and taking other sales positions to find out which sales techniques are the most effective for getting people to pull out their credit cards (Cialdini, 2006). Of course, methods of compliance are also useful outside the marketplace for changing a range of behaviors, from getting your roommate to do the dishes to getting people to give generously to charities.

**Self-Perception and Commitment**

According to Bem’s self-perception theory (discussed in chapter 5), once we freely engage in a behavior, we often infer that we hold attitudes that are consistent with that behavior (Bem, 1967). This process explains the **foot-in-the-door effect**, whereby people are more likely to comply with a moderate request if they initially comply with a smaller request. If you agree to let a door-to-door salesperson into your home, you may infer you have some interest in hearing about his or her product. This makes you more likely to give that product a try.

Imagine that you are participating in the following study by Burger and Caldwell (2003). In one condition, you spend time completing several questionnaires. At the end of the study, you are asked if you would be willing to volunteer but thereafter consistently advocates an open-minded consideration of the evidence. The distinctiveness, flexibility, and firmness of his views ultimately provoke a deeper and more thorough reflection in some of the other jurors, which further inspires their own creative thoughts about the issues at hand. They start to see holes in the prosecution’s case that even Fonda’s character did not notice. This more thoughtful and systematic consideration leads some of the jurors to more sustained attitude change. In contrast, those jurors who were simply agreeing with the majority for superficial reasons show signs of more fleeting opinions, “bouncing back and forth like a Ping-Pong ball.”

Henry Fonda’s character also has brief personal conversations with some of the other jurors, which helps to break down the walls between them. He no longer seems like an outcast. And as research shows, the more people identify with a minority, the more influential that minority can be.

Three of the more noteworthy performances are by Lee J. Cobb, E. G. Marshall, and Joseph Sweeney. In Lee J. Cobb’s character, we see a powerful example of personal bias and stereotypes coloring the way a person processes the information to which he is exposed. The young defendant reminds him of his struggles with his own son, and he is unable to get beyond the bias and bitterness that seethe in him. In E. G. Marshall’s character, a cool, level-headed, and (almost) always composed stockbroker, we see the ultimate example of social influence through informational routes. He rationally sticks to his vote until finally, showing his first trickle of perspiration on this stifling, hot afternoon, he admits that the accumulation of information raises a reasonable doubt. With Joseph Sweeney, an astute and rather observant older gentleman, we see the power of an initial defection. After standing alone in his insistence on continuing to go over the details of the case, Henry Fonda’s character takes a gamble, asking for a vote and agreeing to abstain. If everybody else continues to vote guilty, he claims, he will go along with the verdict, adding, “But if one person votes not guilty, we stay here and talk this out.” His initial success in converting a lone defector (Joseph Sweeney’s character) is subsequently followed by the gradual conversion of the remaining jurors.

After the film was released, each of these tactics was subsequently examined and supported in empirical research on how and when minorities can influence numerical majorities.
a couple of hours the following weekend, helping to sort food donations for a local homeless shelter. If you are like most other participants, you probably would come up with some excuse for why you wouldn’t have the time. In this condition, only 32% of the participants volunteered. But now rerun the simulation with the following change: At the very beginning of the session, another participant asks if you might be willing to sign a petition to increase awareness about the plight of the homeless. This is an easy enough thing to agree to, and you add your name to the list. But having done so, you now feel like a champion of the underprivileged. What happens when you are next asked to spend your Saturday afternoon sifting through food donations? In the real experiment, 51% of the participants complied with the fairly substantial larger request if they had first complied with a smaller request (FIGURE 7.6). This significant increase in compliance resulted from simply carrying out an initial, smaller request.

The foot-in-the-door effect happens because when a person complies with a small request, she is likely to infer that she is the type of person who helps others or is interested in the particular cause. Because of this shift in self-perception, the person becomes more receptive to the related but larger second request. Indeed, once she has this new view of herself, refusing the second request would likely arouse dissonance.

This raises an interesting possibility: If a person initially complies with a small request for extrinsic reasons, such as a monetary reward, will she be less likely to infer that she is the helping type? Perhaps yes, if she attributes her compliance to the extrinsic factor. In this case, when she is later asked to comply with a larger request, she will feel less pressure to act in ways that are consistent with her self-image. Indeed, once she has this new view of herself, refusing the second request would likely arouse dissonance.

This raises an interesting possibility: If a person initially complies with a small request for extrinsic reasons, such as a monetary reward, will she be less likely to infer that she is the helping type? Perhaps yes, if she attributes her compliance to the extrinsic factor. In this case, when she is later asked to comply with a larger request, she will feel less pressure to act in ways that are consistent with her self-image. This point was also illustrated in Burger and Caldwell’s (2003) study (see Figure 7.6): When participants were offered a dollar to sign a petition, they were no more willing to comply with a second, larger request to volunteer at the homeless shelter, presumably because they inferred that they signed the petition for the dollar, not because of who they were or what they believed.

The role of self-perception processes is also illustrated in an additional condition in which, after signing the petition, participants were explicitly told by the requestor what caring and thoughtful people they are. Participants in this condition were much more likely to comply with the large request—65% of them did so—because the compliment reinforced their image of themselves as caring. This might be why we often seek to butter up a person before we ask him to do us a favor. By flattering the person for being generous or caring, for example, we validate a self-perception that he then may be more likely to uphold.

Our motivation to view ourselves as consistent also contributes to a social norm to honor our commitments. This norm for social commitment underlies the strong sense of trust that is one of the building blocks of cooperative relationships. Most of the time, behaving in line with such a norm will foster healthy social bonds. Those who renge on their agreements earn a reputation for being undependable, flaky, and untrustworthy. But the norm for social commitment can get you to do things you might not otherwise want to do.

For example, this norm can make you feel trapped in a decision and forced to accept a lowball offer. Lowballing can take different forms, but the general

**Figure 7.6**

The Effect of Self-Perception Processes on Compliance

Burger and Caldwell’s (2003) study shows how self-perception processes can increase compliance. When participants first agreed to a smaller request or were complimented on being thoughtful and caring, they were more likely to agree to a larger request to donate time.

[Data from Burger & Caldwell (2003)]

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**Norm for social commitment**

A belief whereby once we make a public agreement, we tend to stick to it even if circumstances change.

**Lowballing**

A phenomenon in which after agreeing to an offer, people find it hard to break that commitment even if they later learn of some extra cost to the deal.
principle is that after agreeing to an offer, people find it hard to break that commitment even if they later learn of some extra cost to the deal. Consider this technique in the context of trying to sell someone a new car. The strategy is to offer the customer what seems like a great deal and get him to commit to the idea of buying that particular new car. Then only after the customer has already mentally committed to buy the car is a certain “error in calculation” or “salesperson–manager miscommunication” revealed that raises the price. Although the customer might not have signed the deal for this new price if it had been the initial quote, he now finds it hard to say “no.”

Researchers have studied lowballing in a number of real-life contexts. In one such study (Cialdini et al., 1978), researchers called participants and recruited them to take part in a psychology experiment. When participants were immediately told that the study would be taking place at 7:00 in the morning, only 24% agreed to sign up. But the compliance rate more than doubled (56%) when people were first asked if they wanted to participate in a study and only after they said “yes” were informed that it took place at 7:00 in the morning. Even when given the chance to change their minds, none of them went back on their initial commitment. What’s more, 95% of those who agreed actually showed up for the study!

Lowballing is different from the foot-in-the-door request because it requires only an initial commitment that binds one to an agreement with another person, not the enactment of any behavior that changes one’s view of oneself. Because complying with an initial foot-in-the-door request leads to a change in self-view, people will comply with the second, larger request even if it comes from a different person (Freedman & Fraser, 1966). In contrast, the effect of agreeing to an initial lowball request is specific to that requestor; if someone else springs the added cost on us and asks if we will still follow through, we tend to walk away from the table (Burger & Petty, 1981). When the two strategies are compared, lowballing often gains greater compliance (Brownstein & Katzev, 1983; Cialdini et al., 1978).

**Reciprocity**

The age-old saying “You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” reflects another very basic norm of social interaction: reciprocity. Humans across cultures show a very strong norm to reciprocate acts. Reciprocity is seen in nonhuman animals as well—apes, monkeys, even bats! After a successful night of collecting blood, vampire bats will regurgitate some of that blood to share with other bats, but not just any other bats: Such sharing is more likely to happen with bats that have shared their own blood in the past (Wilkinson, 1990). You cough up some of your blood, and I’ll cough up some of mine.

Because the norm of reciprocity is strong, it is often used to induce compliance. If you have ever donated money to an organization after it provided you with a free gift (preprinted address labels, for example), then you have felt the pull of reciprocity. But why do we reciprocate? Is it a built-in instinct, instilled over the course of evolution? Perhaps when someone does us a favor we just like that person more, or we’re simply in a better mood, and these factors make us more likely to reciprocate.

A clever experiment by Regan (1971) provides some answers. Each participant worked on a task alongside a confederate who came across as either very likable or downright rude. In one condition, the confederate returned from a break halfway into the study and, as an unexpected favor, gave the participant a can of Coke. In a second condition, the participant also received a Coke, but this time from the experimenter. And in a third condition, the participant did not...
receive this unexpected gift. At the end of the session, the confederate asked the participant if he would be willing to help him out by purchasing lottery tickets for a fundraiser.

Regan figured that if people help others simply because they like them, then participants in this study would not help the rude confederate, even if he kindly delivered a Coke. Also, if receiving favors increases helping simply because it improves mood, then participants would be more willing to help the confederate if they had been given a free Coke, regardless of whether it came from the confederate or the experimenter. The results did not support either of these hypotheses. Instead, people bought about 75% more tickets when the confederate had given them a Coke compared with the other two conditions, regardless of whether the confederate was generally likable or rude. This suggests that liking or being in a good mood are not essential ingredients of reciprocity. That is, although both positive moods and liking tend to increase compliance, they were not especially influential in this context (Carlson et al., 1988; Isen et al., 1976). Rather, this experiment shows the power of following the norm of reciprocity.

Norms toward reciprocity can also play a role in negotiations. Conventional wisdom might tell you that when you approach your boss about requesting a raise, you might not want to start with a high initial request that could alienate your superior and stop the process before it starts. But such wisdom ignores the powerful role that reciprocity can play. Although your boss might deny your request for a hefty $10,000 raise, the guilt she might experience from turning down your request could lead her to compromise at a $5,000 raise, which might have been the amount you were hoping for all along. This is called the door-in-the-face effect; it’s the idea that people are more likely to comply with a moderate request after they have first been presented with and refused to agree to a much larger request.

Consider a classic study that Cialdini carried out with his research team (Cialdini et al., 1975). Members of his team approached students around campus and asked if they would be interested in volunteering their time on an upcoming Saturday, chaperoning a group of juvenile delinquents on a trip to the zoo. With no financial incentive and concerns about lacking the experience, 83% of those approached refused. But the experimenters first approached another group of students with the offer of spending two hours a week for two full years as counselors to delinquent kids. Not surprisingly, no one was willing to make this extreme commitment of time. However, when their refusal was followed by a smaller request to chaperone for one Saturday afternoon (the same request initially given to the other group of students), half of the students agreed to help.
out. In other words, the door-in-the-face strategy actually tripled the number of volunteers!

How is reciprocity involved here? When the person being approached with a request views the smaller compromise offer as a concession, that person can become motivated to reciprocate and do her part to maintain good faith in the exchange. This then can lead her to be more likely to accept the compromise offer. To put it simply, it is as if the person making the requests is doing you a favor by offering you the smaller request.

Social Proof

During college, one of your authors (Toni) spent a summer selling educational books door to door. The job entailed trying to meet and talk to every family in a neighborhood. Whenever a family placed an order for books, its name was added to a list of buyers. The list was shown to potential customers as a sort of proof that the product was good. In one community, your author was fortunate enough to have several high school teachers and parents in the local school district purchase the books so that their names adorned the buyer sheet. When she approached the house of the high school's principal, he took just one look at this list and instantly said, “Well then, I guess I have to buy them,” and pulled out his wallet without even taking a very close look at what it was he was buying!

This anecdote typifies the powerful effect that social proof has on our behavior. This technique capitalizes on our tendency to conform to what we believe others think and do. It is akin to making salient a descriptive norm but emphasizes the special value of information about what similar and respected others have done. As social comparison theory posits, we often look to similar others to provide us with information about what is good, valuable, and desirable. This makes our friends the most effective salespeople we know, and we commonly follow their recommendations for restaurants, movies, and clothing brands.

If consistency means choosing a behavior that conforms to your perception of yourself, and social proof means choosing a behavior that conforms to what others are doing, you can imagine that in some cases these two compliance strategies could pull a person in opposing directions. In fact, there can be cultural variation in which strategy is more effective. For example, in one study, students from a collectivist culture (Poland) chose to comply with a request based on information about how many of their peers had complied, whereas U.S. students, who are typically more individualistic, were more influenced by considering whether they had complied with similar requests in the past (Cialdini et al., 1999).

Scarcity

In the summer of 2008, record numbers of people lined up for hours, sometimes days, to buy the latest must-have gadget—the first Apple iPhone. Anticipation for the product, with its integrated camera and lightning-speed Internet connection, had been building for months. If Apple wanted to sell products, why hadn't the company’s market-research team more accurately estimated the demand for this new toy? The answer might lie in an interesting fact about human psychology: We want . . . no, need . . . no, absolutely must have things that are scarce. Perhaps because it was selected for back in prehistoric days of feast and famine, we seem to have an innate preference for anything that is in short supply. Consequently, things or even ideas that are scarce or rare are attended to more carefully (Brock & Brannon, 1992). Another explanation is that our craving for scarce things...
stems from the feeling that scarcity is an insult to our basic freedom of choice, and that makes us want rare objects even more (Brehm, 1966).

Each of these explanations has some support, and research has not definitively favored one over the other. Regardless of the precise reason for the valuing of what’s scarce, stores and manufacturers realize and exploit this little quirk of human nature. You probably have seen countless advertisements declaring that a good deal won’t last: Limited time offer! Sale ends Saturday! Limited quantity! In fact, sometimes these offers aren’t even genuine. Take the example of a Circuit City store that was going out of business and having a “liquidation sale” for a “limited time.” Instead of lowering the prices on products, the company charged with orchestrating the liquidation of the store’s inventory actually raised prices (Glass, 2009)! Many unsuspecting customers who hadn’t done their homework flocked to the store and bought up electronics for more than they might have paid online or from a different vendor.

**Mindlessness**

A final way that we can sometimes get people to comply with requests is to take advantage of the fact that we often go about our daily lives operating on autopilot. Situations bring to mind certain standard scripts of what to do and say. Once these scripts are set in motion, we sometimes fail to stop and think whether what we are actually doing seems reasonable. Imagine that you are standing in line at an automated teller machine when someone approaches and wants to cut in line. Presumably, you would be more likely to comply with this request if she gives a good reason, right? Maybe not.

Ellen Langer and her colleagues did a simple study in which a confederate asked if she could cut in line at a photocopy machine (Langer et al., 1978). When the confederate explained her request by saying that she was in a rush, 94% of people agreed to let her go ahead of them, compared with only 60% when the person gave no reason whatever and simply asked to use the copy machine. But the interesting condition was one where the confederate asked to use the copy machine “because I have to make some copies.” On the surface this sounds like a reason and probably activated a schematic impression that the requestor had a good reason, but it was really just a statement of what she planned to do. (Why else would someone use a copy machine?) Yet in a fairly mindless way, a full 93% capitulated to this request. In chapter 6, we introduced the idea that such mindlessness can stunt our creativity and lead us to behave and think in a rather rigid way. As we see here, it can also leave us vulnerable to complying with rather meaningless requests.

Of course, some situations evoke a knee-jerk reaction to say no. When a telemarketer calls during dinner, or a panhandler asks for change, our mindlessly scripted response might be to say no and go on about our business. So in these types of situations, compliance can be increased by breaking people free of their mindless response. For example, would you be more likely to give change to a panhandler who (a) asks for a quarter or (b) asks for 37 cents? Almost any economists would say that a rational person would answer (a) because $0.25 is less than $0.37. But Santos and colleagues (1994) found that when passersby were asked if they could spare any change, only 44% complied. When they were asked for a quarter, 66% complied. But in a surprise result, when they were asked for 37 cents, 75% of people dug in their pockets to fish out their coins.
Why did this last group comply? Because such a specific request breaks some people out of an automatic tendency to say no while also leading them to think there must be a good reason that the panhandler needs this exact amount. Related research further shows that the use of unusual phrasing for amounts of money (300 pennies as opposed to 3 dollars) breaks down people's resistance and opens them up to the suggestion that they've been offered a good deal (Davis & Knowles, 1999). The next time you are hoping to borrow money from your roommate, you might want to remember these little tricks!

**APPLICATION**

**Mind Recycling Toward Sustainability?**

Beginning in the 1990s there has been a growing effort to encourage recycling as a way to offset the enormous costs of processing trash and to protect our environment. From universities to clothing companies, groups create messages designed to promote recycling as an environmentally responsible behavior. Despite these efforts, though, compliance is low. Our foregoing discussion of mindlessness sheds some light on why and points to ways we can improve compliance.

Imagine you are deciding whether to throw a soda can in the trash or take the extra step to find a recycling bin for it. Would it make a difference whether the can was dented or crushed? It shouldn't. Cans that have lost their shape are just as recyclable as whole cans. But when Trudel and Argo (2013) created this situation, they found that people were more likely to recycle a can if it was whole than if it was crushed. They also found that a whole piece of paper was likely to be recycled, but if the same piece of paper was cut into small pieces, it was more likely to be dropped in the garbage.

Here we see mindlessness in action...or inaction. Mindlessness happens when we rely too much on familiar categories. In the case of recycling, we tend to categorize as “garbage” those things that are useless or worthless, whereas we think of “recyclables” as products that have some future use, like paper that can be written on. When we see a recyclable item that is damaged or misshapen, such as a crushed can, we automatically perceive it to be less useful and hence more typical of garbage. As a result, we are more likely to throw it in the trashcan as opposed to recycling it. But if the same product retains its form, we perceive it to be useful and hence more typical of a recyclable. The problem with these heuristics is that they are wrong, leading us to trash things that should be recycled. Does that mean that shifting people's perceptions of an item's usefulness can change their recycling behavior? Other results suggest it can. Participants asked to think of some uses for bits of paper were later more likely to recycle (as oppose to trash) ripped up paper (Trudel & Argo, 2013).

So one strategy for improving recycling compliance is to break people's mindless reliance on familiar categories. Another strategy is to accept that people can be mindless automatons and, from there, create recycling conditions and opportunities that demand less thought. For example, you’ve likely come across those gauntlets of multiple recycling bins for different categories of waste: paper, cardboard, glass, aluminum, paper towels, food waste, batteries, and so on. The design of such recycling opportunities is based on the assumption that the public pays close attention. But many people are likely to get overwhelmed, say “forget it,” and go with a default response of tossing their junk in the nearest dumpster.

Knowing about mindlessness, we can design environments that promote recycling by making it less cognitively taxing. Here’s one way: design recycling...
bins to have those specialized lids where the shape and size of the holes resemble the type of item they’re for, like a hole for cans or a slot for newspapers. The specialized lids are like cues for how to use the containers (such cues for action are called affordances; Gibson, 1979). In this way, they make it easier for people to recycle properly even when they are not paying much attention to what they are doing. Does this really work? Yes. Duffy and Verges (2009) arranged it so that 30 recycling containers placed throughout an academic building were topped with either specialized lids or had no lids on top. They found that the containers with specialize lids increased people’s rate of recycling by more than 30%. What’s more, there was a 95% decrease in the food scraps and other non-recyclable waste incorrectly deposited in the bins.

Summing up, concerns about a sustainable future have prompted efforts to increase compliance with recycling. A major challenge to changing people’s habitual approach to waste is mindlessness, because it makes people too quick to act on familiar categories that prevent them from recycling. To overcome this challenge, you can either break them out of mindlessness, such as by changing their perceptions of products’ usefulness, or you can capitalize on their mindlessness by making recycling conditions that ease demands on their thinking.

SECTION REVIEW Compliance: The Art and Science of Getting What You Want

The study of compliance has revealed a toolkit of methods to get people to do what you want them to do.

The Foot-in-the-Door Effect and Lowballing
- People are more likely to comply with a moderate request after complying with a smaller one.
- People find it hard to break a deal even if they learn later of an extra cost because of the norm to honor commitments.

Reciprocity and Social Proof
- People are likely to reciprocate favors and concessions from others.
- Reciprocity contributes to the door-in-the-face effect of agreeing to a moderate request after refusing a larger one.
- People often choose behaviors that conform with what respected others are doing.

Scarcity
- People value what is scarce.

Mindlessness
- People may comply out of mindlessness.
- When a mindless tendency to refuse is interrupted, people may comply more because they become open to suggestion.

Learning Outcomes
- Outline factors that decrease obedience to authority.
- Summarize explanations for why we obey.
- Explain when charismatic leaders are likely to attract followers.
- Describe how research on obedience and charismatic leaders helps us to understand events such as the Holocaust.

Obedience to Authority

The next set of classic studies concerns obedience—doing what someone else tells you to do. This research focuses on how obedience is sometimes behavior with much more serious consequences than being taken in by a slick roommate or an infomercial. Unlike with the pressure of conformity, which can often be rather subtle, the pressure to obey is very direct and explicit. And unlike compliance techniques, which involve requests, obedience involves commands. Yet like conformity and compliance, it is a very common form of social influence. It is so common because we live in societies that have a hierarchical structuring of power (Milgram, 1974). Some people, by the nature of their roles in the culture, are given the legitimate authority to tell other people what to do in particular contexts. In families, parents have authority over children; in the classroom, teachers have authority over students; in airplanes, pilots have authority over
Obedience to Authority

passengers; in the army, sergeants have authority over privates; and so forth. We even obey people who are not necessarily of higher social status, such as ushers in theaters. And generally in our society, such obedience is encouraged. It is deemed good when children obey their parents, students obey their teachers, employees obey their bosses, patients obey their doctors, and citizens obey the police. But in all too many historical instances, obeyeing authority has led people to do great harm to themselves or others. The most dramatic example was the Nazi Holocaust, the catastrophe that inspired the seminal research on obedience.

Like many other social scientists in the early 1960s, Stanley Milgram wondered about the obedience displayed by the German people during the Nazi era. How did the demented Nazi ideology and the brutality and genocide it spawned come to be embraced by an entire nation? It is not hard to imagine that Adolf Hitler was a disturbed, hateful, narcissistic man because of some combination of genetic predispositions, childhood upbringing, and stressful life experiences. We might conclude the same of members of his Nazi inner circle. But how could the majority of an entire large nation participate in such egregious atrocities? Could millions of people be that deranged or evil?

Milgram did not think that Germany was filled with evildoers, but he did think that perhaps the German people were particularly prone to obedience because they were raised in an unquestioning environment that encouraged obedience to authorities. He speculated that living in this authoritarian society might have led citizens down the tragic path of war, genocide, and national disgrace. To understand this mass obedience, Milgram developed a laboratory situation to test people’s willingness to harm another just because an authority figure told them to do so. Because of the astounding, surprising nature of the findings, these studies have become the best-known, most widely taught research produced by social psychology: the Milgram obedience studies. We refer to this research as a set of studies rather than a set of experiments because Milgram actually did not manipulate an independent variable or randomly assign participants to conditions. Rather he conducted a series of 18 demonstrations that revealed something very fundamental about human nature—something that, before this research was conducted, no one had fully realized.

In his first study, conducted at Yale University, Milgram (1963) recruited 40 ordinary men, ranging in age from 20 to 50, from the New Haven, Connecticut, area to participate in a study of learning. When each man arrived at the lab, he received $4.50 and was told it was for coming to the experiment and was his no matter what happened from that point on. He and another apparent participant were greeted by an experimenter who explained that the study concerned the effects of punishment on learning. However, the apparent participant was actually a confederate working with the experimenter. The participant and the confederate chose slips of paper, ostensibly to determine randomly who would be assigned to be the teacher and who would be assigned to be the learner. This drawing was actually rigged so the participant would always be the teacher.

The learner was then strapped into a chair, with an electrode attached to his wrist. The experimenter explained that the electrode was attached to a shock generator in the next room. The teacher’s task was to read pairs of words to the learner and then test whether the learner could remember which words were paired together by choosing the correct paired word from four possible words. The learner would choose his answer by pressing one of four switches in front of him; his responses would be indicated by a light in an answer box in the adjacent room (see FIGURE 7.7a). The participant was then escorted into that room, which housed the shock generator and the answer box. The generator had 30 switches, labeled from
15 to 450 volts from left to right, in 15-volt increments (see FIGURE 7.7b). The switches for voltage levels above 180 were labeled “Very Strong Shock”; those above 240 were labeled “Intense Shock”; those above 300 were labeled “Extreme Intensity Shock”; and those above 360 were labeled “Danger: Severe Shock.”

The participant was instructed to read the word pairs and then test the learner for each word pair. Whenever the learner made an error, the participant was to give a shock to the learner. With each error, he was to increase the shock by 15 volts. Thus, the participant would administer a 15-volt shock for the first error, a 30-volt shock for the second error, a 45-volt shock for the third error, and so forth. The participant was given a sample shock of 45 volts to convince him that the shock generator was real. What the participant didn’t know was that the shock generator was not connected to the electrode attached to the learner’s wrist. How long the participant would continue administering escalating levels of shock before refusing to continue was the indicator of level of obedience.

As the study proceeded, the learner used a predetermined set of three wrong answers to every correct one. In this initial study, the learner was silent when the shocks were administered, but if the participant continued to the point of delivering 300 volts, the learner pounded on the wall. In subsequent variations of the study, the learner grunted, complained, and screamed as the shocks escalated, but these reactions did not affect the level of obedience exhibited by the participants. After the 300-volt shock, the participant was confronted with silence as the learner no longer provided any answers. At this point, participants usually asked the experimenter for guidance. The experimenter told them to treat no responses after 10 seconds as a wrong answer and to continue with the appropriate level of shock. If the participant expressed unwillingness to continue, the experimenter used a set of four verbal prompts ranging from “Please continue” to “You have no other choice, you must continue.” But, of course, the point is that participants did have a choice: Should they obey these commands, given by respected researchers at Yale University? Or should they refuse and perhaps ruin the experiment but save the learner from additional pain?

How do you think you would respond if you were the teacher in this study? What about other people? What percentage of participants do you think would go along with administering what they believed to be even the most dangerous shocks? Take a moment to think about it.

Milgram asked Yale senior psychology majors, graduate students, faculty, and psychiatrists to predict whether they would continue obeying all the way to 450 volts (about four times the voltage of a standard electrical outlet). He also asked people from these same groups to predict the percentage of participants in the study who would. No one predicted that they would do so themselves, and each of these groups predicted that fewer than 2% of participants would obey fully by continuing to administer shocks until the maximum voltage was reached.

They were quite wrong in their predictions. In fact, 26 of the 40 participants, 65%, obeyed fully to the point of agreeing to deliver a dangerous 450-volt
shock to the learner. Furthermore, not a single participant refused to continue until the shock level reached 315 volts. The level of obedience went far beyond what anyone predicted. As Milgram noted, this was a particularly remarkable level of obedience to engage in morally reprehensible actions because, unlike in many real-life situations, the authority figure here (the experimenter) had no real power to enforce his commands, and no significant penalty would be incurred from disobedience.

In subsequent studies, Milgram used the same shock-the-learner paradigm with one or more aspects changed each time. (See Figure 7.8 for rates of obedience of some of Milgram’s different variations.) From this series of follow-up studies, Milgram learned about variables that contributed to the high level of obedience found in the original study. The most important variable was the extent to which the person giving commands was perceived to be a legitimate authority figure. For example, if the study was run in an unimpressive-looking building in downtown New Haven rather than at the prestigious Yale University, full obedience was reduced to 47.5%. If the person directing the real participant to deliver the shocks seemed to be another participant in the study instead of the experimenter (who left, supposedly to take a telephone call), full obedience dropped to 20%.

These findings help explain why so many Germans contributed to the heinous actions during the Nazi era once Hitler became a legitimate authority figure in 1933. However, Milgram (1974) emphasized two points to make it clear that this proclivity to obey authority is a potential danger in any culture and in any era. First, he pointed out that horrific acts are not limited to dictatorships and fascist states. Once in power, duly elected officials in democracies are legitimate authorities who often demand actions that conflict with conscience. Second, he noted that the Nazi era was far from the first or the last time that obedience has led people to engage in egregious, destructive actions:

> [T]he destruction of the American Indian population, the internment of Japanese Americans, the use of napalm against civilians in Vietnam, all are harsh policies that originated in the authority of a democratic nation, and were responded to with the expected obedience. . . . [W]hen lecturing . . . I faced young men who were aghast at the behavior of experimental subjects and proclaimed they would never behave in such a way, but who, in a matter of months were brought into the military and performed without compunction actions that made shocking the victim seem pallid. In this respect, they are no better and no worse than human beings of any other era who lend themselves to the purposes of authority and become instruments in its destructive processes. (1974, pp. 179–180)

**Other Variables That Play a Role in Obedience**

Milgram also examined the role of the physical closeness of the authority figure. If the experimenter phoned in the instructions from a distant location, full obedience was reduced to 22.5%. So the more physically distant the authority figure, the lower the percentage of obedience. This suggests that a salient authority
In addition, Milgram explored the closeness of the victim. Recall that in the original study, the victim was in a different room and could be heard but not seen. In a variation in which the victim was in the same room, full obedience dropped to 40%. And in another version of the study where participants had to physically place the learner’s hand on a shock plate, obedience dropped to 30%. This is a substantial decrease in obedience, but it is also quite remarkable and disturbing that 3 in 10 participants would obey the repeated commands even when doing so meant physically compelling the shock. The plausibility of this particular variation could be called into question, however, because the confederate had to act out receiving the shocks, crying out, screaming, and so forth. Milgram (1974) did not provide enough details for us to assess this potential problem fully.

These and other variation studies indicate that the more psychologically remote the victim, the greater the obedience to doing the victim harm. It is interesting that in modern warfare, most of the killing is done very remotely. In aerial bombing, the soldiers launching the bombs neither see nor hear their victims. The highest civilian casualties in war have come from this form of violence, whose victims are physically and psychologically remote.

Milgram also wondered what would happen to the level of obedience if the real participant saw two other supposed participants defy the experimenter. As Asch found with conformity, this seemed to reduce greatly the impact of social influence because the full obedience level dropped to 10%. Those who disobey make it easier for others to disobey, something the Nazis seemed to understand.

Thus, psychological distance from the authority, psychological closeness to the victim, and witnessing defiance all reduced obedience. But one important variation led to even more obedience than the original study. In this version, the real participant didn’t physically flip the switch on the shock generator. Rather, the real participant delivered the memory test, while another supposed participant dutifully delivered shocks up to 450 volts. In this version, 92.5% of the participants obeyed fully. This is an especially chilling finding. Very few Germans actually pushed Jews and other “undesirables” into the gas chambers or shot them, but many, many people participated in indirect ways, conducting the trains, spreading hatred of Jews and other groups, arresting them, processing paperwork, building the camps, designing mobile gas chambers at the Volkswagen automobile plants, and so on.

We can see from the Milgram research that at least a minority of people will eventually disobey when they feel that their own actions are physically causing harm. But when people contribute to but are not physically causing the harm, virtually all resistance to participating in atrocities sanctioned by authorities seems to vanish. Consistent with this reluctance to be directly responsible for causing sanctioned harm, it is common practice during executions for more than one individual to pull the lever, inject the serum, flip the switch, or take aim and fire. Thus no single individual knows for sure if he or she was actually physically responsible for executing the person condemned to death. The willingness to obey when one is not certain that one is physically causing the actual harm seems virtually limitless.

The lesson here is reminiscent of the oft-quoted adage (attributed to the statesman Edmund Burke), “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

In addition, if the harm is not severe physical pain and won’t occur until after the participant leaves the situation, resistance to obedience again is virtually absent. In a series of studies in the Netherlands, when participants were
commanded to give negative evaluations of a job applicant’s test performance that would result in the applicant’s not being hired at a later date, more than 90% of the participants obeyed these instructions (Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1995).

**Anticipating Your Questions**

No doubt you have found this set of studies both fascinating and disturbing. But the studies also may have raised some questions. Let’s begin with some simple ones.

*Males were used exclusively in the initial set of studies, and they are more likely to engage in extreme acts of violence. Would females show a similar level of obedience?* The answer is yes. Milgram’s eighth study used only females and found a similar rate of obedience.

*What would levels of obedience be in other countries?* Although the rate of obedience was actually a bit higher in Germany (85%; Mantell, 1971), levels of obedience similar to those in the United States were observed in a variety of other countries, ranging from relatively individualistic to relatively collectivistic ones (Blass, 2000; Milgram, 1974; Shanab & Yahya, 1978). This suggests that the explanation for obedience does not lie primarily in the specific features of a culture but in something about being human.

*What is known about who fully obeys and who doesn’t?* Not much. Researchers have examined a variety of potential personality and demographic differences between the obedient and defiant participants, and most have not distinguished the two groups (Blass, 2000). But some studies have provided relevant insights regarding factors that play a small role. Burger (2009) found that people who are high in empathy for others tended to need a prod sooner than less empathetic people, but they were ultimately just as likely to be fully obedient. There is also some evidence that the defiant participants are lower in authoritarianism. *Authoritarianism* is a broad personality trait that is characterized by a “submissive, uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the ingroup” (Adorno et al., 1950, p. 228). So a submissive attitude toward authority is associated with greater obedience. Milgram (1974) also reported that more educated people and those higher in moral development were less likely to obey fully.

*What about now?* The original studies were done during the early 1960s, a time when people perhaps had more faith in science and authority and before the civil unrest that characterized the later part of the decade had arisen. Would obedience levels be lower now? Well, it turns out that it’s hard to answer this question definitively because institutional review boards now generally do not allow people to use the Milgram paradigm. When Milgram published his initial research, there was quite an uproar over the ethicality of commanding study participants to engage in behaviors that they believed would seriously harm another person (e.g., Baumrind, 1964). Some critics focused on the stress that was imposed on participants; during the task, many displayed signs of stress, such as twitches and nervous laughter. Other critics contended that the most egregious ethical problem was that the study led most participants to discover something about themselves that could harm their self-image: that they were capable of seriously harming another human being simply because they were told to do so.

Milgram responded to these concerns first by noting his elaborate and thorough debriefing procedures. He described how, at the conclusion of each session, participants met the learner, saw that he was unharmed, and were fully informed of the study’s purpose in examining the powerful effects of the situation on behavior. Milgram also conducted a follow-up study which showed that more than 83%
of participants were glad that they had been in the experiment and fewer than 1% of participants were sorry they had been in it. He also had participants examined by an experienced psychiatrist one year later and found no signs that any of the participants had been harmed by the experience. Milgram and others suggested that the ethical uproar might have been a reaction to the unpleasant implications of the findings rather than to the ethicality of the procedures, and some research supports this claim (Schlenker & Forsyth, 1977). Debate regarding this matter continues. In fact, recent archival analysis of Milgram’s private notes and other sources of information indicated that Milgram may not have debriefed participants as consistently as he portrayed and that some participants claimed to have sustained serious harm from their involvement (Brannigan et al., 2015). For example, one participant attributed losing his job to an emotional outburst when discussing his participation in the study, and another reported having a heart attack when recalling his participation (Perry, 2013). The validity of these claims is unclear, but if they are valid, then surely the ethicality of the original experiments would be in question. What position would you take on the ethicality of his research?

Nonetheless, even before these archival analyses, the American Psychological Association (APA) judged that the potential harm of this threatening knowledge about the self could not be undone sufficiently, even by the best of debriefings. Thus, the full study cannot be replicated in the United States or other countries that adhere to the APA’s judgment. However, Milgram’s procedures were replicated in the Netherlands in the early 1990s and showed similarly high levels of obedience (Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1995). Moreover, in 2006, Jerry Burger (2009) obtained permission to replicate Milgram’s Study 2, which originally yielded 62.5% full obedience, as long as he had the experimenter stop the study before the participant could flip the switch for 165 volts. In this way, even if the actions of the participants had resulted in actual shocks being delivered, they would not have harmed the learners greatly. Burger also carefully screened potential participants to ensure that they were not especially vulnerable to psychological harm and had a trained psychologist on site to provide counseling if needed.

In Burger’s voice-feedback variation, the learner began grunting in response to the 75-volt shock; after ostensibly receiving the 150-volt shock, the learner protested that he wanted to quit, was in pain, and was worried about his heart. Burger found that the percentage of participants willing to proceed past the 150-volt level was no different from what it had been over 40 years earlier. And Milgram found that 79% of those who continued past the 150-volt point were fully obedient through 450 volts. In addition, recently the findings of Milgram’s Study 5, a variant where the “learner” does not have a heart problem, were replicated in Poland (Doliński et al., 2017). Other replications have also been conducted, with some interesting twists made possible by technological advances. In one study in France, instead of having a live confederate act as the learner, Dambrun and Vatiné (2010) used an immersive video environment to simulate the learner via video streaming. This study found not only similar rates of obedience but also that the closeness of the victim similarly influenced rates of obedience. So as best we can surmise, the susceptibility to obedience to legitimate authority has not changed.

Why is this willingness to obey a part of human nature? That’s a bigger question, and we’ll address it in the next section.
Why Do We Obey?

Milgram offered some potential answers to the question of why we obey, each of which may have some validity. First, he proposed that from an evolutionary perspective, groups with a single leader and people willing to do what they are told may have operated more effectively as small groups in obtaining food and other resources and defending the group from threats. Thus, a capacity to obey may be part of our heritage as group-living animals. In situations in which individuals feel that they are in the presence of a legitimate higher authority, they acquire a state of mind in which they view themselves as agents executing the wishes of that authority figure, thereby abdicating personal responsibility for their actions.

Some research supports this agentic account. In a situation resembling Milgram’s, participants in Belgium were either ordered by an experimenter to administer electric shocks to another participant or were given the choice to administer shocks (Caspar et al., 2016). What is surprising about these studies is that participants actually inflicted harm on each other; thus, there can be no doubting the participants believed the shocks were real. The researchers measured electrical activity in the brain often associated with feeling responsible. When participants obeyed commands to inflict harm, they showed neurological signs of a lower sense of personal agency, as if the cause for their action came from outside themselves.

However, Milgram (1974) himself reported that his participants often exhibited signs of stress and internal conflict, including nervous laughter. These indicators suggest that participants struggled with what was the right thing to do rather than simply becoming agents of the authority figure and entirely abdicating responsibility for their actions. And, of course, a substantial minority of participants eventually refused to go on even after being forcefully prodded to continue (Reicher et al., 2014).

Another explanation begins by noting that a considerable portion of the socialization process involves teaching children to obey first their parents and then teachers, other adults, doctors, police, and a host of other legitimate authority figures within the culture. So we all have been taught to obey legitimate authority figures. And by and large we are rewarded when we do obey and are punished, often severely, when we don’t. Obedience is the norm in all cultures and becomes a remarkable and negative phenomenon only when authority figures tell us to do things that end up causing great harm.

Besides the innate predispositions and learning experiences we humans share, Milgram also pointed to some specific factors in the paradigm he created that may have contributed to the levels of obedience. One is the gradual increase in the severity of the actions in which the participants were commanded to engage. Fifteen volts is barely a noticeable tickle, a 30-volt shock is very tolerable, and so on. Thus, one aspect of the process was its gradual nature. Once the participant delivered 30 volts, why not proceed to 45? Once 45, why not 60? And if one has delivered 330 volts, why resist moving on to 345?

Can you think of any theories that could explain how actions once taken can increase commitment to further actions along similar lines? Recall self-perception theory, which suggests that we infer our attitudes from our own actions, and cognitive dissonance theory, which proposes that people often shift their attitudes to justify their prior actions. Either or both of these theories could help explain why someone who has delivered 315 volt shocks likely would be okay with delivering 330 volts. Such processes are even more likely to be involved in harmful real-life examples of obedience. Imagine being a non-Jewish German during the early 1930s. Perhaps a friend coaxes you into going to a Hitler rally. Once you are there, others greet you with “Heil Hitler.” You find yourself following suit.
Sometime later, the Nazi propaganda machine exhorts you to boycott Jewish shops. If you support that, why not support the deportation of Jews to concentration camps, where they will have to work for the Third Reich? The point is that historically significant atrocities often start with small acts that escalate to more severe ones over time.

Another aspect of this paradigm that Milgram noted was that, in the studies with the highest levels of obedience, the participants had to tell the authority figure to his face that they refused to continue. Milgram posited that it is very difficult to defy a legitimate authority figure in this manner. Why? Milgram based his explanation on Erving Goffman’s analysis of self-presentation (1959). Defying legitimate authorities challenges the definition of the situation and disrupts the working consensus by which we all live. The participants had agreed to take part in the study, and they may have viewed their agreement as a contract they needed to honor. Another, broader way to view the difficulty of defying authority is that legitimate authority figures are valued representatives of the prevailing cultural worldview (Solomon et al., 1991). In fact, the legitimacy of their authoritative position is given to them by the culture. In this vein, Haslam and colleagues (Haslam et al., 2015; Haslam et al., 2016) argue that participants both identify strongly with the experimenter and the goals of the study and lack such identification with the learner. They suggest that this takes participants from a position of blind obedience to engaged followership.

So to defy a scientist running a study, a doctor in an examining room, a police officer who has pulled you over, or a teacher in a classroom is to go against the very worldview and social identifications on which you predicate your meaningful view of the world and your own self-worth. So for this reason as well, we obey.

Nursing is one context in which socialization to obedience can occur. In fact, one study found that 21 of 22 nurses who received a phone call from a supposed doctor they did not know would have, without hesitation, administered an excessive level of medication (Hofling et al., 1966). Once obedience becomes routine, it can occur virtually automatically.

Death in the Voting Booth

Although research has shown that people’s awareness of death can influence decisions in hypothetical elections, would reminders of death affect voting in a real political context? Landau and colleagues (Landau, Solomon, et al., 2004) proposed that the dramatic spike in support for President George W. Bush and his policies following the deadly terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, suggested that it would. On September 10, 2001, polls showed that President George W. Bush’s approval rating was at a dismal 49% (Pyszczynski et al., 2003). On September 13, his approval rating soared to 94%. Why did the events of 9/11 have such a powerful effect on support for Bush? Landau and colleagues (2004) proposed that the dramatic spike in support for President George W. Bush and his policies following the deadly terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, could be traced in part to the massive reminder of mortality the attacks caused and people’s corresponding need for a charismatic leader.

Bush fit the characteristics of a charismatic leader in that he exuded calm self-confidence and espoused the greatness of America and the importance of vanquishing “evildoers.” Landau and colleagues posited that the attacks heightened Americans’ awareness of death on a mass scale and that people sought to avoid death-related fears by supporting Bush’s message of triumphing over evil and ensuring America’s legacy. To assess the role of mortality threat in support for Bush, Landau and colleagues examined whether reminders of death or reminders of the 9/11 attacks would increase Americans’ support for President Bush and his political policies prior to the 2004 presidential election. This was exactly what they found. Moreover, these effects of mortality salience and 9/11 reminders were found among both liberal and conservative Americans, indicating that Bush’s charismatic leadership quelled death concerns for Americans, regardless of their political orientation.

In a follow-up study, Landau and colleagues posited that making mortality salient to Americans would not afford the
The Role of Charisma in the Rise to Power

So now we know that people are likely to obey far beyond what our intuitions would lead us to believe. And we know some reasons people obey. Understanding that humans have a proclivity to obey is one aspect of explaining the historical phenomenon of Nazi Germany. But another major aspect is understanding whom we obey. Obviously we obey people in various authoritative roles whom the culture tells us to obey. One important set of such individuals is the people we view as leaders. But the remaining question regarding the Nazi phenomenon is, How in the world did someone as vile as Adolf Hitler become the revered leader of Germany?

The existential perspective provides some answers. According to Ernest Becker (1973) and terror management theory (e.g., Greenberg et al., 2008), new leaders emerge when the prevailing worldview of a culture no longer provides its members with compelling bases of meaning and self-worth. In this context, people need a more secure belief system that provides them with a sense of enduring significance, especially if death-related concerns are heightened by prevailing political or economic factors. In such circumstances, an individual who takes bold action and who very confidently espouses an alternative worldview that seems to offer a better basis of meaning and self-worth can gain followers. A worldview that portrays the ingroup as representing the greater good and as being on a heroic mission to vanquish evil is particularly suited to providing such a sense of purpose and enduring significance. A leader who exhibits these attributes—boldness, self-confidence, and a vision that inspires and meets the psychological needs of followers—is known as a charismatic leader.

same benefit to John Kerry, Bush’s opponent in the upcoming 2004 election. Kerry did not emphasize the need to triumph over evil, and he was painted by well-publicized political ads prior to the election as an untrustworthy waffler who continually changed his positions. Thus, Landau and colleagues predicted that whereas mortality salience would increase the appeal of Bush, it would decrease the appeal of Kerry. In a study conducted just one month prior to the election, this is precisely what happened (see FIGURE 7.9). This research suggests that the many reminders of the attacks of 9/11 and threats of additional terrorist attacks leading up to the election, including a video of Osama Bin Laden shown on television just one day before the polls opened, may have tipped the scales in favor of Bush, who won a second term as U.S. president.

Interestingly, months before the 2016 American presidential election, Cohen, Solomon, and Kaplin (in press) proposed that Republican candidate Donald Trump was similarly charismatic, with his bold vision to “Make America Great Again,” whereas Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton did not fit the charismatic style; her motto, “Stronger Together,” better reflects a relationship-oriented leadership style. In support of this hypothesis, and replicating the Bush findings, in a series of pre-election studies, they found that reminders of mortality increased support for Trump but not for Clinton. It may not be a coincidence that, as in the case of Bush in 2004, the charismatic candidate who better assuaged mortality concerns won the 2016 presidential election.
CHAPTER 7  Social Influence

APPLICATION

Historical Perspectives

This terror management analysis seems to fit many historical instances in which charismatic leaders, including Hitler, emerge and rise to great power. Germany was humiliated and economically devastated by the loss of World War I and the signing of the very disadvantageous Treaty of Versailles in 1919. In the wake of all these events, it did not feel good to be a German. During the early 1920s, Hitler began his crusade to oust the ruling government and rid Germany of what he called the impure evil others—Jews, communists, homosexuals, and other supposedly inferior peoples. After a bold but failed attempt to overthrow the government by violence, Hitler was tried for treason. He became a well-known figure as he confidently and eloquently attacked the government during his well-publicized trial. He was given a relatively light prison sentence despite his treasonous actions. While in prison he wrote Mein Kampf (“My Struggle”), a book in which he outlined his worldview, which espoused the superiority of the Aryan people and his desire to lead Germany back to greatness. When he got out of prison, he organized the National Socialist Party and began gaining followers in an atmosphere of fears of economic and political instability. When Germany experienced a severe economic depression following the stock market crash of 1929, Hitler’s message began to gain considerable ground. In 1933, the former fringe figure was elected chancellor as part of a coalition government. Once in office, he seized total power. The rest was a very tragic chapter in human history.

Similar contributing factors have been observed in the rise of admired leaders as well as vilified ones. For example, the Indian leader Mohandas K. (“Mahatma”) Gandhi engaged in acts of nonviolent resistance and espoused a philosophy of national empowerment in his early efforts to free India from subjugation to Great Britain. He became the leader of this large nation during its process of liberation from British control without formal election to any official government position. Similar analyses can be applied to the emergence of leaders of small cults, such as the Reverend Jim Jones, and the leaders of large cults, such as the Reverend Sun Yung Moon, as well as many other religious and political leaders.

Of course, all of these historical phenomena are complex and involve many potential causal factors that are difficult to disentangle. However, studies support the role of these charismatic qualities in binding people to a particular leader. Experiments inspired by social identity theory show that participants are more willing to stand behind leaders who affirm the value of their shared social identity and contribute to the ingroup’s collective interests (Haslam & Platow, 2001). Leaders who are “one of us” and exemplify what makes the group distinct and special are seen as more charismatic (Steffens et al., 2015). And leaders who have a vision for how the group can achieve great things are better able to inspire followers, especially in times of crisis (Halevy et al., 2011).

Other studies have supported the specific role of terror management in the appeal of such charismatic leaders. In a study by Cohen and colleagues (2004), half the participants were led to think about their own deaths. The other half were primed with another aversive topic, an upcoming exam. Participants then read campaign statements purportedly written by three political candidates in a hypothetical gubernatorial election. On the basis of research on leadership styles (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001), each candidate was modeled to fit the profile of either a charismatic, task-oriented, or relationship-oriented leader. The charismatic
leader was bold, self-confident, and visionary, promising citizens, “You are not just an ordinary citizen, you are part of a special state and a special nation, and if we work together we can make a difference.” The task-oriented candidate emphasized effectiveness at solving practical problems. The relationship-oriented candidate promised to promote positive relationships and portrayed everyone as an equal contributor to a better future for the state. Finally, participants were asked how much they admired each leader and which of the three leaders they would vote for.

In FIGURE 7.10, you can see that after people thought about an upcoming exam, their attitudes toward the charismatic leader were less favorable than they were toward the other two leaders. However, after people thought about their own deaths, they were significantly more attracted to the charismatic leader. This effect was also reflected in their voting intentions. Whereas exam-primed participants gave the charismatic leader a paltry 4 votes (out of 94), death-primed participants gave the charismatic leader a third of the votes, significantly more. These results support the terror management analysis by showing that when people are led to think about their own deaths, rather than just any negative topic, they are especially attracted to a charismatic leader who boldly espouses the greatness of the group.

SECTION REVIEW  

Obedience to Authority

In Milgram’s studies, the level of obedience went far beyond what anyone predicted and made it clear that the proclivity to obey authority is a potential danger in any culture and in any era.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables That Influence Obedience</th>
<th>Who Obey</th>
<th>We Obey Because</th>
<th>The Role of Charisma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Psychological distance from the authority</td>
<td>• Obedience does not vary according to sex or nationality.</td>
<td>• We evolved a propensity to follow those in power.</td>
<td>• When the prevailing worldview no longer provides members of society with compelling bases of meaning and self-worth, charismatic leaders are likely to gain followers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Psychological closeness to the victim</td>
<td>• Obedience is influenced by whether the participant has a submissive attitude.</td>
<td>• We are socialized to obey authority.</td>
<td>• Reminders of mortality increase the appeal of charismatic leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Witnessing defiance</td>
<td>• More recent research suggests that rates of obedience have not changed.</td>
<td>• Small acts may escalate such that once an action is begun, we gradually become more and more committed to continuing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not personally causing the harm</td>
<td></td>
<td>• It is difficult to defy a legitimate authority.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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