

# Social Influence

## MODULE OVERVIEW

Module 44 demonstrates the powerful influences of social situations on the behavior of individuals. Central to this topic are research studies on conformity, obedience, and group and cultural influences. The social principles that emerge help us to understand how individuals are influenced by advertising, political candidates, and the various groups to which they belong. Although social influences are powerful, it is important to remember the significant role of individuals in choosing and creating the social situations that influence them.

Although there is some terminology for you to learn in this module, your primary task is to absorb the findings of the many research studies discussed. The module headings, which organize the findings, should prove especially useful to you here. In addition, you might, for each main topic (conformity, group influence, etc.), ask yourself the question, "What situational factors promote this phenomenon?" The research findings can then form the basis for your answers.

NOTE: Answer guidelines for all Module 44 questions begin on page 371.

## MODULE REVIEW

First, skim each section, noting headings and bold-face items. After you have read the section, review each objective by answering the fill-in and essay-type questions that follow it. In some cases, Study Tips explain how best to learn a difficult concept and Applications help you to know how well you understand the material. As you proceed, evaluate your performance by consulting the answers beginning on page 371. Do not continue with the next section until you understand each answer. If you need to, review or reread the section in the textbook before continuing.

## Conformity: Complying With Social Pressures

**Objective 44-1:** Describe automatic mimicry, and explain how conformity experiments reveal the power of social influence.

1. People take on the emotional tones of others around them. This natural tendency is called automatic mimicry. The chameleon effect refers to our natural tendency to unconsciously mimic others' expressions, postures, and voice tones. This helps us to feel what they are feeling, referred to as empathy. It also helps explain why studies of British nurses and accountants have revealed more positive sharing up and down moods.
2. The term that refers to the tendency to adjust one's behavior to coincide with an assumed group standard is conformity.
3. The psychologist who first studied the effects of group pressure on conformity is Solomon Asch.
4. In this study, when the opinion of other group members was contradicted by objective evidence, research participants were (were/were not) willing to conform to the group opinion.



1 2 3

List the conditions under which we are more likely to conform.

- made to feel incompetent or insecure
- group at least 3 people - all agree
- admire group's status - all attain
- no prior commitment to a response
- others will observe our behavior
- culture of respect for social standards

were similar (higher than/lower than/similar to) men's.

List the conditions under which obedience was highest in Milgram's studies.

1. person close at hand
2. legitimate authority figure
3. authority supported by peers
4. victim depersonalized
5. no role models for defiance

5. One reason that people comply with social pressure is to gain approval or avoid rejection; this is called normative social influence.

Understood rules for accepted and expected behavior are called social norms.

6. Another reason people comply is that they have genuinely been influenced by what they have learned from others; this type of influence is called informational social influence.

**APPLICATION:**

7. Maria recently heard a speech calling for a ban on aerosol sprays that endanger the earth's ozone layer. Maria's subsequent decision to stop using aerosol sprays is an example of
- a. informational social influence.
  - b. normative social influence.
  - c. the foot-in-the-door phenomenon.
  - d. cognitive dissonance.

**Obedience; Following Orders**

**Objective 44-2:** Describe what we learned about the power of social influence from Milgram's obedience experiments.

8. The classic social psychology studies of obedience

were conducted by Stanley Milgram.

When ordered by the experimenter to electrically shock the "learner," the majority of participants (the "teachers") in these studies

complied (complied/refused). More recent studies have found that women's compliance rates in similar situations



**Objective 44-3:** Discuss what we learned from the Asch and Milgram studies.

9. In getting people to administer increasingly larger shocks, Milgram was in effect applying the foot-in-the-door technique.

10. The Asch and Milgram studies demonstrate that strong social influences can make ordinary people conform to falsehoods and commit cruel acts.

**APPLICATIONS:**

11. José is the one student member on his school's board of trustees. At the board's first meeting, José wants to disagree with the others on several issues but in each case decides to say nothing. Studies on conformity suggest all except one of the following are factors in José's not speaking up. Which one is NOT a factor?

- a. The board is a large group.
- b. The board is prestigious and most of its members are well known.
- c. The board members are already aware that José and the student body disagree with them on these issues.
- d. Because this is the first meeting José has attended, he feels insecure and not fully competent.

12. Twenty-year-old Marge belonged to a sorority. During pledge week, she was ordered to strip in front of their friends. Although Marge disapproved of asking fellow students to embarrass themselves, she did it anyway. She respected the sorority officers, and all her fellow sisters were also hazing the pledges. How would Milgram explain Marge's behavior?

- situation not personal
- respected officers of sorority
- everyone else participated in hazing

## Group Influence

Objective 44-4: Describe how our behavior is affected by the presence of others.

13. The tendency to perform a task better when other people are present is called social facilitation. In general, people become aroused in the presence of others, and arousal enhances the correct response on a(n) easy (easy/difficult) task. Later research revealed that arousal strengthens the response that is most likely in a given situation.
14. Researchers have found that the reactions of people in crowded situations are often amplified (lessened/amplified).
15. Researchers found that people worked less hard (harder/less hard) in a team tug-of-war than they had in an individual contest. This phenomenon has been called social loafing.
16. The feeling of anonymity and loss of self-restraint that an individual may develop when in a group is called deindividuation.

**STUDY TIP:** To help solidify the idea of social facilitation in your mind, think about sports you play—or don't play (because you don't do well). Think about your friends in similar situations, your children if you are a parent. Then think about professional athletes. Does the same hold true for the performing arts (acting, playing a musical instrument, dancing)? What about your everyday activities?

### APPLICATIONS:

17. Which of the following would most likely be subject to social facilitation?
  - a. proofreading a page for spelling errors
  - b. typing a letter with accuracy
  - c. playing a difficult piece on a violin
  - d. running quickly around a track
18. Concluding her presentation on deindividuation, Renée notes that deindividuation is less likely in situations that promote
  - a. anonymity.
  - b. decreased self-awareness.
  - c. increased self-awareness.
  - d. the fundamental attribution error.

Objective 44-5: Explain group polarization and groupthink, and discuss the power of the individual.

19. Over time, the initial differences between groups usually increase (increase/decrease).
20. The enhancement of each group's prevailing tendency over time is called group polarization. Electronic discussions in internet groups provide a medium for this tendency.
21. When the desire for group harmony overrides realistic thinking in individuals, the phenomenon known as groupthink has occurred.
22. In considering the power of social influence, we cannot overlook the interaction of social (the power of the situation) and personal (the power of the individual).
23. The power of one or two individuals to sway the opinion of the majority is called minority influence.
24. A minority opinion will have the most success in swaying the majority if it takes a stance that is unswerving (unswerving/flexible).

### APPLICATION:

25. Jane and Sandy were best friends in their first year of university. Jane joined a sorority; Sandy didn't. By the end of their last year, they found that they had less in common with each other than with their current friends. Which of the following phenomena most likely explains this?
 

<input checked="" type="radio"/> a. group polarization	c. deindividuation
b. groupthink	d. social facilitation

## PROGRESS TEST

### Multiple-Choice Questions

Circle your answers to the following questions and check them with the answers beginning on page 372. If your answer is incorrect, read the explanation for why it is incorrect and then consult the text.

1. In his study of obedience, Stanley Milgram found that the majority of participants
  - a. refused to shock the learner even once.
  - b. complied with the experiment until the "learner" first indicated pain.
  - c. complied with the experiment until the "learner" began screaming in agony.
  - d. complied with all the demands of the experiment.

## Terms and Concepts to Remember

1. **Conformity** is the tendency to change one's thinking or behavior to coincide with a group standard.
2. **Normative social influence** refers to the pressure on individuals to conform to avoid rejection or gain social approval.

*Memory aid:* **Normative** means "based on a norm, or pattern, regarded as typical for a specific

group." **Normative social influence** is the pressure groups exert on the individual to behave in ways acceptable to the group standard.

3. **Informational social influence** results when one is willing to accept others' opinions about reality.
4. **Social facilitation** is stronger performance of simple or well-learned tasks that occurs when other people are present.
5. **Social loafing** is the tendency for individual effort to be diminished when one is part of a group working toward a common goal.
6. **Deindividuation** refers to the loss of self-restraint and self-awareness that sometimes occurs in group situations that foster arousal and anonymity.

*Memory aid:* As a prefix, *de-* indicates reversal or undoing. To *deindividuate* is to undo one's individuality.

7. **Group polarization** refers to the enhancement of a group's prevailing tendencies through discussion, which often has the effect of accentuating the group's differences from other groups.

*Memory aid:* To *polarize* is to "cause thinking to concentrate about two poles, or contrasting positions."

8. **Groupthink** refers to the unrealistic thought processes and decision making that occur within groups when the desire for group harmony overrides a realistic appraisal of alternatives.

*Example:* The psychological tendencies of self-justification, conformity, and group polarization foster the development of the "team spirit" mentality known as groupthink.