

## **Chapter 6: Conformity and Influence in Groups**

### **Key Terms and Concepts**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| conformity                                    | Consistency (Balance) Theory                                  |
| implicit and explicit norms                   | epistemological weighting hypothesis                          |
| Social Impact Theory                          | hedonistic hypothesis   |
| Social Influence Model                        | social proof  |
| informational influence                       | viral marketing   |
| normative influence                           | group buying  |
| one versus more than one dissenter in a group | viral marketing   |
| moral conviction                              | ostracism   |
| morality as motivated resistance hypothesis   | deindividuation   |
| indoctrination (softening up,                 | flaming   |
| compliance, internalization,                  | Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects<br>(Box 6.3) |
| consolidation stages)                         | public and private self-awareness                             |
| group initiation                              | social loafing  |
| identification                                | Collective Effort Model                                       |
| reference group                               | free ride effect  |
| ethnocentrism                                 | sucker effect   |
| groupthink                                    | social facilitation effect                                    |
| strong culture                                | diligent isolates   |
| gender, culture, personality, and conformity  | social compensation   |
| peer pressure                                 | social facilitation   |
| power distance                                | risky shift phenomenon  |
| uncertainty avoidance                         | group polarization phenomenon                                 |
| masculinity-femininity                        | Persuasive Arguments Theory                                   |
| individualism-collectivism                    | message repetition in group discussions                       |
| group locomotion hypothesis                   |   |
| Social Comparison Theory                      |   |

### **Chapter Summary**

I. People are likely to conform to the implicit and explicit norms of a group.

A. Early research by Asch illustrated that groups exert tremendous pressure and that individuals are likely to conform to such pressure.

B. Several variables influence the likelihood of group conformity.

1) The influence of group size depends on the goal of the person being influenced.

a. Social Impact Theory suggests that the first person added to a group is granted the most influence.

b. The Social Influence Model argues that the third and fourth members added to a group hold more influence as it is more difficult to voice dissent as the group size increases.

c. Both perspectives may be accurate when one considers an additional variable. Groups have normative influence when group members want to be liked and informational influence when group members want to be right.

d. When being liked is important, larger groups lead to more conformity.

- e. When being right is important, the first person added to a group has the most influence. Each new member has less influence than the person added before him/her.
  - 2) If there is more than one dissenter in a group, conformity is less likely.
    - a. Sometimes, the minority can influence the majority when she/he possesses the knowledge or utilizes one of two influence strategies (see Box. 6.1).
  - 3) According to the morality as motivated resistance hypothesis, people with stronger moral convictions are more resistant to group pressure than are people with weaker convictions.
  - 4) Individuals are more likely to conform to a group (e.g., a cult) when their indoctrination into the group is difficult or intense.
    - a. Evidence of the deadly consequences of conformity is provided in a chronology of modern-day cults (Box 6.2).
  - 5) According to Baron (2000), indoctrination into cults occurs in four stages.
    - a. Potential recruits who have undergone loss or heartache are befriended by cult members and invited to meetings in the softening-up stage.
    - b. Feeling important and loved, the recruits engage in experimentation requested by the cult such as changes in appearance, diet, or sleeping habits in the compliance stage.
    - c. Recruits soon begin to reflect upon the demands and beliefs of the cult and see them as acceptable in the internalization stage.
    - d. In the final stage, recruits demonstrate their loyalty to the cult by surrendering their lifestyles to the cult and by recruiting new members.
  - 6) Reference groups, or groups with which we identify, make us more likely to conform.
    - a. Ethnocentrism, or the belief that one's culture is the standard by which all others should be evaluated, demonstrates the negative consequences of too much identification.
    - b. Small groups are vulnerable to the concept of Groupthink, whereby members are so concentrated on reaching consensus that they do not bother to disagree when necessary.
    - c. Members in organizations are susceptible to strong culture when they begin to completely identify with the organization and conform to its values and actions.
  - 7) Several communicator characteristics influence the likelihood of conformity.
    - a. Females are more likely to conform than males.
    - b. Teenagers feel substantial peer pressure to conform.
    - c. People who are cognitively complex, low self-monitors, high in the desire to control the events in their lives, and high in the need for affiliation are less likely to conform than their counterparts.
    - d. People from different cultures vary widely in the degree to which they are expected to conform.
    - e. The value dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, and individualism-collectivism offer variations of the probability of conforming.
- C. A considerable number of models/theories have been proposed to explain why conformity occurs.
- 1) The Group Locomotion hypothesis suggests that individuals will conform to achieve the group's goals.
  - 2) Social Comparison theory provides the explanation for conformity by suggesting that engaging in social comparison prompts individuals to follow others' actions.
  - 3) Consistency (balance) theory argues that an individual will find it uncomfortable to disagree with a group she/he likes and finds attractive.
  - 4) The epistemological weighting hypothesis suggests that an individual's degree of conformity depends greatly on how much weight is given to personal and social knowledge.
  - 5) The hedonistic hypothesis proposes that an individual will conform to avoid pain and obtain pleasure.
- D. Because we tend to see an action as more appropriate when others are doing it, social proof (e.g., claiming a product is "popular") is an effective influence tactic.
- 1) In his book *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell illustrates how "viral" marketing is based on the assumption that social proof is a powerful tool of influence.
  - 2) Declaring a product as "the most popular" or "best-selling" provides enough social proof for customers who are uncertain about what gifts to purchase for others.
  - 3) Group buying, which encourages individuals to make purchases and receive discounts through buying groups, relies on social proof to be effective.
  - 4) Social proof may backfire on persuaders when a message highlighting the negative behaviors of others creates a "negative social proof."
- E. Ostracism, or the act of excluding and ignoring others, prompts individuals to conform to groups.

II. Deindividuation occurs when being in a large group causes a person to feel more aroused and anonymous.

- A. Deindividuation has been known to lead to acts of violence (e.g., lynchings, riots).
- B. Deindividuation can be attenuated by increasing a person's private self-awareness.

III. Social loafing occurs when individuals exert less effort in a group than they would if they were alone.

- A. There are several explanations for the effect.

- 1) The Collective Effort Model argues that people get lazy if they don't expect their efforts to lead to personally valued outcomes or if they don't think their effort will be instrumental in obtaining those outcomes.
- 2) The "free ride effect" suggests that when they can get away with it, people try to benefit from the efforts of others.
- 3) The "sucker effect" occurs when people don't want to get taken advantage of but also suspect others may be taking a free ride.

- B. Social loafing can be attenuated.

- 1) When people receive feedback on their performance, they may loaf less.
- 2) People in smaller groups may loaf less.
- 3) People who are open to new experiences, conscientious, agreeable, and high in the need for cognition are less likely to loaf than their counterparts.
- 4) Diligent isolates, who work harder in groups, may increase social loafing in others.
- 5) When people perceive themselves as superior and group members as inferior, they'll work harder if the task is difficult (i.e., social compensation).

IV. Social facilitation occurs when the presence of others improves one's performance.

- A. The presence of others tends to improve one's performance on simple or well-rehearsed tasks.
- B. The presence of others tends to impair one's performance on complex or unfamiliar tasks.

IV. Because of the group polarization phenomenon, groups tend to make more conservative or risky decisions than individuals do.

- A. The desire to be "better than average" may lead some individuals to shift their position so that it is more extreme.
- B. Positions that have the best and most arguments supporting it are more likely to prevail among group discussions based upon the persuasive arguments theory.
- C. Repetition of one's position also moves individuals toward polarization.

V. (Box 6.3) Computer-mediated interaction does not make one immune to the pressures of conformity.

- A. The anonymity of online communication makes it more likely that individuals will engage in flaming (i.e., engaging in uninhibited and inappropriate behavior).
- B. The Social Identity of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) argues that computer-mediated communication decreases an individual's personal identity and increases her/his social identity.