Chapter 17

Group Perception and Social Norms

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Introduction

Groups create the very basis of our society. We are, as humans, social animals. We are born into groups, learn in groups, live in groups, and work in groups. Groups can range anywhere from three people to a nation. Think of the groups you belong to. How similar are you to other members of your groups? In most cases, we tend to be similar to other members of our groups because standards within the group define behavioral expectations. These standards are called social norms.

Throughout this chapter, we hope to provide basic answers to some of the fundamental questions about social norms and group dynamics: What are social norms? How do social norms influence our behavior? How have social norms been studied? What are the classic experiments on social norms? What is conformity and how does it relate to social norms? When and why do individuals conform? What makes a group? How do social norms and group dynamics overlap?

What Are Social Norms?

Imagine you get on an elevator. There's no one on it, so you stand in the middle and listen to the soft music while the doors close. Perhaps you start tapping your foot or humming—it is, after all, pretty catchy for elevator music. At the next floor, the door opens and someone else steps in. Where do you expect this person to stand? Do you move? How would you feel if this individual stood right next to you? What if they started talking to you—would that be strange or expected? It's likely that no one ever sat you down and explained proper elevator protocol, yet somehow, you are likely aware that you're supposed to face forward and be as far from others as possible. Our behavior in elevators is an example of a social norm.

There are almost as many definitions of social norms as there are articles written about them. Every researcher tends to tweak the definition a little to fit with what they are studying. Some definitions are very broad; others extremely specific. We'll start our definition of social norms as *unwritten rules that govern our social behavior*.

Think of social norms as grammar to frame the writing of our lives and interactions. Social norms are how we shape our actions into behaviors that are considered proper. You likely have different ways of writing for academic papers than you

do for e-mails or text messages. The grammar you use depends on the social environment and your audience. So, too, do the social norms that influence your life.

Digging a little deeper into the definition of social norms, we can refine the meaning further. Social norms, or simply norms, can be viewed as customary standards for behavior, attitudes, and beliefs that members of a group share. Social norms define boundaries for what is considered appropriate and expected in a situation and within a group. Norms give us a better sense of how to behave and think in new or ambiguous situations and allow us to predict others' behavior better.

Social norms are found in any organized society, so they are cross-cultural and universal. According to Sherif (1936), social norms include customs and traditions, standards and values, and all other rules of conduct that are developed as a function of social interactions. Social norms, therefore, govern almost every facet of life. Despite being universal, norms are culturally specific. Each group creates its own set of standards for acceptable and desirable behaviors and attitudes. For instance, Christians, Jews, and Muslims all have different moral standards and practices.

Groups preserve their own norms, even without the members' awareness. These norms are preserved in three main ways: "socialization," "internalization," and "institutionalization." Socialization is the process through which individuals are taught how to behave in a manner appropriate to society. We learn social norms from our groups, especially those that impact our lives early on, such as family and teachers. You likely learned elevator norms this way. You saw other people—perhaps strangers, perhaps family—standing a certain way in the elevator and caught on how you were to behave. There might have been rewards or punishments for acting in accordance or against the norms others follow. We will discuss rewards and punishments further on in this chapter. Internalization refers to actions and beliefs being guided by norms without our conscious awareness over time. For example, as we will later see, feelings such as shame and guilt can give us a sense of what we should do without fully understanding why. Institutionalization is the process where social norms become embedded in social institutions. Appeals from officials, such as politicians, priests, and law enforcement officers, enforce the norms of the institution.

Norms serve a purpose: They have a function in our society, both for individuals and for groups. They are also among the strongest predictors of behavior (Kallgren, Reno, and Cialdini 2000). When we first defined social norms, we said they were unwritten rules that govern behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. These unwritten rules are there for everyone in a specific group. Imagine you're playing a board game with a group of friends. Is it easier to play the game once everyone knows the rules? Or can you get by with just playing however each person thinks the game should be played? The rules for the game facilitate the game play. There's less arguing and you know the consequences of certain moves. And because you know the outcomes for when you move a certain way, the rules can simplify your choices and allow you to better predict the behavior of others. If you know your friend can make only one move that doesn't require him to lose points, it is more likely that your friend will

choose that move. In short, social norms facilitate interactions with others, simplify behavioral choices, and organize social interactions.

Durkheim, a sociologist, suggests in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1983/1960) that without social norms, we would no longer know how to interact with others, as social norms give us a sense of who we are and what social roles we hold. Shifting or inconsistent social norms are viewed as a cause of social unrest—what Durkheim referred to as "anomie" (a-=no; -nomie=norms). In times of economic hardship or political change, tensions mount and social norms become unstable and liable to break. Social unrest, then, is a time of transition from one set of norms to another, perhaps with a stage of chaos and uncertainty between. The French Revolution was a transition period like Durkheim described, with large amounts of political and social change. People didn't know which norms to follow, so there was fighting in the streets, more crime than usual, and a large number of deaths. We tend to value the consistency that prevents revolutionary unrest, and because norms keep society running smoothly day to day, those who challenge norms are seen as deviants and are "punished" in a variety of ways that we will discuss later.

So what exactly is a social norm in the real world? Social norms affect our daily activities in ways that are not always apparent to us. The way that you dress and the way that you talk to others are both influenced by social norms. Do you throw your empty water bottle in the garbage or in the recycling? Or do you use a reusable water bottle? Social norms can dictate your recycling habits, too.

In addition to subtle influencing of our everyday acts, what many would consider some of the most fundamental "laws" of humanity are social norms. Indeed, many social norms have turned into formalized laws over time. Don't kill others, the Golden Rule, and keep your promises are all examples of everyday norms. In addition, many religious texts and doctrines are simply outlining social norms (for example, thou shall not steal) that are upheld at an institutional level. These norms are also examples of moral imperatives. Moral imperatives have a sense of "oughtness." Oughtness means that individuals feel something must be done. Moral imperatives are often upheld because we would feel shame or guilt for breaking the norm. As we discussed earlier, shame and guilt can be internalized so that we are not aware that a norm is influencing us. There are also norms that do not have a sense of oughtness or morality. For violations of these norms, there are not necessarily feelings of shame or guilt, so some other consequences are necessary, such as penalties carried out by the law.

When considering violations of norms, we also need to take into account "descriptive norms" and "prescriptive norms." Descriptive norms tell us whether a norm violation is common or not common. For example, is smoking in front of the "no smoking" sign a common phenomenon? Do many individuals smoke in front of the sign? Descriptive normativity is concerned with what most others do. Prescriptive norms tell us whether the behavior is right or wrong and the extent to which the behavior violates societal standards. For example, is smoking in front of a "no smoking" sign the right or wrong thing to do? Prescriptive norms are directly

related to "social control": The more deviant a behavior is, the more likely someone is to say or do something to indicate that the norm is being violated (Brauer and Chaurand 2010). In the case of the smoker, social control might include saying something to the smoker or making a face at them. If the smoker was handing out cigarettes to children, chances are there would be even greater control because the smoker's behavior would be considered more deviant.

Behaviors can be prescriptively normative and descriptively nonnormative, or vice versa. Take, for instance, donating blood. Most people consider donating blood to be prescriptively normative. That is, most people would agree that donating blood is a good thing to do. Yet, only few people actually donate their blood—there is low descriptive normativity. In contrast, most would consider driving a short distance to be low in prescriptive normativity and high in descriptive normativity—you shouldn't drive short distances, but many people do. Studies have suggested that descriptive and prescriptive normativity are negatively related and that descriptive normativity determines prescriptive normativity (Brauer and Chaurand 2010). That is, if a behavior becomes more frequent (increase in descriptive normativity) then it becomes less deviant (decrease in prescriptive normativity).

Social Norms and Group Dynamics in Early Research

Over the course of history, the study of social norms has shifted to reflect, in part, changes in research methods. As researchers have developed new methods, we are able to investigate smaller and smaller phenomenon. In biology, this advancement has meant shifting from looking at the outside of animals to the internal organs, and then to cells and DNA. What was once only observable in nature, we can now look at in labs under high-powered microscopes. In the social sciences, theories were often developed regarding large populations. For example, when Durkheim studied suicide, he made generalizations based on data from entire nations of individuals (Durkheim 1897). Since Durkheim, social scientists have studied smaller groups and even interpersonal relations. We now have complex theories of group dynamics.

Early theorizing on group dynamics resulted from the observation of group behavior. Le Bon (1895) noted that participating in a group changes the thinking and actions of individuals. Individuals tend to lose their sense of self within the group. This loss of self often results in returning to a more primitive level: Individuals tend to act more aggressively in groups and are quick to act. Think of all the incidents surrounding Black Friday shopping. Large numbers of individuals trying to get into stores ignore someone who has fallen and trample the fallen individual. We might like to think that we would never do something like that, but in the presence of the group of shoppers where emotions are running high, we can often lose our sense of individuality in the group. We will explore the loss of self in the group in more detail later in the chapter.

Decades after Le Bon, Muzafer Sherif resumed the investigation of the group influence phenomenon and brought it to the field of psychology. Sherif (1936)

designed an experiment using the "autokinetic effect." The autokinetic effect is when a stationary light appears to move when there is no reference to compare its position to. To get a better sense of how the autokinetic effect can be used to study social norms, let's take a look at how Sherif designed the experiment.

Participants entered a closed, dark room. Half of the participants were in the room with an experimenter first (individual condition) before being in the room with a group (group condition) and half were in the room with a group first and then alone. Once the room was closed off, participants could not see anything but a dot of light on the wall. Due to the autokinetic effect, the light appeared to move. The task for the participants was simple: Estimate the distance the light moved. However, because participants had no idea where the walls were in relation to themselves, they had no way of truly judging how far the light moved.

In addition to the lack of visible walls, participants also had no previous experience with a situation like this. Without the walls and without previous experience, participants had no reference for determining how far the light moved. The lack of reference point suggests that there were no preestablished norms for the light's movement.

The first assessments of line movement in the individual setting reflect the lack of norms. Participants' answers varied considerably. Some participants saw a lot of movement and some very little. With more trials, however, Sherif found that individuals became more consistent in their ratings. The first few trials had a wide range between distances, but after a few trials, the range decreased so that the last few trials were relatively similar.

There were similar findings in the group setting. Although each individual had different ratings for the first trial, over the course of several trials the ratings tended to converge at some value. It is important to note that the participants were given no indication that the dot of light would be moving the same distance each trial. Rather, the results suggest that there is a basic need for some rule to govern behavior, either for individual consistency or agreement with the group.

We mentioned earlier that some participants were alone with the experimenter first or were with the group first. Splitting up the participants by whether they were in the individual condition or the group condition first allowed Sherif to tease out these findings.

Participants in the individual condition first illustrated the influence the group had even after the participant had established a consistent response. It was found that individuals who are first in the alone setting and then the group setting tend to have their estimates converge with each other when in the group. Because the individuals have already established a consistent estimate, however, this convergence is less than if they were in the group condition first.

Participants in the group condition first helped determine if the group norm influenced individual opinion when the participants were later alone. Once they were in the individual condition, participants' estimates reflected the estimate that the entire group had converged on during the last trial. There was also less variability in estimates between participants than when participants started in the individual condition. The most important conclusion from this study was that once a norm

has been established, the norm holds even when the individual is no longer in the group setting.

Sherif's study took place in 1936. The study was a huge step forward for the study of social norms and group influence, and even more change was still coming in the field. After World War II, there was a shift in the field of psychology. Not only did American social psychology become the major source of research, there was also new motivation for understanding the influence of social norms and the influence of groups: Over six million European Jews, Gypsies, and others had been killed during the Holocaust. Many psychologists and other researchers attempted to examine the phenomena that contributed to this genocide. Later on in the chapter, we will look at the role of obedience to authority, which some have claimed to be the reason why the plans for genocide were carried out.

Normative Tightness and Social Influence

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in "normative tightness" in the social norms literature. Normative tightness refers to the degree to which social norms are pervasive, clearly defined, and reliably imposed in a given social group (Gelfand et al. 2011).

To get a better sense of this definition, let's consider an example. Imagine a conference room full of business people. All of them are wearing the exact same thing: black suit, white shirt, and holding a briefcase. All of the business people also have the same hairstyle and are standing rigidly and quietly. In this example, many aspects of appearance and behavior seem to be regulated, which means that the social norms for appearance are pervasive—there are many rules for how businesspeople should dress and act in a conference room. We also get a sense that there is a clear definition of the norm for dress and behavior, especially because everyone in the conference room is following these norms. If someone wearing a bright red shirt walked into the room, the other occupants would likely be surprised. If the businesspeople have a strict white shirt–only policy, even if unwritten, there are likely predictable consequences that the individual wearing the red shirt would face. Indeed, there would be predictable consequences for every violation of the appearance and behavior norms in the conference room. The predictable consequences suggest that the norms are reliably imposed.

Think back to our example of social norms as grammar. Some schools are very strict about their grammar, whereas others are more relaxed. Those schools with strict grammar would be considered to have high normative tightness. Broadly speaking, normative tightness can be thought of as the range of acceptable behaviors and the intensity of sanctions for norm deviance within a social group.

In 2011, Michele Gelfand and colleagues conducted a cross-cultural study in which they compared 33 countries. The results showed that many East Asian countries (for example, Pakistan, Malaysia) had relatively tight social norms, whereas countries that used to belong to the former Soviet Union (for example, Ukraine, Hungary) tended to score low on normative tightness. The United States, with a

tightness score of 5.4, was slightly below the average of all 33 countries (average score = 6.5), comparable to Australia (4.4), Spain (5.4), and Belgium (5.4). According to the authors, countries with more historical threat tend to have tighter social norms. Examples of historical threats include territorial wars, food shortages, pathogen scares, and high population density. It should be noted, however, that the study was correlational, and it is not possible to draw any causal conclusions. Although countries with more historical threat tend to have tighter social norms, we do not know if historical threat caused the social norms to be tight.

Imagine you were living centuries ago when people lived in small communities and were constantly defending their boundaries. How does your community react to another group of individuals trying to take over your land? Would it be easier to defend your territory if people could do whatever they wanted, or would it be easier if you had a highly structured set of rules to follow? Chances are, having more rules would organize your community to better defend themselves. For this same reason, agricultural societies tend to have higher normative tightness than hunter-gatherers. The coordination necessary for productive agriculture is much more efficient with norms that are clear, pervasive, and reliably imposed.

Beyond historical threats and agriculture, Gelfand and colleagues (2011) also found more modern-day characteristics related to normative tightness. On average, in nations with high normative tightness, citizens have a higher need for structure and higher impulse control. This finding makes sense. Because nations with high normative tightness have more structure and require more impulse control to not deviate from the norm, citizens would adapt to the situation and feel more comfortable with a high amount of structure in their lives and with controlling their impulses. Part of the reason that individuals in nations with tight norms have a higher need for structure is because there is "narrower socialization" in nations with high normative tightness. Narrower socialization means that institutions such as the media and schools promote the tighter norms and teach their audiences and students these norms.

Gelfand and colleagues (2011) also found that nations with higher normative tightness had a higher degree of situational constraint. Situational constraint reflects the range of behaviors that are thought appropriate across a variety of everyday situations. In the study, participants rated how appropriate actions such as kissing or eating were in situations such as schools and elevators. Nations with high normative tightness were found to have a high amount of situational constraint. Perhaps this finding is not too surprising. After all, if social norms are clearly defined, widespread, and violations have well-defined consequences, it makes sense that there would be more restrictions on behavior in certain situations. What is important to take away from this finding, though, is that normative tightness was linked with the restrictions placed on everyday behaviors.

Harrington and Gelfand (2014) studied differences in normative tightness across the 50 states in the United States. Like the study across nations, threats such as disease and natural disasters were related to increased normative tightness at the state level. States with higher normative tightness tended to have higher levels of social stability. Social stability includes lower drug and alcohol use and lower social

disorganization. Lower social disorganization is consistent with tighter nations that have a higher need for structure. States with higher normative tightness also have higher incarceration rates, consistent with social norms being reliably imposed and formalized into law. There was also greater inequality, lower creativity, and lower happiness in states with higher normative tightness.

The Southern states had the tightest social norms, followed by the Midwest and the Northeast and West. There was no difference in normative tightness between the Northeast and the West. To give a sense of how the states were ranked, the first 10 states with the highest normative tightness were (from highest to lowest): Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky, South Carolina, and North Carolina. The 10 states with the lowest normative tightness (from lowest to highest) were: California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Hawaii, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

There were also differences in individual traits, such as conscientiousness and openness. States with higher normative tightness tended to have higher levels of conscientiousness, which might suggest that their citizens spent more time being aware of social norms. Perhaps unsurprisingly, states with higher normative tightness also tended to have lower levels of openness. Low levels of openness are consistent with high rates of inequality and lower creativity. Although these findings might not be surprising after learning about the differences between nations, this study is important in illustrating that normative tightness can vary across smaller units than entire nations.

Gelfand and colleagues (Gelfand, Nishii, and Raver 2006) have also thought about normative tightness at the business level. Businesses are said to have their own cultures. With their own cultures come differences in normative tightness between businesses. Think about a really prestigious law firm. The people in charge of hiring new employees likely have pretty strict rules about who can work for the company. Perhaps they just have rules about background like what schools individuals attended and who they have worked for before. Chances are they also are looking at the potential employees' appearance and attitude. Will they fit in with the atmosphere at the company? Do they look like they belong? Will they go along with how the company has been run or stir things up? Now think of a marketing company. Do they value the same things in a potential employee as the law firm? Chances are that the marketing company is looking for someone who thinks outside of the box more than the law firm. Both the law firm and the marketing company will select potential employees based on how they fit into the company's culture. Because the law firm likely has a higher normative tightness than the marketing company, it will likely have higher restrictions on the range of characteristics they are looking for in employees.

What do these findings tell us, and how can we use it? Unfortunately, these studies have all been correlational. The studies have simply established a relationship between normative tightness and things such as situational constraint and hiring practices. We cannot say that normative tightness causes situational constraint or that situational constraint causes normative tightness. Although we cannot

determine cause, we can make guesses based on these findings. If you travel to a different country, go to a sporting event, or just see some sort of organized group, think about how people look and behave. Are these individuals more similar than they are different? Are these individuals more similar than individuals in another group? If so, the first group likely has higher normative tightness than the second group.

Imagine you go to an event and everyone there is wearing an article of red clothing. You, however, are not. You might not notice the differences in clothing, though, until the other guests start looking at you strangely. Slowly, you come to realize that you are doing something wrong. As you look around, the dots start to connect and you realize you are wearing blue. And you stand out, a lot. Wearing the blue clothing might be acceptable for the first day, but what if you go to that event again? Would you wear blue or red? Would you bring a red shirt just in case? If you said you'd wear a red shirt, or even strongly considered wearing red, you experienced "normative influence."

Normative influence is when another person's or people's behavior indicates when we have violated a norm and gives us information about what is appropriate. In this case, the other event goers' strange looks indicated that you had violated the red-clothing norm. Normative influence occurs when individuals wish to meet the expectations of the majority, which usually results in conforming, or going along with, these expectations. Normative influence is sometimes thought of in terms of rewards and punishments. The strange looks are punishment and acceptance in the group is reward.

In contrast to normative influence, Deutsch and Gerard (1955) defined informative influence as the acceptance of the majority's judgments as real. With informative influence, individuals accept information from others as evidence about reality because others' information may be the only reference we have. Imagine you walk into a toy store to buy a gift for your young cousin. Often, the toys are color-coded: blue for boys and pink for girls. What if there were not gender indicators? How would you decide which toy to buy for your cousin? It's likely that you would follow social cues: You would look at the children in various aisles and compare those children to your cousin. We look at our social reality (children) when physical reality (gendered labels) is uncertain. Conformity as a result of informative influence likely has more ramifications than normative influence, as we are likely to act in accordance to this information in the future because we learned this information in an ambiguous situation in which it was our only cue. Information tells us what's proper. Reward/punishment doesn't hold to all situations if the change in behaviors, attitudes, or beliefs were due to force.

Test this yourself: Stand on a busy sidewalk and look up. You might feel silly, but after a while, other people will be looking up as well. This example illustrates the power of informative influence. Others will assume that because you are looking, there must be something worth looking *at* (Milgram, Bickman, and Berkowitz 1969). But how is informative influence different than normative influence? Normative and informative influence might have similar outcomes. The difference is in

the end goal. The goal of informative influence is being right while the goal of normative influence is being liked by living up to others' expectations. Oftentimes, these goals align. Consider driving a car. In most countries, there are laws against driving on the wrong side of the road. Both informative and normative influence will cause you to drive on the correct side of the road. You are doing the right thing, and others will approve of you. As we will see in the next section, normative and informative influence both play a role in conformity.

Conformity

Imagine you are about to leave your apartment building. As you look around you, you see people leaving and entering carrying umbrellas. You have your umbrella in your apartment, hoping you wouldn't need it today. What do you do? Do you go back and grab your umbrella? Should you carry it just in case? Is it better to conform and risk looking foolish if it doesn't rain or not conform and go without your umbrella and get caught in the rain? You might feel foolish for carrying an umbrella for no reason, but perhaps more foolish if caught in the rain.

As was mentioned previously with normative influence, conformity is often considered going along with another's expectations or doing what others do simply because they are doing it. More specifically, conformity is a change in behavior, attitude, or belief resulting from real or imagined social norms. Interestingly, conformity can be merely pretending to accept the group's norms or actually accepting the group's norms.

Individuals base their opinions and actions off of friends, families, and fads. They also base their actions on their neighbors. Consider the Sacramento Municipal Utility District. They sent 35,000 customers' electric bills with their energy consumption and their neighbors' energy consumption compared in a nifty bar graph (Kaufman 2009). What do you think happened? If you guessed that consumption went down when the neighbors' consumption was lower, you were right. Consumption decreased by 2 percent when people saw their energy consumption was higher than that of their neighbors!

Now, imagine you've received an invitation to tea with the queen of England. Aces! You get through the introduction and suddenly realize you've never had tea before. What do you do? Chances are you'll take your cues from the queen and those sharing the tea with you. These individuals will define new norms for you in this novel situation. You will be conforming to these norms simply because that is what your fellow tea drinkers are doing. We previously discussed the importance of reference points in Sherif's study. In this case, the fellow tea drinkers are your reference points for how to behave, basically telling you how far the point of light moves. Or in this case, which spoon to use.

In both of these examples—reducing energy consumption and tea with the queen—conformity has led to positive outcomes. A common misconception nowadays is that conformity is bad and should be avoided. Yet most individuals conform on even the most basic of actions and beliefs, even those deemed "deviant." Consider, for instance, the typical image of a "punk," a "biker," or a "goth."

Although all three of these groups are often considered deviant, there is a great deal of similarity between members of the same group. We established in the previous sections the function of social norms. Social norms facilitate interactions with others, simplify behavioral choices, and organize social interactions. But without conformity, these functions would never be achieved. How could social norms possibly facilitate social interactions if those we are interacting with don't follow the same norms? However, we also find that conformity remains the dominant behavior even when it results in collective failure, which is not necessarily adaptive all the time. As we further explore social norms and conformity, keep the dual nature of conformity in mind.

Festinger's Group Conformity Hypotheses

In 1950, Leon Festinger published a set of hypotheses on group conformity in small face-to-face groups, pulling from the results of other studies. Festinger found something that sheds light on individual motivation for conformity: Groups rejected members who were different from the group. This finding suggests that the possibility of rejection pressures individuals to conform. Festinger also outlined a few features of group conformity: Group conformity is important for cohesion; group conformity is important for group locomotion, or meeting the group's goals; and group conformity establishes a social reality, which validates opinions that are not anchored in physical reality.

Festinger suggests that the pressure to conform results in communication aimed to reduce differences. Differences can be reduced in one of three ways: The opinions of all members were changed to fit the group, the group's average opinion was changed to make room for other opinions, or the group was redefined to exclude anyone sharing an opinion different from the group. The more relevant the issue being discussed is to the group's functioning, the more communication will be used to reduce the group differences. In the groups Festinger was considering, the group members were functioning on normative influence—they were focusing on what was appropriate for the group.

Asch's Conformity Study on Line Length

Solomon Asch conducted one of the most well-known studies on conformity in 1951. In comparison to Sherif's study, Asch's participants completed a much less ambiguous task. Subjects joined the study thinking it was about the evaluation of perceptual judgments. Eight subjects were in one room together. They were shown cards with three printed lines of varying lengths and one "standard line." The standard line very obviously matched up with only one of the other lines. Participants simply responded to the question: Which line matches the standard line?

You might ask: How do matching lines measure conformity? Here's the kicker: Only one of the subjects was a participant. The other seven subjects were confederates—individuals paid by the experimenters to follow a predetermined script. Each participant answered the experimenter's question in turn, with the real participant among the last to be called on. In the first two trials, all the participants answering truthfully. After that, all the confederates gave the same wrong answer.

Imagine you are in this situation. What would your thoughts be after the first participant gave the incorrect answer? What about once all the other participants had given the incorrect answer? Would you start to doubt yourself? What would you do? Your first instinct might be to say that you would go with what you perceive to be the right answer. But chances are, you'd be wrong. Of the participants, 75 percent conformed and gave the wrong answer on at least one trial, and participants conformed on 37 percent of the trials. These participants didn't actually misperceive the length of the lines—if alone, the participants were 100 percent accurate—they gave in to the normative influence of the majority response (Asch 1955). What does this finding tell us? It tells us something very fundamental to conformity: Individuals are more likely to believe what others say than themselves. In the case of Asch's study, participants were more likely to believe what others said (or at least went along with their incorrect answers) than trust their own visual perceptions.

Let's make Asch's study clearer with a more realistic scenario: a student whose opinion is influenced by a group. A course at a college is co-taught by two professors. Toward the middle of the semester, some of the students get together to study. During the study break, the group starts discussing who the better teacher is. After a brief silence during which they all think about the best teacher, Ramon says Professor A, while all the other group members say Professor B. Though confused about why the other students would say Professor B, eventually Ramon mumbles, "Perhaps Professor B is the better teacher."

Why did Ramon conform? What does Ramon get from conforming? How did Ramon's classmates get Ramon to conform? Did Ramon's opinion change or just what he said out loud? We don't know what was going on in Ramon's head. Was Ramon confident in the initial opinion of the professors? Does Ramon like his classmates? Is Ramon a wishy-washy person, often changing opinions about things?

What we do know is that there were no explicit constraints against Ramon's individuality. There were no clear sanctions against nonconformity and no clear rewards for conforming to the other students' opinion. Why did Asch's participants and Ramon conform, then? What was their motivation? Did they change their opinion or did they just say the incorrect response to be accepted by the others?

For Asch's participants and for Ramon, there is both normative influence and informative influence. In both cases, being right (as perceived by the participant and Ramon) did not agree with the incorrect answers of others. However, some participants in Asch's study insisted that the group answer was correct. In this case, there was informative influence as the participants' reality had changed. Other participants conformed but acknowledged that the group answer was incorrect. Here, we have normative influence, as the participants didn't want to disturb the group harmony. If you said you would go with the line you perceived to match in Asch's experiment, you are like most people. Most people believe that they are motivated to be right and that others are motivated to meet expectations. Does this difference make sense? How can we hold ourselves to different standards? Perhaps it doesn't make sense, but it does explain why individuals underestimate their own conformity.

Wolosin, Sherman, and Cann (1975) investigated the underestimation phenomenon. They had participants observe an Asch-like experiment. Participants predicted that the subjects in the Asch-like experiment would conform more than they actually did. The observers also predicted that they would conform less than similar individuals actually did conform. In Asch's experiment, participants were asked afterward what they really saw. Few insisted they really saw the lines differently than they reported in the study. Would you admit to bowing to group pressure, especially when the experiment was about your own perceptions? Participants conformed, and they didn't want to admit (or perhaps didn't even think) they were doing so.

Do the findings of Asch and others suggest that people are all sheep? Not necessarily. Although Asch's work is often used as evidence that people are sheep, we must take into account the interpretation of the results. Asch's study took place in the United States, where independent thinking is valued and conformity like that seen in Asch's study was surprising. Let's think about Asch's study a different way. If we think of the participants as individuals who are socially smart and work well in teams, the conformity can been seen as positive. In many East Asian countries, it would be considered immature and socially unskilled if an individual didn't go with the group judgment.

Conformity: Why Does It Happen?

Consider these situations: Would you listen to a unanimous majority or a group full of different conflicting opinions? Would you listen to experts or nonexperts? Would you listen to someone whose opinion you value more than a strangers? What about a fellow student or 10-year-old? Did you go with the first option in all those questions? Then you're on your way to predicting conformity!

We tend to conform more when there is a unanimous majority. Even one member who doesn't agree with the group frees others from the pressure to uniformity discussed in Festinger's study. We also tend to conform more when a group consists of experts. In the co-teaching example with Ramon, Ramon is far more likely to conform to the group's opinion if Ramon views his classmates as better judges of professors. Perhaps the other students know more about the course material or are more advanced than Ramon so they are better at evaluating who teaches more effectively. We also conform more when the group members are important to us or comparable in some way. For these reasons, friends have a great deal of influence on us because they are likely both important and very similar to us.

So why do we conform? There are many factors and likely unique ones to each group and individual. Going back to normative and informative influence, we want to be right and be liked by living up to others' expectations. As Festinger's study illustrated, we fear rejection from groups and so do our best to fit in with the group. Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that it is important to us that others like us, in part because we rely on others for safety and food. For example, hunters and gatherers relied on each other because they were providing something the other couldn't. If the gatherers rejected hunters, both would suffer. Likewise, you might listen to parents or guardians because you need their care or follow a teacher's rules

because you need a good grade. But these people have a hold over us for a very specific reason: authority.

Milgram's Obedience Study

Stanley Milgram conducted his obedience study in 1963. Not only did the study shape the way we have thought about authority and obedience, but it also brought up many ethical questions. In fact, this same study could not be conducted today! Obedience is the tendency to do what powerful people tell us to do. Some people, such as teachers, are given authority to define and enforce norms in certain situations. In Milgram's experiment, participants met a middle-aged man who was introduced as another participant but was actually a trained confederate. The participants were "randomly" assigned to either teacher or student—in reality, the participant was always the teacher. The study was marketed as learning words and teaching through negative reinforcement. The negative reinforcement was a shock that would be given if the student repeated words back wrong. The shocks ranged from 15 volts (labeled "slight shock") to 450 volts (labeled "Danger: severe shock"). The trained confederate was strapped into a chair and hooked up to the shock machine. The teacher started reading the words and the student attempted to repeat them back, getting a shock for every wrong answer.

You would think that the shock would be motivation enough to get the student to perform well. But no! The students did horribly. Thank goodness, the student was intentionally performing badly and acting as though the shocks were painful. So although we know that the trained confederate received no shocks at all, imagine you're a participant and giving shocks. At 75 volts, the student cries out. At 150 volts, the student screams "Get me out of here. I told you I have heart trouble. . . . I refuse to go on. Let me out!" The screams become more agonized until after 330 volts, the student becomes silent.

How can people possibly give that much shock to a trained confederate, you might ask. Participants did typically ask the experimenter to stop. To this request, the experimenter replied, "You have no choice; you must go on." The experimenters never did anything beside give their reply and stand there in the room with the teacher, calmly instructing the participant to continue.

What would you do in this situation? It seems silly to ask, right? Of course you wouldn't do that! And 40 psychiatrists at a leading medical school surveyed by Milgram before the experiment would agree with you. The psychiatrists predicted most subjects would quit at 150 volts, 4 percent would continue to shock at 300, and less than 1 percent would go all the way.

The results were shocking, to say the least. Before the turning point of 150 volts, one-third of participants dropped out. After the turning point, however, not many questioned the behavior, and only 10 percent dropped out after that. Of the participants, 80 percent continued to shock the student even after he went silent. Sixty-two percent went to the end (450 volts)—a far cry from the 1 percent predicted! Surely, you might think, these people are atypical; they must take some joy out of causing others pain. That was certainly not the case. Participants exhibited signs of distress such as sweating and pleaded with the experimenters to stop.

A recent replication (or as close as ethically possible) even found about the same rates of obedience (Burger 2009).

What does Milgram's study tell us? It tells us that everybody will conform given the right situation. Like Asch's study, people underestimated their obedience, thinking they would stop far earlier than they did. The experimenter's authority and the rhythm of the experiment likely kept the compliance high. Not only did participants likely see the experimenter as an expert on the study, but they also had little time to stop and think about their actions. If participants had more time to think, it is likely more would have stopped earlier.

If you're not completely convinced, think about this issue from a norm standpoint instead: Hurting others is often wrong, but there are exceptions. Individuals get painful injections at their doctor's request everyday. Why do they get these injections? Simply because their doctor said so. Why do you suffer through painful readings for class? Because your professor said so. Suffering is necessary in these cases to reach a higher goal—good health and academic success. The experiment was likely a new, unclear, and confusing situation for the participants. And what do individuals do in new situations in which they don't have a reference for appropriate behavior? They look to others for cues. The experimenter's calm demeanor and insistence suggested that the experimenter knew what was appropriate behavior in this situation and was assisting the participant in playing their part and doing as ordered.

At this point, you might be wondering what factors influence obedience. Milgram and others have done follow-up studies on many characteristics related to obedience. Women were found to be at least as obedient as the men from Milgram's original study, though women were more likely to express distress over the situation. Many other factors lead to obedience. For starters, the participants agreed to participate in the experiment and can readily assume the "students" did as well. In addition, the participants might have assumed the experimenters would only run the experiment if they were investigating an important scientific question. Most people also tend to assume scientists are responsible, credible, and morally good. All factors that would lead participants to assume the experimenter knew what he was doing.

Finally, Milgram conducted his study at Yale, a prestigious university. When a follow-up study was completed at a less prestigious location, obedience decreased from 65 percent to 48 percent. The decrease in obedience suggests the importance of a legitimate authority. You read for psychology class because your professor said so, but if a biology professor gave you the same readings, chances are that you would question doing the readings a lot more. What does a biologist know about psychology anyway? And if a random person on the street gave you the readings to do, would you even consider it? The location of the study and legitimate authority help us understand war crimes and genocide. Adolf Eichmann, a convicted Nazi war criminal sentenced to death for sending millions of Jews to their deaths, argued that he was merely obeying authority. Many officers and soldiers were following orders from their superiors as well. Knowing the results of Milgram's experiment, we can get a sense for just how influential authority can be, even against our better judgment.

Social Sanctions and Social Control

Individuals and groups who break social norms are called deviants. Given that norms are specific to some groups and certain historical periods, deviants are specific to groups and eras as well. The same behavior may be deviant in one group, society, or historical era but completely normative in another. For example, just a few decades ago, a woman in pants would be a shock. Now, however, pants and shorts are common for women in many places. As another example, take the typical image of a biker. It is common for bikers to have tattoos, but a businessman would not be expected to have a tattoo visible.

Individuals and groups who act against social norms often face consequences, either legally or socially. "Social sanctions" are the most general term to describe the different ways deviants are dealt with. Social sanctions can involve excluding the deviant from the group, distancing oneself from the deviant (socially and physically), not allowing the deviant to take on leadership or responsibility roles in the group (for example, the deviant doesn't get elected treasurer), and "social control."

Social control is any reaction to someone who breaks a social norm. Think back to the social event where everyone was wearing red. The strange looks at the blue clothing are social control. Social control can be formal or informal. Institutions like the church or police force have guidelines or laws that enforce formal social control. Individuals such as police have roles in specific situations to uphold the laws. Informal social control is sanctioning of an individual who violates social norms by a peer, group member, or bystander. Informal social control can be an angry look, a comment, or a hostile reaction. One way to remember the difference between formal and informal social control is that in formal social control, the social norms are *formalized*. By formalized, we mean that the social norms have been written into law and are no longer simply unwritten guidelines. That is not to say that there are not unwritten guidelines as well, just that the norms are reliably imposed by an organization such as the police rather than the public.

We've already discussed that the pressure to conformity stems from a fear of being excluded from a group. Although people can often just *know* how they should act, social control acts as a buffer. Think of social control as bumpers on a bowling alley. People are the bowling balls, hurtling toward the pins. A skilled bowler knows how to hit the pins without using the bumpers. The bowler knows the social norms of the situation and goes along accordingly. A new bowler might not be so aware of the social norms, bouncing off the bumpers and clumsily making it to the pins. Now imagine you were in charge of inflating the bumpers. When do you inflate the bumpers so they take over the lane? When do you deflate the bumpers and let the bowler take the lead? Studies suggest that you would inflate the bumpers more if the number of pins dropped affected you in some way (Brauer and Chaurand 2010). That is, people who are more negatively affected by a deviant are more likely to exert social control than those who are not as affected.

Is social control really necessary? Think about the bumpers. If the bumpers weren't there for some people, they would constantly be getting gutter balls. And if you've ever played with someone who constantly gets gutter balls, the game starts

losing its purpose and is no longer fun. The bumpers, in a way, give structure to the game for the unskilled. Likewise, social control is important for maintaining order. As we learned previously, social norms establish social order and provide structure for its maintenance. Violating even the most basic social norm has the potential to disturb this order, especially when the group considers the norm important. For our bowling example, there are strong norms for wearing bowling shoes. If someone doesn't wear bowling shoes, they will likely receive looks and comments, and possibly a visit from management. However, if someone decides to wear a baseball hat, they likely wouldn't receive looks or comments (given, of course, that there were no strong norms against wearing hats inside).

Schachter's Deviance Study

Stanley Schachter conducted an experiment in 1951 designed to look at how group members reacted to deviants in their group. In the study, groups of about nine students (generally six real subjects and three paid confederates) met for a discussion group about Johnny Rocco, a juvenile delinquent. Each member of the group read Johnny's story, including criminal history, on their own. Then, the group discussed Johnny's case and suggested a treatment for Johnny ranging from "very lenient" to "very hard." The three confederates took turns playing one of three roles: the average person, who conformed to the average position of the real subjects; the deviant, who took a position opposed to the average position of the real subjects and maintained the position throughout the discussion; and the slider, who had an initial position similar to the deviant's, but who slid into the average position over the discussion.

Initially, group members talked to the deviant and the slider, attempting to shift opinions toward the average position in the group. If this attempt failed, the other group members ignored the deviant and wished to exclude him/her from the group. Participants were asked to rank the other group members in order of preference. The deviant received the lowest rankings and the average confederate received the highest rankings. These results suggest that groups prefer conformity, and that group members evaluate deviants negatively and support sanctions such as exclusion (Schachter 1951).

Think of all the social norms you see everyday. . . . What about those people who deviate from those norms? What are your reactions? Does it matter whether or not you see that individual as a member of your group? If you say or do something in reaction to this deviant, you are exerting social control.

Deviant or unlikable group members are downgraded and disliked more than unlikable individuals who are not part of the group. This phenomenon is called the "black sheep effect." Groups tend to have more extreme evaluations of their own group members, both positive *and* negative evaluations. Researchers believe the black sheep effect occurs because the group is a large part of an individual's identity and deviant members are more likely to hurt the group than non–group members (Marques, Yzerbyt, and Leyens 1988; Marques, Abrams, and Serôdio 2001).

Recent studies conducted by Markus Brauer and his colleagues have focused on social control exerted on strangers and large groups. Over the course of several

studies, Brauer and colleagues have shown that people are more likely to exert social control if they feel that they are affected by the norm transgression. Individuals feel they are affected by norm transgression in three ways.

First, individuals feel affected if the individual cares about the domain in which the norm transgression occurs (Chaurand and Brauer 2008; Chekroun and Brauer 2004). Consider someone littering in Yellowstone National Park. An observer who is a nature lover is more likely to become upset and exert social control than someone who cares less about nature. We've mentioned that deviant group members are more disliked than deviant non–group members because of identity (the black sheep effect). The black sheep effect also helps explain why the norms most important to the identity of groups are norms that face the strongest social control. In short, people will exert social control when they are serving their self-interest, which is the preservation of the group and other personal concerns (such as the national parks).

Second, norm transgression affects individuals if they have the impression that the deviant behavior affects them personally. Put yourself in this situation: Would you react more to someone littering in a park in your hometown or in a town you are visiting? In one study by Chekroun and Brauer (2002), 40 percent of individuals who saw a confederate throwing an empty plastic bottle in the bushes at a park expressed their disapproval. The park might be considered to have a moderate effect on the individual. Another study (Brauer and Chekroun 2005) increased the personal implication by observing the amount of social control exerted on a confederate who littered in the entrance of an apartment building. Rather than 40 percent, 79 percent of the inhabitants of the apartment building exerted social control toward the confederate. A similar contrast was found between the social control exerted on someone drawing graffiti on an elevator and someone littering in a neighborhood park (Chekroun and Brauer 2004). Because the elevator has far less impact on the individual observing the behavior than a park in their neighborhood, more social control was exerted on the litterer than the graffiti artist.

Finally, the observer's perceived responsibility helps determine whether someone will feel affected by a norm transgression (Chekroun and Brauer 2002, 2004). Consider the situation of the individual drawing graffiti in an elevator. Would you be more likely to say something if you were alone with the graffitist or if there were other people in the elevator with you? Chekroun and Brauer (2002, 2004) suggest that as more people enter the elevator with you, your perceived responsibility decreases. That is, with more bystanders to the graffiti, the less likely individuals are to exert social control. However, this outcome is more characteristic of situations with low personal implication like the elevator. The more a deviant behavior affects the individual more personally, as in the case of the neighborhood litterer, the more likely an observer is to react.

Brauer and Chaurand (2010) have also noted differences in social control between countries. When one of their fellow countrymen transgresses a social norm, Italians, Portuguese, and Spaniards are more likely to confront the "perpetrator" than Germans, Americans, and the British. Nations such as Germany, the United States, and England tend to focus more on the individual. The more nations focus on the

individual, the weaker people's reactions to norm transgressions. People in more collectivistic cultures such as Italy, Portugal, and Spain have a larger, more interconnected definition of the self. Those in collectivistic cultures tend to feel that a wider range of behaviors affects their self and thus they tend to react more often, exerting more social control.

Are the differences in social control between countries surprising? They shouldn't be. As you learned previously, Gelfand and colleagues have found differences in normative tightness between countries. One aspect of normative tightness is that social norms are reliably imposed, which means that there are predictable sanctions for norm deviance. Social control is very similar to the reliably imposed aspect of normative tightness. What is interesting, though, is that although individualism is a reasonable predictor of social control, individualism is weakly associated with normative tightness (Carpenter 2000). To understand these differences, it is important to note that the studies were looking at very different concepts. Situational constraint might be more related to individualism than normative tightness because social control—which is related to individualism—and situational constraint both look at specific behaviors.

There are many other reasons why we might study social control. Perhaps knowing about social control will give you a greater understanding of your behavior and that of others. Think about the reactions you have to certain people or groups of individuals. What are you telling them by your behavior? What norm are you supporting? And when others react to you—what norm are they trying to uphold? Thinking about the value of social norms to groups can help us understand others' perspectives in their reaction to perceived deviants. In some situations, people aren't just being rude (though that might also be true). Many times, those people are simply trying to uphold the norms that they value as a part of their own identity.

Groups and Decision Making

Before we talk about the decision-making part of groups, let's talk about what exactly a group is. When you think of a group, what do you see? Family, friends, co-workers, sports teams? When we ask, "who are you?" we are essentially asking, "what groups are you a part of?"

A group is a collection of individuals with something in common that they do not share with individuals outside the collection. People often use signs to indicate their group membership because what they have in common may not be easily seen. Consider gangs and sports teams. If you saw pictures of members of opposing gangs or sports teams wearing the exact same outfit, how would you tell the difference? Both gangs and sports teams use specific colors to indicate their group membership and to distance themselves from other groups.

Group dynamics is the study of the nature of group life, that is, the study of behavior in groups, the development of groups, and the relationships between groups and individuals as well as other groups. We study groups because humans are small-group beings. Humans live in groups, and the groups we are a part of can determine the quality of our lives. We have always depended on individuals coming

together to live, work, and govern. Whether humans lived as hunter-gatherers or in farming communities, group life has been essential to survival. Only in the last 1,000 or so years have large cities developed. An understanding of the dynamics of historical and modern-day groups will help maintain our relationships and long-term psychological health and lead to more effective businesses, industries, and educational systems.

Johnson and Johnson (2006) drew a line between "aggregates" and "small groups." Aggregates are a collection of individuals who are in the same place at the same time but who don't have anything in common beyond that. Small groups, on the other hand, are two or more people in face-to-face interaction who are aware of their membership in the group, aware of the others who belong to the group, and aware of the group's goals.

This last feature of a small group is key: Members are aware of the group's goals. To be aware of the group's goals, there must actually be goals. And so, the group serves a purpose and has a function: Achieve these goals. Individuals often join groups to achieve goals they don't think they can achieve by themselves. Although team projects might seem like more work than they're worth in school, oftentimes dividing the work actually does make it easier on the individuals (providing everyone does their fair share) and to achieve the group's end goal.

There are many other features of groups. Group members are often interdependent. That is, something that affects one member affects all members. Chances are group projects get group grades, and your grade depends on your partners' efforts. We know that groups have norms and that norms make interactions between people easier and more structured. We saw in the studies by Sherif, Festinger, Asch, and Schachter that group members influence our opinions.

Do you ever notice that groups of people talk similarly? Not only do people from England have different accents than Americans, the *ways* of speaking differ quite dramatically. Those we live around have shaped our way of fitting words together, our very grammar. Similarly, those around us shape our behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. We learn this other form of grammar from our family, friends, peers, and teachers. And this grammar and these social norms are specific to our group memberships.

So far, we've talked about what social norms are, about normative tightness and normative influence, what social control is, and what conformity to norms looks like. Let's focus a bit more on what these all mean for the functioning, real-world, social group.

Social norms in the group setting are common expectations about group members' appropriate behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. Norms are rules that may be acknowledged or just known by the group. These rules regulate the behavior of group members and are specific to the group. In a business group, there might be social norms about being on time, being nice, and being responsible. Remember, the function of a group is to achieve a goal. These goals can range from finishing a project to the support from a grief group to the satisfaction from hanging out with friends. No matter the goal of the group, there will be norms to help the group function in order to do so. These norms will typically only concern behaviors that

are related to achieving the goal and the maintenance of the group. Although the business group has norms about promptness, there are likely no norms on what the members eat for breakfast. Likewise, the grief group might have norms about how to respond to others in the group, but not about what clothes the members should wear.

Norms are necessary for the group to function. They introduce regularity and control into interactions by providing a foundation for interactions. Norms can integrate the actions of group members by having different norms for the different roles in the group and making sure the roles fit together. As we mentioned earlier, social norms facilitate interactions by organizing behavior. By making interactions easier, social norms save energy and resources. With strong norms in place and clear consequences for those who violate norms, resistance and conflict in the group are less frequent. Norms in a group will specify the kinds of responses expected in particular situations by particular individuals.

For a group norm to influence a person's behavior, the individual must recognize that the norm exists, must be aware that other group members accept and follow the norm, and accept and follow the norm themselves. Because influence is dependent on the acceptance of the norm, social norms cannot be imposed on group members without their consent. At first, a person might conform because of the rewards for conforming (group membership) or the punishment for not conforming (exclusion from group). Over time, norms become a part of the individual and there is automatic conformity even without the presence of other group members to give a reward or punishment.

We have talked about social norms as a concept that exists a bit independent of an individual's group membership. Let's now look further at norms, but from a specific standpoint. As an example, we'll continue with the classroom. In doing so, we hope to shed light on how social norms act within the social groups you, the readers, are a part of.

In the classroom, there are general norms—attendance, appropriate times to speak—and specific norms for you and other students as well as the teacher. There are norms for how you behave alone in the classroom, how you interact with other students, and how you interact with your teacher. For the classroom norm of attendance to influence your behavior, you must be aware that there is a norm of good attendance (this awareness is why teachers often make attendance expectations clear on the first day of class); you must know that other members of the classroom conform to the norm of good attendance, and you must actually conform yourself. The norm of attendance will have no influence on you if you acknowledge it and your fellow students attend class, but you do not feel you need to attend class yourself.

A 1943 study by Newcomb illustrates the influence that groups have on individuals. Newcomb focused on female underclass students at Bennington College. Although the subjects were mostly from well-to-do and politically conservative families, most of the faculty and older students were politically liberal. Over the course of their time at Bennington, a majority of the students became progressively more liberal. However, some did not. Why the difference? The students had different

"reference groups." A reference group is a group that individuals identify with and compare their attitudes to. Students who identified as members of the campus community tended to be more liberal than students whose reference group were their conservative families.

The Bennington study suggests that individuals change their attitudes and beliefs to fit the groups to which they belong. When students became more liberal, they were essentially changing group membership. That's not to say their families were no longer important, just that another group's membership had more influence over them. And because of the change in reference group, we follow certain norms more than others. If you transfer schools, you will likely change your classroom behavior to fit your new environment. Perhaps there is a stronger norm for attendance and you find yourself attending class more at your new school. This change will occur only when you are accepted into the new classroom and you accept your own place in the classroom.

As you learned earlier in this chapter with the discussion of Sherif's autokinetic experiment, social norms develop out of interaction among members. In Sherif's experiment, the participants in the group setting converged around a reference point for the movement of the dot of light. Even when the participant was alone after being with the group, the individual participants continued to use the group judgment as a frame of reference to evaluate the movement of the light. Norms, then, are social products. And many of the values and judgments that we think are the individual's are actually shaped by the values and judgments of other group members. A study by Nolan et al. (2008) suggests that normative influence is underdetected. So we are not often aware that the groups we are a part of shape our values and judgments.

In Schachter's study, you learned that of the three confederates (average, deviant, slider), the confederate that conformed was the most liked. The deviant was the least liked. Conformity is usually a requirement for continued membership in the group. Even groups that value thinking outside the box have "think outside the box" as a norm. In Schachter's study, you also learned that the more relevant the deviance was to the purpose of the group, the greater the rejection of the deviant member from the group. Festinger's hypotheses support Schachter's finding. There was a greater pressure to conform to task-related norms if the group's goal depends on coordinating the behavior of members. As was established with normative tightness in agricultural cultures, coordination is easier with conformity.

Negative Outcomes of Groups

For most of this chapter, we have emphasized the value of groups and social norms. Groups are fundamental building blocks for our lives. Social norms are the blueprints for how we place the blocks. Sometimes, however, the blocks don't fit quite right and the structure collapses. Or the blueprints didn't give enough detail to make the structure stand. Either way, we now have a chaotic mess of blocks all over.

In the first section of this chapter, we spent a few paragraphs talking about group behavior and the loss of the individual within the mind of the group. People in

groups tend to do things that the individual members would not do themselves (Yzerbyt and Demoulin 2010). Take a sporting event. Rowdy cheering, the wave, the sea of team colors. If you took away the other spectators, it is likely that there would be no cheers and no wave started. Why would the sporting event suddenly be still and quiet?

Le Bon was mentioned earlier in the chapter. He suggests that groups have a "group mind." With a group mind, people in a mob lose their sense of responsibility because of the anonymity of the group. Beyond that, individuals in groups are open to suggestion and contagion. Emotional states spread like disease, and panic that starts with one individual can suddenly become mass hysteria.

Part of the reason why individuals tend to act differently in a group than by themselves is "deindividuation." Deindividuation suggests that being a part of a group leads individuals to become less concerned about their personal values. Essentially, they have lost their sense of self. Although losing a sense of self can be helpful in certain situations, especially in the military, deindividuation also leads to individuals making decisions in groups that they wouldn't otherwise.

There is also a "diffusion of responsibility" in groups. Diffusion of responsibility refers to individuals feeling less responsibility for their action when they are surrounded by others acting in the same way (Darley and Latané 1968). When you are alone, taking a step forward is solely your responsibility, but when others are there, we tend to assume someone else will take that step. Every time you don't pick up trash because you think someone else will do it or you don't tell someone their gas cap is open because someone else will do it, you are falling victim to the diffusion of responsibility.

Deindividuation and the diffusion of responsibility go hand in hand and are important to remember when you are part of a large crowd. In general, you might help someone who has dropped papers on the ground. You put value on being helpful like that. We like to think others share this value as well. Now imagine you are in a crowded hallway and someone drops papers on the ground. What do you do? Remember that you value helping people. But why is no one else? If they value helping too, there should be someone doing something. The chances that you help in this situation are small and become smaller the more you feel a part of the crowd that is standing by watching. If you become totally immersed in the crowd, you've become deindividuated and likely lost your personal value of helping. And because nobody that is part of the crowd is helping—a value you share—why should you? Deindividuation and diffusion of responsibility have caused many injuries in crowds. If you look up Black Friday stampedes, you will get a sense of what these phenomena look like.

Decision Making

Popular belief tends to be that the more individuals involved in a decision-making process, the better the decision. Why is that? For many, it is because there are more voices being heard and more opinions being presented, more viewpoints to look at. Is this really the case? Contrary to popular opinion, history suggests that groups are not necessarily good decision makers.

One of the most famous instances when a group made a horrible decision is the Bay of Pigs. The Bay of Pigs happened in 1961 when John F. Kennedy was president of the United States. CIA and military leaders planned on using Cuban exiles to invade Cuba and overthrow Fidel Castro. Despite being a secret invasion, Castro was alerted and Castro's forces outnumbered the 1,400-plus exiles. Not only that, but the exiles were lacking air support, ammunition, and an escape route, resulting in 1,200 exiles surrendering and the others dying. What should have been a simple operation ended in disaster, but why? It turns out that some of Kennedy's advisers held back objections to the invasion simply because they didn't want to upset the group or their position in the group. When the idea of the invasion was proposed, everyone conformed to the idea because they thought it was expected of them.

The Bay of Pigs invasion led to the development of the theory of "groupthink." *Groupthink* is a term coined by Janis (1972) to describe the phenomenon when a group has a desire for conformity that leads to incorrect decision-making outcomes. Janis looked at the Bay of Pigs incident and pulled out why the group acted as it did. The advisers were an isolated, cohesive group. They had to rely on themselves because it was supposed to be a covert mission. The members also needed to make a decision as soon as possible, and this desire for a unanimous decision can override looking at other solutions. The desire for harmony leads to members attempting to both minimize conflict and reach a consensus decision, which often results in strong negative reactions to group members who voice dissenting opinions. Kennedy's advisers likely thought themselves untouchable, unquestionably moral, and in complete agreement. Once Kennedy rethought his decision-making process, now encouraging deviant opinions and critical thinking, better decisions were made.

You might wonder why people don't voice disagreement if they know about the negative outcomes of groupthink. Think back to why people conform. Even if individuals know that the group is making the wrong decision, the group is still making the decision together. Being a part of a group is a very strong motivation. What might be an even greater motivation is the knowledge that your position in the group is often unknown.

Dittes and Kelley (1956) determined how security in the group related to voicing opposition. College students were invited to join a prestigious group on campus. Subjects were told that members could be removed at any time to increase group efficiency. The threat of removal was meant to make the positions insecure. The group engaged in a discussion of juvenile delinquency. Periodically, the group discussion was interrupted and each member was asked to rate the other members' value to the group. After the discussion, members were shown how the other group members "rated" them. What members actually saw were just made up ratings. Some of the members were told that they were accepted by the group and other members were told they were not as accepted. Conformity was measured by the opinions expressed in later discussions and the vulnerability to group pressure during performance of a simple perceptual task, like those used in Sherif's or Asch's studies. The study found that the members who were moderately accepted by the

group were more likely to conform than those who were totally accepted—they expressed opinions more similar to the groups and were more vulnerable to group pressure during the perceptual task. These results suggest that being accepted (having a secure position in the group) led to less conformity. In this case, less conformity meant expressing opinions that weren't necessarily the same as the rest of the group's. So perhaps if Kennedy's advisers had felt more secure in their place on the cabinet, they would have voiced their conflicting opinions about the Bay of Pigs.

Conclusion

From the studies we've covered in this chapter, you should have become aware that most people tend to underestimate the power of social norms on their daily lives. For both individuals and groups, social norms are powerful predictors of behavior. Social norms functions as a grammar of sorts for our interactions, providing frameworks for our attitudes and behaviors.

You've learned about normative tightness and social influence, groupthink, and conformity. You've learned that social norms influence our behaviors and interactions as individuals and groups. Social norms can have positive outcomes. Consider driving: There would certainly be more chaos if there were not norms for driving on one side of the street. Social norms can also have negative outcomes. Oftentimes, pressures to conform are counterproductive to diversity and good decision making.

When you look at the actions of others now, consider what norms are shaping their behaviors and determine if they are conforming and why. Consider what group they are a part of and how that group relates to you. When you see news reports of war crimes or genocide, consider the social influences at work. Remember that social norms are like grammar and though all nations can share a language, everyone uses their words differently.

See also: Classic Experiments in Psychology: "1951—Conforming to the Norm"

Further Reading

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