

Journal Article

Studies of Independence and Conformity: I. A Minority of One Against a Unanimous Majority

Journal	Psychological Monographs: General and Applied
Publisher	APA Journals
ISSN	0096-9753 (Print)
Collection	PsycARTICLES®
Issue	Volume 70, Number 9 / 1956
Category	monograph
Pages	1-70
DOI	10.1037/h0093718

[PDF \(4.7 MB\)](#) [First Page Preview](#)

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Abstract

The investigations described in this series are concerned with the conditions of independence and lack of independence in the face of group pressure. The abstract temper of present-day theory and investigation in this region rests to a considerable degree on a neglect of the cognitive and emotional experiences that are part of the individual's psychological field. The understanding of social influences will require the study of a wide range of conditions and of the interrelated operations of different psychological functions. A group of seven to nine individuals was gathered in a classroom to take part in what appeared to be a simple experiment in visual discrimination. The subjects were all male, white college students, ranging in age from 17 to 25; the mean age was 20. For certain purposes a large number of critical subjects was required for the present experiment. The present report is based on a total of 123 subjects. The task consisted of the comparison of a standard line with three other lines, one of which was equal in length to the standard. We investigated some of the conditions responsible for independence and lack of independence in the face of arbitrary group pressure. To this end we produced a disagreement between a group and one individual member about a clear and simple issue of fact. The interview, which followed the experimental session, provided qualitative evidence concerning the effects produced by the majority. The particular properties of the experimental situation and their relation to more usual social contradictions were described.

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Psychological Monographs: General and Applied

Studies of Independence and Conformity: I. A Minority of One Against a Unanimous Majority¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

THE investigations described in this series are concerned with the conditions of independence and lack of independence in the face of group pressure.²

Of the many diverse forms of social independence and submission, we have selected one in particular for study. By

means of a procedure shortly to be described we generated a disagreement between a single person and a group concerning a simple and clear matter of *fact* in the immediate environment. Further, the group that disagreed with the individual judged the facts in question *wrongly*, while the individual could not but judge

¹ This is the first of a series of reports describing an extensive investigation of group pressures and their effects on judgment. The scope of the studies required support and the help of many persons.

I am glad to record my gratitude for financial assistance from the Office of Naval Research, which supported these investigations as part of its policy of encouraging basic research in the psychological disciplines. In particular I wish to extend my thanks and appreciation to Dr. J. V. Macmillan and Dr. Howard E. Page of the Office of Naval Research for their helpfulness and for their devotion to the interests of science.

In the conduct of the investigations I was particularly fortunate to have the assistance of a number of psychologists whose cooperation and enthusiasm made the work possible. The reader of these pages will soon discover that we were engaged in exacting experiments which can be justified on the ground of their potential scientific value provided the investigator treats the subject with respect, and succeeds in conveying to him that he is making a contribution. In such matters one can only rely on the sensitiveness and human feeling of the experimenter. I am proud to say that those who were associated with me in this work fully justified this confidence. It is with pleasure and thankfulness that I mention the help in the conduct of the experiments of Dr. David A. Emery, Miss Esta Soloway, Mrs. Enid Hobart Campbell, Dr. Dorothy Dinnerstein, Dr. Irwin M. Rosenstock, Mr. Jack Hahn, Mrs. Lillian Z. Berg and Mr. Irwin Feinberg. To Dr. Henry Gleitman I am indebted for expert help in the designing of

many experiments in this series and for the statistical analysis of the data. In the latter work he was also ably assisted by Mr. Robert H. Peters.

Mrs. Doris M. Joseph provided the arduous secretarial assistance. In time she also became responsible for the innumerable practical problems accompanying an extensive undertaking. These tasks required, in addition to skill, a considerable expenditure of good spirits. For her help in keeping our work on an even keel I am very grateful.

The studies were conducted in three institutions of higher learning. It seems proper not to identify them by name. This decision deprives me of the opportunity to acknowledge specifically the friendly cooperation of the authorities in these institutions, but I hope they will understand that their contribution has not been forgotten.

It remains only to mention the many young persons who served as subjects in these experiments and who must also remain anonymous. If any of them should happen to read these pages they will, I hope, realize what we tried to have them understand at the time, namely, that the work in which they took part was not only with and about them, but also for them.

To prevent a possible misunderstanding in unwary readers I might also mention that among the subjects of the present series of studies there were no Swarthmore College students.

² The present study grew out of earlier experiments that have been reported in the writer's *Social Psychology*, Chapter 16 (1). A preliminary abstract of the present studies has appeared in Asch (2).