Social influence and prosocial behavior

Chapter 4

Learning Objectives

Describe the factors that influence conformity
Describe the six basic principles of compliance and how they function
Analyze the role of authority in inducing obedience
Describe several forms of unintentional social influence
Assess the factors that lead people to help others
Identify factors that influence whether bystanders will offer help in emergency situations
Relate crowdfunding to the factors influencing prosocial behavior

Texting while driving is likely to cause an accident!

Many public service organizations have launched campaigns to increase awareness of the dangers of driving while texting, and these campaigns have been successful.

An example of social influence…

Money scam alert!

An individual or some people can convince hundreds of people—many of whom were highly sophisticated about financial matters.

An example of social influence?

Introduction

Definition: Social influence refers to efforts by one or more people to change the **behavior, attitudes, or feelings** of others (Cialdini, 2000, 2006).

Powerful force: It is highly effective in shaping how people think, feel, and act.

Value-neutral concept: Social influence itself is neither good nor bad — its moral value depends on how it's used.

Negative use: It can be employed for manipulation or selfish gain (e.g., Bernie Madoff's fraud).

Positive use: It can promote beneficial social outcomes (e.g., public safety campaigns like "don't text while driving").

Variety of methods: Techniques range from appealing to moral reasoning ("it's the right thing to do") to persuasive tactics that encourage people to comply or say "yes."

Core idea: Regardless of purpose or method, **social influence always aims to bring about change in others' thoughts, emotions, or behaviors.**

Introduction

Why do you listen to a campaign by an organization or many people?

Why do you trust a single person, a stranger?

"If you found a wallet with money, would you keep it or return it?"

Types of social influence:

- **Conformity**
- **Compliance**
- **Obedience**

Conformity

Have you ever laughed at a joke you do not find it funny, just because everyone else is laughing?

Conformity

Why do people follow emergency fire exit instructions?

Conformity

Conformity-(doing what we are expected to do in a given situation), is the act of changing your behaviors to fit in or go along with the people around you.

This social influence might involve agreeing with or acting like the majority of people in a specific group, or it might involve behaving in a particular way in order to be perceived as "normal" by the group. **Conformity involves giving in to group pressure.**

Conformity, refers to pressures to behave in ways consistent with rules indicating how we should, or ought to, behave. These rules—whether subtle or obvious— are known as **social norms**, and they can exert powerful effects on our behavior.

When norms are clearer, greater conformity by most people can be expected compared to contexts like this where norms are less clear about what action is the "correct" one.

Conformity

Definition: Social norms are rules—explicit or implicit—that define expected behavior in specific situations.

Explicit norms: Clearly stated and detailed, such as:

- Laws and constitutions in governments
- Rules in games like football
- Public signs (e.g., *Speed Limit 60 mph*, *No Parking*, *Keep Off the Grass*)

Implicit norms: Unwritten and informal, developed through social interaction, e.g.:

- Not talking loudly on a cell phone in public places
- Dressing appropriately for an interview

Widespread conformity: Most people follow social norms most of the time, whether or not they are formally enforced.
Examples of compliance:

- Standing during the national anthem regardless of political beliefs
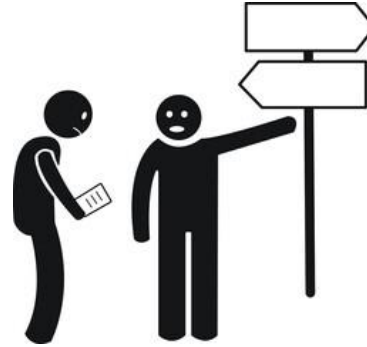- Leaving a tip in restaurants—even when service quality is poor

Key point: Social norms exert a powerful influence on behavior, guiding people to act in socially acceptable ways.

Types of Conformity

Reels sharing

Ask for directions

- **Normative conformity** prompts individuals to conform to group norms to fit in, gain acceptance, and feel good.

- **Informational conformity** leads people to conform, believing the group possesses competent and correct information, especially in ambiguous situations or tasks.

Normative Conformity: Solomon Asch experiment

- **Experiment setup:** Participants were shown a target line and asked to choose the matching line from three options.
- **Group composition:** Each group included several confederates (people working with the experimenter) who intentionally gave incorrect answers.
- **Order of responses:** The real participant answered last or near the end, after hearing the confederates' wrong responses.
- **Findings:** Many participants conformed to the group's incorrect choice, despite knowing the right answer.
- **Reason for conformity:** Participants conformed to avoid social discomfort, ridicule, or standing out from the group.
- **Post-experiment interviews:** Most admitted they did not truly believe the group's answers but went along to fit in socially.
- **Conclusion:** The experiment demonstrated the power of group pressure in shaping individual behavior and judgment.
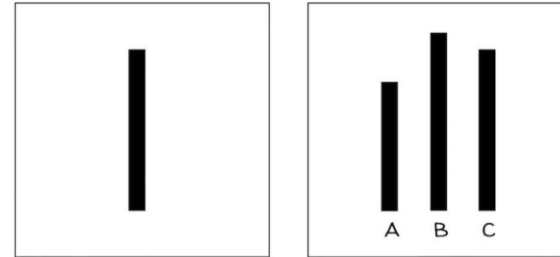
Informational Conformity: Jenness' Bean Jar Experiment

Study setup: Participants were asked to **estimate the number of beans in a jar**.

Two stages:

- First, each participant made an **individual estimate**.
- Then, they discussed and made a **group estimate** together.

Findings:

- Individual estimates **varied widely** at first.
- After group discussion, estimates **converged toward a common value**.

Conclusion: The study showed that **group influence can change individual judgments**, even in ambiguous situations.

Type of influence: This is an example of **informational social influence**, where people conform because they **doubt their own judgment** and **believe the group knows better**.

Conformity

Why people conform?

- When people don't follow existing social norms, their actions are unpredictable—and sometimes, that can be dangerous. **Conformity makes life more predictable.**
- **To "look good" to others**—to indicate that they are "good citizens," and are following the rules—whatever these are in a specific time and place.

Why and how norms develop?

- We have a strong desire to be "correct"—to behave in an appropriate manner—and behaving consistent with social norms help us attain that goal, a key foundation of social influence.
- There is the desire to be accepted by others and liked by them.

Factors affecting Conformity

Cohesiveness and Conformity: Being Influenced by Those We Like
Ex: Joining a group workout or fitness class because your close friends participate, even if you would prefer to exercise alone.

Definition: *Cohesiveness* refers to how strongly individuals are attracted to a group and want to belong to it.

Effect on behavior: The greater the group cohesiveness, the more likely members are to follow group norms.

Motivation to conform: People conform to gain acceptance and avoid rejection from valued group members.

Example: Prestigious fraternities and sororities can demand high conformity from eager members who want to join.

Approval-seeking behavior: Individuals often act and look like others in the group to win approval and signal belonging.

Key idea: The more we like or admire a group, and the more uncertain we are about being accepted, the stronger our tendency to conform.

Factors affecting Conformity

Conformity and Group Size: Why More Exerts Greater Social Pressure
Ex: Clapping or cheering loudly at a sports event because a large audience around you is doing so, even if you might not feel like it initially.

General trend: Conformity increases as group size increases.

Early findings: Conformity rises up to about 3–4 members, then levels off.

Later research: Shows conformity can continue increasing up to around 8 members or more.

Key idea: The larger the group, and the more people who behave in a certain way, the greater the pressure to conform and "do as they do."

Factors affecting Conformity

Conformity and Status Within a Group
Ex: Less experienced investors follow market trends due to herd behavior, while experienced investors act independently.

Status differences: Group members often vary in status or seniority.
Senior members:

- Feel less pressure to conform.
- Have secure positions within the group.

Junior members:

- Experience stronger pressure to conform.
- Their status is not yet secure, so they conform to gain acceptance and approval.

Key idea: Conformity decreases with higher status—those with less authority or experience tend to follow group norms more closely to fit in.

Factors affecting Conformity

Descriptive and Injunctive Social Norms: How Norms Affect Behavior

- Descriptive norms are ones that simply describe **what most people do** in a given situation. They influence behavior by informing us about what is generally seen as effective or appropriate in that situation. For instance, a workplace where most employees consistently recycle paper, plastic, and other waste in clearly labeled bins. You follow them.

- Injunctive norms specify **how people ought to behave or are expected to do**—either people want to receive others' approval or avoid others' disapproval. Breaking these norms may be disapproved by others. For instance, People follow this norm of recycling because they **want approval** for being responsible citizens and **avoid disapproval** for being wasteful or careless.

- Norms will influence behavior only to the extent that they are salient (i.e., relevant, significant) to the people involved at the time the behavior occurs. **People will obey injunctive norms only when they think about them and see them as applying to themselves and their actions.**

Factors affecting Conformity

Descriptive and Injunctive Social Norms: How Norms Affect Behavior
Examples: Let us identify the norms

Littering: A park without any trash on the ground shows that people here do not litter. You are more likely to throw your trash away properly because you see others doing it.	**Littering:** A sign that says "Please don't litter" informs you that littering is disapproved of and you should not do it.
Greeting: Seeing that people in a specific country shake hands when they meet, even in formal settings, you do the same.	**Gratitude:** Writing a "Thank You" card after receiving a gift is a social rule that is approved of in many cultures.
Social living: Some neighbors water the lawn in the afternoon.	**Social living:** Neighbors may strongly disapprove of watering the lawn in the afternoon.
Economic behavior: Many people are buying stocks because "everyone else is doing it." Seeing friends, influencers, or coworkers investing creates the impression.	**Economic behavior:** Society or peer groups may praise risk-taking and innovation, suggesting that investing in stocks bold, forward-thinking, and profitable. People invest partly to gain approval or avoid being viewed as overly cautious or outdated.

Downside of Conformity: Zimbardo's famous Stanford prison experiment

The **Stanford Prison Experiment** (SPE), conducted by psychologist **Philip Zimbardo** in 1971, was a landmark study exploring the psychological effects of perceived power and authority.

Purpose of the Study

- To investigate how individuals conform to social roles, particularly those of prisoners and guards, in a simulated prison environment.
- To examine how power dynamics influence behavior in hierarchical structures.

Setup

- Location: A basement at Stanford University was transformed into a mock prison.
- Participants: 24 male college students were selected after screening for psychological health and stability.
- Random Assignment: Participants were randomly assigned to play the roles of either **prisoners** or **guards**.
- Compensation: Each participant was paid $15 per day.

Downside of Conformity: Zimbardo's famous Stanford prison experiment

Rules and Environment

- Prisoners were "arrested" unexpectedly at their homes, fingerprinted, and brought to the mock prison to enhance realism.
- Guards were given uniforms, sunglasses (to create anonymity), and batons, while prisoners wore smocks with ID numbers.
- Guards were instructed to maintain order but were given no specific training on how to manage prisoners.

Without any explanation, they arrest you and take you downtown to be photographed, fingerprinted, and "booked." Participants did know that they had volunteered to take part in social psychological research, but still, these events were still surprising for many of them.

Downside of Conformity: Zimbardo's famous Stanford prison experiment

Prisoner rules:

- Obey strict rules under threat of punishment.
- Remain silent during rest periods and after lights out.
- Address other prisoners by I.D. numbers and guards as "Mr. Correctional Officer."
- Request permission for basic activities (reading, writing, bathroom).

Initial prisoner reactions: Rebellion against restrictions.
Subsequent prisoner reactions: Became increasingly passive, depressed, and resentful.
Guard behavior over time:

- Became brutal and sadistic.
- Harassed prisoners and forced them to humiliate each other.
- Assigned difficult, senseless tasks.
- Encouraged dehumanization, perceiving prisoners as inferior.

Key insight: Situational roles and power dynamics can drastically influence behavior, causing ordinary people to act in extreme and harmful ways.

Downside of Conformity: Zimbardo's famous Stanford prison experiment

Situational influence: People's behavior is largely determined by the situations they are in, rather than their personal traits.

Disappearance of individual differences: In powerful situations, personal differences among people tend to disappear.

Role of situational pressures: Yielding to situational pressures, including conformity to role-based norms, can lead to harmful or evil behavior.

Permeable line between good and evil:

- People often believe that only "others" commit atrocities.
- Zimbardo argues that the line between good and evil is permeable.
- In the wrong situation, almost anyone—even morally upstanding individuals—might commit atrocities.

Key idea: Context and social roles can powerfully shape behavior, sometimes overriding personal morality.

Downside of Conformity

Conformity pressures: Surrendering to social pressures can lead to harmful behaviors, even among good people.

Individual differences: Some people can resist powerful situational pressures, but most cannot.

Strength of situations: Situations often override personal values, influencing behavior more than individual morality.

Role of identification: Whether people comply with social roles or norms that create inequality depends on how much they identify with the existing social structure.

- **Low identification:** More likely to resist and seek social change.
- **High identification:** More likely to accept and conform.

Historical examples of resistance:

- **Civil rights movement (1950s–1960s, USA)**
- **Women's movement (1970s–1980s)**
- **Arab Spring (2010–2012)**

Key idea: While social norms and roles are powerful, they are not invincible; under the right conditions, people can challenge the status quo and drive social change.

Reasons for non-Conformity

The Actor–Observer Effect Revisited: Its Role in Resisting Pressures to Conform
Ex: Actively chanting slogans and marching by protestors, and passersby or media personnel watching the protest without participating.

- **Roles in synchronous behavior:**
  - **Actors:** Participate in synchronized actions (e.g., leading a national anthem).
  - **Observers:** Watch others performing synchronized actions.
- **Conformity pressures:**
  - **Actors** feel direct **pressure to conform** due to group membership.
  - **Observers** do not experience direct pressure and may instead notice **limitations on personal freedom**.
- **Reactance in observers:**
  - Observers may feel **reactance**—the sense that their **freedom is restricted**—leading them to resist conformity pressures.
- **Focus differences:**
  - **Actors** focus on **goals they hope to achieve**, increasing likelihood of conformity.
  - **Observers** focus on the **freedom actors give up**, making them less likely to conform themselves.
- **Key idea: Perspective matters**—being an active participant vs. a passive observer affects how strongly social pressures influence behavior.

Reasons for non-Conformity

Power As a Shield Against Conformity
Ex: political leaders, generals, heads of corporations.
- **Power and freedom:** Powerful people appear to enjoy more freedoms than others—they make the rules and can shape situations rather than being constrained by them.

- **Reduced dependence:** They are less dependent on others for social resources.

- **Resistance to influence:** Powerful individuals are less affected by threats or attempts to constrain their actions.

- **Perspective-taking:** They are less likely to take the perspective of others, making them less susceptible to social influence.

- **Behavioral alignment with traits:** Their thoughts and actions are more closely guided by internal states, meaning a stronger correspondence between their personal traits/preferences and their behavior compared to most people.

Reasons for non-Conformity

The Desire to Be Unique and Nonconformity
Ex: You post a different opinion, unique content, or creative commentary, intentionally standing apart from the majority.

- **Need for uniqueness:** People have a desire to see themselves as distinct individuals.
- **Threat to uniqueness:** When this sense of uniqueness is threatened, people feel motivated to protect it.
- **Response to threat:** Individuals actively resist conformity pressures to restore their uniqueness.
- **Behavioral outcome:** People may refuse to endorse majority-supported views and display nonconformity when their uniqueness is at risk.
- **Key idea:** The motivation to be unique can override the tendency to conform.

Reasons for non-Conformity

The Benefits of Nonconforming
Ex: An individual adopting a zero-waste lifestyle, despite mainstream habits, is seen as autonomous and principled, gaining respect for nonconformity.

- **Perception of nonconformists:** Individuals who resist conformity are seen as high in personal autonomy ("do their own thing").

- **Perception of conformists:** Those who conform to the group are seen as lower in autonomy.

- **Status implications:** Nonconformists are often perceived as having higher status due to their independence and self-direction.

- **Key idea:** Autonomy and willingness to be different can enhance social prestige, even if it involves resisting group norms.

Compliance

Compliance—for getting others to say "yes" to your requests.
According to Cialdini (2008), these basic principles underlie many techniques used by professionals and ourselves for gaining compliance from others.

Six principles/tactics

- Friendship/liking

- Commitment/consistency

- Scarcity

- Reciprocity

- Social validation

- Authority

Compliance

Friendship/liking: In general, we are more willing to comply with requests from friends or from people we like than with requests from strangers or people we don't like.

Will you open a bank account at the bank your friend works?

Compliance

Commitment/consistency: Once we have committed ourselves to a position or action, we are more willing to comply with requests for behaviors that are consistent with this position or action than with requests that are inconsistent with it.

The lowball procedure is a compliance technique where an individual is first offered an attractive deal, leading them to commit to the decision. After this commitment, the deal is altered to become less favorable—such as a higher price or worse terms. Although the rational response would be to refuse the new offer, many people still agree to proceed. This happens because the initial commitment creates psychological pressure to remain consistent, making it harder to withdraw even when circumstances change.

Compliance

Scarcity: In general, we value, and try to secure, outcomes or objects that are scarce or decreasing in availability. As a result, we are more likely to comply with requests that focus on scarcity than ones that make no reference to this issue.

Would you like to buy a "limited-offer" product or product that stocks out fast or an "end-of-season" product?

Do you know "playing hard to get"?

Compliance

Reciprocity: We are generally more willing to comply with a request from someone who has previously provided a favor or concession to us than to someone who has not. In other words, we feel obligated to pay people back in some way for what they have done for us.

Would you accompany your friend to the grocery store for their sake, since they once went with you to the bank? *What will you do if your friend requests you to do something risky?*

Door in-the-face technique
Instead of beginning with a small request and then escalating to a larger one, people seeking compliance sometimes start with a very large request and then, after this is rejected, shift to a smaller request—the one they wanted all along.
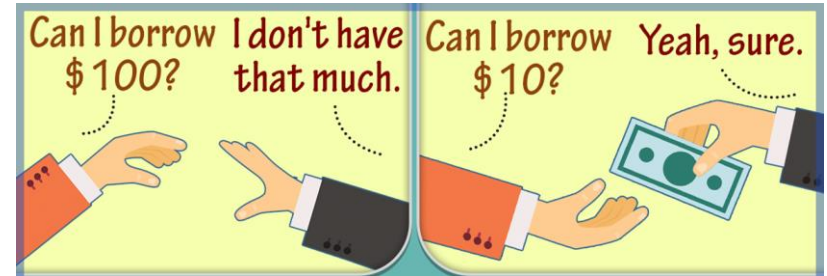
Compliance

Social validation: We are generally more willing to comply with a request for some action if this action is consistent with what we believe people similar to ourselves are doing (or thinking). We want to be correct, and one way to do so is to act and think like others.

Would you prefer to watch a popular drama or an unfamiliar documentary?
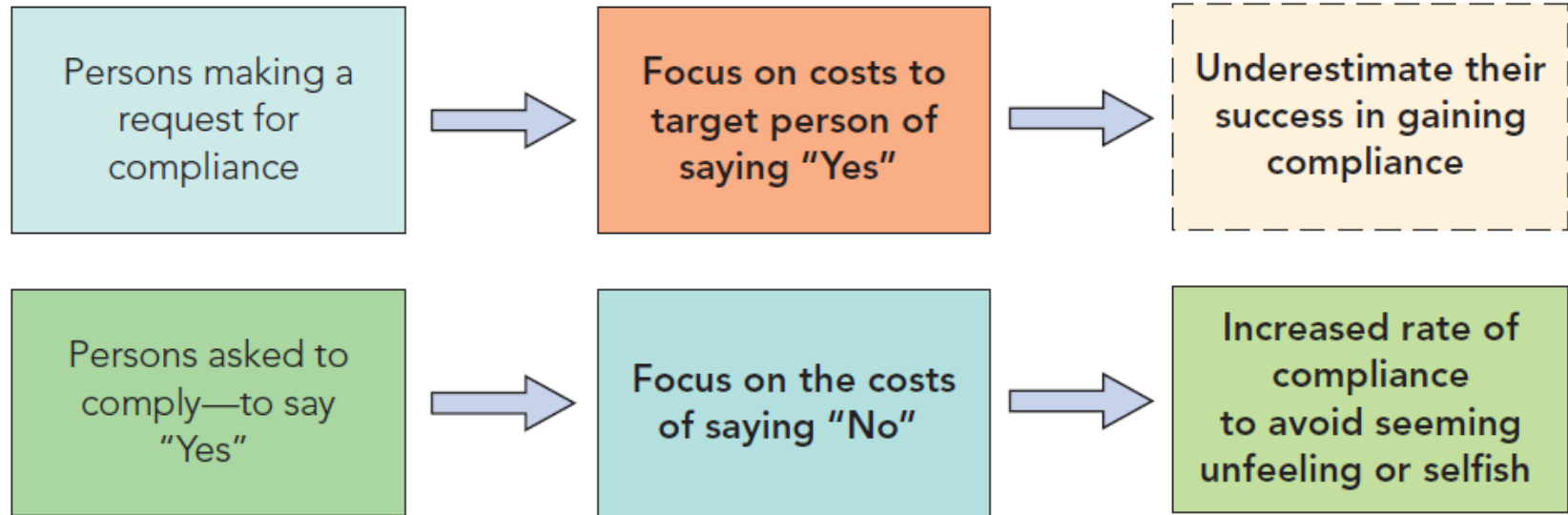
Compliance

Authority: In general, we are more willing to comply with requests from someone who holds legitimate authority—or simply appears to do so.

Will you take advice from a professional?

Compliance: how tactics work

Persons making a request for compliance	→ Focus on costs to target person of saying "Yes"	→ Underestimate their success in gaining compliance
Persons asked to comply—to say "Yes"	→ Focus on the costs of saying "No"	→ Increased rate of compliance to avoid seeming unfeeling or selfish

Can you guess the influence

a child cleaning the table when asked by their parents

a soldier obeying orders from a superior officer during a mission

Obedience

Major type of social influence— **obedience**—in which one person directly orders one or more others to behave in specific ways.

Obedience is less frequent than conformity or compliance because even people who possess authority and could use it often prefer to exert influence in less obvious ways— through requests rather than direct orders.

Obedience to the commands of people who possess authority is far from surprising; they usually have effective means for enforcing their orders. More unexpected is the fact that often, people lacking in such power can also induce high levels of submission from others.

Obedience: Stanley Milgram experiment

One of the most famous studies in psychology on
obedience to authority

Milgram wished to find out whether individuals would obey
commands from a relatively powerless stranger requiring them
to inflict what seemed to be considerable pain on another
person—a totally innocent stranger.

For example, during World War II, troops in the German army
frequently obeyed commands to torture and murder unarmed
civilians. The Nazis established horrible but highly efficient
death camps designed to eradicate Jews, Gypsies, and other
groups they felt were inferior or a threat to their own "racial
purity."

THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS

Lines may divide us, but hope will unite us.
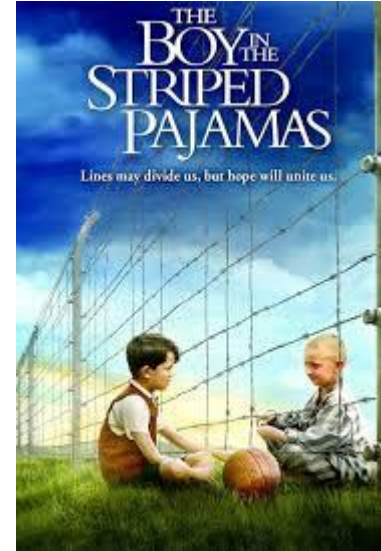
Obedience: Stanley Milgram experiment

Experiment Setup:

- Participants were told they were part of a study on **learning and memory**.
- a simple task involving memory (supplying the second word in pairs of words they had previously memorized after hearing only the first word).
- They were assigned the role of a **"teacher"**, while a confederate (an actor) played the **"learner"**.
- The learner was placed in a separate room and strapped to a chair with electrodes.
- The teacher was instructed to give the learner an electric shock for every incorrect answer, increasing the shock level each time.
- The shock generator had labels from **15 volts (slight shock) to 450 volts (danger: severe shock).**
- The learner (actor) would pretend to be in pain, scream, and eventually stop responding.
- If the teacher hesitated, the experimenter (a man in a lab coat) gave verbal prods like:
  - **"Please continue."**
  - **"The experiment requires that you continue."**
  - **"You have no other choice; you must go on."**
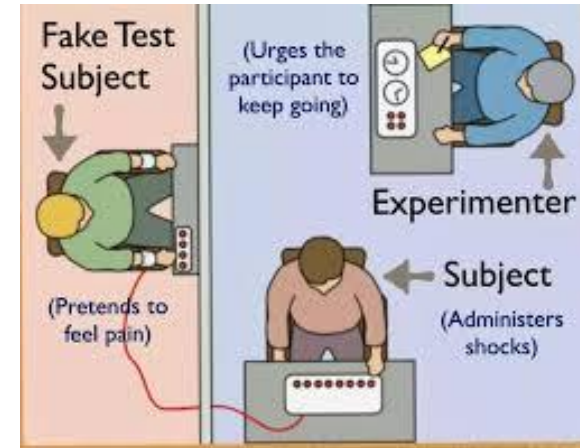
Obedience: Stanley Milgram experiment

Results:

- **65% (two-thirds) of participants administered the highest 450-volt shock.**
- **All participants** went up to at least **300 volts**, despite hearing the learner's cries of pain.
- Many participants were visibly distressed but still obeyed.

Conclusions:

- Ordinary people are likely to **follow orders from an authority figure**, even when it goes against their personal morals.
- Authority can strongly influence behavior, leading people to commit harmful acts if they believe they are simply "following orders."

Obedience: Why does such destructive obedience occur?

Factors combine to make most people unable to resist such situational pressures:

First, people in authority relieve those who obey of the responsibility for their own actions. "**I was only carrying out orders**" is the defense many offer after obeying harsh or cruel commands. In life situations, this transfer of responsibility may be implicit; the person in charge (e.g., **the military or police officer**) is assumed to have the responsibility for what happens.

Second, people in authority often possess visible badges or signs of their status. They wear special uniforms or insignia, have special titles, and so on. These serve to remind many individuals of the social norm "**Obey the persons in charge**." This is a powerful norm, and when confronted with it, most people find it difficult to disobey.

A **third** reason for obedience in many situations where the targets of such influence might otherwise resist involves the **gradual escalation** of the authority figure's orders. Initial commands may call for relatively mild actions, such as merely arresting people. Only later do orders come to require behavior that is dangerous or objectionable.

Finally, events in many situations involving **destructive obedience move very quickly:** Demonstrations turn into riots, arrests into mass beatings or murder, quite suddenly. The fast pace of such events gives participants little time for reflection or systematic thought: People are ordered to obey and—**almost automatically**—they do so.

Unintentional social influence

Conformity, Compliance and Obedience-all involve intentional efforts by one or more people to change the behavior and thoughts of other people. Groups—and society as a whole—generally want their members to follow the rules (i.e., norms), and put pressure (subtle or direct) on them to do so.

Is all social influence intentional? Do individuals sometimes influence others without overtly intending to do so?

Research findings indicate that such **unintentional social influence is actually quite common.**

- ❏ Emotional Contagion
- ❏ Symbolic Social Influence
- ❏ Modeling: Learning from Observing Others

Unintentional social influence

Emotional Contagion

- We are influenced by the moods and emotions of others.
- Moods can **spread automatically** from one person to another — a process called **emotional contagion**.
- When we observe someone's emotions, we often **mimic their expressions**:
- If they are happy, we tend to smile.
- If they are sad, we may frown.
- This physical imitation leads us to **feel the same emotions** ourselves.
- Beyond imitation, we also **interpret others' emotions** as **informational cues** about how we should feel.
- For example: If others appear anxious or excited while making a decision, we assume the situation is important.
- As a result, we may start to feel **similar emotions** like anxiety or excitement.

Unintentional social influence

Are you ever scared while/after watching a movie?

Do you smile when you see others smiling?

Unintentional social influence

Symbolic Social Influence

Symbolic social influence occurs when the mere **thought of others** affects our actions and attitudes, even when they are **not physically present**.

Our behavior is shaped by our **mental representations** of others — what they prefer, how they would judge us, and our relationship with them.

Relational schemas are mental models of people we know and our relationships with them.

- When we think of someone, **related goals** may be activated.
- Example: Thinking of a friend may make us want to be helpful; thinking of parents may make us want to make them proud.

The **psychological presence** of others can also **activate their goals for us**, influencing our motivation and performance.

- Example: Thinking of a father who values education may increase our **commitment to study harder** to meet his expectations.

Unintentional social influence

Modeling: Learning from Observing Others

Modeling (or observational learning) happens when we **learn by watching others** and then **imitate their behavior**.

Another term for modeling is **imitation**, which, despite sounding negative, provides important learning benefits.

Modeling is especially common when we are **uncertain about how to behave** and **no clear rules** exist for what's appropriate.

In such cases, we **use others' actions as a guide** for our own behavior.

This influence is **very powerful** — people often **adjust their actions** to match others in many areas, such as:

- Expressing opinions
- Showing aggression
- Offering help or cooperation

Unintentional social influence

Have you followed an electrician around while repairing in your house to learn how to fix such problems later?

Do you want to learn guitar following some musicians?

Unintentional social influence

New tax policy and taxpayers' attitude (modelling in taxation)

Will you carry your own water bottle? (modelling in consumerism)

Prosocial behaviour: Motives

Why do people help others?

What motives underlie the tendency to help others?

- *Empathy-altruism: It Feels Good to Help Others*

- *Negative-State Relief: Helping Can Reduce Unpleasant Feelings*

- *Empathic Joy: Feeling Good by Helping Others*

- *Competitive Altruism: Why Nice People Sometimes Finish First*

- *Kin Selection Theory*

- *Defensive Helping: Helping Outgroups to Reduce Their Threat to Our Ingroup*

Prosocial behaviour: Motives

Empathy-altruism: It Feels Good to Help Others

- Prosocial behavior is driven by empathy — the ability to:
    - Experience others' emotional states
    - Feel sympathetic toward them
    - Take their perspective
- We help others because we vicariously experience their unpleasant feelings and want to alleviate their distress.
- Helping can be unselfish (offering aid without external reward) but also self-beneficial (improving our own mood).
- Empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson et al.):
    - Some prosocial acts are motivated purely by the desire to help someone in need.
    - This motivation can lead helpers to engage in unpleasant, risky, or even life-threatening actions.
- Types of empathy involved in prosocial behavior:
    - **Emotional empathy**: Sharing others' feelings and emotions
    - **Empathic accuracy**: Accurately perceiving others' thoughts and feelings
    - **Empathic concern**: Feeling genuine concern for another's well-being

Prosocial behaviour: Motives

Empathy-altruism: It Feels Good to Help Others

The higher adolescents are in empathic accuracy—that is, the better their skill in what has been termed "everyday mind-reading" (accurately understanding what others are thinking and feeling), the better their social adjustment: The more friends, they will have, the more they will be liked by their peers, the better the quality of their friendships, Basically, the researchers reasoned that empathic accuracy would help the students respond appropriately to others; this in turn would lead to better relationships, and better adjustment.

Gleason and colleagues (2009)

Why does bullying happen?

Prosocial behaviour: Motives

Negative-State Relief: Helping Can Reduce Unpleasant Feelings

- Helping to reduce personal distress occurs when we assist others to alleviate our own negative emotions.

- Witnessing others' suffering can be distressing, prompting us to act to feel better ourselves.

- In this case, prosocial behavior is self-focused, and empathy is not necessary.

- Unhappiness can motivate helping: feeling bad leads to prosocial actions as a way to improve mood.

- **Example:** *A manager at a company notices that a colleague is struggling to meet a tight sales target. Seeing this causes the manager to feel stressed and guilty for not stepping in sooner. To ease their own negative feelings, the manager offers extra resources, guidance, or temporarily reallocates team support to help the colleague reach the target. Afterward, the manager feels relieved and satisfied.*

Prosocial behaviour: Motives

Empathic Joy: Feeling Good by Helping Others

- The empathic joy hypothesis suggests that helpers enjoy the positive reactions shown by others whom they help.
- An important implication of this idea is that it is crucial for the person who helps to know that their actions had a positive impact on the victim.

- Example: *You stay up late to help a friend finish an urgent assignment. When your friend sees the completed work and expresses genuine gratitude with a smile and words of appreciation, you feel a **sense of joy and satisfaction** from knowing your assistance made a positive difference.*

Prosocial behaviour: Motives

Competitive Altruism: Why Nice People Sometimes Finish First

- This general idea is carried one step further by another perspective on prosocial behavior—the competitive altruism approach.
- This view suggests that one important reason that people help others is that doing so boosts their own status and reputation and, in this way, ultimately brings them large benefits, ones that more than offset the costs of engaging in prosocial actions.

Example: _many people who donate large amounts of money to universities are treated like stars when they visit their alma mater, and they may have entire buildings named after them. Research findings confirm that the motive to experience a boost in social status does lie behind many acts of prosocial behavior—especially ones that bring public recognition._

Can you relate to the attitudes of sponsors?

Prosocial behaviour: Motives

Kin Selection Theory

- From an evolutionary perspective, a key goal of all organisms is to pass on their genes to the next generation.
- Studies show we are more likely to help close relatives than distant or unrelated individuals.
- People are also more likely to help younger relatives, who have more reproductive potential, than older relatives.
- Helping unrelated individuals can still occur through reciprocal altruism:
- Helping others increases the likelihood that they will help us in return.
- This mutual aid can indirectly improve our survival and reproductive success.

A grandmother may be more willing to spend extra time and resources supporting her teenage grandchildren—helping with education or extracurricular activities—than her adult children, because the younger grandchildren have more reproductive potential and represent a greater opportunity to pass on family genes.

Prosocial behaviour: Motives

Defensive Helping: Helping Outgroups to Reduce Their Threat to Our Ingroup

- People often categorize the social world into ingroup (their own group) and outgroups (others).

- They tend to see their ingroup as distinctive and superior to outgroups.

- Defensive helping occurs when people help others—especially outgroup members—not to benefit them, but to reduce perceived threats to their own group's status.

- This type of helping is selfish, aimed at protecting ingroup distinctiveness and authority, rather than empathy or positive feelings.

- Example: *A business group helps a low-income neighborhood with small donations or minor workshops instead of programs that could greatly improve their economic independence, aiming to maintain their own status.* What do you think of microcredit programmes?

Response to emergencies: bystanders!
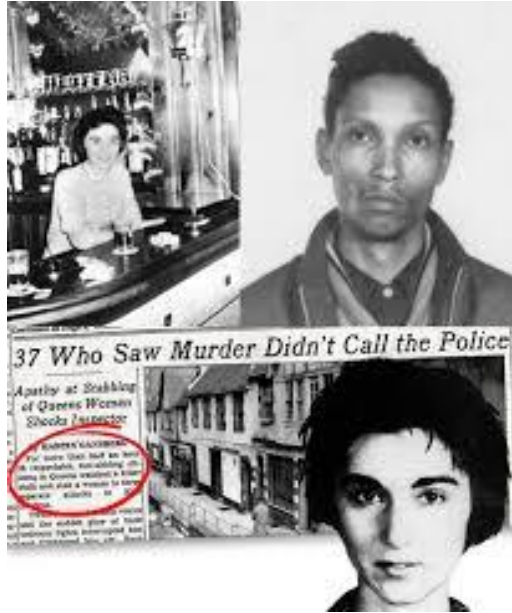
Kitty Genovese Case (1964)

- The Kitty Genovese case in 1964 involved the murder of a 28-year-old woman in Queens, New York, after which a New York Times article claimed 37 witnesses heard or saw the attack but did not intervene.

Response to emergencies: bystanders!

Smoke-Filled Room Experiment (Latane & Darley, 1968)

- Participants in a room noticed smoke starting to fill the room.
- When alone, most participants reported it quickly; when in a group of passive others, few intervened, demonstrating social influence and diffusion of responsibility.

Response to emergencies: bystanders!

Seizure Experiment (Latane & Darley, 1968)

- Participants overheard a person having a seizure over an intercom.
- Alone, most helped quickly; in a group of other passive listeners, participants were less likely to help or delayed helping.

Response to emergencies: bystanders help

Who is a bystander?

*Someone who is near the **place** where an **event** happens, **but not** directly involved in it.*

Common sense suggests that the greater the number of witnesses to an emergency (or in this case, a crime), the more likely it is that someone will help. **Is this right?**

Response to emergencies: bystanders help

Findings suggest: The greater the number of witnesses to a staged emergency, the less likely they were to help the apparent victim.

What are the decision-making factors/steps for a bystander to help or not:

- **Noticing, or failing to notice, that something unusual is happening:** An emergency is obviously something that occurs unexpectedly, and there is no sure way to anticipate that it will take place or to plan how best to respond.
- **Correctly interpreting an event as an emergency:** Even after we pay attention to an event, we often have only limited and incomplete information as to what exactly is happening. Most of the time, whatever catches our attention does not turn out to be an emergency and so does not require immediate action. Whenever potential helpers are not completely sure about what is going on, they tend to hold back and wait for further information.
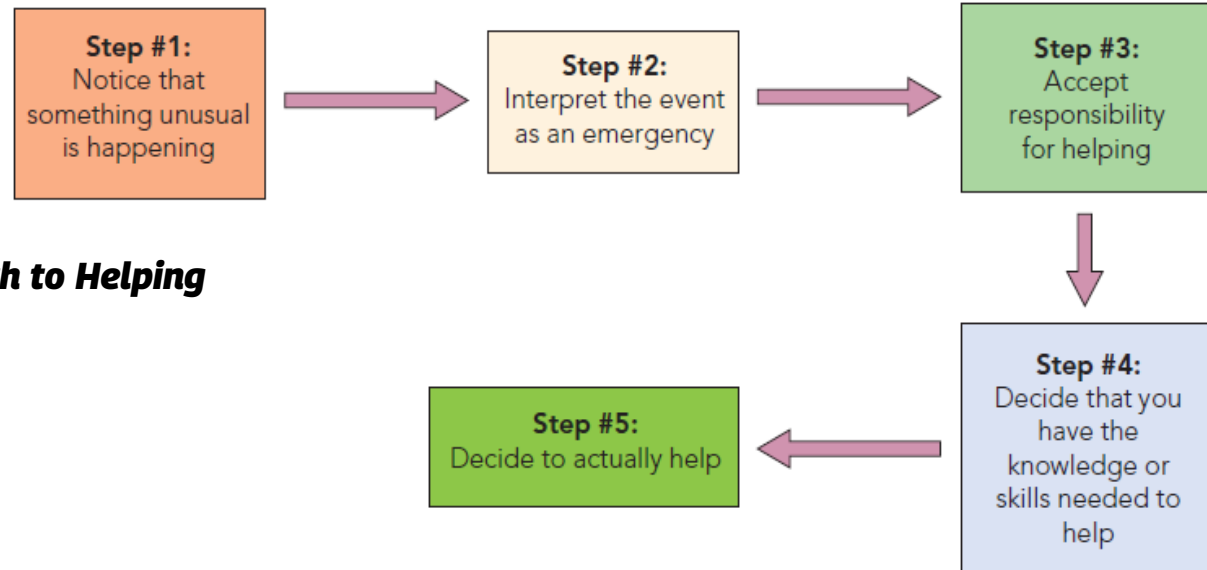
Response to emergencies: bystanders help

Findings suggest: *the presence of multiple witnesses may inhibit helping not only because of the diffusion of responsibility, but also because it is embarrassing to misinterpret a situation and to act inappropriately. Making such a serious mistake in front of several strangers might lead them to think you are overreacting in a stupid way. And when people are uncertain about what's happening they tend to hold back and do nothing.*

What are the decision-making factors/steps for a bystander to help or not:

- **Deciding that it is your responsibility to provide help:** If responsibility is not clear, people assume that anyone in a leadership role must take responsibility—for instance, adults with children, professors with students. When there is only one bystander, they usually takes charge because there is no alternative.

- **Deciding that you have the knowledge and/or skills to act:** Even if a bystander progresses as far as Step 3 and assumes responsibility, a prosocial response cannot occur unless the person knows how to be helpful.

- **Making the final decision to provide help:** Even if a bystander passes the first four steps in the decision process, help does not occur unless he or she makes the ultimate decision to engage in a helpful act. Helping at this final point can be inhibited by fears (often realistic ones) about potential negative consequences. So, here **PROSOCIAL MOTIVES** may work.

Response to emergencies: bystanders help

Step #1:
Notice that something unusual is happening

Step #2:
Interpret the event as an emergency

Step #3:
Accept responsibility for helping

Five Steps on the Path to Helping in Emergencies

Step #5:
Decide to actually help

Step #4:
Decide that you have the knowledge or skills needed to help

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding—a process in which entrepreneurs use the money contributed to set up and then run their companies. Since contributors will receive virtually nothing in return (perhaps a T-shirt or other small "reward" for their help), this is clearly a form of prosocial behavior—and one that has grown hugely in recent years.

Donation-based crowdfunding is a type of crowdfunding where individuals contribute money to a cause, project, or person without expecting anything in return. It is commonly used for:

- **Charity and Social Causes** (e.g., medical bills, disaster relief, education support)
- **Nonprofits and Community Projects**
- **Personal Fundraising** (e.g., helping someone in need)

Crowdfunding sites carefully screen the projects entrepreneurs submit, and include safeguards to insure that the people who request funds really use them for the purposes they describe.

The overall effects are very positive: Entrepreneurs acquire the funds they need to get started, and as you probably know, the companies they start often provide jobs and contribute to economic growth. **This form of prosocial behavior benefits not just the entrepreneurs, but their communities too.**