

**How do internal and external thought
processes influence conformity within
familiar and unfamiliar groups?**

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Introduction

This experiment examines the effects of conformity within relationships, and whether or not people retain their individuality when surrounded by unfamiliar persons. This will be achieved by analysing the internal thought process, and the external thought process, through the utilization of Rorschach's inkblot test (1927).

Section 1 - Review of Literature

a) Experimental Literature

Asche's 1950s Experiments

Experiments conducted in the 1950s by Solomon Asch aimed to demonstrate exactly to what degree an individual's opinions can be influenced by a majority opinion within a group.

Asche's study presented a group with a single sample, a picture of a line; the group was then shown a group of three differently-sized lines and asked to decide which they thought matched the sample. In groups of eight, with seven 'confederates', each unknowing participant would face three trials; in the first two, the confederates were instructed to unanimously give the correct answer in order to encourage conformation. The third trial, however, would see a unanimously (and quite obviously) incorrect answer, leaving the participant with the final choice of conforming and 'yielding' to the group, or maintaining individuality.

Results of the experiment revealed that around 75% of participants ultimately yielded to the group and gave the incorrect answer, meaning the remaining

quarter maintained their individual position over a clearly incorrect majority consensus.

Asche's experiment was effective within its own boundaries, but was also lacking in more in-depth variables; group size, communication method and confederate majority are not examined, which leaves several potential gaps in the research that can be looked at further (it must also be said that Asche later varied his experiments to explore many of these factors).

This research relates to our own study in that it provides a base on which to ground our examinations; as a pioneering study into conformity and cohesion, it provides relatively basic but reliable data over which we can supplant our own variations to better explore the effect of conformity within groups.

Crutchfield's 1962 experiment

Crutchfield extended Asche's work to look at some more specific variables, particularly concerning those to do with personality and more 'rational' influences; for example, like that within a group of family members or peers.

Ultimately, Crutchfield concluded that individual conformity is much more likely depending on the subject's opinions and relationships with the people with whom he is being surveyed; close relations or friends encouraged conformity through a perception of trust, similarly to figures of authority or those the subject respects highly. The latter conclusion was reached following a particular experiment utilising military personnel, extending the range to also include professional influences.

To the end of informing our own work, this study is effective in that it starts to explore additional variables that Asche's original experiment had not considered; most importantly looking at the correlation between strength of relationships within a group and likelihood of conformity. One drawback, however, is that the process of experimentation is quite different from that which we have decided to employ, which could affect how closely this data will inform our work.

Autokinetic Experiment - (Sherif, 1932)

Muzafer Sherif similarly investigated conformity within social groups by experimenting with the 'autokinetic' effect. In his experiment, subjects were placed in a dark room with a single small dot of light from a distance of 15 feet; asked to assess just how much the light moved, the experiment was essentially a visual illusion as the dot never actually moved. Every participant returned completely different data (as the judgement was made based on individual norms, given the illusion) but, over several trials, soon re-evaluated this to conclude a unanimous amount of movement; a clear depiction of the effect of group opinion against individualism and how group norms are wrought from the 'levelling-out' of individual norms until a compromise can be reached.

As with many visually-based social conformity experiments, Sherif's features similarities to ours and the others that have been reviewed; as such, they can be seen as a useful tool to evaluate and inform the validity of our research. How Sherif varies from ours, however, is that our experiment involves telling participants a distinctly 'wrong' answer, closer to Asche's methodology, rather

than allowing them to make judgements based on their individual perception on an uncertain target. In this sense, this experiment and the subsequent results may not be that effective for informing our research.

b) Theoretical Literature

Social Impact Theory - (Latane, 1981)

Social impact theory, formulated by Latane, proposes three basic rules that influence social decision making.

1. Social impact is the result of social factors including strength of message, time constrictions and how much information is being communicated
2. Social Impact tends to increase the greater the amount of information being communicated is, along with how many sources are communicating it.
3. The greater the number of targets that are impacted by this communication, the less impact is felt by individuals

According to the theory, these three parameters have a direct link to just how much influence a message will have on a subject in a social context.

Related to our study, this research would be relevant to how many confederates we would use in our groups. Strength of message does not hold much relevance, but the immediacy of the decision and the amount of confederates (in this context, 'sources') would be; the second rule, however, we would not examine as the number of confederates will not increase throughout the experiment. The third rule would suggest keeping the group sizes relatively small, and more so the participants within that group; reduction of the impact of

the confederate message would most likely cause any analysis on social conformity to be greatly reduced thus lowering the effectiveness and relevance of our study.

Social Exchange Theory - (Homans, 1960)

The social exchange theory purports that social interaction is essentially constructed by a series of negotiated exchanges, of both material and immaterial goods. This can be simplified to the equation of 'Worth = Rewards - Cost', which forms a very basic summary of the theory as a whole: people are most likely to make decisions based on what is most likely to benefit them to the greatest level, through monetary value, social acceptance or security of person amongst many other 'human' concerns.

This theory is relevant to our study as conformity and cohesion can be directly related to a desire to be accepted in social groups; individuals will, more often than not, try to align themselves with a majority opinion in order to solidify their position in a social context. In unison with Crutchfield's (1962) research, this summarises the key concepts of our research project- we are investigating how both familiarity of subjects and internal/external thought comparison affects conformity of opinion. As this theory, although itself generic, can be specified to any social situation in which an exchange of values or goods takes place, this theory could be very relevant in helping us contextualise the results we garner from our experiments.

'Groupthink'- (Janis, 1972)

Janis' 'groupthink' theory dictates that individuals are more likely to disregard any perceived flaws with a consensus if the greater majority of others within their group hold a shared, alternate opinion. Sharing similarities with concepts such as cognitive dissonance in that it reflects an alteration of ideology based on external influences, this theory is relevant in the sense that it again underlines the likelihood of subjects to choose an obviously incorrect opinion on what they are seeing rather than be considered outside of the 'norm' and potentially so rejected from the group. This theory is quite generalised, however, so placing too much emphasis on its importance would be short-sighted.

Section 2 – Methodology

This experiment will be conducted with a sample size of two groups consisting of five people. Group A's participants will be unfamiliar with one another, whilst Group B will be a group of friends. Each group will be shown two images of inkblots and they will then be asked to interpret the image. Firstly, they will be asked to write down this answer on paper, they will then be shown the second image, which will require them to share their answer aloud with the rest of the group. The two sets of results within each group will allow for a comparison with what they have independently written down and what they have shared aloud in front of the group. This will allow us to see whether group conformity affects the second set of results where the group have been shown the second picture. The second variable will allow us to see whether this group conformity varies

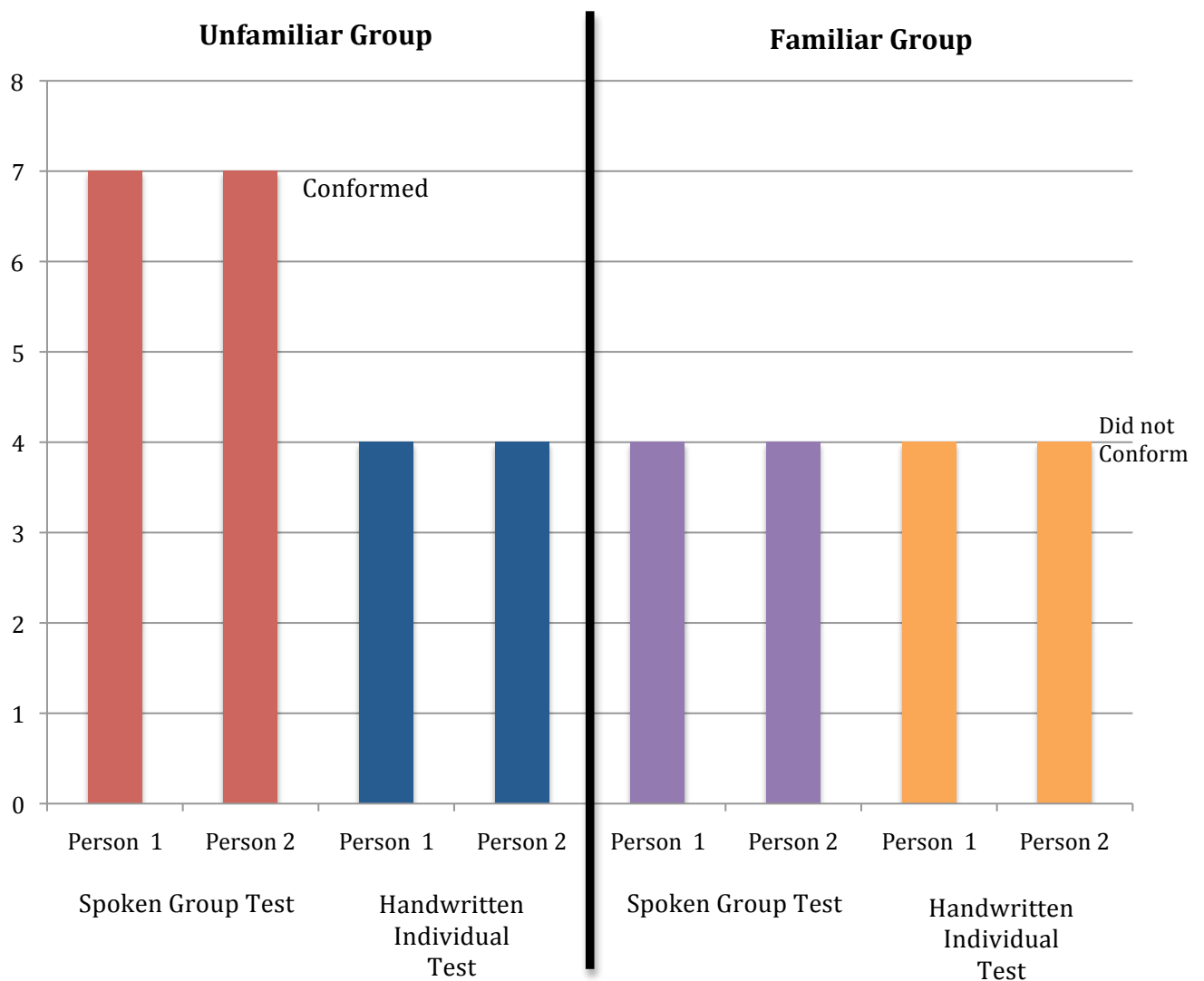
depending on whether the participants are familiar with one another. To test the conformity we will add three confederates to each group who will be aware of the true aim of this experiment. Prior to the experiment the confederates will have planned the answer they will be sharing aloud (they will all be sharing the same answer) in order to test whether the pattern of conformity with their answers will affect the other participants' answers.

It is hypothesised that the subjects will conform when speaking aloud, and will retain their individuality when writing down an answer. As inkblots are being used, there is clearly not an obvious answer to the question of, 'what do you see?' This will therefore examine whether the subjects conform to the other's way of thinking or allow themselves to speak freely and openly, in a similar method to that used by Sherif (1936). The expectation is that the group type will influence the decision making of the individual, for example one would presume that a person would be able to speak with an open mind when surrounded by friends, rather than being surrounded by a group of strangers. Therefore, the experiment is re-opening the methods used by Sherif, to see whether a person still relies on others when they are placed within an ambiguous situation.

Section 3 – Data Presentation and Analysis

a) Table and Graphs

Ink Blot Conformity Experiment Results				
Group Type	Handwritten Individual Test		Spoken Group Test	
	Person 1	Person 2	Person 1	Person 2
Unfamiliar	Did not conform	Did not conform	Conformed	Conformed
Familiar	Did not conform	Did not conform	Did not conform	Did not conform



b) Analysis

According to Allen (1965), “conformity pressure to a group norm may be induced by giving either descriptive information or injunctive information”. In order to reinforce the manipulation, we combined those two factors by using confederates who were told exactly what to say, prior to the experiment.

In the first phase, we established that individualism is a norm in which participants are expected to think independently and freely within a non-pressured environment. As a result, all of these answers were different and conflicted with one another. Moreover, the content, which people saw, gave valuable clues about “what is on their mind” and how they participate in isolated conditions.

In the second phase, we defined that collectivism is a norm where subjects are cooperating and exchanging ideas. They are expected to comply with the task and have respect of other opinions within the assigned group. The confederates played a big role here by influencing the others, leading to a mutual decision about the inkblot images.

Sheriff (1936) defines group norms as “customs, traditions, rules, values, fashions and any other criteria of conduct which are standardized as a consequence of contact with individuals.” According to the theorist, norms are patterns of behavioral functioning and interpretations. They signify the shared values, ideologies and viewpoints of a group community. In certain social situations, as well as individual ones, norms can easily regulate people’s behaviour and have impact upon specific work environments.

In high conformity conditions, like this one, our participants gave more descriptive data about the inkblots and were more inclined to change their opinions. They tried to be as collectivistic as possible whilst working together. Within 10 minutes of the group task, it appeared that the participants felt pressured to join in forming a mutual decision with a pattern of either similar or identical answers. After each member gave their opinion, they started excluding the most inadequate prepositions and started to focus on the rest. As a result, every participant managed to interpret the images in a similar way but it was acknowledged that this was only after hearing how the others decoded them.

According to Sherif (1936) it is “hypothesised that the group members will conform when speaking aloud and also maintain their individuality when writing down an answer.” In our experiment we used inkblots as this allowed for a variation in interpretations if the group chose not to conform- there cannot be an actual answer to the question “what do you see?” Our experimental approach, however, analyses whether participants conform to alternate ways of thinking or whether they follow their own instincts and senses. We used two group types and these were friends and strangers. The participants who took part in the experiment proved that group work might influence other people’s decisions. For instance a single person will be able to speak freely and openly when surrounded by friends, rather than in the company of strangers. We managed to apply Sherif’s approach (1936), to see whether an individual will rely on the other subjects when placed within an ambiguous situation.

When we asked group A to work together, we noticed that they began to conform to reach a mutual answer and their suggestions incrementally related to each other throughout the process. Friends were less likely to conform when working together as opposed to when unfamiliar participants were co operating and this led to a more inefficient environment within this unfamiliar context. Janis defines groupthink as “a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action” (1982, p.9). Groupthink, however, does not actually occur in routine situations, involving equivocal decisions, but it might increase when decision-makers are under pressure or in a highly complex environment. When feeling stressed, subjects spend more time talking about what to do and how to deal with the assigned task. Janis (1982, p.259) states that long conversations can be defined as “displaying collective uncritical thinking” and that under heated conditions, “members become highly dependent on the group”. In the case of the experiment conducted, his statement referring to heated conditions becomes relevant and provides reasoning for why they conformed to reach similar answers.

Section 4 – Conclusion

Our results suggest that conformity occurs within unfamiliar groups (group a) when the external thought process is being utilized. However, one finds that when the same thought process is being operated by a group of companions (group b), the pressure to conform is a lot less apparent. When group b was

asked to interpret the images, it was acknowledged that it was more in their nature to express their inner thoughts and feelings. According to Rorschach's technique (1927), the inkblots can be used as a way to examine the unconscious part of a person's mind. The participant feels more inclined to reveal this internal reflection when less pressure is placed upon them, juxtaposing this thought action, the group found that more pressure will prevent the said participant from revealing their beliefs or opinions.

When such thoughts are being prohibited, the subjects begin to think as one, Janis (1971) terms this effect as 'groupthink'. Contrasting this, our group discovered that familiar groups do not enter the 'groupthink' stage; one can therefore criticize Janis' theory, by the fact that she does not contain variables, such as relationships, which hugely affect the group's vulnerability for entering the 'groupthink' phase.

The experiment, whilst successful in creating conformity within unfamiliar groups, was hugely influenced by the environment, the collecting of the participants and the method we used on the groups. Firstly, the setting for the experiment was informal with distracting background activity occurring whilst the trial was being performed. Secondly, the people who took part in our test were gathered in a casual means, and were not fully onboard with the idea of contributing to a psychological test. Lastly, the method of using Rorschach's Inkblot test (1927), meant that there was no correct answer to the experiment. The answers given were dependant on one's individual view. These are some of

the issues that have arisen when examining the results of the trial, and are elements that can be improved upon in future experimentations.

To summarize, the pressure of being placed in an unfamiliar group setting, meant that the subjects were more liable to conform to the rest of the group. However, this only befalls upon the participants when using the external thought process. When one examines the effects of using the internal thought process, a juxtaposing event happens as the subjects do not conform with the rest of the group. When placed in a familiar setting, conformity does not occur both within the internal, and the external thought processes. Therefore, one can state that being placed in an unfamiliar group results in the need to conform to the rest of the said group, especially when they are openly expressing the inner thoughts, whereas familiar groups, feel open to express their beliefs whether using the internal or external thought process.

Section 5 – Appendix

a) Bibliography

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b) Attendance Sheet

Attendance Sheet		
Date	Members	Attended
29/10/12	Jonathan	Yes
	Miroslava	Yes
	Georgia	Yes
	Cameron	Yes
06/11/12	Jonathan	Yes
	Miroslava	Yes
	Georgia	Yes
	Cameron	Yes
08/11/12	Jonathan	Yes
	Miroslava	Yes
	Georgia	Yes
	Cameron	Yes
12/11/12	Jonathan	Yes
	Miroslava	Yes
	Georgia	Yes
	Cameron	Yes
13/11/12	Jonathan	Yes
	Miroslava	Yes
	Georgia	Yes
	Cameron	Yes
19/11/12	Jonathan	Yes
	Miroslava	Yes
	Georgia	No
	Cameron	Yes
20/11/12	Jonathan	Yes
	Miroslava	Yes
	Georgia	Yes
	Cameron	No
22/11/12	Jonathan	Yes
	Miroslava	Yes
	Georgia	Yes
	Cameron	No

c) Inkblots

