

The Implicit Desire of Conformity

Eugene Kolesnikov

Abstract—The purpose of this research is to confirm the results of the Asch's experiment. We have conducted an improved Asch's experiment in the Kaplan's English School in Los Angeles and Asch's hypothesis was totally confirmed. Despite their own opinion, people don't want to stand out, so they accept the opinion of a group or an authority figure even if this opinion is going against their own beliefs.

1 INTRODUCTION

People are highly susceptible to different trends: fashion trends, market trends, trends in political and economical views. Why do people prefer Apple products when most of the people use only those functions which are available in a lot of other devices from all other companies? Why do people eventually change the style of their clothes saying that it's out of fashion? People are conforming to the opinion of the majority of the population even in political and economic views without trying to understand if their opinions are right. Why do they behave in a such way? There is a proverb in Russia that says "If you repeat the same lie one thousand times, then you will eventually believe in this lie". Fascinated by this topic, many scientists all over the world studied human behavior in groups or in different situations. A pioneer in that field is Solomon Asch, a Polish psychologist and pioneer in social psychology in the United States whose experiments in social psychology revealed extraordinary findings and motivated further research on conformity. In our improved variation of Asch's experiment we take into consideration two additional variables: the level of English and culture.

2 HISTORY

Since the 19th century, the act of matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to group norms has been of high interest to psychologists.

- Eugene Kolesnikov,
E-mail: eugene.kolesnikov.95@gmail.com

Solomon Asch conducted one of the most famous experiments. His experiment was intended to find out if people would conform to the opinion of the group or an authority figure even if this opinion went against their own beliefs. In his experiment students were asked

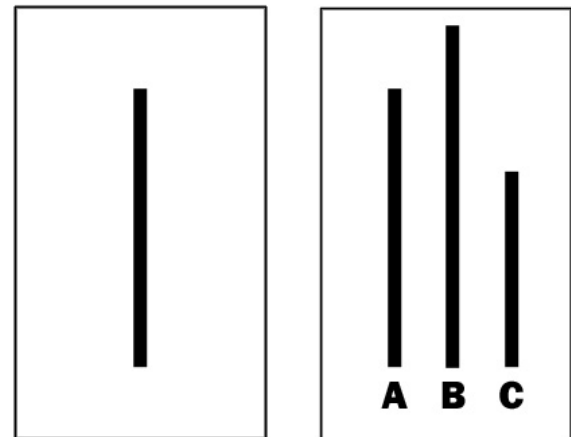


Figure 1. Two cards in Asch's experiment

to complete a visual perception test sitting with seven other students in the same room. But in reality there was only one participant and seven confederates in each room who were instructed what answers they should give. The actual purpose of the experiment had not been told to the real participants. The experimenter informed them that they will be comparing the lengths of lines. He showed them two large white cards. On one was a single vertical black line which length is to be matched. On the other card were three vertical lines of various

lengths. A particular example of these two cards can be seen in (Figure 1). The subjects were to choose the one that was of the same length as the line on the other card. One of the three actually was of the same length; the other two were substantially different. Students gave their answers in the order in which they had been seated in the room. In the first round every person chose the matching line. But after a few rounds every student except the actual participant started giving the same wrong answer. Even though participants clearly knew the right answer, nearly 75% of them conformed to the group's opinion at least once and 25% of the participants never conformed. Up to 33% of all answers conformed to the group's opinion. More information about Asch's experiment and his results can be found in [1].

3 KAPLAN'S EXPERIMENT

Asch's experiment has been repeated a lot of times with different amendments since the original experiment was conducted in order to verify results or receive additional data. We repeated the original Asch's experiment in August 2015 at the Kaplan's English School in Los Angeles. Like in the original experiment we asked participants to complete a visual perception test sitting with seven confederates in the same room. Seven confederates were from the advanced group where students had a very good level of English. On the other hand the participants were from groups with a lower English speaking level: the "intermediate" and "upper intermediate" where people had some difficulties either with the understanding of some not commonly used words or with expressing their own thoughts.

The participants were of different sex and culture, all of them belonged to the same age group though. Students whom we tested were from Brazil, Italy, Germany, Denmark, Japan and South Korea.

In our version of the experiment we slightly modified the original experiment. If a person didn't conform to the group's opinion our instructor suggested him or her personally to change the opinion due to the fact that all the others gave another answer. Here we can

see a straight relation to the experiment of the American social psychologist Stanley Milgram [2]. The main purpose of this modification is to obtain the information about conformity to the opinion of the authority figure.

4 ANALYSIS

We took into consideration two additional variables: the level of English and culture. So the goal of Kaplan's version of Asch's experiment was to find out if a student's cultural background or level of English could influence the tendency to conform to a group's opinion or instructor's opinion.

When the participants were interviewed after the experiment, most of them told that they conformed because they thought that they didn't understand the task correctly and conformed to the group's opinion due to the widespread belief that almost always a group of people behaves more rational than an individual. So, repeating the "correct" group's opinion they thought that no one would find out that they didn't understand the task. Another common cause which led to a conformity was the difficulty with expressing thoughts in a foreign language. Some participants didn't feel comfortable arguing with the whole group and the instructor and therefore these participants decided to conform to the group's opinion.

5 CONCLUSION

Having conducted this experiment we obtained a very interesting result. It turned out that for the vast majority of the participants the most difficult part was to conform to the group's opinion for the first time. Once a participant conformed to the group's opinion, it becomes easier to conform and at the end of the experiment the participant conforms to the group's opinion with no mental doubt.

Even if a person had enough confidence to go against the whole group it didn't mean that the person was able to argue with the authority who in our case was the instructor. The experiment showed that people who had enough strength to argue with the instructor were not as much confident as stubborn.

As a result, almost all participants conformed to the opinion of the instructor.

Further analysis of the data gained from the experiment showed that the key parameter in the students' conformity was the level of English. The cultural variable played almost no role in the experiment since all young people nowadays use social networks like Facebook and Instagram which leads to the elimination of most differences between international students' mentalities.

REFERENCES

- [1] S. E. Asch, "Opinions and Social Pressure," *Scientific American*, pp. 31–35, November 1955.
- [2] S. Milgram, "Behavioral study of obedience," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, vol. 67, pp. 371–378, 1963.