CHAPTER 7

Conformity

OUTLINE
I. Putting Common Sense to the Test
II. Social Influence as “Automatic”
   A. The Early Classics
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   C. Majority Influence
   D. Minority Influence
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   A. Milgram’s Research: Forces of Destructive Obedience
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   C. Defiance: When People Rebel
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   A. Social Impact Theory
   B. Perspectives on Human Nature
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VII. Key Terms

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: GUIDELINES FOR STUDY
You should be able to do each of the following by the conclusion of Chapter 7.

1. Explain the process and purposes of mimicry. Discuss the implications of mimicry for questions concerning the automaticity of social influence. (pp. 222-224)
2. Define, compare, and contrast conformity, compliance, and obedience. (pp. 224-226)
3. Compare normative and informational influence. Explain each in the context of Sherif’s and Asch’s studies, and in relation to public and private conformity. (pp. 226-229)
4. Discuss the relationship between research on ostracism and the concept of conformity. (pp. 226-229)
5. Identify and explain each of the factors that have been shown to predict levels of conformity, including group size, awareness of norms, having an ally, age, and gender. Explain the relationship between culture and conformity. (pp. 229-236)
6. Differentiate between majority and minority influence. Explain how to account for the effects of minority influence, and how majorities and minorities exert pressure to affect people’s behavior. (pp. 229-236)
7. Describe the ways in which the discourse of making requests affects compliance with reference to mindlessness. Explain the role of the norm of reciprocity in such efforts to elicit compliance. (pp. 236-238)

8. Define and explain the sequential request strategies known as the foot-in-the-door technique, low-balling, the door-in-the-face technique, and the that’s-not-all technique. Explain why each works. Address strategies for resisting these strategies. (pp. 238-242)

9. Describe the procedures used in Milgram’s research on obedience to authority. Compare the predictions made about how participants would behave to what actually happened. Summarize how each of the following predicted levels of obedience in the study: participant characteristics (e.g., gender, personality), authority figure characteristics (e.g., prestige, presence), and proximity of victim. (pp. 243-248)

10. Consider the applicability of the Milgram findings to real-world events such as the Holocaust. (pp. 248-249)

11. Compare the findings of Milgram to more recent studies of obedience by Meeus and Raaijmakers (1995) and Gamson et al. (1982). Explain the similarities and differences in the procedures and findings of these studies compared to those of the Milgram study. (pp. 249-250)

12. Summarize social impact theory. Identify the factors that influence a source’s strength, immediacy, and number, and the aspects of the target that facilitate resistance. Explain the relevance of this theory to conformity, compliance, and obedience. (pp. 250-253)

MAJOR CONCEPTS: THE BIG PICTURE

Below are four basic issues or principles that organize Chapter 7. You should know these issues and principles well.

1. Conformity is the tendency for people to change their behavior to be consistent with group norms. Sherif and Asch conducted two classic studies that illustrate different types of influence and conformity, including informational influence, normative influence, private conformity, and public conformity. A number of situational factors affect majority influence, and a number of other factors affect minority influence. Majorities and minorities may exert different kinds of pressure and elicit different types of conformity. Resistance to conformity is enhanced by having allies in dissent. Cultural influences are important factors in the understanding of both conformity and independence.

2. In conformity situations, people follow implicit group norms; but in compliance situations, people are influenced by direct explicit requests. The style of a request may affect the likelihood that someone will comply with the request even if its content is not very reasonable. People are more likely to comply when they feel indebted to a requester. A number of sequential request strategies can effectively trap people into compliance. Compliance techniques are more likely to work if they are subtle and if people are not vigilant.

3. In contrast to situations eliciting compliance, if the request is a command and the requester is (or seems to be) a figure of authority, the resulting social influence is obedience. Milgram's research on the forces of destructive obedience demonstrated dramatically how susceptible people are to obedience to authority, and how a number of situational factors can increase or decrease the chances that people will obey an authority’s command to harm another human being. Milgram’s original research continues to hold in the twenty-first century. Just as processes of social influence breed obedience, they can also support acts of defiance against authority.

4. Social influence situations vary in their impact on people. Social Impact Theory maintains that three factors—strength, immediacy, and number—affect the impact of a social influence situation.
Strength refers to the power that the influence source has over those being influenced. Immediacy refers to the proximity in time and space between the influence source and the target of influence; the closer the source, the greater its impact. And finally, number refers to the number of influence sources; the larger the number of sources, the greater their impact—at least up to a point.

**KEY TERM EXERCISE: THE CONCEPTS YOU SHOULD KNOW**

Below are all of the key terms that appear in **boldface** in Chapter 7. To help you better understand these concepts, rather than just memorize them, write a definition for each term in your own words. After doing so, look at the next section where you’ll find a list of definitions from the textbook for each of the key terms presented in random order. For each of your definitions, find the corresponding textbook definition. Note how your definitions compare with those from the textbook.

**Key Terms**

1. individualism
2. that’s-not-all technique
3. conformity
4. foot-in-the-door technique
5. idiosyncrasy credits
6. private conformity
7. collectivism
8. compliance
9. normative influence
10. low-balling
11. public conformity
12. social impact theory
13. door-in-the-face technique
14. obedience
15. informational influence
16. minority influence

**Textbook Definitions**

a. Tendency to change perceptions, opinions, or behavior in ways that are consistent with group norms.

b. Influence that produces conformity because a person believes others are correct in their judgments.

c. Influence that produces conformity because a person fears the negative social consequences of appearing deviant.

d. Change of mind that occurs when a person privately accepts the position taken by others.
e. A superficial change in observable behavior, without a corresponding change of opinion, produced by real or imagined group pressure.

f. A cultural orientation in which independence, autonomy, and self-reliance take priority over group allegiances.

g. A cultural orientation in which interdependence, cooperation, and social harmony take priority over purely personal goals.

h. Interpersonal “credits” a person earns by following group norms.

i. Changes in behavior that are elicited by direct requests.

j. A two-step compliance technique in which an influencer sets the stage for the real request by first getting a person to comply with a much smaller one.

k. A two-step compliance technique in which the influencer secures agreement with a request but then increases the size of that request by revealing hidden costs.

l. A two-step compliance technique in which an influencer prefaces the real request with one so large that it is sure to be rejected.

m. A two-step compliance technique in which the influencer begins with an inflated request, then immediately decreases its apparent size by offering a discount or bonus.

n. The process by which dissenters produce change within a group.

o. Behavior change produced by the commands of authority.

p. Theory that social influence depends on the strength, immediacy, and number of source persons relative to target persons.
ANSWERS FOR KEY TERM EXERCISE

Answers for the key terms exercise are listed below.

1. f
2. m
3. a
4. j
5. h
6. d
7. g
8. i
9. c
10. k
11. e
12. p
13. l
14. o
15. b
16. n
Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Jane conducts a new experiment based on Milgram’s study of destructive obedience. She manipulates the number of authorities and participants present in the room. She finds that when there are three people in authority present all giving similar commands to one participant, obedience rates are extremely high. However, when there are several participants and only one person in authority giving orders, obedience rates are quite low. These findings are most consistent with
   a. research findings on informational influence.
   b. social impact theory.
   c. the two-step compliance technique.
   d. reciprocation ideology.

2. Which of the following people is least likely to conform to group pressure?
   a. An adolescent in eighth grade
   b. A person from an individualistic culture
   c. A person from a collectivistic culture
   d. A person whose attention has been drawn to the group norm

3. Before registering for class, Susan asks her friends about a professor. They all say the professor is a great teacher. Not knowing the professor, Susan therefore comes to believe that he is a great teacher and looks forward to taking his class. This illustrates
   a. reciprocal concessions.
   b. perceptual contrast.
   c. informational influence.
   d. public conformity.

4. Although they are distinct techniques, the foot-in-the-door, door-in-the-face, low-balling, and that’s-not-all techniques are similar in that they all involve
   a. starting with a small request and subsequently raising the costs.
   b. normative influence.
   c. two steps.
   d. the norm of reciprocity.

5. Joanie asked an acquaintance named Chachi if he would do a small favor for her. After he agreed and did the small favor, Joanie then asked him to do an even larger favor for her. This scenario describes
   a. the foot-in-the-door technique.
   b. reciprocal concessions.
   c. low-balling.
   d. minority influence.

6. Hector’s friends all say a recent test was difficult. Hector thinks the test was easy. When asked what he thought, Hector agrees with his friends. This outcome illustrates
   a. normative influence.
   b. private conformity.
   c. reciprocity norms.
   d. obedience.
7. A dozen participants were gathered into a group. An authority figure approached the group and ordered the group to do something most of the participants thought was morally wrong. The group defied the authority, refusing to obey. According to social impact theory, a factor likely to have helped the group defy the authority is that the
   a. social impact of the authority was divided among the dozen targets.
   b. source of the social influence was not immediate.
   c. situation created normative influence rather than informational influence.
   d. situation was ambiguous.

8. Which of the following people should be least likely to conform to a unanimous majority in a situation similar to that faced by the participants in Asch's study concerning line judgments?
   a. Jeff, who is not confident about his eyesight
   b. Shari-Beth, who made her responses in public
   c. Jacob, who comes from a collectivistic culture
   d. Benjamin, who saw someone else dissent

9. When Milgram exposed participants to an authority who demanded that they harm another person by administering electric shocks of up to 450 volts to him, he initially found that the percentage of participants who obeyed the authority's orders to administer all of these shocks was
   a. 0.1 percent.
   b. 10 percent among the male participants and 50 percent among the female participants.
   c. 65 percent.
   d. more than 97 percent.

10. Karen needs to type a term paper. To persuade her roommate to let Karen use her computer, Karen first lends her some notes that the roommate needs and then asks if she can use her computer. Karen is using the
   a. social impact theory.
   b. that's-not-all technique.
   c. low-balling technique.
   d. norm of reciprocity.

11. Although neither group makes any explicit requests or demands of her, Sheetal expresses pro-conservative opinions when she is with her conservative friends and she expresses anti-conservative opinions when she is with her liberal friends. Sheetal's actions best illustrate
   a. compliance.
   b. individualism.
   c. conformity.
   d. obedience.

12. A majority is more likely to be persuaded to change its views if the dissenting minority
   a. has accumulated idiosyncrasy credits.
   b. seems very obstinate and unusual.
   c. keeps changing back and forth from conforming to dissenting.
   d. is perceived as an outgroup.

13. Which of the following is most accurate concerning gender differences in levels of conformity?
   a. Across situations, men are reliably more likely than women to conform to a group norm.
   b. Across situations, women are reliably more likely than men to conform to a group norm.
   c. When they think they are being observed, women conform more and men conform less than they do in more private situations.
   d. There is no evidence of gender differences in levels of conformity.
14. Sherif conducted a study in which participants in totally darkened rooms estimated how far a dot of light appeared to move. Asch conducted a study in which participants were asked to report which of three lines was identical in length to a standard line. Compared to the participants in Sherif’s study, those in Asch’s study exhibited more
   a. vulnerability to informational influence.
   b. private conformity.
   c. obedience.
   d. public conformity.

15. Though in the minority and new to the Senate, a group of senators argued consistently, persuasively, and successfully against a particular bill. Most of the other senators eventually agreed with them that the bill should not be approved. In this example, the first group of senators derived their power to influence from their
   a. idiosyncrasy credits.
   b. style of behavior.
   c. sheer number.
   d. reciprocation ideology.

16. Keana hopes that Naomi will pledge $5 and sign a petition in support of a community center. Keana first asks Naomi if she’d be willing to pledge $50 in support of a proposed community center. Naomi politely declines. Keana then asks Naomi if she’d be willing to pledge $5 and sign a petition in support of the community center. Naomi complies. Keana’s ability to get Naomi to pledge $5 and sign the petition is likely to have been enhanced by Keana’s use of the
   a. foot-in-the-door technique.
   b. low-balling technique.
   c. door-in-the-face technique.
   d. that’s-not-all technique.

17. Oscar was walking in a relatively clean parking lot. Walking a few feet in front of him was a man named Felix. Oscar observed Felix stop to pick up and throw into a garbage can some litter that someone had thrown on the ground. Having seen Felix do this, Oscar, who was just about to throw his gum wrapper on the ground, stopped himself from doing this and instead threw the wrapper into the garbage can. Oscar was influenced by Felix’s behavior because it
   a. made Oscar more aware of injunctive norms.
   b. elicited obedience in Oscar.
   c. made Oscar exhibit reciprocal concessions.
   d. was a sequential strategy.

18. Bickman and his colleagues had a stranger (actually a confederate) approach people on the street and order them to do something. People were most willing to comply with these orders when the
   a. stranger watched them closely.
   b. stranger was dressed in a uniform.
   c. the initial command was extreme and a subsequent one was smaller.
   d. participants were not authoritarian.

19. In which of the following situations is Matthew most likely to exhibit private conformity?
   a. Matthew is sure of the proper way to behave, but he is faced with a very large group that is behaving in a very different way.
   b. Matthew is not at all sure of the proper way to behave, and he is in the presence of three other people who are confident that their behavior is correct.
   c. Matthew is sure of the proper way to behave, but he is faced with a small but unanimous group that is behaving in a very different way.
   d. Matthew is commanded by an authority to behave in a particular way.
20. By their willingness to maintain independence from the majority, people in the minority force other group members to
   a. publicly, but not privately, conform.
   b. respond with informational influence.
   c. issue idiosyncrasy credits to them.
   d. think carefully about a problem.

21. A cultural orientation in which independence, autonomy, and self-reliance take priority over group allegiances best describes
   a. individualism.
   b. collectivism.
   c. public conformity.
   d. private conformity.

22. The tendency to change our perception, opinions, or behavior in ways that are consistent with group norms best describes
   a. conformity.
   b. minority influence.
   c. compliance.
   d. idiosyncrasy credit.

Essay Questions

23. Sherif conducted a study in which participants in totally darkened rooms estimated how far a dot of light appeared to move. Asch conducted a study in which participants were asked to report which of three lines was identical in length to a standard line. Was the conformity found in Sherif’s study private conformity, public conformity, or both? Was the conformity found in Asch’s study private conformity, public conformity, or both? How can one tell the difference? Explain your answers.

24. Summarize the door-in-the-face technique. Give two reasons why this is such an effective strategy for eliciting compliance.

25. Summarize the ways in which Milgram varied the authority in different conditions of his research on destructive obedience. How did these variations affect the levels of obedience observed?

26. What determines whether a culture becomes individualistic or collectivistic?
ANSWERS TO THE PRACTICE QUIZ

Multiple-Choice Questions: Correct Answers and Explanations

1. b. **social impact theory.** Social impact theory holds that social influence depends on the strength, immediacy, and number of source persons relative to target persons. In Jane’s study, the levels of obedience are affected by the number of source persons relative to target persons. Informational influence produces conformity because a person believes others are correct in their judgments. There is no evidence that the participants would have this belief; in addition, Jane’s study is about obedience to commands rather than conformity to a group norm. There is no single (i.e., “the”) two-step compliance technique but rather several, including the foot-in-the-door and the door-in-the-face techniques. These concern eliciting compliance to a request rather than obedience to an authority; moreover, there is nothing in this question about a technique involving two steps. A person’s reciprocation ideology refers to his or her individual motives in using the norm of reciprocity; this is not relevant here.

2. b. **A person from an individualistic culture.** An individualistic culture is one that values independence, autonomy, and self-reliance over group allegiances. People from such a culture are more likely to exert their independence and autonomy over group allegiances and hence to resist conformity than are people from a collectivistic culture, which is one that values interdependence, cooperation, and social harmony over purely personal goals. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure, so an adolescent in eighth grade is relatively likely to conform to group pressure. And making people aware of a group norm increases the likelihood that they will conform to the group norm.

3. c. **informational influence.** Informational influence is influence that produces conformity because a person believes others are correct in their judgments. Faced with a clear consensus among her friends, and not having had any opportunity to form her own opinion about the professor, Susan reasonably assumes that her friends’ judgments are valid, hence, she adopts their opinion. The notion of reciprocal concessions refers to the pressure to respond to changes in a bargaining position; there is no bargaining going on in this example. In the context of social influence, perceptual contrast refers to the tendency to perceive a request as smaller if it was preceded by a larger request than if it was not; this is not relevant in this example. Public conformity is a superficial change in observable behavior, without a corresponding change of opinion, produced by real or imagined group pressure, but there is no evidence that Susan was responding to real or imagined group pressure, and in any case Susan’s opinion did change.

4. c. **two steps.** All of these techniques involve a two-step, sequential trap. In the foot-in-the-door technique, the influencer first gets a person to comply with a relatively small request, and next makes a much larger request. The door-in-the-face technique involves the opposite sequence: first a large request (one so large that it is likely to be rejected), followed by a much smaller request. In low-balling, the influencer first secures an agreement, and next changes the agreement by revealing hidden costs. In the that’s-not-all technique, the influencer first begins with an inflated request, then immediately decreases the apparent size of that request by offering a discount or bonus. Thus, each of these techniques involves two steps. As is particularly evident in the door-in-the-face technique, they do not all start with a small request and subsequently raise the costs. Normative influence, which is influence that produces conformity because a person fears the negative social consequences of appearing deviant, is not relevant here because these techniques do not involve groups (against which one could appear deviant) or conformity. And finally, the norm of reciprocity dictates that we should treat others as they treat us, but this is not
relevant in the foot-in-the-door technique, in which the influencer does not do anything that would make the person feel the need to reciprocate.

5. a. **the foot-in-the-door technique.** The foot-in-the-door technique is a two-step compliance technique in which an influencer prefaces the real request by first getting a person to comply with a much smaller one; this is what is described in this example. Reciprocal concessions refer to changes one makes in a bargaining position to reciprocate the opposing side’s changes in their bargaining position; there is no bargaining going on in this example. Low-balling is a two-step compliance technique in which the influencer secures agreement with a request but then increases the size of that request by revealing hidden costs. In this example, Joanie did not change an already secured agreement by revealing extra costs; rather, she secured an agreement, and then made a separate request that did not change the original agreement. Finally, minority influence is the process by which dissenters produce change within a group. There is no issue between a group and some dissenter(s) in this question.

6. a. **normative influence.** Normative influence is influence that produces conformity because a person fears the negative social consequences of appearing deviant. Hector’s behavior is consistent with this influence; rather than stand out from his friends, Hector decides to agree with them even though he had a different opinion. Because Hector’s personal opinion was that the test was easy, there is no evidence of private conformity, which refers to a change of mind that occurs when a person privately accepts the position taken by others. The reciprocity norm dictates that we should treat others as they treat us; but there is no evidence that Hector was reciprocating for a previous favor or for previous conformity on the part of his friends. Finally, obedience is behavior change produced by the commands of authority; but Hector was not commanded by an authority.

7. a. **social impact of the authority was divided among the dozen targets.** Social impact theory maintains that social influence depends on the strength, immediacy, and number of source persons relative to target persons. According to this theory, resistance to the social influence is more likely to occur to the extent that the social impact of the source (in this case, the authority figure) is divided among many targets (in this case, the dozen participants). In this example, the source of the social influence was immediate; the authority was described as having *approached* the group to give the order. Normative influence is influence that produces conformity because a person fears the negative social consequences of appearing deviant; but there is no evidence that this was a factor in this example. Indeed, the fear of appearing deviant might have prevented anyone from starting the resistance against the authority in the first place. The situation did not seem to have been ambiguous—most of the participants thought that the order they had received was morally wrong. Moreover, they probably would have been more likely to obey if the situation were ambiguous because they’d have had little reason to defy the command.

8. d. **Benjamin, who saw someone else dissent.** The research of Asch and of others has shown that having an ally in dissent can break the spell cast by a unanimous majority and reduce the normative pressure to conform. Jeff, who is not confident in his eyesight, is vulnerable not only to normative influence in this study but also to informational influence because he would not be sure what the correct answers are. Thus, Jeff would be especially likely to conform. Because the conformity typically elicited in the situation faced by Asch’s participants is public conformity, Shari-Beth would be likely to publicly conform. Finally, since collectivist cultures value interdependence, cooperation, and social harmony over purely personal goals, Jacob, who is from such a culture, would be more likely to conform in order to cooperate and preserve social harmony with the group.
9. c. **65 percent.** Although psychiatrists who were told about Milgram's experimental procedure predicted that only about 0.1 percent of participants would obey through the maximum level of shock, 65 percent of the participants did so all the way to 450 volts. This was true of both male and female participants.

10. d. **norm of reciprocity.** The norm of reciprocity dictates that we should treat others as they treat us. Karen apparently assumes that if she does her roommate a favor, then her roommate will feel obligated to return the favor later. Social impact theory maintains that social influence depends on the strength, immediacy, and number of source persons relative to target persons, but Karen has not manipulated any of these factors, so this theory is not relevant here. The that's-not-all technique is a two-step compliance technique in which the influencer begins with an inflated request, then immediately decreases the apparent size of that request by offering a discount or bonus, but Karen has not offered a discount or bonus. The low-balling technique is a two-step compliance technique in which the influencer secures agreement with a request but then increases the size of that request by revealing hidden costs, but Karen has not increased the size of her request in any way.

11. c. **conformity.** Conformity is the tendency to change perceptions, opinions, or behavior in ways that are consistent with group norms. In this example, the norm (pro- versus anti-conservative) varies among Sheetal’s friends, and she changes her opinions to be consistent with the norm of each friendship group. Compliance refers to changes in behavior that are elicited by direct requests, but in this example, Sheetal was not requested to act in a particular way. Individualism is a cultural orientation in which independence, autonomy, and self-reliance take priority over group allegiances, but this is not relevant in this example. And obedience is behavior change produced by the commands of authority, but Sheetal was not commanded by an authority to change her opinions.

12. a. **has accumulated idiosyncrasy credits.** Idiosyncrasy credits are interpersonal “credits” a person earns by following group norms. Research has shown that by first conforming and then dissenting, minorities may be effective in influencing the majority. Minorities are less effective if they seem very obstinate or unusual, do not appear to be sure of themselves because they keep changing back and forth from conforming to dissenting, or are perceived as an outgroup.

13. c. **When they think they are being observed, women conform more and men conform less than they do in more private situations.** This is one of the few reliable sex differences reported in the literature.

14. d. **public conformity.** Public conformity is a superficial change in observable behavior, without a corresponding change of opinion, produced by real or imagined group pressure. Because the correct answers in Asch’s study were so obvious, the participants’ conformity reflected the desire to seem to agree with the majority, privately, they knew the correct answers. Because the correct answers were obvious to them, the participants in Asch’s study were protected from informational influence, which is influence that produces conformity because a person believes others are correct in their judgments. In contrast, Sherif’s participants were not at all sure what the correct answers were, so they looked to the other participants to provide them with information about these answers. Thus vulnerable to informational influence, the participants in Sherif’s study exhibited private conformity, which is a change of mind that occurs when a person privately accepts the position taken by others, but Asch’s participants did not privately accept the position taken by the others. Obedience is a behavior change produced by the commands of authority, but there were no commands given by an authority in either of these two studies.
15. b. **style of behavior.** According to Moscovici, people in the *majority* derive social influence power by virtue of their sheer number and inherent power, but people in the *minority* derive social influence power from the style of their behavior. These senators, who were in the minority, argued in a consistent and persuasive style. Idiosyncrasy credits are interpersonal “credits” a person earns by following group norms, but there is no evidence that these senators had any such credits or that they had followed group norms; indeed, because they were new to the Senate, they probably hadn’t had time to earn any idiosyncrasy credits, and they certainly were not earning any by arguing consistently against the majority in this example. A person’s reciprocation ideology refers to his or her individual motives in the use of the norm of reciprocity; but this is not relevant here because no mention is made either of the senators’ motives or attitudes about this norm or of any behaviors that the senators might want to reciprocate.

16. c. **door-in-the-face technique.** All of the possible answers to this question are two-step compliance techniques. It is important to recognize the differences among them. In the door-in-the-face technique, an influencer prefaces the real request with one so large that it is sure to be rejected. This is the technique described here—by preacing the request to pledge $5 and sign a petition with a request for a much larger pledge, Keana increased the chances that Naomi would comply with the smaller, second request. In contrast, in the foot-in-the-door technique an influencer prefaces the real request by first getting a person to comply with a much smaller one; this is the opposite of what transpired in this example. In the technique of low-balling, the influencer secures agreement with a request but then increases the size of that request by revealing hidden costs; Keana did not secure an agreement first and then reveal hidden costs. And finally in the that’s-not-all technique, the influencer begins with an inflated request, then immediately decreases the apparent size of that request by offering a discount or bonus. Keana did not immediately decrease the apparent size of her request by offering a discount or bonus; rather, she first made one request, which was rejected, and then made a different, smaller request.

17. a. **made Oscar more aware of injunctive norms.** Injunctive norms specify how people in general *should* behave; for example, they should clean up litter. Research by Cialdini and others has shown that making people aware of group or situational norms increases the likelihood that they will be influenced by these norms. Because no authority commanded anyone in this example, there was no evidence of obedience, which is a behavior change produced by the commands of authority. The notion of reciprocal concessions refers to the pressure to respond to changes in a bargaining position; but there was no bargaining going on in this example. And finally, although several compliance techniques involve a sequential strategy, in which two or more related requests are made in a sequence, no such requests were made in this example.

18. b. **stranger was dressed in a uniform.** The presence of a uniform suggests authority. Even when those authorities are not very powerful, they can elicit obedience. Bickman found that obedience levels were high even when the stranger gave the order and then turned the corner, not waiting to see if the orders had been followed. In this study, the stranger did not make an initial extreme command followed by a subsequent, smaller command, nor did this study measure how authoritarian (a personality dimension characterized by attitudes and behaviors concerning authority, rigidity, dissent, ethnocentrism, etc.) the participants were.

19. b. **Matthew is not at all sure of the proper way to behave, and he is in the presence of three other people who are confident that their behavior is correct.** Private conformity is most likely to occur when there is no obviously correct or incorrect opinion. Because it is not clear to Matthew what the correct or incorrect opinion is, he is vulnerable to private conformity, particularly because the confidence of the other people should make their opinion a source of informational influence for him. If Matthew were sure of the proper way to behave, he would have been less likely to exhibit private conformity. The presence of a large group, or of a small
but unanimous group, that was behaving in a very different way would increase the chances of public conformity, but Matthew’s confidence would leave him less vulnerable to private conformity. If Matthew were commanded by an authority, he might exhibit obedience, which is a behavior change produced by the commands of authority, but he would not exhibit private conformity.

20. d. Think carefully about a problem. When faced with a persistent minority, majorities often think about a problem more carefully than they would otherwise. As a result, the overall quality or creativity of group decisions is enhanced. Minority influence is more likely to lead to private, rather than public, conformity. Minorities are not particularly likely to cause other group members to respond with informational influence, which is influence that produces conformity because a person believes others are correct in their judgments; instead, the group members are likely to apply their sheer number and power and use normative influence. Idiosyncrasy credits are interpersonal “credits” a person earns by following group norms, but minorities are not in a position of power to “issue” credits to the rest of the group. Indeed, by going against the majority, the minorities are acting in a way that should cost them idiosyncrasy credits.

21. a. Individualism. There are different cultural orientations toward persons and their relationships to groups. Some cultures primarily value individualism and the virtues of independence, autonomy, and self-reliance, while others value collectivism and the virtues of interdependence, cooperation, and social harmony. Under the banner of individualism, personal goals take priority over group allegiances. Yet in collectivistic cultures, the person is first and foremost a loyal member of a family, team, company, church, and state.

22. a. Conformity. When social psychologists talk of conformity, they specifically refer to the tendency of people to change their perceptions, opinions, and behavior in ways that are consistent with group norms.

Answers to Essay Questions: Sample Essays

23. Private conformity is a change of mind that occurs when a person privately accepts the position taken by others. Public conformity is a superficial change in observable behavior, without a corresponding change of opinion, produced by real or imagined group pressure. The conformity found in Sherif’s study was primarily private conformity, whereas that found in Asch’s study was primarily public conformity. The situation was very ambiguous for the participants in Sherif’s study, they could not be sure how far the dot of light really moved. Hence, these participants looked to the other participants to provide them with information about what the correct answers were. Thus vulnerable to the informational influence that the participants provided for each other, the participants in Sherif’s study exhibited private conformity to the group norm. One can tell that this was private and not merely public conformity because, when participants in Sherif’s study were later asked to make the same judgments alone (in a situation where there would be little pressure against deviating from a group norm), they continued to make judgments consistent with the group norm. By contrast, the situation in Asch’s study was not ambiguous, the correct answers were obvious to the participants. When these participants conformed to the judgments given by the majority, they were publicly, but not privately, conforming. That is, they continued to believe their original judgments, but they responded by giving a different judgment so as not to deviate from the rest of the group. One can tell that the conformity was more public than private here because, when participants were asked to write down their answers privately (in a situation where there was much less pressure against deviating from a group norm), levels of conformity dropped sharply.
24. The door-in-the-face technique is a two-step compliance technique in which an influencer prefaced the real request with one so large that it is sure to be rejected. One reason this technique works may have to do with the principle of perceptual contrast. The contrast effect is the tendency to perceive stimuli that differ from expectations or other stimuli as even more different than they really are. In this case, after exposure to the very large request, the second request may seem even smaller than it would otherwise. Cialdini and his colleagues concluded that perceptual contrast is only partly responsible for the effectiveness of the door-in-the-face technique. A second, and possibly more compelling, reason for the effectiveness of this technique concerns reciprocal concessions – namely, the pressure to respond to changes in a bargaining position. When the influencer backs down from the original large request and makes a subsequent smaller request, the person who rejected the original request may perceive the influencer’s second request as a concession or gesture of compromise and thus feel pressure to respond in kind by complying with this second request.

25. Milgram varied the apparent status of the experimenter (the authority) by moving his lab from the prestigious Yale University to a rundown urban office building with no university affiliation. The rate of total obedience dropped from 65 percent at Yale to 48 percent at the office building – still a surprisingly high level of obedience. When the authority of the experimenter was diminished even more by replacing him with what appeared to be another participant, there was a dramatic drop in total obedience to 20 percent. In another condition, the experimenter issued his commands to the participants by telephone. This condition also showed a dramatic drop in obedience from the original condition – 21 percent of the participants obeyed all the way.

26. There are three key factors. The first is the complexity of a society. As people come to live in more complex industrialized societies, there are more groups to identify with, which means less loyalty to any one group and a greater focus on personal rather than collective goals. Second is the affluence of a society. As people prosper, they gain financial independence from each other, a condition that promotes social independence as well as mobility and a focus on personal rather than collective goals. The third factor is heterogeneity. Societies that are homogeneous, sharing the same language, religion, and social customs, tend to be rigid and intolerant of those who deviate from the norm. Societies that are culturally diverse, where two or more cultures coexist, tend to be more permissive of dissent, allowing for more individual expression. Cultural orientations may also be rooted in religious ideologies, for example, the link between Christianity and individualism.