

Research Review Project
Psychology 250
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For my research review project I choose the topic “conformity” – the influence on (changing of) one’s behavior, judgment, or belief resulting from exposure to opposing behaviors/beliefs in a group setting. This topic yielded many “hits” so I narrowed it down by including “social psychology” in the search. I still got many results both within PsychInfo and Google (and Google Scholar). I selected several more recent sources, while also selecting sources on diverse topics. I also found many scholars with interests in conformity and social psychology,

First, the individual researcher that I selected was Marilynn Brewer, a Professor Emerita at Ohio State University. Dr. Brewer has authored many articles on various group processes, including conformity. She has received major awards from professional organizations such as the Society of Experimental Social Psychology, Society for Personality and Social Psychology, and the Society of Psychologists for the Study of Social Issues. Dr. Brewer has also served as the President of the American Psychological Society. Dr. Brewer is considered an expert on intergroup relations, and especially the study of ingroup loyalty (see her biography at the Social Psychology Network, www.socialpsychology.org). An individual’s willingness or opposition to conformity plays a very large role in intergroup relations and how group members react toward each other.

Second, I found a number of peer-reviewed journal articles on conformity. Bond (2005) did a review of the past conformity literature, while Song (2005) proposed some new perspectives on the topic. Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) placed conformity within the broader scope of social influence, whereas Granberg and Bartels (2005) focused on the consequences of being a dissenter as opposed to a conformist. Deschesnes, Finès, and Demers, S. (2006) wrote an interesting article examining whether the growing trend of body piercing among adolescents is simply conformity to a mainstream norm or an indicator of a distinctive type of individual (a teen more likely to be involved with drugs, crime, gangs, etc.). The first page of each resource is attached and a brief summary of each follows on separate pages.

Third, the other (non-scholarly) sources that I selected included Mueller’s (2006) web site of resources for instructors who teach about the topic of conformity (see reference section for the link). I selected this source because I am an instructor and found several useful ideas for teaching students about conformity at Mueller’s site. The second non-scholarly source I selected was a biography of Solomon Asch found at the Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict (see reference section for website link). Solomon Asch is widely recognized for being an originator of research on conformity, and it is interesting that the Bryn Mawr College Center bearing his name studies Ethnopolitical Conflict. It seems that conformity within one group, often results in an increased likelihood of conflict with other groups (out-groups). Not surprisingly, research by Marilynn Brewer (see above) and others often integrates ingroup conformity with outgroup conflict.

[NOTE: If I was turning in this in for the course I would have printed the article abstracts or first page of other sources.]

Bond, R. (2005). Group Size and Conformity. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 8, 331-354.

Summary: Bond reviewed theory and research on the relation between group size and rates of conformity. A number of different theoretical models of this relation were examined systematically, including social impact theory, the social influence model and three other-total ratio. Results from over 100 published experiments in this area were analyzed using a meta-analysis, a quantitative tool used to combine results from multiple studies. Most of these were conducted in the United States, using procedures initially developed by Solomon Asch in which people interact in a face-to-face environment. However, a sizable number of experiments used a method developed by Crutchfield in which research participants were not in direct contact with the other members of their group..

Overall, the trend across studies showed that conformity rates grew higher as the number of other group members opposing one's view increase (e.g., a person is more likely to conform to 4 others than to 1 other). However, subsequent analyses showed that the strength of this finding changed depending on the methods used in the study. One focus was on how participants expressed their views following group pressures to conform, publicly (telling others in the group) or privately (which others would not learn); another focus was on whether the Asch or Crutchfield method was used. With public responses, conformity rates were small to moderate, but there was some indication that with private responses conformity rates were higher using the Crutchfield method. In general the relation between group size and conformity depends on the methods used. The study had some shortcomings in that it examined only studies examining judgments of line length. It is not at all clear these results would generalize to other types of judgments, beliefs, or behaviors, in fact much research has found that conformity rates differ dramatically depending the other issues facing the group.

Deschesnes, M., Finès, P., & Demers, S. (2006). Are tattooing and body piercing indicators of risk-taking behaviours among high school students. *Journal of Adolescence*, 29, 379-393.

Summary: The authors examined whether the increasing prevalence of body modification (piercing and tattooing) among adolescents are simply the result of harmless conformity to social norms or whether such modifications are related to other risk behaviors. Self-report surveys were obtained from 2000 Canadian students aged 12-18, these respondents came from the "normal" population of teenagers. The researchers found that body modifications were correlated with illegal activities, gang affiliations, drug use, truancy and problem gambling. Teens who are more likely to have body modifications are more likely to engage in risky and illegal behaviors, leading the researchers to conclude that tattoos and piercings are not simply harmless decorations, but rather indicants of an increased likelihood of deviant and illegal behaviors.

I should also include summaries of my other three peer-reviewed articles -- Song (2005); Cialdini and Goldstein (2004); and Granberg and Bartels (2005). Remember that you can use the about.com article on understanding research to help you get the key points out of articles, which would serve as the foundation of your summaries.

References

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- Song, G. (2005). A New View on Conformability. *Psychological Science*, 28, 1174-1178.