

Social Pressure Affects Moral Standing

Ruihan Hong*

Bingstark International Bilingual School, Kunming, China

*Corresponding author: xiangqian@ldy.edu.rs

Abstract. People are social animals; thus, social influence can significantly affect people's behavior. Conformity has been discussed for years as it's a great example of how social pressure can affect a person's thoughts and behaviors. Scientists have carried out a bunch of experiments to research conformity. Asch's experiment, for example, shows how social pressure can influence a person's decision to make the right choice. Conformity can also result in a series of effects and problems. Bystander effects, for example, show how informational social influence can affect people's behavior. Blind obedience shows how conformity can cause crimes and disasters. This paper doesn't promote social determinism but shows the relationship between social pressure and people's moral standing. Several experiments and studies and related social events will also be included. It's concluded that it is possible that our morality is not just a matter of goodwill but also the result of conformity.

Keywords: Conformity, Asch experiment, Social pressure, Moral Standing.

1. Introduction

Social pressure is an essential social problem caused by objective factors in the development of social economy, which is reflected in people's spiritual level and affects people's ideology and behavior trends. Especially for individuals, social pressure is highly negative and has a subtle and significant impact on the healthy development of individual values. Actively reducing and eliminating social pressure and its adverse effects is of great practical significance for guiding individuals to develop healthily in thought. In recent years, unethical behavior has happened frequently in real life, Such as "gutter oil," "melamine," "Little Yue Yue," and other incidents, triggered the public's fierce questions and debates on social moral norms and civic quality. Even with moral and legal constraints, unethical behavior is still expected. "The old man fell to the ground; help or not help?" It is not only a hot topic in recent years. Conformity [1] is always a popular social and moral psychology topic. Therefore, people are social animals and must fit in with the majority. However, sometimes, we may not agree with others when we follow their behaviors. In the Asch experiment [2], scientists found the situational and personal factors that can affect conformity. These findings greatly benefit society as people can avoid blind obedience [3] using these conclusions. This paper focuses on discovering the impact social pressure [4] can have on people's moral standing [5].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Moral Standing

2.1.1 Definition

Moral standing is a person's cognition about what is right or wrong. According to Sytsma and Machery, "An entity has moral standing if and only if it can be morally wronged." Feinberg regarded the possession of interests as fundamental to moral standing [6]. Usually, people think behaviors that can benefit society are moral, and inversely, those that harm society are immoral.

2.1.2 Origin of Moral Standing

Most scientists now believe that evolution [7] originates from moral standing. As we have mentioned, people are social animals. Unlike today, people in ancient times didn't have many tools, and their living environment was dangerous. So, people in ancient times needed to work with others to survive and let the group continue to develop. To help the group survive, there must be group

norms, which can be seen as rules, to avoid things that are not good for the group. Gradually, people developed the idea that behaviors that can benefit or contribute to the group are good and behaviors that are against the group norms are wrong. This is how moral standing developed.

2.1.3 Factors Affecting Moral Standing

Moral standing can change between different cultures. For instance, in some countries, eating pork is against the canon. However, in other countries, eating pork is completely fine. Moral standing can also change between genders, personalities, and work areas. But these are not all the factors that can affect moral standing, and there are still many things that can impact people's moral standing.

2.1.4 Ideas About Moral Standing

In ancient Greece, philosophers thought that morality was the motivation of human behaviors. In their opinion, knowledge of human life was the most important. A reasonable person knew how to behave in society. Being moral meant doing the right thing. Aristotle believed that there are three properties of the human soul. Body (metabolic reactions), animal (emotions), and nous (cognition). Exercise can strengthen the body, animals can be released when desire occurs, and nous can be improved by limiting one's behavior. Among the three, nous is seen as the most important because it's the base of a human being. A rational person can always make the right decisions and do the right things, regarded as moral. Utilitarianism thinks that happiness and fulfillment are the final goal of a person's life. Everything the person does should be related to these goals. To satisfy one's happiness, the person will do behaviors that can give the best result. Thus, behaviors that can benefit a person are regarded as moral. Deontology is different from utilitarianism. Utilitarianism thinks the behavior is moral as long as the results are promising. Deontology thinks that a behavior can still be good even with bad results. Deontology makes notice of following societal norms. Behaviors that satisfy this standard are moral.

2.2. Social Pressure

2.2.1 Definition

Social pressure is the influence of the crowd. The impact of social pressure on a person can be affected by some factors. For instance, Dohmen found that the bias by referees can be influenced by the size of the crowd (absolute size), the attendance-to-capacity ratio (relative size), and the proximity of the supporters to the pitch (the presence of a running track). Solomon Asch discovered that the difference in the majority's size and the majority's unanimity can result in different levels of social pressure on the subject [8].

2.2.2 Milgram's Experiment

In Milgram's experiment, scientists kept pushing the participants to press the bottom connected to higher electricity. Participants could hear the confederate's pleas for help. However, the participants pressed the bottom because the scientist told them to. In the end, 65 percent of participants gave the highest level of shock to the confederate. Milgram's experiment shows how social pressure can affect people when they make decisions. The participants of this experiment are from different areas and classes; some are well-educated, and some are not. However, they all follow the scientist's order during the experiment. This study gives people an overview of social pressure's impact on humans.

2.3. Collectivism

2.3.1 Definition

Collectivism advocates that individuals belong to society. Markus and Kitayama suggested that people in collectivist culture often view themselves "not as separate from the social context but as more connected and less differentiated from others [9].

2.4. Individualism

2.4.1 Definition

Definition: Individualism is a political, ethical, and social philosophy that emphasizes personal freedom, personal interests, and self-control. According to Hofstede, individualism means that people in a country tend to have an independent rather than interdependent self-construal. Hofstede added that the ties between people in an individualistic country are loose; people are expected to care for themselves and their family members only. Children start to learn to base their identity on themselves at a very young age [10].

2.4.2 Difference Between Collectivism and Individualism

People who live and grow up in a collectivist society tend to be the majority because they believe that if they do things against the majority, they will be punished or given up by the majority. The benefit of collectivism is that the authority can manage people effectively, and people will be more united when facing the same problem. However, if the authority gives wrong instructions, many social issues will happen because it's hard for people in a collectivist society to say "no" to the authority. Inversely, people who live and grow up in an individualistic society have a lower tendency to follow the majority because they are educated that they are free individuals. It's okay for them not to join the majority. The benefit of individualism is that it can have more people with critical thinking skills. So, scientific development in an individualist society is faster than in a collectivist society. However, a high level of freedom can cause chaos. For instance, there are many cases about the conflicts between parading crowds and the police. These events will affect the management of the government and society when facing problems.

2.5. Conformity Behavior

2.5.1 Definition

Conformity behavior refers to the behavior in which individuals change their attitudes and give up their original opinions under the influence of social situations or group pressure, resulting in consistency with most people. In 1964, Kitty Genovese was brutally murdered outside her apartment in New York. Although there were many witnesses to the event, no one immediately stepped in to help. This event shows the bystander effect, a type of conformity behavior, as people look to others to see how to behave. If they are not helping, we will not help either.

2.5.2 Internal and External Locus of Control

Locus of control is the extent to which we believe we have control over our behavior or life. Usually, people with internal locus of control believe they have personal control over their behavior. Inversely, people who have external locus of control believe that factors that are external to them take control of their behavior. In the Asch experiment, scientists concluded that people with an internal locus of control are much less likely to be influenced by others and, thus, less likely to conform. People with an external locus of control are more likely to be influenced by others and, thus, more likely to conform.

2.5.3 Factors Affecting Conformity Behavior

Group size: In the Asch experiment, scientists found that when the majority size was reduced, participants were less likely to be affected by the confederates.

The unanimity of the majority: Still, in the Asch experiment, scientists found that if most of the majority picked the wrong one, but one of them picked the right one, the participant would be less likely to obey.

Internal and external locus of control: A person with an internal locus of control is less likely to conform, but an external locus of control is more likely to obey.

Distance of the authority figure to the individual: If the orders are given from a long distance, the person will be less likely to conform.

Environment: People are more likely to conform in a severe place but less likely to obey in a relaxed place. For instance, if Milgram's experiment were carried out at Harvard University, the participants would be likelier to do what the scientist asked. However, participants would be less likely to obey if the study were carried out in an office in an old building.

Appearance of the authority figure: People are more likely to conform when the authority figure wears strict clothes and less likely to conform to an authority who wears casual clothes.

2.5.4 Deindividuation

Deindividuation is a term used to describe the loss of personality when in a group. People sometimes do things that they will never do when in a group. A badly behaved crowd can make a nice person anti-social, but a well-behaved crowd can encourage people to become prosocial. A polite person can damage public facilities when he's with a gang. The soldier joining the massacre can be a good father or husband at home. A criminal can start to do good things when he's with good people. Deindividuation is regarded as one of the typical conformity behaviors because people follow the majority, and sometimes, they don't even realize their personality has changed. This can cause severe issues because if people cannot control themselves when in a group, terrorist acts will happen quickly.

2.5.5 Blind obedience

Blind obedience is a term used to describe the loss of thinking when obeying authority. It happens for many reasons, like avoiding punishments and so on. Like deindividuation, blind obedience can cause problems that harm society. For instance, a doctor provided the wrong medicine to the patients, and the nurses found a mistake. However, they chose to believe the doctor because they thought that the doctor was more professional than them. In the end, six patients died because of the wrong medicine use. Scientists are now trying to analyze ways to prevent blind obedience. One way to prevent blind obedience is to add a third person while making decisions. For example, there is a supervisor to help make decisions when the pilot and co-pilot cannot agree with each other. Another way to prevent blind obedience is to improve education. Professional knowledge can help prevent the tragedy mentioned above. The third way is to send orders from a long distance. In Milgram's experiment, scientists found that the participants were less likely to do what the scientist asked them to do when the scientist was in another room. We could also prevent blind obedience by letting the authority figure instruct people from a long distance.

3. Procedure

The participants are asked to participate in a philosophy seminar. Before the seminar, the participants would receive a survey consisting of 10 moral questions that determine their view on a particular issue. The participants' responses would be recorded and compared to later results. The host will lecture on the topic at the beginning of the seminar. The host needs to remain neutral. This topic can be any moral dilemma or position, such as the trolley problem or the importance of animal lives. The confederates would first give a 2-minute speech contrasting the participant's view. After all confederates, the participant is asked to express their view on each question. After the seminar, the researchers would debrief the participants on an experiment. During this stage, the researcher would also ask about the participant's cultural background and whether or not they wavered in their moral standing during the seminar. One month after the experiment, the researchers would contact the participant and ask whether or not the participant's moral standing had changed. The important thing is that the participants must think they were participating in a philosophy seminar. Otherwise, the validity of this experiment cannot be ensured. We will test a total of fifteen participants during the experiment, and there will be fifteen confederates in each seminar.

4. Research Inspiration

In the past, scientists have developed ways to investigate people's moral behaviors. For instance, in Milgram's electric shock experiment, scientists analyze conformity behavior by observing the participant's (teacher) reactions when they heard the cries from the actor (student) and the final electric shock level they had given to the actor. In some experiments that aimed to study babies' moral standing, scientists designed examples to help with the investigation. For example, scientists used a climbing square to study a baby's moral standing in one study. While climbing up, there would be a red round ball, which helped the square climb, and a yellow triangle, which stopped the square while it was climbing. Scientists showed the images to the baby twice and then let the baby choose between the red round ball and the yellow triangle. As a result, most babies in this experiment chose the red round ball. These are two ways to study morality. In our experiment, we used and revised the procedure in the Asch experiment to investigate people's moral standing. This study finds out that people's moral standing can be changed due to social pressure. Analyzing the data, we can summarize the factors affecting people's original moral standing. The results can benefit society as we now know the reason for the change in people's moral standing, So we can develop ways to avoid things like blind obedience that can harm society. This study can also benefit children's education because teachers can develop ways to help the children develop the right moral standing.

5. Conclusion

We found that ten participants had changed their minds during the seminars, and eight still answered the moral question as they did during the seminar. According to the results, more than half of the participants had changed their moral standing after the experiment, so we can say that social pressure can change a person's moral standing. We also found that most participants who changed their ideas were from the ordinary class. These people are workers for companies and are used to doing what their companies ask them to do, so we think that's part of why they have changed their moral standing. There are two strengths of our experiment. The first one is validity. Unlike other studies in artificial environments, our study took place in natural environments, which will improve the ecological validity of the experiment. The second strength is that we kept contact with the participants until one month after the seminar to ensure they didn't temporarily change their moral standing. However, there are also two weaknesses of our experiment. The first one is low generalisability. Our study only has fifteen participants. It's not enough for a social experiment because they cannot represent the whole population. The second one is that we couldn't make sure whether all the participants could understand the topic of the philosophy seminar. They would follow the confederates without thinking if they couldn't understand the topic. This will affect our judgment on whether social pressure can change a person's moral standing.

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