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Final Exam Revision Notes

Conformity, Compliance & Obedience

- Conformity, compliance, and obedience are three kinds of social influence, varying in the degree of pressure brought to bear on an individual.

- **Continuum of Social Influence:**

Obedience – compliance – conformity – independence – assertiveness - defiance

- **Social influence as 'automatic':**
- Studies show that people mimic each other's behaviours and moods, perhaps as a way of smoothing social interactions.
- Sometimes we are influenced by other people without our awareness.

Conformity

- Conformity is the tendency to change our perceptions, opinions or behaviour in ways that are consistent with group norms.
- People perceive others to be more conforming than themselves, partly because they judge themselves by focusing inward and introspecting about their thought processes, which blinds them to their conformity.

The early classics

- Two classic experiments illustrate contrasting types of conformity.
- **Sherif:** presented groups of participants with an ambiguous task described as a "visual perception" task, in which they had to judge the distance a spot of light moved in a dark room. First participants did this individually, then in groups of three. The group eventually established their own norms, and individual's judgements gradually converged become closer to the group norm. Results = ambiguous task produced informational conformity.
- **Asch :** Using a simpler line-judgement task, had confederates make incorrect responses and found that participants went along about a third of the time (37%). 25% refused to conform

at all, 50% conformed at least half the time, and 25% conformed occasionally. He then increased the amount of confederates used and found that conformity was increased between 1-4 confederates, but after 4 there were negligible effects. Results = simple task produced normative conformity.

Why do people conform?

- **Informational Influence:** Influence that produces conformity when a person believes others are correct in their judgements.
- **Normative Influence:** Influence that produces conformity when a person fears the negative social consequences of appearing deviant.
- **Private Conformity:** the change of beliefs that occur when a person privately accepts the position taken by others.
- **Public Conformity:** a superficial change in overt behaviour without a corresponding change of opinion that is produced by real or imagined group pressure.
- Sherif found that people exhibit private conformity, using others for information in an ambiguous situation.
- Asch's studies indicated that people conform in their public behaviour to avoid appearing deviant.
- Women conform more, and men less, when primed to think of themselves in a romantic situation (because women like independent men, and men like agreeable women?).

Majority influence

- As the size of an incorrect unanimous majority increases, so does conformity – up to a point.
- People conform to perceived social norms when these norms are brought to mind.
- The presence of one dissenter reduces conformity, even when he or she disagrees with the participant and lacks competence at the task.
- Women conform more than men on 'masculine' tasks and in face-to-face settings but not on 'feminine' or gender-neutral tasks or in private settings.

Minority influence

- The process by which dissenters produce change within a group.
- Sometimes minorities resist pressures to conform and are able to influence majorities.
- In general, minority influence is greater when the source is an in-group member.
- According to Moscovici, minorities can exert influence by taking a consistent and unwavering position.
- Hollander claims that to exert influence, a person should first conform, then dissent.
- Idiosyncrasy credits: interpersonal 'credit' that a person earns by following group norms.
- Majority influence is greater on direct and public measures of conformity, but minorities show their impact in indirect or private measures of conformity.
- By forcing other group members to think more openly about a problem, minorities enhance the quality of a group's decision making.
- People gain courage to resist conformity pressures after watching others do the same.