

The effects of influence conditions and discrepancy upon authoritarian conformity

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Having made a series of numerosity judgments, Ss were exposed to judgments presumably made by three other individuals. The discrepancy between Ss' judgments and those attributed to the others was either small or large and was revealed under conditions that emphasized either group or individual accuracy. When the discrepancy was large, nonauthoritarian Ss changed their judgments in both influence conditions, while the authoritarian Ss showed substantial change only in the group accuracy condition. When the discrepancy was small, no differences between authoritarian and nonauthoritarian conformity were observed.

Although several studies have reported a direct relationship between authoritarianism and conforming behavior (e.g., Crutchfield, 1955; Canning & Baker, 1959; Wells, Weiner, & Rubel, 1956), others have failed to find such a relationship (Hoffman, 1957; Weiner & McGinnies, 1961; Steiner & Vannoy, 1966). One explanation that has been advanced for these inconsistent findings is that the response by authoritarian Ss to influence attempts may be at least partially determined by situational variables (Steiner & Vannoy, 1966). Moreover, evidence from studies involving "in-group" vs "out-group" pressure (Steiner & Johnson, 1963) and biracial groups (Katz & Benjamin, 1960) appears to support this proposition.

This study likewise concerns situational influence upon authoritarian conformity and focuses upon two situational variables that have received little attention in this particular area: (a) the type of influence condition (group vs individual accuracy) and (b) the discrepancy between S's judgment and the judgment of others (large vs small). There is indirect evidence that both variables may be useful in understanding authoritarian conformity.

With regard to influence conditions, a number of studies have reported that under conditions involving no explicit social norms—but simply new information about the task—persons scoring high on the F scale show strong resistance to change (Mischel & Shopler, 1959; Harvey, 1963). On the other hand, studies that have found authoritarian Ss to be *more* easily influenced than nonauthoritarian Ss have been those involving direct influence attempts by others, particularly when others are seen as constituting an "in-group" (Steiner & Johnson, 1963). In short, the studies noted here suggest

that authoritarians are not easily influenced by information alone, but *are* influenced by information presented by members of the group to which they belong.

In addition, it has been pointed out that, when source credibility is high, amount of discrepancy and subsequent change are positively related (e.g., Aronson, Turner, & Carlsmith, 1963). In situations involving authoritarian Ss, it might be hypothesized that group members constitute a particularly credible source (Steiner & Johnson, 1963). If so, one might predict that authoritarian conformity will be greatest when discrepancy is high *and* when the discrepancy is revealed under group accuracy conditions.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

Design and Subjects

Systematically varied in this experiment were (a) Ss (authoritarian vs nonauthoritarian), (b) amount of discrepancy (high vs low), and (c) influence conditions (group vs individual accuracy). The Ss were 56 University of Kansas undergraduates who were taken from the first and fourth quartiles of F scores obtained from a larger (202) sample of Ss who completed Form 45 of the California F scale. With regard to sex, the high-F (authoritarian) group consisted of 13 males and 15 females; the low-F (nonauthoritarian) group consisted of 16 males and 12 females.

Procedure

All Ss participated in groups of four. In each case, Ss were seated in individual cubicles so as to prevent visual contact with each other, while at the same time allowing Ss to observe a screen located in front of the group. At two points during the experimental session (pretest and posttest), a series of 10 slides was projected onto the screen. Here, each slide consisted of a haphazard array of 50 objects differing in size, shape, and color. Following a brief (3-sec) exposure, S was asked to estimate (on an answer sheet) the total number of objects in each array.

At the conclusion of the pretest (designated a "practice session"), Ss were told that E would examine the practice judgments before proceeding to the final judgment session. After a suitable delay, E gave to each S a prearranged summary sheet, ostensibly showing the judgments made by the other three Ss in the group. The nature of the summary sheets and the instructions which accompanied them were systematically varied so as to manipulate discrepancy and type of influence.

Discrepancy Conditions

Previous use of this judgment task revealed that Ss typically underestimate the number of objects. As expected, Ss in this experiment also tended to underestimate the number of objects on the pretest, i.e., the mean estimate during the "practice session" was 44.5. Following the "practice session," each S in the low-discrepancy condition was shown a prearranged summary sheet which indicated that the other three Ss who were present had made judgments only slightly discrepant from this group mean (and from S's own judgment). That is, the summary sheet indicated that the mean judgment made by the other three Ss was 50. In the high-discrepancy condition, the judgments attributed to the other were highly discrepant from S's own

Table 1
Mean Change Scores for Authoritarian and Nonauthoritarian Ss According to Condition

	Low Discrepancy		High Discrepancy	
	Individual Accuracy	Group Accuracy	Individual Accuracy	Group Accuracy
Low F	8.40	-.58	24.76	23.06
High F	10.61	.44	3.44	23.76

judgment, i.e., the mean judgment attributed to the others was 90.

Influence Conditions

In both influence conditions, Ss were instructed that accuracy in the final judgment session would be rewarded. In the group accuracy condition, Ss were instructed that the most accurate group would be rewarded. It was stressed that each S was a member of the group present at that time, that accuracy was based upon a group score, and that poor performance by one member of the group could prevent the group from doing well. In the individual accuracy condition, Ss were simply instructed that the most accurate individuals would be rewarded. No reference was made to "group accuracy," nor was group membership mentioned.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As noted earlier, each S made 10 "practice" judgments (pretest) and 10 "final" judgments (posttest). Mean change scores for each S were calculated and treated according to a 2 by 2 by 2 analysis of variance. This analysis revealed only one statistically reliable main effect, i.e., change varied according to amount of discrepancy ($F = 19.86$, $df = 1/48$, $p < .01$). Here, as might be expected, change was substantially greater in the high-discrepancy condition (18.7) than in the low-discrepancy condition (4.7). This result, of course, is consistent with numerous other findings (e.g., Hovland & Pritzker, 1957).

In addition to the main effect, two interactions of borderline significance were found. Specifically, the analysis revealed a Discrepancy by F Score interaction ($F = 3.60$, $p \cong .07$) and a Discrepancy by Influence Condition by F Score interaction ($F = 3.41$, $p \cong .08$). With regard to the Discrepancy by F Score interaction, it was found that high- and low-F Ss responded approximately the same in the low-discrepancy condition (5.5 and 3.9 units of change, respectively) but quite differently in the high-discrepancy condition (13.6 and 23.9, respectively). The Discrepancy by Influence Condition by F Score interaction can be accounted for by the finding that, in the high-discrepancy condition, low-F Ss changed substantially more (24.8) than did high-F Ss (3.4) in the individual accuracy condition. A Neuman-Keuls comparison revealed that this difference was statistically significant ($p < .05$). Under conditions of group accuracy, the response by the high- and low-F Ss to the high discrepancy was nearly equal (see Table 1).

These findings suggest that the possibility of substantial error is *necessary* and *sufficient* for the nonauthoritarian S to change his judgments—at least in the somewhat ambiguous judgment task used here. For the authoritarian S, on the other hand, the possibility of substantial error was a *necessary* but *not sufficient* condition for conformity. That is, the authoritarian S tended to conform only when a large discrepancy was revealed under conditions which stressed group membership. In short, the authoritarian S seemed to be influenced by his group membership as much as by the potential for error in his judgments. In this regard, the results suggest that new information about the state of the world is of limited value to the authoritarian, unless the use (or misuse) of this information has implications for approval from others. If such is the case, one might speculate that the authoritarian—perhaps as a result of harsh, punitive childhood experiences—is characterized by a stronger need for approval from significant others than the nonauthoritarian.

Although this particular explanation is clearly post hoc, the results seem to support the point introduced at the outset. That is, authoritarian conformity is at least partially contingent upon characteristics of the situation, e.g., upon the discrepancy between S's judgments and the judgments of others, and upon the context within which the discrepancy occurs.

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