

ABSTRACT

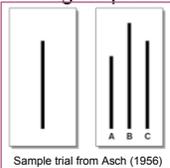
Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, there has been a large increase in the use of online platforms, making it important to study these new environments. This study examined conformity in virtual settings. Conformity occurs when individuals alter their behaviors/opinions to match the majority. We recruited 40 undergraduate students in a study on memory and examined whether participants would conform by turning their camera on or off in accordance with confederates' actions or experimenter's instructions in a Zoom meeting. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: Keep Camera On, Keep Camera Off, Gradually Turn On Camera, or Gradually Turn Off Camera. Participants were measured on conformity and obedience to following the experimenter's directions of keeping their camera on or conforming to the actions of the confederates around them. Our analyses revealed statistically significant differences between the conditions. The control condition, in which the confederates kept their cameras on, had both the highest and fastest rates of conformity. However, when analyzing the results without the control group, the Kept Camera Off condition had the highest and fastest rates of conformity. These results provide evidence that virtual conformity is very likely to occur. Therefore, individuals learning and working online should be aware of how their actions can be influenced by others and how they can influence the actions of others, even through a screen.

Hypothesis

If all confederates have their camera off/on, then the participant will conform and turn their camera off/on in accordance with the confederates.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

The Asch Line Judgement Task (Asch, 1956) was the key inspiration for our research. In this classic study, participants were asked to match a target line from among three options. However, 6-8 confederates provided wrong responses before the participant gave their response. Asch found that 1/3 of the participants conformed to the confederates' wrong responses. Limitations of past research include the setting and population. Most research was conducted face-to-face and done with participants ages 30 and older. Many of the studies also have only one correct answer.



METHODS

- 40 Participants: 34 F, 6 M, M age = 20 years, SD = 1.68
- Recruited for a study on memory from the Psychology Subject Pool and convenience sampling

Procedure

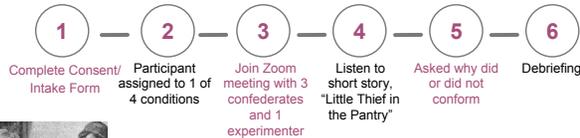
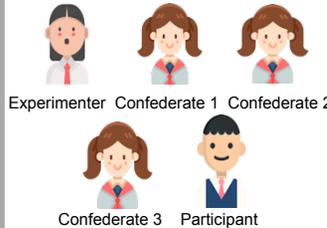


Illustration from the story participants thought they would be tested on, Little Thief in the Pantry by Anonymous

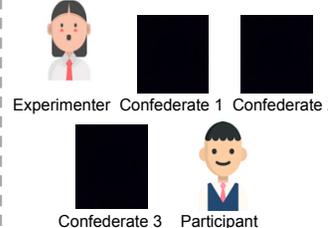
EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS

KEPT CAMERA ON (CONTROL)



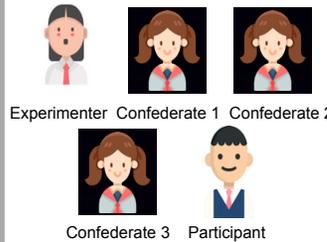
- No camera activity; all confederates' cameras stayed on

KEPT CAMERA OFF



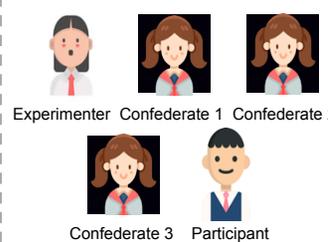
- No camera activity; all confederates' cameras stayed off

GRADUALLY TURN CAMERAS ON



- Confederates start with cameras off and individually turn them on every 30 seconds

GRADUALLY TURN CAMERAS OFF

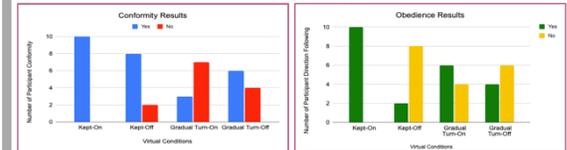


- Confederates start with cameras on and individually turn them off every 30 seconds

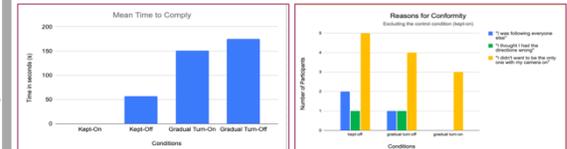
DEPENDENT VARIABLES

- Conformity** determined by "yes, participant conformed" or "no, participant did not conform"
- Obedience** determined by "yes, listened to experimenter instructions" or "no, did not follow experimenter instructions"
- Time to comply** If the participant never complied with the group, the time recorded was 240 seconds, which is time to complete the reading. If participant immediately conformed to the group and for the entirety of the story, their time recorded was 0 seconds.
- At end of study asked participants their rationale for either conforming or not to uncover the thought processes, opinions, and underlying reasons for doing so

RESULTS



- Overall, 67.5% of participants conformed to the group.
- All participants conformed in the kept-on, 80% in the kept-off, 30% in the gradual turn-on, and 60% in the gradual turn-off.
- A chi square on conformity was significant $\chi^2(3) = 12.19, p = .007$
- Overall, 55% of participants were obedient to the experimenter.
- All participants were obedient in the kept-on, 20% in the kept-off, 60% in the gradual turn-on, and 40% in the gradual turn-off.
- A chi square on obedience was significant $\chi^2(3) = 14.14, p = .003$



- A one-way independent samples ANOVA on time to comply was significant difference $F(3,36) = 9.62, p < .0001$.
- Tukey's HSD revealed that time to comply in the gradual turn-off condition was significantly slower than the kept-on and kept-off conditions. Similarly, the gradual turn-on condition was significantly slower than the kept-on condition.
- Most participants said they chose to conform because they did not want to be the only person with their camera on.
- Others said they chose to conform because they were following others or thought they had the directions incorrect and the other participants had the correct directions.

DISCUSSION

Results supported the hypothesis that conformity can occur in a virtual setting, consistent with Asch (1956). The most common reasons for participant's actions were following the group and following directions. This experiment studied the overlap of obedience and conformity, whereas past research only studied one variable. The use of four groups, instead of two, allowed the researchers to study which conditions produce the highest rates of obedience and conformity, however the use of convenience sampling and psychology majors posed the risks of reactivity and awareness of the deception.

REFERENCES

Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, 70, 1-70.