

## **Additional Try It Yourself Exercises Chapter 8**

Imagine you were a participant in Asch's experiment. Do you think you would conform? Why or why not? If you did conform, how would you feel when the true nature of the situation was explained during debriefing? Do you think the study is ethical?

The issues presented in Asch's experiment have significant implications for the real world. Consider situations in which a group of people meet seeking agreement (to make sure they are "all on the same page"). Sometimes, the discussion is open, but in some cases the majority may be seeking to influence others, much as in Asch's situation. For example, it could be a group of medical professionals who would like a patient to agree to a certain treatment, a group of teachers who wish to persuade parents to change the class of a student with special needs, a group of business people seeking support from a politician, and so on. When the majority, who are all in agreement, meet with the person they wish to persuade, this individual is put in a situation not unlike that created by Asch. Does this increase the chances of conforming to the majority? Should we be concerned? Why or why not?

*Conformity due to group pressure is a serious concern. We may think that we would not perform like Asch's conforming subjects, but in reality, most of us have conformed to group pressure in some situations. When the issue is minor ("Let's all order the Caesar salad and then we can get a big one!"), there may be no problem. But in cases of more major decisions, terrible mistakes can be made, simply because no one said "No." History is full of such mistakes, and many lives have been lost because of this, not to*

*mention the vast amounts of money that have been lost in the business world because of such pressure. The advice to groups who are making a decision is to take time out to talk to people outside the group who may have different ideas about the issue to be decided. In addition, it is beneficial to have one member of the group designated 'devil's advocate', a person who will argue against the prevailing idea in spite of his or her own opinion. This may cause others to pause and reconsider their position. If you feel that you are being pressured by a unanimous group to do something that you are doubtful about, take your time, remove yourself from the situation in order to think about it for yourself, and if you then decide that the group's decision is not right for you, stand firm in the face of this.*

### **Try It Yourself**

Gordon Allport once observed that no one is consistent all the time, but if no one were consistent at all, the world would be chaotic. He was suggesting that personal differences exist, but aren't absolute. Thinking about your own behaviour, do you agree? Consider the following situations, and imagine how you would act and what you would say in each:

- You are meeting a friend of a friend for the first time.
- You are meeting a friend's grandmother for the first time.
- You are meeting a job interviewer for the first time.
- You are meeting a four year-old child for the first time.

Is your behaviour consistent in all these situations? What does this say about the person–situation debate?

*It seems clear that in different situations, we behave in somewhat different ways. For example, you probably wouldn't use the same words when meeting a peer as when meeting an older person or a child. Yet, it is unlikely that there will be major personality changes in these situations. For example, a sociable, friendly person will probably be perceived as sociable and friendly in all or most of these situations, whereas a shy person will probably always seem shy. The inconsistency we find in people's behaviour is mingled with consistency, then: fundamental personality traits tend to remain while the way these traits are manifested may be different. We are multi-faceted diamonds, showing a different facet in different situations, but we are still basically diamonds!*

### **Try It Yourself**

Research on violent crime clearly indicates that such behaviour varies considerably across nations; for example, homicide rates in the USA are five times higher than in Canada on a per capita basis. How would you explain the difference in homicide rates, in terms of theories of aggression? What extra information would you need to have to make a decision about what approach is most plausible? For example, consider these facts: Suicide rates are higher in the USA when guns are present in the home, and suicide rates in Canada have decreased since the inception of stringent gun control laws (Hadad 2008). What approach seems best able to explain these data?

*Wide cross-cultural differences in violence should not be so prevalent according to the biological approach or the psychodynamic approach. Any differences should be only the result of different societies providing differing numbers of opportunity for catharsis.*

*While there are cultural differences between the United States and Canada, both cultures*

*have many commonalities: both countries were developed through immigration of peoples from other continents, both political systems are based on representative democracy and a generally capitalist ideology (although Canada has more socialistic policies such as universal free medical care), both have exposure to the same television programming and movies, both countries enjoy and encourage sports participation and viewing, and so on. Consequently, opportunities for catharsis do not seem to be widely different, but extra information in this regard would be desirable. Since an innate tendency toward aggression does not seem to plausibly account for the large differences seen between the two countries, one must examine the environment for clues. The behaviourist approach might suggest that children (and adults) are more likely to be reinforced for aggressive acts in the United States than in Canada. The cognitive approach might suggest that in the United States, there are more occasions when children and adults witness aggressive acts, with positive consequences, than there are in Canada. This might lead to imitation of violence to a greater extent in the US, with the formation of schemata that view violence as a more acceptable form of behaviour. The reduction in suicide when gun control is enforced in Canada supports this notion: laws indicating that weapons of violence must be strictly monitored and regulated implies that the society does not see acts of aggression as acceptable (i.e., does not have positive or tolerant schemata about violence). The humanistic approach might suggest that Canada is providing better conditions for growth for its population than the US is, leading to less overall violence. But much more information is needed to determine if any of this is true. Do Americans reinforce their children and others more for violent acts than Canadians do? Are there more opportunities to witness violence with positive consequences in the*

*US than in Canada? Does Canada provide better conditions for growth than the US does (and what constitutes 'better')? And perhaps most importantly, does the homicide rate really reflect the amount of violence within a society?*