

always obvious, and all the fake subjects will get every answer wrong. The question is whether or not the real subject will maintain his own correct answer, or begin to conform with the group.

The Conclusion: While most people maintained their right answers, the “error rate” in the experiment group was 37% versus less than 1% in the control group. Meaning 36% of subjects eventually began to change their answers to align with the consensus, even though they knew they were wrong.

Around one-third of people will either pretend to change their minds for the sake of conformity or, more alarmingly, will actually alter their beliefs if they find themselves in the minority.

The Application: Staged or invented polls, falsified vote counts in elections, bot accounts on social media, astroturfing campaigns. Media headlines proclaiming “everyone knows X” or “only 1% of people think Y”.

There are a great many tools you can use in order to create the impression of a fake “consensus”, a manufactured “majority”.

NOTE: The experiment has been done a million times in dozens of variations, but perhaps the most interesting finding is that putting just one other person in the panel who agrees with the test subject seemed to reduce conformity by 87%. Essentially, people hate being a lone voice but will tolerate being in the minority if they have some support. Good to know.

4. Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance Experiment

The Experiment:

The least well-known experiment on the list, but in some ways the most fascinating. In 1954 Leon Festinger created an experiment to evaluate the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance, his setup was again quite simple.



A subject is given a repetitive and dull physical task to do (originally turning wooden pegs, but other variations use other tasks).

After the task is complete, the subject is instructed to go and prepare the next subject (actually a lab assistant) for the task, by lying and telling him/her how interesting the task was.

It’s at this point the subjects are divided into two groups, one group is offered \$20 to lie, the other only \$1. This is the real experiment.

The Conclusion: After lying to the fake subjects, and being paid their money, the real subjects take part in a post-experiment interview and record their genuine thoughts on the task.

Interestingly, the 20-dollar generally told the truth, that they found the task dull and repetitive. While the one-dollar group, more often than not, claimed to have genuinely enjoyed the task.

This is cognitive dissonance in action.

Essentially, for the \$20 group, the money was a good reason to lie to their fellow test subject, and they could justify their own behaviour in their head. But, for the \$1 group, the meagreness of the reward made their dishonesty internally unjustifiable, so they had to unconsciously create their own justification by convincing themselves they weren’t lying at all.

In summary, if you offer people a small reward for doing something, they will pretend to enjoy it, or be otherwise invested, to justify only making a small profit.

The Application: Casinos, computer games and other interactive media use this principle all the time, offering players very little pay off knowing they will convince themselves they are enjoying playing. Big corporations and employers can likewise rely on this phenomenon to keep wages

down, knowing that low paid workers have a psychological mechanism that may convince them they enjoy their jobs.

NOTE: A variation on this experiment introduces a third group, who are paid nothing to lie. This group is not affected by cognitive dissonance, and will honestly appraise the task just as the well-paid group do.

5. The Monkey Ladder

The Experiment:

Now this is a somewhat controversial addition to the list, but we’ll get to that later. It’s a very famous experiment you’ve probably heard cited dozens of times.



In the 1960s scientists at Harvard put five monkeys in a cage with a stepladder in the middle. Atop the stepladder is a bunch of bananas, however each time a monkey tries to climb the ladder they are all sprayed with ice-cold water. Eventually, the monkeys learn to avoid the ladder.

Then one monkey is removed and a new monkey is introduced. He naturally goes straight for the ladder and is set upon by the other four monkeys.

Then a second monkey is removed, and another new monkey is introduced. He naturally goes straight for the ladder and is set upon by the other four monkeys...including the one who was never sprayed.

They continue to replace each monkey in turn, until no monkeys are present who were ever sprayed with water, and yet they all refuse to go near the stairs and prevent all the new monkeys from doing so.

Now, the obvious conclusion here is that people can be conditioned to mindlessly follow rules they do not understand.

The only problem with that is that none of this ever happened.

Yes, that’s the controversy I mentioned earlier. Despite being easily found on every corner of the internet, despite magazine articles explaining it and animations recounting it...it never happened. The experiment appears to be entirely apocryphal.

No ladder, no monkeys, no cold water.

So while this supposed experiment doesn’t actually teach us about herd mentality, it does explain the modern world, because it shows us how easily a myth can be worked into a reality through sheer dint of repetition.

BONUS: Monkey Ladder Redux

That’s right, it doesn’t stop there, there’s another twist.



National Geographic did actually recreate the fictional monkey ladder experiment using people:

One subject walks into a doctor’s waiting room filled with fake patients. When a bell sounds, all the fake patients stand up for a second and then retake their seats.

After this process repeats a few times, the fake patients are slowly removed one-by-one until only the subject of the experiment remains. Then secondary real subjects are introduced one at a time.

The experiment seeks to answer the following questions:

- a) Will the original subject stand up at the bell without knowing why?
- b) Will they will continue to stand up when they are alone in the room?

- c) Will they then teach this behaviour to the new subjects?

The answer to all three appears to be “yes”.

Now, while far less scientific than the other four experiments, I include this here for a very specific reason. The above video of the experiment doesn’t just record the conforming behaviour but describes it as possibly beneficial. Adding that herd behaviour saves lives in the wild and is “how we learn to socialise”.

A very interesting take, don’t you think?

So, while the fake monkey experiment that never happened was used to teach us about the perils of herd mentality, its nonexistence actually teaches us about the perils of non-primary sources and the group consciousness’s ability to confabulate.

Meanwhile, the real monkey experiment is used to sell us the idea that herd mentality does exist but is potentially a good thing. Raising the possibility the whole thing could have been staged, simply to promote conformity.

...Isn’t the world a strange and confusing place?

 So, there they are. Five of the most critical pieces of psychological research ever done, hopefully going forward nobody will be left in the dark when these concepts or experiments are referenced.

But the point of this article is not to just make you, the reader, understand these experiments...it is also meant to remind you that they do.

The people in charge, the elite, the 1%, “The Party”. The powers that be – or shouldn’t be – whatever you want to call them.

They know these experiments. They have studied them. They’ve probably replicated them countless times on grand scales and in unethical ways we can barely imagine. Who knows exactly what takes place in the dank dark dungeons of the deep state?

Just remember, they know how the human mind works.

- They know they can make people do anything if they reassure them they won’t be held responsible.
- They know that they can rely on people to abuse any power they’re given, OR believe they are powerless if they’re treated that way.
- They know that peer pressure will change a lot of people’s minds even in the face of undeniable reality, especially if you make them feel completely alone.
- They know that if you offer people only a small reward for completing a task, they will make up their own psychological justification for taking it.
- They know that people will mindlessly do whatever everyone else is doing without ever asking for a reason.
- And they know that people will happily believe something that never happened if it is repeated often enough.

They know all of this. And they use that knowledge all the time – All. The. Time.

Every commercial you see, every article you read, every movie they release, every item on the news, every “viral” social media post, every trending hashtag.

Every war. Every pandemic. Every headline.

All of them are constructed with these principles in mind to elicit specific emotional reactions that steer your behaviour and beliefs. That’s how the media works, not to inform you, not to entertain you... but to control you.

And they have it down to a science. Always remember that.