

## 18BPS62C-UNIT-4

### CONFORMITY, COMPLIANCE AND OBEDIENCE

social influence, one very close to the central core of social psychology—is not immune to such effects. What is social influence? A general definition is that it involves efforts by one or more people to change the behavior, attitudes, or feelings of one or more others (Cialdini, 2000, 2006). Confidence artists, including the electronic scammers described above, are intent on changing the behavior of their intended victims so that these people give them what they want—money, valuables, or confidential personal information. But people exert social influence for many reasons, not just to swindle others. Sometimes they exert influence in order to help the people involved (e.g., by getting them to stop smoking or stick to their diets). Or—and less altruistically—they may try to get them to do personal favors, buy certain products, or vote for specific candidates—the goals are almost infinite. The means used for inducing such change—for exerting social influence—vary greatly too, ranging from direct personal requests to clever commercials and political campaigns (see Figure 8.1). Whatever the goals, though, social influence always involves efforts by one or more people to induce some kind of change in others. Direct efforts to change others' overt behavior through requests are often labeled compliance (or seeking compliance); these involve specific requests to which the people who receive them can say “Yes,” “No,” or “Maybe.” Often, efforts to change others' behavior involve the impact of rules or guidelines indicating what behavior is appropriate or required in a given situation.

These can be formal, as in speed limits, rules for playing games or sports, and dress codes (if any still exist!); or they can be informal, such as the general rule “Don't stare at strangers in public places.” This kind of influence is known as conformity, and is an important part of social life. Finally, change can be produced by direct orders or commands from others—*obedience*. To provide you with a broad overview of the nature—and power—of social influence, we proceed as follows. First, because it was one of the first aspects of social influence studied by social psychology, we examine conformity—pressures to behave in ways that are viewed as acceptable or appropriate by a group or society in general. Next, we turn to compliance—direct efforts to get others to change their behavior in specific ways (Cialdini, 2006; Sparrowe, Soetjijto, & Kraimer, 2006).

After that, we examine what is, in some ways, the most intriguing form of social influence—*influence that occurs when other people are not present and are not making any direct attempts to affect our behavior* (e.g., Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003). We refer to such effects as symbolic social influence to reflect the fact that it results from our mental representations of other people rather than their actual presence or overt actions. Finally, after considering this indirect form of social influence, we examine another kind that is, in some respects, its direct opposite: obedience—social influence in which one person simply orders one or more others to do what they want.

#### **Conformity: Group Influence in Action**

The people involved could, potentially, behave in many different ways. But probably you can predict with great certainty what they will do. The student with the loud cell phone will silence

it immediately—and perhaps apologize to other members of the class sitting nearby. When you hear an ambulance, you will pull over to the right and perhaps stop completely until it passes. The checkout line is a little trickier. People near the front of the long checkout line *should* get to be first in the new line—but this might not happen. Someone from the back of the long line might beat them to it. In contexts where norms are more obvious, greater conformity by most people can be expected compared to contexts like this where norms are less clear about what action is the “correct” one.

The fact that we can predict others’ behaviour (and our own) with considerable confidence in these and many other situations illustrates the powerful and general effects of pressures toward *conformity*—toward doing what we are expected to do in a given situation. Conformity, in other words, refers to pressures to behave in ways consistent with rules indicating how we *should* or *ought to* behave. These rules are known as social norms, and they often exert powerful effects on our behaviour. The uncertainty you might experience in the checkout line situation stems from the fact that the norms in that situation are not as clear as in the others; it’s uncertain whether people in the front or the back of the existing line should go first. In some instances, social norms are stated explicitly and are quite detailed. For instance, governments generally function through written constitutions and laws; chess and other games have very specific rules; and signs in many public places (e.g., along highways, in parks, at airports) describe expected behavior in considerable detail (e.g., *Stop! No Swimming; No Parking; Keep Off the Grass*). As another example, consider the growing practice, in many restaurants, of showing tips of various sizes on the bill (e.g., 15 percent, 17 percent, 20 percent, etc.). In a sense, these numbers establish social norms concerning tipping, and in fact, research findings (Setter, Brownlee, & Sanders, 2011) indicate that they are effective: when they are present, tips are higher than when they are absent. In other situations, norms may be unspoken or implicit, and, in fact, may have developed in a totally informal manner. For instance, we all recognize such unstated rules as “Don’t make noise during a concert” and “Try to look your best when going on a job interview.” Regardless of whether social norms are explicit or implicit, formal or informal, though, one fact is clear: *Most people follow them most of the time*. For instance, virtually everyone regardless of personal political beliefs stands when the national anthem of their country is played at sports events or other public gatherings. Similarly, few people visit restaurants without leaving a tip for the server. In fact, so powerful is this social norm that most people leave a tip of around 15 percent *regardless of the quality of the service they have received* (Azar, 2007).

Another reason people conform is, simply, to “look good” to others—to make a positive impression on them. For instance, at work, many employees adopt what are known as *facades of conformity*—the appearance of going along with the values and goals of their organizations, even if they really do not (Hewlin, 2009). For instance, they often say things they don’t really believe, suppress personal values different from those of the organization, and keep certain things about themselves confidential. They may find doing so to be unpleasant but necessary to further their careers, and are more likely to engage in them when they feel that they have little input into how things are run (including their own jobs), and intend to leave—thus assuring that they will get a positive recommendation.

## **DESCRIPTIVE AND INJUNCTIVE SOCIAL NORMS: HOW NORMS AFFECT BEHAVIOR**

Social norms, as we have already seen, can be formal or informal in nature—as different as rules printed on large signs and informal guidelines such as “Don’t leave your shopping cart in the middle of a parking spot outside a supermarket.” This is not the only way in which norms differ, however. Another important distinction is that between descriptive norms and injunctive norms (e.g., Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Reno, Cialdini, & Kallgren, 1993). Descriptive norms are ones that simply describe what most people do in a given situation. They influence behavior by informing us about what is generally seen as effective or adaptive in that situation. In contrast, injunctive norms specify what *ought* to be done—what is approved or disapproved behavior in a given situation. For instance, there is a strong injunctive norm against cheating on exams—such behavior is considered to be ethically wrong. The fact that some students disobey this norm does not change the moral expectation that they should obey it. Both kinds of norms can exert strong effects upon our behavior (e.g., Brown, 1998).

Since people obviously do disobey injunctive norms in many situations (they speed on highways, cut into line in front of others), a key question is this: When, precisely, do injunctive norms influence behavior? When are they likely to be obeyed? One answer is provided by normative focus theory (e.g., Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). This theory suggests that norms will influence behavior only to the extent that they are *salient* (i.e., relevant, significant) to the people involved at the time the behavior occurs.

In other words, people will obey injunctive norms only when they think about them and see them as relevant to their own actions. This prediction has been verified in many different studies (e.g., Reno, Cialdini & Kallgren, 1993; Kallgren, Reno, & Cialdini, 2000), so it seems to be a general principle that norms influence our actions primarily when we think about them and view them as relevant to our behavior. When, in contrast, we do not think about them or view them as irrelevant, their effects are much weaker, or even nonexistent (see Figure 8.6). In fact, this is one reason why people sometimes disobey even strong injunctive norms: they don’t see these norms as applying to them.

### **Social Foundations of Conformity: Why We Often Choose to “Go Along”**

As we have just seen, several factors determine whether and to what extent conformity occurs. Yet, this does not alter the essential point: Conformity is a basic fact of social life. Most people conform to the norms of their groups or societies much, if not most, of the time. Why is this so? Why do people often choose to go along with these social rules instead of resisting them? The answer seems to involve two powerful motives possessed by all human beings: the desire to be liked or accepted by others and the desire to be right—to have accurate understanding of the social world (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Insko, 1985)—plus cognitive processes that lead us to view conformity as fully justified after it has occurred (e.g., Buehler & Griffin, 1994).

### **NORMATIVE SOCIAL INFLUENCE: THE DESIRE TO BE LIKED**

How can we get others to like us? This is one of the eternal puzzles of social life. One of the most successful of these is to appear to be as similar to others as possible. From our earliest days, we learn that agreeing with the people around us, and behaving as they do, causes them to like us. Parents, teachers, friends, and others often heap praise and approval on us for showing such similarity (see our discussion of attitude formation in Chapter 5). One important reason we conform, therefore, is this: we have learned that doing so can help us win the approval and acceptance we crave. This source of conformity is known as normative social influence, since it involves altering our behavior to meet others' expectations.

**THE DESIRE TO BE RIGHT: INFORMATIONAL SOCIAL INFLUENCE** If you want to know your weight, you can step onto a scale. If you want to know the dimensions of a room, you can measure them directly. But how can you establish the accuracy of your own political or social views, or decide which hairstyle suits you best? There are no simple physical tests or measuring devices for answering these questions. Yet we want to be correct about such matters, too. The solution to this dilemma is obvious: to answer such questions, we refer to other people. We use their opinions and actions as guides for our own (see Chapter 5 on the important role that others play in the attitudes we form). Such reliance on others, in turn, is often a powerful source of the tendency to conform. Other people's actions and opinions define social reality for us, and we use these as a guide for our own actions and opinions. This basis for conformity is known as informational social influence, since it is based on our tendency to depend on others as a source of information about many aspects of the social world.

Research evidence suggests that because our motivation to be correct or accurate is very strong, informational social influence is a powerful source of conformity. However, as you might expect, this is more likely to be true in situations where we are highly uncertain about what is "correct" or "accurate" than in situations where we have more confidence in our own ability to make such decisions (e.g., Baron et al., 1996). How powerful are the effects of social influence when we are uncertain about what is correct and what is not? Research findings suggest a chilling answer: extremely powerful. Because such effects often operate to encourage negative behaviors—ones with harmful social effects—we now describe them in more detail. But please note: Before we proceed, we should be clear that sometimes conformity can be helpful in such situations; for instance, when confronted with an emergency (e.g., a fire), we can sometimes escape from danger by doing what others do—for instance, following them to the nearest safe exit.

### **POWER AS A SHIELD AGAINST CONFORMI**

Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson (2003) have noted that the restrictions that often influence the thought, expression, and behaviour of most people don't seem to apply to the powerful. And in fact, there are several reasons why this might be so.

First, powerful people are less dependent on others for obtaining social resources. As a result, they may not pay much attention to threats from others or efforts to constrain their actions in some way. Third, they may be less likely to take the perspective of other people and so be less influenced by them. Instead, their thoughts and actions are more directly shaped by their own

internal states; in other words, there is a closer correspondence between their traits and preferences and what they think or do than is true for most people. Overall, then, situational information might have less influence on their attitudes, intentions, actions, and creative expressions. Is this really true? Research conducted by Galinsky et al. (2008) indicates that it is. In a series of related studies, they found that people who possessed power, or were merely primed to think about it, were in fact less likely to show conformity to the actions or judgments of others than people lower in power. In one study, for instance, participants were asked to think either about a situation in which they had power over someone (high power) or a situation in which someone else had power over them (low power). In a third condition they did not think about power one way or the other. Following these conditions, they performed a tedious word construction task—one that most people do not find interesting or enjoyable. Then, they were asked to rate this task. Before doing so, however, they learned that 10 other students rated it very high on both dimensions.

### **SEXUAL MOTIVES AND NONCONFORMITY: WHY THE DESIRE TO ATTRACT DESIRABLE MATES MAY SOMETIMES COUNTER CONFORMITY PRESSURES— AT LEAST AMONG MEN**

As we pointed out earlier, people have strong reasons for conforming: to win social approval, interpret unfamiliar situations correctly, make a favorable impression on others. These are powerful motives, so it is not at all surprising that most people do conform most of the time. But what about nonconformity? What are the reasons for thinking or acting in ways that are different from, or even contrary to, what most others are thinking or doing? One possibility, of course, is that people do this because they want to do what they believe is right—not what is acceptable or expedient. In addition, however, there may be other motives for refusing to “go along”—for remaining independent. Griskevicius, Goldstein, Mortensen, Cialdini, and Kenrick (2006) suggest that one of these motives may be that of attracting a desirable mate. They reason that for men, but perhaps not necessarily for women, standing up to group pressure may add to their attractiveness and help them win desirable romantic partners. This is so because gender stereotypes often include assertiveness and independence for men, but do not necessarily include these characteristics for women.

Furthermore, research on what women find attractive in men suggests characteristics such as assertiveness, decisiveness, independence, and willingness to take risks—all of which can be shown by nonconformity—are rated as desirable. In contrast, men don’t report finding such traits attractive in women, so women would have less reason to use nonconformity to increase their own attractiveness. In a series of ingenious studies, Griskevicius and colleagues (2006) found clear support for this reasoning. In particular, they found that when the motive to attract desirable mates was activated in participants (by asking them to imagine having met someone to whom they were passionately attracted), men *were* less conforming in a situation where they could demonstrate conformity or independence. In contrast, women were, if anything *more* conforming when their mate-attraction motive had been activated.

Presumably, women know that seeming to be agreeable is more attractive to many men (because it is consistent with gender stereotypes) than seeming independent and assertive. In a



sense, then, both groups were showing conformity to gender stereotypes, which were made salient by the dating situation. For men this implied less conformity, while for women it did not. So these findings don't suggest that men and women differ in overall tendency to conform; rather, they merely show that both tend to go along with gender stereotypes, so they may conform or not conform in different situations. In short, this research, and that of related studies, suggests that just as people have strong reasons for conforming, they often have strong motives for nonconformity—for refusing to go along with the group, especially if this puts them in a favorable light or is consistent with gender stereotypes. Once again, therefore, we see that social pressures to conform, although strong, are not irresistible.

### **THE DESIRE TO BE UNIQUE AND NONCONFORMITY**

Do you remember the research by Pronin and colleagues (2007), indicating that most people believe that they conform less than others? In a sense, this is far from surprising because we all want to believe that we are unique individuals (see Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Yes, we may dress, speak, and act like others most of the time, but in some respects, we are still unique. Could this desire be a factor in resisting conformity pressure? Two social psychologists—Imhoff and Erb (2009)—have obtained evidence indicating that, as other researchers (Snyder & Fromkin) suggested, it is. They reasoned that people have a motive to be unique—the need for uniqueness—and that when it is threatened (when they feel their uniqueness is at risk)—they will actively resist conformity pressures to restore their sense of uniqueness.

To test this prediction, they had participants complete a questionnaire that, supposedly, assessed several key personality traits. They then either provided feedback indicating either that the participant was “exactly average” on these traits, or offered no feedback. The first group, of course, experienced a threat to their uniqueness, so they were expected to be motivated to resist pressures to conform. Conformity was measured in terms of the extent to which they went along with what were supposedly majority opinions about the desirability of a nearby lake as a good spot for a vacation. For half of the participants, a majority of other people endorsed the lake, while for the remainder, they rated it lower. What would participants now do? If raising their uniqueness motivation resulted in less conformity, those who had learned they were “just average” on key personality traits would be less likely to go along with the majority than those who had not received this bogus information. Results supported this prediction, so it appeared that when the motive to be somewhat unique was threatened, individuals did respond by showing nonconformity—they refused to endorse the views supported by a majority of other people.

### **Do Women and Men Differ in the Tendency to Conform?**

Consider the following statement by Queen Victoria of England, one of the most powerful rulers in the history of the world: “We women are not made for governing—and if we are good women, we must dislike these masculine occupations . . .” (Letter dated February 3, 1852). This and many similar quotations suggest that women do not like to be in charge—they would

prefer to follow rather than lead. And that idea, in turn, suggests that they may be more conforming than men. As informal evidence for this view, many people who accept it point to the fact that in general, women seem to be more likely than men to adopt new fashions in clothing and hairstyles. But does this mean that they are really more likely to conform in general? Early studies on conformity (e.g., Crutchfield, 1955) seemed to suggest that they are, but more recent—and more sophisticated research—points to a different conclusion.

### **Compliance: To Ask—Sometimes—Is to Receive**

Suppose that you wanted someone to do something for you; how would you go about getting this person to agree? If you think about this question for a moment, you'll quickly realize that you have many tactics for gaining *compliance*—for getting others to say yes to your requests (e.g., Gueguen, in press) (One unusual approach is shown in Figure 8.13.) What are these techniques and which ones work best? These are among the questions we now consider. Before doing so, however, we introduce a basic framework for understanding the nature of these techniques and why they often work.

### **Compliance: The Underlying Principles**

Some years ago, Robert Cialdini, a well-known social psychologist, decided that the best way to find out about compliance was to study what he termed *compliance professionals*—people whose success (financial or otherwise) depends on their ability to get others to say yes. Who are such people? They include salespeople, advertisers, political lobbyists, fundraisers, politicians, con artists, professional negotiators, and many others. Cialdini's technique for learning from these people was simple: He temporarily concealed his true identity and took jobs in various settings where gaining compliance is a way of life.

In other words, he worked in advertising, direct (door-to-door) sales, fund-raising, and other compliance focused fields. On the basis of these First-hand experiences, he concluded that although techniques for gaining compliance take many different forms, they all rest to some degree on six basic principles (Cialdini, 1994, 2008):

- ***Friendship/liking***: In general, we are more willing to comply with requests from friends or from people we like than with requests from strangers or people we don't like.
- ***Commitment/consistency***: Once we have committed ourselves to a position or action, we are more willing to comply with requests for behaviours that are consistent with this position or action than with requests that are inconsistent with it.
- ***Scarcity***: In general, we value, and try to secure, outcomes or objects that are scarce or decreasing in availability. As a result, we are more likely to comply with requests that focus on scarcity than ones that make no reference to this issue.
- ***Reciprocity***: We are generally more willing to comply with a request from someone who has previously provided a favour or concession to us than to someone who has not. In other words, we feel obligated to pay people back in some way for what they have done for us.

- **Social validation:** We are generally more willing to comply with a request for some action if this action is consistent with what we believe people similar to ourselves are doing (or thinking). We want to be correct, and one way to do so is to act and think like others.
- **Authority:** In general, we are more willing to comply with requests from someone who holds legitimate authority—or simply appears to do so.

According to Cialdini (2008), these basic principles underlie many techniques used by professionals—and ourselves—for gaining compliance from others. We now examine techniques based on these principles, plus a few others as well.

### **Tactics Based on Friendship or Liking: Ingratiation**

We've already considered several techniques for increasing compliance through liking in our discussion of *impression management*—various procedures for making a good impression on others. While this can be an end in itself, impression management techniques are often used for purposes of *ingratiation*—getting others to like us so that they will be more willing to agree to our requests (Jones, 1964; Liden & Mitchell, 1988).

What ingratiation techniques work best? A review of existing studies on this topic (Gordon, 1996) suggests that *flattery*—praising others in some manner—is one of the best. Another is known as *self-promotion*—informing others about our past accomplishments or positive characteristics (“I’m really very organized” or “I’m really easy to get along with”; Bolino & Turnley, 1999). Other techniques that seem to work are improving one’s own appearance, emitting many positive nonverbal cues, and doing small favours for the target people (Gordon, 1996; Wayne & Liden, 1995). Since we described many of these tactics in detail in Chapter 3, we won’t repeat that information here. Suffice it to say that many of the tactics used for purposes of impression management are also successful from the point of view of increasing compliance. Still another means of increasing others’ liking for us—and thus increasing the chances that they will agree to requests we make—involves what has been termed *incidental similarity*—calling attention to small and slightly surprising similarities between them and ourselves. In several recent studies, Burger, Messian, Patel, del Pardo, and Anderson (2004) found that research participants were more likely to agree to a small request (make a donation to charity) from a stranger when this person appeared to have the same first name or birthday as they did than when the requester was not similar to them in these ways. Apparently, these trivial forms of similarity enhance liking or a feeling of affiliation with the requester and so increase the tendency to comply with this person’s requests.

### **Tactics Based on Commitment or Consistency: The Foot-in-the-Door and the Lowball**

When you visit the food court of your local shopping mall, are you ever approached by people offering you free samples of food? If so, why do they do this? The answer is simple: They know that once you have accepted this small, free gift, you will be more willing to buy something from their booth. This is the basic idea behind an approach for gaining compliance



known as the foot-in-the-door technique. Basically, this involves inducing target people to agree to a small initial request (“Accept this free sample”) and then making a larger request—the one desired all along. The results of many studies indicate that this tactic works—it succeeds in inducing increased compliance (e.g., Freedman & Fraser, 1966). Why is this the case? Because the foot-in-the-door technique rests on the principle of *consistency*: Once we have said yes to the small request, we are more likely to say yes to subsequent and larger ones, too, because refusing these would be inconsistent with our previous behaviour. For example, imagine that you wanted to borrow one of your friend’s class notes since the start of the semester. You might begin by asking for the notes from one lecture. After copying these, you might come back with a larger request: the notes for all the other classes. If your friend complied, it might well be because refusing would be inconsistent with his or her initial yes (e.g., DeJong & Musilli, 1982).

The foot-in-the-door technique is not the only tactic based on the consistency/ commitment principle, however. Another is the lowball procedure. In this technique, which is often used by automobile salespersons, a very good deal is offered to a customer. After the customer accepts, however, something happens that makes it necessary for the salesperson to change the deal and make it less advantageous for the customer—for example, the sales manager rejects the deal. The totally rational response for customers, of course, is to walk away. Yet, often they agree to the changes and accept the less desirable arrangement (Cialdini, Cacioppo, Bassett, & Miller, 1978). In instances such as this, an initial commitment seems to make it more difficult for individuals to say no, even though the conditions that led them to say yes in the first place have now been changed.

Clear evidence for the importance of an initial commitment in the success of the lowball technique is provided by research conducted by Burger and Cornelius (2003). These researchers phoned students living in dorms and asked them if they would contribute \$5.00 to a scholarship fund for underprivileged students. In the lowball condition, she indicated that people who contributed would receive a coupon for a free smoothie at a local juice bar. Then, if the participant agreed to make a donation, she told them that she had just run out of coupons and couldn’t offer them this incentive. She then asked if they would still contribute. In another condition (the interrupt condition), she made the initial request but before the participants could answer yes or no, interrupted them and indicated that there were no more coupons for people who donated. In other words, this was just like the lowball condition, except that participants had no opportunity to make an initial commitment to donating to the fund. Finally, in a third (control) condition, participants were asked to donate \$5.00 with no mention of any coupons for a free drink. Results indicated that more people in the lowball condition agreed to make a donation than in either of the other two conditions.

These results indicate that the lowball procedure does indeed rest on the principles of commitment: Only when individuals are permitted to make an initial public commitment when they say yes to the initial offer—does it work. Having made this initial commitment, they feel compelled to stick with it, even though the conditions that lead them to say yes in the first place no longer exist. Truly, this is a subtle yet powerful technique for gaining compliance.

## **Tactics Based on Reciprocity: The Door-in-the Face and the “That’s-Not-All” Approach**

Reciprocity is a basic rule of social life: we usually “do unto others as they have done unto us.” If they have done a favour for us, therefore, we feel that we should be willing to do one for them in return. While this is viewed by most people as being fair and just, the principle of reciprocity also serves as the basis for several techniques for gaining compliance. One of these is, on the face of it, the opposite of the foot-in-the-door technique. Instead of beginning with a small request and then escalating to a larger one, people seeking compliance sometimes start with a very large request and then, after this is rejected, shift to a smaller request—the one they wanted all along. This tactic is known as the door in-the-face technique (because the first refusal seems to slam the door in the face of the requester), and several studies indicate that it can be quite effective. For example, in one well-known experiment, Cialdini and his colleagues (1975) stopped college students on the street and presented a huge request: Would the students serve as unpaid counselors for juvenile delinquents 2 hours a week for the next 2 *years!* As you can guess, no one agreed. When the experimenters then scaled down their request to a much smaller one— would the same students take a group of delinquents on a 2-hour trip to the zoo— fully 50 percent agreed. In contrast, less than 17 percent of those in a control group agreed to this smaller request when it was presented cold rather than after the larger request.

Recently, it has been found that this tactic works on the Internet, as well as in face to-face situations. Gueguen (2003) set up a website supposedly to help children who are the victims of mines in war zones. More than 3,600 people were contacted and invited to visit the site, and 1,607 actually did. Once there, they received either a very large request (the door-in-the-face condition): Would they volunteer 2–3 hours per week for the next 6 months to increase awareness of this problem? In contrast, those in a control group were simply invited to visit a page where they could make a donation to help the children. It was expected that very few people would agree with the large request—only two did.

But the key question was, would more people who had received and refused the first request visit the donation site and actually begin the process of making a donation? this is precisely what happened. Higher percentages of the door-in-the-face group than in the control group went to the donation page and activated the link to make a donation. So clearly, this tactic can work in cyberspace as well as in person.

A related procedure for gaining compliance is known as the that’s-not-all technique. Here, an initial request is followed, *before the target person can say yes or no*, by something that sweetens the deal—a small extra incentive from the people using this tactic (e.g., a reduction in price, “throwing in” something additional for the same price). For example, television commercials for various products frequently offer something extra to induce to pick up the phone and place an order—for instance a “free” knife or a “free” cook book (see Figure 8.13). Several studies confirm informal observations suggesting that the that’s-not-all technique really works (e.g., Burger, 1986). Why is this so? One possibility is that this tactic succeeds

because it is based on the principle of reciprocity: People on the receiving end of this approach view the “extra” thrown in by the other side as an added concession, and so feel obligated to make a concession themselves. The result: They are more likely to say “yes.”

## **Obedience to Authority: Would You Harm an Innocent Stranger If Ordered to Do So?**

Have you ever been ordered to do something you didn’t want to do by someone with authority over you—a teacher, your boss, your parents? If so, you are already familiar with another major type of social influence—*obedience*—in which one person directly orders one or more others to behave in specific ways. Obedience is less frequent than conformity or compliance because even people who possess authority and could use it often prefer to exert influence in less obvious ways—through requests rather than direct orders (e.g., Yukl & Falbe, 1991). Still, obedience is far from rare, and occurs in many settings, ranging from schools to military bases. Obedience to the commands of people who possess authority is far from surprising; they usually have effective means for enforcing their orders. More unexpected is the fact that often, people lacking in such power can also induce high levels of submission from others. The clearest and most dramatic evidence for such effects was reported by Stanley Milgram in a series of famous but still controversial studies (1963, 1965a, 1974).

### **Obedience in the Laboratory**

In his research, Milgram wished to find out whether individuals would obey commands from a relatively powerless stranger requiring them to inflict what seemed to be considerable pain on another person—a totally innocent stranger. Milgram’s interest in this topic derived from tragic events in which seemingly normal, law-abiding people actually obeyed such directives. For example, during World War II, troops in the German army frequently obeyed commands to torture and murder unarmed civilians. In fact, the Nazis established horrible but highly efficient death camps designed to eradicate Jews, Gypsies, and other groups they felt were inferior or a threat to their own “racial purity.”

In an effort to gain insights into the nature of such events, Milgram designed an ingenious, if unsettling, laboratory simulation. The experimenter informed participants in the study (all males) that they were taking part in an investigation of the effects of punishment on learning. One person in each pair of participants would serve as a “learner” and would try to perform a simple task involving memory (supplying the second word in pairs of words they had previously memorized after hearing only the first word).

The other participant, the “teacher,” would read these words to the learner, and would punish errors by the learner (failures to provide the second word in each pair) through electric shock. These shocks would be delivered by means of the equipment and as you can see from the photo, this device contained 30 numbered switches ranging from “15 volts” (the first) through 450 volts (the 30th). The two people present—a real participant and a research assistant—then drew slips of paper from a hat to determine who would play each role; as you can guess, the drawing was rigged so that the real participant always became the teacher. The teacher was then told to

deliver a shock to the learner each time he made an error on the task. Moreover—and this is crucial—teachers were told *to increase the strength of the shock each time the learner made an error*. This meant that if the learner made many errors, he would soon be receiving strong jolts of electricity. It's important to note that this information was false: In reality, the assistant (the learner) *never received any shocks during the experiment*. The only real shock ever used was a mild pulse from button number three to convince participants that the equipment was real.

During the session, the learner (following prearranged instructions) made many errors. Thus, participants soon found themselves facing a dilemma: Should they continue punishing this person with what seemed to be increasingly painful shocks? Or should they refuse? If they hesitated, the experimenter pressured them to continue with a graded series “prods”: “Please continue”; “The experiment requires that you continue”; “It is absolutely essential that you continue”; and “You have no other choice; you *must* go on.”

### **Destructive Obedience: Why It Occurs**

As we noted earlier, one reason why Milgram's results are so disturbing is that they seem to parallel many real-life events involving atrocities against innocent victims such as the murder of millions of Jews and other people by the Nazis, the genocide advocated by the Hutu government in Rwanda in which 800,000 Tutsis were killed in less than 3 months in 1994, and the massacre of more than 1 million Armenians by Turkish troops in the early years of the 20th century. To repeat the question we raised above: Why does such destructive obedience occur? Why were participants in these experiments—and so many people in these tragic situations outside the laboratory—so willing to yield to this form of social influence? Social psychologists have identified several factors that seem to play a role, and together, these combine to make an array of situational pressures most people find very hard to resist.

First, in many situations, the people in authority relieve those who obey of the responsibility for their own actions. “I was only carrying out orders” is the defense many offer after obeying harsh or cruel commands. In life situations, this transfer of responsibility may be implicit; the person in charge (e.g., the military or police officer) is assumed to have the responsibility for what happens.

### **Destructive Obedience: Resisting Its Effects**

Now that we have considered some of the factors responsible for the strong tendency to obey sources of authority, we turn to a related question: How can this type of social influence be resisted? Several strategies may be helpful in this respect.

First, individuals exposed to commands from authority figures can be reminded that *they*—not the authorities—are responsible for any harm produced. Under these conditions, sharp reductions in the tendency to obey have been observed. Second, individuals can be provided with a clear indication that beyond some point, total submission to destructive commands is inappropriate. One procedure that can be effective in this regard involves exposing individuals

to the actions of *disobedient models*— people who refuse to obey an authority figure's commands. Research findings indicate that such models can reduce unquestioning obedience (e.g., Rochat & Modigliani, 1995)—although as Burger (2009) reported, not always.

Third, individuals may find it easier to resist influence from authority figures if they question the expertise and motives of these figures. Are those in authority really in a better position to judge what is appropriate and what is not? What motives lie behind their commands—socially beneficial goals or selfish gains? Dictators always claim that their brutal orders reflect their undying concern for their fellow citizens and are in their best interest, but to the extent large numbers of people question these motives, the power of such dictators can be eroded and perhaps, ultimately, be swept away. Finally, simply knowing about the power of authority figures to command blind obedience may be helpful in itself. Some research findings (e.g., Sherman, 1980) suggest that when individuals learn about the results of this social psychological research, they often recognize these as important (Richard, Bond, & Stokes-Zoota, 2001), and sometimes change their behavior to take into account this new knowledge. With respect to destructive obedience, there is some hope that knowing about this process can enhance individuals' resolve to resist. To the extent this is so, then even exposure to findings as disturbing as those reported by Milgram can have positive social value.