

MORAL EVALUATION OF CONFORMITY : A COMPARATIVE STUDY¹

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INTRODUCTION

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1. The Author would like to express her thanks to Ahmet Ekiştemli and Mete Turan for their help with the data collection and to Sevgi Aral for her helpful criticisms of an earlier version of the paper.

2. F. HEIDER, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, New York: Wiley, 1958, p.224.

3. L. FESTINGER and J.M. CARLSMITH, *Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance*, *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, v.58, 1959, pp. 203-211.

Moral values are a part of the general value systems of individuals which serve the function of guiding the individual's choices in life and determining his reactions to his various experiences. According to Lewin, "values influence behavior but have not the character of a goal... the individual does not try to reach the value of fairness but fairness is *guiding* his behavior."²In other words, acting in accordance with one's values does not decrease the power of that value in guiding one's behavior. A person feels content with himself when he acts according to his values and feels discomfort or dissonance when his behavior contradicts his values. Just as values influence the choices individuals make and the actions they take, actions and choices in turn may influence people's values. Numerous studies generated by dissonance theory give examples of this phenomenon.³

It is reasonable to expect people who are trained for different professions to have sets of values or to endorse a given set of values differentially. People whose professions require them to excel and to produce original work, such as artists, musicians, athletes and to some extent, scientists, would be expected to hold values different from those people who hold service and administrative jobs. Vocational decisions, of course, are influenced by people's values so that different types of people are attracted to educational institutions that train for different professions. These educational institutions, in turn, reinforce a set of values in their students that are consistent with the professional goals they are being trained for. Thus, a result of selection and differential training, different value patterns are endorsed by people in different professions.

It is generally agreed that some values such as aesthetic values are relative and therefore differ for different individuals. Moral values, on the other hand, are considered to be universally valid at least by the people who endorse them. Thus, when a person calls another *dishonest* he thinks that the other is dishonest by any standards. As Heider says, *oughts* have a constancy very much like object constancy, so that, given

4. F. HEIDER, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, New York: Wiley, 1958.

5. L. KOHLBERG, Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive Developmental Approach to Socialization, *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research*, ed. D. Goslin, Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1969, pp. 376. Kohlberg describes six stages of moral development. Stage 1: Obedience and punishment orientation. Stage 2: Naively egoistic orientation. Right action is that instrumentally satisfying the self's needs and occasionally others'. Stage 3: Orientation to approval and to pleasing and helping others. Stage 4: Authority and social order maintaining orientation. Stage 5: Contractual legalistic orientation. Stage 6: Conscience or principle orientation.

6. H. KELLEY, Moral Evaluation, *American Psychologist*, v.26, n.3, 1970, pp.293-300.

7. E.E. JONES and K.E. DAVIS, From Acts to Dispositions: The Attribution Process in Person Perception, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. L. Berkowitz, v.2; New York: Academic Press, 1965.

8. K.G. SHAVER, Defensive Attribution Effects of Severity and Relevance on the Responsibility Assigned for an Accident, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, v.14, n.2, 1970, pp. 101-113; E. WALSTER, Assignment of Responsibility for an Accident, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, v.3, n.1, 1966, pp.73-79; J.I. SHAW and P. SKOLNICK, Attribution of Responsibility for a Happy Accident, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, v.16, n.3, 1971, pp.380-383.

9. H. KELLEY, Moral Evaluation, *American Psychologist*, v.26, n.3, pp.293-300.

the facts, an act should be judged similarly by everybody no matter what one's relationship is to the actor just as a table is judged as being square no matter which direction people are looking from.⁴

However, acts are not judged similarly by all observers even if the same facts are known to all. These differences may be due to several factors. Firstly, people have different moral evaluation processes in which facts are weighed differentially. It is expected that a person with a moral orientation that emphasizes law and order (Kohlberg Stage 4) will judge civil disobedience on different grounds than a person with a moral orientation that emphasizes acting according to personal principles (Kohlberg Stage 6).⁵ Also, a person who uses a reality-like moral evaluation system that recommends conformity to norms or to the majority will judge an act differently from a person that gives credit to trying to be more moral than others.⁶

A second reason for differential judgement of moral acts is the degree of relevance of the act and to the observer. As discussed by Jones and Davis, actions that have consequences for the judge have hedonic relevance and are generally judged with more confidence and possibly in a more extreme fashion than actions that do not have hedonic relevance.⁷ Actions engaged in by similar others, on the other hand, might arouse defensiveness, and lead to evaluations different from those engaged in by dissimilar others. Several studies have shown that people tend to attribute less responsibility to similar others than dissimilar others when these similar others are perceived to be in threatening situations.⁸

According to Kelly, " the moral evaluation process is, in part, based on the processes of reality evaluation and achievement evaluation."⁹ A reality-like evaluation system is one that values conformity to norms or, in the case of lack of established norms, conformity to group decisions. In such a system, nonconforming behaviors are punished and normative or correct behaviors are taken for granted. An achievement-like moral evaluation system, on the other hand, gives credit to being different and better than others and would consider conforming behavior as average, and, therefore, not worthy of praise. (When conforming behavior is obviously the best course of action, it also will be approved by the achievement system. Such clear definitions of best behavior, however, usually are not available.)

The present study was undertaken in order to compare the moral evaluations of MA (Military Academy) and METU (Middle East Technical University) architecture students in a situation of conformity and nonconformity to group decisions. It was expected that students at the two institutions would have different sets of values and that their moral evaluation systems and consequently their reactions to conforming and nonconforming acts would be influenced by these different value systems.

There are a number of differences in the socialization experiences of MA and METU students. MA students, generally, after graduation from primary school or junior high school, enter military schools where room, board and education are free. Life at military schools is strictly regulated and disobedience is severely punished. Thus obedience, which is an important requirement for the professional officer, is

drilled into the MA students from around age 12 or 15 till graduation from the academy.

METU, on the other hand, is known as a relatively liberal University and METU architecture students have the reputation of being more individualistic, less conventional and less inhibited than the rest of METU students. Another important difference between the two institutions is that METU is coeducational while MA is not.

Taking all these differences into consideration, one would expect MA and METU students to have different reactions to conforming and nonconforming acts in a moral decision making situation. MA students were expected to use a reality-like moral evaluation system and to evaluate conforming acts more positively than nonconforming acts. METU students, on the other hand, were expected to use a moral evaluation system similar to achievement evaluation and to evaluate nonconforming acts more positively than conforming acts. MA students, also, were expected to engage in defensive attribution to a greater extent than METU student. There are two reasons for this expectation. Firstly, the hero of the experimental stories is a military man like the MA students, a fact that would increase defensive attribution. Secondly, obedience is strongly required of MA students. People who *must* obey cannot have a high degree of personal freedom and those who have a small degree of freedom cannot be held responsible for their actions.¹⁰ Thus, the socialization process of MA students would help the development of the defence mechanism of denial of responsibility.

To summarize, it was hypothesized that conformity in a moral decision making situation would be valued more positively by MA students than by METU architecture students, and secondly, that MA students would engage in defensive attribution of responsibility to a greater extent than METU students.

METHOD

Design: The independent variables manipulated in this study were the type of decision (conformity vs. nonconformity), the consequences of the course of action taken (correct or incorrect) positive or negative nature of the action engaged in (kill or let live), and educational institution (MA or METU). Although the study may be conceived of as a 2x2x2x2 design, data from the two institutions were analysed as two 2x2x2 analysis of variance designs in order to compare the patterns obtained for the two institutions.¹¹ Four way analyses were also conducted in order to detect any possible institution main and interaction effects.

Subjects: Forty nine male MA students and fifty male METU architecture students took part in this study. The MA study was conducted in Spring and METU study was conducted in Fall of 1975. MA subjects were in the first year of the academy while METU subjects were drawn from all years of the architecture department. MA students read the stimulus materials and responded to written questions during a course in social sciences and METU students read the stimulus materials and responded to written questions during studio hours.

Stimulus materials: Stimulus materials consisted of a booklet

10. F. HEIDER, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, New York: Wiley, 1958.

11. The 2x2x2x2 analysis of variance is a statistical technique used to partial-out the total variability in an interval level dependent variable into its component parts which are explained by the four nominal level independent variables separately and in the interaction.

containing a short story and some questions related to the story. Both the story and the questions were in Turkish. The short story was about an event that took place in a prisoner of war camp during a hypothetical war. The basic story was varied systematically according to the 8 experimental conditions.

The story begins with the prisoners planning escape in order to inform their troops of an enemy plan, which, if successful, would result in the death of many civilians. The prisoners suspect a certain prisoner of being an enemy spy and have to decide whether to kill that person or to let him live. They have no proof of his guilt. Some time before the escape they discuss the issue as a group and come up with a decision. This decision is either death or life for the suspect according to the experimental condition.

When the decision is death, one of the prisoners (actor) is chosen by lottery to carry out the killing. The actor believes in the principle of treating suspects as innocent till proven guilty and does not want to carry out the group decision. Finally, the actor either kills (conformity) or does not kill (nonconformity) the suspect. Later, the suspect is either proven innocent or guilty, making the actor's decision either a correct or incorrect decision.

When the group decision is life, one of the prisoners, the actor, thinks that the suspect should be killed because the slightest probability of his informing and thus causing the death of many civilians is too much of a risk to take. The actor either lets the suspect live (conformity) or kills him (non-conformity). His decision later proves to be either correct or incorrect. A summary of the eight stories used in the different conditions of the experiment is presented in Table 1.

Actor kills	Conformity	Group decides to kill Actor kills Suspect is proven guilty, prisoners escape	Group decides to kill Actor kills Suspect is proven innocent, prisoners get caught
	Nonconformity	Group decides to let live Actor kills Suspect is proven guilty, prisoners escape	Group decides to let live Actor kills Suspect is proven innocent, prisoners get caught
Actor lets live	Conformity	Group decides to let live Actor lets live Suspect is proven innocent, prisoners escape	Group decides to let live Actor lets live Suspect is proven guilty, prisoners get caught
	Nonconformity	Group decides to let live Actor lets live Suspect is proven innocent, prisoners escape	Group decides to let live Actor lets live Suspect is proven guilty, prisoners get caught

Table 1. Summary Table for the Experimental Manipulations.

After reading the story, the Ss answered a number of questions about the actor on nine point bipolar scales. The questions were : 1) Did P (the actor) do the right thing? 2) Is P guilty? 3) Should P feel guilty? 4) Should P have conformed to the group decision? 5) How free was P in his behavior? 6) How attached is P to the group? 7) Should P be punished? 8) Does P like O (the suspect) ? 9) Ss also rated the actor on a number of evaluative nine point bipolar adjective pairs.

RESULTS

Nine 2x2x2 analyses of variance each were performed separately for MA and METU samples on the answers to eight questions about the actor in the story and on the summed bipolar adjective scales used to evaluate the actor. The dependent variables were 1) evaluation of the act, 2) evaluation of the actor, 3) judgement of the actor's guilt, 4) judgement of the amount of guilt, the actor should feel, 5) judgement of the necessity of punishment by the group, 6) judgement of the actor's attachment to the group, 7) judgement of the necessity of the actor's conformity to the group, 8) perception of the amount of freedom with which the action was taken, 9) actor's perceived liking for the suspect.

Four way analyses of variance were also performed on the above nine dependent variables, but only the main effects due to institution and the interaction of the institution variable with other variables will be reported in this paper.

Evaluation of the act and the actor: Two dependent variables were included in this category, the question about the action was right or wrong and the evaluation of the actor on ten bipolar adjective scales. No significant main or interaction effects were found for the MA sample on these variables. METU data showed a significant Conformity x Consequences interaction effect on the first question ($F(1,42)=9.91, p<.01$). As can be seen from Table 2, letting the suspect live was perceived to be a better course of action than killing him when the decision proved to be correct and letting the suspect live was perceived to be worse than killing the suspect when the decision proved to be incorrect. The conforming actor was evaluated more positively than the nonconforming actor on the summed bipolar scales by METU students ($F(1,42)=8.85, p<.01$).

The four way analysis of variance showed a significant institution main effect on the evaluation of the actor variable ($F(1,87)=16.89, p<.01$). The actors in the stories were evaluated more positively by MA students than by METU students.

As can be seen from Table 3, the Institution x Conformity interaction on this variable showed that METU students evaluated the conforming and nonconforming actors differentially while MA students did not ($F(1,87)=6.19, p<.05$). The four way analysis of variance also showed a significant Institution X Nature of action X Consequences interaction on this variable ($F(1,87)=4.49, p<.05$). As can be seen from Table 4, METU students evaluated the let live-correct decision condition more positively than the kill-correct decision condition. There was no difference between the let live and kill conditions when the decision proved to be incorrect. MA students did not differentiate between kill and let live-correct decision conditions.

	kill	let live
Correct decision	6.75 (n=10)	3.22 (n=13)
Incorrect decision	3.93 (n=15)	5.72 (n=13)

Table 2. Evaluation of action by METU students (mean scores).

	MA	METU
Conformity	31.75 (n=28)	35.26 (n=27)
Nonconformity	30.80 (n=28)	45.05 (n=23)

Table 3. Evaluation of actor on bipolar adjective scales.

	MA		METU	
	Kill	Let live	Kill	Let live
Correct Decision	28.28 (n=14)	31.45 (n=13)	46.66 (n=10)	34.57 (n=12)
Incorrect Decision	34.57 (n=15)	30.79 (n=14)	40.06 (n=15)	39.18 (n=13)

Table 4. Evaluation of actor on bipolar adjective scales.

	MA	METU
Conformity	5.79 (n=28)	7.72 (n=27)
Nonconformity	5.02 (n=28)	3.70 (n=23)

Table 5. Perceived guilt of actor.

Judgement of guilt and punishment: The following questions were relevant to this issue: "According to you, is P guilty?", "According to you, should P feel guilty?", "Should the group punish P?" No significant effects were found on the first two questions with the MA sample. A conformity-nonconformity effect was found on the third question. MA students judged the necessity of group punishment to be greater for the nonconforming than the conforming actor ($F(1,41)=13.12, p<.01$).

Analyses with the METU sample showed significant conformity effects for perceived guilt of the actor ($F(1,42)=12.18, p<.01$) and the perceived necessity of group punishment for the action ($F(1,42)=26.93, p<.01$). No significant effects were found on the second question.

The four way analysis of variance on the perceived guilt variable showed a significant Institution x Conformity interaction ($F(1,87)=5.61, p<.05$). As can be seen from Table 5, the difference between the perceived guilt of conforming and non conforming actors was greater for METU than for MA students.

Judgement of the actor's attachment to the group and the perceived freedom with which the action was taken: Three questions were included in this category: "How attached was P to the group?", "Should P have conformed to the group decision?" and "How free was P in his behavior?". MA data showed significant conformity-nonconformity effects on all three questions. The actor was perceived to be more attached ($F(1,41)=18.31, p<.01$) and less free in his behavior ($F(1,41)=10.58, p<.01$) in the conformity than in the nonconformity conditions. MA students also thought that the conforming actor should have conformed more than the nonconforming actor ($F(1,41)=4.58, p<.05$). METU data showed no significant effects on any of the three variables in this category.

Actor's perceived liking for the suspect: A main effect on conformity and two significant interaction effects were found with MA data on this variable. The conforming actor was perceived to like the suspect less than the nonconforming actor ($F(1,41)=4.37, p<.01$). As can be seen from Table 6, the Conformity x Nature of action interaction ($F(1,41)=12.06, p<.01$) showed that the actor's perceived liking for the suspect was greater in the let live-nonconforming condition than in the

	Kill	Let live
Conformity	5.22 (n=14)	7.43 (n=14)
Nonconformity	6.00 (n=15)	4.27 (n=13)

Table 6. MA students' perception of the actor's liking for the suspect (mean scores).

	Correct decision	Incorrect decision
Conformity	5.72 (n=14)	6.93 (n=14)
Nonconformity	5.92 (n=13)	4.36 (n=15)

Table 7. MA Students' perception of the actor's liking for the suspect (mean scores).

let live-conforming condition. The difference between the conforming and nonconforming conditions was less when the action was negative. Table 7 shows a similar Conformity X Consequences interaction on this variable with MA students ($F(1,41)=5.97$), $p<.05$). The actor's liking for the suspect was perceived to be greater in the nonconforming actor-incorrect decision than the conforming actor-incorrect decision conditions. There was no difference between the perception of the conforming and nonconforming actor's liking for the suspect when the decision proved to be correct. No significant effects were obtained with the METU data on this variable.

DISCUSSION

It was hypothesized that MA students would use a moral evaluation process similar to a reality evaluation system and would evaluate conforming acts more positively than nonconforming acts. METU architecture students, on the other hand, were expected to use a moral evaluation process similar to achievement evaluation and to evaluate nonconforming acts more positively than conforming acts. Secondly, it was hypothesized that MA students would engage in defensive attribution of responsibility to a greater extent than METU students.

Our results showed that both MA and METU students valued conformity to group decision over nonconformity. There were four dependent variables concerned with the evaluation of conformity: evaluation of the actor, evaluation of the action, perception of the actor's guilt and the judgement of the necessity of punishment. Of these four variables, only the judged necessity of punishment showed a significant effect of conformity-nonconformity for MA students while three variables, namely, perception of guilt, judged necessity of punishment and evaluation of the actor, showed significant effects of conformity-nonconformity for METU students. These results show that conformity is valued more positively than nonconformity by both MA and METU students but that the effects is more stable and perhaps stronger for METU students in that a greater number of judgements are influenced by this factor. The Conformity x Institution interaction on the judged necessity of punishment for the actor, although it failed to reach significance ($F(1,87)=3.50$, $p<.01$), also showed that the conformity-nonconformity variable led to greater differential judgement by METU than by MA students. In other words, although students at both institutions judged the necessity of group punishment to be greater for the nonconforming than the conforming actor, the difference between the two conditions tended to be greater for METU subjects.

These results show quite clearly that our prediction of differential judgement of conformity by MA and METU students was not supported. Positive evaluations of conformity was expected of MA students but is rather surprising in METU architecture students who are reputed to be individualistic. The explanation of our findings has to be sought in the nature of the experimental manipulations and in the recent experiences of METU students concerning with conformity to group decisions. As was widely publicized, METU architecture

students have been greatly involved in the student boycotts of the academic year 1974-1975, and, with the support of other groups, have succeeded in getting some of their demands through solidary group action. They have, therefore, been rewarded for conforming to group decisions and have devaluated those amongst themselves who have acted against the group decisions. The conforming or nonconforming act to be judged in this study is concerned with conformity to group decision in a situation where a powerless small group is in conflict with a powerful, larger group. Although the situation of METU students was very different from the situation portrayed in this study, the recent reinforcement and increased salience of conformity might have led to positive evaluations of conformity by METU students.

It was said in the introduction that MA students would employ a moral evaluation system similar to reality system. A piece of evidence in support of this idea other than the finding that they evaluate conformity more positively than nonconformity was that MA students perceived the conforming actor as *having to conform* more than the nonconforming actor. This is an example of the perception of *what is* as *what ought to be* and is evidence of the contamination of the moral evaluation system by the criteria of reality system.¹²

There is also some evidence that in spite of the finding that they valued conformity over nonconformity, the judgements of METU students were influenced by the correct-incorrect decision manipulations to some degree. There was a tendency for the METU students' judgements of the amount of guilt that should be felt by the actor to be less in the correct decision than the incorrect decision conditions ($F(1,42)=3.44, p<.1$). This insignificant finding is an example of the perception of *what succeeds* as *what ought to be*, and indicates a contamination of moral evaluations by achievement criteria.¹³ This tendency provides some support for the idea that the positive evaluation of conformity by METU students may not be caused by a reality-like moral evaluation system and therefore is likely to be the result of their recent rewarding experience of acting as a solidary group.

The prediction that defensive attribution of responsibility would be engaged in by MA students and not by METU students was supported to some degree by the data. The analyses conducted with MA data led to several findings that are consistent with a defensive attribution interpretation. Firstly, MA students evaluated the actor more positively on the summed bipolar adjective scales than METU students, indicating a possibly higher degree of identification with the actor by MA students. Secondly, the MA students perceived the behavioral freedom of the actor to be less in the incorrect decision (failure) than in the correct decision (success) condition, thus avoiding responsibility for unsuccessful acts. Thirdly, MA students perceived the nonconforming actor to feel greater liking for the suspect than the conforming actor when the actor let the suspect live but no such differential liking was perceived when the actor killed the suspect, thus allowing for the possible effect of actor's feelings for positive acts and not allowing for such an effect for negative acts. None of the above significant effects were found with the METU data. Conformity-

12. H. KELLEY, Moral Evaluation, *American Psychologist*, v.26, n.3, 1970, pp. 293-300.

13. H. KELLEY, Moral Evaluation, *American Psychologist*, v.26, n.3, 1970, pp. 293-300.

nonconformity manipulations did not affect METU students' perceptions of the behavioral freedom of the actor, nor did this variable affect the perceived necessity of conformity to the group decision in the METU data.

To summarize, the findings of this study show that conformity to group decisions is evaluated positively by both MA and METU students. There is some evidence that METU students are, if anything, more consistent and extreme in their positive evaluations of conformity than MA students. The prediction that defensive attribution of responsibility would be engaged in by MA students but not by METU students was supported to some degree by the data. It was conjectured that the positive evaluation of conformity is caused by a moral evaluation system similar to reality evaluation in the case of MA students and is influenced by the past rewarding and salient experience of group solidarity in the case of METU architecture students.

GRUP KARARINA UYMANIN TÖREL DEĞERLENDİRMESİ : KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR ÇALIŞMA

ÖZET

Bu araştırmada Kara Harb Okulu ve Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Mimarlık Fakültesi öğrencilerinin değişik koşullarda grup kararına uygun ve ters yönde davranışlarda bulunan kişiyi nasıl algıladıkları incelenmiştir. Araştırmanın beklentisi Harb Okulu öğrencilerinin eğitilmekte oldukları uğraşı gereğince grup kararına uymayı ODTÜ öğrencilerine göre daha olumlu değerlendirecekleri, uymıyan kişiyi ise daha suçlu ve cezalandırılmaya lâyık olarak görecekleridir.

Araştırma sonuçları hem Harb Okulu öğrencileri ve hem de ODTÜ öğrencilerinin grup kararına uymayan kişinin cezalandırılması gerektiğini düşündüklerini göstermiştir. Bunun yanında ODTÜ öğrencileri grup kararına uymayan kişiyi suçlu bulup, onu olumsuz olarak algılamışlardır. Bu sonuçlar, grup kararına uyma-uyumama değişkeninin her iki okul öğrencilerinin de yargılarını etkilemekle beraber ODTÜ öğrencilerinin yargılarını daha geniş ve tutarlı olarak etkilediğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Sonuçlar kesin olarak eğitim kurumunun grup kararına uyma üzerinde etkisine ilişkin beklentileri desteklememektedir. Beklentilerin tersine ODTÜ öğrencileri grup kararına uymamayı Harb Okulu öğrencileri kadar olumsuz karşılamışlar, ve hatta bu olumsuz tepkilerini Harb Okulu öğrencilerinden daha tutarlı bir şekilde ortaya koymuşlardır. ODTÜ öğrencilerinin grup kararına uymamaya karşı bu olumsuz tepkileri 1975 yılı baharında gelişen öğrenci hareketleri ışığında açıklanmıştır.

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