

PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE IN HIGH SCHOOL CLASSES

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Social influence is a well-known phenomenon in social psychology (Moscovici, 1977). The perceived behaviors, attitudes and expectations of peers have essential impacts on what individuals consider to be appropriate in certain groups (Smith, 1988). Since school classes are generally important parts of students' social environment, the behavior of classmates could act as examples which describe the expected and accepted behaviors within the group (Rimal & Real, 2005). These effects take place even when personal and group beliefs are contradicting, which could lead to normative conformity (Asch, 1956). Therefore the impact of social influence and conformity needs to be taken into account when exploring behavior and motivational problems in school.

In school context, each class creates its own norms during group development (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). However, it is important to take into account that individuals tend to have false representations about the attitudes of peers, which leads to pluralistic ignorance (Katz et al., 1931). Questionnaires which can grasp personal, descriptive and prescriptive norms can help unfold which norms are not detected correctly (Szabó & Labancz, 2015).

The current research analysed the norms of 10 ninth grade high school classes. Altogether more than 200 students answered the questionnaires regarding classroom related norms and individual goal orientation. The comparison of personal and perceived group norms confirmed the phenomenon of pluralistic ignorance, as significant differences were found in every group. Students tend to underestimate the approval of learning-oriented behaviors in the class, while peers' attitude towards cheating or disrespecting the teachers is perceived overly positive. Results implied the presence of social influence, as students' mastery goal orientation was positively linked to classmates' perceived attitude toward learning-oriented behaviors.

These results show that group dynamics and social influence in the classroom could have a significant impact on students' behavior in school. The findings highlight the importance of further research to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying processes. Practical applications, such as improved classroom management are also fundamental.

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