

# Research on College Students' Conformity in Sports

**Pu Liu**

School of Physical Education, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China  
Email: 309233791@qq.com

Received 28 January 2016; accepted 14 March 2016; published 17 March 2016

Copyright © 2016 by authors and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

As a social member, college student will inevitably be influenced by the other students and the society as a whole. Conformity is a psychological term that indicates the influence. It means that an individual tends to keep accordance with the majority under direction or pressure. Conformity is a common phenomenon among college students when they are having PE class or playing sports after class, which has a great effect on students' physical activities, sport attitude and philosophy of life. This paper analyzes the effects of conformity on college students in sports and gives some practical suggestions to PE instructors about how to make use of conformity to help students change their attitude to sports and form lifelong sports habit.

## Keywords

Conformity, Effects of Conformity, Suggestions

---

## 1. Introduction

Conformity is a social phenomenon that individual readily conforms one's attitudes, beliefs, perception, and behaviors to group norms under the influence of group members. In college, students are still immature psychologically. Therefore, they are likely to be influenced by their peers and follow the herd whether they are studying, taking examination, joining a club, making friends and so on. Conformity is also a common phenomenon when college students play sports. In PE class, they tend to have the same attitude to the sports and the teacher. After class, they choose to play the same sport as their friends. According to a survey (Mo & Zhang, 2007) conducted in Hengyang Normal School, 48.0% students choose to do regular exercise out of interest; 23.0% students play sports to build the body; 25.7% students go to exercise to make more friends; and 13.3% of them play sports to get credits or for other reasons. Without any doubt, those 13.3% students will have blind conformist behavior when they play sports. It is also possible for the students who play sports to build the body and to make friends will have herd behavior because they know little about sports and their interest.

Many researches have been done about individuals' herd behavior in China and abroad. Solomon E. Asch is a psychologist who has done an extensive study about conformist behavior. His experiment shows that individuals will have conformist behavior even in cases where they can obviously determine others are incorrect (Asch, 1955). In China, many professors have done a quantity of researches about college students' herd behavior. For example, in the article entitled *Exploration on Conformity among Chinese College Students*, Professor Wu (2002) points out conformity is widespread in college. Professor Liu (2008) and Professor Wu Yan (2006) analyze factors that cause college students to have group conformity when choosing elective PE courses. This paper makes an analysis of the effects of conformity in sports and gives some practical suggestions to PE instructors about how to make use of conformity to help students cultivate lifelong sports habit and improve their comprehensive qualities.

## 2. Effects of Conformity on College Students in Sports

There are many factors causing college students to have conformity in sports. In test-oriented educational system in middle school, students spend large amount of time and energy in preparing for College Entrance Exam, neglecting participating in physical activities or fostering their interests in sports. As a result, students are at a loss what to do in PE class and they tend to have conformist behavior in sports when they are in college. Meanwhile, lack of confidence in sports, loneliness in new environment, desire for better interpersonal relationship, worship of fashion and other psychological factors also contribute to conformity in sports among college students. For example, some students play football once a week because their roommates like playing it. Conformity has both positive and negative effects on college students when they play sports.

### 2.1. Positive Effects of Conformity on College Students in Sports

One of the direct consequences brought by conformity is that college students who have no interest in sports will have a chance to play sports with their friends. By playing sports together and communicating with others, those students are likely to develop their interest in sports. Thus, they will form a lifelong sports habit. A research by Stephens & Craig (1990) demonstrates that 65% exercisers prefer to play sports in a group. People in a group are more likely to carry out the plan of regular exercise than those who make a plan for exercise alone. Undoubtedly, conformity helps students to form a group to take regular exercise.

Another benefit of students' conformity in sports can be reaped because students are willing to accept ideas from peers and change for the better. Therefore, teachers can make good use of their characteristics to introduce new ideas, concept and skills to them and help them understand new ideas, concept and improve their sports skills. Thus they can develop positive attitude to PE. What's more, students in a same class or a same team will form common life value and social norms because of conformity, which contributes to boosting class cohesion, team spirit and achieving the same goal.

### 2.2. Negative Effects of Conformity on College Students in Sports

Conformity in sports has negative effects on students who are interested in sports and those who are not enthusiastic about sports as well. On the one hand, the influence is mutual. Students who love sports may also be influenced by those students who are not interested in sports. They are likely to change their attitude to sports. On the other hand, those students who are not keen on sports have no chance to think critically even if they participate in sports. When students without interest in sports just follow the herd to do sports, they fail to think about sport differences and individual gap, and couldn't find what sport they are interested in and which sport is suitable for them. Gradually, they will lose interest in sports for they couldn't experience the charm of sports. What's worse, conformity prevents them from being independent and creative. Conformity means students conform to majority in belief and behavior. That is to say, they accept ideas passively and have no chance to challenge others and develop their personality. Meanwhile, they are more confused about their identity, and they will become lazier. Then, they stop thinking critically and thus lose their identity. Negative thinking will be widespread in the class.

## 3. Approaches to Deal with Conformity

The ultimate goal of college Physical Education is to cultivate students lifelong sport awareness and help them

develop a sound personality. In order to reach this teaching goal, instructors of PE course should learn to make use of conformity to help students change their attitude to sports and form a positive group. There are three main factors influencing conformity among students: group (group size, group cohesion, agreement among group members), environment (ambiguity of information, effects of authority and publicity of behavior) and individual difference (self-consciousness, gender, social status etc.). Therefore, those factors should be taken into consideration in order to eliminate negative effects of conformity in sports.

### 3.1. To Create a Positive Environment

No matter in or out of class, there are students who follow the herd to take part in sports. Those students have no interests in sports, not alone have a good sport habit. Therefore, more attention should be paid on them. By cultivating their interest in sports, those students can understand the sport event better and learn sport skills more efficiently. Meanwhile, instructors should also pay attention to those students who are enthusiastic about sports as they exert great influence on the students who follow the trend. If those students show interest in physical activities and take part in them actively, others will naturally follow their examples. In this way, a good environment will be created, in which all students will be inspired to play sports.

American social psychologist S. Milgram has done an experiment (Milgram, 1977), which found the more people have the same attitude or behavior in a group, the greater influence they will have on other members. The bigger group size also has greater influence. In the experiment, Milgram asked his assistants to stand on the street and look up at a window on the sixth floor. The number of his assistants increased from 1 to 2, 5, 10 and 15. Then they counted the number of passers-by who followed suit and looked up. The finding showed when one assistant stopped and looked up at the window, 4% passers-by followed the suit; when five assistants looked up, 16% people followed the herd; when 15 people looked up, the number of people who followed the example and looked up increased to 20%. Therefore, instructors should organize the class in reasonable group, making active students have greater influence on others.

### 3.2. To Improve Students' Comprehensive Qualities

In order to deal with negative effects of conformity, not only should PE teachers teach sports skills and create a positive environment for students, but they also should help students improve their comprehensive qualities, including improving their abilities, building their character and promoting their humanistic quality. It is universally acknowledged that the more difficult question is faced, the more likely people have compliance. That is to say, individuals will be unconfident if they realize that their cognitive ability is weak or they have less knowledge about something. Under great pressure in society, conformity behavior is caused. Therefore, it is critical for teachers to help students to improve their cognitive and other abilities in order to build character and confidence. So students should be given more chances to play sports with the guidance of teachers. Participating in sports gives students a sense of self-worth and accomplishment and teaches them the value of hard work and determination. In addition, PE teachers should organize kinds of group activities or arrange games between two classes. By working in a group and competing with others, students will learn how to cooperate with group members to achieve the same goal and how to face difficulty and frustration. With improved sports skills, students will gain confidence and build character. And they will gradually find their interest in sports and form good sports habit. Finally, teachers should take the responsibility of humanistic quality education. It is essential to show students how to care about others and help them know how to distinguish right from wrong in PE class. Only when students have critical way of thinking and humanistic quality, negative effects of conformity can be changed into positive ones.

## 4. Conclusion

Conformity is an inevitable part of college students' life. As PE teachers, we should understand that conformity is a necessary stage in the process learning sports skills. It is also an attitude and a way to life for self-protection and self-adjustment. Conformity has both positive and negative effects on college students when they play sports. Not only can conformity help students change their negative attitude to sports and thus form a lifelong sports habit, but it also contributes to boosting team spirit and achieving the common goal of a team. On the other hand, conformity prevents students from being independent and creative. Students fail to find the genuine interest of sports and thus lose their identity. If correct ways are adopted to deal with conformity, negative ef-

fects of conformity can be eliminated and converted into positive ones. It is essential for teachers to create a positive environment and to improve students' comprehensive qualities for the purpose of helping students develop the awareness of sports.

## References

- Asch, S. E. (1955). Opinions and Social Pressure. *Scientific American*, 5.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1155-31>
- Liu, Y. M. (2008). Exploration on Conformity among College Students in Choosing PE Optional Courses. *Journal of Lu-liang Technical College*, 24, 90-91.
- Milgram, S. (1977). *The Individual in a Social World: Essays and Experiments* (3rd Edition). Pinter & Martin.
- Mo, Y. R., & Zhang, Q. (2007). Study on Influence of Conformity on College Students' Attitude to Sports. *Science and Technology Information*, 35, 558.
- Stephens, T., & Graig, C. L. (1990). *The Well-Being of the Canadians: Highlights of the 1988 Campbell's Survey*. Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute.
- Wu, L. (2002). Exploration on Conformity among Chinese College Students. *Journal of Henan Education College*, 2, 35-36.