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An Exploration in Health Behavior: Conformity and Mask Usage

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Background

- Solomon Asch's study: 37% of participants went along with the majority answer, even though participants knew the answer was wrong, conformity dropped to 5% when one confederate said correct answer (Asch, 1955)
- Peer influence can alter individual's likelihood to engage in preventive health behaviors in regards to amount of alcohol/nicotine consumed (Phua, 2011)
- Correct answer is wearing a mask (Olivera-La Rosa et al., 2020)
- College students underestimate the number of people engaging in preventative behaviors (Scholly et al., 2005)
- Does the presences of others wearing or not wearing a mask change the likelihood of a participant wearing a mask?

Hypothesis

In the vignette where no individuals wore a mask, there would be a smaller percentage of participants that elect to wear a mask when compared to those in the conditions where there was at least one other person in the vignette already wearing a mask.

Methods

There were three different groups that participants could be randomly assigned to by a website called *Allocate Monster*
All got the same vignette expect for one sentence

1	No one (6) wearing a mask	*When they open the door you are surprised to see six people sitting spaced apart in their rather large living room. None of them have masks on.*
2	One wearing a mask, and five not wearing a mask	*When they open the door you are surprised to see six people sitting spaced apart in their rather large living room. One of them have masks on and five of them do not.*
3	All (6) wearing a mask	*When they open the door you are surprised to see six people sitting spaced apart in their rather large living room. Six of them have masks on.*

The full vignette read like this:

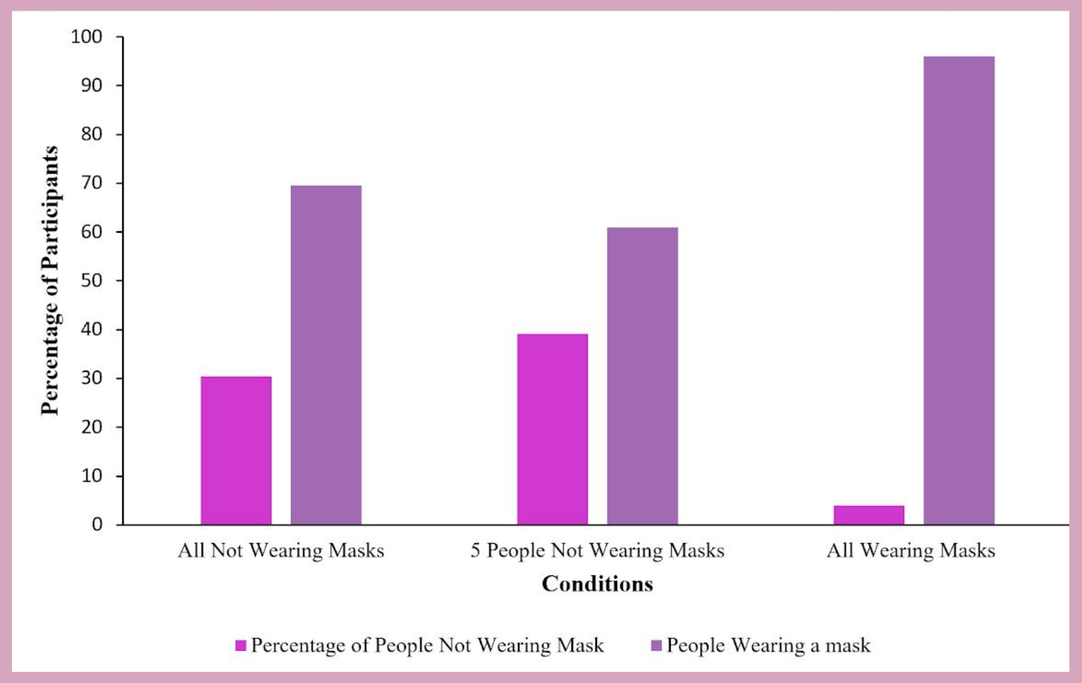
You are walking over to your friend's house to hang out after a day of classes. You are looking forward to just being able to hang out with them. When they open the door you are surprised to see six people sitting spaced apart in their rather large living room. Six/One/None of them have masks on and none/five/six of them do not. You are quickly welcomed into the room and conversation and find yourself a seat.

Interested in viewing the survey? Follow this QR code

Participants then answered many questions through a google survey, but the only one we were interested in was **"Will you wear your mask?" Yes or No**

Results

Figure 1: *Percentage of Participants to Wear or Not Wear a Mask*



$X^2(2, N = 72) = 7.75$, $p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .328$ p = .021

Discussion

- Our results do not follow what was found in Solomon Asch's study
  - The group with one mask wearer was closer to the group with no mask wearers
- At least the All Mask wearing group was significantly different from the mathematically estimated result
- Underestimated the effect of group norm
  - Other studies on preventive health behaviors have found that is the most important social influence -> Focused on what the majority is doing (Smith et al., 2019)
- Overemphasized informational conformity instead of normative

Limitations

- Under powered
- Participant's personal beliefs
- Vignette Clarity

Future Directions

- Additional conditions such as 3/3 (half with a mask on) and 4/2 (four with a mask on)
- Add more manipulation checks within the survey
- Give more vignettes with slightly different scenarios to each participant

Conclusion

Group norms have the largest impact on an individual's decision to wear a mask. The more non-mask wearing individuals there are in a group, the more likely a person is to not wear a mask.

References

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