

To Be Right or To Belong – Prediction & Reward in Social Conformity

Garrett Mauter

University of California, Irvine, Irvine, California, United States

Mimi Liljeholm

University of California, Irvine, Irvine, California, United States

Abstract

To test whether conformity reflects an intrinsic reward signal, we devised a multiplayer economic choice task that pitted monetary gain against group consensus. Specifically, we assessed whether hedonic valence elicited by majority alignment would transfer to contextual stimulus features. Contrary to the characterization of social conformity as reflecting an intrinsic utility of consensus, we did not find evidence of reinforcement of contextual stimuli based on decision unanimity. This failure cannot be attributed to unsuccessful majority alignment manipulation, since stay/switch behavior reflected an integration of consensus and monetary rewards, nor can it be attributed to a failure to obtain reinforcement of contextual stimuli, since such effects were observed for monetary payoffs. Intriguingly, individual differences in social anxiety predicted the influence of social alignment on contextual reinforcement and stay/switch behavior, suggesting that the utility of conformity is modulated by social affect. The results reflect an imitative basis of normative conformity.