

Social Influence

Social influence: The influence of others on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of others.

Conformity: A change in behaviour or belief as a result of real or imagined group pressure.

Types of Conformity

- 1) Compliance - agreeing a group of others in public but the person actually privately disagrees with the group's viewpoint/behaviour e.g. a person laughing at a joke because their group of friends find it funny but deep down the person does not find it funny
- 2) Internalisation - agreeing or behaving with a group others because you have actually accepted the group's views or beliefs. This results in a change to a person's private beliefs and attitudes. May therefore have longer lasting effects than public compliance e.g. converting religion because someone else has influenced you and you now deep down believe this religion is right

Explanation of why people conform

- 1) Normative influence - this refers to instances where someone conforms in order to fit in and gain approval from other group members. Leads to compliance because the person conforms just for show but deep down does not want to do that e.g. person may feel pressurised to smoke as their friends are (refer to Asch)
- 2) Information social influence - this refers to instances where people conform because they are uncertain of what to do in a particular situation so they look to others for guidance. Leads to internalisation usually e.g. going to a posh restaurant for the first time and may look to a nearby person to find out what fork to use

Asch's study on conformity

Aim: Wanted to investigate if P's conform in a situation where there could be not doubt the correct answer

Method:

- P's shown a pair of cards. On one card was a standard line and on the other, three lines of different lengths (called comparison lines)
- P's were required to say aloud which of the three lines matched to the standard line in length
- In each group there were 7 people, 6 of which were confederates of the experimenter posing as P's and there was only one true P.
- Confederates were required to give the wrong answer for 12/18 times

Findings: P's conformed on 32% of the critical trials. 74% of P's conformed at least once

Conclusion: It was thought that those who did not conform were confident

Evaluation:

- ☺ Lab study so high level of control. Helps eliminate EVs, which makes it easier to determine cause and effect
- ☹ Sample used were all male university students so they are not a representative so results cannot be generalised to general population
- ☹ Lacks ecological validity as it was based on peoples' perception of lines, this does not reflect the complexity of life.
- ☹ There is also evidence that there are cross-cultural differences in conformity levels for instance **Perrin** and **Spencer** replicated Asch's study in the UK and found that only 1 conformed out of 396. This shows that Asch's cannot be applied to different cultures
- ☹ Some psychologists argued that Asch's results were "time-bound". This is supported by Larson who repeated the study 20 years later and found conformity levels had dropped. The proposed reason for this difference is that at the time of Asch's study deviating from the majority and showing independence was frowned upon; hence why conformity levels may have been high. Nowadays independence is encouraged. This again questions how valid Asch's results are - it implies that Asch's results were only true of the time in which he carried out his study.
- ☹ Ethical issues - deception, informed consent and psychological harm

Zimbardo's study on conformity/obedience

Aim: Wanted to investigate how readily people would conform to new roles by observing how quickly people adopt to the roles of guards or prisoner in a role-playing exercise that simulates prison life

Method:

- All male student P's
- Some were given the role of prisoners and others prison guards
- The prisoners were arrested at their homes
- A fake prison was set up at Standford University

Findings:

- Prisoners rebelled against guards
- Guards retaliated against prisoners by harassing and humiliating them
- All P's conformed to the roles they were given
- Lasted for only 6 days due to the fact many prisoners were clearly distressed and had asked to withdraw (but should have lasted 2 weeks)

Conclusion: Zimbardo highlighted that people can conform to a role that they are given easily

Evaluation:

☹ Ethical issues - lack of informed consent (e.g. arresting at homes) and psychological harm (e.g. P's expressed clear distress during the experiment e.g. some were even depressed by it but Zimbardo did follow them up a year later)

In terms of conformity- in this study participants conformed to the roles they had been given e.g. Guards acted out the role of a tough person whereas prisoners became submissive (which means they gave into orders) and also withdrawn. This could also link into obedience because prisoners gave into the orders of the prison guards.

Obedience

Obedience: When a person complies with orders that are given by a legitimate authority figure

Milgram's study

Aim: Wanted to know why Germans were willing to kill Jews during the Holocaust. He thought it might have been because German's were just evil. He thought Americans were different and would not have followed such orders, so he wanted to find out whether ordinary Americans would obey an unjust order from a person in authority to inflict pain on another person.

Method:

- 40 male volunteers paid \$4.50 deceived into thinking they were giving electric shocks
- P's were told the study concerned the role of punishment into learning.
- The genuine P was always the teacher, whose role was to administer a shock (which were actually harmless) each time the learner made a mistake. The teacher sat in front of a shock generator and had 30 levers each indicating the level of shock to be given (15-450mv)
- The confederate had learner role whose task was to memorise pair of words. When tested, the learner would indicate his choice using a system of lights

Findings:

- All P's went to at least 300V
- 65% of P's went to 450V
- Most P's showed signs of distress and wanted to withdraw from the experiment

Conclusion: The "German's are different" hypothesis is false. Also, under certain circumstances, most people are willing to obey an authority figure even when asked to do something potentially harmful to another person.

Evaluation:

☹ In terms of internal validity, Orne and Holland claimed that P's did not believe the experiment and that P's were only "going along with the ad" when they "shocked" the learner, that they were not really distressed, just pretending in order to please the experimenter (demand characteristics)

However, Milgram's survey revealed that 75% of P's believed the set up

☹ Some researchers say this study lacks ecological validity. It was replicated in a run-down office in New York. During this study, obedience levels dropped to 47%. This suggests that Milgram's results only apply to the original Yale University setting.

☺ However, some research shows that it can apply to other settings. For example Hofling found that 21/22 nurses were willing to give patients a potentially fatal dosage of a drug known as Astroten after an unknown doctor asked them to do so over the phone, showing that people do obey authority figures in real life events

☺ This is further supported by Bickman. Bickman had an experimenter (in a field experiment) dressed a milkman, police officer or civilian. These men asked passerbys to either pick up a bag or provide money

for a parking meter. Results showed that passerbys were more likely to obey the man in the police outfit. Supports the ecological validity of Milgram's study as it shows high levels of obedience exist in real life situations

⊖ There are also cross-cultural variations in obedience levels. For example, Bond replicated Milgram's study in Germany (85% obedience) and Australia (40% obedience). This suggests Milgram's results only apply to the U.S.

⊖ It is also proposed there are gender variations in obedience levels. Milgram's results cannot be generalised as his studies were only based on men. There is evidence that a difference in obedience levels occur - females were found to have 12% obedience levels while males 40%

Ethical issues:

- 1) Milgram deceived P's by telling them that the study was about the role of punishment when it was in fact about obedience to authority figures.
- 2) P's were clearly distressed by the task and this was evident on the video clips.
- 3) P's expressed their desire to withdraw from the experiment but this was made difficult by the experimenter.

Milgram's defence:

- **Issue of consent**
- Milgram asked senior psychologists whether they thought this experiment was ethically acceptable. Most predicted that only one or two in a hundred would give 450V. So no one had thought such results were likely.
- **Right to withdraw**
- Milgram pointed out that although the right to withdraw was made partially difficult it was possible as 35% of P's had chosen to withdraw.
- **Psychological harm and Deception**
- Milgram debriefed all his participants straight after the experiment and disclosed the true nature of the experiment. P's were assured that the behaviour was common and Milgram also followed the sample up a year later and found that there were no signs of any long term psychological harm. In fact the majority of the P's said that they were pleased that they had participated.

Hofling's et al

- A field experiment demonstrated that obedience can occur in real life situations. 22 nurses participated and were unaware they were taking part. This took place in a number of American hospitals
- Nurses were called by "Dr Smith", a confederate of the experimenter who told them to administer 20mg of a drug called Astroten to "Mr Jones". He told the nurses he wanted the drug to take effects before he arrived. If nurses agreed, they would be breaking several rules: 1) it was against hospital policy to take prescriptions over the phone and 2) acting without a signed order from a doctor. In addition, the nurse was aware that the maximum daily dose of "Astroten" was 10 mg.

- Of the 12 nurses in the control group who were asked what they would do in that situation 10 said that they would not have given the drug without authorisation; however, 21 of the 22 nurses in the experimental condition did administer the drug.

Explanations of why people obey

Situational factors

a. Legitimate authority figure (A01)

One suggestion about why people obey is that we feel obligated to those in power because of their credentials/status and as a result we assume they know what they are doing.

Evidence for legitimate authority figure (A02)

☺ Milgram's study - Participants were willing to give electric shocks to the learner participant merely because they were asked to do so by an **experimenter wearing a lab coat**. This therefore supports the idea that someone may obey a legitimate authority figure even when asked to do something which might cause harm to another.

☺ Bickman's study - Also supports this study explanation as he found that when passer bys were asked to pickup a bag or provide money for a parking meter people were more likely to obey this request when asked by someone wearing a **Policeman's uniform** than a Milk man or an ordinary person.

☺ Hofling's study - Nurses were willing to give a potentially fatal dosage to patients just because they were asked to do so by a doctor

b. Gradual commitment

Also referred to as the 'foot in the door phenomenon' e.g. shopping for a pair of trainers you may have only wanted to spend £50 but once you get in the shop you may be willing to buy something for £55 because it is only slightly more than what you were ready to spend.

This refers to instances where a person might show some sort of commitment to a particular task e.g. by starting something and then as they continue it becomes harder to back down/change their mind.

Evidence for gradual commitment (A02)

☺ Milgram's study supports this theory as P's may have found it difficult to back away from the experiment as the shocks were increasing in small amounts. As a result they found it harder to withdraw themselves when it came to more serious requests. Also they had put themselves forward for the experiment, again showing commitment to the task in question. Thus they felt committed to completing the task.

c. Agency theory

This theory suggests that when we obey we experience something called an **agentic shift** (This is where we move from an autonomous (independent) state in which we take personal responsibility for our actions, to the agentic state)

Autonomous state  Agentic state

This agentic state is where we see ourselves as the instrument, or '**agents**' of the authority figure's wishes.

Evidence for the agency theory (A02)

☺ Milgram's study - In Milgram's study P's at various points made it clear they wanted to withdraw but were asked to continue. Some P's asked specifically who is going to take responsibility for this experiment to which the experimenter would say that he would. It was at that point that P's were willing to continue.

☺ Hofling's study - nurses were merely following orders; they were agents of the doctors.

Personality factors

d. Authoritarian personality

Some people are more likely to obey than others.

For example, Adorno proposed that those who have an authoritarian personality are more obedient. This personality tends to arise from having very strict parenting.

Social influence in everyday life

Explanations of independent behaviour

1) How people resist pressures to conform

a. Independence

A person may choose not to conform because they are truly independent when making decisions about how they wish to behave. Therefore the person will simply behave in the way they want to. For example an independent person would only smoke if they actually wanted to not just because a group of friends are smoking.

b. Anti-conformity

This refers to instances where someone purposely behaves in a way which opposes (goes against) the norm (what everyone else is doing). Such people would deliberately dress in a way that is different from others.

c. Allies

In one of Asch's variation he showed that the presence of a dissident (ally) led to a decrease in the conformity levels in true participants - this is thought to be because the presence of a dissident gave the true participant social support and made them feel more confident in their own decision and more confident in rejecting the majority position.

d. Confidence

As mentioned earlier when Asch carried out his line task experiment on Mathematicians and Engineers the conformity levels dropped and it was suggested that the reason for this was because such people would have been more confident in the actual line task as their job would involve such tasks. Thus suggesting that confidence could prevent someone from conforming to the majority.

2) How people resist pressures to obey authority

a. Situational factors

Proximity of the authority figure (e.g. phone or face to face), the presence of a disobedient model - Milgram's study was remade and a confederate of the experimenter pretended that they wanted to withdraw from the experiment in front of a true participant. The presence of this disobedience model led to a decrease in obedience levels by 10%.

b. Personal characteristics

Such as past experiences, one woman who took part in a version of Milgram's study refused to continue because she claimed that it reminded her of Nazi times.

c. 'Present of a group identity'

It is suggested that when a whole group is rebelling against an authority figure then people are more likely to disobey, more so than if they were alone

d. 'Systematic processing'

This refers to instances where a participant may have time to think about the task at hand and in such cases they are more likely to disobey.

Gamson's study on resisting obedience

Method:

- Volunteers were asked to take part in a discussion for an **Oil company**
- P's told the discussion would be about a **manager who had been fired** because his lifestyle was offensive to the local community
- OR - he had been fired for speaking out on a local television against high petrol prices.
- When P's began taking part it was apparent that the interviewer thought the P's **actual views were irrelevant**
- P's were **instructed to argue in favour of the sacking** of the manager from the oil company
- P's were asked to **sign a consent form** allowing the film to be shown in a court case.

Findings:

- Out of the 33 groups 32 **rebelled in some way during discussions.**
- In 25 out of 33 groups the majority of group members **refused to sign** the consent forms

Evaluation:

- ☺ Reduction in DC as P's were unaware this was a study
- ☹ But rebellion could have been due to the high costs of lying on a film that is to be seen in court
- ☹ Also ethical issues - deception/informed consent, stressful

The influence of individual differences on independent behaviour

I know that sounds like a tongue twister but it just focuses on how people differ and how this effects whether people do or don't resist the pressures to conform and/or obey.

This section focuses specifically on something called locus of control, this makes up part of someone's personality.

The term 'Locus of control' refers to how much control a person feels they have in their own behaviour. A person can either have an internal locus of control or an external locus of control.

People with a high internal locus of control perceive (see) themselves as having a great deal of personal control over their behaviour and are therefore more likely to take responsibility for the way they behave. For example I did well on the exams because I revised extremely hard.

In contrast a person with a high external locus of control perceive their behaviours as being a result of external influences or luck e.g. I did well on the test because it was easy.

Focusing on how the locus of control relates to INDEPENDENT behaviour, research has uncovered key characteristics of internal and external individuals.

Key characteristics of individuals with a high INTERNAL locus of control:

- 1) They tend to be active seekers of information and are less likely to rely on the opinions of others (this would imply that such individuals are less likely to conform)
- 2) They also tend to be more achievement-oriented and as a result are more likely to be leaders.
- 3) They are also better able to resist coercion (control) from others (this would imply that they are less likely to obey).

Key features of individuals with a high EXTERNAL locus of control:

- 1) They tended to be correlated with poor school achievement and they are more likely to obey and conform.

RESEARCH SUPPORT of locus of control:

Research has shown that internals are more likely to be leaders than followers. This is because internals believe that they have the ability to change things in their environment, including the behaviour of those around them.

Evaluation:

A recent meta-analysis by Twenge et al found that young Americans increasingly believe that their lives are being controlled by outside forces (so things that are beyond their control) than that of their own behaviour.

Research also shows that students have a tendency to have high external locus of control.

Twenge believed that this increase in high externals has been due to dramatic social changes that have taken place in most western countries since the 1960s such as; increase in divorce rates, violent crimes, mental problems and suicide.

Other factors which could explain individual differences in independent behaviour

1) Personality

Research suggests that conformers tend to have lower self-esteem, were less intelligent and had a higher need for social approval than non-conformers. Also remember those who are confident are less likely to conform - Asch's study with Mathematicians and Engineers supports this.

Also in terms of disobedient behaviours in Milgram's study it was found that those who had some personal relevance attached to Nazi Jews episode were less likely to obey.

2) Cultural differences

Remember there are two types of cultures - individualistic e.g. America which is the me, me, me society and collectivistic society e.g. China which is a we, we, we society.

Research has found that individualistic societies are less conforming than collectivistic societies. For example Marcus found that Asian Americans were more likely to conform than European Americans.

However cultures change over time and are constantly changing.

3) Gender differences

Men tend to conform in power groups e.g. If people in a group are of a higher status and Women tend to conform in a social group

Implications for social change of research into social influence

This is the last section of social psychology. It looks at how explanations such as Normative influence and research into social psychology such as Asch and Milgram can help us better understand real life examples. For example how research into conformity and obedience helps us understand acts of terrorism.

Social change: Instances 'when a whole society adopts a new belief or way of behaving which then becomes widely accepted as the norm'. A group may want this to happen in order to improve their social status.

1) IMPLICATIONS FOR CONFORMITY RESEARCH

a. MOSCOVICI (STUDY ON MINORITY INFLUENCE).

Aim: To see whether the minority can influence the majority and if so what factors lead to this influence.

Procedure: In his study 6 P's in each group (consisting of 2 confederates and 4 true participants). P's were asked to state the colour of a slide which was blue.

There were two conditions:

Consistent: In one condition the confederates would both say the slides were green throughout all 36 trials.

Inconsistent: In the other condition the confederates would say the slides were green sometimes whilst saying blue on other occasions.

Findings: The true participants conformed 8.42% of the time when in the consistent group in contrast to 1.2% when in the inconsistent group.

Conclusion: The minority does have an influence and consistency in the minority was important in this effect. It is thought that consistency is important because it creates a sense of doubt and uncertainty in the minds of the majority.

b. South Africa

When minorities have enough supporters they may become the majority, thus they are transformed into the NEW MAJORITY. Whereas the majority is transformed into the NEW MINORITY. Research shows that losing this majority position leads to dissatisfaction and increases in hostility and desire to exit a group. For example - In South Africa the majority was once white South Africans; it is now dominated by black South African government. This led the white South Africans feeling dissatisfied.

c. Terrorism as a tactic for social change (another form of minority influence)

Another real life example of minority influence is acts of terrorism. The aim of terrorism is to bring social change when direct social change is prevented (e.g. due to dominant majority, weak minority).

The following apply to terrorism:

Consistency and persistence: According to research into minority influence, the influence of a minority is most effective when it is both consistent and persistent (e.g. Moscovici).

The persistent suicide bombings by Palestinian terrorists are designed to demonstrate their commitment to overthrowing the Israelis'. Their view point is likely to be internalised.

2) IMPLICATIONS FOR OBEDIENCE RESEARCH

Now focusing on how research (e.g. Milgram, Hofling & Bickman) and explanations (such as legitimate authority figure, gradual commitment, and disobedient model) of obedience help us understand real-life examples.

a. Obedience as a mechanism for social change

During the Holocaust many Nazi leaders claimed that they were simply following orders and Milgram's study also showed this strong tendency to obey orders. More recently in the ethnic cleansing (eliminating an unwanted group from society) carried out by Serbian soldiers in the former Yugoslavia - soldiers allegedly received orders to rape Muslim women in a direct attempt to undermine the fabric of Muslim family life.

b. The role of disobedient models in social change

Reminder in Milgram's study - obedience levels dropped to 10% when there was a disobedient model nearby. The important role of disobedient models has been shown in many movements for social change including the Civil Rights movement in the US - Rosa Park's refusal to obey an unjust law sparked America's civil rights movement.

c. Reversing Milgram's Gradual commitment effect: a 'drift of goodness'

This is an example of how research into obedience has had a positive impact. Milgram highlighted that gradual commitment is one way in which we can be lead into destructive obedience.

However some research has shown that this could lead to a positive effect by using the same principle.

Gradual commitment: Researchers have found that merely getting someone to sign a petition leads to increases the chances of that person giving money to charities. Or getting people to fill in a short questionnaire increases the chances that they will sign up as an organ donor.

3) IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH INTO INDEPENDENT BEHAVIOUR

This focuses on how research which has looked into reasons why a person might resist conformity and resist obedience applies to real life examples.

a. Dissent (anti-conformist) - a catalyst for social change.

In Asch's study one of the most important factors for increasing independent behaviour was the presence of a dissenter. This tends to make a person feel more at ease to disobey. A real life example of this is Mahatma Gandhi. In 1930, Mahatma Gandhi and 78 other volunteers began a march to protest against the salt tax that was introduced by the British in India. Three weeks later, over 5 million people followed his example; and eventually led to the overthrow of British colonial rule in India.

b. The role of moral principles

In Milgram's study those who based their decisions on moral principles tended to defy orders. This is also true of Rosa Parks again as she clearly felt that the laws were morally incorrect.