

Social Psychology - conformity

Theme A: PART 1 – TYPES OF CONFORMITY

Social influence involves the efforts made by others to change our attitudes, beliefs, perceptions or behaviour (Cialdini 1994).

Two important forms of social influence: CONFORMITY AND OBEDIENCE.

CONFORMITY: a change in a person's behaviour or opinions as a result of real or imagined group pressure. It is a form of majority influence.

3 types of conformity:

COMPLIANCE – just going along with others so they like you (publicly conforming, privately disagree)

IDENTIFICATION – accepting group norms in order to belong to that group.

INTERNALISATION – change private views and publicly conforming also known as conversion.

RESEARCH INTO INTERNALISATION (JENESS' RESEARCH)

- First study of conformity, particularly of informational social influence.
- **PROCEDURE:** ppts estimated number of jellybeans in a jar alone (first independent estimate)
- Then they joined a group and discussed ideas, ppts had differing estimates because task had no clear answer.
- Group then reported overall average estimate.
- Individual asked again to give their own estimate.
- **FINDINGS:** big difference between two independent estimates. For every ppt, their second estimate as closer to the group average.
- **CONCLUSION:** judgement of an individual is affected by majority opinions, especially when answer is ambiguous. DISCUSSION OF ANSWERS LEADS TO INFORMATIONAL SOCIAL INFLUENCE.

EVALUATION

- **THE FINDINGS OF JENESS' STUDY MIGHT NOT BE TRUE IN THE MODERN WORLD** – CONDUCTED IN 1923, A LOT OF SOCIAL CHANGE HAS OCCURRED SINCE THEN, PEOPLES SUSCEPTIBILITY TO CONFORMITY MUST HAVE CHANGED, LACKS **HISTORICAL VALIDITY**, RESULTS CANNOT BE APPLIED TO THIS DAY AND AGE.
- **THIS STUDY DOES NOT TELL US MUCH ABOUT CONFORMITY WHILST MAKING IMPORTANT DECISIONS IN THE REAL WORLD** – DOESN'T TELL S ABOUT MAJORITY INFLUENCE WITH A CLEAR ANSWER ONLY AMBIGUOUS ANSWERS. HAS **MUNDANE REALISM**.

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- **THERE WERE NO ETHICAL ISSUES WITH THIS STUDY (NO DECEPTION)** – NO BREACHING OF ETHICS CODE, ALL FAMOUS STUDIES IN THIS TOPIC HAS SOME ELEMENT OF HARM. THIS IS ETHICALLY SOUND RESEARCH AND NO PPTS DISTRESSED.
- **LAB BASED EXPERIMENT – LACK OF ECO VALIDITY**, IMPORTANT ESTIMATES THAT PEOPLE CARRY OUT IN REAL LIFE HAVE MORE INFO TO USE TO MAKE CLOSER GUESS.

RESEARCH INTO COMPLIANCE (ASCH 1951)

- Find out whether ppts would conform to an answer from a majority group even though they knew that the majority answer was incorrect.
- **PROCEDURE:** male student volunteers, told they were taking part in a vision test.
- were seated around a table and shown three comparison lines and a standard line. They had to say which of the comparison lines were the same as the standard line.
- 6 ppts were CONFEDERATES, and one was a naïve participant who always answered second to last.
- 18 trials in study and on 12 of these confederates gave unanimously the wrong answer.
- **FINDINGS: 12 trials – ppt conformed 36% of the time**
- **74% conformed at least once, when they gave their answers in private they were right 99% of the time.**

EVALUATION

- **ASCH'S METHODS OF STUDYING CONFORMITY HAS BEEN USED BY MANY OTHER RESEARCHERS.** IT IS THE ESTABLISHED WAY OF CONDUCTING RESEARCH (RESEARCH PARADIGM)
- **IT WAS A STUDY OF CONFORMITY THAT USED A LAB METHODOLOGY IN A LAB SETTING (LOW ECO VALID)**
- **THERE WERE THICAL ISSUES WITH ASCH'S STUDY AS SOME PPTS FELT NERVOUS ABOUT DISAGREEING WITH THE GROUP OF CONFEDERATES.** Bogdanoff et al replicated Asch and found elevated stress levels in ppts when they were faced with the majority choosing an incorrect answer.
- **ASCH WAS NOT ALWAYS MEASURING WHAT HE WANTD TO MEASURE, IN POST EXPERIMENTAL INTERVIEWS** they explained why they conformed and the answers varied from not wanting to appear silly and wanting to please the experimenter (demand characteristics).

PART 2: EXPLANATIONS OF CONFORMITY

DUAL-PROCESS DEPENDENCY MODEL (DEUTSCH AND GERRARD)

2 REASONS FOR CONFORMITY.

1. *NORMATIVE SOCIAL INFLUENCE (THE DESIRE TO BE LIKED)* the person conforms because of a need to be accepted by the group. Belonging could be rewarding and not belonging leads to punishment, they publicly conform and privately disagree and keep original attitudes.
2. *INFORMATIONAL SOCIAL INFLUENCE (THE DESIRE TO BE RIGHT)* sometimes we don't know what to do in a social situation, we look to others and what they're doing and conform because they might know. You both publicly and privately agree – known as conversion.

AQ2

Normative social influence is also known as **compliance** and ASCH researched this.

Informational social influence is also known as **internalisation** and JENESS' research showed this.

SOCIAL IMPACT THEORY (LATANE AND WOLFE 1981)

THREE FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE STRENGTH OF THE MAJORITY'S INFLUENCE:

1. **NUMBER**- more people means there will be a stronger influence. The amount of added impact is progressively smaller three have far more strength than one but 11 is no stronger than 10.
2. **STRENGTH** – the more status and power of the individual or group the stronger the influence.
3. **IMMEDIACY** – physically close or psychologically closer means the stronger the influence. (If you know them well).

AQ2

ASCH – found conformity rates increased when number of majority was increased up to 4 people. (number)

SEDKIDES AND JACKSON (1990) – found high strength and immediacy sources had more influence and led to more conformity.

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PART 3: OBEDIENCE

Obedience is a direct order from somebody with perceived authority that we comply with because of fear of punishment or trust in authority. Whereas, conformity is an indirect pressure from the majority that we buckle under out of desire to be liked or the desire to be right.

RESEARCH IN TO OBEDIENCE (STANLEY MILGRAM 1963)

AIM: to find out whether ordinary Americans would obey an unjust order from a person in authority to inflict pain on another person. In particular what factors lead to obedience in these situations 'Germans are different' hypothesis

PROCEDURE:

- 40 American males aged 20 – 50
- At Yale university lab
- Volunteer sample through advert.
- Met by an experimenter (an actor)
- Told that experiment was about effects of punishment on learning. One plays role of 'teacher' and other 'learner' (confederate).
- Roles allocated randomly, experimenter explained punishments were electric shocks.
- Delivered shocks 15 – 450 volts, going up by 15 each time. Pre-recorded voice of Mr Wallace's cries, he screams protest after 150 volts and after 300 doesn't answer (dead).
- Experimenter said 'the experiment requires you to continue' if they wanted out.

FINDINGS:

- 65% ADMINISTERED FULL 450VOLTS OF SHOCKS (ABOUT 26/40 PPTS)
- Some ppts were visibly distressed (twitching, giggling, digging nails in to flesh) others unaffected.

CONCLUSION:

- 'Germans are different' hypothesis is false; people obey those regarded as authority figures. We will go against our moral code.

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AO2 – VERY important! You may be asked a 12 mark question

1. Sample was all male, American students. this makes it **occupationally biased, ethnocentric and androcentric** because it cannot be generalised beyond the sample as it is not representative of the population. Therefore this lowers the external validity. However, Milgram did a later study using females and found 65% went all the way to 450v, but again he only used a sample of 40 females and Kilham and Mann studied females too and found conflicting findings of only 16% going up to 450v.
2. Milgram's experiment was criticised by Orne and Holland who said that demand characteristics was inevitable because 'people feel they have to obey in an experiment, it was not measuring obedience in general, just in an experiment' they said it lacked internal validity.
3. Milgram's study was laboratory based and therefore it cannot be generalised however, Hofling's research goes against and he found that nurses in a hospital setting 21 /22 gave lethal injections and it was all natural but Rank and Jacobson showed his study was flawed and couldn't be replicated because nurses had no knowledge of the drug and in most hospital situations the nurses have time to seek advice and they did this and found only 2/18 gave lethal drug.
4. It was ethically unsound, participants were deceived and told they were taking part in a memory experiment and they were also psychologically distressed administering shocks. Moreover it was difficult to withdraw because they were told that 'they had to continue'
5. Cross cultural replication – milgram's paradigm has been used in many countries and methodological diffs make comparison difficult but 40% obedience in Australia and 90% in Spain, reflects cultural differences in authority not just because it was an authoritative figure.