

# SOCIAL INFLUENCE

## WHAT THE SPEC SAYS:-

- A) types of conformity and explanations for them,
- B) Asch's conformity study,
- C) conformity to social roles,
- D) Milgram's research and variations,
- E) explanations for obedience,
- F) resistance to social influence,
- G) minority influence,

### A)

- **INTERNALISATION:** this occurs when a person genuinely accepts the group norms and results in a private as well as a public change of opinions/behaviour and so persists in the absence of other group members.
- **IDENTIFICATION:** we conform to a group's opinions/behaviours because there is something about the group we value. We identify with the group, so we want to be part of it. This may mean we publicly change our opinion/behaviours to achieve this goal, even if we don't privately agree with everything the group stands for.
- **COMPLIANCE:** this involves simply 'going along with others' in public, but privately not changing personal opinions and/or behaviour. Compliance results in only a superficial change and stops as soon as group pressure stops.
- **INFORMATIONAL SOCIAL INFLUENCE:** this occurs when we are uncertain about what behaviours or beliefs are right or wrong and so we conform to be correct. The reason individuals follow the behaviour of the group is because people want to be correct. ISI is a cognitive process because it is to do with what you think and so is most likely to happen in situations that are new to a person or situations where there is some ambiguity, so it isn't clear what is right. Research studies support ISI. For example, in 2006 Lucas asked students to give answers to some maths problems that were hard and some problems that were easy. There was a greater conformity to incorrect answers when they were difficult rather than when they were easier ones. This was true to most students who rated their mathematical ability as poor. This study supports ISI because it shows that people conform in situations where they feel they don't know the answer.
- **NORMATIVE SOCIAL INFLUENCE:** this occurs when people do not want to appear foolish and prefer to gain social approval rather than be rejected and so they stick to the group norms. NSI is an emotional rather than a cognitive process. It is most likely to occur in situations with strangers where you may feel concerned about rejection or in stressful situations where people have a greater need for social support. Some research shows that NSI does not affect everyone's behaviour in the same way. For example, people who are less concerned with being liked are less affected by NSI than those who care more about being liked. This shows that the desire to be liked underlies conformity for some people more than others. Therefore there are individual differences in the way people respond.

## B)

**PROCEDURE:** In 1951 Solomon Asch tested conformity by showing participants two large white cards at a time. On one card was a 'standard line' and on the other card there were three 'comparison lines'. One of these three lines was the same length as the standard and the other two were substantially different. The participant was asked which of the three lines matched the standard. The participants were 123 American male undergraduates. Each was tested individually in a group of 6-8 confederates. On the first few trials the confederates gave the right answers but then they started making errors. All the confederates were instructed to give the same wrong answer. Altogether each participant took part in 18 trials and on 12 of the 'critical' trials the confederates gave the wrong answer.

**FINDINGS:** the naïve participant gave the wrong answer 36.8% of the time. Overall 75% of participants conformed at least once. The term Asch effect has been used to describe this result - the extent to which participants conform even when the situation is unambiguous. When participants were interviewed afterwards they said they conformed to avoid rejection (NSI)

**VARIATIONS** Asch was further interested in the conditions that might lead to an increase or a decrease in conformity. He investigated these by carrying out variations of his original procedure.

1. **GROUP SIZE:** he found that with three confederates conformity to the wrong answer rose by 31.8%. But the addition of further confederates made little difference. This suggests that a small majority is not sufficient for influence to be exerted but, at the other extreme, there is no need for a majority of more than three.
  2. **UNANIMITY:** he introduced a confederate who sometimes gave the correct answer and sometimes gave the wrong answer. The presence of this confederate led to reduced conformity of 25%. This is because the presence of a dissenter enabled the naïve participant to behave more independently. This suggests that the influence of the majority depends to some extent on the group being unanimous.
  3. **TASK DIFFICULTY:** he made the line-judging task more difficult by making the stimulus line and the comparison lines more similar in length. He found that conformity increased under these conditions. This suggests that ISI plays a greater role when the task becomes harder. This is because the situation is more ambiguous, so we are more likely to look to other people for guidance and to assume that they are right and we are wrong.
- In 1980 Perrin and Spencer repeated Asch's original study with engineering students in the UK. Only one student conformed in a total of 394 trials. This could be because when Asch carried out his research in the 1950's people were generally more conformist as it was a social norm to conform at the time. But society has changed a great deal since then, and people are possibly less conformist today. This is a limitation of Asch's research because it means that the Asch effect is not consistent over time and so is not a fundamental part of human behaviour.
  - Participants knew that they were in a research study and so may simply have gone along with the demands of the situation. Also, the members of the groups didn't resemble groups that were part of everyday life. So, this is a limitation that decreases the external validity of the study.
  - Only men were tested by Asch. Other research suggests that women might be more conformist, possibly because they are more concerned about social relationships than men. Also, Asch's study took place in the US which is an individualist culture and similar conformity studies that have taken place in collectivist cultures show higher conformity rates. This shows that conformity levels are sometimes even higher than Asch found. Asch's findings may only apply to American men because he didn't take gender and culture differences into account.

## C)

- **PROCEDURE:** In 1973 Zimbardo set up a mock prison in the basement of the psychology department at Stanford University. He wanted to find out if prison guards behaved brutally

because they have sadistic personalities, or is it the situation that created such behaviour? They advertised for students and selected those who were deemed 'emotionally stable' after extensive psychological testing. The students were randomly assigned the roles of guards or prisoners. The social roles of these were strictly divided and the prisoner's daily routines heavily regulated. There were 16 rules they had to follow which were enforced by the guards. The guards were told they had complete power over the prisoners, for instance even deciding when they could go to the toilet.

- **FINDINGS:** The guard's behaviour became a risk to the prisoner's psychological and physical health and the study was stopped after six days instead of the intended 14. Within two days, the prisoners rebelled as the guards harassed the prisoners constantly. After the rebellion, the prisoners became subdued, depressed and anxious. One prisoner was released on the first day because he showed symptoms of psychological disturbance. Two more were released on the fourth day with one prisoner going on hunger strike and then shunned by the other prisoners. The guards identified more and more closely with their role, with some of them appearing to enjoy the power they had over the prisoners. Zimbardo concluded that all guards, prisoners and researchers conformed to their roles within the prison- even volunteers who came in to perform certain functions found themselves behaving as if they were in a prison.

- Strength of this study is that Zimbardo has some control over variables. For example, the selection of participants. Emotionally stable individuals were chosen and randomly assigned the roles. This was one way to rule out individual personality differences as an explanation of the findings. Having this control over variables is a strength because it increases the internal validity of the study. So we can be much more confident in drawing conclusions about the influence of roles on behaviour.
- Participants could have just been merely play-acting rather than genuinely conforming to a role. Their performances were based on stereotypes of how they were expected to behave. However, Zimbardo said that quantitative data gathered, suggested that 90% of the prisoners' conversations were about prison life. On balance, it seems that the situation was real to the participants, which gives the study a high degree of internal validity.
- Zimbardo was accused of over-exaggerating his conclusion. As only a minority of the guards behaved in a brutal manner whilst most were keen on applying the rules fairly and actively supporting the prisoners. The differences in the guards' behaviour indicate that they were able to exercise right and wrong choices, despite the situational pressures to conform to a role.

#### D)

- **PROCEDURE:** In 1963 Stanley Milgram wanted to know why the German population had followed the orders of Hitler and slaughtered over 10 million Jews. He wanted to know if they were any different. Milgram recruited 40 male participants through newspaper adverts and flyers in the post. The participants recruited were aged between 20 and 50 years, and their jobs ranged from unskilled to professional. They were offered \$4.50 to take part. When participants arrived at Milgram's lab they were paid the money on the outset and there was a rigged draw for their role, in which they ended up as the teacher and the confederate 'Mr Wallace' ended up as the 'learner.' There was also an experimenter, dressed in a lab coat, played by an actor. Participants were told they could leave the study at any time. The teacher was required to give the learner increasingly high electric shocks; little did they know that these shocks were actually fake. There were 30 shock levels that went to 450 volts. At 315 volts the learner pounded on the wall and after that there was no further response. If the teacher was unsure about continuing, the experimenter used a sequence of four standard prods.

- **FINDINGS:** no participants stopped below 300 volts, 12.5% stopped at 300 volts, 65% continued to the highest level of 450 volts. Observations showed that some of the participants

showed signs of extreme tension such as sweating and trembling. Whilst three even had 'uncontrollable seizures.' All participants were debriefed, and assured that their behaviour was entirely normal. They were also sent a follow-up questionnaire; 84% reported that they felt glad to have participated.

- It is argued that the participants behaved the way they did because they didn't really believe in the set up- they guessed it wasn't real electric shocks. Therefore, the study lacked internal validity as tapes from the study confirmed many of the participants expressed doubts about the shock.
- Milgram said that the lab experiment accurately reflected wider authority relationships in real life. For example, Hofling studied nurses on a hospital ward and found that levels of obedience to unjustified demands by doctors were very high (21 out of 22 nurses obeying). This suggests that the process of obedience to authority that occurred in Milgram's lab study can be generalised to other situations. So his findings do have something valuable to tell us about how obedience operates in real life.
- A French tv show included a replication of Milgram's study. The participants believed they were contestants in a pilot episode for a new game show and were paid to give (fake) electric shocks. 80% of the participants delivered the maximum shock level of 460 volts to an apparently unconscious man. This replication supports Milgram's original conclusions about obedience to authority, and demonstrates that his findings were not just a one-off chance occurrence.

- **VARIATIONS:** after Milgram conducted his first study on obedience, he carried out a large number of variations in order to consider the situational variables that might create greater or lesser obedience.

1. **PROXIMITY** in this variation the teacher and learner were in the same room and obedience dropped from 65% to 40%. When the teacher was made to force the learner's hand onto an 'electroshock plate' the obedience rate dropped even further to 30%.
  2. **LOCATION** when Milgram changed the location of the study to a run-down building rather than the prestigious university setting where it was originally conducted, obedience fell to 47.5%.
  3. **UNIFORM** when the role of the experimenter was taken over by an ordinary member of the public in everyday clothes rather than a lab-coat. The obedience dropped to 20%, the lowest of these variations.
- Other studies have supported the findings of these variables. For example, a field experiment in 1974 had three confederates dress in three different uniforms- jacket and tie, milkman's uniform and a security guard's uniform. The confederates stood in the street, and asked passers-by to perform tasks such as picking up litter or giving the confederate a coin for the parking meter. People were twice as likely to obey the assistant dressed as a security guard than the one dressed in a jacket and tie. This supports Milgram's conclusion that a uniform conveys the authority of its wearer and is a situational factor likely to produce obedience.
  - It is even more likely that participants in Milgram's variations realised that the procedure was faked because of the extra manipulation. This is a limitation of all Milgram's studies because it is unclear whether the results are genuinely due to the operation of obedience or because the participants saw through the deception and acted accordingly.
  - A strength of Milgram's research is that his findings have been replicated in other cultures. The findings of cross-cultural research have generally been supportive of Milgram. For example a study with Spanish males found a 90% obedience rate. This suggests that Milgram's conclusions about obedience are not limited to American males, but are valid across cultures and apply to females too.

## E)

### PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

- **AGENTIC STATE:** is a mental state where we feel no personal responsibility for our behaviour because we believe ourselves to be acting for an authority figure. This frees us from the demands of our consciences and allows us to obey even a destructive figure.
- **AUTONOMOUS STATE:** this is the opposite of being in an agentic state. So a person is free to behave accordingly to their own principles and therefore feels a sense of responsibility for their own actions. The shift from autonomy to agency is called the agentic shift. Milgram suggested that this occurs when a person perceives someone else as a figure of authority. In most social groups when one person is in charge, others defer to this person and shift from autonomy to agency.
- **LEGITIMACY OF AUTHORITY:** an explanation for obedience which suggests that we are more likely to obey people who we perceive to have authority over us. This authority is justified by the individual's position of power within a social hierarchy. One of the consequences of this is that some people are granted the power to punish others and this is destructive authority.
  - When students were shown a film of Milgram's study they were asked to identify who they felt was responsible for the harm of the learner. The students blamed the experimenter rather than the participant because he was top of the hierarchy and therefore had legitimate authority. This supports this explanation.
  - The agentic shift explanation doesn't explain many of the research findings. For example, why some participants did not obey. This suggests that, at best, agentic shift can only account for some situations of obedience.
  - A strength of the legitimacy of authority explanation is that it is a useful account of cultural differences in obedience. Many studies show that countries differ in the degree to which people are traditionally obedient to authority. This reflects the ways that different societies are structured and how children are raised to perceive authority figures. Such supportive findings from cross-cultural research increase the validity of the explanation.

### DISPOSITIONAL FACTORS

- **THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY:** Theodor Adorno wanted to understand the anti-Semitism of the Holocaust. To do this Adorno investigated the causes of the obedient personality in a study of more than 2000 middle-class, white Americans and their unconscious attitudes towards other racial groups. They developed the F-scale to investigate this and this is what is still used to measure authoritarian personality. People who scored high on the F-scale and so had authoritarian leanings identified with strong people and were generally contemptuous of the weak. They were very conscious of their own and others' status, showing excessive respect, deference and servility to those of higher status. There was found to be a strong positive correlation between authoritarianism and prejudice.
- **AUTHORITARIAN CHARACTERISTICS:** Adorno concluded that people with an authoritarian personality have a tendency to be especially obedient to authority. They have an extreme respect for authority and submissiveness to it. They believe we need strong and powerful leaders to enforce traditional values such as love of country, religion and family. Everything is either right or wrong and they are very uncomfortable with uncertainty.
- **ORIGIN OF THE PERSONALITY:** Adorno concluded that the personality was formed in childhood, as a result of harsh parenting that typically features extremely strict discipline, an expectation of loyalty, impossibly high standards, and severe criticism of perceived failings. Adorno argued that these experiences create resentment and hostility in the child that is displaced onto others who are perceived to be weaker, in a process known as scapegoating.
  - It is impossible to draw a conclusion that the authoritarian personality causes obedience on the basis of a correlation as it may be that a third factor is involved. For example, perhaps both of these are associated with a lower level of education, and are not directly related with each other at all.
  - This one explanation will find it hard to explain obedient behaviour in the majority of a country's population. For example, the millions of Germans who all displayed obedient, racist and anti-Semitic behaviour must have differed in their personalities in all sorts of

- ways. It seems extremely unlikely that they could all possess an authoritarian personality. This is a limitation of Adorno's theory because it is clear that an alternative explanation is much more realistic – that social identity explains obedience.
- Another limitation is that of its flawed methodology. This is because every one of its items is worded in the same 'direction.' This means it is possible to get a high score for authoritarianism just by ticking the same line of boxes down one side of the page. People who agree with the items on the F-scale are therefore not necessarily authoritarian but merely 'acquiescers', and the F-scale is just measuring the tendency to agree to everything.

## F)

- **SOCIAL SUPPORT:** This can help people resist conformity as the pressure to conform can be reduced if there are other people present who are not conforming. The person who is not conforming doesn't have to give the right answer but simply the fact that someone else is not following the majority appears to enable a person to be free to follow their own conscience. This other person acts as a 'model'. Social support can also help people to resist obedience. The pressure to obey can be reduced if there is another person who is seen to disobey. The other person's disobedience acts as a 'model' for the participant to copy that frees him to act from his own conscience. Resistance to conformity is supported by Asch's study when a confederate joins the participant in getting some of the answers correct. Resistance to obedience is supported by Milgram's study when the rate of obedience dropped from 65% to 10% when the genuine participant was joined by a disobedient confederate.

- **LOCUS OF CONTROL:** was first proposed by Julian Rotter in 1966. People who identify as 'internals' believe they are mostly responsible for what happens to them. Whereas, 'externals' believe it is mainly a matter of luck or other outside forces. There is a continuum with high internal LOC at one end and high external LOC at the other end. People who have an internal LOC are more likely to be able to resist pressures to conform or obey as they take more responsibility for their actions and experiences. They also tend to be more self-confident, more achievement-orientated, have high-intelligence and have less need for social approval. In 1967 Holland repeated Milgram's baseline study and measured whether participants were internals or externals. He found that 37% of internals did not continue to the highest shock level whereas, only 23% of externals did not continue. Therefore, internals showed greater resistance to authority. This increases the validity of the LOC explanation. However, in 2004 Twenge analysed data from American obedience studies over a 40-year period and it showed that, over this time span, people have become more resistant to obedience but also more external. We would have expected people to become more internal. This challenges the link between LOC and increasing resistant behaviour. However, it may be possible that the results are due to a changing society where many things are out of personal control.

## G)

Minority influence is a form of social influence in which a minority of people persuade others to adopt their beliefs, attitudes or behaviours. It leads to internalisation or conversion, in which private attitudes are changed as well as public behaviours.

- **CONSISTENCY:** over time this increases the amount of interest from other people. The consistency might be the views/agreements of the minority group or how long they have been going over time. Such consistency makes other people start to rethink their own views.
- **COMMITMENT:** sometimes minorities engage in quite extreme activities to draw attention to draw attention to their views. It is important that these extreme activities are at some risk to the



minority because this demonstrates commitment to the cause. Majority groups then pay even more attention. This is called the augmentation principle.

- **FLEXIBILITY:** Nermeth in 1986 argued that consistency is not the only important factor in minority influence because it can be interpreted negatively as it can be seen as unbending, dogmatic and inflexible and this is off-putting to the majority. Instead, members of the minority need to be prepared to adapt their point of view and accept reasonable and valid counter-arguments. The key is to strike balance between consistency and flexibility.

- There is research evidence that demonstrates the importance of consistency. For example, Moscovici in 1969. It showed that a consistent minority opinion had a greater effect on other people than an inconsistent opinion.
- A limitation of minority influence research is that the tasks involved are as artificial as Asch's line judgement task and so the participants may have guessed the aim of the experiment and just did what they thought the experimenters wanted them to do. This means findings of minority influence studies such as Moscovici are lacking in external validity and are limited in what they can tell us about how minority influence works in real-life social situations.
- Research studies usually make a very clear and obvious distinction between the majority and the minority. However, a limitation is that real-life social influence situations are much more complicated than this. There is more involved in the difference between a minority and a majority than just numbers.