

# Basic Social Influence Notes

Learn this or fail module 3

NB: You must also learn APFCC for at least one study per section

Description AO1	Evidence/Commentary AO1/AO2	Criticisms/Evaluation AO2
<p><b>Research Studies of Conformity</b></p>		
<p><b>Definition</b> A change in behaviour due to real or imagined pressure from others.</p>		
<p><b>Asch (1951)</b> PPs in a group with confeds instructed to give wrong answers to task. Shown line-matching task. Pp calls out answer last. When confeds gave wrong answer, pps gave wrong answer 32% of the time.</p>	<p>Shows that people will go along with behaviour they know is wrong if there is implied pressure from the group. An example of normative influence (see below) An example of <b>compliance</b> – pps going along with group, but didn't change their views</p>	<p>Lab study – lacks ecological validity PPs might have been going along with the experimenter's expectations (responding to demand characteristics) Might be due to social climate in 1950s. Studies in the 70s/80s found lower rates of conformity.</p>
<p><b>Sherif (1953)</b> PPs asked to give estimate of how far a light moved (optical illusion - it didn't move). Do this singly, then in groups. When exposed to other group members' views, answers tended to converge and a group norm was established.</p>	<p>Shows that in situations where there is doubt or ambiguity, people use each other as a source of information. An example of informational influence An example of <b>internalisation</b> – pps changed both their behaviour and their views</p>	<p>Lab study – lacks ecological validity Pps might have felt under pressure to alter their answers. Only happens when pps believe they are part of the same social group. <b>Hogg &amp; Abrahams (1991)</b> found that pps would not conform to members of a different group.</p>
<p><b>Zimbardo (1973)</b> Pps assigned to play role of guards &amp; prisoners in a mock prison. Played their roles too well. Guards became brutal and domineering, prisoners became passive and neurotic. Study had to be stopped after 6 days out of 14.</p>	<p>Shows that behaviour can be drastically altered by social roles. Guards and prisoners took on expected behaviours and attitudes in spite of the fact they were just normal students. An example of <b>identification</b> – pps became the roles they were playing.</p>	<p>Role-play simulation – might not exactly resemble real life. However, compare guards behaviour with US soldiers in Iraq Many ethical problems (see below)</p>
<p><b>Reasons for Conformity to Majority Influence</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Normative influence – people go along with the group's behaviour to remain in the group</li> <li>2. Informational influence – people go along with the group as they think the group knows better</li> </ol>	<p>Normative influence results first in compliance (Asch) but might produce internalisation over time. Informational influence results in internalisation (Sherif)</p>	<p>Both processes play a part in most conformity e.g. Hogg &amp; Abrahams showed how group membership (normative influence) could affect behaviour in the Sherif task (informational influence)</p>

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<p><b>Minority Influence</b></p> <p><b>Moscovici et al (1969)</b> PPs asked to judge the colour of slides. There were two confeds in the group who said the wrong colour. When confeds gave wrong colour all the time, some of the PPs agreed.</p> <p><b>Reasons for Conformity to Minority Influence</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dissent from minority causes social disruption. People are motivated to move towards the minority to reduce disruption.</li> <li>2. Dissent causes people to question own views if it is consistent. This may loosen attitudes.</li> </ol>	<p>Shows that a minority can change the behaviour of a majority. This only happens if the minority are consistent in their disagreement Happens quicker if the minority is larger</p> <p>E.g. minority groups that manage to change society's views e.g. ecological movement were regarded as cranks in the 70s, but through persistent dissent their views became mainstream</p>	<p>Lab study – lack of ecological validity Conformity effect was very small – perhaps not important</p>
<p><b>Obedience to Authority</b></p> <p><b>Definition</b> Complying with a request from a legitimate authority</p> <p><b>Milgram (1963)</b> PPs volunteer for learning experiment. Told to give electric shock to confed every time he got a word wrong. Shocks go up to 450v, increasing each time. Confed screams, shouts, goes silent. PP instructed to carry on. 100% of pps gave 300v; 65% gave 450v</p> <p><b>Milgram variations</b> Seedy office block – 48% obedience Confed in room – 30% obedience Disobedient colleagues – 10% obedience Colleague gives shocks – 90% obedience</p> <p><b>Reasons for Obedience</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Legitimacy of the authority – people assume that an authority is qualified to tell them what to do &amp; has good reasons for their request</li> <li>2. Agency – people assume the authority will take responsibility for the consequences</li> <li>3. Socialisation – we are taught to obey authorities from an early age</li> </ol>	<p>Shows that obedience is not due to a weak personality but due to social pressure. All the pps were normal people, but still gave lethal shocks to victim</p> <p>Shows that obedience affected by two factors:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Authority of the experimenter (original expt was in Yale uni – lots of prestige)</li> <li>2. Psychological distance from victim (when they could see the victim, they obeyed less)</li> </ol> <p>Milgram &amp; variations</p>	<p>Study has been criticised on several grounds:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of ecological validity</li> <li>2. Lack of internal validity</li> <li>3. Ethical problems</li> </ol> <p>See below for all of these</p> <p>As above Obedience also affected by gradual commitment – pps started off with small shocks that gradually got bigger – each shock only 15v more than the last</p> <p>As above Ignores political context of many acts of destructive obedience e.g. Nazis killed the Jews because of obedience processes, but there was also a carefully nurtured climate of hatred against Jews. Similar situation in Rwanda</p>

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<p><b>Resisting Obedience</b> Easier to resist an authority if:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Authority's status is undermined</li> <li>2. Other people are disobedient with you</li> <li>3. People are made aware of the consequences of their actions</li> </ol>	<p>See Milgram &amp; variations e.g.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. seedy office block (lack of authority)</li> <li>2. disobedient colleagues</li> <li>3. victim in room</li> </ol>	<p>Personal variables also play a part e.g. people who went against the Nazis &amp; helped the Jews often had strong moral/religious convictions</p>
<b>Validity of Obedience Research</b>		
Two types of validity:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Internal validity (was the study truthful?)</li> <li>2. External validity (can the results be generalised?)</li> </ol>		
<p><b>Internal Validity</b> Orne suggested that the PPs weren't fooled by the experimental setup. They just went along with the experimenter because they thought it was expected of them.</p>	<p>It was a lab study – people assume that everything will actually be OK, but like seeing a magician saw a woman in half – you play along, but don't really believe it's happening.</p>	<p>The pps got very stressed and cheated when the experimenter was out of the room. This suggests they really were fooled and so their obedience was real.</p>
<p><b>External Validity (sampling)</b> The sample was only white American men. The results may not generalise to other populations e.g. women.</p>		<p>The study has been repeated many times. US women are as obedient as US men. Results in other countries are similar, usually with higher rates of obedience.</p>
<p><b>External Validity (setting)</b> The lab setting is unlike other types of social situations &amp; a special relationship exists between researcher &amp; participant. Obedience like this may not happen in other settings.</p>	<p>Although lab settings are unlike other settings, certain key features are the same e.g. a relationship where one person abdicates responsibility to another person with a higher status e.g. the army. <b>Hofling et al (1966)</b> found that nurses would obey an order to give an overdose to a patient. <b>Bickman (1975)</b> found that pps would obey someone in uniform more than someone in normal clothes. These findings show that similar obedience processes to Milgram happen in real-world settings.</p>	<p>Hofling's nurses thought they were acting in the patient's best interests Bickman's pps were only doing minor acts of obedience and not hurting anyone. Therefore, obedience in these studies was not exactly the same as in Milgram.</p>

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<p><b>Ethical Issues in Social Influence Research</b></p> <p>Moral problems that arise from how PPs are treated in a study e.g.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Informed consent</li> <li>2. Deception</li> <li>3. Protection from harm</li> </ol>		
<p><b>Informed Consent</b></p> <p>Pps have the right to know everything that might affect their willingness to take part in a study before they agree to take part. They can withdraw from the study at any time.</p>	<p>In Milgram, PPs were misled about the nature of the study they volunteered for (thought it was about learning, didn't know they were going to have to 'kill' the confed.</p> <p>In Zimbardo, pps had full info, but were not allowed to withdraw from the study (prisoners had to apply for parole which could be refused)</p> <p>In Hofling et al, nurses had no idea it was a study</p> <p>In Milgram, pps were deceived into believing they were hurting the confed. This led to great stress</p> <p>In Asch, the pps were led to believe the confeds were other pps. This led to embarrassment.</p>	<p>Milgram &amp; Hofling's studies would not have worked if the PPs had had full information.</p> <p>Zimbardo is harder to justify, but it wouldn't have been a realistic prison if the pps could walk out at any time.</p>
<p><b>Deception</b></p> <p>Deception of pps should be avoided, especially if the nature of the deception is likely to disturb them</p>	<p>In Milgram the pps were subject to extreme stress &amp; had their self-concept altered by realising they could have killed the confed.</p> <p>In Zimbardo the prisoners were abused by the guards.</p> <p>In Hofling, the nurses realised they could have killed the patient.</p>	<p>The research wouldn't work if there was no deception. Need to balance requirement to deceive against well-being of PPs.</p> <p>Could use role-play instead (like Zimbardo) but results aren't guaranteed to be valid. Aronson (1985) tried role playing Milgram, but all the pps disobeyed.</p>
<p><b>Protection from Harm</b></p> <p>Pps should not be exposed to physical or mental harm and should leave the experiment in the same state they entered.</p>		<p>Difficult to justify any of these, but Milgram and Zimbardo had no idea how far the pps would go when they started the studies.</p> <p>NB. Milgram did twenty or so more experiments</p> <p>Debriefing (see below) can help to restore the pps to their original state.</p>
<p><b>Dealing with Ethical Issues</b></p> <p><b>Debriefing</b></p> <p>After the study the pps have the whole thing explained, are reassured that they are normal and are given the chance to give their views on the experiment</p>	<p>E.g. Milgram did a very good debriefing. Pps were introduced to the confed so they knew he wasn't dead and interviewed about their experiences. Most said they thought it was an important study, they'd learned a lot and were glad they'd taken part. Milgram also did long-term follow up to make sure they were OK.</p>	<p>This should be done as a matter of course after every study.</p> <p>However, it's a mistake to assume you can make up for anything just by saying sorry afterwards. Ideally there should be little/no damage to undo.</p>

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<p><b>Ethical Guidelines</b> Professional bodies like the BPS publish rules about what can and can't be done. The guidelines are enforced by the BPS, which can discipline psychologists who persistently violate them.</p> <p><b>Ethical Committees</b> Universities have a committee of senior psychologists who review all research proposals and can enforce changes if they do not meet appropriate ethical guidelines.</p>	<p>Current BPS guidelines cover most ethical problems e.g.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deception to be avoided if possible and not allowed when PPs will be disturbed by it.</li> <li>2. PPs must be put at no more risk than they would encounter in their everyday lives</li> <li>3. Informed consent must be obtained except in naturalistic observations, but here you must only observe things pps would expect to be observed doing.</li> </ol> <p>More likely to ensure people stay within guidelines because they are being actively regulated.</p>	<p>Guidelines are good in that they give psychologists a clear set of rules to follow that help avoid ethical dodginess. However, the rules are still open to interpretation e.g. what counts as a necessary deception? Rules only work if they are enforced. The professional bodies sometimes do not enforce the rules strictly and in any case, do not prevent ethical abuses by psychologists operating outside the BPS (e.g. military?)</p> <p>Committee may be biased towards psychological research and let through things that laypeople might find unacceptable. Not many committees have laypeople on them. More should. Different committees may apply the guidelines differently e.g. at my Uni (Aston) there was a blanket ban on research using drugs even coffee, but this is not the case elsewhere Not all research takes place in unis (though lots does) so committees may not regulate commercial or military research. Ironically, these are the areas most likely to raise ethical issues.</p>