

Theories of social influence

Morton Deutsch and Harold Gerrard's (1955) dual model of social influence proposes that behaviour can be explained in terms of informational social influence or normative social influence

Informational social influence (ISI)

People conform due to the superior knowledge of other/s.

- The aim is to seek information from a knowledgeable person/people in an ambiguous situation.
- There is public acceptance of the information.
- There is private internalisation of the information.

Normative social influence (NSI)

People conform due to their desire to be liked or to fit in.

- The aim is to get approval from others, or to avoid punishment.
- There is public acceptance of the information.
- There is no private internalisation of the information.
- For an example, see Solomon Asch's (1951) line length study.

Real-world example

It is Jim's first day of college, but he has arrived late and missed the part where a lecturer told all the new students what they should do and where they should go during induction. He sees a group of students filing off towards a corridor and decides to follow them.

Real-world example

Mary has just started work in an office. During a coffee break, her colleagues state that refugees receive favourable treatment from the government and that this should stop. Mary doesn't agree, but when she is asked what she thinks, she says that her colleagues are right.

An alternative explanation

Referent informational influence (Turner 1991)

Here ISI and NSI are seen as part of a single model of influence — based on the social identity approach.

- Social influence is due to group membership.
- We identify with one or more social groups — this creates our social identity.
- An 'ingroup' is a group of people that we perceive ourselves as belonging to at any one specific moment (for example, 'students' or 'English people', etc.).

We conform with reference to the currently relevant ingroup:

- We want to be liked by them and to be accepted (normative).
- If our first response would have been to disagree, we assume we must be wrong because we expect to agree with the ingroup and therefore tend to conform to the ingroup views/behaviour (informational).

