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AQA A-level

Psychology

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DYNAMIC LEARNING

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Contents

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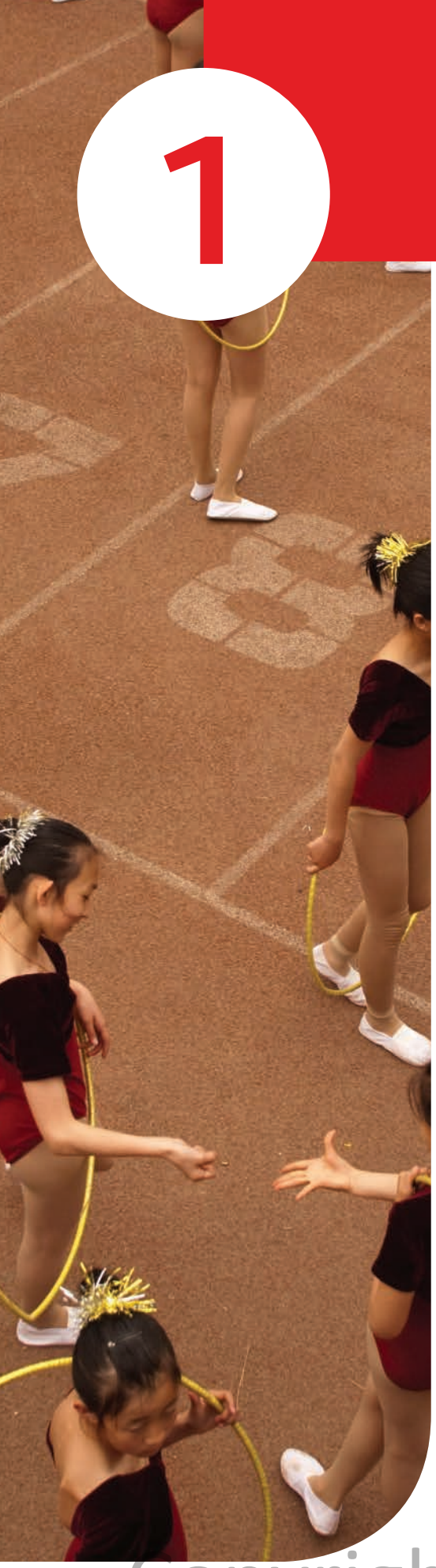


1 Social psychology: social influences

Introduction

Social psychology studies how people's thoughts, feelings and behaviour are affected by the presence of others. Focus can either be upon how others affect an individual or upon group interactions. The social psychology topic looked at here is that of **social influence** – how individuals affect and are affected by others. Several areas of social influence are focused upon:

- Majority influence (types of conformity, explanations for conformity, variables affecting conformity and conformity to social roles)
- Obedience (explanations for obedience, situational variables affecting obedience and dispositional explanations for obedience)
- Explanations of resistance to social influence
- Minority influence
- The role of social influence processes in social change.

Understanding the specification

- *Internalisation, identification and compliance* are types of conformity students must have knowledge of; they are referred to directly in the specification.
- *Informational and normative social influences* are also referred to directly as *explanations of conformity* and so again must be studied.
- A knowledge of *conformity to social roles* is additionally required, including the *research of Zimbardo* into this area.
- Another area to be studied is that of *explanations for obedience*, including the *agentic state* and *legitimacy of authority*. *Situational variables affecting obedience* will also need to be studied, including *proximity, location and uniform*. There will be a requirement to have knowledge of the research of *Stanley Milgram* and others to achieve this. There is an additional requirement to study the *dispositional explanation of the authoritarian personality*.
- Students are required to be able to explain *resistance to social influence*, especially *social support* and *locus of control*, as they are referred to specifically.
- *Minority influence* is another required area of study, which must include focus upon consistency, commitment and flexibility.
- Finally, a knowledge of the *role of social influence processes in social change* is required.

These are the basic requirements of the specification. However, other relevant material is included to provide depth and detail to your understanding.

IN THE NEWS

Ψ The Psychological Enquirer

Pirates of independence

Figure 1.1 The Edelweiss Pirates (Jean Jülich, 1st left)

Figure 1.2 Jean Jülich as an older man

In November 2011 the press reported on Jean Jülich, who had died aged 82. He was one of the last surviving **Edelweiss Pirates** – working-class German teenagers who resisted the Nazis during the Second World War. Distinctive by their long hair, checked shirts, Edelweiss badges and their love of jazz music, by 1944 5,000 'Pirates' were living as outlaws in bombed-out cities throughout Germany.

Throughout the war Jean and his friends, both male and female, provided food and shelter to concentration camp escapees, fugitive Jews and German army deserters. They attacked Hitler Youth patrols, derailed ammunition trains, vandalised weapons factories and sabotaged machinery.

Jean was arrested at age 15, held in solitary confinement and tortured for four months. His 16-year-old friend, Barthel Schink, was hanged with 11 other Pirates, in public, without trial, on orders from Heinrich Himmler. Jean survived beatings, starvation and typhus in a concentration camp until he was freed by American troops in 1945.

One explanation at the time for the atrocities committed by the Nazis in the Second World War, such as the extermination of Jewish people and Gypsies, was that Germans had a 'personality defect' that led them to unquestioningly obey and commit such horrific acts. However, the bravery of Jean and the Edelweiss Pirates in opposing the Nazis shows this to be untrue, and that blind obedience wasn't the response of all Germans; indeed, there were groups of Pirates in most German cities. This goes against the dispositional explanation of obedience – that it was the internal characteristics of Germans which made them so obedient. Stanley Milgram's famous study suggested instead that it is situational factors – aspects of the environment – that lead to such behaviour. An element of normative social influence can also be seen in the hairstyle, clothing and music that the Pirates conformed to.

The actions of the teenagers also highlight how social influence can be resisted. Indeed, it is heartening to realise that obedience with such destructive consequences can be resisted and that we are not doomed to commit immoral acts against our free will. However, the actions of the Pirates weren't appreciated. Due to their non-conformist nature, the conquering forces refused to recognise or reward their actions, and it wasn't until 2005 that their actions against the Nazis were no longer officially seen as criminal acts.

KEY TERM

Social influence – how the actions, thoughts and attitudes of an individual are affected by others

ON THE WEB

Want to know more about the Edelweiss Pirates and their resistance to the Nazis' attempts to control German society? Then go to:

www.raoulwallenberg.net/saviors/others/edelweiss-pirates-story/

1.1 Types of conformity

Conformity (majority influence)

'No man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.'
John Dunne (1624)

'We are half ruined by conformity, but we would be wholly ruined without it.'
Charles Dudley Warner (1896)

Conformity is defined as yielding to group pressure. Conformity occurs when an individual's behaviour and/or beliefs are influenced by a larger group of people, which is why conformity is also known as **majority influence**. When conformity reduces a person's independence and leads to harmful outcomes, it can be a negative force. Generally though, conformity has positive outcomes, helping society to function smoothly and predictably. Much human activity is socially based, occurring in groups, so there is a need for individuals to agree in order for groups to form and operate efficiently. Conformity helps this process; by conforming we can make it easier to get along with each other.

Kelman (1958) made reference to three types of conformity, which vary in the amount to which they affect an individual's belief system.

1 **Compliance** – occurs when individuals adjust their behaviour and opinions to those of a group to be accepted or avoid disapproval. Compliance therefore occurs due to a desire to fit in and involves public, but not private, acceptance of a group's behaviour and attitudes. It is a fairly weak and temporary form of conformity, only shown in the presence of the group. For example, you may claim to support a certain football team, because many others of your age group do and you want to be accepted and not ridiculed by them. However, privately you may have little interest in this team, or indeed football at all.

2 **Identification** – occurs when individuals adjust their behaviour and opinions to those of a group, because membership of that group is desirable. This is a stronger type of conformity, involving private as well as public acceptance, but is generally temporary and is not maintained when individuals leave the group. For example, in the army you may adopt the behaviour and beliefs of fellow soldiers, but on leaving the army for civilian life, new behaviours and opinions will be adopted.

3 **Internalisation** – (also known as true conformity) occurs when individuals genuinely adjust their behaviour and opinions to those of a group. This involves individuals being exposed to the belief systems of others and having to decide what they truly believe in. If a group's beliefs are seen as correct, it will lead to public and private acceptance of the group's behaviour and opinions, which will not be dependent on the presence of the group or group membership for maintenance. For example, if you are influenced by a group's religious beliefs so that you truly convert to that faith, then your new religious way of life will continue without the presence or influence of the group. (Internalisation can also occur through minority influence, see page 41.)

KEY TERMS

Conformity – yielding to group pressure (also known as majority influence)

Compliance – publicly, but not privately, going along with majority influence to gain approval

Identification – public and private acceptance of majority influence in order to gain group acceptance

Internalisation – public and private acceptance of majority influence, through adoption of the majority group's belief system

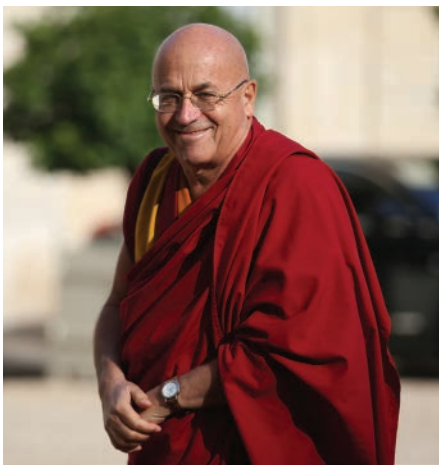


Figure 1.3 A religious conversion would be an example of internalisation

STRENGTHEN YOUR LEARNING

1 What is meant by conformity (majority influence)?
2 What type of conformity involves public, but not private, acceptance of a group's behaviour and attitudes?
3 What type of conformity involves an individual truly converting to the belief system of others?
4 Why does compliance occur?
5 What type of conformity is maintained without the presence or influence of majority influence?
6 What type of conformity occurs because membership of the group is seen as desirable?
7 Why is identification seen as a stronger form of conformity than compliance, but a weaker form than internalisation?
8 Give one real-life example of your own of:
   (i) compliance
   (ii) identification
   (iii) internalisation.

Figure 1.4 'Which to use?' We have a better idea when we examine the behaviour of others

KEY TERMS

Informational social influence (ISI) – a motivational force to look to others for guidance in order to be correct

Normative social influence (NSI) – a motivational force to be liked and accepted by a group

1.2 Explanations for conformity

Explanations for conformity are an identification of the reasons why people conform.

Deutsch and Gerard (1955) distinguished between **informational social influence (ISI)** and **normative social influence (NSI)**. This distinction, they believed, was crucial to understanding majority group influence.

Informational social influence (ISI)

Humans have a basic need to feel confident that their ideas and beliefs are correct (a need for certainty). This helps people feel in charge of their lives and in control of the world. This is the motivation underpinning ISI. When individuals are uncertain about something, they look at the behaviour and opinions of others and this helps shape their own thoughts and behaviour. This generally occurs in unfamiliar situations, like knowing which cutlery to use when in a restaurant for the first time, or in ambiguous situations where there is no clear correct answer, like watching a film and not knowing what to make of it. Watching others to see which cutlery they use, or asking what they thought of a film, helps a person make up their own mind. When people conform because of ISI, they tend to believe the opinions adopted. As they are uncertain what to believe, they look to the opinions of others and become converted to their viewpoint.

For example, Jenness (1932) (see Classic research, page 5) gave participants a task with no clear answer: estimating how many jellybeans were in a jar. He found that individual estimates moved towards the estimates of others, showing that they genuinely (privately) believed these estimates, demonstrating an example of *internalisation* (true conformity).

ISI can be seen to have an evolutionary basis to it, as looking to others for guidance in new situations that are potentially dangerous could have a survival value.

Abrams *et al.* (1990) think that we are only influenced by others' opinions in ambiguous situations when we see ourselves as sharing characteristics with them. Thus we are much more likely to internalise the opinions of friends than strangers and those we identify with (this is a similar effect to that of minority influence, where if a majority identifies with a minority, the minority will be more persuasive in converting the majority to its viewpoint – see page 41).

Normative social influence (NSI)

Individuals want others to like and respect them and not reject or ridicule them. This is the motivation underpinning NSI – the need to be accepted by others. The best way of gaining the acceptance of others is to agree with them. However, this does not necessarily mean that we truly agree with them.

Research

For example, Asch (1955) (see Classic research, page 6) got participants to conform to answers given by others that were obviously incorrect. If the participants gave the correct answers, they risked being ridiculed by the majority. A conflict had been created between an individual's opinion and

that of the group. In the post-experimental debriefing, many said 'I didn't want to look stupid' or 'I didn't want to be the odd one out'. So they compromised, with what they *said* (publicly) and what they *believed* (privately) being completely different, demonstrating an example of *compliance*. Jenness' participants did not face this conflict, as in his study there was no obviously correct answer.

However, conflict is only experienced when individuals disagree with others whom they see as similar to themselves in some relevant way (as in ISI: see Abrams *et al.*, 1990).

Figure 1.5 Normative social influence occurs because of a need to be accepted

INCREASE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Cognitive dissonance

When individuals have two simultaneous contradictory ideas (cognitions), an unpleasant feeling occurs known as **cognitive dissonance**. Festinger (1957) suggested that altering these cognitions will reduce cognitive dissonance and this is best achieved through conforming. The fact that some examples of conformity cannot be explained by normative or informational social influence, but only by cognitive dissonance, supports this explanation. For example, Bogdonoff *et al.* (1961) found that the conflict created by participants performing an Asch-type procedure increased their stress levels (due to participants having opinions that went against those of the majority), but this was reduced by conforming. This also illustrates how conformity can be seen as a healthy response, as it reduces stress levels.

KEY TERM

Cognitive dissonance – an unpleasant feeling of anxiety created by simultaneously holding two contradictory ideas

CLASSIC RESEARCH

The role of discussion in changing opinion regarding a matter of fact – Arthur Jenness (1932)

Figure 1.6 How many jellybeans are in the jar?

Originally conducted as an investigation into social facilitation (the effect of the presence of others on performance), Jenness' research is now regarded as a groundbreaking study into informational social influence. The original focus was on how group discussion influenced the accuracy of judgement, but the most interesting result concerned how majority influence caused individual judgements to converge (move together). The task Jenness gave his participants, estimating the number of jellybeans in a jar, had no obvious answer; it was difficult to assess the amount. Therefore, the conformity produced was motivated by informational social influence, where individuals in uncertain situations look to others for guidance as to how to behave.

Aim

To investigate whether individual judgements of jellybeans in a jar were influenced by discussion in groups.

Procedure

1. Participants made individual, private estimates of the number of jellybeans in a jar.
2. Participants then discussed their estimates either in a large group or in several smaller groups, discovering in the process that individuals differed widely in their estimates.
3. After discussion, group estimates were created.
4. Participants then made a second individual, private estimate.

Findings

Typicality of opinion was increased – individuals' second private estimates tended to converge (move towards) their group estimate.

Conclusions

The judgements of individuals are affected by majority opinions, especially in ambiguous or unfamiliar situations. Discussion is not effective in changing opinion, unless the individuals who enter into the discussion become aware that the opinions of others are different to theirs.

Evaluation

Although Jenness did not tell participants what the aims of the study were, there was no intentional deception as in other social influences studies. Therefore, the study could be regarded as more ethically sound.

This was a laboratory-based experiment using an artificial, unusual situation. It therefore lacks mundane realism, as it's not an everyday event to be asked how many sweets there are in a jar and so it does not reflect actual behaviour in real-life situations.

The study tells us little, if anything, about majority influence in non-ambiguous situations where people conform to obviously wrong answers (see Asch, 1955).

Jenness' study may involve NSI as well as ISI. After making initial individual estimates, participants then created group estimates; therefore their later second individual estimates may have moved towards their group estimates due to a desire for acceptance (NSI) as well as a desire to be correct (ISI).

YOU ARE THE RESEARCHER

Design a modification of Jenness' study that uses a different conformity task. For example, how could you use a library to conduct the study by asking participants to estimate the number of books? Or your local swimming pool by asking participants to estimate the volume of water? Or indeed a car filled with balloons? Try to think of an example of your own. What would be your independent variable (IV) and dependent variable (DV)? Write a suitable directional (one-tailed) and null hypothesis. Create some appropriate standardised instructions.

Figure 1.7 How could balloons in a car be used to study informational social influence?

For more on research methods, see Chapter 7.

KEY TERM

Confederates – (also known as pseudo-participants and stooges) individuals who pretend to be participants or researchers in research studies, but who are actually playing a part

CLASSIC RESEARCH

Opinions and social pressure – Solomon Asch (1955)

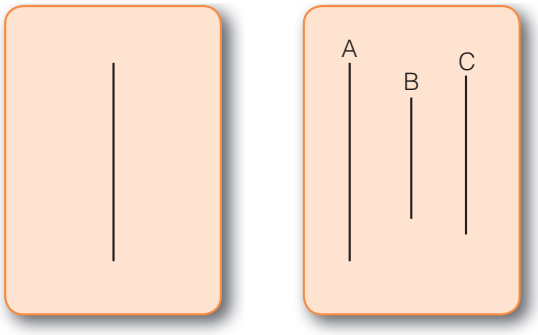


Figure 1.8 Stimulus cards used in Asch's experiment

Solomon Asch, a Polish immigrant to the USA, transformed the study of social influence with his groundbreaking research at Harvard University. He also taught Stanley Milgram, who achieved later fame with his studies of obedience.

Asch was interested in testing conformity to obviously incorrect answers. He criticised research like Jenness' that only involved ambiguous tasks and uncertain situations. Beginning in 1951, Asch conducted a series of experiments, adding and publishing new data as he progressed.

Aim

To investigate the degree to which individuals would conform to a majority who gave obviously wrong answers.

Procedure

1 123 American male student volunteers took part in what they were told was a study of visual perception. Individual participants were placed in groups with between seven and nine others, sat either in a line or around a table, who in reality were pseudo-participants (**confederates**). The task was to say which comparison line, A, B or C, was the same as a stimulus line on 18 different trials. 12 of these were 'critical' trials, where pseudo-participants gave identical wrong answers, and

the naïve (real) participant always answered last or last but one.

2 There was also a control group of 36 participants who were tested individually on 20 trials, to test how accurate individual judgements were.

Findings

1 The control group had an error rate of only 0.04 per cent (3 mistakes out of 720 trials), which shows how obvious the correct answers were.

2 On the 12 critical trials, there was a 32 per cent conformity rate to wrong answers.

3 75 per cent of participants conformed to at least one wrong answer (meaning that 25 per cent never conformed).

4 5 per cent of participants conformed to all 12 wrong answers.

Post-experiment interviews with participants found three reasons for conformity:

- Distortion of action – where the majority of participants who conformed did so publicly, but not privately, as they wished to avoid ridicule.
- Distortion of perception – where some participants believed their perception must actually be wrong and so conformed.
- Distortion of judgement – where some participants had doubts concerning the accuracy of their judgements and so conformed to the majority view.

Conclusions

The judgements of individuals are affected by majority opinions, even when the majority are obviously wrong.

There are big individual differences in the amount to which people are affected by majority influence. As most participants conformed publicly, but not privately, it suggests that they were motivated by normative social influence, where individuals conform to gain acceptance or avoid rejection by a group.

Evaluation

Asch's method for studying conformity became a paradigm, the accepted way of conducting conformity research.

As only one real participant is tested at a time, the procedure is uneconomical and time-consuming. Crutchfield (1954) performed similar research, but improved on the procedure by testing several participants at once.

The situation was unrealistic and so lacked mundane realism. It would be unusual to be in a situation where you would disagree so much with others as to what was the 'correct' answer in a situation.

Asch's study was unethical, as it involved deceit; participants believed it was a study of visual perception. It also involved psychological harm, with participants put under stress through disagreeing with others (see Bogdonoff *et al*. (1961), page 5).

As the overall conformity rate on the critical trials was only 32 per cent (one-third of the participants), the majority of people are actually not conformist, but independent.

(a)

(b)

Figure 1.9a and b A minority of one faces a unanimous majority in Asch's study

CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

Asch without the actors – Kazuo Mori & Miho Arai (2010)

Figure 1.10 Participants in the study by Mori & Arai

Asch's study became a paradigm study, but a major criticism was that of demand characteristics (see Chapter 7 Research methods) – the confederates weren't trained actors and therefore participants may have realised that the confederates' answers weren't real and so just pretended to conform, as that is what they thought the researcher wanted them to do. Mori & Arai's solution was the MORI technique (Manipulation of Overlapping Rivalrous Images by polarising filters). Participants wore filter glasses, allowing them to look at the same stimuli, but see different things. One participant in each group wore different glasses, thus perceiving a different comparison line to match to the stimulus line. Asch's study also only used males, while this study additionally used females.

ON THE WEB

Listen to a BBC Radio 4 programme about Asch's pioneering research into conformity as part of the *Mind Changers* series:

www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00f8mzr

Search for the 'Asch Conformity Experiment' or the 'Asch Experiment' on YouTube to see some videos about the Asch procedure.

Aim

To reproduce the Asch experiment, but without a need for confederates.

Procedure

1 104 Japanese undergraduates were put in same-sex groups of four. Participants sat around a table, with the seat order randomised, and had to say aloud which of three comparison lines matched a stimulus line. The same comparison and stimulus lines were used as in Asch's study.

2 Participants wore sunglasses, supposedly to prevent glare, with the third participant in each group wearing different glasses, which made them see a shorter or longer comparison line to the other three participants on 12 out of 18 'critical' trials. The other six trials were neutral, where participants all saw the same thing.

3 Participants then answered a questionnaire containing 22 questions taken from the interview Asch used with his participants. Among the questions were ones asking whether participants were suspicious about the images seen, whether they noticed the others answering differently, whether they were sure of their answers and whether they were influenced by the others' answers if not confident of their own judgements.

Findings

1 The 78 majority participants who saw the correct-sized comparison lines answered incorrectly 8.2 per cent of the time (77 out of 936 tasks), with no significant gender differences.

2 The 26 minority participants who saw the different-sized comparison lines answered incorrectly 19.6 per cent of the time (61 out of 312 tasks). However, female minority participants answered incorrectly 28.6 per cent of the time, while for males it was only 5 per cent of the time.

3 With females, the results were similar to Asch's, with the minority conforming to wrong answers on the 12 critical trials an average of 4.41 times (3.44 times in Asch's study), but male conformity was not noticeable. This is noteworthy because all participants in the Asch study were male.

Conclusions

Minority participants noticed their judgements were different, but none reported suspicions concerning the honesty of majority participants' answers; therefore it suggests demand characteristics did not occur.

Unlike Asch's findings, the frequency of conformity of minority participants was similar regardless of whether the majority answered unanimously or not. This suggests the number of people in a majority group has little effect on conformity levels (see Asch's variations, page 6).

As women conformed more than men, it suggests cultural or generational differences have occurred since Asch's study.

As no majority participants laughed at the performance of minority participants, conformity cannot have occurred due to fear of ridicule.

Evaluation

This new procedure could provide an effective means of examining conformity, especially in natural settings and in social situations where the use of confederates wouldn't be practical, such as with children.

The new procedure is still unethical, as participants were deceived into thinking the sunglasses were worn to prevent glare.

Conformity may have occurred due to both normative social influence (a desire to be accepted) and informational social influence (a desire to be correct).

Both Asch and Mori & Arai's studies lack mundane realism (can the results of a study be applied to real life), as comparing line sizes isn't something that is often done in real life.

Mori & Arai's study may be more externally valid, as the participants knew each other. Real-life conformity tends to occur among people familiar to each other like family members, rather than in Asch-type situations where decisions are made among strangers.

ON THE WEB

You can read the full research paper of Mori & Arai's conformity study at:

http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/psych.2013.411127

RESEARCH IN FOCUS

1 Studies of conformity tend to be laboratory experiments. Give one advantage and one disadvantage of this method.

2 What experimental design was used in Jenness' study? Give one advantage and one disadvantage of this design.

3 What are the independent variable (IV) and dependent variable (DV) in Jenness', Asch's and Mori & Arai's studies?

4 Mori & Arai's study is somewhat of a replication of Asch's paradigm. What is a replication and why would it be performed?

5 In what way can Asch's and Mori & Arai's studies be considered unethical?

6 Mori & Arai's study was designed to reduce demand characteristics. What are demand characteristics and how did their study attempt to reduce them?

For information on research methods, see Chapter 7.

PSYCHOLOGY IN THE REAL WORLD

Figure 1.11 Better group cohesion can be achieved through informational social influence

One way in which knowledge of conformity can be used in a practical manner is in the formation of groups, for example sports teams. By giving potential members ambiguous tasks, where there is no clear correct answer, individuals will be drawn together through informational social influence into creating a group identity. This would involve identification (maybe even internalisation) and thus would create a stronger group bond than that done through compliance by simply creating normative social influence through getting new members to conform to group norms.

STRENGTHEN YOUR LEARNING

1. In what way does normative social influence differ from informational social influence?
2. What type of conformity is associated with normative social influence?
3. What type of conformity is associated with informational social influence?
4. Can you think of real-life examples of your own of informational social influence and normative social influence?
5. What aspect of Jenness' study involves informational social influence?
6. What aspect of Asch's study involves normative social influence?
7. What is cognitive dissonance? How can it be used as an explanation of conformity?

1.3 Variables affecting conformity

Situational variables

Research into majority influence has identified several **situational variables** – that is, features of an environment that influence levels of conformity – which have an influence over the degree to which individuals conform.

These include **group size** (the number of members within a social group), **unanimity** (to what degree the group members are in agreement with each other) and **task difficulty** (how obvious the correct answer/decision is when regarding a task). Asch performed several variations of his procedure that investigated these factors.

Size of group

Research indicates that conformity rates increase as the size of a majority influence increases, but there comes a point where further increases in the size of the majority don't lead to further increases in conformity.

KEY TERMS

Variables affecting conformity – characteristics that can affect the degree to which individuals conform

Situational variables – features of an environment that affect the degree to which individuals yield to group pressures

Group size – the extent to which the number of people in a group affects the degree to which an individual conforms

Unanimity – the extent to which members of a group agreeing with one another affects the degree to which an individual conforms

Task difficulty – the extent to which how obvious a correct answer seems affects the degree to which an individual conforms

Figure 1.12 Even stickleback fish show conformist behaviour

Research

Asch (1956) found that with one real participant and one confederate conformity was low, rising to 13 per cent with two confederates and 32 per cent with three confederates (around the same rate as in his original study). Adding extra confederates (up to fifteen confederates) had no further effect on the overall conformity rate. Bond & Smith (1996) supported this idea by performing a meta-analysis (see Chapter 7) of 133 Asch-type studies from seventeen countries, and finding that conformity peaks with about four or five confederates. Gerard *et al.* (1968), however, questioned this, finding that conformity rates do rise as more confederates are added, though the rate of increase declines with each additional confederate. Pike & Laland (2010) gave support to Gerard by reporting that stickleback fish demonstrated conformity to feeding behaviour by showing an increased level of copying of a demonstrator fish eating at a food-rich site, but that the rate of conformity increase declined as the number of demonstrator fish increased. This additionally suggests an evolutionary basis to conformity due to its survival value.

Unanimity

Conformity rates have been found to decline when majority influence is not unanimous. The important factor though would seem to be the reduction in the majority's agreement, rather than an individual being given support for their opinions, as conformity drops if a rebel goes against the majority who don't support the rebel's viewpoint.

Research

Asch (1956) found if there was one confederate who went against the other confederates, conformity dropped from around 32 per cent to 5.5 per cent, but if the 'rebel' went against both the other confederates and the real participant, conformity still dropped to 9 per cent, highlighting the powerful effect unanimity of a group can have on getting people to conform.

Task difficulty

Greater conformity rates are seen when task difficulty increases, as the right answer becomes less obvious. This means that individuals will look to others more for guidance as to what the correct response is, suggesting that ISI is the dominant force.

Research

Asch (1956) increased task difficulty by making the comparison lines similar to each other, finding that when he did so participants were more likely to conform to wrong answers, thus demonstrating the effect of task difficulty on conformity and how it can turn normative influence into informational social influence.

KEY TERM

Individual variables – personal characteristics that affect the degree to which individuals yield to group pressures

INCREASE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Research has also identified important **individual variables** – qualities of an individual that influence their level of conformity, like their gender. Individual and situational variables often interact to determine the degree to which a person conforms.

Individual variables

Gender

Studies can suggest women conform more. Three possible interpretations of this could be that:

1 Females are socialised to conform more. This is supported by Eagly *et al.* (1981), who argued that females learn to

focus more on the quality of relationships with others and take greater responsibility for creating and maintaining interpersonal relationships, thus leading them to conform more. If true, this would involve NSI more than ISI, due to a need for acceptance. Eagly *et al*. also argue that males learn gender roles which demand that they remain independent and so they do not conform readily with others in order to achieve this.

2 Females are biologically programmed to be more conformist as evolution primes them to be more nurturing and co-operative and thus more likely to seek consensus and agreement, especially in times of perceived threat. This was supported by Taylor (2000), who found that stress prompts a 'fight-or-flight' response in males, but a 'tend-and-befriend' response in women, as they produce more oxytocin, which promotes nurturing behaviour.

3 Most studies were conducted by men using male-type tasks which women were less familiar with and so created more informational social influence in females. This was supported by Sistrunk & McDavid (1971) who found that when tasks used had a traditionally male bias, such as involving cars rather than cooking, females felt more uncertain and conformed more.

Mood

Research suggests that humans will conform more when they're in a good mood, perhaps because when happy they are more amenable to agreeing with others. Research has also indicated that people will conform more readily when moving from a fearful to a more relaxed mood.

Tong *et al.* (2008) found that participants were more likely to conform to wrong answers to mathematical questions given by confederates when in a positive rather than neutral or negative mood, illustrating the effect mood can have on conformity levels.

Dolinski (1998) found evidence for a fear-then-relief phenomenon in both field and laboratory settings. Abrupt relief of anxiety states led to participants conforming more readily, again showing how mood states can affect conformity.

Culture

People from different cultures have been shown to conform to different levels, possibly because some cultures are more uniform in their structure, have shared values among their members and thus find it easier to agree with each other. Cultures can also be divided into collectivist ones, where conformity to social norms is more socialised and expected, and individualist cultures that tolerate and encourage more deviance from social norms.

Figure 1.13 Norwegians are conformist as they share cultural values and norms

Smith & Bond (1993) found an average conformity rate among collectivist cultures of 25 to 58 per cent, while in individualist cultures it ranged from 14 to 39 per cent, which suggests culture does affect conformity to some extent.

Milgram (1961) found 62 per cent of Norwegian participants conformed to obviously wrong answers concerning the length of acoustic tones. Avant & Knudson (1993) argue that this is due to Norway being a very cohesive country with few ethnic minorities that values and promotes traditional values and frowns upon individualism.

Perrin & Spencer (1980), using the Asch paradigm, found a conformity level of only 0.25 per cent among Yorkshire science students, which could suggest Britons have low conformity levels, but a more sensible interpretation might be that science students are taught to question things and be independent thinkers. Indeed, the same researchers found a similar conformity rate to Asch's in young British criminals, who could be said to lack independent thought.

YOU ARE THE RESEARCHER

Psychology is centred on the designing and carrying out of practical research. Can you design a simple study to compare the level of conformity in science students with PE students? What would the independent variable (IV) be? What experimental design would you use? You will need a measure of conformity to form your dependent variable (DV).

For more on research methods, see Chapter 7.

Figure 1.14 Who conforms more?

RESEARCH IN FOCUS

1 Bond & Smith (1996) performed a meta-analysis of Asch-type studies. What is a meta-analysis?
2 Bond & Smith found a positive correlation between conformity rates and the size of the majority influence. Explain how a positive correlation differs from a negative correlation.
3 Give one strength and one weakness of correlations.
4 What kind of graph would correlational data be plotted on?
5 Asch's variations, performed to identify important variables involved in conformity, involved the use of controlled conditions. What are controlled conditions and why are they used in experiments?

For information on research methods, see Chapter 7.

PSYCHOLOGY IN THE REAL WORLD

Figure 1.15 Individuals are heavily influenced by what peers think of products – advertisers use this as a form of NSI to get us to buy things!

Advertisers often use a knowledge of conformity to increase sales. One useful technique is the 'bandwagon effect', which focuses on the idea that individuals decide what to buy based on what their peers recommend, due to a need to fit in. If you feel everyone in a desirable social group has a product, such as a certain type of phone, then buying that type of phone will make you feel that you will be accepted into that group. Supporting evidence for this form of NSI comes from a Neilson Company study (2009) that surveyed 25,000 people from 50 countries and found that 90 per cent trusted their peers' opinions of products, significantly more than the 69 per cent who trusted media recommendations.

STRENGTHEN YOUR LEARNING

1 In relation to conformity what are:
  (i) individual variables
  (ii) situational variables?
2 Does increasing the size of a group always lead to greater conformity? Explain your answer.
3 What happens to conformity rates when majority influence isn't unanimous? What is the important factor here?
4 Why does conformity increase as task difficulty increases?
5 Why is conformity stronger when individuals identify with members of a group?
6 How might giving public and private answers affect conformity rates?
7 How can social norms affect conformity?
8 Do females or males generally conform more? Explain your answer.
9 How can mood affect conformity levels?
10 Explain why people from different cultures are thought to conform to different levels.

1.4 Conformity to social roles

Each social situation has its own social norms, expected ways for individuals to behave, which will vary from situation to situation – for example, joining the back of a queue when arriving at the till in a shop. Individuals learn how to behave by looking at the **social roles** other people play in such situations and then conforming to them. These learned social roles become like internal mental scripts, allowing individuals to behave appropriately in different settings.

Conformity to social roles therefore involves *identification*, which is stronger than compliance, involving both public and private acceptance of the behaviour and attitudes exhibited.

Conformity to social roles isn't as strong as internalisation though, as individuals adopt different social roles for different social situations and only conform to particular roles while in those particular social situations. With each social role adopted, behaviour changes to fit the social norms of that situation, so as an individual moves to another social situation, their behaviour will change to suit the new social norms, played out through a different social role.

Conformity to social roles is therefore a useful way of understanding and predicting social behaviour, which brings a reassuring sense of order to our social interactions.

Philip Zimbardo's 1973 prison simulation study perfectly illustrates the role of social roles in conformity.

KEY TERM

Social roles – the parts individuals play as members of a social group, which meet the expectations of that situation

CLASSIC RESEARCH

A study of prisoners and guards in a simulated prison – Craig Haney, Curtis Banks, Philip Zimbardo (1973)

Figure 1.16 Zimbardo's study showed how people conform readily to social roles

Zimbardo's study was an attempt to understand the brutal and dehumanising behaviour found in prisons and reported on a regular basis in the American media. Two widely differing explanations were to be explored (see page 27). Firstly, there was the dispositional hypothesis that the violence and degradation of prisons were due to the 'nature' of the people found within the prison system – basically, that both guards and prisoners were 'bad seeds' possessed of sadistic, aggressive characteristics, which naturally led to endless brutality. Secondly, there was the situational hypothesis that saw violence and degradation as a product of 'the prison soil', the interactions between environmental factors that supported such behaviour – in essence that the brutalising and dehumanising conditions of prison led to the brutal behaviour of all concerned. To separate the effects of the prison environment from those within the prison system, Zimbardo built a mock prison that used 'average' people with no record of violence or criminality to play both prisoners and guards – roles that were determined completely randomly. If no brutality occurred, the dispositional hypothesis would be supported, but if brutality was seen, then it must be situational factors that were driving normal, law-abiding people to such behaviour.

Aims

- To investigate the extent to which people would conform to the roles of guard and prisoner in a role-playing simulation of prison life.
- To test the *dispositional* versus *situational* hypotheses that saw prison violence as either due to the sadistic personalities of guards and prisoners, or to the brutal conditions of the prison environment.

Method

1 75 male university students responded to a newspaper advertisement asking for volunteers for a study of prison life paying $15 a day. 21 students rated as the most physically and mentally stable, mature and free from anti-social and criminal tendencies were used (10 as guards and 11 as prisoners). Selection as to who would be guards and who would be prisoners was on a random basis. All participants initially expressed a desire to be prisoners. Zimbardo himself played the role of the prison superintendent.

2 The basement of the psychology department at Stanford University was converted into a mock prison and the experience was made as realistic as possible, with the prisoners being arrested by the real local police and then fingerprinted, stripped and deloused. **Dehumanisation** (the removal of individual identity) was increased by prisoners wearing numbered smocks, nylon stocking caps (to simulate shaved heads) and a chain around one ankle. Guards wore khaki uniforms, reflective sunglasses (to prevent eye-contact) and were issued with handcuffs, keys and truncheons (though physical punishment was not permitted).

3 9 prisoners were placed 3 to a cell and a regular routine of shifts, meal times etc. was established, as well as visiting times, a parole and disciplinary board, and a prison chaplain. The study was planned to run for two weeks.

Findings

1 Both guards and prisoners settled quickly into their social roles. After an initial prisoner 'rebellion' was crushed, dehumanisation was increasingly apparent with the guards becoming ever more sadistic, taunting the prisoners and giving them meaningless, boring tasks to do, while the prisoners became submissive and unquestioning of the guards' behaviour. Some prisoners sided with the guards against any prisoners who dared to protest. **De-individuation** was noticeable by the prisoners referring to each other and themselves by their prison numbers instead of their names.

2 After 36 hours, one prisoner was released because of fits of crying and rage. Three more prisoners developed similar symptoms and were released on successive days. A fifth prisoner developed a severe rash when his parole was denied.

3 Scheduled to run for 14 days, the study was stopped after 6 days when Zimbardo realised the extent of the harm that was occurring, and the increasingly aggressive nature of the guards' behaviour. The remaining prisoners were delighted at their sudden good fortune, while the guards were upset by Zimbardo's decision.

4 In later interviews, both guards and prisoners said they were surprised at the uncharacteristic behaviours they had shown.

Conclusions

The situational hypothesis is favoured over the dispositional hypothesis, as none of the participants had ever shown such character traits or behaviour before the study. It was the environment of the mock prison and the social roles that the participants had to play that led to their uncharacteristic behaviour.

Individuals conform readily to the social roles demanded of a situation, even when such roles override an individual's moral beliefs about their personal behaviour.

Both guards and prisoners demonstrated social roles gained from media sources (e.g. prison films) and learned models of social power (e.g. parent–child, teacher–student).

Evaluation

Individual differences are important, as not all guards behaved brutally. Some were hard but fair; some were brutal; others rarely exerted control over the prisoners. Prisoner behaviour was not identical either.

Zimbardo hoped his research would lead to beneficial reforms within the prison system. Beneficial reforms in the way prisoners were treated, especially juveniles, did initially occur. However, Zimbardo regards his study as a failure in the sense that prison conditions in the USA are now even worse than when he performed his study.

KEY TERMS

Dehumanisation – degrading people by lessening of their human qualities

De-individuation – a state in which individuals have lower self-awareness and a weaker sense of personal responsibility for their actions. This may result from the relative anonymity of being part of a crowd

ON THE WEB

Listen to a BBC Radio 4 programme about Zimbardo's prison simulation study as part of the *Mind Changers* series:

www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b008crhv

A half-hour BBC television programme about Zimbardo's prison simulation study, including interviews with participants, can be seen on YouTube if you search for 'The Stanford Prison Experiment'.

NB Zimbardo's study contains elements of both conformity and obedience, so take care to use only the aspects that relate to conformity to social roles when answering questions.

RESEARCH IN FOCUS

1 Zimbardo used a self-selected sample.
   (i) Explain how this was achieved.
   (ii) Give one strength and one weakness of self-selected sampling.
2 In Zimbardo's study, guards and prisoners were selected by random sampling.
   (i) What is random sampling?
   (ii) How would it be achieved?
   (iii) Give one strength and one weakness of random sampling.
3 Zimbardo's study is not an experiment. What research method was used?
4 In what ways can Zimbardo's study be considered unethical? Justify your answer.

For information on research methods, see Chapter 7.

STRENGTHEN YOUR LEARNING

1 What are:
   (i) social roles
   (ii) social norms?
2 Why are different social roles adopted for different social situations?
3 Explain why conformity to social roles involves identification, but not internalisation.
4 Why, in Zimbardo's study, if no brutality had occurred, would the dispositional hypothesis have been supported?

ASSESSMENT CHECK

1 The following descriptions relate to conformity.

A Looking to the group for information as to the correct behaviour

B Going along with a group because we accept their belief system as our own

C Going along with a group, even though privately we do not agree with them

D Conforming to group norms publicly and privately, but only temporarily, as conformity is not maintained outside the presence of the group

Copy and complete the table below by writing which description, A, B, C or D, describes which type of conformity. One statement will be left over. **[3 marks]**

Type of conformity	Description
Compliance	
Internalisation	
Identification	

2 Outline what is meant by identification. Give a real-life example. **[3 marks]**

3 Outline and evaluate explanations of conformity. **[16 marks]**

4 Discuss conformity to social roles. **[12 marks]**

5 **a)** Outline the aims and findings of one study of conformity to social roles. **[4 marks]**

b) Describe one ethical issue associated with this study. **[2 marks]**

6 Zimbardo's prison simulation study uses a participant observation study method. Give one strength and one weakness of this type of study. **[2 + 2 marks]**

7 Priti has recently moved to a new school and has found it hard to make new friends, but she noticed that many fellow students support the local football team, Vale City. She bought a replica shirt of the team, even though she had little knowledge of or interest in football, and on wearing the shirt to school, soon found people being friendly to her and including her in their activities.

a) What kind of conformity is being exhibited in the above passage? **[1 mark]**

b) Refer to features of the passage to justify your answer. **[3 marks]**

8 Research studies of conformity generally involve experiments. Describe and evaluate the experimental method. **[6 marks]**

1.5 Obedience and the work of Milgram

Obedience

'I was only following orders.'
Adolf Eichmann (1961)

Obedience is a type of social influence defined as complying with the demands of an authority figure. Obedience generally has a positive influence, as society could not operate in an effective manner unless rules and laws are obeyed and people in authority are acknowledged as having the right to give orders.

However, obedience can also have negative consequences. During the Second World War, under the Nazis, some German citizens unquestioningly followed orders that saw the mass murder of millions of people like the Jews, the Gypsies and people with disabilities – an event that became known as the Holocaust. The American psychologist Stanley Milgram had a personal interest that motivated him to seek explanations for these despicable acts. Milgram came from a New York Jewish family that had fled Europe for America and escaped the Holocaust. He wanted to know whether Germans have a different personality that led them to blindly obey and commit acts of murder without question, or whether people are generally more obedient than they would care to believe. If Hitler and the Nazis had been a British phenomenon, would we have obeyed to the same extent? Milgram had been a student of Asch, whom he sought advice from in designing his classic obedience study.

As Milgram conducted his study, Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi responsible for carrying out *die Endlösung* (the Final Solution), the genocide of millions in the concentration camps, was abducted by Israeli secret service agents in Argentina and taken to Jerusalem to stand trial. Hannah Arendt, in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), famously reported on the *banality* (ordinariness) *of evil* – of how when Eichmann was led into court, instead of the expected inhuman monster, people were confronted by a mild-mannered, likeable man, who had 'merely been doing his job'. His defence for his behaviour was repeatedly to say 'I was only following orders.' A few days after Milgram completed his study, Eichmann was executed. Milgram had originally wanted to conduct his study in Germany after performing what was intended as a pilot study at Yale University. However, the results of this were so dramatic, there was no need.

KEY TERM

Obedience – complying with the demands of an authority figure

Figure 1.17 Obedience is seen as necessary for safety to be maintained

Figure 1.18 Adolf Eichmann: monster or obedient servant?

Figure 1.19 The Nazis dehumanised Jewish people, seeing them as sub-human

Behavioural study of obedience – Stanley Milgram (1963)

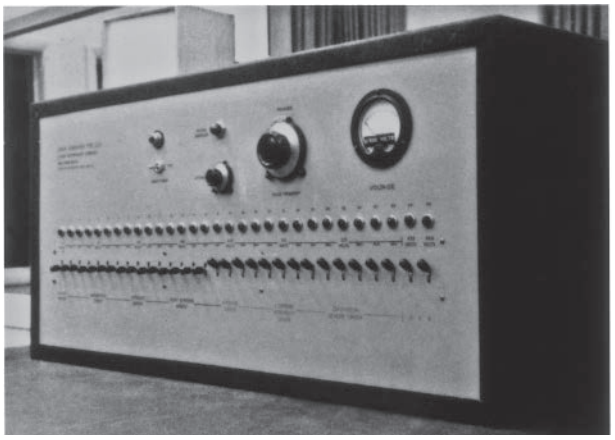


Figure 1.20 Stanley Milgram's shock generator

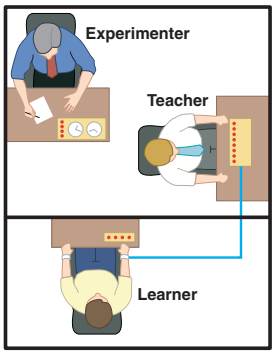
Aims

- To test the 'Germans are different' hypothesis, which claimed that Germans are highly obedient and that Adolf Hitler could not have exterminated the Jewish people and other minority groups in the 1930s and 1940s without the unquestioning co-operation of the German population.
- To see if individuals would obey the orders of an authority figure that incurred negative consequences and went against one's moral code.

Procedure

1 40 American males aged 20–50 years responded to a newspaper advertisement to volunteer for a study of memory and learning at Yale University Psychology Department. They were met by a confederate experimenter wearing a grey lab coat (to give him the appearance of authority), who was actually a biology teacher. He introduced them to Mr Wallace, a confederate participant, a gentle, harmless looking man in his late 50s. The participants were told that the experiment concerned the effects of punishment on learning and that they would be either a 'teacher' or a 'learner', with the roles determined randomly. In fact this was rigged; Mr Wallace was always the learner and the real participant was always the teacher.

2 The experimenter explained that punishments would involve increasingly severe electric shocks. All three



'I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching nervous collapse. He constantly pulled on his ear lobe, and twisted his hands. At one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered "Oh God, let's stop it". And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experimenter, and obeyed to the end.'

Figure 1.22 The Milgram experiment set up

went into an adjoining room, where the experimenter strapped a consenting Mr Wallace into a chair with his arms attached to electrodes. The teacher was told to give shocks through a shock generator in the next room. This generator had a row of switches each marked with a voltage level. The first switch was labelled '15 volts' and the verbal description 'slight shock'. Each switch gave a shock 15 volts higher than the one before, up to a maximum 450 volts, marked 'XXX'. The real participant received a real shock of 45 volts to convince him that everything was authentic.

3 Participants then read out a series of paired-associate word tasks, to which they received a pre-recorded series of verbal answers from the learner, with the real participant believing these to be genuine responses. The teacher was told by the experimenter to give a shock each time Mr Wallace got an answer wrong. His answers were given by him supposedly switching on one of four lights located above the shock generator. With each successive mistake, the teacher gave the next highest shock, 15 volts higher than the previous one.

4 At 150 volts the learner began to protest and demanded to be released; before this he had been quite willing to take part. These protests became more insistent and at 300 volts he refused to answer any more questions and said he has heart problems that are starting to bother him. At 315 volts he screamed loudly and from 330 volts was heard no more. Anytime the teacher seemed reluctant to continue, he was encouraged to go on through a series of verbal prods, such as 'the experiment requires you continue' and 'you have no choice, you must go on'. If the teacher questioned the procedure, he was told that the shocks will not cause any lasting tissue damage and was also instructed to keep shocking Mr Wallace if he stopped answering.

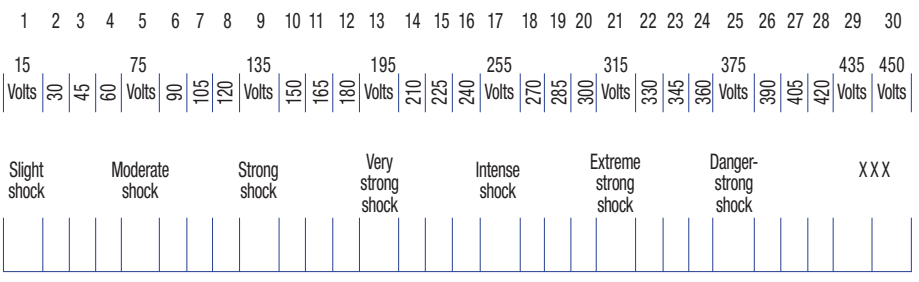


Figure 1.21 The levels of electric shock used in the Milgram experiments

Findings

1 Quantitative results – obedience was measured as the percentage of participants giving shocks up to the maximum 450 volts. In the main version of the experiment the obedience rate was 62.5 per cent (25 out of 40 participants). An earlier 'remote victim' version with no pre-recorded responses, but the victim pounding on the walls instead, gained an obedience rate of 65 per cent (26 out of 40 participants). 100 per cent of participants continued up to at least 300 volts.

2 Qualitative results – many participants showed distress, such as twitching, sweating or giggling nervously, digging their nails into their flesh and verbally attacking the experimenter. Three participants had uncontrollable seizures. Some participants showed few if any signs of discomfort, instead concentrating dutifully on what they were doing.

Conclusions

The 'Germans are different' hypothesis is clearly false – Milgram's participants were 40 'ordinary' Americans. Their high level of obedience showed that people obey those regarded as authority figures. If we had lived in Nazi Germany in the 1930s, we might have acted just as obediently. The results suggest that obeying those in authority is normal behaviour in a hierarchically organised society. We will obey orders that distress us and go against our moral code.

Evaluation

The **Milgram paradigm** – Milgram established the basic method, or paradigm, for studying obedience, which was adopted by many subsequent researchers.

It was intended as a pilot study – it is more useful to consider the research inspired by Milgram's study than the study itself. Milgram was so astounded by the results that he subsequently conducted 19 variations of the study, each time varying one aspect of the procedure, to try and identify the reasons why people were so obedient.

Practical application – it was hoped that Milgram's findings would help form strategies to reduce destructive blind obedience. Unfortunately, not much has changed since 1963; horrendous crimes are still committed by people operating under the excuse of 'simply following orders'.

Type of study – most people presume that Milgram's study is an experiment; indeed Milgram referred to it as such. However, there is no independent variable and in reality it is more of a controlled observation. It can, however, be considered an experiment if Milgram's variations of his study are considered. The independent variable (IV) then becomes which particular variation a participant performs, for example, having the experimenter not present in the room, as opposed to him being in the room.

INCREASE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Milgram's work into obedience can help explain the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by US troops in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2004. Several stages of abuse were involved. Firstly, *gradual commitment*, where initial abuses were minor, but paved the way for the acceptance of more serious abuse. This was similar to the initial shocks in Milgram's study only being minor ones and only increasing in small 15-volt increments. Secondly, *senior role*, where low-ranking troops, like the teacher in Milgram's study, were given important roles in controlling prisoners. Thirdly, *dehumanisation*, where the prisoners were degraded, making it easier to suspend morality and abuse them.

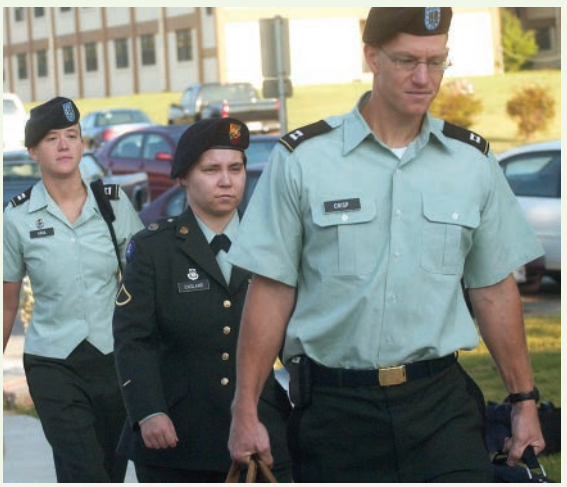


Figure 1.23 Lynndie England arrives at her trial for mistreatment of prisoners in Abu Ghraib

STRENGTHEN YOUR LEARNING

1 Define obedience.
2 What is meant by the Milgram paradigm?
3 What percentage of participants gave the maximum 450 volt shocks in Milgram's study?
4 Why can the 'Germans are different' hypothesis be rejected?
5 What practical application did Milgram hope would come from his study? Was this hope realised?

KEY TERM

Milgram paradigm – experimental procedure devised by Stanley Milgram for measuring obedience rates

ON THE WEB

To read an account of what it was like to be one of the 40 original participants, go to:

https://archive.jewishcurrents.org/2004-jan-dimow.htm

Here you will find the personal account of Joseph Dimow.

You can also find a detailed account of Milgram's life and work at:

www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200203/the-man-who-shocked-the-world

An excellent modern day replication of Milgram's study can be seen on YouTube if you search for 'Milgram's Obedience to Authority Experiment'.

A video of Milgram's actual study, including commentary from Milgram himself, can be seen on YouTube if you search for 'Milgram Obedience Study'.

Figure 1.24 Joseph Dimow

RESEARCH IN FOCUS

1 Milgram's study produced both quantitative and qualitative data. What is the difference between these two forms of data?
2 Give one example of quantitative and qualitative data from Milgram's study.
3 Milgram's study was intended as a pilot study.
   (i) What is a pilot study?
   (ii) Why are pilot studies conducted?
4 Why is Milgram's original study not actually an experiment? At what point does his study become an experiment?

For information on research methods, see Chapter 7.

KEY TERM

Ethical considerations – moral aspects of research that need to be taken into account before studies are conducted

Ethical considerations

Milgram's study raised several ethical issues and indeed Milgram had his membership of the American Psychological Association (APA) suspended after his research was published. His work though was eventually ruled ethically acceptable, and he won a major award for it. Maybe what upset people was not the abuse of ethics, but the upsetting results that went against the accepted ideas of free will and personal responsibility for one's behaviour. It was the work of Milgram and similar psychologists, like Asch, which helped to identify the ethical issues that psychologists must consider when planning and conducting research. Without these studies of social influence, there would not be ethical codes and guidelines. Let us now consider the arguments for and against Milgram's study being unethical. (See also Burger (2009), page 24, for an attempt to conduct Milgram's paradigm in a more ethical manner.)

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