

Introduction

So what does social influence mean?

Social influence can be a deliberate attempt by someone, or some group to alter our opinions. An everyday example of how people try to persuade us can be seen through television. For example where a programme tries to persuade us to act in a particular way because, we relate a heroic role model. Through advertising where we may be encouraged to lose weight because you want to look like the supermodel in the photograph, or in newspapers which are affiliated to a particular political party.

However, there are influences which are much more difficult to recognise. These are known as **social norms** or **implicit rules**.

These tell us how to behave in the presence of others on an unconscious level.

This unit is going to look at both the positive and adverse effects of relating to and dealing with other people. It will look at what happens to us when we are isolated as an individual whilst being part of a crowd, as in a rally, and how social norms and external pressures change the way we react in different situations. To make this clearer we will now have a look at some examples of social influence

- ! Would you give up your seat on a bus if someone asked you to?
- ! Do you change your behaviour if you see a member of the police force?
- ! Do you find yourself saying you agree with what other people are saying even if you don't?
- ! When you are on your own at home do you still wear clothes?

The final example shows that other people can influence us even when they are not there. For example how often do you put on specific clothes just in case someone comes to the house?

For a human being part of a group is very important to the way we live.

We are born into a group known as the *family*.
We go out to work with a group called our *work mates* and
We socialise in groups who are our *friends*.

Read and Make Notes



I want to be like you!
From
www.supermanhomepage.com

Yes	No

Important to note

Attitudes are taken as being learned. For example, the attitude of prejudice is learned as it is not something we are born with.

Some groups we join voluntarily, for example the Scouts, whereas some are necessary to our survival as is the family for a new born infant.

Read and Make Notes

So you can see from this that we have family groups, friendship groups, work groups and social activity groups.

Each of these groups has a different set of group norms.

! Look back at the groups you belong to. Can you identify a group norm for any of these groups?

Hint: think about the clothes you wear, the language you use and your behaviour when you are in these groups.

Activity

Definition of group norms

These are expected and accepted ways of behaving within a certain group. For each of the groups that you have identified in your diagram above there will be a different set of group norms that you have to follow.

SAQ 1.	
Explain, using an example what is meant by the term 'group norms'?	

SAQ's

SAQ 2.	
Why do we follow group norms?	

You should now understand Crutchfield's definition of conformity: **Yielding to (giving way to) group pressure.** Social scientists have looked at the existence of groups and how membership of a particular group can affect the behaviour and attitudes of its individual members.

Furthermore, every group has certain norms. These are expectations of the group members about the appropriate behaviour, values and attitudes of the group. To keep cohesion within a group, pressure is placed on group members to **conform** to these norms. To do this implicit (unsaid and unwritten rules) and explicit (rules which are written such as laws) methods are used to ensure conformity. In this unit the types of social influence we are going to look at are:-

1. Minority and majority influence

- a) Majority influence (better known as conformity) – going along with what everyone else in the group is doing
- b) Minority influence – where one person (or a small group) can influence a group of people

Read and Make Notes

2. Social influence of authority

- a) Obedience – doing what someone in authority tells you to do
- b) Defiance – refusing to do what someone in authority tells you to do

3. Compliance – going along with a request

1. Majority and minority influence

- a) Majority influence
 - i. Conformity:

Definition of conformity: Crutchfield (1962) defined conformity as *yielding to group pressure*

So what do we mean by a group?

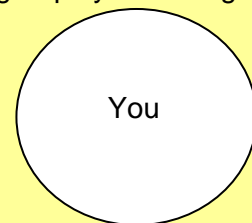
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Each of these groups has a different set of group norms.

Look back at the groups you belong to. Can you identify a group norm for any of these groups?

Hint: think about the clothes you wear, the language you use and your behaviour when you are in these groups.

Activity
Write your name in the circle. Draw a diagram showing the different groups you belong to.



Activity

SAQ's

SAQ 3.	
Explain, using an example what is meant by the term 'group norms'?	

SAQ 4.	
Why do we follow group norms?	

In voluntary groups, members join because they share the values and attitudes of the group and there is little need for change. However, in some groups where membership is involuntary, the new member may not share the attitudes of the group and some attitude change or behaviour change is necessary. (For example a new colleague at work).

An example which illustrates conformity was shown a long time ago in a study by Newcomb (1943) who studied attitude change in a group of female students. These were attending a College in America which was progressive and liberal for that time.

He found that female students who entered the college with conservative and affluent backgrounds changed their attitudes to be more liberal as they progressed through college. This was demonstrating the effect of group influence on attitudes.

Newcomb followed up the students after they left college and found that their new attitudes gained at college remained and they did not revert to the old ones.

The same thing can be said for prejudiced attitudes. We can have positive and negative prejudices. Positive prejudice towards a group would make us see everything about it in a positive light.

Definition of group pressure
 This is the spoken or unspoken influences of a group on an individual, usually when the individual's behaviour, beliefs etc. are different to group norms. The 'pressure' could, for example, be being made to feel foolish by everyone in the group.

Negative prejudice makes us more likely to judge the person harshly. Prejudice can result from uncritically conforming to the groups' norms, whether family, peer group, or social class.

Pettigrew studied racial prejudice in America and found that racial prejudice was far more common in the South than in the North. This was despite there being no personality differences between the two groups.

Pettigrew concluded that in the South, people were conforming to the dominant group norms rather than different personalities. Conformity is therefore "going along with the demands of the group". For example the graffiti writer may think of him/herself as a non-conformist, but s/he is really strictly conforming to the norms (expected behaviours and attitudes) of his/her chosen group.

ii. The autokinetic effect.

To illustrate this further, **Sherif (1935)** did a study using an optical illusion called **the autokinetic effect**. In the experiment, a small stationary light seen in a totally darkened room appears to move.

Read and Make Notes

Sherif tested participants individually and asked them to estimate the 'movement' of the light. He found that there were in fact differences between the individuals' estimations.

To look at the idea of conformity, he then began testing students in groups. In this condition each participant heard the other people's estimates. He found that eventually the participants' estimates of distance of movement became similar to the other people in the group and that a 'compromise' estimate was eventually made. By the end of the experiment most participants gave the same 'middle of the road' response.

This experiment is also interesting from a perceptual viewpoint. This is because the participants were using hypothesis testing. Their brains were using the additional information from the group to interpret the estimates because there was not enough information from the stimulus itself.

Evaluation:

Later psychologists eg. **Brown (1966)** believed that Sherif's study does not show normative conformity because the participants who took part were not really a group as they did not interact with each other. Because there was no definite right answer participants may have just looked to others for guidance because they were unsure. This is informational influence.

iii. Asch's Experiments

This leads us on to a famous study of conformity carried out by **Solomon Asch (1951)**.

The aim of the study was to find out if people will conform to a group when there is clearly a right and wrong answer and the rest of the group are giving the wrong one.

He carried out an experiment using groups of between 6 and 9 people. However, only one was a true participant (naïve participant) the others were confederates (pretending to be participants but told by Asch what to do and say).

Asch told the participants that the experiment was testing visual perception, and showed the groups pictures of lines of differing lengths.

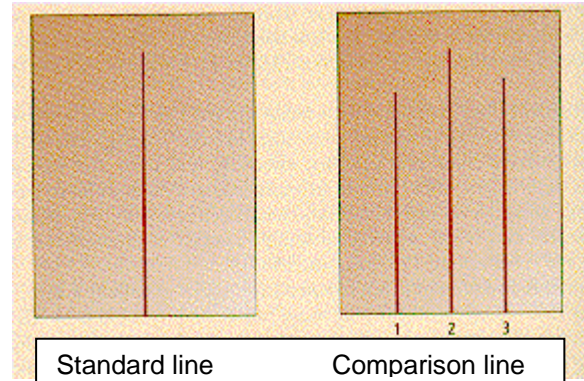
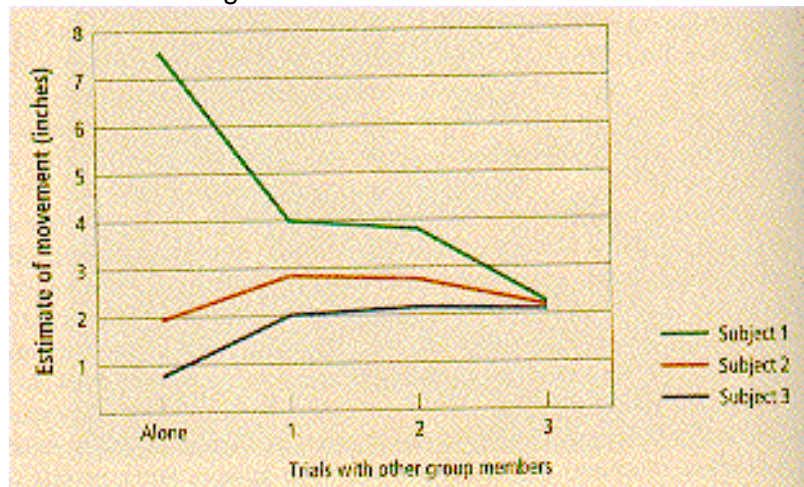


Diagram showing the lines used by Asch

They had to say which of the lines was the same length as the standard line:

Each person in the group had to give their answer with the naïve participant being the last or second to last to respond.

The confederates had been told that sometimes they should all give the same wrong answer. (Each time this happened was a 'trial').



What is important here was that it was absolutely clear which of the three lines was in fact the correct answer. However, all the confederates still gave the same, **wrong** answer.

To make the situation even more disconcerting for the true subject of the experiment each of the confederates responded individually one after another with the subject being asked last.

Of the 50 participants tested, 32% of them conformed each time by giving the wrong answer themselves

Results from the Asch experiments
<http://www.lermanet.com/exit/milgram/conform.htm>



Naïve participant (in the middle) with confederates in Asch's experiment

(Participants agreed with the wrong answer in about a third of all trials.), whilst 75% conformed at least once.

When this is compared to a control group of participants who were tested on their own, almost no-one gave a wrong answer. When asked after the experiment, participants who had worked with the group all said that they had been influenced by the response of the rest of the group. They had felt honour-bound to distort their own judgment in order to conform to the majority and not to risk ridicule.

Conclusion

People will conform, even when this means going against the evidence of their own eyes, in order to fit in and not appear different

Strengths and weaknesses of the study.

Low ecological validity (it was an experiment and therefore a 'set up' situation). In real life if we are unsure what to say we keep quiet, but these participants had to give an answer.

Asch only tested white American males. His results cannot therefore be generalised (applied to) everyone else. However, many later studies eg. Doms and Avermaet who used a wider range of participants than Asch, have found support for his findings.

Asch's experiments were carried out in the 1950s when people in America were frightened of expressing their own opinion in case they were seen to be opposing the government. Different results might be gained today.

For example Perrin and Spencer (1980) replicated Asch's experiment with a new set of participants. They found that whilst participants reported feeling anxious about the majority response they did not conform as they had in Asch's experiment.

However, Derris & Avermaet (1981) argued that the failure to show conformity was due to the type of participants chosen.

They were all science students, which meant that they may have been more likely to emphasise the need for correct measurement, unlike members of the population in general who had not been trained in scientific observation.

Even though they disliked going against the majority, they felt they were obliged to be accurate.

Derris & Avermaet also stated that many modern replications of Asch's study do show the expected degree of conformity.

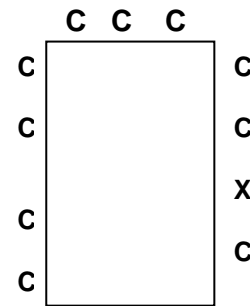


Diagram showing confederates and Naive participant round the table

Read and Make Notes

Extension Work

What happened in the US in the 1950's relating to the McCarthy witch hunts?

Who did every one fear?

These experiments were unethical because they caused unnecessary stress to the participants

- Try the effect of conformity on your family. Pick a stationary object in the night sky and ask someone to have a look at it, explain to the person that it suddenly swoops to the left and then exclaim 'See it has just happened.'

ACTIVITY

SAQ	
Give an example of when you have conformed	

SAQ

SAQ	
Briefly summarise the results and conclusion of Asch's study	

SAQ

SAQ	
What is conformity?	

SAQ	
Should the year it was carried out be taken into consideration when looking at Asch's study? Explain your answer	

Now that we have looked at what conformity is in general terms, we need to look in more detail at the differences between types of conformity we touched on earlier. As we have already seen there are generally viewed as being four types, although there is some overlap between these.

These are:-

1. Normative
2. Informational
3. Compliance
4. Ingratational

1. Normative conformity.

This happens when we go along with what other people are saying or doing because we want other people to accept us (fear of rejection) and to gain approval from others. We therefore don't want to do things that make us seem different. Here, the group is important.

For example we smoke because all our friends smoke. We therefore do it because we want to feel part of the group.

Asch's study is therefore a study of normative conformity because the participants went along with what the rest of the group were saying. They didn't want to stand out or seem different.

2. Informational conformity.

This is when we are unsure how to think or behave so we do what other people are doing because we presume they know what they are doing.

We look to them for guidance. It can also occur when there is no obvious answer to a question so we say or do what other people are saying or doing.

As you can see here the group is not so important.

NOTE: Asch's study can also be used as an example of informational conformity because, when the task was made more difficult by having all the lines of a similar length, the participants gave the same answer as the rest of the group because they were unsure and looked to others for guidance.

- If you were at a large banquet and had lots of different knives and forks to use, and you weren't sure which one to use what would you do?
- I would.....

ACTIVITY

3. Compliance

Careful here because there are two definitions of compliance. The one that is relevant to conformity claims that:

We conform to other people's behaviour publicly, without believing what we are doing or saying is correct. (Kelman)

For Example:

Your friends all say they don't like a certain person in your group, so when you are with them you say the same. Privately, however, you do like this person, so when your friends are not around you spend time with them and are nice to them.

4. Ingratiation.

Mann suggested that we go along with a group's opinions and behaviours because we want their approval (want them to like us) and acceptance. It may be that this is very similar to compliance in that, to begin with, when we do things so that people will like us we may privately not believe that what we are doing is correct.

However, in time we may come to believe that what we are doing *is* correct. For example:

Suppose you want to belong to a certain group of people. They are all fans of country music which you dislike. You may try to get them to like you by listening to country music when you are with them and saying you enjoy it. When you are alone you wouldn't dream of listening to country music. This is ingratiation. It is also an example of compliance.

However, in time you may, having listened to lots of country music, decide you like it after all and listen to it even when you are alone. This started off as ingratiation and compliance but now you have converted to other people’s opinion. (This is called ‘internalisation’.)

Try to think of real-life examples of the four types of conformity described above.

Activity

SAQ	
Give an example of ingratiation conformity	
Give an example of normative conformity	

SAQ

SAQ Which of the following is informational influence and which is compliance? (Write either I or C)	
1. In Asch’s study some of the participants said afterwards that they hadn’t agreed with the group’s answer. They made comments such as ‘If I’d been the first to answer I probably would have responded differently	
2. In Sherif’s study, some participants (because they were unsure of their own answers) were guided by other peoples responses believing them to be correct.	