

National 5 Psychology

Social Behaviour: Conformity



CONFORMITY

Doing what everybody else is doing can be cool.

Unit content

Outcome 1

Explain topics relating to human social behaviour by:

- 1.1 Describing a topic in social psychology
- 1.2 Explaining relevant concepts and psychological research evidence that contributes to understanding of the topic
- 1.3 Using psychological knowledge to explain examples of everyday behaviour

Candidates must be able to describe and explain:

- the topic of conformity
- informational and normative social influence
- compliance and internalisation
- individual, situational and cultural factors
- minority and majority influence
- the main aims, method and results of Asch, S.E. (1951) and Mori, K, and Arai, M (2010)
- one strength and one weakness of the studies used.

Welcome to Social Psychology

We are Social Animals

Humans are highly social animals, who gravitate to living in communities, towns, cities and large complex societies. Unlike some other animals, babies are extremely fragile, cannot walk, talk, feed themselves or survive without adults caring for them. Humans are what we call 'group animals'.



In-groups and out-groups

We are brought up to see ourselves as part of an in-group. For example, Scottish/British, male/female, young/old etc. Research shows that we tend to think that other members of our in-group are very different from us, for example white British people may believe that other white British people have different personalities, music tastes and voting preferences to them.

However we tend to see out-groups as being very similar to one another e.g. young black men all like rap music. These views are called 'in-group heterogeneity' and 'out-group homogeneity'. These biases in our thinking can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

Activities:

1. What in-groups do you belong to?
2. Who does our society regard as out-groups?
3. Do you think your friends or family harbour any stereotypes or prejudice towards out-groups?
4. Give 2 examples of in-group heterogeneity and out-group homogeneity?

Online learning:

Watch the clip "*A girl like me*" on YouTube and the Dr Clark doll experiment.

Discussion

- What does the film tell us about how the self-image of African American women has been affected?
- What strategies do they use to try and fit in?
- Is the original experiment still relevant today?

<http://youtu.be/rjy9q8VekmE>

What is Conformity?

Conformity is a form of social influence that results from exposure to the majority position. David Myers (1999) defines conformity as: 'a change in behaviour or belief as a result of real or imagined group pressure'. Zimbardo et al (1995) state that it is: "a tendency for people to adopt the behaviour, attitudes and values of other members of a reference group'. Our reference group are the people we refer to, our peers, friends and family. These people have more impact on us than strangers.

Conformity is a specific reaction to '**social influence**'. When conforming, individuals adopt the behaviours, attitudes and/or values of a numerically larger group (majority). It is sometimes known as 'majority influence'.

We conform every day

We take on the beliefs and behaviour of the society we live in, and change our behaviour in different situations to fit expectations.

For example we:

- wear school uniform or 'fashionable' clothes
- 'choose' gendered hairstyles
- encourage girls to shave their legs and armpits
- queue at bus stops and cash machines



Many of these things are a result of **socialisation** or **conditioning**.

Socialisation refers to the lifelong process of passing on norms, beliefs, customs and ideologies, providing an individual with the skills and habits necessary to fit in to our society.

Activities:

1. Write your own definition of conformity using the following key terms: *social influence, majority, change*.
2. Think of at least 3 examples of when your behaviour changes depending on who you're with.
3. After you have done this, indicate whether this is due to imagined or real group pressure.
4. What does it mean when it's said that conformity is a result of *socialisation*?

Types of Conformity

Conformity comes in different forms and it is important you know the difference between them, can define each and can identify examples which illustrate them all.

Not all conformity is the same. People conform in different ways and for a variety of reasons, depending on the situation they are in. **Kelman (1958)** proposed 3 types of conformity:

Compliance

This is conforming to majority opinions and behaviour in public but privately maintaining your own attitudes e.g. agreeing with a parent that your bedroom is untidy just for a quiet life, wearing a tie to school even though you think they're uncomfortable.

Identification

An individual takes on the majority beliefs and behaviours both publicly and privately but this may only be temporary and will not be maintained when the individual leaves the group e.g. you join an animal rights campaign group with your friends at college, but stop your subscription to the charity when the group disperses after the course ends.

Internalisation

This occurs when an individual privately accepts the majority view. The new attitudes and behaviours become part of the individual's personal value system.

Examples:

Compliance	Tom notices that everyone else has taken their food off their tray in the cafeteria, so he decides to do the same.
Identification	Dave supports his school hockey team, but then he moves school and starts to support the team of his new school instead.
Internalisation	Ava spends a lot of time with a group of friends who love rock climbing and comes to take up the sport. Long after she no longer sees those friends, she is still rock climbing.

Some conformity is a good thing for society to run smoothly:

- Stopping at a red light
- Telling a white lie to protect someone's feelings e.g. 'no your bum does NOT look big in that'
- Laughing at a bad joke told by the host of a party
- Not attacking people in the street - behaving in an appropriate manner



Some conformity is a bad and abused by evil leaders:

- The Nazis believed that Jewish people were inferior and slaughtered 6 million people. Many people conformed to this idea.



Activities:

1. Put the statements under the correct headings : **compliance, identification & internalisation.**
 - *Publically and privately agreeing and this view becoming part of your belief system.*
 - *Privately disagreeing but outwardly going along with the group.*
 - *Taking on the beliefs of a group, but requiring their presence to maintain the beliefs and behaviour.*
 - *An example is drinking water because all your friends do, when you are not around them you revert to lemonade.*
 - *An example is voting for a political party because you feel strongly that they are the best party.*
 - *An example is going along with the request of your boss and apologising to a customer, even though you think you are not at fault.*
2. Think of your own example of each type on conformity. They can be from your own life, or things you've seen happen
3. Give 1 example of conformity which is positive (pro-social) and one example of conformity that is negative (anti-social), other than the examples given above.
4. Here are some real-life examples of conformity. For each one, identify the different type(s) of conformity that are happening. You should try to explain your answers.
 - (a) *It is David'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 during induction. He sees a group of students filing off towards a corridor and decides to follow them.*
 - (b) *Lucy is a police officer. Her friends have remarked that when she is off duty, she is a relaxed and easy-going person but when she is in uniform she becomes much more serious and authoritative. In fact, it's almost as if she was two different people.*
 - (c) *Sam has just started work in an office. On his second day there, his colleagues had a discussion about asylum seekers coming to the UK. His colleagues thought that they received favourable treatment from the government and that this should stop. Sam doesn't agree with this view, but when he was asked what he thought, he said that his colleagues were right.*

Why do we conform?

So far we've looked at the different ways people conform, but without really understanding why. Here we look at reasons for conformity.

Deutsch & Gerard (1995) distinguished between INFORMATIONAL SOCIAL INFLUENCE and NORMATIVE SOCIAL INFLUENCE. They saw this as crucial to understanding majority group influence.

Informational influence

People conform because they believe the majority is right. This occurs especially in ambiguous situations (where the answer isn't obvious) and/or where the majority is known to have superior knowledge. There is a belief that others are better informed about a certain issue (e.g. music and fashion), and have made a better choice (better music/fashion taste) and that their choice is the correct one.

Normative social influence

People conform in order to be liked and accepted as part of a group. The individual is not in doubt about what is right, but is influenced by social norms. The pressure comes from the group, based on the need to be liked and accepted by it. Pressure can be real or imagined. For example a pupil at school may want to fit in and be accepted by a group and go along with others to avoid ridicule/rejection.

Activities:

1. Copy and complete the table below.

TERM	WHAT IT MEANS
Informational Social Influence	
Normative Social Influence	

2. Think of an everyday example for each type of social influence.

Exam Style Q:

Bobby conforms because of the influence of his friends. Name and describe **two** types of social influence that Bobby may experience. **(6 marks)**

Classic Research into Informational Influence



Aim

Jenness (1932) was interested to find out whether people would conform in a task where the answer was unclear (ambiguous) due to informational influence.

Procedure

He asked students to *privately* guess how many beans there were in a jar. They were then given an opportunity to discuss their estimates in groups. Finally, to give their individual estimates again. Jenness wanted to see if participants would change their original private guess to be closer to the group estimate. If participants did change their answers, then this would mean that they had conformed. They were motivated to be correct because Jenness offered the reward of an A grade for the most accurate guess in the class.

Findings

Jenness found that individual estimates tended to converge to a group norm. Most people altered their original answer to be closer to the group estimate.

Conclusion

It seems reasonable that, in an ambiguous situation, one looks to others to get some ideas about a reasonable answer. We do look to others who we believe may have more/superior knowledge to us (informational influence).

Evaluation

- ✓ This was a lab experiment and was therefore highly controlled and easily replicated.
- ✗ This experiment used an artificial task – how can we be sure that people would conform in the same way when the task was meaningful?
- ✗ Participants were deceived about the true aim of the experiment – if they knew it was about conformity then they would be unlikely to behave naturally. Deception is an ethical issue.
- ✗ Jenness sometimes asked participants to say their guess aloud. This makes the experiment unethical, as causing potential distress/embarrassment to participants would not protect them from harm

Activities:

1. Try a variation of Jenness' experiment to find out if people are influenced by the estimates of other people. There are two conditions of the independent variable: experimental condition - a fake estimate sheet (with inflated estimates) and the control condition - a blank sheet. The design of this experiment is Independent Measures - each participant will be tested under only one condition.

Jobs to allocate amongst your team:

- Write standardised instructions
- Bring in a jar!
- Buy sweets/pasta/anything that you have a lot of!
- Design 5 blank and 5 false estimate sheets
- Write a debrief
- Choose a sampling method – random, opportunity or volunteer.

Informational Influence Research #2

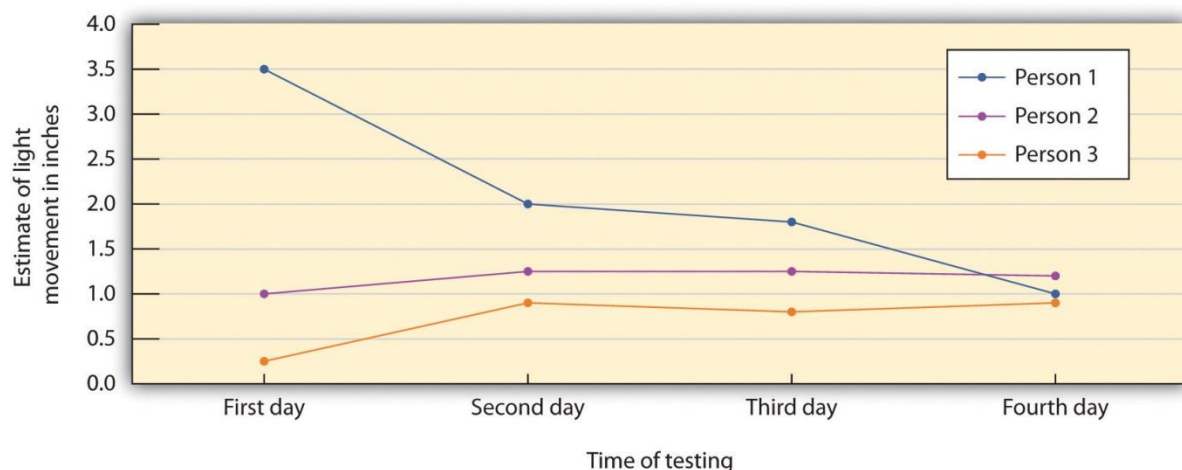
Aim: Sherif (1935) investigated responses to an ambiguous stimulus, using the autokinetic effect. This is an illusion, much like a disco lights, where a stationary point of light appears to move in a dark room. The light wasn't actually moving at all. He wanted to see if people's estimates would change when they heard the estimates of other people.

Method: Sherif told participants he was going to move the light and they had to estimate how far the light moved. When tested individually several times their answers fluctuated but settled down. There were wide differences between participant estimates though.

They then heard the estimates of two others who had given quite different estimates of the light's movement. After their discussion each participant was asked to provide individual answers again.

Results: A group norm emerged, where estimates become similar to the ones they had heard, so their answers had 'converged' / come closer.

Conclusion: This demonstrates a tendency to conform to the group norm, especially in ambiguous situations where we are unsure of the correct answer. We look to others.



Evaluation: This was one of the first studies to look at the power of the group, and prompted many other social psychologists to see if they could measure this phenomenon. The most notable research was conducted by Solomon Asch, who hoped to improve on Sherif's procedure by having real group members present and by introducing a situation where the answer was completely obvious.

However, his participants were asked to state their answers publically. This could cause embarrassment and is therefore unethical.

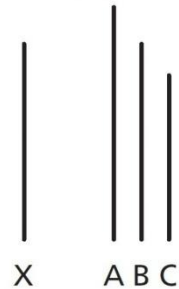
Classic Research into Normative Social Influence #1

Early studies such as Jenness (1932) put people into ambiguous social situations, to see whether people follow the crowd when they don't know what to do or say.

However, a study by Asch (1951) tested whether social pressure would result in people denying something they could see quite clearly with their own eyes. He tested people's judgement of the length of lines. Asch found that 75% of people conformed on at least one occasion – demonstrating that most people are willing to say something that they know is wrong due to social pressure.

Aims

The aim of this study was to find out how people would behave when given an unambiguous task where the answer is obvious. Would they be influenced by the behaviour of others, or would they stick firmly to what they knew to be right? How much conforming to majority influence would there be?



Method and procedure

In total, 123 male American undergraduates were tested. Asch showed a series of lines (the standard line and the possible answers as shown here) to participants seated around a table. All but one of the participants was a confederate of the researcher. The 7-9 confederates were



instructed to give the same incorrect answers on 12 'critical' trials. In total there were 18 trials with each participant. The true participant (naïve participant) was always the last of last but one to answer.

Results

On the critical trials, an average of 36.8% of the responses made by the participants were incorrect. 13 out of 50 participants never conformed, which was 25%. **The majority**

- **75% conformed at least once.** This is surprising because the task was unambiguous. Asch conducted a control trial where no confederate gave a wrong answer, he found that people do make mistakes about 1% of the time.

Conclusion

This shows a surprisingly strong tendency to conform to group pressures in a situation where the answer is clear. For Asch the important finding was that there was any conformity at all. However, Asch also noted that on two-thirds of the trials his participants had remained independent, which was clear evidence of how people could resist pressure to conform. This study is represented in most social psychology textbooks as resounding evidence of people's tendency to conform when faced with a unanimous majority. It is also evidence of conditions under which people resist conformity.

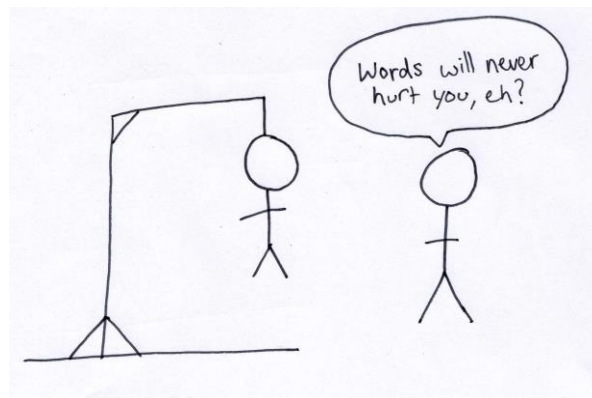
Evaluation

- ✓ Lab experiment so it had a high level of control of variables. It can be easily replicated.
- ✗ **Lack of ecological validity. What does this study actually tell us about real life?**
Asking people to judge the length of lines is a rather insignificant task; people may be willing to conform to save face. On a more important conformity task, we would expect conformity levels to drop. The experiment used strangers, but conformity may be even higher when with people you know. **The study had low ecological validity.**

- ✗ This was conducted in a highly conformist time in American society during the cold war - the era of McCarthyism where Senator McCarthy was pulling in people to answer charges of communism if they held any sympathy with left wing views of equality. Perrin and Spencer repeated Asch's study in 1981 with British students. They found only 1 conformist answer out of 396 trials. The era of individualism did not take place until the 1960's. There have been studies that support Asch's results and others which suggest it's an unpredictable phenomenon.
- ✗ **Biased sample** - All participants were male and belonged to the same age group. These results cannot be generalised to women.
- ✗ Participants were not protected from psychological harm; participants were deceived and experienced some distress. Giving answers aloud is considered highly unethical today.

Activities:

1. Illustrate the Asch study using ONLY stickmen, speech bubbles and captions. Make sure you include the aim, method, results, conclusion and evaluation.



2. "Describe and evaluate the Asch study on conformity" (10 marks)

Classic Research into Normative Social Influence #2

Arai and Mori (2010)

Aim

Asch's finding was hugely confounded (made invalid) by the fact that some confederates would have been more convincing than others. To solve these problems Kazuo Mori and Miho Arai adapted the MORI technique (Manipulation of Overlapping Rivalrous Images by polarizing filters), used previously in eye-witness research. By wearing filter glasses similar to those used for watching 3-D movies, participants can view the same display and yet see different things.



Method and Procedure

Mori and Arai replicated Asch's line comparison task with 104 participants tested in groups of four at a time (on successive trials participants said aloud which of three comparison lines matched a single target line). In each group, three participants wore identical glasses, with one participant wearing a different set, thereby causing them to observe that a different comparison line matched the target line. As in Asch's studies, the participants stated their answers publicly, with the minority participant always going third. Whereas Asch used male participants only, the new study involved both men and women.

Results

For women only, the new findings closely matched the Asch research, with the minority participant being swayed by the majority on an average of 4.41 times out of 12 key trials (compared with 3.44 times in the original). However, the male participants in the new study were not swayed by the majority view.

Discussion and Conclusion

There are many possible reasons why men in the new study were not swayed by the majority as they were in Asch's studies, including cultural differences (the current study was conducted in Japan) and generational changes. Mori and Arai highlighted another reason - the fact that the minority and majority participants in their study knew each other, whereas participants in Asch's study did not.

Evaluation

- ✓ The researchers argue that using familiar people is a strength of their new approach: 'Conformity generally takes place among acquainted persons, such as family members, friends or colleagues, and in daily life we seldom experience a situation like the Asch experiment in which we make decisions among total strangers.'
- ✗ The Mori and Arai study was only conducted in Japan so the results cannot be generalised to other cultures.
- ✗ Again, participants were asked to give answers publically which is unethical.

Activities:

1. Copy and complete the table below.

Study	Type of conformity
Jenness (1932) jar of beans	
Sherif (1935) autokinetic effect	
Asch (1951) standard line experiment	
Mori and Arai (2010) conformity in Japan	

2. Discuss the questions below as a small group and then write them up individually.
- Describe Mori and Arai's study in **no more than four** action-packed sentences.
 - Paragraph 1 describes a problem with Asch's original study; outline this **problem** choosing terminology from the research methods unit.
 - Compare the **procedures** used by Asch (1951) and Mori & Arai (2010); find as many similarities and differences as you can.
 - Compare the findings of Asch (1951) and Mori and Arai (2010); is there anything **surprising or unexpected** about the findings?
 - Based on these new findings, what are your thoughts about whether **demand characteristics** and the **low ecological validity** of the laboratory setting were responsible for the lower levels of conformity in Asch's original study?
 - Can you think of any **alternative strategies** for researching conformity that would have higher levels of ecological validity?

Factors That Increase And Decrease Conformity

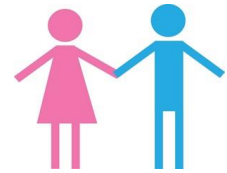
Since the original Asch (1951) research, a number of similar studies have been carried out to find out the circumstances under which people will or will not conform to a majority. Some of the studies are outlined below.

1. For each study, suggest whether the rate of conformity would be higher or lower than found in the Asch study. You should also write a brief explanation of *why* you think the rate of conformity would change.

Variation on original experiment	Effect on Conformity?	Why?
The size of the majority was increased to sixteen confederates against one participant.		
The size of the majority was increased to sixteen confederates against one participant.		
The task was made more difficult by using lines that were much closer in length to each other and the comparison line.		
Participants give their answers in private, rather than calling them out in front of the group (Deutsch & Gerard,1955)		
The participants are Maths and Science students, rather than Social Science students (Perrin & Spencer,1981)		
The participants are young offenders and the confederates are all probation officers (Perrin & Spencer, 1981)		

2. Based on the results we have discussed, what do you think are the most important factors in producing conformity to a majority? Write a short paragraph explaining your views.

Factors that Influence Conformity



We want to “fit in” with friends or groups and are brought up to believe stereotypical views about others as a quick way to understand the world e.g. girls are more interested in fashion and gossip than boys, boys are more aggressive than girls and better leaders.

We are also shaped by **religion**, our **parents**, and the **culture** we live in. There are three types of factor that may influence our conformist behaviour:

- *Individual factors*
- *Situational factors*
- *Cultural factors.*

Individual factors

Individual factors are things about the individual that make them likely to conform. Things such as self-esteem, confidence, intelligence, experience or gender would be considered as individual factors.

Gender

We may be more likely to conform depending on our **gender**. It is thought that women tend to be more conformist than men (Eagly and Carli, 1981). This may be explained in terms of the fact that women are more concerned with social relationships than men and this means that, in the experimental condition, they have different short term goals. The result is that women **appear** to be more conformist than they are in the real world (Eagley, 1978).

Personality

Those who are introverted are more likely to conform than those who are extroverts. This is because introverts are shyer and would find it difficult to oppose the majority.

Self esteem

Our **self-esteem** may affect how likely we are to conform. Asch suggested that people low in self-esteem are more likely to conform because they are more likely to fear rejection from the group.

Parenting and life experience in previous situations is another individual difference. Adorno et al (1950) described the authoritarian personality - people who are more likely to conform because of the way in which they were brought up.

Need for social approval

If an individual has a strong need for social approval they are more likely to conform to the group

Social relationships

If an individual is concerned about social relationships they are more likely to conform (this tends to be women).

Situational factors

Situational factors are anything in the environment, including the behaviour of other people and social roles.

Group cohesiveness

In situations where a group of people know each other (unlike Asch's experiment) conformity may be even higher.

Importance of task

In situations where people have a strong moral basis for their beliefs they are less easily swayed by the opinions of others. Hornsey et al (2003) found that students who had strong beliefs about the recognition of gay couples in law were publicly and privately less likely to conform to majority opinion.

Size of the majority

Asch (1956) found that the size of the opposing majority did affect conformity - up to a point. He found that as the size of the majority grew, so did the percentage of trials in which the naïve participant conformed.



Status of majority group

If the status of the majority group is high (eg: popular group of girls at school) then they will be more influential, and others will be more likely to want to be part of their group and therefore conform.

Cultural factors

Individualist vs Collectivist

Compared with **individualistic** cultures such as the UK and USA, conformity appears to be higher in societies where group harmony is a priority. These cultures are called **collectivist** cultures, examples of these are China, Korea and Japan. Conformity may be seen as a positive feature in cultures where interdependence is more highly valued than independence. In collectivist cultures family and work group goals are emphasized above individual needs or desires. This is what Smith and Bond (1993) found in a review of 31 studies of conformity.



Time period

Many psychologists argue that Western culture in the 1950s encouraged conformity, but these strict norms were subverted in the 1960s and 70s by the black civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the contraceptive pill and the sexual revolution that resulted. Many people cite rock and roll music as a major turning point, where people no longer felt they had to do things in the old ways.

Activities:

1. Create a mind-map outlining all of the factors that may influence conformity.

Exam Preparation:

Make your teacher redundant – become an SQA marker! Look at the past paper question below. Write your answer to this question and then, using the mark scheme that your teacher will give you, mark your work.

2014 Past Paper Question 2 (d)

Bobby is afraid of the video games which his brother plays. However he pretends to like the games when with his friends because they all seem to enjoy them.

Describe **one** individual and **one** cultural factor which may have influenced the likelihood of Bobby conforming.

- | | | |
|------|-------------------|---------|
| (i) | Individual factor | 2 marks |
| (ii) | Cultural factor | 2 marks |

Minority influence

So far we have focused on majority influence (the power of the majority). However it has been suggested that this preoccupation with the majority does not fit with historical reality. If the only form of social influence was majority influence then we would all think and behave in the same way, and this would be unchanging from generation to generation.

There are several examples where minority groups have had a powerful impact on society. The suffragette movement of the 1920's gradually changed public opinion and political opinion so that eventually women were given the vote. The suffragettes, like other minority groups, tend not to have had much power or status and may have been dismissed as troublemakers, extremists or weirdos.

How can they have influence over the majority?

Moscovici suggests that the answer to this question lies in their behavioural style – the way that they get their point across. The success of the suffragette movement lies in the fact that they were **consistent** in their views. This consistency created a considerable degree of social influence.



Minorities that are active and organised who advocate and defend their position consistently can create social conflict, doubt and uncertainty among members of the majority, and this can lead to social change.

Activities:

1. What is minority influence?
2. Why must minority influence exist, instead of majority influence alone?
3. Which group from history used minority influence to insight change?
4. What methods are used by minorities to create change?
5. Can you think of any other historical cases where minority influence has been successful?

Case study – Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was an activist in the African–American civil rights movement. She is now regarded as the ‘first lady of civil rights’ thanks to her arrest on December 1st. This day (and her birthday) are commemorated as ‘Rosa Parks day’ in California and Ohio.

“I'd see the bus pass every day... But to me, that was a way of life; we had no choice but to accept what was the custom. The bus was among the first ways I realized there was a black world and a white world”



On December 1, 1955, in [Montgomery, Alabama](#), Parks refused to obey bus driver [James F. Blake](#)'s order that she give up her seat in the colored section to a white passenger, after the white section was filled. Parks was not the first person to resist bus segregation. Others had taken similar steps, including [Irene Morgan](#) in 1946, [Sarah Louise Keys](#) in 1955, and the members of the [Browder v. Gayle](#) lawsuit ([Claudette Colvin](#), [Aurelia Browder](#), [Susie McDonald](#), and [Mary Louise Smith](#)) who were arrested in Montgomery months before Parks. [NAACP](#) organizers believed that Parks was the best candidate for seeing through a court challenge after her arrest for [civil disobedience](#) in violating Alabama segregation laws, although eventually her case became bogged down in the state courts while the *Browder v. Gayle* case succeeded.

Parks' act of defiance and the [Montgomery Bus Boycott](#) became important symbols of the modern [Civil Rights Movement](#). She became an international icon of resistance to [racial segregation](#). She organized and collaborated with civil rights leaders, including [Edgar Nixon](#), president of the local chapter of the NAACP; and [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#), a new minister in town who gained national prominence in the civil rights movement.

Although widely honored in later years, she also suffered for her act; she was fired from her job as a seamstress in a local department store, and received death threats for years afterwards. After retirement, Parks wrote her autobiography and lived a largely private life in Detroit. In her final years, she suffered from [dementia](#).

Parks received national recognition, including the NAACP's 1979 [Spingarn Medal](#), the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#), the [Congressional Gold Medal](#), and a posthumous statue in the United States Capitol's [National Statuary Hall](#).

Upon her death in 2005, she was the first woman and second non-U.S. government official to [lie in honor](#) at the [Capitol Rotunda](#).

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa_Parks)

Activities:

1. Explain how Rosa Parks and her actions are examples of minority influence.
2. What measures did Parks, and others such as MLK take to fight for equal rights?
3. What negative consequences were there for Parks?

The difference between majority and minority influence

There are several key differences between these two types of influence:

Numbers

Minority influence is exerted by a minority of one or more people. What's important is the number of people **doing** the influencing **not** the number of people **being** influenced.



Innovation or status quo?

Majority influence is maintaining the status quo, it is resistant to social change. Majorities serve to promote uniformity among group members and exert pressure on those who deviate from social norms. Minority influence is associated with change and innovation. The views of a deviant minority generate a social conflict with mainstream ideas, values and norms.

Imitation or originality?

Minorities must work harder to get their point across, because of this arguments are thought to produce more cognitive effort in the minority than is the case with majority influence. Majority influence leads to restricted convergent thinking based simply on imitation, whereas minority influence leads to more divergent thinking and original thinking as alternatives are weighed up against each other in search of the best solution.

Compliance or conversion

In order for minority influence to take place, there must be a conversion within individuals who were formerly part of the majority. This conversion involves a careful thinking through of the arguments of the minority and gradual acceptance of their point of view. This process is slow to take place. Majority influence, on the other hand, is a much more passive process, it doesn't involve much thought.

Social approval versus information

Majority influence represents the need for social approval and minority influence represents the need for information about reality.

Research on Minority influence

Behavioural style

Moscovici et al (1969) proposed that the minority must be consistent in their views and that this consistency will create conflict in others, leading them to question and possibly change their views, even when the stimulus is explicit. Researchers arranged for 4 participants plus 2 confederates to name the colour of 36 slides. The slides were blue-coloured but both confederates consistently said that the slides were green. Overall, the participants agreed with the minority on 8.42% of the trials (i.e. they said that the slides were coloured green) 32% gave the same answer as the minority at least once. In a second experiment, where the participants had to write down their answer, this led to greater agreement with the confederates.

Flexibility rather than consistency has also been found to be important. Nemeth and Brilmayer (1987) found that a minority of one who refused to change his position (when arguing in a mock-jury situation for the amount of compensation to be paid to someone in a skiing accident) had no effect on others. However, a minority member who was willing to shift his opinion slightly in the direction of the majority did exert an influence on majority opinion.

Situational factors

Moscovici and Nemeth (1974) demonstrated that seating position can affect minority influence. In his study, five people sat around a rectangular table; one of the five was a confederate who expressed a minority opinion. When the confederate was **assigned** a seat, position did not matter but if the confederate **chose** to sit at the head of the table they exerted more influence.

Activities:

1. Explain 2 of the differences between minority and majority influence.
2. Explain the main findings of 2 pieces of research into minority influence.

How does minority influence work?

Conflict rethinking - Moscovici proposed that the confidence and consistency of a deviant minority challenges the way the majority thinks and causes them to rethink their position, thus bringing about internalised attitude change rather than superficial compliance.

Social Cryptoamnesia - There is a point in any group, where, after some members have started to agree with the minority, the minority then turns into a majority. Van Avermaet (1996) calls this the snowball effect. We should also remember that minority influence generally shows itself in private rather than public, so how does this snowball effect take place?

The answer may lie in social cryptoamnesia. It has been observed that major attitude changes (conversion) take place only when the spirit of the times has changed. In the case of the suffragettes, it was years after they started campaigning for the right to vote that public opinion actually changed. So, opinion change was not a direct result of minority influence.



What probably happened was that the minority influence changed private attitudes and these views gradually became the “spirit of the times”. When change occurred (women were given the vote) this was in accordance with majority opinion. Perez et al (1995) coined the phrase social cryptoamnesia - by the time change occurs people have forgotten the original source of opinion change, but innovation was actually due to minority influence.

Activities:

1. What is meant by conflict re-thinking?
2. Explain social cryptoamnesia in relation to minority influence

1.3 Examples of everyday behaviours

Classwork This booklet has given you lots of examples of conformity in everyday situations.

- 1) In groups make a list of all the ways that we conform in the situations below. Present your findings in a form of your choosing e.g. drawing, poster, mind-map, stickmen, comic strip, puppet show, table etc:



Everyday life	Example
School	
Workplace	
Home	
Cinema	
Relationships	
Shopping mall	
Parties	
Music tastes	
Online bullying	

- 2) The producers of the X-Factor (or if, like me you prefer Strictly Come Dancing) have approached you, in your capacity as an expert in Social Psychologist, specializing in Social Influence, as they are concerned that the panel of judges might be conforming to each other's judgments of contestants rather than judging them independently. Explain why this might happen. Refer to types and explanations of conformity that you have already learnt about.
- 3) People use conformity every day to try and get people to do what they want (sometimes without those people even knowing!). One particular group of people who do this are politicians. You have recently been appointed campaign manager for an up and coming politician and they want your help in swaying the opinions of other politicians and the public. Write a report (a concise piece of writing broken up into sub-sections) advising on the best way your boss can go about influencing people. Make sure you make reference to studies and/or theories from Psychology.

Practice exam questions

1. Describe your topic. 4
2. Explain one research study into conformity. Your answer should include the aims, method/procedure and results of the study. 6
3. Give one strength and one weakness of the study you have outlined in the previous question. 2
4. Give one example of how a pupil may conform to their friendship group. 2
5. Name and describe two types of social influence. 4
6. Describe one individual factor and one situational factor which may increase conformity. 4
7. Give one weakness of the Asch (1951) study. 2
8. Describe and Evaluate the Mori and Arai study. 6

