Social influence

* Types of conformity: internalisation, identification and compliance.  Explanations for conformity: informational social influence and normative social influence, and variables affecting conformity including group size, unanimity and task difficulty as investigated by Asch.
* Conformity to social roles as investigated by Zimbardo.
* Explanations for obedience: agentic state and legitimacy of authority, and situational variables affecting obedience including proximity and location, as investigated by Milgram, and uniform. Dispositional explanation for obedience: the Authoritarian Personality.
* Explanations of resistance to social influence, including social support and locus of control.
* Minority influence including reference to consistency, commitment and flexibility.
* The role of social influence processes in social change.

Zimbardo’s research:

**Aim** – to see if people conform to social roles

**Procedure** – used male, American, undergraduates. Paid to participate and were randomly allocated prisoner or prison guard. Prisoners wore plain clothes and a number, guards wore a uniform and mirrored glasses. Zimbardo was prison superintendent as well as researcher. Guards relentlessly got prisoners to perform tasks e.g. cleaning toilets and waking them in the night. Prisoners were only referred to as numbers. The experiment was stopped on day 6/14 as it was too unethical

**Findings** – people will conform to their social roles. An evil place can win over good people

Asch’s research:

**Procedure** - studied 123 American males; showed them a line and 3 comparison lines to select which was correct. In groups of 6-8 confederates who gave the wrong answer on purpose to test conformity levels

**Findings -** 75% of participants conformed at least once

Asch’s variations:

**Group size** – no more than a majority of 3 needed to affect conformity

**Task difficulty** – When a situation is ambiguous/ harder conformity increases

**Unanimity** – a dissenting confederate (social support) makes conformity drop

Types and explanations:

**Internalisation** – wholly taking on a groups views publicly and privately

**Identification** – agreeing completely publicly but privately may disagree with certain aspects

**Compliance** – wholly agree with the group publicly, completely disagree privately

**Informational social influence (ISI)** – the desire to be right, a cognitive response, more likely to happen when a situation is ambiguous

**Normative social influence (NSI)** – the desire to be liked, an emotional response more likely to happen with strangers

Conformity:

Minority influence:

**Consistency** – keep your point consistent over time and between the group

**Commitment** – show willing to make sacrifices for your belief

**Flexibility** – don’t change your view but be open to negotiation

**Snowball effect** – more and more people begin to join the minority

**Process of change** – make people hear new ideas and consider changing

Social change:

**Steps** – draw attention to the issue, be consistent over time, promote deeper processing of the issue, the augmentation principle – shock the majority, the snowball effect and social cryptomnesia where you know change has happened, but you can’t recall how

**Examples** – civil rights movement, LGBT, climate change, suffragettes, smoking

**Conformity** – NSI can be used to make social change by convincing people that everyone is acting in a certain way and so should they

**Obedience** – gradual commitment to authority means they find it harder to resist bigger orders after carrying out smaller orders

Resistance to social influence:

Social support

**Conformity** – social support helps people to resist conformity, as there is less pressure to conform when other also are not. Can be seen in Asch’s study when introducing a dissenting participant. However if the dissenting participant starts conforming again so will the participant

**Obedience** – social support helps people resist obedience. If others are disobedient there is less pressure to obey. Seen in Milgram’s variation with the introduction of a disobedient confederate, obedience dropped to 10%

Locus of control

**Internal** – hold yourself responsible

**External** – hold outside factors responsible e.g. luck

**Continuum** – All on a scale from high – low internal to low – high external

**Resistance** – internal LOC are more likely to resist influence, see themselves as intelligent and are confident and ambitious

Dispositional explanations:

**Authoritarian personality** – extremely susceptible to obeying authority

**Characteristics** – respect for authority, contempt for inferiors, conventional attitudes, inflexible see things black and white, believe we need strong leaders

**Origins** – formed in childhood as a result of harsh parenting, fears displaced onto inferiors who they think negatively of

Adorno – studied white American’s unconscious attitudes to racism. Used different scales including the F-scale to measure authoritarian personality.

Findings – People with an authoritarian personality respect authority and reject inferiors, strong positive correlation between authoritarian personality and prejudice

Social-psychological explanations:

**Agentic state** – feel no personal responsibility and act as an agent for someone else following their orders

**Autonomous state** – acting independently

**Agentic shift** – the shift from autonomy to agency

**Legitimacy of authority** – society is structured in a hierarchy, and some people have more authority than others e.g. police, parents, teachers

**Destructive authority** – using authority in a negative way e.g. Hitler

Situational variables:

**Proximity** – Teacher and learner in the same room, obedience dropped to 40%. Researcher giving instructions over the phone and not in the same room, obedience dropped to 20.5%

**Location** – In a run down office block obedience dropped to 47.5%

**Uniform** – not investigated by Milgram, researcher left and was replaced by a normal clothed member of the public, obedience dropped to 20%

Milgram:

**Aim** – to see if German’s were more obedient than other people

**Procedure** – used all American, males who had responded to an advertisement. A lab study, where participant was always the teacher and confederate was always the learner. Teacher was asked to shock the learner for wrong answers given, increased by 15V, with the minimum volts 15 and the max 450. Experimenter used prompts to continue when participants wanted to stop

**Findings** – 100% of people shocked up to 300V. 65% of people shocked up to 450V (maximum volts)

Obedience

Social Influence