

# Social influence

## Last week

- Some classic studies
  - Milgram (1963, 1974)
  - Sherif (1935)
  - Asch (1955)
  - Moscovici

## This Week

- Theories of Social Influence
  - Dual process theories
    - Social Comparison Theory (Festinger)
    - Normative vs. Informational influence (Deutsch & Gerard)
    - Minority influence (Moscovici)
  - Single-process theories
    - Social Impact theory (Latané)
    - Self-Categorization Theory (Turner)

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# The story so far...

- **Social** influence was equated with conformity for a long time. Conformity was the reliance on others' judgment in the absence of, or even in contradiction to, one's own judgment:
  - People seem alarmingly willing to go against their own beliefs and harm another when instructed to by an authority (Milgram)
  - People use the opinions of others as a guide to reality in situations that are ambiguous and uncertain (Sherif)
  - But, even in situations that are clear and certain, social pressures can produce conformity to the majority (Asch)

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## Theories of Social Influence

- Early research suggested two possible explanations for social influence:
  - Influence based on a **rational** process of information processing and thought (e.g., Sherif)
  - Influence exerted by outsiders and by groups, social pressures, and **irrational** acceptance of others' judgments (e.g., Asch)
- Early theories of social influence evolved around the distinction between these two types of social influence. These became known as **dual process theories** because they suggest two distinct processes by which social influence might occur.

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## Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1950, 1954)

People are motivated to hold beliefs that are correct and about which they can feel confident. To determine the correctness of their beliefs they can do one of two things:

- **Physical reality testing** (i.e., Men taller than women? Measure the height! Police more powerful than you? Hit policeman). This is the rational approach, and according to Festinger the preferable form of reality testing.
- However, most judgments cannot be tested physically. Where physical reality testing is not possible, we have to rely on **social reality testing** (Do I look fat in this? Ask others!). Social reality testing involves getting feedback from relevant others (a reference group) in order to *reduce uncertainty* about the nature of reality.

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## Social reality testing

According to Festinger's Social Comparison Theory:

- Social reality testing involves making **social comparisons** with others in order to learn about the world and about the self within it, and thereby reduce uncertainty.
- Social comparisons are more likely when people are uncertain.
- People compare themselves with **similar** others in order to determine what is correct, appropriate and desirable.
- Social reality testing creates conformity pressures because people seek to reduce disagreement between themselves and similar others.

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## Deutsch & Gerard's (1955) theory of social influence

- But why did people conform in the Asch (1955) study, where physical reality testing was possible?



- Deutsch and Gerard suggested that Festinger's theory was incomplete because people sometimes conform to the group simply to avoid being stigmatised.

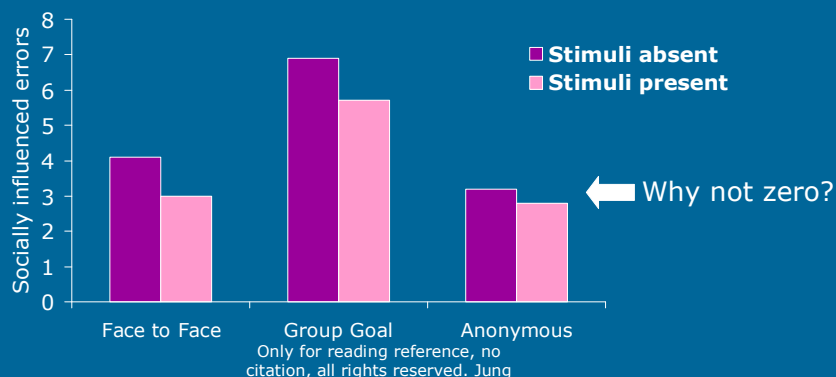
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## Normative and Informational Influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955)

- **Informational influence** is influence to achieve accurate perceptions (e.g., factual information from experts about the weather; similar to Festinger's definition of social reality testing).
- **Normative influence** is influence to gain approval and avoid rejection. This typically involves compliance (going along with others' requests despite private disagreement) and is related to ideas of 'peer-group pressure' most commonly associated with social groups.
- Informational influence is seen as superior and more 'real' or 'true' than normative influence.

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In order to test this idea, Deutsch and Gerard conducted a study in which responses in the Asch paradigm (i.e., experimental procedure) were given face to face (similar to Asch), in the presence of a group goal to be accurate, or anonymously. They also manipulated the certainty of the situation by having the stimuli present or absent.



## Limitations of dual process theories

A common theme runs through dual process theories:

- Informational influence = true influence and results in private attitude change.
- Normative influence = mere compliance with social which results in public changes to appear desirable/ avoid sanctions.

Turner (1987, 1991) questioned this distinction because

1. It over-emphasises the role of surveillance:
  - we conform to group standards even when alone (residual conformity).
2. It downplays the role of group belongingness:
  - We don't conform to all groups.

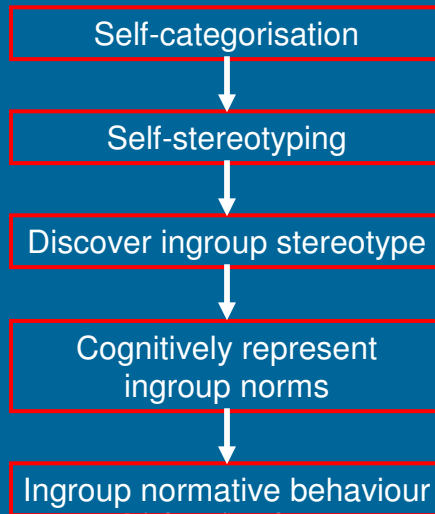
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## Self-Categorization Theory

- The group is not necessarily an external influence: Group memberships provide people with *social identity*, a sense of who they are and what that means.
- When we think about ourselves as group members, distinctions between "me" and "you" are irrelevant: what matters is "us" or "we".
- When the self is defined in social terms, we are influenced by the group because the group is an important part of who we are:
  - The values and standards of the group (norms) become important guides to what is true and correct.
- This form of social influence is both informational and normative at the same time: we evaluate information rationally and thoughtfully, but values are normatively established.

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## Referent informational influence



Turner, 1991;  
Turner et al.,  
1987

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## And what about minority influence?

### Summary:

- Conformity bias in studies of social influence –the role of minorities in producing social change overlooked
- Moscovici:
  - Minority influence small relative to majority. BUT
  - Consistent minorities can influence the majority more than inconsistent minorities.
  - Consistent minorities might make us 'think twice' about what is true and correct.

Question: How is minority influence produced?

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## Theories of minority influence

Moscivici (1980) suggested that minority influence was different from majority influence in both kind and effect. He developed a dual-process model to account for this difference:

- Majority influence → direct public **compliance**
  - little or no private attitude change
  - short-term change
- Minority influence → indirect, latent private change
  - more enduring
  - occurs through process of **conversion**

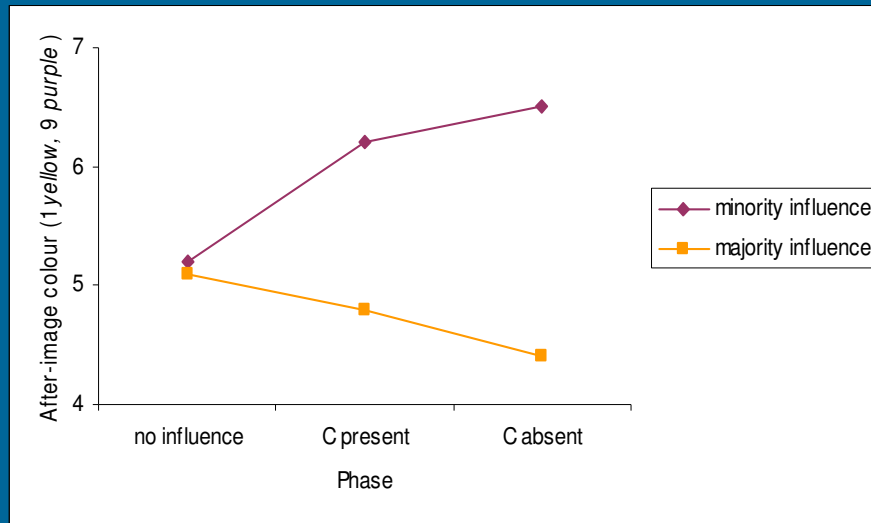
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## Evidence for two processes

Moscovici and Personaz (1980):

- P's exposed to blue slides varying in intensity
- exposed to single confederate (C) who always answers "green"
  - C either represents majority (82% agree with C) or minority (18% agree with C)
- P's publicly call out colour of slide
- P's privately write down colour of after-image
  - after-image is complementary colour (i.e., blue slide = yellow after-image, green slide = purple after-image)

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## More evidence for minority influence

Wood et al. (1994) conducted a meta-analysis of 100 studies of minority influence. Statistical analysis of the patterns across studies revealed that:

- Minorities + majorities both produce influence on measures of public change, direct private change, and indirect private change.
- Majorities produce more influence than minorities.
- However, **majority** influence was strongest on public + direct private change for and **minorities** were stronger on indirect private change.

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## Two processes or one?

- Minority influence appears to be a real phenomena, and one that is really different from majority influence. Despite this, some have suggested that the difference between minority and majority influence may be one of *degree* than *kind*.
- According to Latané's (1981) social impact theory, social influence depends on:
  - Strength of the influencing agent:
    - Powerful & important > weak & unimportant
  - Immediacy of the influencing agent
    - Proximal > distant
  - Number of the influencing agents
    - More > fewer; BUT in a negatively accelerating fashion
- Latané & Wolf (1981) reanalysed studies of minority and majority influence and showed that group size increased conformity, BUT the effect of group size was not linear:
  - Each member of a small minority exerted more influence than each member of a large majority.

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## Some minorities are more influential than others

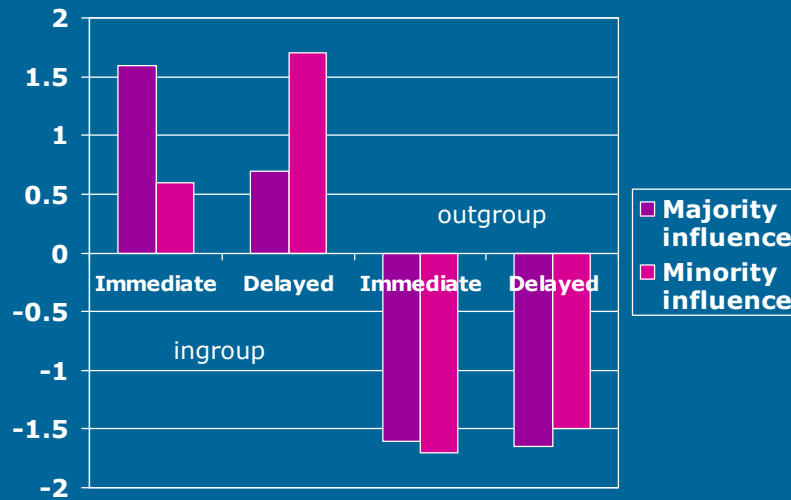
As we saw, majority influence is greatest when the majority represents a group to which we belong and to which we attach some value.

On the basis of Turner's self-categorisation theory, it could also be suggested that minorities will be influential to the extent that the targets of influence categorise the minority as belonging to some common, shared ingroup.

To test this possibility David & Turner (1996) presented participants with arguments from an ingroup or an outgroup described as either a minority or a majority.

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## David & Turner, 1996



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## Two processes or one?

Ingroups do appear to be more influential than outgroups, regardless of whether they represent a minority or majority position.

However, minority influence still seems most likely to be indirect, in comparison to the direct influence of majorities.

Single-process models, can account for quantitative differences between majority and minority influence.

However, single process models cannot account for the qualitative differences between majority and minority influence

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