

Types of social influence

Social influence

Process whereby attitudes and behaviour are influenced by the real or implied presence of other people.

Norms

Attitudinal and behavioural uniformities that define group membership and differentiate between groups.

Social psychology was defined by Gordon Allport (1954a) as 'an attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others' (p. 5). This widely accepted and often quoted definition of social psychology (see Chapter 1) identifies a potential problem for the study of **social influence** – how does the study of social influence differ from the study of social psychology as a whole? There is no straightforward answer. Instead, we will look at the kinds of issues that are researched by social psychologists who claim to be studying social influence.

Social life involves a great deal of argument, conflict and controversy, where individuals or groups try to change the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of others by persuasion, argument, example, command, propaganda or force. People can be quite aware of influence attempts and can form impressions of how affected they and other people are by different types of influence (see Chapter 6).

Social life is also characterised by **norms**: that is, by attitudinal and behavioural uniformities among people, or what Turner (1991) has called 'normative social similarities and differences between people' (p. 2). One of the most interesting sets of issues in social influence, perhaps even in social psychology, is how people construct norms, how they conform to or are regulated by those norms, and how those norms change. Since norms are very much group phenomena, we discuss their structure, their origins and some of their effects later in the text (Chapter 8), reserving for this chapter discussion of the processes of conformity and resistance to norms.

Leaders play a central role in the development of norms and, more broadly, in processes of influence and persuasion. Leadership is clearly an influence process (Hogg, 2010), but it is also a group process because norms are properties of groups; and where there are leaders, there are followers. For this reason, and because leadership is so central to the human condition, we discuss leadership in detail later in the text (see Chapter 9).

Compliance, obedience, conformity

We are all familiar with the difference between yielding to direct or indirect pressure from a group or an individual, and being genuinely persuaded. For example, you may simply agree publicly with other people's attitudes, comply with their requests or go along with their behaviour, yet privately not feel persuaded at all. On other occasions, you may privately change your innermost beliefs in line with their views or their behaviour. This has not gone unnoticed by social psychologists, who find it useful to distinguish between coercive **compliance** on the one hand and persuasive influence on the other (Box 7.1).

Some forms of social influence produce public compliance – an outward change in behaviour and expressed attitudes in response to a request from another person, or as a

Compliance

Superficial, public and transitory change in behaviour and expressed attitudes in response to requests, coercion or group pressure.

Box 7.1 Your life

Where shall we go to eat?

You are sitting around with your friends discussing where to go to eat. You have your heart set on Lebanese, but they are all into Indian. A spirited debate ensues, and in the end, you find yourself agreeing that Indian is the way to go. What has happened here? Did you simply cave in to pressure – you were coerced, and still much prefer Lebanese but complied to keep the peace? Or did you feel persuaded in such a way that Indian seemed

exactly what you'd like, and on reflection, this group that you belong to more often than not goes out for Indian food? Would the outcome or associated feelings about the decision have been different if the group was not one that you felt deeply grounded in? This chapter discusses the difference between behavioural compliance and more deep-seated persuasion that produces attitude change.

consequence of persuasion or coercion. As compliance does not reflect internal change, it usually persists only while behaviour is under surveillance. For example, children may obey parental directives to keep their room tidy, but only if they know that their parents are watching! An important prerequisite for coercive compulsion and compliance is that the source of social influence is perceived by the target of influence to have power; power is the basis of compliance (Moscovici, 1976).

However, because evidence for internal mental states is gleaned from observed behaviour, it can be difficult to know whether compliant behaviour does or does not reflect internalisation (Allen, 1965) – although some recent neuroscience experiments have begun to chart brain activity differences associated with compliant behaviour versus more deep-seated cognitive changes (cf. Berns, Chappelow, Zink, Pagnoni, Martin-Skurski, & Richard, 2005). People's strategic control over their behaviour for self-presentation and communication purposes can amplify this difficulty. Research into compliance with direct requests has generally been conducted within an attitude-change and persuasion framework (see Chapter 6).

In contrast to compliance, other forms of social influence produce private acceptance and internalisation. There is subjective acceptance and conversion (Moscovici, 1976), which produces true internal change that persists in the absence of surveillance. Conformity is based not on power but rather on the subjective validity of social norms (Festinger, 1950): that is, a feeling of confidence and certainty that the beliefs and actions described by the norm are correct, appropriate, valid and socially desirable. Under these circumstances, the norm becomes an internalised standard for behaviour, and thus surveillance is unnecessary. In making determinations about the validity and self-relevance of group norms, we often turn to leaders we trust as members of our group – and this can cause us to perceive them as having charisma (e.g., Platow, Van Knippenberg, Haslam, Van Knippenberg, & Spears, 2006) and power (Turner, 2005).

Some time ago, Harold Kelley (1952) made a valuable distinction between reference groups and membership groups. **Reference groups** are groups that are psychologically significant for people's attitudes and behaviour, either in the positive sense that we seek to behave in accordance with their norms, or in the negative sense that we seek to behave in opposition to their norms. **Membership groups** are groups to which we belong (which we are *in*) by some objective criterion, external designation or social consensus.

A positive reference group is a source of conformity (which will be socially validated if that group also happens to be our membership group), while a negative reference group that is also our membership group has enormous coercive power to produce compliance. For example, if I am a student but I despise all the attributes of being a student, and if I would much rather be a lecturer because I value lecturer norms so much more, then 'student' is my membership group and is also a negative reference group, while 'lecturer' is a positive reference group but not my membership group. I will comply with student norms but conform to lecturer norms.

The general distinction between coercive compliance and persuasive influence is a theme that surfaces repeatedly in different guises in social influence research. The distinction maps on to a general view in social psychology that two quite separate processes are responsible for social influence phenomena. Thus, Turner and colleagues refer to traditional perspectives on social influence as representing a **dual-process dependency model** (e.g. Turner, 1991). This dual-process approach is currently perhaps most obvious in Petty and Cacioppo's (1986b) elaboration-likelihood model and Chaiken's (Bohner, Moskowitz, & Chaiken, 1995) heuristic-systematic model of attitude change (see Chapter 6; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Power and influence

Compliance tends to be associated with power relations, whereas conformity is not. Compliance is affected not only by the persuasive tactics that people use to make requests but also by how much power the source of influence is perceived to have. **Power** can be interpreted as the capacity or ability to exert influence; and influence is power in action. For example, John French and Bert Raven (1959) identified five bases of social power, and

Reference group

Kelley's term for a group that is psychologically significant for our behaviour and attitudes.

Membership group

Kelley's term for a group to which we belong by some objective external criterion.

Dual-process dependency model

General model of social influence in which two separate processes operate – dependency on others for social approval and for information about reality.

Power

Capacity to influence others while resisting their attempts to influence.

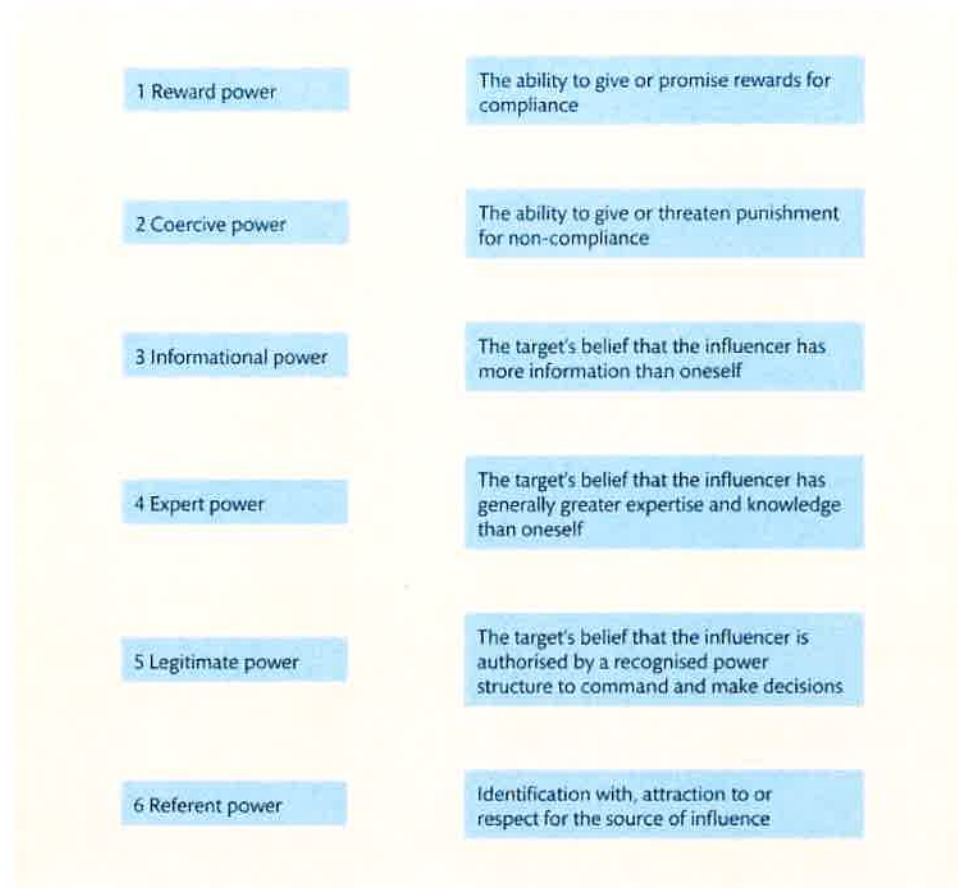


Figure 7.1 There are many different sources of power that people can access to persuade others

Source: Based on Raven (1965).

Raven (1965, 1993) later expanded this to six: reward power, coercive power, informational power, expert power, legitimate power and referent power (see Figure 7.1).

Because it is almost a truism in psychology that the power to reinforce or punish people should influence behaviour, there have been virtually no attempts to demonstrate reward and coercive power (Collins & Raven, 1969). One problem is that reinforcement formulations, particularly of complex social behaviour, find it difficult to specify in advance what are rewards and what are punishments, yet find it very easy to do so after the event. Thus, reinforcement formulations tend to be unfalsifiable, and it may be more useful to focus on the cognitive and social processes that cause specific individuals in specific contexts to treat some things as reinforcement and others as punishment.

While information may have the power to influence, it is clearly not true that all information has such power. If we were earnestly to tell you that we had knowledge that pigs really do fly, it is very unlikely that you would be persuaded. For you to be persuaded, other influence processes would also have to be operating; for instance, the information might have to be perceived to be consistent with normative expectations, or coercive or reward power might have to operate.

However, information can be influential when it originates from an expert source. Bochner and Insko (1966) provided a nice illustration of expert power. They found that participants more readily accepted information that people did not need much sleep when the information was attributed to a Nobel Prize-winning physiologist than to a less prestigious source. The information lost the power to influence only when it became intrinsically implausible – stating that almost no sleep was needed (see Figure 6.2 in Chapter 6).

Legitimate power rests on authority and is probably best illustrated by a consideration of obedience (see the next section, 'Obedience to authority'). Referent power may operate through a range of processes (see also Collins & Raven, 1969), including consensual validation, social approval and group identification (all of which are discussed in the section on conformity later in this chapter). Focusing on legitimacy and power, Galinsky and his colleagues have pursued a line of research showing, among other things, that people who believe they have legitimate power are more likely to take action to pursue goals – they feel empowered (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003), and that people who do not feel their power is legitimate or associated with status can be extremely destructive (Fast, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2012).

In addition to power as the ability to influence, there are other perspectives on social power (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Ng, 1996). For example, Fiske (1993b; Fiske & Dépret, 1996; Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000) presents a social cognitive and attributional analysis of power imbalance within a group (see Chapter 9). Serge Moscovici (1976) actually contrasts power with influence, treating them as two different processes. Power is the control of behaviour through domination that produces compliance and submission: if people have power, in this sense, they do not need influence; and if they can influence effectively, they need not resort to power. There is also a significant literature on intergroup power relations (e.g. Hornsey, Spears, Cremers, & Hogg, 2003; Jost & Major, 2001; also see Chapter 11).

Power can also be thought of as a role within a group that is defined by effective influence over followers: that is, as a leadership position. However, as we shall see in Chapter 9, the relationship between power and leadership is not clear-cut. Some leaders certainly do influence by the exercise of power through coercion – they are the all-too-familiar autocratic or dictatorial leaders who may cajole and use ideological methods to keep their power elite in line, but most certainly exercise raw power over the masses (e.g. Moghaddam, 2013). However, most leaders influence by persuasion and by instilling their vision in the rest of the group. Groups tend to permit their leaders to be idiosyncratic and innovative (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Hutchison, 2008; Hollander, 1985), and they see their leaders as being charismatic (Avolio & Yammarino, 2003) and, in many cases, as having legitimate authority (Tyler, 1997).



Legitimate

You may want the leader of a powerful nation to have expertise, charisma, and to be greeted with respect. Does a buffed pose do it for you?

Leadership researchers typically distinguish leadership from power (e.g. Chemers, 2001; Lord, Brown, & Harvey, 2001). Leadership is a process of influence that enlists and mobilises others in the attainment of collective goals; it imbues people with the group's attitudes and goals and inspires them to work towards achieving them. Leadership is not a process that requires people to exercise power over others in order to gain compliance or, more extremely, in order to coerce or force people. Leadership may actually be more closely associated with conformity processes than power processes, and power may be social construct rather than a cause of effective leadership (Hogg, 2010; Hogg & Van Knippenberg, 2003; Hogg, Van Knippenberg, & Rast, 2012a; Reid & Ng, 1999).

John Turner (2005) has critiqued traditional perspectives on power and influence. The traditional perspective is that power resides in control of resources and is the basis of influence that psychologically attaches people to groups. In contrast, Turner argues that attachment to and identification with a group is the basis of influence processes. Those who are influential are invested with power, and power allows control of resources. Turner's approach is a social identity analysis (see Chapter 11). It invokes social identity theory's conceptualisation of influence in groups (e.g. Turner, 1981b; see the section 'Social identity and self-categorization' in this chapter) and of leadership in groups (e.g. Hogg & Van Knippenberg, 2003; see the section 'Social identity and leadership' in Chapter 9).

Obedience to authority

In 1951 Solomon Asch published the results of a now-classic experiment on conformity, in which student participants conformed to incorrect judgements of line lengths made by a numerical majority (see later in this chapter for details). Some critics were soundly unimpressed by this study: the task, judging line length, was trivial, and there were no significant consequences for conforming or resisting.

Stanley Milgram (1974, 1992) was one of these critics; he tried to replicate Asch's study, but with a task that had important consequences attached to the decision to conform or remain independent. He decided to have experimental confederates apparently administer electric shocks to another person to see whether the true participant, who was not a confederate, would conform. Before being able to start the study, Milgram needed to run a control group to obtain a base rate for people's willingness to shock someone *without* social pressure from confederates. For Milgram, this almost immediately became a crucial question in its own right. In fact, he never actually went ahead with his original conformity study, and the control group became the basis of one of social psychology's most dramatic research programmes.

A larger social issue influenced Milgram. Adolf Eichmann was the Nazi official most directly responsible for the logistics of Hitler's 'Final Solution', in which 6 million Jews were systematically slaughtered. Hannah Arendt (1963) reported his trial in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, bearing the riveting subtitle *A Report on the Banality of Evil*. This captures a scary finding, one that applied to Eichmann and later to other war criminals who have been brought to trial. These 'monsters' may not have been monsters at all. They were often mild-mannered, softly spoken, courteous people who repeatedly and politely explained that they did what they did not because they hated Jews (or Muslims, etc.) but because they were ordered to do it – they were simply obeying orders. Looks can, of course, be deceiving. Peter Malkin, the Israeli agent who captured Eichmann in 1960, discovered that Eichmann knew some Hebrew words, and he asked:

'Perhaps you're familiar with some other words,' I said. 'Aba. Ima. Do those ring a bell?'

'Aba, Ima,' he mused, trying hard to recall. 'I don't really remember. What do they mean?'

'Daddy. Mommy. It's what Jewish children scream when they're torn from their parents' arms.' I paused, almost unable to contain myself. 'My sister's boy, my favorite playmate, he was just your son's age. Also blond and blue-eyed, just like your son. And you killed him.'