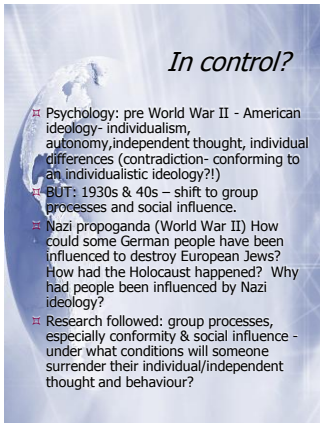


"In control of your own behaviour or do you just want to be liked, right and obedient?"

Dr Jackie Abell

Lancaster University



In control?

- ❑ Psychology: pre World War II - American ideology- individualism, autonomy, independent thought, individual differences (contradiction- conforming to an individualistic ideology?)
- ❑ BUT: 1930s & 40s – shift to group processes and social influence.
- ❑ Nazi propoganda (World War II) How could some German people have been influenced to destroy European Jews? How had the Holocaust happened? Why had people been influenced by Nazi ideology?
- ❑ Research followed: group processes, especially conformity & social influence - under what conditions will someone surrender their individual/independent thought and behaviour?



Why do people allow themselves to be socially influenced?

- ❑ *Government Health Warning: who funds the research and determines 'what' gets researched? (government - vested interest in findings??)*
- ❑ Social psychology turned to consider 'social influence'
- ❑ What do we mean by 'social influence' ?
- ❑ How thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individuals are influenced by imagined or perceived others (Allport, 1968)
- ❑ 3 classic studies - people conform to be:
 - ❑ Right
 - ❑ Liked
 - ❑ Fear of authority

To be right: Muzafer Sherif (1906 - 1988, Turkey)

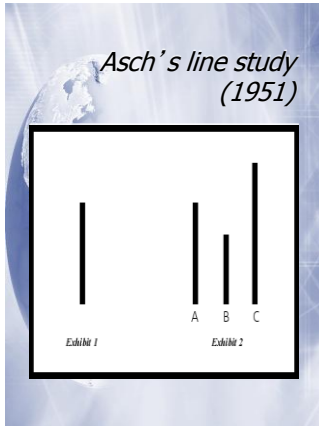


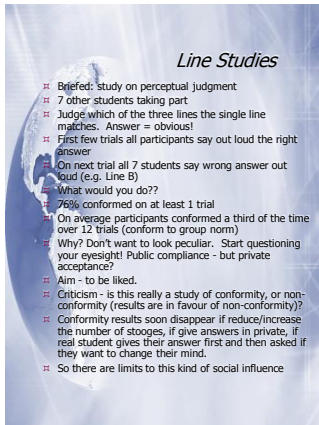
Sherif's "autokinetic effect" (1936)

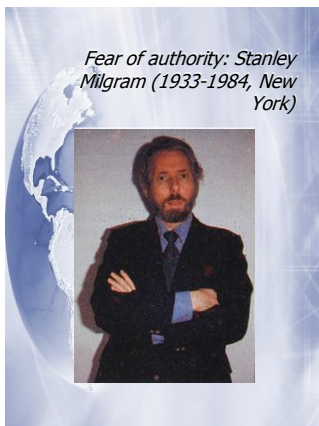
- ❑ Optical illusion - focus attention of dot of light, 15ft away, sat alone in dark room
- ❑ Estimate in inches how far the light moves
- ❑ Set your own judgement
- ❑ Participants paired with 2 other people - give their judgement out loud
- ❑ Over series of trials, participants abandon own judgement and conform to group judgement
- ❑ When asked again alone - group judgement prevailed (group norm)
- ❑ Private acceptance - aim to be right!
- ❑ Criticism of study - so what? Is it really that surprising people are socially influenced when put in highly ambiguous situation??
- ❑ We can ask: What if situation is completely obvious? Would peer pressure cause people to allow themselves to be socially influenced?

To be liked: Solomon Asch (1907 - 1996, Poland)









Obedience to authority (1963)

- As children, socialised into obeying authority figures - e.g. police, parents, teachers, governments
- Even obey in their absence - e.g. stop at red traffic lights
- In our interests to obey authority at times
- But obedience to authority can be negative - would it cause us to hurt/kill another human being?
- Had what happened in Nazi Germany been a result of obedience to authority?
- Milgram wondered - To what extent will someone inflict pain on another if simply ordered?
- Milgram - got participants to answer an advert in a newspaper for a study on memory and learning
- Arrive at lab - meet another participant, a 47yr old, overweight, looks pleasant
- Briefed - you will be teacher, the other will be learner - you teach them a list of word pairs (blue-box; nice-day) and then test on list
- For each mistake, you deliver an electric shock

Obedience to authority experiment (1963)

"Learner/Student" is strapped into chair in adjacent room

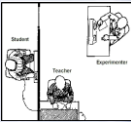
Teacher - seated in front of shock generator 15-450 volts - XXX

Increases the amount of shock per mistake

Sounds of pain audible

If you ask to stop, experimenter asks you to continue

Average shock delivered 360 volts - 62.5% participants went all the way to 450 volts (even when told "learner" had heart condition)



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHuL2JIPylk&feature=related>

But: Obedience drops when....

- Teacher & Learner are put in same room
- If experimenter leaves room
- If it is known other teachers disobey authority
- If conducted in a seedy office! (demand characteristics)
- So limits to obedience

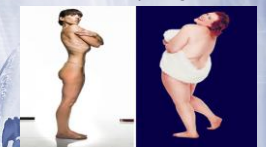
Criticisms of Classic Studies

- Who's funding the research? Biased interpretation of results? (How generalisable are the results? Are they really studies of social influence or the lack of it?) E.g. Asch doesn't work in other cultures, and it doesn't work today
- Some problems of the studies - e.g. in Asch study many conformed because they didn't understand it, not because they felt ridiculous!
- Dodgy stats - e.g. in Milgram's study he averaged across all conditions!
- The research prescribes an inherent negative evaluation of conformity (it's always bad!) - reflects value of individualism.
- But might it be a good thing to allow yourself to be socially influenced?
- Asch & Sherif - conform to a group norm (to be right or liked) and group identity
- Milgram - we conform to what is 'expected' of us - cultural norm (to obey those we think know more than us or have the power to punish/reward us)
- Some social psychologists (e.g. Reicher, Tajfel, Turner) argue we conform to a group identity (to belong)
- To what extent do these studies apply to real life (ecological validity)? Do we conform to group norms today?

Contemporary Examples, Contemporary Research

- Modern day examples of social influence:
- Body Image (conformity to group norm of how "women" should physically look)
- Football Hooliganism (conformity to a group norm of how people should behave at football matches)
- Why?
- To be liked?
- To be right?
- Fear of authority?
- Sense of identity?
- Are the central findings of this classic research essentially correct???

Body Image: Women



- Western culture - value extreme thinness in female form (current size zero trend)
- Cultural differences: Judith Anderson (1992) - how "thin" you ought to be is directly related to how much food is available in your culture
- Change over time: Brett Silverstein (1986) - analyzed photos of women in female magazines from 1901 - 1991 - measured bust, waist. 1920s - thin and flat-chested. 1940s - voluptuous, 1960s+ - very thin
- Why socially influenced? Pressure from family, friends & media - who define what an attractive body is
- To be right - thinness associated with health (anorexia??)
- To be liked - by men, other women
- Sense of identity - to belong
- Is this really a million miles away from the findings of Asch and Sherif??
