Social Psychology

The Influence of groups on behaviour
Impact of the presence on others
- Our behaviour is influenced by others
- As long ago as 1989 Normal Triplett notices that cyclists rode faster when they raced against each other and hypothesised that the presence of others boosted performance (Triplett, cited in Myers, 2007)
- He tested this by asking adolescents to wind in a reel as quickly as they could, he found that their performance was better when they were with another person who was also winding a reel than when they were doing the task alone
- He referred to this boost in performance due to the presence of others as "Social facilitation"

- Later research showed that the presence of others did not always have this helpful effect. It could lead to worse performance= "Social inhibition"
- These different effects of the presence of others can be understood when we consider that being watched increased our level of arousal
- Yerkes and Dodson (1908) found that people generally perform best at moderate levels of arousal
- With simple or well-learned tasks we perform better with a relatively high level of arousal
- For new tasks, we perform better at lower arousals

Diffusion of responsibility
- The effects of group membership can have more dramatic consequences
- In New York in 1964, there was a brutal murder that received a lot of publicity, kitty Genovese was walking home when a man attacked her with a knife, she fought the man off and screamed loudly for help, no one came to her assistance. She escaped, but he found her and attacked her again and it took 30 min for her to die
- 38 people heard her scream from the safety of their rooms and yet no one phoned the police, the media asked why?

- This question was of interest to two social psychologists Bibb Latane and John Darley, who began carrying out a series of studies
- In one of these studies (Darley and Latane, 1968), individual students were placed in small rooms and told they would take part in a discussion using a microphone and headphones, some students were led to believe that they would have a discussion with one other person, others were told that they would be having a discussion with a small group of students
- One student was actually an accomplice of the researchers and told others that he was epileptic and suddenly made noises that sounded as if he was having a fit
- The findings showed that the percentage of students who went for help depended on the number of students they thought were in the discussion group
- All the participants who thought that they and the epileptic were the only members went for help with 85% going in the first 80 seconds
- By contrast 62% of students who thought that there were 6 people in discussion group went for help with only 31% going quickly
- The research showed that the more people who are present in an emergency, the less likely it is that each person will try to help which is known as the "Bystander effect"
- Latane thought that this effect was due to "diffusion of responsibility", if a person is alone, he or she accepts responsibility, if several people are present, each assumes that the other will do something so he or she does not need to take responsibility

Social Influence
- Another way individuals are affected by groups is through social influence, this happens when we change our behaviour in response to other people
- A recent Australian study (Platow et al, 2005) has shown that the influence of the groups to which we belong is stronger if we identify with the group

- University students listened to a tape of a stand-up comedian telling jokes, half of the students heads the tape accompanied by 'canned laughter' after each joke, half heard the joke without the laughter
- Half of each group was told that the tapes had been recorded at a show attended by students from their university- a group that they had identified with
- The other half were told that the tapes had been recorded at a show put on for members of a political group- a group unimportant to the students
- Students who heard the joke accompanied by canned laughter supposedly from their fellow student rated them funnier than the students who though the laughter came from members of a group that was of no important to them or who heard no laughter at all

- Peers are usually important to us and can influence us greatly, they have similar status, own social norms (e.g style of dress, taste of music and attitudes towards things such as alcohol, marriage and bullying, slang terms or expressions that are not understood by others outside the group)
- Research studies show the influence of the peer group starts to increase around middle childhood and continues until middle adolescence, when it starts to decline as the influence of close friends on adolescents behaviour increases
- Social influence from peers is often given the negative label of peer pressure (pressure from the group for individuals in the group to think, feel or behaviour in certain ways whether they want to or not)

- People who are "fringe" members of groups or who are less sure of their standing in the group are more likely to be influenced by peer pressure than other members who have higher standing, they try to gain favour with other members of the group by acting the way they think the group would approve of (Kaplan, 2004)

Group Polarisation
- Group Polarisation: When individuals are in groups with others who hold similar attitudes or beliefs, discussion within the group tends to strengthen opinions
- David Myers and George Bishop (1970) found that when students who were low in racial prejudice talked together about racial issues, their attitudes become even more accepting, however when highly prejudiced students talked about the same issues, they became even more prejudiced
- Group polarisation can help us understand the processes that can lead to actions such as suicide bombers and the young men and women joining isis.

- Terrorists are members of groups whose beliefs become stronger and more firmly entrenched as a result of discussion with like-minded people
- Clark McCauley (2002, in Myers, 2007) notes that a terrorist mentality does not come out of thin air, rather it arises when people with shared grievance get together and talk in a group in which there are no moderation influences

Conformity
- Conformity: Changing behaviour in response to group pressure
- This process was firsts studied experimentally in a classic study reported by solomon Asch in 1955

Soloman Asch's study- Conformity
- Asch's experiment was set up as a simple visual judgment task
- Groups 8-10 participants seated around a table were shown two cards, on one was a set of three lines of different lengths and on the other there was a single line
- One by one the participants were asked which of the three lines was the same length as the single standard line
- Unbeknown to the real participant the others in the groups were not real participants but stooges- confederates of the experimenter

- The were 18 comparison trials, for the first few trials everyone agreed about which line was the same length as the standard, giving the obviously correct answer

- But on 12 of the 18 trials the confederates all agreed on an answer that was incorrect, sometimes obviously so
- What would the real participant in the study do- give an answer in agreement with the rest of the group or follow the evidence of his or her senses
- Asch found that 75 per cent of his participants agreed with the confederates on at least one trial and 50 percent of his participants agreed with the confederates on 6 or more trials
- Only a quarter of the people in the study actually stuck with the evidence of their senses all the time

- Normative social influence: when we conform to group standards in order to be part of a group and be accepted by the group
- Friendship groups exert strong influence on the ways we dress, speak and behave
- Breaking social norms can lead to disapproval or even exclusion from the group

- Some conformity exists otherwise behaviour would be unpredictable (e.g children are socialised into group norms and expected behaviours in different situations and parents and teachers are to teach children what is expected
- Conformity means that people will assume behaviour of others in any particular social group without explicitly being told how to behave or act
- Informational social influence: We take our cues on how to behave from watching the people around us

- Later studies by Asch and other psychologists who have been stimulated by his research have investigated the factors that influence the extent to which we are likely to conform to group pressure
- Group size: Has been found to have some effect-conformity increases with the size up to a group of four, after that increasing the group size has little influence
- Degree of unanimity: Is of greater importance, when others are unanimous- agree completely- it is difficult to stand out

- Asch found that if only one confederate disagreed with others, the amount of conformity by the real research participant was greatly reduced (80%)
- The presence of another person who shares one's views or who at least doesn't agree with the others in the group strengthens resistance to conformity
- Asch's classic line-judgement task has been repeated by experimenters in many parts of the world, Bond and Smith (1996) compared the data from 133 Asch- type studies carried out in 17 countries and they found evidence for cultural differences in conformity
- The highest levels of conformity were found collectivist cultures and lower levels found in individualist cultures
- Remember: Achieving group goals is highly valued in collectivist cultures whereas being independent and achieving personal goals is valued in individualist cultures

Obedience
- As well as responding to the social pressures of groups we may also change our behaviour when we are in a situation in which obedience is expected
- When an authority figure asks us to do something there is an explicit expectation that we will obey or face negative consequences
- 1963- famous experiment on obedience by Stanley Milgram

Milgram's experiment- Obedience
- Recruited a range of men to take part in his research on the effects of punishment and learning with a financial inducement for participation, were from a range of occupations and education levels
- Payment was made for turning up and they could leave at any time
- Arrived in pairs and one was a teacher the other the learner
- The learner had to learn a list of pairs of words and the teacher had to administer an electric shock each time the learner gave the wrong answer

- After the teacher had watched the learner being attached to all wires necessary for the shock, he was taken to another room and shown the shock equipment, administer larger shock for every single mistake made.
- Labels of shock ranged from slight (15 volts) to danger severe shock (375 volts) 2 final switches (435 and 450 volts) were labelled XXX
- The teacher was shown how to operate the shock generator, when the lever was pulled a light came on, buzzing sounds then meter showed the reading. Some clicks were heard and the teacher experienced a slight shock himself
- The teacher could not see the learner, so assumed the shock had been administered
- Milgram conducted several versions of the experiment and the teacher would administer larger and larger shocks even when the teacher could hear the learner groan, at 150 volts the learner would yell our that he had to get out of the experiment as he had heart trouble and refused to continue
- But the experimenter continued to insist that the teacher continue
- 26 out of 40 participants administered 450 volts even believing they were hurting someone else
- All participant administered 300 volts but 5 refused to continue (at this stage the learner went silent- no longer responded to the shocks)
- The whole experiment was a deception: 40 men were the teachers, the learner a male was an actor- it was a hoax
- Participants were debriefed and were reassured that their behaviour as the teacher was normal

- Milgram's experiment was to study obedience to authority and was partly derived from questions about why Nazi SS officers obeyed orders from their superior officers to gas millions of jews during the Second World War
- Such obedience to authority resulted in million son deaths- why did it occur?
- The main factors influencing such obedience:
- Immediacy and proximity to the victim were not seen: subsequent studies had situations where the teacher could see the learner and obedience dropped
- Immediacy or proximity of the experimenter: was also influential- removing the experimenter from the same room as the teacher reduced obedience
- Authority of the experimenter: in Milgram's experiments, the experimenter was a white lab-coated Caucasian university professor, conducting the experiment in a non- university setting also reduced the levels of obedience

- Conclusion drawn from Milgram's research for the reasons people obey authority:
1) Belief in legitimate authority figure
2) Commitment to successful achievement of the experiment
3) Lack of disobedient role models, conduction of the experiment in social isolation meant that social norms or expected behaviours were not present
4) Lack of personal responsibility, Milgram as the experimenter assured teachers that they were not personally responsible for the distress of the learner
- Milgram's studies suggest that soldiers would be much more willing to fire a rocket or drop a bomb on a city than they would be to shoot civilians at close range

Zimbardo- Obedience
- Another study which gives further insights into role of individuals' power and status in determining social behaviour is Zimbardo and his colleagues
- At Stanford University- they carried out a study to determine the effects of being either a prisoner or a prison guard (Zimbardo et al, 1973)
- Recruited 70 young male university students through newspaper advertisement which sought men who were prepared to participate in a prison experiment for two weeks
- 24 healthy average males with no psychological problems were selected
- Half of these were randomly assigned to the role of the prisoner and half to the role of the guard
- Basement of the Stanford University- cells, security doors, guards were issued uniforms, dark glasses, whistles, handcuffs and truncheons and instructed to enforce the rules
- Prisoners were stripped, sprayed for lice, issued with smocks with numbers and shared a small cell with 2 other inmates

- Guards developed rules to keep prisoners in their place- brutal, humiliated them, subjected ringleaders to solitary confinement, they were dehumanised

- The guards in Zimbardo's prison study were dressed in similar uniforms and dark glasses to increase anonymity
- This lead the guards to act more aggressively towards prisoners with was due to deindividuation
- Deindividuation: The loss of social identity and inhibition causing a person to lose responsibility for his or her own actions and causing them to ignore possible consequences

- 4 prisoners had to be released over the first 4 days of the study as a result of severe negative reactions-crying, hysteria, rage and one person had a severe body rash
- After 6 days the experiment was halted
- The assignment roles had become reality for those involved
- Zimbardo was concerned that even he was becoming the Prison Superintendent and was becoming more concerned for the security of his prison than for the study participants

- Zimbardo's study made him realise that social roles influence behaviour in more complex ways then he had ever realised
- The behaviour of the guards and prisoners was due to the social environment of the prison and the roles of the participants influenced the way both the guards and prisoners behaved
- Zimbardo's study received renewed publicity in 2003-2004 because of its relevance to the behaviour of US guards at Abu Ghraib during the US military campaign in Iraq

- It should be noted that there are always some individuals who resisted group influence
- A committed individual or two who hold a minority view can eventually sway majorities
- Some of the most influential people of the past century held views that were initially opposed by the majority of people or those in power e.g Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King

Theories of Social Psychology
- Social Psychology: the scientific study of the nature and causes of individual behaviour in social situations, how thoughts, feelings and behaviours are influenced by others
- Social psychology is related to perception, language, cognitive psychology, sociology and cultural history, it is applied to sport psychology and organisational psychology
- Some titles of a few papers presented in 2005:
• Do mass media affect stereotypes even when exemplar information is available?
• Perception of Juvenile offenders: The impact of age, race and outcome

- Historically, social psychology grew out of German discipline of Volkerpsychologie or folk psychology in the mid 1800's, which studied the collective or group mind, which means a societal way of thinking and behaving
- William McDougall 1908 text sparked the debate by claiming the beliefs, attitudes and thoughts were institutionalised and became part of individuals who reflected those beliefs
- McDougall argued that social behaviour was innate- this view is discredited nowadays
- 1924 Floyd Allport attacked McDougall's view of the origins of social psychology and argued that it is concerned with the scientific study of individual behaviour

- Allport postulated the use of behaviourist approach to the study of social psychology- this was the start of experimental social psychology
- Allport argued that social behaviour is derived from the behaviour and actions of others and introduced ideas such as conformity, facial expression of emotions and the influence of an audience on individual behaviour
- Social psychology expanded rapidly in the 1950's when social psychologist started to look at groups and group membership
- Two theories developed:
1) Cognitive dissonance

2) Attribution theory

Attribution Theory
- Attribution theory- how people infer the reasons behind the behaviour of others
- e.g why did your neighbour donate $50 to save the children? Was she altruistic? Did someone pressure her? Does she really believe in the work of the agency?
- Which of the possible causes the action that should be attributed?
- Internal or dispositional attribution: We infer something about the person- their attitude, personality etc
- External or situational attribution: We conclude that some external cause- peer pressure of threats for example is responsible for the behaviour

- Fritz Heider, the originator of attribution theory, noted that we usually take an individual's behaviour at face value and do not sufficiently consider the surrounding circumstances (Heider, 1985) in other words we favour a dispositional attribution for the behaviour- this bias is fundamental attribution error
- Jones Harris (1967) provided strong support for this attribution bias in a series of experiments in which they asked students to judge the true attitude of a person after reading limited information presented in either an essay or speech by him on a controversial topic
- In one of the studies the students read what was portrayed as the opening statements in a college debate that "Castro's Cuba is a legitimate member of the family of nations" Speeches either supported or opposed this position
- Despite the fact that participants in the study were told that debaters were assigned which side of the argument they were to take, they inferred that the debater held an attitude towards Castro that was close to the one they argued in the debate.
- Therefore we can see that the dispositional attribution was stronger than the situational one

- It has been found that children showing reactive aggression (an angry response) are likely to show attribution bias and interpret situations as hostile when no hostility is intended (Crick and Dodge, 1994)
- e.g Toby and Jonas are running around a corner and bump into each other, based on previous experience, Toby has developed a hostile attribution bias, so that he thinks Jonas is a nasty person who has deliberately tried to hurt him, Toby might push Jonas.

- We make attributions on ourselves. They can be dispositional- I bought the bag because i need it, or situational- I bought the bag because the lady pressured me
- De Michele and colleagues (1998) suggest that we distort the facts and make situational attributions to maintain self-esteem: this is known as "self-serving bias"
- e.g we bought the bag which we could not afford and blamed it on the assistant and protecting our self-esteem
- Kelley's theory of causal attribution (1973) explains how people make causal explanations and answers questions about the 'why' something happened- i.e. not on face value

- Following this theory if we were trying to decide among possible causes as to why e.g Harry failed an exam we would consider:
1) Personal Factors: does he like maths?, is he lazy?
2) Time factors: had he failed maths tests in the past?
3) Entities: Other relevant info about the situation- was it a hard test? Did other people pass the exam?
- If we knew that Harry was hardworking then we would likely attribute his failure to the test being too difficult

- Kelley (1973) acknowledged that there were still issues about attributions theory that need to be addressed such as why prior beliefs such as stereotypes affect the intake information about possible competing causes of behaviour and events

- This theory does not explain why some people prefer simple causal explantations over ones that take into account the person, time and entity information
- To use the earlier example: some people may jump to the conclusion that Harry is unintelligent

Cognitive Dissonance Theory
- Festinger (1957) was interested in the fact that people experience discomfort or psychological tension when they hold two beliefs that are in conflict of when they behave in ways that are inconsistent with their beliefs
- Cognitive dissonance: people attempt to reduce this dissonance by changing the belief, attitude or behaviour
- e.g a smoker beliefs that smoking is bad for his health may decide that the evidence against smoking being a health hazard is flawed or inconclusive (change in the belief) or he may join a quit program (change in behaviour)

- Cognitive dissonance research has provided explanations for some unexpected phenomena- the dissonance and hence attitude change is created when there are not compensation reasons for the change
- This is seen in an experiment by Festinger and Carlsmith (1959, in Atkinson et al, 1996) in which college student participated in a series of dull tasks
- After they completed the tasks, half were offered $1 to tell the next participant that the tasks were interesting and would be fun- the other half were paid $20 to do this
- Those who were paid $1 rated the tasks enjoyable but those who had been paid $20 rated it lower- similar to that of control participants who had not spoken to another participant
- It would appear that the small incentive led individuals to believe what they had said, whereas who were paid the larger amount had a compensating reason for changing their belief