

# Majority or minority influence essay sample



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This essay concerns social influence in general. Aspects of social influence as such as majority influence and minority influence will be discussed in terms of their underlying psychological processes and how they differ. Majority influence or conformity refers to the desire to belong or to fit in within a particular group which involves adopting certain attributes, behaviour and attitudes of a particular group. As a result individuals consequently experience group pressure (in Baron, Branscombe & Byrne 2008).

Minority influence on the other hand, refers to the influence that the minority exert over the majority in that the majority come to accept the beliefs and behaviours of a minority (in Baron et al. 2008). A considerable body of research has been injected into the nature and impact of both majority and minority influences. Moscovici (1980 in Hogg and Vaughan 2007) claimed that both majorities and minorities exert influence in different ways. One psychological process underlying majority influence is through direct public compliance.

The dual-process dependency model which was postulated by Deutsch and Gerard, (1955 in Hogg and Vaughan 2007) proposes two important motives for conformity: normative social influence and informational social influence. Normative social influence refers to the need to be accepted and approved by society. This involves individuals to modify their behaviours and to adopt new/current ones that are associated with the particular social group so that they are not rejected (in Hogg & Vaughan 2007). An example of this situation can be reflected in Asch's (1956 in Baron et al. 2008) study of conformity in which participants conformed to the majority group but at the same time maintained their own private opinions and disagreed.

This process is known as compliance (in Bailey, J. et al. 2008). The second motive that explains why people conform according to Deutsch and Gerard, (1955) is based on informational social influence. According to Festinger, (1950, 1954 in Hogg & Vaughan 2007) this type of influence is associated with uncertainty. Here individuals are uncertain and lack knowledge as to how to behave in certain situations. Festinger referred to this as social comparison in which individuals are not fully confident about their beliefs, attitudes and opinions and therefore yield to majority in order to be correct. This occurs particularly under ambiguous conditions and is clearly demonstrated in Asch's (1956 in Hogg and Vaughan 2007) and Sherif's (1936 in Hogg and Vaughan 2007) studies in which participants converged on similar answers particularly when the tasks became extremely difficult for them to be able to rely on their own judgments (in Bailey et al., 2008).

Moreover, one study into majority influence was that of Asch's (1956 in Bailey, J. et al. 2008). Asch devised a non ambiguous task and presented participants with a series of lines and the possible answers. All participants were confederates apart from one participant. Confederates were instructed to produce incorrect answers in the 12 critical trials. Asch observed a 32% conformity rate, 26% never conformed and 75% conformed at least once. Asch's observational records also led him to conclude that conformity rates were at its highest when the group size consisted of three or four participants and when the difficulty of the task participants experienced stress and temporary discomfort. Another limitation is that the study lacks validity as women tend to be more conformist than men therefore suggesting a

gender difference in the way in which males and females respond to minority influence. An ethical issue present in the study was that participants were deceived and not fully informed about the nature of the study. In addition, the study lacks ecological validity (in Bailey, J. et al. 2008).

In conclusion, both majority and minority influence hold great importance in their own right. The main differences among majority and minority influence is that majority influence relies on compliance, immediacy and a high need for approval whereas minority influence relies on conversion, lower need for approval and which takes place over time.