

Social Influence: Theoretical and Applied Issues

Overview

As you are aware Part Two of this course examines the sub-discipline of social psychology. The coverage area of social psychology is wide ranging but there is a consensus of opinion amongst psychologists that social psychology is the study of social interaction. The subject of Unit 5 *Social Influence* lies at the heart of the nature and scope of social psychology because generally speaking social influence revolves around changing the behaviour of others. Specifically, **social influence** is defined as “efforts by one or more individuals to change the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, or behaviour of one or more others.” (Baron, Branscombe & Bryne, 2009, p. 273). There are many approaches to the study of social influence but the one adopted in this Unit is to integrate the examination of social influence within the context of the information presented in Units 1-4. You already know a great deal about social influence from your reading of the previous units and your completion of the activities documented in Units 1 to 4. Some of the published papers that were mentioned in the previous units will be re-used because of the contribution of the findings and comments of the authors to the discussion in Unit 5. A summary of the information on social influence extracted from previous units is located in the Power Point presentation below. Please review the brief document carefully (Click to activate).



Although you have a general idea about the nature, scope and relevance of social influence, its contribution to social psychology and to youth development work, there is much more to be explored in Unit 5. This Unit is divided into two sessions. In the first session the focus is on outlining the parameters of social influence and explaining the key concepts of compliance, conformity, perception, obedience and persuasion that help to shape the understanding of social influence. The aim of this unit is to remind learners of the connections between emotion, motivation and social influence. The discussion opens by considering some of the factors that influence attitudes and this is followed by a deeper exploration of the definition, function and structure of an attitude. The psycho-social processes underlying attitude formation and attitude change are briefly documented. Social influence can be symbolic as it can operate at the level of the individual and at the group-level. In the second session the emphasis switches to applied issues relating to social influence such as how people are prone to social influences. Special attention will be placed on the contribution of society, culture, peers, groups, media and parents as sources of negative or positive social influence. The role of technology and the internet cannot be ignored so the discussion of agents of socialization includes the role of the traditional and social media. A podcast will be used to deliver a thought provoking discussion titled *'Does the Mind Have a Future?'* delivered by Baroness Greenfield, University of Oxford as she considers the threats and benefits of information technology (IT) to the way in which humans think and feel. The concepts role models, primary and secondary agents of socialization and lifespan development will be used though out the Session. Session 5.2 concludes with some remarks on the powerful role of social influence in the vulnerable human developmental periods of childhood and adolescence. Please pay particular attention to this subsection as the notes will help you to focus your thoughts on Units 6 and 7 which explore in detail developmental psychology. Sources of information in Unit 5 include selected scientific papers, video presentations and a podcast which contain relevant information for your unit activities and tutorial discussions.

The coverage area for this unit speaks to competencies YDWCYP0263 'Enable young people to become active and responsible citizens, YDWCYP0283 'Build partnerships and networks with key stakeholders', YDWCYP0323 'Assist young people with their personal development plans' and YDWCYP0353 'Implement strategies to help young people develop their team building and group facilitation skills.' Most of the skills set and knowledge gain needed to effect change will be provide in Unit 5. For instance, competency YDWCYP0263 is designed to assist young people to recognize their roles as agents of change. Specifically, young people are enabled to understand the effect of their actions on individuals, groups and the community- at- large, the acquisition of appropriate attitudes and values. The role of cultural norms and traditions as agents of socialization on attitude formation will be highlighted in this unit. By the end of this unit learners would have an enhanced, scientific understanding of the role of social influence in social psychology, developmental psychology and policy development.

As with the preceding units you are required to embark upon your own active internet searches to supplement the unit material and readings as these resources would help you to successfully complete the activity tasks and to make a valuable input in your tutorial discussion. The readings identified in the unit will be placed in the unit 5 folder in the Learning Exchange. The concepts written in bold font are defined in the Glossary of Terms

which appears at the end of the unit.

Competencies

1. YDWCYP0263: Enable young people to become active and responsible citizens.
2. YDWCYP0283: Build partnerships and networks with key stakeholders.
3. YDWCYP0323: Assist young people with their personal development plans.
4. YDWCYP0353: Implement strategies to help young people develop their team building and group facilitation skills.

Key Concepts in Unit 5: society, culture, conformity, compliance, obedience, persuasion, social perception, social influence, role models, agents of socialization, social exclusion, self.

Structure of the Unit

This Unit is divided into two sessions as follows:

Session 5.1: Theories and Concepts underlying Social Influence

- Parameters of social influence.
- Outlining the concepts of conformity, compliance, social perception, obedience and persuasion.
- Relating social influence to attitudes, motivation and emotion.

Session 5.2: Social Influence: Applied and Contemporary Issues

- Applied issues relating to social influence.
- Culture and social influence.
- Agents of socialization – primary agents (parents and caregivers); secondary agents (society, schools, peer influence, traditional and social media).
- Social influence within the context of developmental psychology.

Unit 5 Learning Objectives

By the end of this unit learners would be able to:

1. Define the concept social influence;
2. Explain the factors affecting social influence in the unit reflective activities using the unit notes;
3. Distinguish between conformity and compliance in tutorial discussions;
4. Link the concepts of obedience and persuasion to social influence in the reflective activities cited Unit 5;
5. Be aware of how attitude formation and attitude change are related to social influence;
6. Recognize the importance of internet technology and social media as powerful agents of social influence;

7. Utilize the knowledge and psychological principles outlined in this unit to develop and evaluate relevant policies and programs to empower citizens and post your thoughts in the discussion forum;
8. Identify and report on the main points of the essential readings in the unit in the tutorial discussions;
9. Incorporate the principles and concepts outlined in this Unit in your professional responsibilities;
10. Conduct web searches of the relevant literature to assist you with the activity tasks identified in this unit.

Session 5.1

Theories and Concepts Underlying Social Influence

Introduction

In Session 5.1 the importance of understanding social influence will be outlined and examples of social influence in action will be presented. You would recall the definition offered by Baron, Branscombe & Bryne (2009) in the overview which defined **social influence** as efforts by one or more individuals to change the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, or behaviours of one or more others. On a daily basis we often try to influence others and are in turn on the receiving end of many attempts to influence our behaviour. If you work in the field of youth development you are likely to be engaged in trying to re-shape the behaviour of young people in your care who might be engaging in risky activities such as drug and alcohol abuse or criminal activities. This is particularly relevant in light of estimates that, “64 percent of the population of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) consists of young people under 30 years of age.” (Caribbean Human Development Report, 2012, p. 45). As an adult learner, attempts will also be made by the course writers, the course coordinators and the team of e-tutors to guide and motivate you towards achieving your goal of successfully completing PSYC1000 as part of your degree programme. Advertisements displaying tempting items for sale in the print and electronic media constantly seek to influence you to part with your money in various ways.

In units 3 and 4 mention was made of the article by Charles (2010) *Skin Bleaching in Jamaica: Self-Esteem, Racial Self-Esteem, and Black Identity Transactions*. The author defined skin bleaching as “the use of dermatological creams, cosmetic creams, and homemade products by some people to bleach the melanin from the skin.” (Charles, 2010, p. 25) Despite medical evidence cautioning against skin bleaching and outlining skin-lightening risks as outlined by the UK National Health Service (2012) why would individuals contemplate doing so or continuing to do so. Partial explanations for this process include low self esteem and the experiences of colonialism or White oppression (Charles, 2003a). You are encouraged to read Charles’s (2010) paper which provides an invaluable insight into, amongst other issues, how individuals who bleach their skin regard their racial group and how they conceptualize the **self**. After reading the paper you would have a better understanding of the connections between social influence, emotion and motivation.

Session 5.1 Objectives

By the end of this session learners would be able to:

1. Define social influence;
2. Distinguish between conformity and compliance;
3. Relate persuasion to obedience in the unit activities;
4. Define the concept attitude and explain its structure in the reflective activities mentioned in this unit;
5. Outline the various theories that explain attitude change in tutorial discussions;
6. Discuss and illustrate how attitudes guide behavior in the forum discussions.

Social Influence - Changing the Behaviour of Others

In the model of social influence shown in Diagram 5.1 conformity, compliance, persuasion and obedience represent varying effects of social influence on human behaviour. The effects of social influence can be positive or negative depending on the circumstances outlined.

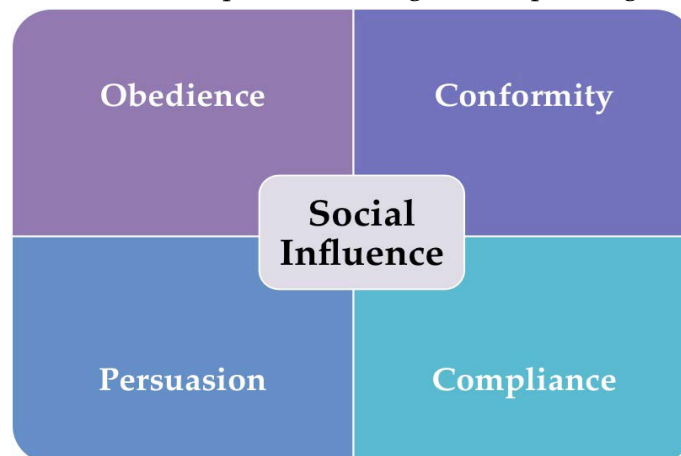


Figure 5.1: Effects of social influence on human behaviour

Change with respect to an attitude or behaviour is generally referred to as **persuasion**. In contrast, change in overt behaviour, generally produced by a specific request, is termed **compliance** and it involves getting other people to do what we want them to do. Change that is induced by general rules concerning what behaviour is appropriate or required in a given situation is termed **conformity**. For example, job contracts would ensure that workers adhere to their responsibilities and fulfil their contractual obligations through a process of compliance and conformity rather than depending on persuasion. Change induced by direct orders or commands from others is described as **obedience**; for example, parental influence over their children, particularly minors. The social psychologist, Philip Zimbardo (2007) claimed that the powerful impact of social influence helps us understand why basically good people sometimes do bad things. This is perhaps most noticeable when 'good' students in our nation's schools succumb to the influence of negative peer pressure and to materialistic goals. This leads to an increase in the number of juvenile delinquents and even perpetrators of crime as Caribbean youths exchange 'services' for quick access to cash.

Influences do not necessarily have to be in the environment in order to have an impact on human behaviour. **Symbolic social influence** explains how one can be influenced by others even when they are not actually present in the environment. The mental representations of others exert powerful effects on us even when we are not consciously aware of these effects. The preferences of significant others in our lives – such as parents, siblings, or spouses –and our relationship with these significant others can influence our current actions. Evidence of this tendency can be seen in very young children who, having internalized the rules of socially acceptable behaviour instilled by their parents, use these rules and expectations to monitor and govern their behaviour even in the absence of their parents. The discussion of emotions in Unit 4 tapped into the notion that young children who are emotionally coached by their parents learn how to self-regulate and are thus less prone to the influences of external environmental forces. This self-regulation can occur even in the absence of parents. The psychological presence of others in our mental representations can also influence behaviour and thought in other ways. Baron et al. (2009) suggested that individual goals or objectives are linked to the people that we know and the relationship that we have with them. Hence, thinking of our parents may activate the goal of making them proud of us, thus guiding our behaviour in line with this goal. Much is written in health magazines about the negative effects of teenagers' exposure to media celebrities who are 'fashionably thin'. These celebrities function as role models and this triggers the goal of wanting a similar physique, leading to an epidemic of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. You would recall the definition of social influence offered by Baron et al. (2009) in the overview which included efforts by one or more individuals to change the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, or behaviour of one or more others. Having explored the types of social influence attention will now be placed on defining attitudes and explaining attitude formation and change. The theoretical information will be brought to life by using illustrations to shed light on psychology in action.

Attitudes and Social Influence

A brief discussion of attitude, attitude formation and attitude change is necessary in order to place the role and impact of social influence, persuasion, obedience, conformity and compliance in context. An **attitude** is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* as, "An enduring pattern of evaluative responses towards a person, object, or issue." What are the functions of attitudes? Attitudes allow us to evaluate and to respond to our social world. Are attitudes permanent? If not, how can attitudes be changed by persuasion – including self-persuasion. In other words, how can our attitudes lead us to engage in behaviour modification? Having read the notes on the topic *Motivation* in Unit 3 and the topic *Emotion* in Unit 4 you can now fully understand the vital link between motives, emotion and social influence. In Unit 3 the need for affiliation was described as one of the social motives. While gangs may have a negative influence on vulnerable youths these young persons can also be persuaded to turn their life around by the intervention of a targeted program with the assistance of interested persons.

DeWall (2010) aptly summarized the connectivity between social influence and emotion. "What influences how attitudes are formed? Attitude formation depends not only on how the individual processes information about the issue, but also on how forming a certain attitude can fulfil specific goals and motivations. Events that motivate people to gain

social acceptance may render people highly susceptible to social influence, driving them to form attitudes consistent with potential sources of affiliation.” (DeWall, 2010:245-246).



Key Points

Here are two key points from the article by DeWall. **Please read the article in its entirety so that you can complete activity 5.1.**

1. People depend heavily on others for much of their well-being and therefore are motivated to restore their sense of belonging after social exclusion. Several recent lines of research have demonstrated that social exclusion increases the motivation to seek out potential sources of affiliation, which influences attention to signs of acceptance.
2. People differ in their susceptibility to social influence, which can include their desire to satisfy frustrated motivations and unfulfilled goals.



LEARNING ACTIVITY 5.1 •

Read the article by DeWall, C. N. (2010). Forming a basis for acceptance: Excluded people form attitudes to agree with potential affiliates, *Social Influence*, 5(4), 245-260. Do not worry if you cannot understand the finer details of the study. Your general impression of the role of social influence on attitudes, emotions, motivation and behavior in general is the objective of this exercise.

Now read what is said about youth involvement in gangs by clicking on to the respective hyperlinks.

BBC Caribbean. (2008, May 16). Gangs, crime and Caribbean Youth. *BBC Caribbean*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/caribbean/news/story/2008/05/080508_youthcrime.shtml

Tsvetkova, B. (2009, July 30). Gangs in the Caribbean. *Harvard International Review*, Retrieved from <http://hir.harvard.edu/gangs-in-the-caribbean>

Muggah, R. & Leslie, G. (2010, Sep 13). Jamaica's war on gangs. *Open Security Reconciliation & Conflict*. Retrieved from <http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/robert-muggah-glaister%2%A0leslie/jamaicas-war-on-gangs>

Nationnews. (2013). Crime spike, *Nationnews.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationnews.com/articles/view/crime-spike/>

Post your comments to the two questions listed below in the Learning Exchange.

1. What information from this article helped you to understand the formation of gangs and conformity to gang activities in your country of residence? (100 words)
2. (2) Can criminal or deviant gang members be encouraged to either leave the gang or to resist persuasion to participate in gang activities? Please give reasons for your responses and post on the Learning Exchange. Post a summary of your discussion in 200 words in the discussion forum in the Learning Exchange. You must also respond to the post of 1 other group on this topic. **Learning activity 5.1 is due by Week 6.**

The ABC Tripartite Model of Attitude

Mention is made of attitudes, both positive and negative, but what exactly is an attitude? Famous quotes about attitudes include:

- Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference. ~Winston Churchill.
- Life is a shipwreck but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats. ~Voltaire
- I don't like that man. I must get to know him better. ~Abraham Lincoln
- To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it. ~Confucius
- Could we change our attitude, we should not only see life differently, but life itself would come to be different. ~Katherine Mansfield
- I will not let anyone walk through my mind with their dirty feet. ~Mahatma Gandhi

Psychologists have a less philosophical view of attitudes than the persons quoted above and more of a structural and functional view of an attitude. Empirical examination reveals that an attitude has a tripartite structure. If you need to quickly recall the components of an attitude, the ABC mnemonic (i.e. memory aid) is very useful. According to the ABC tripartite model, an attitude has three dimensions: an affective component (feeling), the behavioural (action, response) component and a cognitive component (thinking). The affective component consists of emotional reactions and these can be positive or negative, favourable or unfavourable. The behavioural component of an attitude consists of a predisposition or intention to act in a way that reflects the attitude. Finally, the cognitive component of an attitude refers to beliefs and thoughts about the object of the attitude. Collectively, these components do not act independently of each other but they are interrelated as emotional reactions affect behavioural intentions and beliefs influence our emotions. The consequences of deeply held attitudes for negative behaviour can be very serious. For instance, people can harbor strong sentiments or racial attitudes towards members of another ethnic group to the extent that it results in ethnic cleansing and genocide described in the article at the hyperlink below: Interwoven in the article is indirect reference to obedience and compliance to political dictates that made citizens engage in mass murder. The article further suggests the allures and dangers of blindly following authority. Social psychologists Stanley Milgram and Dr. Philp Zimbardo investigated how easy it is to conform to the dictates of authority figures.

LEARNING ACTIVITY 5.2 •

This constitutes your tutorial discussion activity for Unit 5. Each member of the tutorial group must choose one of the following to prepare for presentation to the group.

1. Read the article from BBC News Africa (2011, May 17). Rwanda: How the genocide happened, *BBC News Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13431486>
2. Then view the YouTube video illustrating the Stanley Milgram experiments on conformity and obedience. BBC TV. (2009, May 15). Milgram's obedience to authority experiment 2009 1/3. [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcvSNg0HZwk>



LEARNING ACTIVITY 5.2 • Cont'd

3. Now look at the following YouTube presentation, HeoricImagination TV. (2011, Aug 20). The Stanford Prison Experiment. [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZwfNs1pqG0>
4. Discuss in tutorials the conditions under which conformity, compliance, persuasion and obedience are likely to occur. Please post in the discussion forum a summary of your discussion in 200 words. **Learning activity 5.2 is due by Week 6.**

Attitude Formation and Attitude Change

The BBC article that you read detailed the socio-political conditions that precipitated the genocide in Rwanda. You would realize that the actions resulted from extremist attitudes and compliance to the directives of political and military leaders. Here are some psychological theories that pertain to attitude formation or attitude development. These theories are loosely based on social learning, classical conditioning and instrumental conditioning. Once again, depending on the conditions accompanying attitude change, the role of social influence, obedience, conformity and compliance were contributors to attitude formation and attitude change. Theories outlining attitude change will assist you to reflect on the structure of policies, programs and interventions that will be required to address the array of psycho-social challenges facing your country of residence.



LEARNING ACTIVITY 5.3 •

Here is another example of how encouraging citizens to change their prevailing or current attitudes towards drinking and driving can help to save lives. Read the articles on road carnage in Trinidad and Tobago cited in the hyperlinks below and discuss (1) the role of culture on the prevailing attitude of drunk driving and (2) what in your view should be done to achieve attitude changes to foster respect for the law. Please use the articles for your tutorial discussion and post a summary of your discussion in the learning exchange in 200 words. This is due by Post a summary of your discussion in 200 words in the discussion forum in the Learning Exchange. **Learning activity 5.3 is due by Week 6.**

Ramdass, A. (2012, June 19). Road Carnage. *Trinidad Express*. Retrieved from http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/ROAD_CARNAGE-159667815.html

Alexander, G. (2012, June 7). Govt has \$5 m plan to stop carnage on roads. *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian online*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/2012-06-07/govt-has-5m-plan-stop-carnage-roads>

Fieser, E. (2013, July 22). Dominican Republic looks to law to curb road carnage. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/jul/22/dominican-republic-road-safety-law>

Baron et al. (2009) noted that most people hold attitudes that are culturally acquired. Social psychologists use the term attitude to refer to people's evaluation of virtually any aspect of their social world and these attitudes or views influence human behaviour. Many of our attitudes are acquired from our interactions with others in our social environment but we also contribute to the attitudes of society.

In addition to the cultural influence, Baron et al. noted that our attitudes can also be acquired through **social learning** from several sources of influence including the result of first-hand experience or exposure to the opinions of others in our social world. **Classical conditioning**, or learning based on association, states that the evoking of an attitude occurs when an **unconditioned stimulus** (a stimulus that triggers a positive or negative response without substantive learning) is associated with a neutral or **conditioned stimulus** (the stimulus that comes to stand for or signal a prior unconditioned response). This simply means that the unconditioned stimulus becomes a signal for the conditioned stimulus, a relationship that is adopted in marketing and advertising campaigns to persuade consumers to develop attitudes that would translate into a purchasing behaviour. For example, in marketing a new brand of premium beer or alcohol the target audience may be primarily young adult males. Hence the norm is to utilize attractive young women to display the product thereby stimulating a positive response in the targeted male audience. Some advertising campaigns are also based on **subliminal conditioning** (the classical conditioning of attitudes by exposure to stimuli that are below individuals' threshold of conscious awareness). The process of mere exposure; that is, having seen an object before, but not remembering having seen it, can result in attitude formation.

Attitude change is defined as the process whereby an attitude towards a person, object, or issue becomes more or less favourable, usually as a consequence of persuasion (Coleman, 2006). The theories of attitude change as outlined in social psychological textbooks can be very detailed, technical and complex. Although known by slightly different terms, the two basic theories are as follows: First, according to Penrod (1986) the sub-theories that relate to the consistency theory of attitude change include (a) balance theory, (b) congruity theory and (c) cognitive dissonance theory. The second major theory of attitude change relates to social judgment theory. We will navigate the complexity of the theoretical ideas by outlining the essential aspects of each theory and illustrating the application of the theories with relevant examples. This section on theories of attitude change will conclude with a brief discussion of social learning and imitation.

1. *Consistency Theories*

A. Balance Theory. This theory is derived from the work of Fritz Heider (1946, 1958) who proposed that people maintain consistent attitudes by balancing their feelings and beliefs about one another against their feelings and beliefs about salient aspects of their environment. The typical scenario is two female friends who suddenly discover that they are in a love triangle with a third party. The attitudes of the two females toward each other will have to be resolved in some way, either by abandoning their female friendship in favor of the male party or placing a higher value on their sisterly bond and abandoning the dishonest male.

B. Congruity Theory. This is related to balance theory but it is more limited in its

scope. Congruity theory is concerned with attitude change that may occur when a particular source makes a statement about a particular concept. Are such statements or messages congruent (consistent) or incongruent (inconsistent) with an individual's frame of reference or current attitudes and values? For example, during an election campaign contesting parties bombard the electorate with competing messages. Potential voters must decide on how to use new information, often negative material from a competing political party, about a candidate in light of the existing positive information about that candidate that the voters already possessed. The underlying question asked by congruity theorists is, how would the voter deal with the source of the message? In congruity theory there are three relevant variables (1) the voter's attitude to the source of the message; (2) the voter's attitude towards the person, concept or issue evaluated by the source; and (3) the nature of the assertion made by the source about the concept or person. Hence, if we like the source of the new information and this new information meets our approval, we would have congruent ideas to our frame of reference or existing beliefs. However, if we like the source of the information but disapprove of the message it would be incongruent or inconsistent to our existing beliefs. The way to resolve this dilemma is to either change our attitudes about the source of the message or change our attitudes about the message that has been evaluated by the source.

- C. Cognitive Dissonance Theory.** The idea that there could be a gap between attitudes and behaviour is mentioned in the psychological literature. The social psychological reasoning underlying this tendency is made clearer by the explanations of cognitive dissonance, which was developed by Leon Festinger (1957). "Cognitive dissonance is an internal state that results when individuals notice inconsistency between two or more attitudes or between their attitudes and behaviour." (Baron et al., 2009, p. 176) For example, a woman genuinely loves her husband but is subject to his abusive behaviour when he is intoxicated. Her way of resolving her cognitive dissonance may be to block out her abuse and to focus on servicing the needs of her children in the household. She may also distort the situation by making excuses for her husband's behaviour expressing the view that 'he is a good man when he does not drink.'

An outside observer to an incident of spousal abuse similar to the one that is described in the above example may conclude that the wife is essentially lying to herself by making excuses for her abusive husband. It is an uncomfortable mental state when we realise that either the various attitudes that we hold are not consistent with each other or that our behaviour is at variance or at odds with our deeply held attitudes. In some cases, the attitude-inconsistent behaviour cannot be sustained or justified for a lengthy period and the inconsistent attitude is changed in order to reduce the mental stress and anxiety produced by cognitive dissonance. Other every day examples of cognitive dissonance include: being forced to say something that you don't really believe; for instance, praising someone you do not like or making a difficult decision that requires you to reject an alternative that you find appealing or to accept an outcome that you do not favour. It is important to remember that cognitive dissonance theory is not premised upon the belief that man (or woman) is rational; rather the emphasis is on human beings as rationalizing individuals

who are motivated to change their attitudes to minimize psychological discomfort and to ensure consistency of beliefs.

2. Social Judgment Theory

The social judgment approach to attitude change is based on the notion that the structure of a particular attitude determines how receptive the person who holds the attitude will be to a persuasive message that is relevant or pertinent to that attitude. The structure of an attitude refers to the range of possible positions that an individual can hold in relation to a specific attitude. For instance, the range of positions that the person is willing to accept is called the latitude of acceptance, while the range of positions that the person rejects is called the latitude of rejection. This is aptly seen in collective bargaining situations between public servants and the State. The central assumption of social judgment theory is that if a particular message falls within the individual's latitude of acceptance, attitude change occurs in the direction of the message. Similarly, if a message fails in the band of the latitude of rejection, attitude change may either not occur or it occurs in the opposite direction or position adopted in the message.

3. Social Learning and Imitation

Social learning and imitation were linked to the work of Millar and Dollard in the 1940's but largely from the writings of Albert Bandura from the 1970's onward. You would be familiar with the name Albert Bandura from Unit 3 Motivation and the subsection titled Social Learning Theory and Social Exchange Theory. Please re-read the relevant section if you need to refresh your memory of the contribution of Albert Bandura. The point to remember about the connection between social learning and social influence is as follows. "Empirical studies have established other conditions that determine whether a child will or will not replicate the actions of another person; for example, models who are nurturant, adept, and socially powerful are more likely to be imitated than those who do not possess these characteristics. (Bandura, 1977 as cited in Hartup, 2009, p. 5)

Social influence: Some Concluding Remarks

The focal point of the discussion in Session 5.1 was to relate social influence to the processes of emotion and motivation and to place the discourse largely in the context of the discipline of social psychology using the concepts conformity, compliance, obedience and persuasion. However, much more can be said about the topic of social influence and the comments below reflect other salient issues that will be touched on in subsequent units such as developmental psychology (Units 6 and 7) as well as abnormal psychology (Units 8, 9 and 10).

In addition to the ways in which social influence shapes attitude formation and attitude change, studies in the 1960's developed a framework for explaining how peers influence each other using a system of reward and imitation. Some of this was discussed in relation to the findings of Albert Bandura in the preceding section. The behaviours peers teach each other range from negative to positive such as cooperation, altruism and aggression. Peers can influence the activities of their colleagues, such as changing a hobby from piano-playing (a solitary activity) to playing cricket (a team sport). Such effects are known as

'behaviour contagion' defined by Wikipedia as *"the propensity for certain behavior exhibited by one person to be copied by others either in the vicinity of the original user, or who have been exposed to it"*. Social influence is also believed to be influenced by **sociometry** as group membership (such as in gangs or in a sporting team) along with individual placement or status within groups, collectively determine the extent to which members are either attracted to, or repulsive by, others in the group. Thus sociometry determines the effectiveness and nature of social influence. To elaborate a bit on sociometry it refers to the sociological thought of Jacob L. Moreno whose publications spanned between 1925 and 1960. Moreno and colleagues developed the sociometric test which is used to measure attraction and repulsion existing between two persons.

Social influence can be functional and positive as it facilitates the formation of relationships which are part of the healthy development of an individual. Without the effect of social influence to help in the formation of bonds and attachment a child or an adult may be in danger of experiencing withdrawal, isolation or rejection from the peer milieu. This can lead to social abnormalities or developmental pathologies. In other words, "peers are necessities and not luxuries in human development." (Hartup, 2009, p. 3) Psychologists such as Rubin, Bukowski and Laursen (2009) remind us that certain factors can predispose an individual to be susceptible to social influence. These were broadly categorized by Rubin et al. into two categories (1) distal factors which comprised race/ethnicity, culture, and neighbourhood) and (2) proximal factors which consisted of genes, temperament, parents and family. The constructs of distal and proximal simply refer to distance and proximity.

Reflect and Review

Reflect

You were presented with a lot of information in Session 5.1. In order to facilitate your understanding of the theoretical material examples of real world contemporary situations were provided using a multi-media format comprising YouTube videos and a PowerPoint presentation. After reading Session 5.1 you would also have your own thoughts and examples on the issues discussed. Please remember to post any questions that you may have in the relevant section of the Learning Exchange and you will receive a timely response from your e-tutor. Outlining the connection between social influence, attitudes, emotion, and motivation was designed to assist you to develop the skills set and knowledge base to acquire and develop the competencies identified at the beginning of this Unit. These are YDWCYP0263: Enable young people to become active and responsible citizens; YDWCYP0283: Build partnerships and networks with key stakeholders; YDWCYP0323: Assist young people with their personal development plans; and YDWCYP0353: Implement strategies to help young people develop their team building and group facilitation skills. The theories, concepts and principles documented in Session 5.1 collectively provided you with the framework to enable you to reflect on or to design targeted policies and interventions. The activities in this Session encouraged you to formulate interventions to encourage youths out of gangs and to promote healthy attitudes towards driving.



SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Think of two statements that pertain to each item listed below:

1. Stanley Milgram.....
2. Peer influence.....
3. Philip Zimbardo.....
4. Authority.....
5. Conformity.....
6. Compliance.....
7. Social influence.....
8. Behaviour contagion.....
9. Cognitive dissonance.....
10. Persuasion.....



Key Points

1. An attitude comprises of an affective component (related to feeling and emotions); a behavioural component (relation to action) and a cognitive component (the thoughts or cognitions that underpin feelings and behaviour).
2. The main consistency theories of attitude change are balance theory, congruity theory, and cognitive dissonance theory. Social Judgment theory is the second major theory that explains attitude change. Mention was made of social learning imitation.
3. Attitudes are acquired through the process of conditioning (classical, instrumental and subliminal), via social learning and the influence of significant people in our lives and also through the internalization of cultural norms.
4. Attitudes are interwoven in the discussion of social influence with varying effects on persuasion, obedience, conformity and compliance.

Session 5.1 Summary

In Session 5.1 the discussion began by outlining some of the parameters of social influence. In particular, it was noted that attempts to change the behaviour of others in our social world can be achieved via the processes of obedience, conformity, compliance and persuasion. Mention was also made of the effectiveness of symbolic social influence; that is, our mental representations of significant others in our life exert powerful influences on our behaviour. Having made a case for the importance of analysing the role of social influence in society the main theoretical discussion focused on defining an attitude, outlining the ABC tripartite model or structure of an attitude and illustrating how attitudes guide behaviour. The theories relating to attitude change were outlined; namely, consistency theories, social judgment theory, and social learning and imitation.

The primary concepts, key ideas and working examples were provided for each theory. In summary, it is important to remember that attitudes are functional because they help us to make sense of our social environment and they act as storehouses for our reflections, beliefs and memories. Moreover, attitudes are the cornerstone for understanding the principles outlined in prior units on motivation and emotion. Finally, there is connectivity between attitudes and the processes of conformity, compliance, obedience and persuasion. Specifically, positive attitudes are likely to foster obedience, compliance to laws and societal norms while negative attitudes are likely to be associated with disobedience, including law breaking and civil disobedience.

Session 5.2

Social Influence: Applied and Contemporary Issues

Introduction

Session 5.1 provided the theoretical and conceptual background for understanding social influence. Session 5.2 will elaborate on the diverse ways in which social influence occurs in daily life. Culture and sub-cultural values are major sources of social influence on the behavior of members of society. The impact of culture is more easily understood perhaps than the impact of information communication technologies (ICTs') as a form of social influence. Session 5.2 focuses on three main areas: first, the relationship between culture and social influence; second, the distinction between primary and secondary socialization and the identification of major socialization agents – namely, parents, schools, the media, peers; and third, social influence via ICT's. Learners will have the opportunity to listen to a podcast titled Does the Mind Have a Future? You will also be presented with innovative ideas from the article by Sestir & Green (2010) titled *You are who you watch: Identification and transportation effects on temporary self-concept*. The information documented on the role of internet technology on formation of the mind, the self and the self-concept illustrates the potential of psychology to respond to the changes in society, to account for the benefits and to advise on potential threats. By the end of this unit you will draw your own conclusions about the powerful role of social influence. You are also expected to utilize the knowledge presented in this session to explore and identify ways in which persons can resist social influence so that they can in fact have a mind of their own. Session 5.2 outlines a developmental perspective of social influence. Childhood and adolescence are particularly vulnerable stages during the lifespan during which external influences have a powerful impact. You will already be familiar with some of the ideas discussed as Session 5.1 provided examples of how social influence, including symbolic social influence, impact upon children and youths.

Session 5.2 Objectives

By the end of this session learners would be able to:

1. Define agents of socialization in your tutorial discussions;
2. Distinguish between primary and secondary agents of socialization when reading the unit notes;
3. Discuss the effects of social influence within the context of developmental psychology in the unit activities;
4. Outline how social influence is conveyed through internet or screen technology in the discussion forum;

5. Utilize the knowledge and psychological principles outlined in this unit to develop and evaluate relevant policies and programs to empower citizens and discuss these in tutorials.

Culture as a Social Influence

What exactly is meant by the concept 'culture'? The definitions of culture are as varied as the range of cultures that exist globally. However, one can think of the culture of a society as the way of life of its members: the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation. Without a shared culture, members of a society would be unable to communicate and co-operate resulting in chaos and disorder. Culture has two essential qualities: it is learned and it is shared. Culture also defines accepted ways of behaving for members of a particular society. Thus culture would vary from society to society. Classical sociologists such as Gouldner¹ (1971) explain that concepts such as culture and society stress the manner in which men are shaped and influenced by their groups and group heritage. However, the terms 'culture' and 'society' also have a life apart from the men (and women) who create and enact them. For instance, pop culture or the culture of social networking constantly evolve in exciting and unpredictable ways as people use or create them.

The article by Charles (2010) cited in Session 5.1 introduced the idea that skin bleaching in Jamaica has an historical and a cultural context. Specifically, the author noted,

"Jamaicans use the term 'browning' to refer to non-White peoples with light or fair skin complexion. Preference for lighter skin tones was shown in a few studies among different samples. Mohammed (2000) has argued that light skin complexion is still important in male-female relationships. Mulatto women in Jamaica (the product of miscegenation between Blacks and Whites during the colonial period) are now the browning in the contemporary culture. These brown-skinned women are still the objects of desire for many Black men." (Charles, 2010, p. 26)

Furthermore, skin bleachers are influenced by external values (historical and contemporary societal values) as well as internal values (perceptions of self). As Charles wrote,

"The bleachers reported reasons for altering their black physicality which suggest that they are making use of the perceived benefits of colourism, specifically the perceived social advantages of having light skin tone in Jamaica. The skin bleachers believe that skin bleaching makes them beautiful and attractive to their partners, unlike their pre-bleaching physicality which was too dark and therefore socially unacceptable. The skin bleachers with their low self esteem are more likely to be influenced by the colourized norms in the society. It is possible that the skin bleachers respond to these social norms in order to feel good about self." (Charles, 2010, p. 34)

Charles's article provides a systematic analysis of skin bleaching in Jamaica and his findings serve as a reminder that social influence occurs as a result of the environment acting upon individuals. However, as individuals we are equally a source of social influence on culture and society. Let us now examine the concept of agents of socialization. The effects of the socializing experience have significant implications for personality development, our interactions with groups with respect to obedience, conformity and compliance as well as our ability to engage in decision-making.

¹ A. W. Gouldner (1983) *Sociology's Basic Assumptions*, p.15 in Kenneth Thompson and Jeremy Tunstall (Eds) *Sociological Perspective*, Penguin Education.

Agents of Primary and Secondary Socialization

Socialization, defined as the development of social behaviours and attitudes, is subject to the influence of primary and secondary socializing agents. This discussion is tied to the preceding one with respect to the social influences on behaviour. The social psychologist Penrod (1986) explains that socialization refers to the total upbringing that prepares a child for full adult participation in society. **Parents and family** are the most important socializers of a child: they are the **primary agents of socialization**. In Unit 4 the role of emotional coaching was introduced to demonstrate the importance of parents to the development of emotional intelligence in children. Empirical evidence reveals that children who have close, warm relationships with their parents tend to be socially competent with peers (Michiels, Grietens, Onghena, & Kuppens, 2010 as cited in Boyd & Bee, 2012, p. 254). Moreover, parenting variables contribute to the development of self-regulation. These include the parents' ability to self-regulate because they are providing the child with role models of either good or poor behavior. Another example of the effect of primary socialization is provided by Trommsdorff (1995) regarding the development of pro-social behaviour. The underlying logic is that warm and responsive parental behaviour is related to the development of empathy and pro-social motivation in a child via the social learning process outlined by Albert Bandura. However, apart from social learning feelings of attachment to the mother or to the caregiver fosters a child's sense of security and this in turn assists in the child's socio-emotional development.

Unfortunately, in some cases there could be negative influences from the family on a child's behaviour as outlined by Farrington. If you would like to know more about this topic an optional reading is identified in the box below.



Optional Reading Material

Farrington, D. P. (n.d.) Chap 10 Family Influences on Delinquency (pp. 203-222). Jones and Barlett Publishers http://samples.jbpub.com/9780763760564/60564_CH10_Springer.pdf

Also available in the Unit 5 reading folder in the course site.

Secondary socializing agents include the school, peers, teachers, the workplace and the media which impact significantly on our life. The influence of peers and the peer context was previously mentioned. An important source of social influence is the media, particularly on the young, vulnerable mind of a child or the impressionable mind of an adolescent or vulnerable individual whatever his or her age. Televisions, computers, the internet and video games are found in most homes. Parents, educators and policy makers are increasingly expressing their concern that children who are in possession of their own media devices —such as computers, smart phones, blackberry and Ipads – spend a great deal of unsupervised time on these devices so the potential threats can outweigh the benefits of exposure to internet technology. From a psychological perspective it is relevant to investigate and to report on how the media influences children's development. Baroness Greenfield (2012) as well as Sestir and Green (2010) shed light on the impact of the media and internet technology on human thinking and behaviour. These points are developed upon in the next sub-section.

The workplace can also be a secondary socializing agent. Some companies encourage their employees to develop organizational citizenship behaviour and they groom their employees towards achieving this corporate identity. Podsakoff, MacKenzie et al. (2000) cited in Baron et al. (2009) defined organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) as prosocial behaviour occurring within an organization that may or may not be rewarded by that organization. Examples include the following. (1) Employees' participation in fund raising activities such as organising school bazaars and manning the stalls. (2) Assisting with building a house as part of a Habitat for Humanity project. (3) Organising a charity barbeque fund-raising dinner for an ill co-worker and going out into the community to sell tickets in support of this worthy cause is another instance of engagement in OCB. Social psychologists state that in general such behaviour are ones that are not part of the helper's job specifications and as such it is not recognised by the formal reward system of increased salary or promotion. Employees who spend their own time to help others can be informally recognised by organizations that seek to promote their reputation as good corporate citizens. For instance, banks encourage their employees to engage in community activities as a form of building trust with their clients and potential clients thereby gaining the respect and confidence of the national community as a commercial leader. Baron et al. (2009) identified the following examples of organizational citizenship behaviour in the workplace:

1. **Altruism** – helping others to perform their jobs.
2. **Conscientiousness** – going beyond the minimum requirements of the job or doing more than is required. For example, an employee who never misses a day at work or who takes shorter lunch breaks and returns to work earlier than the stipulated period.
3. **Civic virtue** – participating in and showing concern for the 'life' of the organisation by attending voluntary meetings or social functions.
4. **Sportsmanship** – showing willingness to tolerate unfavourable conditions without complaining. For instance, taking on the extra responsibilities of a co-worker who is on medical leave without complaining despite not receiving an increase in salary for the extra duties.
5. **Courtesy** – making efforts to prevent interpersonal problems with others. For example, turning the other cheek when a co-worker is rude, offensive or gives you their assigned tasks to perform.

Social Influences from Information Communication Technology (ICT's)

The explosion of the internet and all the attendant technologies exponentially increased the mass of information to which we are exposed. We desire some of this information but in most cases we are bombarded by 'spam', junk emails, alerts and messages. As Baroness Greenfield outlined in her podcast there are both benefits and threats associated with internet technology. The article by Sestir and Green (2010) contains similar messages. Here are some of their key comments but you are strongly urged to read the article as you will need to incorporate the information from the article in activity 5.5. The references in the points listed below were cited by Sestir and Green.

1. Among the most important societal shifts in the last few generations is the ubiquity of the mass media. From magazines to blogs, television to video games, media consumption comprises a massive chunk of the day-to-day lives of most people in the developed world. It allows us access to information, opinion, entertainment, and social connections on a scale and at a rate inconceivable by past generations, and there is no apparent end to the increasing presence of media in nearly every aspect of our lives.
2. With the steady growth of media penetration, however, has come an increasing concern with the potential effects of media on its consumers. This is particularly true of entertainment media, which is typically fictional or a dramatized version of factual events. Entertainment media is essentially a series of simulated situations (Mar & Oatley, 2008). Because entertainment media often centers on violent, promiscuous, and amoral characters.
3. Bartholow, Bushman & Sestir, (2006) have expressed concerns that characteristics and behaviors modeled in the media could influence the characteristics and behaviors of their audience. With this concern have come sporadic efforts to regulate, restrict, or ban access to books, television shows, video games, and websites. There is also widely reported anecdotal evidence of media consumers, typically young men, copying the violent tendencies depicted in their preferred movies or video games. For example, the Columbine school shooters notoriously favored a violent game modified to incorporate two player characters, unlimited ammunition, and enemies that could not fight back (Glick & Keene-Osborn, 1999).
4. The primary aim of this research is to investigate whether exposure to media narratives can lead to an increase in the accessibility of character traits in the mind of the viewer, and specifically, whether media exposure can cause changes (even temporary ones) in the self. In other words, can viewing a narrative produce changes in something as central as the viewer's self-concept? We believe two factors, character identification and transportation, to be primary moderators of this relationship.
5. Identification with media characters, from a theoretical perspective, is something of a slippery term: while it is self-evident that identification involves a perceived connection between viewer and character, the actual definition of the term varies across researchers. Identification has been conceptualized as synonymous with liking (Cohen, 2001) and perceived similarity (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991). However, the most commonly used definition of identification is a process whereby viewers vicariously take the place of a media character and react to his or her experiences as if they were happening to the viewer.
6. Developmental research has repeatedly found strong, albeit correlational, evidence that children tend to identify strongly with media characters and describe themselves as being highly similar to the characters with whom they identify. These results have been found in radio (Cantril & Allport, 1971), television (Schramm, Lyle, & Parker, 1961) and video games (McDonald & Kim, 2001).
7. The state of feeling cognitively, emotionally, and imaginatively immersed in a narrative world has been labeled transportation (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000).

8. The research described here provides an important addition to existing knowledge about media effects. While many major theories relevant to media consumption have implied that consumers might, at least temporarily, come to adopt the perceived characteristics and traits of characters with whom they identify, our research provides an initial empirical demonstration of these effects. Specifically, individuals in high-identification conditions were quicker to respond to character-relevant personality traits that were also self-descriptive, without comparable effects for traits not displayed by the character, or traits not identified as self-descriptive. Furthermore, our study provides initial support to the general hypothesis of media trait activation, as well as beginning to delineate a mechanism by which such trait activation can take place.

After reading the article by Sestir and Green (2010) it is clear that the role of the media can neither be ignored nor underestimated. Findings pertaining to media effects suggest how easy it is for the viewer to identify with media images and characteristics and to internalize the traits of media characters. Another view of the influence of information technology is outlined in the podcast by Baroness Greenfield cited in Activity 5.4. The podcast also provides a sketch of the discipline of neuroscience, the physiology of the brain, dementia, the impact of drugs on the mind, as well as the impact of internet or screen technology (both negative and positive) on the human mind.

Social Influence: A Developmental Perspective

The article by Sestir and Green (2010) contained references to how children may be influenced by the media. Why are children regarded as easily suggestible? The literature on developmental psychology sheds light on this relevant and important issue. Please refer to the course textbook by Boyd and Bee (2012) *Lifespan Development*. Chapters 9 to 12 provide a comprehensive account of the issue. Selected comments are made below but more details will be provided in Units 6 and 7 which is based on developmental psychology.

The Caribbean Human Development Report (2012) in a chapter on *Youth Violence Reducing Risk and Enhancing Resilience* flags the developmental role in social influence on Caribbean youth.

The experiences of and involvement in crime and violence among Caribbean youth have become linked to other developmental issues, including high levels of youth unemployment, poor educational opportunities, and feelings of voicelessness and exclusion from national and regional governance processes. In this context, youth violence is more than a security concern. It is a major human development problem. (Caribbean Human Development Report, 2012, p. 45).

Childhood and adolescence stages are regarded as vulnerable or **critical periods of development** largely because the physical, intellectual, social, emotional and personality dimensions of the individual are at the formative stages and thus most prone to external influences. These stages are associated with the emerging self and **self-concept**. The social psychological literature indicates that the typical child and adolescent spend significant periods of time each day in the company of peers. The peer context strengthens and this experience provides the child or adolescent with an increasing range of skills, values, attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and preferences. As discussed in the preceding sections

peers, parents and the media are regarded as powerful agents of socialization. Parents and guardians usually advise children to 'choose your friends carefully' because the influence of peers can override the influence of teachers, caregivers, family and the church. Parents are aware that peers are often a necessity and relatively few parents or guardians will discourage children to distance themselves from their peers except in the case where it may be dangerous or disadvantageous. For instance, a child may refuse to attend school because of the presence of a bully or a group of bullies. Moreover, it is estimated that by the age of 10 years children have understood the relevance of friends and friendships. However, they now begin to build on the concept of trust and they use their judgments of peers' trustworthiness to choose their friends (Rotenberg et al., 2004 cited in Boyd & Bee, 2012:256). Boyd and Bee (2012) identified the nature, function and scope of social influences during middle childhood (approximately 6-12 years). By this age children have sufficient information processing skills to the extent that in some jurisdictions they are deemed to be reliable eyewitnesses in judicial proceedings. It is because of this information processing competency that the stimuli to which children are exposed should be carefully monitored and regulated.

The stage of adolescence is associated with sensation-seeking. Boyd and Bee describes sensation-seeking as "a desire to experience increased levels of arousal such as those that accompany fast-driving or the 'highs' associated with drugs. Sensation-seeking leads to recklessness, which in turn leads to markedly increased rates of accidents and injuries in this age range." (Boyd & Bee, 2012:286). If you reflect on the information presented in Session 5.1 Activity 5.3 which related to attitudes towards drunk driving, you will discern that the victims of road traffic deaths and the perpetrators of motor manslaughter tend to be young persons engaging in risky behaviors at the time of the accident.

The role of social influence and peer pressure is evident from the findings reported by Donnengerg, Emerson, Bryant, and King (2006) which state that, "Risky behavior may be more common in adolescence than other periods because they help teenagers gain peer acceptance and establish autonomy with respect to parents and authority figures." (cited in Boyd & Bee, 2012:286). The messages transmitted in the popular media regarding sex, drugs, violence, alcohol, codes of behavior may influence teenagers' risky behavior. Evidence of this can be seen in your country of residence. Other academics agree with the views of Boyd and Bee as well as Donnengerg et al. For example, Johnson and Malow-Iroff (2008) summarised various theories for explaining the risk taking behaviour of youths. These theories have their genesis in the developmental psychological theories which will be mapped out in Units 6 and 7. Successful interventions to mitigate or reverse risk must be informed by these theories.

1. Rebellion – Adolescents take risks to rebel against adult authority.
2. Problem Behaviour Theory – Adolescents that engage in risk taking take multiple risks and do so as a form of their unconventionality.
3. Sensation Seeking – A subset of adolescents possesses a biological predisposition to engage in activities associated with heightened physiological arousal. This theory assumes a genetic component to adolescent risk taking.
4. Invulnerability – Adolescents engage in risk-taking behaviour because they see themselves as invulnerable to the potential risks associated with their actions.

5. Conscious Decision – Adolescents consciously decide to take risks because they perceive personal benefits from doing so.
6. Immaturity and Present Orientation – Adolescents take risks because they are not yet mature enough to see the potential risks associated with their actions and because they tend to live in the present moment, making it difficult for them to consider future consequences.

In concluding this brief sub-section it should be borne in mind that the impact of social influence will not be the same for all individuals. A host of factors can mediate the effects of social influence, via agents of socialization, on the person. Most important of the factors is the recipient's pre-disposition to act in a particular way. For example, a message depicting violence will have a more certain effect on a child or an adolescent who is already pre-disposed towards aggressive behavior. Another person who has been brought up with strict parental supervision, emotional coaching or religious instruction is likely to have safeguards that act as protective factors that serve to mitigate the impact of violent or inappropriate stimuli.



LEARNING ACTIVITY 5.4 •

Listen to the University of Oxford podcast by Baroness Greenfield cited below

Greenfield, S. (2012, Feb 28). Does the mind have a future? Oxford Internet Institute. Podcast retrieved from <http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/does-mind-have-future-audio>

Read the article by Sestir and Green (2010) and the relevant sessions in the course text by Boyd and Bee (2012). Post your reflections to the following questions in the discussion forum. (1) The risk factors posed by the media and internet technology to children and adolescents and (2) What protective factors can you recommend for these age groups?

Learning activity 5.4 is due by Week 6.

Reflect

The discussion in Session 5.2 adopted an applied and contemporary view of the effects of social influence on human thinking and behaviour. The following areas of social influence were addressed; first, the relationship between culture and social influence; second, the distinction between primary and secondary socialization; third, the identification of major socialization agents – namely, parents, schools, the media, peers; fourth, the risks and benefits of over- exposure to ICT's; and fifth, a developmental approach to understanding the role, nature and scope of social influence. You were given the opportunity to listen to a podcast on *Does the Mind Have a Future?* You were presented with a commentary and the findings of Sestir & Green (2010) who offered a tantalizing account of their article *You are who you watch: Identification and transportation effects on temporary self-concept*.

As you would realise from the material documented in Session 5.2 agents of socialization could be 'live agents' that is immediately present in the environment or these agents could act as role models via screen or internet technology. It was also noted that the effectiveness

of role models, agents of socialization and stimuli on cognition and behaviour was to a large extent dependent on the predisposition of the listener or viewer. The discussion in Session 5.1 on attitudes, attitude formation and attitude change explains how these processes occur.



Key Points

1. Individual differences such as personality factors and self-esteem measures can determine the effects of social influence on human cognition and behaviour.
2. Baroness Greenfield spoke to the opportunities and threats of screen or internet technology.
3. In the podcast it was noted that the brain adapts to the environment and to environmental stimuli via a system of plasticity or moulding of the brain which is linked to the development and the functioning of the mind. The view was espoused that each human differs from another human not by the personality but by the brain and the experiences of the mind.
4. Social factors such as culture and peer pressure exert significant influences on conformity and compliance.
5. Emotional coaching and good parenting practices can foster compliance and obedience in the social environment.
6. Social influence is a powerful and pervasive aspect of daily life.

Unit Summary

The discussion in Unit 5 highlighted selected theoretical and applied issues associated with social influence. The emphasis on social influence was based on recognition of the fact that social influence is the cornerstone of the sub-discipline of social psychology as it revolves around changing the behaviour of others. You would recall the definition offered by Baron et al. (2009) that social influence relates to the efforts by one or more individuals to change the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, or behaviour of one or more others in the environment. This unit was designed to support the competencies, skills and knowledge base of YDWCYP0263; YDWCYP0283, YDWCYP0323, and YDWCYP0353. The issues examined in Unit 5 provided an introduction to the sub-discipline of developmental psychology which will be the focus of attention in Units 6 and 7. The activities were designed to help you to reflect on the material presented as a self-check measure of your understanding of the theories and concepts embedded in the framework of social influence. You are now more aware, than you were at the beginning of Unit 5, of the nature, scope, relevance and function of social influence on human behavior, the evolution of culture, and the regulation of society and its values.

We began Session 5.1 by defining the parameters of social influence and explaining the concepts conformity, compliance, obedience and persuasion. This was followed by several examples illustrating various ways in which the degree of social influence can be evaluated using each concept as a frame of reference. For example, the social psychologist Penrod (1986) noted that the pressure to conform pre-supposes a conflict between an individual and a group which results in a state of cognitive dissonance. The conflict is

resolved only when the individual goes along with the group. In light of the fact that there could be conformity to negative behaviour, such as joining a criminal gang, you were required in Activity 5.1 to develop strategies for persisting persuasion and conformity to gang membership and activities. The details of attitude structure, attitude formation and attitude change were designed to support your understanding of how social influence can be either accepted or rejected. Session 5.2 offered an applied and a contemporary perspective of social influence using the concepts agents of socialization and role models to make the case that social influence is pervasive, inevitable, a feature of everyday life, and it is meshed with threats as well as benefits. A multi-media approach using Power Point, podcast, YouTube videos and readings from electronic resources were incorporated in the unit to bring the text material to life and to assist you in reading, understanding and remembering key points and concepts.



Key Points

1. Social influence and conformity are part of life. There are valid reasons why conformity amongst citizens is functional to the well-being of society. Equally, non-conforming behaviour, such as anti-social and criminal behaviour, can be very disruptive to the society.
2. Two important motives underlie our tendency to conform: the desire to be liked by others and the desire to be right or accurate. This point is linked to the discussion on motivation and emotion in previous units.
3. Although pressures to conform are strong, there is resistance to conformity based on two strong motives: (a) the desire to retain one's individuality; and (b) the desire to exert control over one's life.
4. Under some conditions, such as outlined in the newspaper article on genocide, minorities can induce even large majorities to change their attitudes or behaviour.

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Glossary of Terms Used in Unit 5

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Abc Tripartite Model	The notion that attitudes are composed of three components: an affective component, a behavioural component, and a cognitive component.
Attitude (N.)	An enduring pattern of evaluative responses towards a person, object, or issue. According to a frequently quoted classical definition, it is a more or less consistent pattern of affective, cognitive, and conative or behavioural responses.
Attitude Change	The process whereby an attitude towards a person, object, or issue becomes more or less favourable, usually as a consequence of persuasion.
Classical Conditioning	A basis form of learning in which one stimulus, initially neutral, acquires the capacity to evoke reactions through repeated pairing with another stimulus. In a sense, one stimulus becomes the signal for the presentation or occurrence of the other.
Cognitive Dissonance	Cognitive dissonance is an internal state that results when individuals notice inconsistency between two or more attitudes or between their attitudes and behaviour. It is an uncomfortable feeling caused by holding two contradictory ideas simultaneously. The "ideas" or "cognitions" in question may include attitudes and beliefs, and also the awareness of one's behavior. The theory of cognitive dissonance proposes that people have a motivational drive to reduce dissonance by changing their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, or by justifying or rationalizing their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Cognitive dissonance theory is one of the most influential and extensively studied theories in social psychology. Dissonance normally occurs when a person perceives a logical inconsistency among his or her cognitions. This happens when one idea implies the opposite of another. For example, a belief in animal rights could be interpreted as inconsistent with eating meat or wearing fur. Noticing the contradiction would lead to dissonance, which could be experienced as anxiety, guilt, shame, anger, embarrassment, stress, and other negative emotional states. When people's ideas are consistent with each other, they are in a state of harmony, or consonance.

If cognitions are unrelated, they are categorized as irrelevant to each other and do not lead to dissonance. A powerful cause of dissonance is when an idea conflicts with a fundamental element of the self-concept, such as "I am a good person" or "I made the right decision." The anxiety that comes with the possibility of having made a bad decision can lead to rationalization, the tendency to create additional reasons or justifications to support one's choices. A person who just spent too much money on a new car might decide that the new vehicle is much less likely to break down than his or her old car. This belief may or may not be true, but it would likely reduce dissonance and make the person feel better. Dissonance can also lead to confirmation bias, the denial of disconfirming evidence, and other ego defense mechanisms.

Conation (N.)	The psychological processes involved in purposeful action.
Conative (Adj)	From Latin conatus; attempt, undertaking, or effort.
Conformity	This means changing your attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, or behaviors in order to be more consistent with others.
Correlate	Have a mutual relationship or connection, in which one thing affects or depends on another. For example, the study found that success in the educational system correlates highly with class.
Critical Period	A time frame deemed highly important in developing in a healthy manner; can be physically, emotionally, behaviorally, or cognitively.
Drive	Any internal source of motivation that impels an organism to pursue a goal or to satisfy a need, such as sex, hunger, or self-preservation. A primary drive is an innate physiological urge or need, such as hunger or thirst.
Explicit Attitudes	Attitudes that are conscious and reportable.
Implicit Attitudes	Those that are uncontrollable and perhaps not consciously accessible to us.
Instrumental Conditioning	A basic form of learning in which responses that lead to positive outcomes or which permit avoidance of negative outcomes are strengthened.
Motives	Explanations of behaviour may be in terms of reasons; for example, someone waves because he wants to attract our attention.

Obedience	This represents a form of social influence based upon direct commands or orders. Evidence gathered by Stanley Milgram and others suggests that many persons have a strong tendency to obey the commands of authority figures.
Persuasion (N.)	The process by which attitude change is brought about, usually by the presentation of a message containing arguments in favour or against the person, object, or issue to which the attitude applies.
Salience (N.)	The protruding or jutting-out property of a physical structure; hence figuratively the prominence, conspicuousness, or striking quality of a stimulus.
Self-Concept	The subjective perception of the self. It is literally the way we view ourselves. We may experience a sense of individuality (being different from others) as well as of interdependence (belonging and association with others). Different cultures tend to emphasize the importance of either individuality or interdependence within the individual. Individualist cultures such as the USA, UK, and Australia stress individualism in their socialization, where as more collectivist cultures such as China and Japan foster a sense of interdependence in their members. The self-concept has two related aspects, self-understanding and self-esteem.
Self-Esteem	Reflects a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own worth. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs (for example, "I am competent/incompetent") and emotions (for example, triumph/despair, pride/shame). Behavior may reflect self-esteem (for example, assertiveness/timorousness, confidence/caution). Psychologists usually regard self-esteem as an enduring personality characteristic (trait self-esteem), though normal, short-term variations (state self-esteem) occur. Self-esteem can apply specifically to a particular dimension (for example, "I believe I am a good writer, and feel proud of that in particular") or have global extent (for example, "I believe I am a good person, and feel proud of myself in general").
Social Influence	This is a basic concept of social psychology which refers to the effects on a person of relations with others, whether individuals, groups or society in general.
Social Learning	The process through which we acquire new information, forms of behaviour, or attitudes from other people.

Sociometry	This is both an idea and a technique that provides researchers with ways of thinking about groups and ways of developing measures of groups (e.g. social distance) as well as the individuals comprising a group.
Stagex	This is both an idea and a technique that provides researchers with ways of thinking about groups and ways of developing measures of groups (e.g. social distance) as well as the individuals comprising a group.
Subliminal Conditioning	Classical conditioning of attitudes by exposure to stimuli that are below individuals' threshold of awareness.