

## **Social influence and power in context**

Ronald Fischer & Christin-Melanie Vauclair

Instituto D'Or de Pesquisa & Ensino, Brazil

Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIS-IUL, Lisboa

In this chapter, we present a broader perspective on social influence research in line with the conceptualization of social influence by Forgas and Williams (2001) and the differentiation by Ng (2001). Our aim is to balance a prevailing individualistic bias in social psychology research and highlight important social influence processes that have received some attention in diverse fields of social inquiry. We hope to forge and stimulate avenues for further research of theoretical and practical relevance by trying to bridge the gap between classical studies of social influence that focus on linear, decontextualized and direct influence strategies with more diffuse, naturalistic and cultural influence processes. We start off by outlining a multilevel process of social influence and discuss some classic areas of social influence research. Specifically, we review classic work by Ash and Milgram and how recent reconceptualizations of these classic studies contribute to a refined and more nuanced understanding of social influence processes. We then present classic and contemporary approaches to persuasion as a classic area of social influence research.

In the second half, we present some innovative new lines of inquiry that focus on 1) social influence via social and digital media, 2) social influence via shared cultural norms, specifically focusing on recent inquiries around morality and 3) specific cultural influence strategies in the Brazilian context in the form of the Brazilian *jeitinho*, which has received significant attention in recent years. We conclude by emphasising that social influence is a major topic of inquiry in Social Psychology and highlight important practical implications.

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Social influence is arguably one of the most important topics in social psychology. Some authors even argue that social psychology is nearly synonymous with social influence research (Levy, Collins, & Nail, 1998; Vaughan & Hogg, 2005). Allport (1924) defined social psychology as the study of how individuals are influenced by the presence (real or imagined) of others. This constitutes a rather individualistic notion of social psychology and social influence and neglects more indirect and group level phenomena (Ng, 2001). Forgas and Williams (2001) highlighted that all interpersonal behaviour involves some form of mutual influence processes and that groups or societies can only exist and function because of effective, pervasive and shared forms of social influence. In contrast to this general view, much of psychological research has focused on more narrow phenomena under the description of social influence. When examining social psychology text books, social influence chapters typically discuss studies of conformity and obedience (Asch, 1952; Milgram, 1963; Sherif, 1936), (social facilitation (Triplet, 1898; Zajonc, 1965.), social loafing (Karau & Williams, 1993; Ringelmann, 1913) and attitude change and persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In this chapter, we are reviewing some of these classical studies and approaches to social influence, while also extending the scope to other areas that we deem important and interesting.

What types of social influence can be differentiated? Ng (2001) distinguished between three fundamentally different influence types. First, the most commonly studied type involves direct person-to-person influence. This is in line with most research listed in social psychology text books. This type of research is noticeable by a focus on the individual in line with Allport's definition of social psychology. This research has a clear individualistic bias in that it focuses on the person being influenced by some other agent (influencer) and typically focuses on informational

influence rather than normative influence (Ng, 2001). This fits with the recent turn in social psychology to social-cognitive theories and paradigms that conceptualize the individuals as an autonomous meaning-making and rationally thinking entity.

Normative influences stemming from groups and social structures are less central.

The second level of influence relates to indirect manipulation of social norms, customs and social or cultural attitudes. Here, an agent may influence others by manipulating agendas, mobilize relevant social values and norms to direct the discussion in certain directions or remove or isolate certain individuals from discussion. The final level is the most subtle, indirect and hard to observe. Here the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are influenced by others without individuals being aware of the influence strategies. The probably best example is cultural influences on individuals. Culture is a diffuse set of traditions, norms, ideologies and values that influence how individuals think, feel and behave without individuals being aware of this influence on their very thoughts, feelings or behaviours. These processes are reproduced and perpetuated through socialization mechanisms and help to stabilize and maintain social groups and societies.

Another insight gained from this three level distinction is that much research in the social influence tradition has focused on the person being influenced. Less emphasis has been on the agent or source of the influence. Research on power (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965; Raven, 1993; Raven & French, 1958) has differentiated between different sources of power that influence individuals. Some of this work has experienced a renaissance in work in organizational settings, for example in work on social influence strategies of subordinates (Ralston et al, 2009). Work on leadership in organizational psychology is another example of exerting social influence that has been dissociated from social influence research. A second issue that becomes clear

when examining research through this lens of three levels of social influence is that social and group-level processes have been largely ignored (Ng, 2001). As noted above, social psychology research has focused on individuals. Normative influences or interpersonal and group processes have not taken a central role in social influence research.

In this chapter, we take a broader perspective on social influence research in line with the conceptualization of social influence by Forgas and Williams (2001) and the differentiation by Ng (2001). In doing this, we aim to balance the individualistic bias in social psychology research, highlight some important social influence processes that have received some attention in diverse fields of social inquiry and hope to forge and stimulate avenues for further research of theoretical and practical relevance.

We will start by outlining and describing some classical work in the social influence and power literature. By necessity of the sheer volume of this work, our overview is selective and only focuses on some key studies, findings and areas of social influence. We then highlight social and group-level processes that has much potential in future research. We will draw upon research that is relevant to Brazil where available and will discuss cultural and social conditions in Brazil when linking international research to Brazilian examples.

#### Classical Typologies of social influence and power

Levy et al (1998) provided a taxonomy of social influence types that would fall within the first level of Ng's classification. Noting the large overlap between social influence and social psychology, they reviewed major research and identified the fewest number of elemental characteristics that can best differentiate between the maximal number of

social influence studies and approaches. Therefore, their quest was to identify the essential or fundamental distinctions that can help us to organize classical studies in the psychology of social influence. They identified the following four key characteristics: a) level of cognitive processing (conscious versus nonconscious); b) perceived intentionality (intentional versus unintentional versus orthogonal/irrelevant); c) relative status of influencer (high status versus peer/equal status versus low status versus orthogonal/irrelevant) and d) direction of change (positive versus negative versus orthogonal/irrelevant). Although this typology could potentially lead to 72 different types of influence, they identified 'only' 24 different types of social influences. Taking a classical example to be discussed further below, 'obedience' can be classified as a type of influence in which the person being influenced is a) consciously aware of the influence attempt, b) perceives the influence attempt as intentional, c) the influencer is of higher status and d) the person behaves consistently with the influencer's position. Therefore, the framework provides a categorization of influence types, separating them by a mixture of the influence process and the outcome of the change process.

Nail, MacDonald and Levy (2000) developed a descriptive model of social responses to identify the conceptual dimensions that can be used to classify various types of influence. With this categorization the focus is even more directly on the responses of social influence attempts. Responses are differentiated in terms of a) whether there is pre and post-exposure agreement and b) whether the (non-)agreement is voiced publicly or privately. Crossing these two dimensions, 16 different social responses are differentiated. For example, this helps to distinguish the responses of congruence, conversion and compliance. Congruence can be defined as pre- and post-exposure agreement in private and in public. In this case, no attitude or behavioural

changes take place and individuals are in agreement with the topic. Conversion is characterized by pre-exposure disagreement both publicly and privately and post-exposure agreement publicly and privately, whereas compliance only involves post-exposure public agreement, but private disagreement. Conversion is therefore the case of genuine and deep changes in attitudes and beliefs after an influence attempt.

Compliance on the other hand is characterized by superficial public agreement, but individuals do not change their privately held attitudes. It also helps to think about some less well-known social influence responses. For example, disinhibitory contagion refers to behaviour where an individual disagrees publicly and agrees privately prior to the influence attempt, but then agrees both privately and publicly after the event. A good example is where somebody had thought about stealing some object (e.g., a luxury item), but was afraid to do so. When witnessing a riot where another individual breaks a window and steals something, the target person may also participate in the looting. In this instance, the observation of the other person performing the act is an act of social influence and removes the previous inhibition of the target person.

These models have focused on aspects of the influence process and the influence outcome. These models fall within the first level of Ng's classification and are a typical example of response or influencee-centred view. The next typology focuses on power, that is characteristics (capacity or ability) of the influencer that exert influence or bring about change in others. French and Raven (1959) distinguished five bases of power. These are reward power, coercive or punishment power, legitimate power, expert power and referent power. Raven (1965) later added informational power. Reward power is defined as the power to distribute rewards for compliance. With increasing magnitude of rewards (positively valenced rewards or

removal of negative valences) the power of a person should increase. Coercive or punishment power refers to power over punishment for non-compliance. The strength of coercive power depends on the magnitude of negative valence of the punishment relative to the probability that the person can avoid such punishment through conforming. Legitimate power is the belief that the agent is authorized and recognized with an established power structure to command and make decisions. Although often tied to role relations, it may also be based on promises or some code or standard that is accepted by the individual and allows an agent to assert his power. A uniform is often a code or standard of legitimate power, even though the individual may not actually be a representative of a legitimate organization. Expert power is the belief that an agent has greater expertise and knowledge than the target person. It increases with the knowledge differential between the agent and the target person as well as with perceived absolute levels of knowledge. For example, a medical doctor is more knowledgeable about diseases and ailments than individuals in the general public, this is why we typically defer to the recommendations of our doctor. The added dimension by Raven (1965) was informational power. This is the belief that an agent has more information than a target. The distinction has been shown to be important because expert and informational power are associated with different persuasion strategies (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Referent power is the identification with, attraction to and respect for an agent or source of influence (e.g., group). The greater the identification and desire to associate with the source of influence, the greater the power. Good examples would be celebrities or famous sports athletes that people identify with or feel respect for. Research on these power sources show that expert and referent power typically produce more positive outcomes when used for influencing others, but that reward, coercive and legitimate power are often negatively related to important



variables such as job satisfaction, work performance and satisfaction with supervisors (Podsakoff & Schriesheim, 1985). However, the review by Podsakoff and Schriesheim also outlined that the measurement and operationalization of power has been problematic and no firm conclusions can be drawn from field studies.

Inspired by these classical studies, Raven, Schwarzwald and Kozlowski (1998) expanded the number of power bases and developed an instrument aimed at refining and differentiating these power sources further. For example, Raven et al. differentiated between personal and impersonal bases of coercive and reward power. The original version only focused on impersonal aspects (e.g., threat to dismiss an employee or promise a promotion). Personal forms focus on approval, liking and socio-emotional rewards as well as disapproval, disliking and socio-emotional punishments. Legitimate power was differentiated into four categories. First, the original version was closest to new legitimate position power source, in which a supervisor was perceived to have the right to prescribe behaviour and the subordinate was obliged to comply. Second, legitimate reciprocity power is the obligation to comply with a request by an agent because the agent has done something positive for the target previously. Third, legitimate equity draws upon equity theory (Adams, 1965). Compliance is demanded to compensate for some endurance, suffering or harm inflicted on or effort exerted by the agent. Finally, legitimate dependence is related to the social responsibility, where one person is obliged to assist and take care of others who need this assistance. These power bases were distinguished in studies in the US and Israel. Furthermore, it appears that they can be categorized into harsh bases (personal and impersonal coercive & reward power, legitimate power of reciprocity & equity) and soft bases (expert power, referent power, informational power, legitimate power of dependence and position).

Beyond these classifications of power sources, there has been a resurgence in the effects of power on our thoughts and behavior (van Kleef & Cheng, 2020). Recent studies have demonstrated that high power individuals are more likely to interrupt others, are more likely to run a red light or pedestrian crossing, are less likely to share with others, and draw more inspiration and creativity from themselves instead from their environment (Piff et al., 2012; Piff & Moskowitz, 2018; Stamkou et al., 2019; Van Kleef et al., 2015). These studies have also highlighted that cultural context matters greatly when discussing power. How individuals will react to behaviors by the powerful depends to some extent on the cultural norms around the expectance of power differences within groups and the tightness of social norms (Stamkou et al., 2019).

### Selected Classical Approaches and Topics

#### Asch's group conformity studies

Solomon Ash (1952) was interested in extending previous work by Sherif (1936) in which Sherif had shown that groups of people develop norms develop to guide behaviour in situations of uncertainty. Sherif (1936) had used an optical illusion (autokinesis which is an optical illusion consisting of a fixed point of light in a dark room that seems to move) to examine how groups of people make judgments on this apparent movement. It turned out that people in small groups converged over time on the perceived movement (note that there was no movement since the light was fixed). Therefore, the estimates converged around a social norm. This emerging norm then carried over into subsequent sessions and perpetuated across time (including when new people were introduced to the group). This was one of the earliest experiments showing social influence effects and outlined one important process for the

emergence of social norms (norms emerge to reduce uncertainty). In these experiments, stimuli were ambiguous. Asch was now interested in what happened if the stimulus material was less ambiguous and a group of people appeared to make incorrect estimates. In a series of studies, participants were shown a number of lines of varying length and had to decide which of the three lines was of identical length to a standard line. Each participant in these groups varying between seven and nine individuals had to make a judgment. The target person was always the last to make the judgement. Unknown to the target person, the other group members were confederates of the experimenter and provided incorrect judgements. The dependent variable was whether the target person would change his opinion (conform with the incorrect group consensus) and if yes, on how many trials would this be the case. On average, about 33% of trials showed some level of conformity. According to the typologies reviewed above, these studies show signs of direct conformity (Levy et al., 1998) or compliance (Nail et al., 1998). The influence attempt involves conscious processing, is intentional and the group members are of equal status. There is private disagreement prior and post to the influence attempt, but about one third of the participants comply with the group publicly. In terms of power bases, the influence may stem from reference power, since individuals would like to be liked by the group and therefore conform to the group norm.

A large number of studies have tried to replicate this effect. This allowed Bond and Smith (1996) to conduct a meta-analysis to estimate the average effect, whether conformity depends on study designs, is stable over time and whether there are differences between individuals from different cultures. First, Bond and Smith found that the level of conformity across all studies was about 29%. A bit less than one third of participants conformed and gave wrong judgements. Second, a number of

study design variables had a significant impact. When the material was highly ambiguous, conformity increased. Conformity was also higher if group members consisted of in-group members (compared to out-group members, such as strangers, students from another university, etc.) and if the groups increased in size. Females were also found to show higher levels of conformity. Studies in the US showed a significant decrease in conformity from the 1950's to the 1990's. Third, conformity was higher in samples from more collectivistic societies. The explanation is that in collectivistic societies, people are more attuned to the needs and goals of the group and try to preserve social harmony. Therefore, it would be impolite to contradict a majority, even if the participants personally felt that the majority made the wrong decision. Rodrigues (1982) conducted some replications of the original Asch paradigm in Brazil and found conformity rates that were about 30% higher on average than across all studies. An older study by Whittaker and Mead (1967) showed even larger effects in Brazil, with levels of conformity being twice as large as the average across all studies and countries.

A re-analysis of the meta-analysis found that conformity was also higher in societies that face higher disease threat (Murray et al., 2011). The logic of this finding is related to a biological theory called parasite stress theory. Over our evolutionary history, our brains have been tuned to pay attention to dangers in our environment. In contexts where there are lots of parasites and diseases, it is safer to pay attention to what others are doing and conform to the group. In contrast, in contexts with less parasite stress, individuals are less at risk when exploring their environment and not paying that much attention to what others are doing. Therefore, this theory provides a more ecological explanation of the same pattern. In fact, the two explanations are compatible with each other, because greater disease stress is also related to greater

group orientation and collectivistic values. Therefore, the parasite stress explanation may be the environmental variable that triggers behavioral responses such as conformity and collectivistic values (Sng et al., 2018).

### Milgram's obedience studies

Arguably one of the most famous and controversial series of psychological studies, Milgram's (1963, 1965, 1992) work on obedience is a classic of social influence. Milgram was interested in Asch's work, but with tasks that are less trivial and where the actions of the participant have some real consequences for others. Milgram (1963) observed that 'obedience is as basic an element in the structure of social life as one can point to. Some system of authority is a requirement of all communal living. Obedience is the psychological mechanism that links individual to political purpose. It is the dispositional cement that binds men to systems of authority' (Milgram, 1963, p. 371). Shocked by the atrocities committed during the Holocaust and Nazi period in Germany, he was keen to investigate the process of obedience, how apparent mild-mannered and normal individuals can follow outrageous orders to kill and torture other human beings. In his original experiment, community members recruited through advertisement participated in a supposed study on the effects of punishment on learning. One of the participants was a confederate and through rigged drawing of lots, the confederate was always assigned the role of learner. The task for this learner was to perform some learning and memory task, whereas the real participant was the teacher. The teacher's role was to administer shocks from a neighboring room, if the learner made some mistakes. For this, the teacher had to use a shock generator that had 30 incremental steps, ranging from 15 volts to 450 volts.

Each teacher experienced a shock of 45 volts and observed the learner being strapped into the seat and linked up to the machine. The experimenter instructed to increase the voltage after each mistake by the learner. The voltage steps were clearly labelled, with 15V labelled 'slight shock', 375V being labelled with 'Danger: Extreme Shock' and the final two levels (435V and 450V) marked by XXX. The learner made on average one mistake in four trials. The reactions by the learner were standardized, at 75V grunts could be heard, at 120V the learner shouted that shocks were painful, at 150V the learner demanded to be released, at 180V cries could be heard and at 250V an agonizing scream could be heard. In some variations of the experiment, the teacher can hear the learner pound the wall in pain. At 300V, no response was given anymore and the teacher is instructed to treat a non-response as a wrong answer and to continue to administer shocks. Many participants experienced significant distress and voiced their unwillingness to continue. The experimenter would respond with standardized and increasing prods to continue the experiment (ranging from 'Please continue' to 'You have no other choice, you *must* go on'). In the original experiment, of the 40 participants 26 participants continued to administer shocks until the maximum level was reached. Therefore, over 50% of community members would comply with the requests by an experimenter, even if this supposedly endangered a fellow citizen. Another aspect that is noteworthy is that most people experienced extreme levels of stress. Fourteen of the 40 participants showed signs of nervous laughter or smiling, with the laughter appearing out of place and bizarre. Three participants showed full-blown and uncontrollable seizures. For one participant, the experiment had to stop because the participant (teacher) experienced convulsive seizures while trying to administer the shocks. This indicates that average individuals complying with demands by authorities may do this against their own values and while experiencing extreme stress

and discomfort. Replications of this study have been conducted in Italy, Germany, Australia, Britain, Jordan, Spain, Austria and The Netherlands (Smith & Bond, 1998). Although the obedience rates varied, obedience was typically around or higher than 50% in most samples.

Various factors have been found to influence the level of obedience. The social proximity or immediacy to the victim has been found to have a profound effect. If there is no verbal or visual contact, obedience levels are highest. In conditions where the victim only pounds the wall, obedience is near 100%. When the teacher holds the hand of the learner, the level of obedience drops significantly (but remains still high at about 30%). Therefore, social proximity increases the identification with the victim as a fellow human being and decreases obedience.

Another factor is presence of the authority figure. If the experimenter is absent or gives orders over the telephone, obedience levels drop. When there are role models that show disobedience (refusing to obey orders, staging a revolt), levels of obedience drop. Conversely, having role models that obey the orders and administer shocks till the end does not further increase the level of obedience compared to the situation where individuals are alone (Milgram, 1965). The status and legitimacy of the experimenter also mattered, if the experiment was conducted in a run-down inner-city office building compared to the prestigious Yale laboratory, levels of obedience also dropped.

These findings have historically been interpreted as evidence how ordinary individuals may commit atrocities when ordered to do so. Individuals can comply with demands that violate their own personal values and moral codes. In times of conflict and war, such moral conflicts are most pronounced. However, even in less extraordinary situations, people may face situations where they are asked to comply

with demands that violate their personal or some general moral principles. However, these interpretations have been challenged recently by historians of science carefully analyzing the original study protocols and observations as well as new studies that varied the original designs (Haslam et al., 2016). These re-interpretations suggest that individuals were engaged followers who were complying with these requests because they wanted to help science. The findings also explain why orders were often less likely to increase compliance and rather participants were most likely to continue giving shocks when the experimenter invited them to cooperate (Haslam et al., 2015). These findings from Milgram's archives do not change the observations, but modify our explanation of the potential mechanisms. Similarly, analyses of ordinary Nazi members in Germany during the Third Reich often reported being motivated to help a greater cause and therefore engaged in atrocities that harmed perceived enemies but were thought to help a virtuous ingroup cause. Therefore, the individuals were not thinking that they were morally wrong (even though they may have felt stress), but rather their actions helped their group and therefore it was a moral duty. These interpretations offer some new perspectives on how such behavior can emerge and provides a new theoretical lens to generate and test new hypotheses.

#### Persuasion and attitude change

The literature on attitude change and persuasion is concerned with the information processes that individuals engage in when they are exposed to messages that aim to change their attitudes. This line of research has obvious applications in the areas of advertising and marketing, including social marketing and health campaigns aimed at inducing positive change in individuals. Persuasion involves three variables: the communicator or the source of persuasion, the communication or message and the audience or target of the persuasion attempt. These three variables need to be



examined when examining persuasion. Each of these variables can be examined in more detail and a large body of research has shown that various characteristics of these communication variables are likely to lead to attitude change. These findings are summarized in a number of reviews. For example, more credible, attractive communicators and greater similarity between communicator and audience typically lead to more attitude change; higher familiarity of messages and messages that are framed as metaphors (Sopory & Dillard, 2002) are more effective; high and low self-esteem individuals are most likely to be persuaded compared to individuals with moderate levels of self-esteem; people are more easily persuaded if presented with credible messages about topics that they have relatively little information (see Petty & Wegener, 1998, for a review).

Another interesting and counter-intuitive effect that has been observed is the so-called sleeper effect. It is often found that if people are presented with a message and a discounting cue (information contradicting or reducing the impact of the initial message, e.g., the communicator is not credible), they are less persuaded right after the exposure, but over time the audience changes attitudes towards the first message. This effect is reliable and particularly strong if the initial message had a strong initial impact and when the audience had higher ability or motivation to think about the message (Kumkale & Albarracin, 2004). This effect may explain why outrageous claims or news are more likely to be believed over time, even though individuals are aware that it comes from a non-trustworthy source.

This research focusing on the three variables in persuasion has typically focused on the impact of selected individual variables. What has been found is that many of these effects were contradictory and sometimes similarity for example led to more persuasion, whereas at other times similarity had little impact on persuasion. To

account for such differences, a dual-process model of persuasion has been developed (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). These models propose that people can use two different strategies when being faced with a persuasion attempt. The main distinction is whether influence attempts are processes which occur with high mental effort or consciously; or whether information is processed with little effort or non-consciously. This is one of the central elements (level of processing) of the typology of social influence outlined above (Levy et al., 1998). If people are motivated to pay attention to the message, they are more likely to scrutinize the content of messages and are less likely to be persuaded by cues such as attractiveness or similarity of the communicators. In this case, people take the central route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) or systematic processing of information. More factually convincing messages are more likely to be persuasive. If people are not able or motivated to process information carefully (e.g., when the topic is of little interest, people are distracted, or the message and topic are too complicated for the audience to process), they rely on peripheral cues such as attractiveness, similarity, status of the communicator and non-content related aspects of the message (e.g., clarity, familiarity, pleasantness). This type of processing uses the peripheral route of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) or heuristic processing of information (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The advertisement industry usually employs peripheral cues in an attempt to persuade individuals to buy certain products. People exposed to ads on streets, TV or radio are often distracted while doing other things and consequently have little incentive or time to carefully process the information presented to them. Hence, to be effective, advertisement relies on peripheral cues.

However, within health settings, researchers and public health officials are interested in getting people to pay attention. One issue with many public health

campaigns such as antismoking campaigns (e.g., the images of cancer patients on cigarette packages) is whether fear induction works in changing peoples' attitudes. A number of meta-analyses have been conducted summarizing the primary studies that have examined this controversial idea (de Hoog et al., 2007; Tannenbaum et al., 2015). The general finding is that more threatening message (higher severity), messages that stress the susceptibility (that is the personal meaningfulness) and if there is a clear message about what can be done to avoid the threat (efficacy messages).

A second way of how public health researchers try to capture the attention of the audience is by using narratives as a vehicle for getting messages across to change behavior or attitudes. The idea is that individuals are more likely to get emotionally involved in stories or narratives compared to other messages and therefore process and remember the information better. A recent meta-analysis comparing the effectiveness of narrative vs non-narrative messages showed that narratives had a stronger effect on behavior both immediately and over time (Oschatz & Marker, 2020).

### New directions and applications of social influence

#### Persuasive technology, culture and social marketing

As discussed above, persuasion has been one of the central areas of social influence research. Much research has focused on traditional advertising effects, particularly in Western societies. However, new technology is emerging that changes the one-directional and passive form of persuasion as studied in previous research. Persuasive technology is one such example, which refers to any interactive computing systems

that were designed to influence and change attitudes and behaviours of individuals (Fogg, 2003). Similarly, there is increasing recognition that culture influences how people perceive, react and are influenced by persuasion attempts (e.g. Aaker & Williams, 1998). As discussed above, much social influence research focuses on individuals and shows an individualistic bias. There is little research that focuses on persuasion processes in more collectivistic settings. This is particularly worrying considering that much applied persuasion work focuses on changing health attitudes and behaviours. Minorities within many modern societies and many developing nations are often more collectivistic and group-oriented and also show worse health behaviours and attitudes compared to individualistic majority group members or individualistic societies (e.g. Khaled, 2008).

Khaled and her colleagues developed a research programme in which they evaluated the effectiveness of an interactive game to help adolescents and young adults quit smoking (Khaled et al., 2007, 2008). They reported that implementing cultural characteristics and values into persuasive games can indeed improve their effectiveness in reaching minority groups and helping individuals to consider changing their health behavior. This programme of research shows that culture influences the persuasion and social influence process, that persuasion attempts that are culturally incongruent might even have negative effects and that much can be gained by paying more attention to cultural factors in persuasion strategies, especially when the focus is on making positive changes for health. This research brings together a number of themes from this chapter and the book (e.g., social norms, values and culture).

A second topical issue considering persuasion and power is the effect of social media on the health and wellbeing of users. Reviewing a large number of studies,

there is now quite consistent evidence that the use of Facebook can be additive, lead to increased anxiety, depression and substance abuse (Frost & Rickwood, 2017), however these effects are often based on associations rather than experimental studies that can show a causal effect (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). A large study in which over 600,000 users were exposed to either positive or negative emotional messages showed that this had an effect on users' status updates – when seeing more positive messages, people also wrote more positive messages and vice versa for negative messages (Kramer et al., 2014). Furthermore, how people may use Facebook and other social media might also explain some these negative effects. Not every user of Facebook is suffering, so there are groups that are more vulnerable than others. At the same time, analysis of social media posts also offers new options for diagnosing individuals who are at risk of suffering from mental health problems (Eichstaedt et al., 2018). The issues around social media and social influence are certainly going to increase as more and more of our lives are embedded and transmitted online.

### The Role of Morality in Social Influence

Ever since World War II, one of the most vexing questions for social psychologists has been how ordinary people can be influenced to do something that is clearly harmful, and therefore immorally wrong. In fact, Milgram's (1963, 1965, 1992) obedience studies aimed to shed light on this very question by showcasing the power of person-to-person influence and its boundary conditions when individuals are instructed to harm another person under the disguise of beneficial motives. Even though his research has been framed as studies on obedience, it is noteworthy that about one third of the participant did not succumb to the social influence pressure to administer the maximum shock in the original study. Hence, an important question is

why some individuals could be influenced to behave immorally by engaging in harmful actions while others withstood the pressure. Early research on social influence and morality focused on this very question by considering intrapersonal mechanisms in terms of how people reason about what is right and wrong and their reactions to immoral social demands. Despite some seminal studies, it can be said that the intersection of morality and social influence processes did not take centre stage in the social psychological literature for a long time. This might be partly due to the difficulties in conceptualizing human morality because moral concerns have shown to differ across different cultural groups (Shweder, Much, Mahapatra & Park, 1997) but also due to the fact that the topic of morality only experienced a resurgence in the social psychological literature over the past 10 years. Consequently, the way social influence processes have been studied is highly dependent on the conceptualization of morality and only recently have there been theoretical approaches that open up new avenues for the study of social influence in human morality.

Despite different conceptualizations in the literature, at an abstract level there is consensus that morality facilitates group functioning (de Waal, 1996; Krebs, 2008) and makes group living easier by regulating personal behaviours that would otherwise reflect self-interest and self-indulgence (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009). Without some agreement in moral codes, people would disregard other's rights and welfare whenever their desires come into social conflict. Considering this very general definition of morality, in the following we will distinguish between three different research lines on morality and social influence by classifying them into Ng's (2001) typology that also follow a chronological order: (1) person-to-person influence and moral behaviours, (2) indirect manipulation of social norms that are moralized, (3) subtle and normative influence in regard to cultural influences in moral outlooks.

We think that the latest developments in this area point to some intriguing new directions for morality and social influence research.

*Moral Reasoning and Moral Behaviour*

The large share of morality research deals with intrapersonal mechanisms which refer to the ways in which people decide by themselves what is morally right or wrong (Ellemers, van der Toorn, Paunov, & van Leuwen, 2019). Research that focuses on intrapersonal mechanisms in morality and person-to-person influence with regard to moral behaviour can be divided into two main theories: (1) Kohlberg's (1984) cognitive theory which centres on the individual's cognitive capacity to engage in higher levels of moral reasoning, and (2) Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory which emphasizes the conditioning effects of the social environment for moral functioning. The following section provides a brief and selective overview of research conducted within these two theoretical frameworks.

Lawrence Kohlberg's (1984) research paradigm consisted in providing participants with moral dilemma and asking them to explain why a certain action is right or wrong. For instance, participants were asked to imagine a man called Heinz who has a wife which is near death from a special form of cancer. There is one druggist who has developed a medicine that may save her life. However, out of self-interest to earn as much money as possible, the druggist charges Heinz more than he can afford. Heinz begs the druggist and explains his situation, yet without success. Eventually, he becomes desperate and breaks into the druggist's store to steal the medicine for his wife. Kohlberg was particularly interested in the reasons participants would provide why or why not Heinz should have stolen the drug for his wife. It is important to note that Kohlberg was not interested in the individuals' ultimate decision (i.e. to steal or not to steal), but only in the justification for the decision.

Kohlberg would use an interview technique in order to categorise participants' moral reasoning into different levels of moral development by distinguishing between three levels of moral maturity called preconventional, conventional and postconventional morality. At the preconventional level, the individual judges behaviour in a self-focused manner. Moral reasoning is mainly centred on fear of punishments. At the conventional level, the individual judges behaviour in terms of social norms or 'what people would say' is right or wrong. Hence, conventionalists tend to reason by referring to issues of social conformity and order. At the final postconventional level – the most mature level of moral thinking - individuals tend to use the moral principles of justice and fairness in their reasoning which Kohlberg regarded as independent of any social convention.

The fact that Kohlberg defined true morality as the postconventional level of moral reasoning which is informed by philosophical principles derived from the Age of Enlightenment and also conceptualized moral cognition as following a developmental pathway, has important epistemological implications. This means that morality is seen as independent from any social influence, but dependent on philosophical principles which are home to Western thinking. In contrast, the lower levels of moral reasoning are conceptualized as a form of social influence that help individuals to determine what is morally right or wrong, but are not truly about morality. Hence, one would expect individuals at the conventional level to be most susceptible to social influence processes, since their moral reasoning is focused on conformity. One would also expect postconventionalists to not succumb to social pressure if their moral principles were challenged.

There are a few studies that aimed to test this hypothesis by using an experimental approach and studying behavioural conformity in a laboratory setting.



These studies can be distinguished by their experimental paradigm with most using a Milgram-like obedience paradigm, an Asch-like conformity paradigm and a few using less standard procedures. In his critical review of the literature on moral cognition and action, which covers mainly research from the 1970s in regard to resistance to conformity, Blasi (1980) noted that Milgram-type experiments yielded complex and ambiguous results indicating that no simple direct relation exists between levels of moral reasoning and quitting in the task of administering punishments. However, there were also important moderator variables to be considered. He noted that the differences in behaviour between individuals at different levels of moral reasoning were somewhat more consistent with Kohlberg's tenets when the experimenter was present or when participants were exposed to the advice to stop. The Asch-like experiments offered a somewhat more consistent picture by showing a positive relation between level of moral reasoning and resistance to conformity. The set of studies using less standard procedures also provided support for the 'resistance to conformity' hypothesis. For example, Fodor (1971, 1972) designed experiments in which participants' moral decisions and reasoning were challenged. The studies showed that individuals who resisted the experimenter's influence and did not change their initial opinion had significantly higher moral maturity scores than those who succumbed to social influence.

A more recent meta-analytic review on moral reasoning and behaviour (Villegas de Posada & Vargas-Trujillo, 2015) shows that there is indeed a significant, albeit small effect, for the relationship between moral reasoning (assessed with structured interviews, the Defining Issues Test or other methods) and resistance to conformity (assessed via a Milgram-type paradigm). Interestingly there was a stronger association between levels of moral reasoning and resistance to conformity in regard

to engaging in immoral behaviours (e.g., harming others) compared to engagement in moral behaviours (e.g., being honest) suggesting that the former carries more moral weight. Nevertheless, the authors also note that an important limitation of these resistance to conformity studies is the overreliance on lab settings and the use of adolescents and undergraduate samples.

One of the main criticisms that has been put forward in regard to Kohlberg's theory of moral cognition is that social influence is granted only a subordinate role in moral reasoning by incorporating it into the lower levels of moral maturity. Yet, some moral theorists have emphasized that social influences are in fact essential to better understand how human morality functions. For instance, Bandura (1991) argues that standards for moral reasoning are much more open to social influence than Kohlberg's cognitive theory would lead one to expect. He proposed a social cognitive theory of moral functioning to explain how moral reasoning, together with other psychosocial factors, guides moral behaviours. His social cognitive theory adopts an interactionist perspective to human morality by postulating reciprocal effects between personal, socio-environmental and behavioural factors. The social environment provides models for behaviour and is herein related to social influence mechanisms, mainly via *observational learning* which is a form of modelling that occurs when a person watches the actions of another person as well as the reinforcements that the person is receiving (Bandura, 1977). Moral learning occurs in a social context in which the social, personal and behavioural aspects are dynamic and constantly influencing each other. For example, once an individual has developed personal moral standards, engaging in moral or immoral behaviour produces two types of consequences: self-evaluative and social reactions which again have a regulatory effect on individuals' moral behaviour. Bandura's socio-cognitive model also allows

for a better understanding of the cognitive strategies individuals might use to justify or rationalize their engagement in immoral actions, such as the perceived diffusion of responsibility. In fact, the power of shifting responsibility can be seen in one of Milgram's (1974) experimental variations in which an additional confederate administered the electric shock on behalf of the subjects in their role as teachers and 92.5% of the subjects agreed to administer the maximum volts.

According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), children acquire more morally mature standards by learning moral values from others and imitating their moral behaviours. Kohlberg's (1984) cognitive theory of moral reasoning, however, stipulates that a child goes through a developmental sequence of moral maturity. Some early studies were carried out to resolve these somewhat contrasting views on morality by studying Bandura's principles of social learning to better understand how children could be influenced to change their levels of moral reasoning. Holstein (1977), for instance, found that parents' level of moral reasoning predicted the level of their children's moral reasoning. If parents used simple moral rules so did their children, whereas if they employed more complex moral reasoning their children did likewise. Parents are not the only source of influence of children's moral reasoning. Other adults, peers and symbolic models play also an important role, however, the moral reasoning of adults has been found to be more influential (Brody & Henderson, 1977; Dorr & Fey, 1974). Other studies showed that children altered their moral standards if they were exposed to opposing views by adult models (e.g. Bandura & McDonald, 1963; Cowan, Langer, Heavenrich, & Nathanson, 1969). Even though social influence through modelling is a powerful form of influence, it does not invariably alter moral reasoning. Bandura (1991) emphasized that subjects can only be influenced by modelled opinions if they cognitively understand them. For instance,

a very young child that is at the pre-conventional level of moral reasoning in which egocentric concerns play a dominant role, will cognitively not be able to comprehend the principle of social justice as the ultimate criterion to decide upon right and wrong if cognitively it has no understanding about the justice principle yet.

#### *Moralized Social Norms*

Kohlberg's (1984) cognitive theory with its focus on moral reasoning dominated the psychological literature on morality until Jonathan Haidt (2001) argued that quick intuitions are more important for individuals than deliberate reflections to judge between right and wrong. He proposed a social intuitionist model of moral functioning which emphasizes the role of affect and social influences in moral judgment. Haidt's position is that moral judgments on many moralized issues, such as not eating a deceased pet or consensual incest, are driven by strong moral emotions (e.g. disgust) and only justified post hoc in the form of moral reasoning. Hence, moral judgments follow a dual process model in which one system is quick, intuitive and nonrational (i.e. affective) and the other is slow, deliberative and reflective (i.e. cognitive in the form of moral reasoning).

Haidt also emphasizes that moral reasoning naturally occurs in a social setting through interpersonal processes rather than privately. Therefore, the social intuitionist model explicitly acknowledges the role of social influences. It even distinguishes between two different types of social influence processes of which one is *reasoned persuasion* (e.g. arguments) and the other a nonrational form labelled *social persuasion* (e.g. implicit social norms). As evidence for the importance of intuitions in this dual process model, Haidt (2001) refers to the phenomenon of 'moral dumbfounding' which occurs when individuals have trouble explaining strong condemnations of actions that do not cause any harm, for example by saying "It's just

wrong to do that!”, “That’s terrible!” or “It’s disgusting”. These type of moral dumbfounding statements are interpreted as a strong judgment that the act is wrong based on intuition, but the post hoc reasoning is having trouble explaining it. When friends, allies and acquaintances have made such a moral judgment, it influences others even if no reasoned persuasion is used, because holding a different moral position from others who strongly condemn a moralized issue may jeopardize one’s image as a good and moral person. In some cases, the social influence mechanism might be just a form of conformity to fit in with the group norms, yet Haidt (2001) also argues that in many cases people’s privately held judgments are directly shaped by the judgments of others, thereby attributing great importance to implicit social norms as social influence processes in moral judgments.

The empirical evidence has so far underpinned the importance of affective reactions in moral judgments. Haidt, Koller and Dias (1993), for example, found in a cross-cultural comparison between Brazil and the USA that moral principles, such as whether someone is harmed, cannot explain all moral judgments that individuals make. They constructed stories in which no plausible harm was involved (e.g. cleaning one’s toilet with the national flag or masturbating with a dead chicken). Respondents’ affective reactions to these stories, especially from Brazil, were better predictors of their moral judgments than claims about harmful consequences. Haidt and Hersh (2001) found similar results when interviewing liberals and conservatives in the USA on the issue of homosexuality – for both groups, affective reactions were the best predictors for moral judgment and not perceived harmfulness. The phenomenon of moral dumbfounding is particularly interesting because it lends support to the importance of quick intuitive moral judgments over deliberate moral

reasoning which may carry more weight for social influence processes given that it activates moral emotions.

It is a common experience that people feel a change in their moral intuitions regarding a particular situation when someone reveals features of the situation that they had not noticed before or is persuaded to appreciate the importance of some features that they had not given sufficient consideration before. Yet, the social intuition model still leaves important questions left unanswered which warrant further empirical investigations (see also Saltzstein & Kasachkoff, 2004). For instance, does social influence generate intuitions first which then influence a person's moral judgment and reasoning? To what extent do perceived social norms indeed trigger gut feelings that something like masturbating with a dead chicken is wrong? Or do people still intuitively perceive harm even if they are reassured that there is none (see for example, Gray, Schein & Ward, 2014)? When it comes to the social component of moral judgments, there is still much that is not well understood given that it is rarely studied in a truly interpersonal context (Malle, 2021) or in real-life naturalistic settings (Hofmann et al., 2014).

#### *Cultural Influences in Moral Outlooks*

The third level of Ng's (2001) social influence typology refers to processes that are subtle, indirect and difficult to observe. Cultural influences are a good example of such subtle influence mechanisms. Culture provides group members with answers to fundamental questions such as how things should be, what is the right course of action and what are the proper values to endorse. Individuals are influenced by their social group to behave within these often moralized standards and are sanctioned if they violate them (see also Vauclair, 2009, for a theoretical discussion on the interrelationship between morality and culture). In this way, morality can be regarded

as one of culture's rule system influencing individuals to conform to the shared moral principles and ostracizing those who openly violate them (Eckensberger, 2007). This form of intragroup mechanism occurs largely without individuals' awareness of the social influence processes. Hence, cultural influences affect moral judgment and behaviour in deeper and subtler ways than the previously mentioned social intuitionist model suggests for its interpersonal processes (see also Greenwood, 2011). There is no actual social persuasion taking place, but group pressures operate so that individuals think and behave in similar ways.

When morality is conceptualized as the group's shared ideas about right and wrong, there is no longer an absolute principle that defines morality (such as justice in Kohlberg's theoretical framework), but space for variation in moral outlooks across cultural, religious and political groups. Homosexuality is a good example which tends to be moralized by political conservatives, but not by liberals (Haidt & Hersh, 2001). Hence, different groups may reach different conclusions as to what is moral or immoral, yet what they have in common is that they largely agree in their moral outlook within their group. However, this shared aspect of moral standards is not systematically addressed in the literature as Ellemers and colleagues (2019) noted in their review that comprised more than 1,000 research articles from 1940 to 1970 on the psychology of morality. They also concluded that there is relatively little knowledge about the social functions of morality that consider intragroup dynamics and intergroup processes. Nevertheless, morality is likely to play an important role in some of the contemporary intergroup conflicts (for example, the Mohammed cartoon controversy) and a better understanding of the role of culture in morality is very much needed.

To date, there are only a few studies that have approached morality and moral judgment from a pluralist perspective. Graham and colleagues (2016) reviewed the contemporary work to on cultural factors affecting moral judgments and behaviours and noted that the state-of-the-art suggests the existence of pronounced cultural differences both within and between societies. Cultural factors that have been found to contribute to variation in morality include values, religion, social ecology (e.g., pathogen prevalence) and regulatory social institutions such as kinship structures and economic markets. For instance, Vauclair and Fischer (2011) found that individuals from collectivistic-oriented countries judged personal-sexual issues (e.g. homosexuality and divorce) more strictly than people from more individualistic-oriented nations. They reasoned that personal–sexual issues are judged more leniently in cultures in which individuals’ rights and welfare are regarded as more important than the interests of the group, whereas the same issues might be judged more strictly in cultures in which the interests of the group are prioritized over the interests of the individual. For instance, a divorce has not only implications for the affected couple, but also for the children, extended family and social group. All these social considerations and interdependencies may be taken into account to a greater extent in collectivistic cultures and lead to stricter moral judgments compared to individualistic cultures. In another study Bastian et al. (2019) showed that pathogen prevalence (from the parasite stress model that we described above) predicts moral beliefs, in this case beliefs in good and evil, which in turn explain why some societies show more conservative ideologies. Studies focusing on within-society cultural differences in morality found that political ideology is an important dimension that delineates subgroups (political conservatives and liberals) regarding their position on moralized issues such as homosexuality or abortion (e.g, Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009).



Given that attitudes towards moralized issues have shown to lead to greater social distancing, lower levels of cooperativeness and greater inability to generate procedural solutions in heterogenous groups (Skitka, Hanson, Morgan, & Wisneski, 2021), it seems paramount to devote more research efforts to this area in order to arrive at more harmonious relations within society and between cultural groups. It is crucial to continue studying different outlooks on morality, to better understand their predictors and especially to consider the social dimension of moral psychology (Greenwood, 2011) which might require the development of new social influence models for the moral domain (see also Lees & Gino, 2017).

#### Jeitinho Brasileiro as a Brazilian influence tactic

In the last section, we briefly touch upon culture and cultural norms as social influence tactics and discuss one particular aspect familiar to many readers of this volume: the *jeitinho brasileiro*. Culture and cultural norms and practices are another example of the types of influence processes that Ng included in his highest level of social influence. *Jeitinho Brasileiro* is one specific social influence strategy typical of Brazilian culture. What is *jeitinho*? Barbosa (1992) discussed *jeitinho* as a fluid and flexible problem-resolution strategy in highly bureaucratic contexts, in which individuals try to establish egalitarian social links with authority figures or gate keepers. Barbosa (1992) situated *jeitinho* as a mixed form inbetween social relationships and corruption. Almeida (2007) also situated *jeitinho* between corruption and providing favors. Duarte (2006) on the other hand discussed various classifications and pointed to a multidimensional nature of *jeitinho*.

A group of social psychologists formed *Conexao Brasil* to develop a Brazilian ethno-psychology. They chose *jeitinho brasileiro* as it is an important aspect

of Brazilian culture and an important strategy of interpersonal relations and social influence. This program of research has made great progress in describing the psychological structure and underlying motivations of this cultural syndrome (see Fischer & Pilati, submitted). The first study to understand the psychology of *jeitinho brasileiro* used a qualitative design, in which students and members of the public identified themes and critical incidences of *jeitinho* during in-person interviews (Pilati et al., 2011). The researchers then constructed 53 scenarios of *jeitinho*. These were administered to students in Rio de Janeiro and Brasilia with the instructions to evaluate how typical the scenario is for *jeitinho* and how typical this behaviour is for Brazilians. In addition, focus groups were used to evaluate the scenarios. The results clearly point to a multidimensional structure of *jeitinho*. Different types of *jeitinho* were distinguishable in a multidimensional scaling model: creativity, *malandragem*, lying and breaking the law. These forms seem to be distinguishable in terms of the extent to which they violate social or legal norms (weak violation to severe violation). These scenarios were further developed and administered in various samples across the country (Akira Miura et al., 2019; Ferreira et al., 2012; Fischer et al., 2014, 2021). Overall, these studies suggest that *jeitinho* consists of at least two distinct behavioral strategies: one focusing on maintaining positive relations with others, the second being more manipulative, breaking social norms and even engaging in corruption, if the opportunity arises. These facets of *jeitinho* are related to different personality traits and values. The positive relationship aspect called *simpatia* is associated with Agreeableness and altruistic and prosocial values; whereas the trickery or manipulative aspect is related to self-enhancing values (Akira Miura et al., 2019; Ferreira et al., 2012). These studies also suggest that situational variables are important for triggering *jeitinho* behavior: for example, images of corruption scandals,

even if showing the negative effects of corruption, are likely to increase the probability that individuals engage in the manipulative and corrupt facet of jeitinho (Fischer et al., 2014). Similarly, political crises can have an effect. A longitudinal study examining changes in jeitinho behavior from the impeachment of the president Rousseff in 2016 to the first round of the election in 2018 showed that individuals became more focused on building *simpatia* networks with their social groups (Fischer et al., 2021). This makes sense if we consider that in times of crises it is important to have a good support network available that we can rely on. These studies demonstrate that it is possible to use a psychological lens to study a cultural construct such as jeitinho that individuals use to influence others when being faced with obstacles or problems. Such culture-specific influence strategies have not been studied systematically in psychology and there is much that can be learned using ethno-psychological research methods (see also Smith, 2008 for a broader perspective of such culture-specific social influence tactics).

## Conclusions

In this chapter, we have tried to bridge the gap between classical studies of social influence that focus on linear, decontextualized and direct influence strategies to more diffuse, naturalistic and cultural influence processes. Social influence is a major topic of inquiry and of important practical implications.

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