Craig McGarty, Natalie Taylor and Karen Douglas

Between commitment and compliance: Obligation and the strategic dimension of SIDE

In this chapter we examine responses to influence attempts. In particular, we explore the traditional dichotomy that underpins almost all research on social influence: responses to influence attempts reflect either a motivation to be correct (associated with genuine influence involving private acceptance) or a motivation to be liked (associated with compliance without private acceptance). We argue that this dichotomy underspecifies the analysis of responses to influence in two important ways. The first is that there are at least four important behavioural responses to influence attempts and the second is that there are at least three important psychological processes from which these responses emerge. The research we discuss in this chapter suggests that in the setting of industrial conflict, where accounts of behaviour habitually stress compliance, there is good evidence of independence, and also of collective action which is consistent with group norms in the face of perceived coercive power. Our research on responses to outgroup members to an ingroup audience also suggests that identifiability produces strategic behaviour that cannot be neatly pigeon-holed as conversion or compliance. We refer to this third process as obligation or duty. This third process may be particularly relevant when we consider behaviours which are consistent with the norms of some group which the perceiver identifies with, but which may be inconsistent with current preferences.

Social Influence

One of the most popular distinctions in the field of social influence is the distinction between private acceptance and public compliance. This is a popular dichotomy that appears in many different treatments that reflect a distinction between agreeing with someone due to a *concern for being right* and agreeing with someone from a *concern for being liked.* The most famous of these distinctions is that introduced by Deutsch and Gerard (1955) between informational and normative influence.

We will not recapitulate here the vagaries involved in the discussion of this distinction and its reincarnations in various forms (such as Moscovici's, 1985, distinction between conversion and compliance) except to note that self-categorization theorists such as Turner (1985, 1991; see also Abrams & Hogg, 1990) have rejected this distinction as being at the core of social influence. For self-categorization theory

(SCT) all influence is both normative and informational, and indeed, what is held to be valid information is itself a product of what is normative in terms of some currently relevant group membership (note though that Mcgarty, 1999, draws some rather different conclusions about validity).

However, self-categorization theory retains the distinction between agreeing with someone because you believe they are correct and expressing agreement with someone because you believe you will be punished if you disagree. The latter response according to self-categorization theory, however, is not influence at all, it is the application of coercive power by an outgroup. SCT could be argued to be a dual process model — it is simply (and critically) the case that one of those processes is theoretically distinguished as a power process which does not involve actual influence. In other words, SCT is a single process model of influence but it is a dual process model of responses to influence.

The SIDE model also retains the distinction between what it terms the cognitive dimension (but we think this is more properly called the self-categorical or *identity definition* aspects as per Reicher, this volume) and the strategic dimension (in Reicher's terms self- presentation or *identity enactment* aspects), but research on the SIDE model has taught us that a much more sophisticated approach to the influence process and a deeper consideration of the effects of audiences on responses to influence attempts is necessary. In particular, Reicher and Levine's (1994) work suggests that the effects of identifiability depend upon whether the audience has surveillance over the behaviour.

The impact of this point can be summarised in this way. Traditional approaches to social influence and persuasion examine the following elements:

SOURCE / MESSAGE / TARGET

That is, in the beginning there is a source who sends a message with the intention of persuading the target. SIDE demands, however, that we look beyond these three components to consider the impact of the target's response on the source or other audiences. In other words, it considers responses to influence attempts to be communicative acts.

The points we wish to emphasize here involve moving beyond the dual process distinction. This involves extending the focal field of responses to influence attempts in two ways: influence responses involves at least four important categories of psychological responses or outcomes, and at least three important psychological processes.

To illustrate the poor fit of the dichotomy we will focus on work conducted by Natalie Taylor and Karen Douglas on reactions to outgroup members. In Taylor's case the focus is on reactions to the rejected norms or influence attempts by outgroups. In that work an outgroup is the audience for a social actor's communication. In Douglas's case the focus is on reactions *to outgroups* directed to ingroup audiences. That is, in the first case the key question for the social actor is 'What should I tell the outgroup?' In the second case the question is 'What should I tell the ingroup about the outgroup?'

To consider the first case we need to reduce the scope of the phenomena that we are dealing with. However, even when we do simplify responses to influence

attempts in ways that exclude many of the things social psychologists are normally interested in there are still great complexities.

According to self-categorization theory, restricting consideration to rejected norms and outgroup sources rules out much chance of genuine social influence occurring, but it also reduces the possibilities for recategorization to occur. That is, a classic problem in social influence research is that providing evidence of disagreement between source and target on a dimension that is relevant to group membership implies that at least one of these positions must be discrepant from the actual norms of the group (see McGarty & Grace, 1999). This inevitably provides a potential basis for recategorization so that the target of an influence attempt can come to consider the source (or self) to belong to some other group. With outgroup sources, presenting positions with which the target disagrees, this possibility is greatly reduced.

We assume further that the context in which participants respond to influence attempts is characterised by relatively low threat such that autonomy is a potentially plausible explanation of what people do regardless of whether they are identifiable or not. In other words, there are no guns being held to people's heads. Under these conditions we think it is possible to identify at least four potentially discrete behavioural responses to influence attempts. These behavioural responses involve a level or intensity of group normative behaviour (GNB) and/or movement in relation to the espoused norms of some group.

BEHAVIOURAL CATEGORY	DEFINED AS	ATTRIBUTION BY PERCEIVER
Public agreement	shift towards norm and/or increased GNB	a. Conformity b. Compliance
Reactance	shift away from norm and/or decreased GNB	a. Differentiation b. Independence
Resistance	no shift and/or steady GNB	a. Maintaining consistency b. Strength c. Inattentiveness etc.
Moderation	ambiguous shift and/or GNB	All of the above PLUS especially desire to avoid conflict

As you can see from the table, each of the responses is associated with a level of public commitment to the normative position of some group as well as a range of possible attributions on the part of the observers of this response (the audience). Importantly for SIDE research the audience of these interactions includes social psychological researchers, that is, we cannot neglect the fact that participants in research are communicating with (or in some cases trying to avoid communication with) the researchers who are observing their behaviour.

The range of possible attributions makes each of the alternatives above conceptually problematic. Public agreement is problematic because it may connote private

acceptance (i.e., actual influence) or it may not. The latter case only occurs under conditions of surveillance by some audience.

Resistance and reactance are problematic because although they are actually very common they receive little attention in the literature. For example, two thirds of the responses observed in the Asch (1951) paradigm and one third in the Milgram (1963) paradigm involve resistance. It is often forgotten that Asch set out to investigate independence in his paradigm. Of course it is the level of yielding (public agreement) observed by Asch which has attracted most of the attention. Resistance and reactance are also difficult to distinguish under conditions where there are only two clear behavioural alternatives.

Reactance (Brehm & Brehm, 1981) may be particularly important in intergroup settings as it facilitates differentiation between social groups. Categorization is something that groups do to themselves and involves processes of differentiation as well as conformity (see Haslam, Oakes, Turner, McGarty & Reynolds, 1998; McGarty, Haslam, Hutchinson & Grace, 1995). Although there is some discussion of negative and non-conformism this is almost invariably misunderstood. The classic example of this would be the conventional wisdom about adolescent smoking: adult analysts frequently explain smoking as compliance to peer group norms. This misrepresents a significant proportion of the the actual motives: for many adolescents, *not smoking* may be explained as compliance to the wishes of powerful outgroup authorities and smoking may represent an explicit attempt to challenge what are perceived to be the illegitimate and hypocritical values of adult authority (Hopkins, 1994).

Taylor has also assembled extensive evidence that the conventional partitioning of public agreement is questionable because compliance is far less common than is conventionally expected in low threat settings. Compliance is a convenient explanation that is adopted by both researchers and participants— that is people tend to explain other people's behaviour as compliance but not their own. This has been demonstrated in a number of experimental studies but we want to focus here on a survey-based study (Taylor & McGarty, 1999).

This was shown in research on explanations of industrial action or inaction. In a survey participants explained their actions in ways which were consistent with their views and identification. Out of 184 participants only 6 reported that they had taken action or not taken action due to pressure from others. By and large, the other responses showed a staggering level of consistency between action, identification and explanations of action. People who most strongly identified with the union took industrial action and reported that they supported the aims of the strike, the non-strikers who identified with management reported that they did not support the strike.

This is contrary to conventional wisdom about industrial action which suggests that industrial action is a product of compliance, interestingly it was also contrary to the subjective impressions of the people surveyed. In general respondents saw the management as having more coercive power than the union but this difference was greatest for union high identifiers and almost nonexistent for non-members. This is not surprising from a self-categorization theory perspective, coercive power is a negative attribute and ingroup members should be less likely to make this negative attribution than outgroup members.

However, it is paradoxical simply because perceived coercive power is negatively related to the actual level of compliance. That is, people actually took action contrary to the norms of the outgroup despite the higher level of perceived sanctions or pressure from the outgroup.

There are two key interpretations of these results. The first is that there may have been reinterpretation in line with cognitive dissonance or self-perception theories. People may have come to develop identifications with groups that were consistent with their actions. The other possibility is that compliance represents a third person effect (see Duck, Hogg & Terry's, 1994, link of this idea to self-categorization theory): it's a vulnerability that other people have. Researchers and social perceivers may have overestimated the importance and prevalence of compliance in explaining actual conduct and nowhere would this be clearer than in the case of industrial action — there are strong political motives for certain interested parties to explain industrial action as coercion.

We argue that responses to unwelcome (or at least rejected) influence attempts can be understood as the interplay between two motivations. The motivations to avoid negative self-perceptions and to avoid aversive consequences. Where those aversive consequences are relatively trivial (as in most experiments) the tendency to avoid negative self-perceptions/ presentations will tend to be most powerful. One way in which this unfolds is through pressures for consistency. This may occur under conditions of experimenter surveillance: where presenting an inconsistent attitude in front of the experimenter may communicate or present a negative image of self as weak, or where inconsistency leads one to perceive one's own behaviour as weak resulting in a negative self-perception. The motivation to avoid the negative self-perceptions that arise from counternormative behaviour should be high for one's own actual or anticipated behaviour. These motivations should be less prevalent when perceivers seek to explain why *other people* have behaved contrary to the *perceivers* norms despite sharing some relevant categorization with the perceiver. A striker may explain their own strike action in terms of commitment to the shared norms of the group but explain the nonstriker's behaviour in terms of a fear of sanctions from the employer (compliance).

Accountability does play a crucial role in responses ABOUT an outgroup TO an ingroup audience as Karen Douglas's research shows (Douglas & McGarty, 1999 see also Douglas & McGarty, this volume). She investigated an effect found in an archival study of computer-mediated communication involving intergroup flaming on the Internet. It was found that flaming of outgroup members involved more strongly stereotypical language (using the linguistic category model) when identifiable persons responded to anonymous messages than when anonymous persons responded.

The form of this effect which has been shown in the archival and a number of experimental studies is of the following form. Identifiable communicators flaming anonymous outgroup targets used more stereotypical language than did anonymous communicators flaming anonymous outgroup targets.

This interaction was unexpected, we had first anticipated more stereotypical language use by anonymous sources and about anonymous targets. Nevertheless we

replicated the effect experimentally, but importantly only when the message was communicated to an ingroup audience.

The aim of Douglas's research program was to investigate the reasons for this unexpected effect. In one experiment she found strong evidence for the effect under conditions that she refers to as obligation: defined as conditions where people are accountable for their actions to some group without being strongly committed to the norms of that group.

Whereas commitment is doing something because you want to do it, and compliance is doing something because you are forced to do it, obligation is doing something because you feel you should do it. Interestingly for SIDE theorists, these conditions are created under conditions of identifiability to ingroup members under high social category salience.

However in another study Douglas found that the identifiability effect was related to commitment to the group. This seems paradoxical at first glance but we think there is a reasonably simple explanation: commitment to the norms of a group and obligation produce the same response because obligation represents overcommitment, acting more strongly in line with the norms of the group than one actually feels.

What makes this result all the more surprising, however, is that language abstraction is supposed by Franco and Maass (1996) to be a measure of implicit stereotyping that is not sensitive to social desirability or conscious control. We think Franco and Maass are probably correct but there is nevertheless good evidence here that this subtle implicit measure is nevertheless sensitive to impression management strategies.

Taken as a package this research suggests that the classic dichotomy between influence and compliance (however one wants to label it) underspecifies the variety of responses to influence attempts in two important ways. Conversion and compliance do not come close to exhausting the range of possibilities for either the psychological responses that underpin responses to rejected influence attempts or the actual behavioural responses to those influence attempts. In relation to the first point even highly strategic behaviour is much more subtle than is traditionally assumed and there is the prospect that overcommitment relating to a sense of duty or obligation may be a plausible explanation of many outcomes that might normally be interpreted in terms of commitment or compliance. In other words, the particular behavioural outcome of agreement with the espoused or anticipated norms of some group can be attributed to at least three alternative explanations and Douglas's results point to two of these (including remarkable evidence of strategic effects on processes which are not believed to be under conscious control).

Just as strikingly, Taylor's work shows that behavioural responses to rejected influence attempts show a complexity that has not been seriously addressed in most of the previous literature. In low threat (or plausible autonomy) contexts the degree of compliance observed was very low when compared to reactance and resistance and there is some evidence of moderation too. However, expected compliance by others is much higher indicating the presence of a third person effect.

How might these processes come into play outside the laboratory? In conclusion, we think we can illustrate this by reflecting on the craftiness of Horatio Nelson's

famous signal at the battle of Trafalgar 'England expects every man to do his duty.' 'Duty' here was to suffer a withering barrage of cannon fire from a large French and Spanish fleet until the British ships were close enough to put Nelson's plan into action.

Some of his jolly jack tars could be expected to be high identifiers who were committed to the norms of firing cannons at French and Spanish ships of the line, others were pressed men following orders, and yet others would reluctantly do what they felt was the right thing to do. Some of the sailors would be visibly and obviously identifiable to other ingroup and outgroup members (as Nelson was himself with his fashionable array of missing body parts and dress uniform in a flagship at the lead of a column of warships). However, in the crowded conditions of the ships few would be all that anonymous to ingroup members. Nevertheless ample opportunities would exist for sailors to shirk their 'duty' and that is what Nelson sought to forestall.

Nelson's signal spoke to all these audiences (except perhaps the Welsh, Scot and Irish sailors aboard). As Taylor's research suggests, for the pressed men the reference to expectations of the powerful authority that had imprisoned them, and the sanctions that they would face for disobedience are hinted at but they are not laid on so thickly as to provoke reactance. What is more, the reference to duty and the expectations of their nation rather than the navy or the admiral may have created pressures for self-consistency that would have had led to greater compliance (and for some switches in salience). To the high identifiers (whom we might term the 'genuinely Jolly Jack Tars') the reference to ingroup norms in the face of threat should have been sufficient for them to self-categorize in a way that produces stereotypical responses to the outgroup. However, the key audience for the communication was that subset of the fleet who were moderately committed to the norms of the ingroup. For them the reference to expectations and duty may have helped to create the conditions of obligation that we have discussed here. If, as Douglas's work suggests, obligation can create supercommitment whereby people who are effectively moderate identifiers act more strongly in line with the norms of the group than do the high identifiers then the full cunning of the communication is revealed. It is given more poignancy by the other statement attributed to Nelson at the battle 'Thank God, I have done my duty.'

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Correspondence to Craig McGarty, Division of Psychology, The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia. E-mail: craig.mcgarty@anu.edu.au