Social influence processes in social change- TOPIC 9

Social change occurs when society adopts a new belief or behaviour which then becomes the norm.

Social change through minority influence-

1. Drawing attention to an issue- minorities can bring about social change by drawing the majority’s attention to an issue, as this creates a conflict which they aim to reduce. The suffragettes drew attention to the issue of inequality among men and women through educational, political and militant tactics.

2. Cognitive conflict- the minority creates a conflict between the majority’s position and the minority’s position, and although this does not directly result in social change it does lead to the majority thinking about the issues more deeply. For example, the suffragettes created a cognitive conflict between the existing status quo that only men were allowed to vote and their position that women should be able to vote. This would lead to the some people moving towards the suffragettes’ position whilst others ignored it.

3. Consistency of position- Research on minority influence shows that the minority is far more effective if they are consistent in their position as this encourages others to take their cause seriously. The suffragettes did this by protesting politically for years in addition to women being involved in ww1, regardless of the attitudes of those around them and the opposition they faced, which eventually resulted in society being convinced that some women were ready for the vote.

4. The augmentation principle- If the minority are willing to suffer for their views it presents them as more dedicated to their cause, which encourages the majority to take it seriously. The suffragettes suffered hunger strikes, imprisonment or even death which made their influence far more powerful as it was augmented.

5. The snowball effect- minority influence initially has a small impact on the majority but eventually spreads as those more likely to accept the view join the majority until it reaches a tipping point where it leads to wide scale social change. All adult citizens having the vote (universal suffrage) was the result of the work of the suffragette minority.

Social change through majority influence-

Social norms interventions are attempts to change the misconceptions of normative behaviour of a peer group in order to reduce risky behaviours of a target population.

For example young adults generally misperceive the alcohol frequency and quantity consumed by their peers which makes them justify their own heavy drinking behaviour. Perception correction strategies include media campaigns to communicate the actual norm to the target audience of young adults in order to modify their behaviour to bring it more in line to the actual behaviour of their peers.