

### Commentary On This Project

This is a great example of a social psychological movie analysis. The student has taken on a movie classic. He gives just enough of the plot at the start of the paper to orient the reader, then provides additional plot details as needed to dissect specific pieces of action as they unfold at different points in the film. He organizes the paper around three main themes, (conformity, attitude change and persuasion, and group process), and within these he brings to bear a number of different theories and perspectives. In doing so, he goes well beyond the minimal requirements for the paper (i.e., the "rule of three"). In each case, the application of social psychological theory is appropriate and convincing. Except for a few minor flaws, the paper is well written. This was a fun paper to read.

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Movie Analysis  
"12 Angry Men"  
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Social Psychology  
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The film “12 Angry Men” exemplifies many social psychology theories. This tense, compelling film, features a group of jurors who must decide the guilt or innocence of an accused murder. Initially eleven of the twelve jurors vote guilty. Gradually, through heated discussion, the jurors are swayed to a not-guilty decision. Upon examination, the film highlights social psychology theories in areas of conformity, attitude change and group process.

### **Conformity**

Within the context of the jury room conformity is a dangerous device. “Twelve Angry Men” exemplifies the power of informational social influence and normative social influence, theories developed through the research of Muzafer Sherif, Solomon Asch and others. According to informational social influence individuals conform because they believe that other’s interpretation of an ambiguous situation is more salient, or valid, than their own. Normative social influence is a theory that posits the cause of individual conformity due to the possibility of appearing deviant.

Judging other’s interpretations of an ambiguous event often leads to conformity caused by informational social influence. This theory is applicable within the juror’s decisional processes of the “Twelve Angry Men.” Informational social influence is exacerbated by ambiguity of situation, importance of being correct, time constraints, and presence of those perceived as experts.

Conformity due to social influence is portrayed within the first moments of the film. Within the jury room, heated debate is precluded by an initial vote. This vote, taken publicly, was susceptible to normative social influence, an element of social influence, or conformity due to a fear of appearing deviant. As the jurors cast their initial vote,

hesitancy is obvious in many of the eleven whom vote guilty. This timidity can be interpreted as weak conviction swayed by the guilty majority's influence.

Two of the jurors, a particularly irascible individual and a sickly, prejudiced man, appeal to normative social influence. The volatile man quickly bolsters his position when he vituperates, "of course he is guilty," prior to the vote being taken. The sickly man exclaims after the vote and Henry Fonda's deviation, "there's always has to be one." Both men attempt to harness the power of normative social influence to convince all that a guilty vote is applicable.

Informational social influence, or conformity based on others views, is exacerbated by time constraints. The nature of a jury, despite philosophical leanings, is one of severe time pressure. The courts are an overburdened element within our justice system. Perceived pressure, upon a jury, by judges and prosecutors alike, could confound the jury process and create conformity according to the theory of normative informational social influence. Though the film is void of any references from the judge regarding timelines of decision this is a relevant factor possibly influencing the "12 Angry Men," and must be considered as a potential factor in creating normative social influence.

An additional time constraint is placed upon the jury by their wishes and needs. Many of the men, in this all-male jury, describe their employment or other aspects of life. Jury duty impedes their life's progress, creating an unmentioned time constraint. As the sickly man exclaims, "I have three stations to attend to," possibly referring to his business, and as the one of the jurors reminds the group, "I have tickets to tonight's Yankees game," each are putting the rest under time constraints. Time constraints

exacerbate informational social influence and possibly played a role in causing some of the jurors to cast guilty, conformist votes.

An advertising executive, also a member of the jury, exemplifies the muscle of informational social influences. After the not-guilty jurors provide the flippant ad executive with a cogent argument, he changes his vote from guilty to not guilty. Oppositely, when the guilty favoring jurors provide the ad executive with a compelling argument he is influenced to reverse his not-guilty vote. After questioning, the advertising executive is unable to formulate his own reasons for his decision. His reliance on others is an example of informational social influence, or the tendency that produces conformity when a person believes other's judgments are correct.

Majority influence and social impact theory induce conformity. These theories are applicable in the jury context and are relevant to an interpretation of "Twelve Angry Men." Social impact theory stipulates the situational and personal factors that engender conformity. Through the work of Milgram, Asch, Sherif, Schacter and others, social impact theory and majority influence are defined as a function of strength of source, immediacy of sources, group size, awareness of norms, compatriots in dissention, age, gender and culture.

Within "12 Angry Men," two figures emerge as leaders for each faction, guilty versus not guilty. These two men, Henry Fonda supporting the not guilty side and a well dressed businessman arguing for a guilty verdict, elicit a certain power and strength. Although the jurors had no prior relationship, these two sources of influence are powerful. Each builds respect and admiration for the faction leader prior to changing their vote. An additional factor in the strength/power element is portrayed in the volatile

gentleman's behavior prior to the initial vote casting. His eagerness to convict the killer is conveyed in a boisterous manner that could be construed as powerful.

Conformity is enhanced by the immediacy element of social impact theory. Within the confines of the juror's room dissention would be difficult. Without anonymity dissention is increasingly difficult. Perception of norms is unequivocally a factor enhancing conformity. Stereotyping and prejudice were rampant at the time "12 Angry Men" was filmed. Cleverly, the director and writers used the movie to address this scornful and widespread racism. Negative sentiment regarding African-Americans in the fifties was routine. The sickly juror utilizes racism in his decision of guilt or innocence. This possibly resulted in the arousal of a perceived negative racial norm and caused others to utilize the accused's ethnic background for decisive means.

Henry Fonda's temerity in opposing the group singularly belies a component of social impact theory and majority influence, while supporting another. According to social impact theory when the majority rulings are immediate and widespread conformity will result. Fonda's vote of not guilty negates this presumption but support the theory of an ally in dissent. According to the ally in dissent component of social impact and majority theory, in the presence of one dissenter others are likely to follow. This occurs. Fonda's vote of not guilty elicits dissention in others as well.

The age components of social impact theory are highlighted within the film too. According to Solomon Asch, a prominent social psychologist, older individuals are less likely to conform. The oldest juror is the first one to break from conformity and switch his vote to not guilty.

Conformity occurs through normative social influence, informational social influence and lastly through social impact and majority influences. “Twelve Angry Men” highlights the efficacy of these theories.

### **Attitude Change and Persuasion**

Persuasion is a function of attitude and is an integral aspect in the intriguing nature of “Twelve Angry Men.” Persuasion is the process by which attitudes are changed. According to social psychologists Richard Petty and John Cacioppo, there are two routes to persuasion: peripheral and central. As persuasion plays a central role in the plot of “12 Angry Men,” these theories are applicable.

The central route to persuasion is the process by which a person thinks carefully about a communication and is influenced by the power of argument. Fonda and the reserved businessman’s approach to attitude change are both characterized by the central route. Fonda appeals for the accused’s innocence in a well-thought, elucidated manner. He stipulates his points through empirical evidence and eventually sways the other jurors. The central route to persuasion characterized Fonda’s approach. Likewise, the businessman utilizes his stoic, inductive nature to create a cogent argument based on fact. He, like Fonda, attempts to use the central route to persuasion. Lastly, a foreign juror appeals to the central route to persuasion when he advocates, “going deeper,” in reference to an examination of the facts.

The peripheral route of persuasion is characterized by superficial cues surrounding the argument rather than the argument’s factual validity. The sickly man urges the other jurors to construe an attitude based on peripheral ethnic and racial cues. Eventually shunned by fellow jurors, the sickly man encourages to his confederates to

convict the man because, “we know how these [African-Americans] act. They are all the same. They lie, they steal they drink.” Through the use of non-factual, environmental cues, the sick gentleman utilizes the peripheral route to persuasion.

Route selection is another component of relevance in “12 Angry Men.” The gentleman jurors who care deeply about the fate of the accused boy, are concerned with justice, take pride in their intellect regardless of social status, and are involved in discussion are susceptible to the central route. This is exemplified through Henry Fonda’s character, the oldest juror and the foreign juror. Each chose the central route.

Those who are not able to understand the complexity of the trial, are distracted and pressed for time tend to take the peripheral route. This phenom is exemplified by the sickly man who complains about his business being interrupted and speaks English poorly, the Yankee’s fan who urgently wants to make it to the ball yard and finally in the volatile man who is distracted by his own personal rage, elicited by the young accused man.

Source theory in persuasion is relevant to the movie as well. Sources are effective if they seem to possess credibility and likeability. Henry Fonda and the businessman, both eminent sources within the jury room, both convey a competence. Competence is achieved through oratory ability and appearance of intelligence, qualities both men possess. Moreover, their credibility is enhanced by their lack of self-interest. Neither Fonda, nor the businessman stands to benefit from their positions. Fonda, arguing from the minority, is at a distinctive advantage because, according to source theory, those who take unpopular stands intrigue people. Lastly, both gentlemen are physically attractive,

which according to source theory enhances credibility. Well dressed and composed, both Fonda and the businessman served as attractive and hence persuasive sources.

Attitude and persuasion theory are both found within the film “Twelve Angry Men.” Characters and plot highlight the central and peripheral theories of attitude change and give credence to the impact of source theory in persuasion. Route and source are elements, which strongly influence attitude.

### **Group Process**

The jury environment is worthy of small group status. As a collective engaged in direct social interaction in pursuit of a verdict, “The Twelve Angry Men,” are deemed a small group. Several theories of group performance are applicable within “Twelve Angry Men,” but they are subject to interpretation and run a less evident course than theories previously discussed. Social facilitation, group polarization and social loafing are theories that are evident within the film.

Social facilitation theory states, presence of others hinders performance on difficult tasks but enhances performance on easy tasks. Within the film a meek man of high intellect is confounded and apprehensive when approached by the group for a valuation of his opinion. This timid fellow, a banker, establishes his intellect later in the film but initially, in the presence and under the scrutiny of others is unable to come up with viable, cogent responses to his fellow juror’s questions. Specifically this man collapses under the scrutiny of others, exemplifying evaluation apprehension theory, a component of social facilitation. Evaluation apprehension theory posits that the presence of others will produce social facilitation effects when the audience is perceived as potential evaluators.

Social loafing is a theory proved through numerous scientific studies of group process. Social loafing defined is group-produced reduction in individual output on task where effort is pooled. This is exemplified when many of the jurors provide inadequate arguments to support their ideas. This theory is relevant when the volatile gentleman abdicates his argument to the businessman exclaiming, "you tell them." The sports fan's behavior is also indicative of social loafing. He often provides inadequate, ill-thought, effortless responses when confronted about his opinion regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused.

Fonda's adherence and conviction to evaluating the case is an example of social compensation. Fonda's character believes in the justice and morality implied within the constitutional guarantee afforded by the jury process. Fonda says, "this man deserves a fair trial and I won't put a man to death without examining the facts." His conviction, in the presence of social loafing, exemplifies compensation.

Group polarization and groupthink are theories relevant to an examination of the group processes occurring within "Twelve Angry Men." Group polarization is the concept that group discussion generally serves to strengthen the already dominant point of view. This often leads to risky shift. "Twelve Angry Men," initially exemplifies this process but with consistent derision is suppressed by Fonda and his associates. Initial discussion does seem to strengthen the confidence of those preferential to a guilty verdict.

The situation in the jurors experience is highly susceptible to the vices of groupthink. Groupthink is likely to occur in a group that has unquestioned beliefs, pressure to conform, invulnerability, censors, cohesiveness from within, isolation from without and a strong leader. The "Twelve Angry Men," find themselves in a situation that

matches many of the variables conducive to groupthink. Perhaps the lack of cohesiveness of ideation and the lack of a strong unified leader prevented groupthink from occurring. Without the influence of Fonda, these pressured, all-white males, segregated by environment would engage in groupthink.

Theories of group process including: groupthink, group polarization, social loafing, social compensation and social facilitation are exemplified in the movie “Twelve Angry Men.” The impact of group process is potentially damaging and in the context of a jury must be mitigated to ensure fairness and adherence to values.

“Twelve Angry Men,” was released at a time when political upheaval and social justice was fomenting. In an era of social, scientific and moral expansion, “Twelve Angry Men,” seems to mirror the growing sentiments of the United States in the late fifties. The film’s illumination of several social psychological theories provides a basis for critical examination and a forum for understanding attitudes, group process and conformity. There is no distinction between those men and myself or you. An awareness of the limiting nature and possible danger of many of these social psychological theories is beneficial and necessary to an understanding of us.