Psychology
Conformity and Obedience

- Conformity is a change in behaviour as a result of real or imagined group pressure.
- Conformity can also be defined as yielding to group pressures, publicly and sometimes privately as well.
- Normative influence: refers to the influence that others have, to lead an individual to conform and observe social norms. It is based on the need that an individual has for social acceptance and approval.
- Informational influence refers to the influence to change, which comes from information gained from other people whose views are considered both valid and reliable. It is based on an individual's need for certainty.

- Changing behaviour but not private opinion (compliance)
- Changing both behaviour and opinion (internalisation)

- When someone conforms to the demands of a given role in society, as seen in the behaviour of a nurse or a traffic warden (identification)

- One of the first studies of conformity was carried out by Sherif, in 1935, who showed how participants, when faced with an uncertain situation would take on the judgements of other people. Sherif used the autokinetic effect – a perceptual illusion in which a point of light seen in darkness appears to move about – and asked participants to estimate how much the light moved. People who were tested individually produced answers that were quite different from each other. However people who were tested together gave answers that were much more similar – in fact they eventually converged so much that a group norm was established.

- Asch, in 1951, found that participants would give answers which they knew to be untrue, rather than ones which deviated from the views being expressed by others. The task in Asch's studies involved judging which line from a set of three was the same length as a stimulus line, and it was clearly apparent what each correct answer was. Individuals, when tested on their own by Asch, would score 100% on this task without difficulty. But when then put the individual into groups of seven or nine sitting around a table and the group was supposed to discuss the answers, before each member of the group was asked to give his answer. After the first few tests (the neutral trials) where everyone would agree on the right answer, Asch had arranged it that in certain tests (but not all) everyone in the group (apart from the subject) would agree on the wrong answer. 32% of the participants gave the wrong answer, a very high figure considering how easy the tests were and how straightforward the answer should have been.

- Cultural factors - Smith and Bond (1993) carried out a meta-analysis of 133 studies on conformity in 17 countries.
  - Asch(1951) students gave wrong answer on 37% of trials.
  - Smith and Bond found average figure was 30%.
  - Highest 58% wrong answers for Indian teachers in Fiji.
  - Lowest 14% among Belgian students.
  - Conformity may be seen as a positive feature in cultures where interdependence is valued more highly than independence (individualism/collectivism)

- Individual factors – Crutchfield (1954) used cubicles, testing six participants at a time. The participants could not see, or be seen, by others. He aimed to see if the increased privacy reduced conformity Participants had to respond by pressing buttons to questions like 'What shape has the greater area, the star or the circle?'. They thought that they were answering in turn (as they were all labelled number 6)