



Social influence 3: obedience

Module PSYB2

Section A - Social Psychology

3.2.1 social influence

What we will be learning about

As a school pupil you have spent many years doing what you are told by teachers. Have you ever stopped to ask why? Obedience can have terrible consequences when people obey orders to hurt or kill others, as much of the history of the 20th Century makes clear. In this topic we will learn about the processes that cause people to obey orders, even if they know that what they are ordered to do is wrong. We will look at the factors that make obedience more or less likely and consider the question of whether there is a type of person who is more likely than others to obey. In doing so we will learn about some startling research. We will also start considering how to assess the usefulness of such studies.

What you could be tested on

	A01 – knowledge & understanding	A02 – application, analysis & evaluation	A03 – methods, statistics & ethics (how science works)
You must be able to...	Define obedience, defiance of authority. Describe the study of obedience carried out by Milgram and at least two variations. State at least two situational factors that affect obedience and outline their effect on obedience. Outline the characteristics of the Authoritarian personality.	Distinguish between obedience and conformity. Analyse situations to identify factors that may affect obedience/disobedience. Distinguish between dispositional and situational explanations of obedience.	Predict the effect of situational variables in Asch-type studies. Define internal validity, demand characteristics, triangulation. Analyse the Milgram study in terms of risk of harm to participants and other ethical issues (e.g. deception)
You should be able to...	Describe a range of studies of obedience besides Milgram's, including some reference to cross-cultural research. Explain situational influences on obedience including perceived legitimacy and the agentic shift. Explain how a person might develop an authoritarian personality. Describe ways of/conditions that support defying authority.	Interpret research findings in terms of situational explanations of obedience. Assess the extent to which research findings support the view that obedience is a dispositional/situational phenomenon. Apply knowledge of factors that facilitate obedience to explain those that inhibit it.	Assess the external validity of Milgram's (and other) studies with reference to samples and settings. Assess the internal validity of Milgram's (and other) studies of obedience.
You could be able to...	Outline the role of attribution bias in producing dispositionally-skewed explanations of destructive behaviour.	Evaluate a range of theoretical explanations of obedience and defiance of authority.	Consider the extent to which ethical objections to Milgram's work stem from the unpalatable nature of his findings.

