

Social Psychology – Notes from 30/01/04

Differences between conformity and obedience

- Both are the result of social influence. In obedience, social influence takes the form of orders from an authority figure. In the case of conformity, the social norms of the majority exert influence on the individual to go along with the behaviour and attitudes of the group.
- Obedience often involves little more than public compliance. Conformity can involve long lasting changes in attitude.
- People who command obedience often display signs of their authority (e.g. uniforms) and individuals are usually well aware that they have obeyed an order. In the case of conformity, individuals may be unaware that they have been subjected to conformity pressures.

Why people resist obedience according to Milgram

- Proximity of victim – Milgram moved the learner closer to the teacher, slowly. Therefore physical presence and contact made teachers sympathise with learner.
- Proximity of authority – Milgram gave telephone instructions. People found it easier to resist obedience in the absence of direct surveillance.
- Presence of allies – when bogus teachers refused to carry on, the real participants withdrew, suggestion it is different to confront authority alone.