

people are motivated not only by role models but also their own beliefs and previous experiences.

### Social influence: compliance

Compliance is another important aspect of behaviour within a group. Conformity occurs when the situation does not exert direct pressure to follow the majority, but the pressure is often perceived by individuals as influencing their behaviour. Compliance can be defined as the result of direct pressure to respond to a request—for example, when people comply to buy certain products, even though the direct pressure may not always be apparent to the individual.

One of the leading researchers in the psychology of persuasion, Robert Cialdini, has outlined **compliance techniques**, or ways in which individuals are influenced to comply with the demands or desires of others. This is the cornerstone of advertising and marketing, where sales tactics are always carefully examined on the basis of what would most likely persuade consumers to buy specific products. Cialdini outlines six factors that influence the likelihood that people will comply with a request:

- **Authority:** People comply more often with those in positions of some authority. Advertisers use famous people to brand their product so that people associate the brand with the famous person. For example, *If that famous basketball player buys those shoes, then I should too!*
- **Commitment:** Once people have agreed to something, either by their behaviour or by a statement of belief, they are likely to comply with similar requests.
- **Liking:** People comply with requests from people they like.
- **Reciprocity:** People often feel they need to “return a favour”.
- **Scarcity:** Opportunities seem more valuable to people when they are less readily available. This is why there are so many “last chance” and “limited time only” sales.
- **Social proof:** People view a behaviour as correct if they see others performing it.

### Reciprocity

Travelling in the Middle East, tourists are often exposed to the compliance technique of reciprocity. Walking into a shop in the bazaar in Istanbul, you are greeted by the kind owner who invites you in, asks you where you are from, and then offers you a cup of coffee and some lovely Turkish pastries. As you sit there, the hospitality of the owner makes you feel a bit guilty about just walking out without buying anything. If you were already thinking of buying a carpet, you might decide to have him show you his collection. As he displays more and more carpets, taking them down from the rack, unrolling them, and then talking to you about their quality, you recognize that he is doing more and more work for you. You are more likely to feel that you need to purchase one of these carpets. If you were not thinking of buying a carpet—or do not have enough money even if you wanted to—you may find yourself looking around the shop for something small that you *could* buy, and maybe give as a gift to someone when you return home.

### Be a critical thinker

How does our knowledge of mirror neurons potentially help to explain social learning theory?

### Possible essay question

With reference to two studies, evaluate research on conformity to group norms.

### Assessment advice

The command term “evaluate” asks you to discuss the strengths and the limitations of the conformity research in relation to the theory. There are many things that you may include in such an evaluation, e.g. methodological, ethical, cultural, and gender considerations.

What happens here is explained by the **reciprocity principle**—that is, the social norm that we should treat others the way they treat us. Anthropologists and sociologists claim that reciprocity is one of the most widespread and basic norms of human culture. This rule says that a person must try to repay what another person has provided. This is a way of creating confidence among people in that what is given to another is not lost but rather a sign of a future obligation that enables development of various kinds of relationships and exchanges. In fact, nearly everyone is trained from childhood to abide by this rule. Since this rule is so powerful it can be used to one's advantage as in the case of the carpet seller who offers a small gift because he knows that if a person accepts it, he or she is likely to buy something because of the rule of reciprocity.

Arousal of feelings of guilt plays a key role, as seen from the example above. The strategy of reciprocity is not limited to Middle Eastern cultures. It is common practice in many cultures to offer gifts, free travel, or free time in hotels to potential customers—for example, when they subscribe to a magazine, sign up for a trip, or plan to buy a property. Lynn and McCall (1998) even found that when restaurant customers are given a mint or sweet with their bill, the size of the tip they leave increases.

However, reciprocity does not always involve giving gifts. It can also be because one feels that the other person has already compromised on what he or she wanted, and that this compromise should therefore be acknowledged with some behaviour. One example of this is called the **door-in-the-face technique**. In this case, a request is made which will surely be turned down. Then a second request is made which asks less of someone. People are more likely to accept the second request because they feel that the person has already lowered the request in order to accommodate them. An example of this is a study by Cialdini et al. (1975). Posing as representatives of the “County Youth Counselling Program”, he and his team stopped university students on campus and asked them if they would be willing to chaperone a group of juvenile delinquents on a day trip to the zoo—83 per cent refused to volunteer. Another time they stopped students and first asked if they would be willing to sign up to work for two hours per week as counsellors for a minimum of two years—no one agreed to volunteer. But when they followed up the students’ refusal with the request to take the juvenile delinquents to the zoo, approximately 50 per cent of students agreed to serve as chaperones.

This behaviour can be seen in many contexts of daily life—for example, when the salesperson lowers the price of a product or service because the customer thinks it is too expensive. Once that compromise is made, the customer is more likely to make a purchase. So what can be done? The best defence against manipulation is perhaps not to reject totally what is offered by others but rather to accept initial favours in good faith—and in some cases be prepared to view them as tricks. If offers are seen in this way, there is no need to feel the necessity to respond with a favour unless you really want to.

### Commitment

Commitment is characterized as being consistent with previous behaviour. Cialdini argues that once people make a choice or take a stand, they will encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with that commitment. Often, this occurs even when it appears illogical to the outsider. Kurt Lewin (1951) argued that behaviour is motivated by **goal gradients**. The longer people commit themselves to something, the less likely they are to abandon the goal. For example, have you ever waited in a queue that is not moving? The longer you stand in line, the less likely you are to change to another queue or simply give up waiting—even though it is illogical to think, “Since I have already waited two hours in this queue, it has to start moving soon!”

Getting people to make a commitment to something small, with the hope of persuading them to agree to something larger often employs the **foot-in-the-door technique**. For example, it is not uncommon nowadays to be stopped on a street corner and asked to sign a petition. These petitions may be for or against a law that may be passed, in support of a political party, or as part of a referendum. Often, such petitions are simply discarded but the simple act of having signed the petition may influence a person’s later behaviour with regard to the issue. By getting people to agree to sign their name, it is hoped that they will then support that cause in upcoming elections. An example of a study that supports this view was carried out by Dickerson et al. (1992). The team wanted to see if they could get university students to conserve water in the dormitory showers. To do so, they asked students in Santa Cruz, California to do two things: first, they asked them to sign a poster that said, “Take shorter showers. If I can do it, so can you!” Then they asked them take a survey designed to make them think about their own water wastage. Their shower times were then monitored. Students who had signed the poster and then been forced to think about their own water usage had average shower times of about 3.5 minutes. This was significantly shorter than the average shower time across the dormitories as a whole. You could argue, of course, that it may be the other way round: they sign because they already have a commitment to the cause.

Cialdini et al. (1974) demonstrated the technique of **low-balling** in a university setting. They asked a class of first-year psychology students to volunteer to be part of a study on cognition that would meet at 7 a.m. Though enthusiastic about psychology, these were college students. Only 24 per cent were willing to leave the warm comfort of their beds that early in the morning to support research in psychology. In a second group they were asked the same favour, but this time they were not told a time. Of these, 56 per cent agreed to take part. When they were then told that they would have to meet at 7 a.m.—and that they could back out if they wished—no one backed out of their commitment. On the day of the actual meeting, 95 per cent of the students who had promised to come showed up for their 7 a.m. appointment.

A final example of the power of compliance techniques can be seen in the controversial practice of **hazing**. Hazing is a series of initiation

rites in order to join an exclusive group, such as a sports team, or a college or university fraternity. Many US universities have barred the practice, after students have died while being exposed to extreme temperatures, drinking themselves into a coma, or literally digging their own graves. In spite of the many horror stories about hazing—and the efforts by universities to stop it—the practice continues. Hazing is a form of initiation that is similar to many of the initiation rites seen in other cultures. In many African societies, there are initiation rites for young men in order to indicate that they have reached adulthood. Also, military training involves “boot camps”, which are not just about teaching recruits how to do their job, but also about humiliation and overcoming difficulty.

Why does this behaviour continue, even if it is potentially dangerous and humiliating for those involved? The individual must first choose to join the group, recognizing that there will be some initiation rite which he or she will have to endure. During the hazing, the participant must rationalize that this is “worth it” in order to be part of the group. Having completed the hazing, the individual has a sense of accomplishment, having proven his or her loyalty to the group. Young’s 1963 study of 54 tribal cultures found that those with the most dramatic and stringent ceremonies were those with the greatest group solidarity. But can this be created in a group without any tradition of such practice?

Aronson and Mills (1959) carried out an experiment to see if someone who has had to endure trouble or pain to join a group will value it more highly than someone who was able to join the group with no effort. In their study, they asked female college students to join a sex discussion group. Some had to go through a severely embarrassing initiation in order to join, while others joined with no initiation ceremony. When the women were finally allowed to take part in the group, the meeting was made up of confederates who were trained to be as boring and uninteresting as possible. The women who went through the initiation ceremony reported that they found the meeting extremely valuable, whereas those who did not have any initiation recognized that the meetings were “worthless and uninteresting”. Gerard and Mathewson (1966) carried out further research where women received electric shocks. Those who endured pain as part of their initiation were more likely to find their group interesting, intelligent, and desirable.



Initiation rites are used in some cultures to mark the passage into adulthood

### *Apply your knowledge*

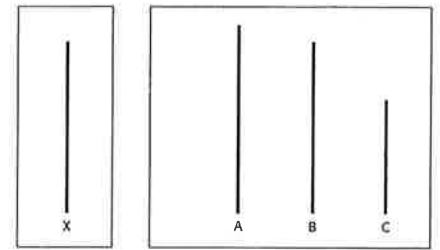
Using either of the compliance techniques discussed in this chapter, think about how you could reasonably (and ethically) increase participation in CAS activities in your school.

## Social influence: conformity

One of the key ways that a society or culture passes down its values and behaviours to its members is through an indirect form of social influence called **conformity**. Conformity is the tendency to adjust one’s thoughts, feelings, or behaviour in ways that are in agreement with those of a particular individual or group, or with accepted standards about how a person should behave in specific situations (social norms). Often, the term “peer pressure” is used to describe the conformity seen in schools, but conformity occurs at all levels of society and is not always simply about the need to fit in with a group of friends at school.

#### 4.2 • Sociocultural level of analysis: social and cultural norms

A classic study of conformity was carried out by Asch (1951). In his study, he wanted to find out to what extent a person would conform to an incorrect answer on a test if the response from the other members of the group was unanimous. The participant entered a room where there were six people and the researcher. The men in the room were dressed like businessmen, in suits and ties. These men were part of the study, and they were playing a role unknown to the participant. They were **confederates**, which helped the researcher to deceive the participant. After the participant took his seat, the group was told that they were going to take part in “a psychological experiment on visual judgement”. They were then shown cards similar to the ones depicted here.



Asch's line test

The participant was asked to select the line from the second card that matched the length of the line on the first card. There were 18 trials in total. In some of the trials, the difference in the lines was hardly noticeable, while in others it was very clear. The confederates had been instructed to answer correctly for some of the trials, but to answer incorrectly for the majority of the trials. The goal was to see if the participant would conform to the wrong answers given by the confederates, even when it was very clear that this response was incorrect.

About 75 per cent of the participants agreed with the confederates' incorrect responses at least once during the trials. Asch found that a mean of 32 per cent of the participants agreed with incorrect responses in half or more of the trials. However, 24 per cent of the participants did not conform to any of the incorrect responses given by the confederates.

During the debriefing after the experiment, Asch asked the participants how they felt about the experiment. All reported experiencing some degree of self-doubt about their answers. Those participants who conformed said that they knew their responses were incorrect, but they went along with the group because they did not want to ruin the experimenter's results, and they did not want to appear to be against the group. Some argue that this could also be explained in terms of “the need to belong”—the need to be part of the group is stronger than the desire to give the correct answer.

This study is referred to as the **Asch paradigm**, and it has been replicated many times. Out of those replications and variations, psychologists have found that the following factors influence the likelihood to conform to the group.

- **Group size:** Asch (1955) found that with only one confederate, just 3 per cent of the participants conformed; with two confederates, the rate rose to 14 per cent; and with three confederates, it rose to 32 per cent. Larger groups did not increase the rate of conformity. In some cases, very large groups even decreased the level of conformity.
- **Unanimity:** Conformity was most likely when all the confederates agreed (Asch 1956). If one of the confederates disagreed, even if it was also an incorrect answer, the participant was significantly less likely to conform.

- **Confidence:** When individuals feel that they are more competent to make decisions with regard to a field of expertise, they are less likely to conform. Perrin and Spencer (1988) found that when they replicated Asch's study with engineers and medical students, conformity rates were almost nil.
- **Self-esteem:** Stang (1973) found that participants with high self-esteem were less likely to conform to incorrect responses.

Though the Asch paradigm has been successfully replicated in many variations, it is still important to take a critical look at the methodology of the study. First, there is the question of artificiality and ecological validity. Do these experiments accurately predict how people will react in real-life situations? In the original experiment, both the task and the use of strangers make this situation somewhat atypical. Asch, however, argued that experiments *are* social situations in which participants feel like an outsider if they dissent. In addition, as with most experiments, there is a concern for demand characteristics—that is, participants may act in a way that they feel is required by the features of the experiment.

In the original study, culture could also have limited the validity of the study. Since only one culture was studied, and the group was not multicultural, the study is limited in its application. Since culture is dynamic, it is possible that the Asch paradigm is no longer valid today, even if it were to be studied in the same cultural groups as the original study.

Ethical considerations also need to be addressed. The participants were deceived, and they were made to feel anxiety about their performance. Today this would not be regarded as acceptable.

Finally, Friend et al. (1990) argue that there is a bias in the interpretation of the findings. In fact, Friend claims that it should be striking to us that in the face of unanimity so many people *did not conform*. Perhaps the question should be which factors allow people to dissent, rather than which factors influence conformity.

### A different way of looking at the Asch paradigm

Can a minority opinion sway the majority to change its views? Moscovici argues that when a minority maintains a consistent view, it is able to influence the majority. In a study carried out by Moscovici and Lage (1976), involving four participants and two confederates, the minority of two confederates described a blue-green colour as green. They found that the minority was able to influence about 32 per cent of the participants to make at least one incorrect judgment about the colour of slides they were shown. In addition, the participants continued to give their incorrect responses even after the two confederates had left the experiment.

How can minority opinions have such influence on the majority? Hogg and Vaughan (1995) argue that some of the reasons for the influence of a minority group could be as follows.

- Dissenting opinions produce uncertainty and doubt.
- Such opinions show that alternatives exist.
- Consistency shows that there is a commitment to the alternative view.

#### 4.2 • Sociocultural level of analysis: social and cultural norms

Throughout the 20th century, there have been several examples of minority commitment to a view not held by the majority—from women's right to vote to civil rights movements. It is through such consistency, for example, that the environmental movement has gradually moved majority opinion more towards conservation and protection of the environment.

Research has shown that minority opinions are essential in a group's decision-making process; otherwise, a group may experience what Irving Janis called **groupthink**. Groupthink is characterized by group members having a unanimous opinion on an issue, and they do not seek out alternative or dissenting opinions. Often, the group is blinded by optimism that their decisions will be successful. Members of the group come to doubt their own reservations and refrain from voicing any dissenting opinions.

A study group is an effective way to prepare for an exam, but only if the members take care to avoid groupthink. Groupthink is what happens when someone in a group suggests an idea, and everyone accepts the idea without considering other possible options. For example, when the group is unsure what the reasons for the First World War were, one individual may come up with what seems at the time to be a plausible answer. If no one takes the time to verify the answer with outside sources, and the group fails to brainstorm alternative answers, groupthink may occur. Teachers can tell when groupthink has happened because several students have the same incorrect answer on an exam, often with exactly the same wording.

#### Why do people conform?

Deutsch and Gerard (1955) argue that conformity is a result of **informational social influence** and **normative social influence**. Informational social influence is based on the way people cognitively process information about a situation. Festinger (1954) said that people evaluate their own opinions and ideas through **social comparison**—that is, by looking at what others do. When one



"Louise, everyone is wearing that this year ...  
don't be such a sheep to fashion."

notices that others are not behaving in the same way, or that they think differently, it causes anxiety. Festinger called this **cognitive dissonance**. If all of your friends like a certain type of music, and you do not, you may experience the odd feeling that you are not “with it”. In order to get rid of this feeling, you may do one of two things. First, you may begin to listen to the music and conform to the group’s opinion about it. Second, you may *rationalize* your opinion, and develop confidence that your opinion is acceptable, even if it is not what the majority of the group thinks.

The second reason people conform is because of normative social influence. This is based on our nature as social animals. People have a need to be accepted by others and to belong. They may conform to avoid rejection and gain social approval. If being opposed to a certain kind of music means never being invited to social gatherings by friends, the choice to learn to like this music is based on the need for their friendship, and the need to belong to that group.

### Cultural aspects of conformity

One of the most significant cultural differences is how people react to the word “conformity”. Studies show that not only do Asian cultures engage in more conforming behaviours than Americans do, but that they also value it to a greater degree. Americans, on the other hand, often see conformity as a negative trait, even though conformity is still part of being an American. One has to be careful not to divide the world’s cultures into an East versus West dichotomy. A study by Cashmore and Goodnow (1986) found that there was a high level of conformity among Italians. In a study by Burgos and Dias-Perez (1986), the researchers found that with regard to childrearing, Puerto Ricans valued conformity and obedience in their children.

Do cultural norms affect conformity? Smith and Bond (1993) carried out a review of 31 conformity studies and found that levels of conformity—that is, the percentage of incorrect responses—ranged from 14 per cent among Belgian students to 58 per cent among Indian teachers in Fiji, with an average of 31.2 per cent. Conformity was lower among participants from individualist cultures—that is, North America and north-west Europe (25.3 per cent)—than from collectivist cultures—that is, Africa, Asia, Oceania, and South America (37.1 per cent). Bond and Smith (1996) found that people who score high on Hofstede’s collectivism scale conform more than people who score lower.

Berry (1967) used a variation of Asch’s conformity paradigm and found that the Temne people of Sierra Leone conformed significantly more than the Inuit people of Canada. He explained this in terms of differences in economic practices. The Temne people have to survive on a single crop that is harvested by all the people in the community. This requires cooperation and coordination of effort, and this is why Temne culture focuses strongly on consensus and agreement. Berry found that consensus is less strongly focused in Inuit culture because the Inuit economy is based on continual hunting and gathering on a relatively individual basis.