

Psychology Transition Tasks



Spec: <https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/psychology/as-and-a-level/psychology-7181-7182/specification-at-a-glance>

Social influence

Getting used to exam technique

Task 1: Read and make notes on the scanned double page spread related to types of and explanations for conformity.

Optional also watch Ms Tovey talk about it here:

<https://www.loom.com/share/62f53fd33ca44684ad92c5af052c0482>

You then need to watch the following Loom in which Ms Tovey explains the assessment objectives in psychology and how to write a 16 mark response:

<https://www.loom.com/share/14fa68bb61764681b9c8f9914e519edf>.

Following this, you will attempt this question: **Outline and evaluate informational social influence and normative social influence as explanations for conformity. [16]**

Please don't worry if you are not completely confident about your response. We are looking here to see how much effort you have put in, so give it your best go. We will give you some feedback on this when you start the course officially in September, but it will not be a graded piece of work.

Issues and debates in psychology: Nature-nurture

Comprehension task

Task 2: The nature-nurture debate runs through all areas of psychology. It requires us to consider: to what extent is our behaviour inherited (in our genes) or acquired (learned through experiences)? Different psychological approaches come down more favourably on one side of the argument or the other. It is an issue that we look at explicitly in the paper 2 'Issues and Debates in Psychology' topic, but it is also implicit throughout the other topics.

You will be watching the documentary 'Three Identical Strangers' and creating a simple summary table where you note down every time you see something which supports the idea that nature is more powerful in driving our behaviour, and every time you see something which suggests it is nurture that is more powerful.

Be prepared to share in September!

3 Identical Strangers is available to watch on Netflix. If there is no way you can access this, please watch this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9h123wEy8s>) in order to complete the task.

The choice is yours!

Open choice psychological research



Task 3: Choose **one** episode/talk from either of these play lists:

1. BBC Radio 4's 'All in the Mind' series:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxx9/episodes/downloads?page=2>

2. Psychological TED talks: <http://www.ted.com/topics/psychology>

After watching/listening to your chosen episode, prepare a presentation to share with a group in class. It should be in the form of a poster, showcasing the main information points. Try to make it as visually appealing as possible, as we would love to display them on our walls (diagrams, pictures, graphics are fab!).

Your presentation should include answers to the following:

1. What *specifically* has psychological research shown about this area?
2. What are the possible *applications*? (i.e. what areas of everyday life can be improved because of this new knowledge?)

CONFORMITY: TYPES AND EXPLANATIONS

THE SPECIFICATION SAYS...

Types of conformity: internalisation, identification and compliance.

Explanations for conformity: informational social influence and normative social influence.

We all like to think that we know our own minds, that we make our own decisions and can tell when someone is trying to manipulate us. In short, we like to think we act *independently*. But is it possible that this is just an illusion? Psychologists believe that we are all subject to the forces of *social influence*. Many of our everyday decisions are the result of pressures to conform to the opinions and behaviours of other people.

KEY TERMS

Conformity – A change in a person's behaviour or opinions as a result of real or imagined pressure from a person or group of people' (Elliot Aronson 2011).

Internalisation – A deep type of conformity where we take on the majority view because we accept it as correct. It leads to a far-reaching and permanent change in behaviour, even when the group is absent.

Identification – A moderate type of conformity where we act in the same way with the group because we value it and want to be part of it. But we don't necessarily agree with everything the majority believes.

Compliance – A superficial and temporary type of conformity where we outwardly go along with the majority view, but privately disagree with it. The change in our behaviour only lasts as long as the group is monitoring us.

Informational social influence (ISI) – An explanation of conformity that says we agree with the opinion of the majority because we believe it is correct. We accept it because we want to be correct as well. This may lead to internalisation (see above).

Normative social influence (NSI) – An explanation of conformity that says we agree with the opinion of the majority because we want to be accepted, gain social approval and be liked. This may lead to compliance (see above).

Types of conformity

Herbert Kelman (1958) suggested that there are three ways in which people **conform** to the opinion of a majority:

Internalisation

Internalisation occurs when a person genuinely accepts the group norms. This results in a private as well as a public change of opinions/behaviour. This change is likely to be permanent because attitudes have been internalised, i.e. become part of the way the person thinks. The change in opinions/behaviour persists even in the absence of other group members.

Identification

Sometimes we conform to the opinions/behaviour of a group because there is something about that group we value. We identify with the group, so we want to be part of it. This may mean we publicly change our opinions/behaviour to achieve this goal, even if we don't privately agree with everything the group stands for.

Compliance

This type of conformity involves simply 'going along with others' in public, but privately not changing personal opinions and/or behaviour. Compliance results in only a superficial change. It also means that a particular behaviour or opinion stops as soon as group pressure stops.

Explanations for conformity

Morton Deutsch and Harold Gerard (1955) developed a **two-process theory**, arguing that there are two main reasons people conform. They are based on two central human needs: the need to be *right* (ISI), and the need to be *liked* (NSI).

Informational social influence (ISI)

Informational social influence (ISI) is about who has the better information – you or the rest of the group. Often we are uncertain about what behaviours or beliefs are right or wrong. For example, you may not know the answer to a question in class. But if most of the class agrees on one answer, you accept that answer because you feel they are likely to be right. The reason individuals follow the behaviour of the group (the majority) is because people want to be right. ISI is a cognitive process because it is to do with what you *think*.

ISI is most likely to happen in situations that are new to a person (so you don't know what is right) or situations where there is some ambiguity, so it isn't clear what is right. It is also typical in crisis situations where decisions have to be made quickly. It also occurs when one person (or group) is regarded as being more of an expert.

Normative social influence (NSI)

Normative social influence (NSI) is about norms, i.e. what is 'normal' or typical behaviour for a social group. Norms regulate the behaviour of groups and individuals so it is not surprising that we pay attention to them. People do not like to appear foolish and prefer to gain social approval rather than be rejected. So NSI is an *emotional* rather than a cognitive process.

NSI is most likely to occur in situations with strangers where you may feel concerned about rejection. It may also occur with people you know because we are most concerned about the social approval of our friends. It may be more pronounced in stressful situations where people have a greater need for social support.

Apply it

Concepts: Social influence at college

It is Oliver's and Lola's first day at college and they are keen to make a good impression. Oliver pretends to be interested in the other students' conversations even though he really finds them boring. Lola watches other students very carefully because she wants to complete her work just like they do, to avoid making any mistakes.

Questions

Whose behaviour is being influenced by informational social influence, Oliver's or Lola's? Whose is being influenced by normative social influence? Explain both of your answers.



There are many reasons for going along with the other people in a group. Often, it's so we can be accepted and liked by them, even if we don't really share their values and opinions.

Practical activity
on page 37

Evaluation

Research support for ISI

Lucas *et al.* (2006) asked students to give answers to mathematical problems that were easy or more difficult. There was greater conformity to incorrect answers when they were difficult rather than when they were easier ones. This was most true for students who rated their mathematical ability as poor.

The study shows that people conform in situations where they feel they don't know the answer, which is exactly the outcome predicted by the ISI explanation. We look to other people and assume they know better than us and must be right.

Individual differences in NSI

Some research shows that NSI does not affect everyone's behaviour in the same way. For example, people who are less concerned with being liked are less affected by NSI than those who care more about being liked. Such people are described as **nAffiliators**. These are people who have a greater need for 'affiliation' – a need for being in a relationship with others. For example, McGhee and Teevan (1967) found that students high in need of affiliation were more likely to conform.

This shows that the desire to be liked underlies conformity for some people more than others. Therefore there are individual differences in the way people respond.

ISI and NSI work together

The idea of Deutsch and Gerrard's 'two-process' approach is that behaviour is *either* due to NSI *or* ISI. But the truth is that, more often, *both* processes are involved. For example, conformity is reduced when there is one other dissenting participant in the Asch experiment (see the next spread). This dissenter may reduce the power of NSI (because the dissenter provides social support) or may reduce the power of ISI (because there is an alternative source of information).

This shows that it isn't always possible to be sure whether NSI or ISI is at work. This is the case in **lab** studies, but is even truer in real-life conformity situations outside the lab. This casts serious doubt over the view of ISI and NSI as two processes operating independently in conforming behaviour.

Evaluation eXtra

Individual differences in ISI

As with NSI (above), ISI does not affect everyone's behaviour in the same way. For example, Asch (1955) found that students were less conformist (28%) than other participants (37%). Perrin and Spencer (1980) conducted a study involving science and engineering students and found very little conformity (details on the next spread).

Consider: Explain why such individual differences are a limitation of the ISI explanation.

Research support for NSI

Asch (1951) found that many of his participants went along with a clearly wrong answer just because other people did (see next spread). So he asked them why they did this. Some of the participants said they felt self-conscious giving the correct answer and they were afraid of disapproval. When Asch repeated his study but asked participants to write down their answers instead of saying them out loud, conformity rates fell to 12.5%.

Consider: How does this research support the NSI explanation? Why is this a strength of the explanation?

Apply it

Concepts: Real-life application

Schultz *et al.* (2008) found they were able to change the behaviour of hotel guests by using printed messages encouraging them to save energy. The messages that suggested other guests were using fewer bath towels were the most successful.

Question

Does this demonstrate ISI or NSI? Explain your answer.

Apply it

Methods: Conformity at work

A psychologist studied conformity by observing five people starting new jobs in an office of a major British retail company.

Questions

1. Explain why this could be considered to be a **naturalistic observation**. (2 marks) (See page 180.)
2. Explain *one* strength and *one* limitation of naturalistic observation. (2 marks + 2 marks)
3. The psychologist needed to devise some **behavioural categories**. So she had to decide which behaviours could be considered examples of conformity. Explain what is meant by behavioural categories. (2 marks) (See page 182.)
4. Give *three* examples of possible behavioural categories in the context of this study. (3 marks)
5. The psychologist used **event sampling** to observe conforming behaviours over a two-week period during break-times and lunchtimes. Explain what is meant by event sampling. (2 marks) (See page 182.)
6. When the psychologist analysed her results, she found high levels of conforming behaviour by people starting new jobs. Use your knowledge of informational social influence and normative social influence to explain why people might conform in this situation. (4 marks)

STUDY TIPS

• The 'Apply it' questions on every spread give you an opportunity to practise the skill of applying your knowledge – which is a good test of your understanding.

CHECK IT

1. One type of conformity is internalisation. Explain what psychologists mean by the term *internalisation* in this context. [2 marks]
2. Explain what is meant by the term *informational social influence* in relation to conformity. [2 marks]
3. Outline normative social influence as an explanation for conformity. [4 marks]
4. Describe and evaluate informational social influence **and** normative social influence as explanations for conformity. Refer to evidence in your answer. [12 marks AS, 16 marks AL]