1.7 Conformity: types, explanations, Asch's research and Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment

AQA 7182 · about 80 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 There are three types of conformity: internalisation, compliance and identification.

(a) Explain what is meant by 'internalisation' as a type of conformity. **(2)**

(b) Explain what is meant by 'compliance' as a type of conformity. **(2)**

(c) Explain what is meant by 'identification' as a type of conformity, and state which of the three types generally results in the most permanent change to a person's private beliefs. **(2)**

(Total for Question 1 is 6 marks)

2 Asch (1951) conducted a laboratory experiment on conformity using a line-judgment task.

(a) Outline the aim and basic task used in Asch's (1951) study. **(3)**

(b) Describe how Asch used 'critical trials' to measure conformity. **(3)**

(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)

3 Zimbardo (1971) investigated conformity to social roles using a simulated prison environment.

(a) Outline how Zimbardo set up his Stanford Prison Experiment (1971). **(4)**

(b) The study was originally intended to run for two weeks. Outline what actually happened. **(3)**

(Total for Question 3 is 7 marks)

4 Zimbardo's study produced striking findings about how both the 'guards' and the 'prisoners' behaved.

(a) Outline the findings of Zimbardo's study in relation to the behaviour of the 'guards'. **(3)**

(b) Outline the findings of Zimbardo's study in relation to the behaviour of the 'prisoners'. **(3)**

(Total for Question 4 is 6 marks)

5 At a monthly book club meeting, a new member, Tom, has read the chosen novel and privately thinks the ending is weak. When it is his turn to comment, every other member has already praised the ending enthusiastically. Tom says he 'loved' the ending too. Later, reflecting at home on his own, he still privately feels the ending was weak.

(a) Using the information given, identify which type of conformity Tom has shown (internalisation, identification or compliance), and justify your answer using evidence from the scenario. **(3)**

(b) Identify which explanation for conformity, ISI or NSI, best accounts for Tom's behaviour, and justify your answer. **(3)**

(Total for Question 5 is 6 marks)

6 A group of six sales assistants in a shop are individually asked by their new manager to estimate how many units of a product they think will sell next month. In the meeting, the first five assistants (who have worked together for a long time) all confidently give the same high estimate. The sixth assistant, Priya, privately thinks the true figure is much lower, but when it is her turn to speak she gives the same high estimate as the rest of the group.

Discuss explanations for conformity. Refer to the scenario above as part of your answer.

(Total for Question 6 is 16 marks)

7 Asch went on to investigate which variables affected the level of conformity.

(a) Outline how group (majority) size affected conformity in Asch's research. **(3)**

(b) Outline how breaking the unanimity of the majority affected conformity in Asch's research. **(3)**

(c) Outline how task difficulty affected conformity in Asch-type research. **(3)**

(Total for Question 7 is 9 marks)

8 Zimbardo's study has been evaluated on ethical grounds and for what it suggests about the causes of behaviour.

(a) Identify one ethical issue raised by Zimbardo's study, and explain how it arose. **(4)**

(b) Explain what the findings of Zimbardo's study suggest about the relative power of social roles (situational factors) compared with individual personality (dispositional factors) in determining behaviour. **(4)**

(Total for Question 8 is 8 marks)

Mark scheme · 1.7 Conformity: types, explanations, Asch's research and Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment

Question 1

(a) conforming both publicly and privately, so the person genuinely changes their private opinion/behaviour oe **B1**

(a) the change is usually permanent and persists even when the group is no longer present oe **B1**

(a) Answer: A genuine, private and public change of belief/behaviour that persists even without the group present.

(b) conforming publicly/in behaviour only, while privately disagreeing with the group oe **B1**

(b) the change is temporary and stops once group pressure is removed oe **B1**

(b) Answer: A public-only, temporary change of behaviour; the private opinion stays unchanged.

(c) identification: conforming to the opinions/behaviour of a group because the person values membership of the group, even if the belief is not fully internalised oe **B1**

(c) internalisation cao **B1**

(c) Answer: Identification: adopting a group's views because of valuing membership of that group. Internalisation produces the most lasting private change.

Question 2

(a) aim: to investigate the extent to which people would conform to an obviously incorrect majority view oe **M1**

(a) male American participants were placed in a group with several confederates who the participant believed were also genuine participants oe **M1**

(a) the group was shown a standard line and three comparison lines, and had to say aloud which comparison line matched the standard line in length, with the real participant answering last or near-last oe **A1**

(a) Answer: Asch tested conformity using a line-judgment task, with a lone real participant among several confederates.

(b) on most trials the confederates gave the obviously correct answer oe **M1**

(b) on certain (critical) trials, all the confederates unanimously gave the same, obviously wrong answer oe **M1**

(b) the researchers recorded whether the genuine participant conformed to (agreed with) the incorrect majority answer on these critical trials oe **A1**

(b) Answer: On critical trials the confederates unanimously gave a wrong answer; conformity was measured by whether the real participant agreed with them.

Question 3

(a) Zimbardo converted the basement of the Stanford University psychology department into a mock prison oe **M1**

(a) male student volunteers, screened as psychologically stable, were randomly assigned to the role of 'prisoner' or 'guard' oe **M1**

(a) 'prisoners' were unexpectedly arrested at home, then processed and given a uniform and an identifying number oe **A1**

(a) 'guards' were given uniforms, sunglasses and batons, and told to maintain order but not to use physical violence oe **A1**

(a) Answer: A mock prison was built at Stanford; volunteers were randomly assigned to 'guard' or 'prisoner' roles and given corresponding uniforms/props.

(b) the study was stopped after only six days oe **M1**

(b) this was because the guards had become increasingly abusive/authoritarian towards the prisoners oe **M1**

(b) and several prisoners were showing signs of extreme stress/emotional breakdown oe **A1**

(b) Answer: It was stopped after six days (not the planned two weeks) due to the guards' abusive behaviour and the prisoners' distress.

Question 4

(a) many of the guards quickly settled into their assigned role and began behaving in an increasingly authoritarian/cruel way towards the prisoners oe **M1**

(a) some guards devised humiliating or degrading tasks/punishments for the prisoners oe **A1**

(a) this occurred even though the guards had been screened beforehand as psychologically stable, ordinary individuals oe **A1**

(a) Answer: Guards conformed strongly to their role, becoming increasingly authoritarian and, in some cases, cruel.

(b) prisoners initially rebelled but soon became increasingly passive and obedient towards the guards oe **M1**

(b) several prisoners showed signs of severe emotional distress, and one was released early because of this oe **A1**

(b) prisoners generally conformed to the passive, subordinate expectations of their assigned role oe **A1**

(b) Answer: Prisoners became passive and obedient, and some showed severe distress, contributing to the study's early termination.

Question 5

(a) compliance cao **B1**

(a) justification refers to Tom's private opinion remaining unchanged (he still privately feels the ending was weak) oe **M1**

(a) only his public statement/behaviour changed, which is the defining feature of compliance rather than internalisation or identification oe **A1**

(a) Answer: Compliance - his public statement changed but his private opinion, reflected on later, did not.

(b) normative social influence (NSI) cao **B1**

(b) justification refers to Tom wanting to be accepted/liked by the group or avoid standing out from their enthusiasm, rather than being genuinely persuaded oe **M1**

(b) since his private opinion is unaffected, this rules out ISI (which would involve him genuinely coming to believe the group's view is correct) oe **A1**

(b) Answer: NSI - Tom goes along publicly to fit in with the group, without genuinely changing his private view.

Question 6

Level 4 Knowledge of explanations for conformity is accurate and generally well detailed. Discussion/evaluation is thorough and effective, showing a good range of relevant material used interactively, including material both supporting and challenging the explanations. The scenario is applied effectively and consistently throughout the answer. The answer is clear, coherent and focused, and specialist terminology is used effectively. **13-16**

Level 3 Knowledge of explanations for conformity is evident, with some detail, although there may be occasional inaccuracy. Discussion/evaluation is apparent and mostly effective, and is partly interactive. Application to the scenario is present but may be less consistent or less well developed. The answer is mostly clear and organised, and specialist terminology is used, generally appropriately. **9-12**

Level 2 Knowledge of explanations for conformity is present but limited, and may be muddled or only partly relevant in places. Discussion/evaluation, where present, is limited/superficial. Application to the scenario is attempted but may be brief, undeveloped or only loosely connected. The answer lacks clear organisation in places, and specialist terminology is used inconsistently. **5-8**

Level 1 Knowledge is very limited and answers may be simplistic, disjointed, or presented as a list. Discussion/evaluation, if present, is barely discernible. Application to the scenario, if attempted, is muddled or absent. The answer lacks structure. Specialist terminology is used inappropriately or is missing. **1-4**

Level 0 No creditable content. **0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: explanations include informational social influence (ISI), conforming because we believe others have more accurate knowledge, particularly in ambiguous situations, and normative social influence (NSI), conforming to be accepted or to avoid social disapproval.
- AO1: Deutsch and Gerard (1955) originally distinguished between these two explanations.
- AO1: Asch's research showed that conformity increases when a task is made more ambiguous (supporting ISI) and falls sharply when the majority's unanimity is broken (supporting NSI).
- AO2 (application): Priya's situation is ambiguous, a genuine sales forecast where she may be unsure of the true figure, so ISI could explain her going along with the confident, unanimous group of experienced colleagues.
- AO2 (application): because Priya continues to privately think the figure is much lower even after speaking, her public agreement looks like compliance driven by NSI, a wish to avoid standing out from a group she works closely with, rather than a genuine change of belief.
- AO3 supporting evidence: Asch found conformity fell sharply when participants wrote their answers down privately rather than announcing them aloud, since removing public visibility removed the normative pressure to agree, supporting NSI as a genuine mechanism, consistent with Priya's continuing private disagreement.
- AO3 supporting evidence: Asch's task-difficulty variation, where increased ambiguity increased conformity, supports ISI as relevant to Priya's more ambiguous business-forecasting scenario.
- AO3 challenging evidence: not everyone conforms, a substantial minority of Asch's participants never conformed on any critical trial, showing individual differences (e.g. confidence) that ISI/NSI alone do not fully explain; a different employee in Priya's position might have given an honest, lower estimate.
- AO3 challenging evidence: Perrin and Spencer's (1980) much lower conformity rates suggest the strength of conformity effects may vary by culture and era, so ISI/NSI may not predict conformity levels equally well in every workplace context today.

Question 7

(a) Asch varied the number of confederates forming the unanimous majority oe **M1**

(a) conformity increased as the size of the majority increased, up to about three confederates oe **M1**

(a) beyond around three confederates, adding further confederates had little additional effect on conformity levels oe **A1**

(a) Answer: Conformity rose as majority size increased up to about three confederates, then levelled off.

(b) Asch introduced a dissenting confederate who gave the correct answer (or a different wrong answer) rather than agreeing with the majority oe **M1**

(b) this broke the unanimous agreement of the majority oe **A1**

(b) conformity fell sharply, showing that the unanimity of the majority, not just its size, matters for conformity to occur oe **A1**

(b) Answer: Adding one dissenting confederate broke the majority's unanimity and sharply reduced conformity.

(c) when the comparison lines were made more similar in length, the task became more ambiguous/difficult oe **M1**

(c) conformity increased under these more difficult conditions oe **A1**

(c) consistent with informational social influence, since participants are more likely to doubt their own judgement and look to others for guidance when a task is genuinely ambiguous oe **A1**

(c) Answer: Making the task harder/more ambiguous increased conformity, consistent with ISI.

Question 8

(a) identifies a genuine ethical issue, e.g. protection of participants from psychological harm, or a conflict of roles/interest oe **M1**

(a) explains that Zimbardo himself took on the role of prison superintendent within the study, compromising his objectivity and ability to intervene promptly oe **A1**

(a) some prisoners experienced significant psychological distress before the study was stopped oe **A1**

(a) this raises questions about whether participants were adequately protected and whether the study should have been stopped sooner oe **A1**

(a) Answer: Zimbardo's dual role as researcher and prison superintendent compromised participants' protection from psychological harm.

(b) ordinary, psychologically stable individuals behaved in ways inconsistent with their usual personality once placed in a particular social role oe **M1**

(b) this suggests situational factors (the social role and the power associated with it) can have a very strong influence on behaviour oe **A1**

(b) and can outweigh individual personality/disposition in determining how a person behaves oe **A1**

(b) supporting a situational rather than a purely dispositional explanation of behaviour in this context oe **A1**

(b) Answer: The findings suggest situational factors (social roles) can override individual disposition in shaping behaviour.