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** A-level only

*** Mainly A-level apart from the following information, which applies to both AS and A-level:

Introduction to statistical testing; the sign test. When to use the sign test; calculation of the sign test.

Topic 1

Social influence

AQA specification for Topic 1: Social influence (AS and A-level)

- Types of conformity: internalisation, and compliance. Explanations for conformity: informational social influence and normative social influence, and variables affecting conformity, including group size, unanimity and task difficulty as investigated by Asch.
- Explanations for obedience: agentic state and legitimacy of authority, and situational variables affecting obedience, including proximity and location, as investigated by Milgram, and (the effect of) uniform. Dispositional explanation for obedience: the Authoritarian Personality.
- Explanations of resistance to social influence, including social support and locus of control.
- Minority influence including reference to consistency, commitment and flexibility.

AQA specification: Social influence

- Types of conformity: internalisation, identification and compliance.

◆ Introduction

Social psychology is the study of human social behaviour – how humans interact with each other. A branch of social psychology that you will be learning about is called **social influence** – how other people's thoughts, feelings and behaviour can influence how we behave. How people would behave in a given situation is not always how they would normally behave – social psychology experiments have proven this. Research studies into social influence have challenged some of our most deep-seated beliefs, by demonstrating that our behaviour is not always based on the consequences of our own free, personal choices, but is often under the influence of others.

◆ Key terms

- **Social influence.** A term that refers to how people can influence each other's behaviour, attitudes and values. Conformity and obedience are an example of social influence.
- **Conformity.** Conformity is a form of social influence that results in an individual or a small group of people changing their behaviour, attitudes and values to fit in with the view of a larger social group (majority group) they have been exposed to, even if it goes against their own personal judgement. For example, a person who alters their behaviour merely to fit in with a peer group is said to be conforming.

◆ Types of conformity

Psychologists, such as Herbert Kelman (1958), have identified that there is not one, but three different types of conformity to the majority. They are *compliance*, *identification* and *internalisation*. Types of conformity tend to be defined by the 'social condition' that leads to that type of conformity – how people conformed, although it can also be used to explain why people conform.

Compliance

- **Compliance** occurs when an individual changes their behaviour, attitude or opinion to that of the majority group. They do this in order to 'fit in' with the group because they want to avoid disapproval or gain approval (e.g. for 'reward' purposes). Compliance means 'going along with others' in public, but privately not agreeing with the group, and does not result in the individual changing their underlying attitude or opinion. As a result, the change in behaviour/opinion is superficial (not long-lasting) and often lasts as long as the group pressure is present but disappears in the absence of group pressure. Compliance tends to be the result of *normative social influence*.

Example of compliance

Your group of friends at college say they do not like a particular person and refuse to talk to them. You may agree with them, but privately you do like that person and when your friends are not around you do talk to them.

Internalisation

- **Internalisation** occurs when individuals genuinely accept the behaviour, attitude, or opinions of the majority group because they have accepted the group's views as being right. This can often be because the majority position is consistent with their own values or the majority's position may convince the individual that they, the individual are wrong, and the majority is right. Accepting the view of the majority as right often leads to an acceptance of the majority position both publicly and privately. Even when the influence of the group is absent, the individual will continue to accept the view of the majority. Internalisation is the most permanent form of conformity and tends to be the result of informational social influence

Example of internalisation

A person who takes on a new religious faith will accept, both publically and privately, the values and norms of the religious group and will continue to accept these, regardless of whether the group is there to influence the individual or not.

Practice exam questions

1. The following statements are related to conformity. In the table below, enter the correct letter (A, B or C) to match the type of conformity to the statement.

[3 marks]

- A** The individual conforms in public with the group but in private they disagree with them.
- B** The individual sees the views of the group are right and these views become part of his or her belief system.
- C** The individual is doing what the group does in order to be liked by them.



Type of conformity	Statement (e.g. A B or C)
Conformity	
Internalisation	
Compliance	

2. Explain what is meant by 'internalisation' in the context of conformity. **[3 marks]**
3. Explain what is meant by 'compliance' in the context of conformity. **[3 marks]**
4. Explain the difference between internalisation and compliance **[3 marks]**
5. Aisha and Bushra have just started sixth form college and have made a group of new friends. All their friends wear a headscarf for religious reasons. Aisha had listened to their point of view and now she also wears a headscarf. Bushra was also happy to wear a headscarf at college. They have now finished college and have started university. Aisha continues to wear a headscarf but Bushra does not. Both girls conformed, but for different reasons. Explain which type of conformity each girl was showing. **[4 marks]**

AQA specification: Social influence

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

◆ Explanations for conformity

According to Deutsch and Gerard (1955), there are two main explanations of why individuals conform to the majority – *informational social influence* and *normative social influence*.

Informational social influence

- **Informational social influence (ISI)** is when a person conforms to the behaviour or opinion of the majority because they see others as a source of the correct information and use this to guide their personal decisions. This is likely to occur when the situation is ambiguous (unclear) and a person is unsure of the correct response. They will then look to others to lead their response, believing the majority to be correct. An example would be during a crisis when people often panic and are uncertain what to do; it is then natural to see how others are responding and follow their example. Another example would be when expert knowledge is required and we trust other people's judgment to be more correct. Therefore, ISI conformity is due to cognitive reasons rather than emotional reasons.

Example of informational social influence

One example would be a person who has started at a new job and the fire alarm goes off and the person watches his colleague's behaviour to see how he should behave.

A sad example is the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. Some people remained in the South Tower building, even after observing the first plane hitting the North Tower of the World Trade Centre. In this ambiguous situation, some people turned to their colleagues' behaviour (who remained in the building), as a reference point to guide their own behaviour; sadly, this may have cost them their lives.

ISI leads to a type of conformity called **internalisation**. This means a person genuinely believes that the views of the others are right, which results in a change in their behaviour or view in public, showing **public compliance**, and in private, showing **private acceptance**. One example would be joining a religious group because you believe their ideas are right.

Normative social influence

- **Normative social influence (NSI)** is when a person changes their behaviour/view to that of the majority (i.e. conforms), in order to be liked and accepted by the group and avoid the group's disapproval. Therefore, NSI is often due to emotional reasons rather than a cognitive (thinking about it) process. Although the individual may publicly change their behaviour/views (i.e. showing 'public conformity'), in private they may not agree. This type of conformity is also known as **compliance**.

Example of normative social influence

An example would be a teenage girl who conforms to deviant behaviour (e.g. shoplifting) with her friends, so she can fit in, but privately she knows this is wrong.

◆ Evaluation

For ISI

Strength

- ✓ **Research support for ISI.** A strength of this theory is that there is supporting research evidence for ISI. A classic study by Jenness (1932) investigated the effect on 101 American students. The aim was to investigate whether individual judgements of the number of jellybeans in a jar were influenced by group discussion. Jenness asked participants to estimate in private how many jellybeans were in a jar. He then grouped the participants and got them to discuss their estimates. After the discussion, the group estimates were created. Then, the participants made a second individual private estimate. Jenness found that private second estimates were closer to the group decision than the initial estimates. This showed that individual judgements were affected by the majority opinion, especially in an ambiguous situation, and thus people were more likely to conform due to ISI.

Weakness

- ✗ **Social identities can influence ISI.** A weakness of the ISI theory is it cannot be replicated reliably. Abrams et al. (1990) found that in an ambiguous situation, people are more likely to conform with others they feel they share a common social identity with, known as the 'in-group', compared to those they do not have things in common with, the 'out group'. Examples of in-groups would be friends, people of the same ethnicity, religion, work colleagues, or a badminton club. This produces an in-group bias (tendency to favour one's in-group over an out-group). As a result, people are more likely to conform by internalising the opinions and views of friends than those of a stranger. This shows that the processes that determine informational influence are much more complex, suggesting that ISI as an explanation is over-simplified.

For NSI

Strength

- ✓ **Research support for NSI.** The strength of this theory is supporting research evidence that people conform as a result of NSI. Asch (1956, see next exam notes for study) carried out an experiment that required a group of 7-9 American male participants, seated around a table, to look at three vertical lines (A, B and C) and judge them, by calling out which line was the same length as the 'standard line'. In each group, there was only one genuine participant (naive participant), the others were confederates, who knew about the study and were told to give a wrong answer. Asch found on average about 32% of the naive participants conformed to the incorrect majority answer (about one-third of them) and about 75% of the naive participants conformed at least once. The study showed that conformity displayed by individuals can be explained by NSI. Even in a situation where the answer is clearly obvious, people will yield to group pressure and conform to the majority view to avoid being ridiculed.

Weakness

- X Individual differences.** A limitation of NSI as an explanation for conformity is that it does not consider individual differences. For example, people who care more about being liked by others are known as nAffiliators and are more likely to be affected by NSI. McGhee and Teevan (1967) found that students who were assessed as nAffiliators were more likely to conform. The desire to be liked underlies conformity for some people more than others. This shows that NSI as an explanation does not cover the fact there are differences in people, which may influence why they conform.

Both ISI and NSI

Weakness

- X NSI and ISI work together.** A limitation of NSI and ISI as explanations for conformity is that this is an over-simplification. This is because these two explanations, NSI and ISI, work independently from each other - conformity is either due to NSI or ISI. However, some psychologists suggest that, in fact, the two work together in influencing levels of conformity. For example, in another experiment by Asch, conformity was reduced when there was a dissenter (a person who disagrees) in the group. It could be argued that this dissenter may have reduced the influence of NSI (by providing social support) or reduced the influence of ISI (because they were an alternative source of information). This shows that it is difficult to know when a person is subject to ISI or NSI.

Practice exam questions

1. Explain what is meant by informational social influence. **[3 marks]**
2. Explain what is meant by normative social influence. **[3 marks]**
3. Explain the difference between informational social influence and normative social influence. **[3 marks]**
4. Outline one study that has demonstrated informational social influence. **[5 marks]**
5. Outline one study that has demonstrated normative social influence. **[5 marks]**
6. Georgina and Tina met at work and have now become really good friends. Georgina finds that when they do meet up, a lot of the time they spend together is with Tina's friends smoking marijuana. They asked Georgina if she would like to join them. She agrees even though she does not like it.
7. Identify whether Georgina is demonstrating normative social influence or informational social influence. Justify your answer. **[3 marks]**
8. Outline and evaluate explanations of conformity. **[16 marks]**
9. Discuss what psychological research has told us about why people conform. **[16 marks]**