



General Certificate of Education

Psychology 1186

Specification B

**Unit 2 (PSYB2) Social and Cognitive
Psychology**

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - January series

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Unit 2: (PSYB2) Social and Cognitive Psychology

General

Candidates coped relatively well with the new style of the examination and the majority were able to follow the requirements of the rubric appropriately. Unfortunately, there were some candidates who attempted to answer all six questions but these attempts were usually extremely brief. There were also some candidates who had difficulties in pacing themselves through the examination. It was clear they did not allocate their time equitably between the questions and had little opportunity to develop their responses on Section C, Individual differences – questions 5 and 6. Also, some candidates did not pay attention to the number of marks available for questions. This was especially the case in question 1 where answers were often more than a side of general description of the Asch study and the Milgram study. It is imperative that candidates are aware of how to allocate their time appropriately when answering questions.

Overall, candidates' performances on the paper were comparable with the standards seen in previous sessions for PYB2. In particular, responses to the short answer sections were often very good. However, descriptions of studies were often quite poor and candidates were not always accurate in their responses. Many of this type of answer failed to achieve more than half marks because of a lack of detail too, with only one condition of the study described, making it impossible to follow the procedure. In particular, aims and conclusions were often the same point and the method section was sometimes quite confused. There were a number of instances where more than one study was presented in a muddle of description.

Some candidates did not always address the questions set and attempted to display their knowledge about the topic area instead of focusing on the requirements of the task. This was particularly evident in part (d) responses: in question 1 some answers referred only to ethical issues in Milgram's research, in question 3 there were multistore model and levels of processing answers, in question 5 some candidates spent a great deal of time describing flooding and in question 6, there were many responses which dealt only with aversion therapy, its procedures and issues related to its use as a therapy for autism. Even when the information could have been made relevant, there were some instances where candidates attempted to produce what appeared to be model answers rather than focusing their knowledge and its application to the specific question.

The most popular questions were 1 and 3 with 5 and 6 being chosen more equally. Candidates are reminded that quality of written communication is assessed in this unit and that vague, inaccurate or ambiguous expression can limit the marks awarded in each question. In addition, there were some appalling spelling errors, especially for specialist terminology. In some cases, it was not possible to understand what was written and it did seem as though candidates had only ever heard psychological terms and never seen them used in text.

On the whole, candidates were able to deal with the inclusion of the questions relating to the experimental method quite well. Most seemed to understand the descriptions of the studies in questions 3 and 4, but they did find the requirement to apply the advantages and disadvantages of independent groups design to this particular study difficult. Instead they often relied on general strengths and limitations of the experimental design.

It was still the case that part (d) responses were slightly formulaic with regard to AO2 marks. Candidates are reminded that credit is awarded for explanation or discussion of evaluative points rather than listing possible points. Some responses were limited to a series of

unexpanded comments relating to ecological validity, ethical and methodological issues. While these can be valid points, they must be developed and applied to the particular topic under discussion.

A majority of candidates failed to fill in the numbers of the questions they attempted at the front of the answer booklet. This added, unnecessarily, to the task of the examiner.

Section A Social Psychology

Question 1

- (a) This part of the question was generally well answered although a significant number of candidates chose B as one of their two responses, which was incorrect.
- (b) Some descriptions were very confused. Often candidates focused on evaluation apprehension studies and found it difficult to relate the aim and conclusion to social facilitation. Even when the studies were investigations of social facilitation, the conclusions did not always show how the results related to this effect. Some responses suggested that social facilitation had caused the results, such as 'social facilitation improves simple tasks', rather than being the effect that was demonstrated by the results.
- (c) There were some very vague answers given, often rather common-sense explanations of why Susan might or might not conform. Markers often had to work hard to identify the factor being described and it was clear that some responses did not relate to the work of Asch and the variations of conformity research he conducted. The factors of large group size and unanimity of the majority were often muddled with vague reference to 'the group' and no real description of what was meant by this phrase.
- (d) Many candidates produced very comprehensive descriptions of the original Milgram research, although some were less accurate than others. Some candidates did not discuss the effects on obedience of the factors investigated in the variations of the studies. Evaluation was often dominated by discussion of ethics but that is only one element of the possible discussion. It was expected that candidates would refer to methodological issues and the impact of the research of the work of others and how our understanding of obedient behaviour has been influenced by this information.

Question 2

- (a) This was generally well answered.
- (b) Some descriptions were muddled but many candidates were able to score well on this question.
- (c) This was answered extremely well, with most candidates providing accurate explanations of attributional biases and applying these to the scenario. Although candidates could gain full credit in part (ii) for application of the actor-observer effect, this did require an explanation of which character was the actor and which the observer for full credit.
- (d) There were some very well organised answers to this question. Candidates gave confident explanations of both effects, described the research accurately and analysed

the impact of these investigations on our understanding of how the interview process might be affected.

Question 3

- (a) This was reasonably well answered. The major failing occurred when candidates did not apply their knowledge of retrieval failure to the stem, especially not saying what the effect would be for the student.
- (b) (i) This was well answered.
- (b) (ii) Many candidates scored half marks for this question. They were able to identify the advantage and disadvantage quite well, but failed to relate their answers to the possible effects and the results. There were many responses of the 'it wouldn't be a fair test' or 'it would make it fairer' variety.
- (c) There were some very good answers to this question with many candidates describing the functions of the components accurately. Reference to research was often rather limited and candidates did struggle to explain what the results of studies showed with relation to the model. Evaluation of the model was often weak with abrupt reference to ecological validity or minor comments about how this model of STM did not explain LTM well.

Question 4

- (a) Candidates found this question quite difficult and often failed to go beyond stating the obvious that both figures were of a door.
- (b) (i) This was well answered.
- (b) (ii) Again, many candidates scored half marks for this question. They were able to identify the advantage and disadvantage quite well, but failed to relate their answers to the possible effects and the results. There were many responses of the 'it wouldn't be a fair test' or 'it would make it fairer' variety.
- (c) There were some excellent responses to this question and some candidates were able to describe and discuss the concepts of optical array, affordances, texture gradient and the importance of movement with clarity. Unfortunately, there were many answers in which these features were not discussed or explained. Evaluation of the theory was generally weaker.

Question 5

- (a) Some candidates merely repeated the stem rather than linking the persistent thoughts to the term obsession and the hand washing to the compulsion. Some referred to 'obsessive hand washing.'
- (b) The genetic explanation was not well done, with candidates asserting that OCD was inherited rather than the idea that the predisposition to the disorder was inherited.
- (c) (i) Candidates rarely went beyond the vague idea of 'bad thoughts' when trying to outline a cognitive explanation for the disorder.

- (c) (ii) The cause and effect criticism was attempted but often lacked clarity.
- (d) Systematic desensitisation was not described with accuracy. Many candidates failed to mention relaxation and often descriptions were confused and it was not clear whether it was flooding that was being described or systematic desensitisation. Evaluation was generally weak with vague reference to a very costly and time-consuming procedure. Few candidates used empirical evidence to support their answers.

Question 6

- (a) This was generally well answered.
- (b) This was very poorly answered with very few candidates appreciating the idea of the match between areas of abnormality and areas of impairment.
- (c) (i) Most candidates understood the relationship between the behaviour of the parents and the development of autism.
- (c) (ii) This was not answered well, with very unfocused responses about how unfair it is to blame parents for the disorder. Few seemed to realise they were required to explain why the theory was not convincing.
- (d) There were some very pleasing responses to this question. Areas of weakness occurred when candidates confused aversion therapy and its basis in classical conditioning, with behaviour modification, which features the principles of operant conditioning. The Lovaas research was often used very effectively. Some candidates did not manage to describe the therapy in any detail, but launched immediately into evaluative points.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website: <http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html>