

# AQA Psychology A-level

## Topic 1: Social Influence Essay Plans

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**Question : Outline and evaluate Milgram's research on obedience (16 marks).**

<p><b>AO1</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firstly describe obedience which is a form of social influence whereby a direct order is followed by an individual. Usually the person issuing the order has authority and the power to punish.</li> <li>• The describe Milgram's study of 1963. The aim was to find out why the german soldiers followed Hitler's orders and killed the jews, whether it was normal to obey such terrible orders?</li> <li>• Then describe the procedure of the study like how it involved three people in each trial. A learning test was administered by each participant and when the learner made a mistake, the participant as the teacher had to administer an electric shock.</li> <li>• Describe the results - 65% continued to 450 volts.</li> </ul>
<p><b>AO3</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. One limitation of his research is that it has been criticised for having a low internal validity. Orne and Holland (1968) argue that the participants didn't believe in the electric shocks. Therefore the study was not really properly testing obedience.</li> <li>2. However , replicates of the study have achieved similar results suggesting his research does have high internal validity. Sheriden &amp; King (1972) replicated Milgram's study with puppies and found that 54% of males and 100% of males administered the fatal shock.</li> <li>3. Milgram's research presents ethical issues. For example deception- the participants were misled into thinking the electric shocks were real when they were actually fake and even the screams from the learner were staged.</li> <li>4. An alternative explanation has been suggested for why the participants obeyed. Reicher believes obedience is due to identification, when the 1st prods were used e.g. "this experiment requires that you continue" , the participants identified with the science of the study hence continued but when the 4<sup>th</sup> prod was used - "you have no other choice but to continue", participants quite as they identified with Mr. Wallace, the victim.</li> </ol>



**Question : Read the item below and answer the question that follows.**

Two psychology students were discussing the topic social influence.

‘I find it fascinating how some people are able to resist social influence’, said Jack. ‘It must be the result of having a confident personality.’

‘I disagree’, replied Sarah. ‘I think resisting social influence depends much more on the presence of others.’

**Discuss two explanations of resistance to social influence. As part of your discussion, refer to the views expressed by Jack and Sarah in the conversation above (16 marks).**

<b>AO1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resistance to social influence refers to the ability that people may have to withstand the social pressure to conform to the majority or to obey authority.</li> <li>Social support can help people resist social influence. Describe how this situational factor does this.</li> <li>Locus of control (LOC), a dispositional factor can also help people resist social influence. Describe how this works by explaining the difference between externals and internals. Internals being the people who are more likely to resist.</li> </ul>
<b>AO2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jack comments that it must be due to a person’s confident personality which refers to a person having a high internal LOC.</li> <li>Sarah comments that she feels its about the presence of others so she is describing the factor- social support.</li> </ul>
<b>AO3</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is research support for social support amongst individuals. Allen and Levine (1971) replicated Asch’s study and found that conformity decreased when support was there, even if the dissenter was wearing glasses, highlighting that they may not be as good at the line task.</li> <li>Similarly there is supportive evidence for the role of LOC. Holland (1867) repeated Milgram’s study. Results showed that 37% of internals didn’t go to the maximum shock compared to 23% of externals who didn’t go to the maximum shock. This shows a higher proportion of participants with internal LOC resisted.</li> <li>However there has been contradictory research. Twenge et al (2004) analysed data from LOC studies over a 40 year period, It was found that over the time span there has been an increase in externals yet also an increase of resistance to obedience. This does not fit with the LOC explanation.</li> <li>Rutter (1982) found that in familiar situations LOC does not have as much influence. People who have conformed or obeyed before in specific previous situations will do so again even if they are internals.</li> </ol>



**Question : Discuss the authoritarian personality as an explanation for obedience (16 marks).**

<b>AO1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authoritarian personality (AP) is a dispositional explanation that was proposed by Adorno et al (1950), it describes a type of personality which is especially susceptible to obeying authority.</li> <li>• The Fascism scale measures if someone has an AP- in 1950 Adorno did investigation on 2000 middle class white Americans where their unconscious attitudes towards others were assessed using it.</li> <li>• People with an AP were found to be submissive to superiors, dismissive to inferiors and highly prejudiced.</li> <li>• Describe how AP develops- the psychodynamic explanation which is through a childhood of harsh parenting.</li> </ul>
<b>AO3</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is research support from Milgram &amp; Elms (1966). They conducted the Fascism (F) interview on 20 fully obedient (reached maximum shock of 450 volts) and 20 disobedient participants of Milgram's study. Results were that the obedient scored higher on the F-scale.</li> <li>2. However, a limitation is that the F-scale is methodologically flawed. Greenstein (1969) claims that it suffers from acquiescence bias which is when all the questions are worded in the same direction.</li> <li>3. Another limitation of the F-scale is that it is politically biased. Christie and Jahoda (1954) argue that it is very right wing and does not account for left-wing authoritarianism.</li> <li>4. AP cannot explain obedient behaviour of large masses of people. For example in the real life context of the WW2, all the Germans had many different personalities. It would not have been possible for all to have APs, therefore the explanation of an AP cannot explain why they obeyed the Nazis.</li> </ol>



**Question: Discuss what Zimbardo's research has told us about conformity to social roles (16 marks).**

<p><b>AO1</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social roles are the behaviours expected of a person that occupies a particular position or status e.g parent, child, student, teacher, manager.</li> <li>• Zimbardo did a study in 1973 known as the Stanford prison experiment. Explain his aim- whether prison guards were brutal due to their sadistic personalities or the situation they were in.</li> <li>• Describe the procedure e.g. involved 24 males, recruited through ad, done in the basement of Stanford University, participants were either guards or prisoners e.t.c.</li> <li>• Describe the results- prisoners became depressed and were mindlessly obedient whilst guards were very aggressive and brutal.</li> </ul>
<p><b>AO3</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Therefore this research has shown us that prison guards are how they are due to the situation they are placed in as all the participants of Zimbardo's study each had different personalities.</li> <li>2. Alternative explanations which oppose that it was due to the situation they were in have been suggested. Tajfel (1981) suggests the social identity theory explains the results whereby as the guards were able to develop a shared sense of social identity as a group they acted brutally together.</li> <li>3. This alternative explanation can further explain why a replicate of Zimbardo's study by Reicher (2006) yielded completely opposite results. Instead in Reicher's study the prisoners are the ones that gained a shared identity hence took over the prison and treated the guards terribly.</li> <li>4. On the other hand, there was good control in Zimbardo's study. Emotionally stable participants were recruited and the participants were randomly allocated to their role of either being a guard or prisoner. Such procedures increase the internal validity of his study.</li> </ol>



**Question : Outline and evaluate how minority influence is able to lead to social change (16 marks).**

<p><b>AO1</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe what minority influence is.</li> <li>• List and describe the three factors that make minorities influential- consistency, flexibility and commitment.</li> <li>• Describe the process of how minorities cause change through steps where processes such as augmentation principle and the snowball effect are described. A real life example can help explain his process e.g. how African- American civil rights in the 1960s were gained or Women Suffragettes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>AO3</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is research support for change to minority view involving deeper thought. Martin et al (2003) did a study that found that people were less willing to change their opinions if they listened to a minority group compared to a majority group. This suggests that the minority message had been more deeply processed.</li> <li>2. All the research done that supports and explains how minorities lead to social change involves artificial tasks. For example Moscovici's study involved identifying colours of 36 slides which had different intensities of blue. These cannot reflect the important outcomes of real life situations which minority influence tend to have.</li> <li>3. A challenge to minority influence is that it has been criticised for being indirectly effective within social change. Nemeth (1986) argues that effects are delayed so are not seen for some time and that usually the majority is not influenced by the central issue but only by more minor related issues.</li> <li>4. Lastly, there are also barriers to social change via minority influence. Bashir et al (2013) found that people are off put by stereotypes (e.g. feminists described as 'man haters') so they advise minorities to not behave in stereotypical ways. However this contradicts the MI explanation since factors within its process such as consistency and the augmentation principle can easily reinforce stereotypes.</li> </ol>

