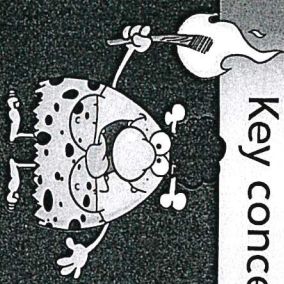Content area B2: Social approach

Key concept 1 and key study

Cavewoman speaks

A woman is visiting a museum and has to pass through a metal detector on the way in. There is a queue. While she queues, she watches as someone dressed as a 'cavewoman' is encouraged by the tour guide to grunt very loudly at the visitors, as if trying to communicate with them. The tour guide (who is 'fluent' in Neanderthal, Caveman and Geordie) asks the visitors to join in.

Without questioning what is going on, the woman begins grunting along with the others, with the tour guide 'interpreting' for her. All the other visitors behave as if this is the most natural thing in the world.

Of course the whole situation was a set-up, for the BBC programme *Michael McIntyre's Big Show*. But have you ever gone along with what everyone else was doing, even if you thought it a bit strange?

Key concept: Conformity

What is conformity?

When we are part of a group, we may choose to 'go along' with other people by agreeing with their opinions or behaving as they do. This is *conformity*. The other people do not *tell* us how to behave or what opinions to have. But conformity is the result of 'invisible' pressure from others.

Social psychologists Morton Deutsch and Harold Gerard (1955) devised the two-process theory, suggesting there are two main processes that explain why people conform.

Process 1: Normative social influence (NSI)

NSI is about group norms. In any group of people there are behaviours and beliefs that are considered to be 'normal' or typical. Norms guide the behaviour of the individuals in the group and are part of what glues the group together, which is why we pay attention to them. We accept the norms of a group (i.e. we conform) because we want to be liked by the other group members and we want to avoid being rejected by them. This means NSI is an emotional process because it is about how you *feel*. It may be stronger in stressful situations where people have a greater need for social support.

Process 2: Informational social influence (ISI)

ISI is about who has the better information, you or someone else. Often we are unsure about what behaviours/beliefs are right or wrong. For example, you may not know the answer to a question in class. But if most students agree on one answer, you accept it because you feel they are probably right. So we may conform to the views of others because we want to be right. This means ISI is a *cognitive* process because it is about what you *think*.

ISI is most likely to happen in situations that are new to you (so you don't know what is right) or situations which it isn't clear what is right (ambiguous). It also occurs when one person is regarded as being more of an expert.

Key concept: Conformity

Specification 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 (Aronson 2011).

Informational social influence (ISI) We agree with the behaviour of others because we believe it is correct. We accept it because we want to be correct.

Normative social influence (NSI) We agree with the behaviour of others because we want to be accepted and liked, and to avoid rejection.

Asch's study

The line X on the left-hand card is the standard line. The lines A, B and C are the three comparison lines. The participants had to say which of the comparison lines was the same length as the standard line (the answer was always obvious – here it is C).

The naïve (genuine) participant was always seated around a table either last of (as here) next to last in the group. Participants gave their answers out loud, one at a time, beginning with the first person.

Key study: Asch (1951) Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgements

Aims

Solomon Asch wanted to see if individuals would agree with answers given by a group when the answers were obviously wrong (i.e. would they conform to the majority?).

Procedure

Asch arranged for groups of about seven students to take part in a line judgement task. Each person in turn was asked to identify which line (A, B or C) matched the standard line X (see left). However, only one student was a genuine participant ('naïve') who did not know what the procedure was really about. The others (*confederates*) were instructed by Asch to sometimes give the wrong answer. In total there were 16 sets of cards and on 12 of these the confederates gave the wrong answer. The naïve participant always answered last or second to last.

Findings

The naïve participants gave wrong answers (conformed with the group) on 36.8% of the trials. Overall 25% of the participants did not conform on any trials, which means that 75% conformed at least once.

Conclusions

A proportion of people conform to the majority even when the situation is unambiguous (the answer is clear). Most conform to avoid rejection by the group (NSI). However, we should also note that most of the time the participants' responses were correct. So the study can also be interpreted as showing that people usually behave independently of the group in unambiguous situations (i.e. we are usually able to resist conformity).

Evaluation

Research supports NSI

One strength is that Asch provided evidence of NSI.

He discovered that many of his participants went along with a clearly wrong answer just because other people did. When he asked them why some said they felt self-conscious giving the correct answer and were afraid of disapproval. So Asch repeated his study but asked the naïve participants to write down their answers instead of saying them out loud. The conformity rate fell to just 12.5%. This suggests that we sometimes conform to avoid rejection by the majority. When this pressure is removed because you don't have to disagree publicly, then conformity is less likely.

NSI and ISI work together in real life

One weakness is that the two processes (NSI or ISI) are interdependent. You are less likely to conform if there is another person present (dissenter') who disagrees with the group. Asch found this in some versions of his study. The dissenter may reduce the power of NSI (because he or she provides social support). They may also reduce the power of ISI (because there is an alternative source of information). This shows that we can't always be sure whether NSI or ISI is at work. It is most likely that both are operating, especially in real-life conformity.

Evaluation

Level of control

One strength of the key study is that it was carried out in lab conditions. Therefore, Asch was able to control several variables. He standardised the study so that every participant experienced the same procedure (e.g. the same behaviour by the confederates, the same materials).

This level of control meant that these variables could be ruled out as explanations for the conformity seen in the study.

Limited application of findings

One weakness of the study is that Asch used only male and American participants.

This matters because other studies indicate that some women may be more conformist, at least in some contexts. This might be because women are more concerned about maintaining social relationships than men are. Also, the USA is an *individualist* culture which values individual needs above those of the wider social group. Studies in *collectivist* societies (e.g. China, where group needs are prioritised) show that conformity is more common.

This means that Asch's findings may generally underestimate the true level of conformity.

Sometimes giving up your independence and pulling in the same direction makes us feel part of a group. Then we can achieve things we wouldn't be able to on our own.
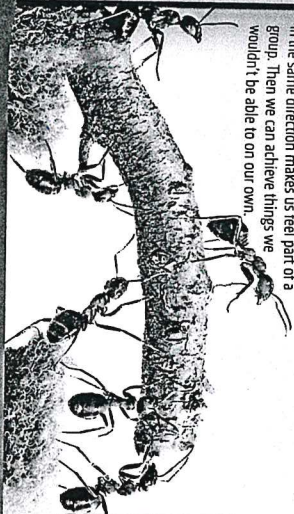
GET ACTIVE True stories of conformity

A man is lying on the pavement in a busy street. People are walking round him and ignoring him. No one stops to see if there is anything wrong. One woman finally kneels on the ground to speak to the man. She looks like she's knows what she is doing. Several other people stop to help now as well.

Twelve members of a jury are discussing the trial they have been involved in. Most of the jury members have been convinced by the evidence and the comments of other jurors, so they believe the defendant is guilty. One jury member is sure the defendant is not guilty. But as he has a carpet being delivered that afternoon he is keen to get home, so he changes his verdict to guilty.

1. *Why did the people in these cases conform – NSI or ISI? Explain your answer.*

2. *Are there any real-life examples of conformity that you have been involved in (remember, in conformity, no one tells you to agree). Why do you think the conformity happened?*

Exam-style questions

1. State what is meant by the term 'conformity'. (1)

2. Briefly explain **one** example of normative social influence from everyday life. (2)

3. Using an example, explain what is meant by the term 'informational social influence'. (3)

4. Miriam is part of a book club and hated the latest book that was chosen for the group to read. However, at the next meeting she said she loved it along with everyone else.
   Did Miriam conform because of normative social influence or informational social influence? Explain your answer with reference to her behaviour. (3)

5. Describe **one** finding of the key study by Asch (1951). (3)

6. Explain what the findings of Asch's (1951) study tell us about the concept of conformity. (3)

7. Explain **one** strength and **one** weakness of the key study by Asch (1951). (4)

8. A team of nurses is meeting to discuss a patient's treatment plan. All are agreed that the plan should continue. However, Amos disagrees but is afraid to say so publicly. So he goes along with the plan even though he thinks it is not the best option.
   Analyse the concept of conformity. In your answer you should consider: (a) the roles of normative and informational social influence, and (b) Amos' experience as outlined above. (9)

An issue to consider

Conformity is often seen as bad in Western cultures because it undermines an individual's independence.

Is conformity a good or bad thing?

Specification content

B2 Social approach

Key concept:
- Conformity (normative social influence and informational social influence).

Key study:
- Asch (1951) Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgements.

Content area B2: Social approach

Key concept 2 and key study

Are brown eyes better?

Did you know that people with brown eyes are superior to their blue-eyed minions? They are more intelligent, they have greater capacity to learn, are cleaner and better behaved.

This is what Jane Elliott, a teacher, told her class of primary-aged children. With their agreement, she divided them into 'brownies' and 'blueys'. She gave the brownies privileges and helped them with their work. She gave the blue-eyed children collars to wear round their necks to mark them out as inferior.

According to Elliott, within an hour the children began to behave in ways that matched their status. The blueys became more confident and worked harder; but also acted with contempt towards their blue-eyed classmates. The blueys became demotivated and their work suffered.

But there's a twist in this tale. On the next school day, the roles were reversed and the blueys were deemed superior. Everyone's behaviour changed with the new situation. The children all conformed to the roles they were given in a process called *identification*.

Specification terms

Compliance The individual does not privately agree with the majority but goes along with it anyway, usually because they do not want to be rejected.

Identification The individual temporarily goes along with the norms and roles of the group because they see membership as part of their identity.

Internalisation The individual goes along with the group opinion because they genuinely believe it is correct, so private views are changed.
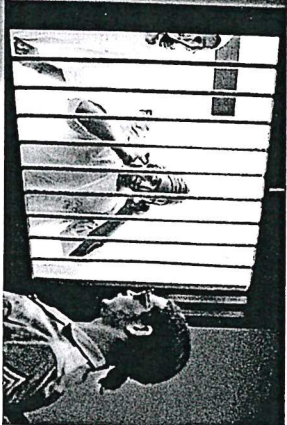
Guards and prisoners in the SPS had their own 'uniforms' which were constant reminders of their different social roles.

Key concept: Types of conformity

We looked at explanations of *conformity* on the previous spread. We saw how social psychologists have tried to explain why we conform to the views and behaviours of others. But psychologists also believe that there are different types of conformity. For example, Herbert Kelman (1958) argued there are three main ways we conform.

1. Internalisation

Sometimes we genuinely come to agree with the view of the group. The group's opinion becomes part of how we think (we internalise it). We privately as well as publicly change our view or behave to follow other group members. We continue to conform even when other group members are not present, so this is a permanent type of conformity. *Internalisation* is most likely to occur because of *informational social influence* (ISI) – we think the group view is right.

2. Compliance

Sometimes we just 'go along' with the majority, but privately we do not change our opinion/behaviour. This is a temporary type of conformity because agreement with the majority ends as soon as the group is no longer present (and there is no group pressure to conform). *Compliance* is most likely to occur because of *normative social influence* (NSI) – we want the group to accept us.

3. Identification

Identification combines elements of the other two types of conformity. It is stronger than compliance because we privately change some of our views (as well as publicly). It is weaker than internalisation because we conform only as long as we are part of the group. We conform because we *identify* with the other members of the group.

In the study below group membership led to identification – the participants took on the social roles required by being a member of either the guards' group or the prisoners' group.

Key study: Haney et al. (1973) A study of prisoners and guards in a simulated prison

Aims

Philip Zimbardo was the lead researcher in this Stanford Prison Study (SPS), though Craig Haney's name comes first. The aim of the study was to investigate whether prison guards behave brutally because they have sadistic *personalities*, or is it the *situation* that creates such behaviour?

Procedure

The researchers set up a mock prison. They recruited 22 'emotionally stable' volunteer students and randomly gave them the role of either prison guard or prisoner. Prisoners were given a uniform and were addressed by number. They had to follow 16 rules which were enforced by the guards. The guards had their own uniform plus wooden club, handcuffs, keys and mirror shades. They were told they had power over the prisoners, even deciding when they could go to the toilet.

Findings

The guards identified very closely with their role, quickly becoming brutal and aggressive. The prisoners also identified with their own role. They initially rebelled against their treatment. But the guards put down the rebellion and the prisoners became subdued, depressed and anxious. Three prisoners had to be 'released' early. The guards' behaviour threatened the prisoners' psychological and physical health, so the study was stopped after six days instead of the intended 14.

Conclusions

Guards, prisoners and researchers all conformed to their roles within the prison (because they identified with them). Even volunteers who came in to perform certain roles found themselves behaving as if they were in a prison rather than in a psychological study. The SPS showed that situations influence people's behaviour very powerfully.

Evaluation

Support for Kelman's three types

One strength is that research studies have found evidence for all three types of conformity.

Many of Asch's participants gave answers they knew were wrong, to avoid disapproval (compliance). Participants in the SPS conformed strongly to their roles in the mock prison (identification). In a study by Muzafer Sherif (1935), participants conformed with the answers of people they believed had more expertise than they did (internalisation).

These supporting studies show that Kelman was right to suggest there is more than one type of conformity.

Conformity types lack influence

One weakness is that, even if the three types exist, they may not influence behaviour much.

For example, Erich Fromm (1973) said that the three types of personality. About one third of the situation and minimised the role of personality. About one third of the guards sympathised with the prisoners and actively tried to help them (e.g. offering cigarettes and reinstating privileges).

Therefore, identifying with social roles may not be a strong influence on behaviour, as the guards were able to exercise choice despite situational pressures to conform.

Evaluation

The study was controlled

One strength of the SPS is that the researchers had control over some key variables.

For example, emotionally stable students were selected and randomly assigned to the roles of guard and prisoner. The group of guards and group of prisoners behaved very differently from each other, but were in their roles only by chance, so their behaviour must have been due to the situation.

This means that we can be confident in drawing conclusions about one type of conformity (identification) in this study.

The SPS lacked realism

One weakness is that some psychologists (e.g. Banuazizi and Movahedi 1975) have argued that participants in the SPS were just play-acting. Instead of genuinely conforming to a role, their performances were based on beliefs about how prisoners and guards are *supposed* to behave. For example, one guard claimed he based his role on a brutal character from the film *Cool Hand Luke*. This also explains why the prisoners rioted – they thought that was what real prisoners did.

This means that the participants' behaviour may not tell us much about conformity in real-life situations.

Although the 'prison' in the key study wasn't a real one, the researchers tried to make the experience as realistic as possible. For example, the students who played the role of prisoner were 'arrested' by the local police and taken to the police station. They then went through a genuine imprisonment procedure, including fingerprinting, a strip search and delousing.
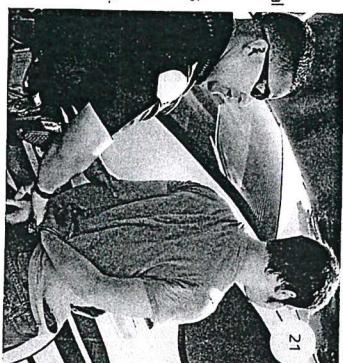
Exam-style questions

1. State what is meant by the term 'compliance'. (1)
2. Briefly explain an example of internalisation from everyday life. (2)
3. Eve's friends decide to go to Club Phantom for a night out. Eve prefers Club Crystal but she tags along with the group anyway. Vik became a vegan after his friends persuaded him it is wrong to kill animals for food.
   Identify the types of conformity operating in each of these situations. (2)
4. Sol is a carer in a nursing home. He wears a uniform and has to carry out certain tasks every day. He is very helpful and cheerful towards the residents because he believes that is part of his role.
   (a) What type of conformity is Sol showing? Explain your answer. (3)
   (b) Use the findings from the study by Haney et al. (1973) to explain Sol's behaviour at work. (2)
5. Explain what the findings of Haney et al's (1973) study tell us about types of conformity. (3)
6. Explain **one** strength and **one** weakness of the key study by Haney et al. (1973). (6)
7. Discuss different types of conformity. In your answer you should consider: (a) internalisation, identification and compliance, and (b) the key study by Haney et al. (1973). (9)

An issue to consider

Psychologists disagree over whether conformity is due to the pressure of the situation or to the personalities of individuals.

What do you think? When people conform (at work, with friends or strangers, etc.), is it because they are the conforming type, or is the situation responsible? How would you know?

GET ACTIVE Abu Ghraib

The Iraq war began in March 2003. During the following year, personnel from the United States Army Military Police and the CIA committed serious human rights violations against Iraqi prisoners. These occurred at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad.

The prisoners were tortured, physically and sexually abused, routinely humiliated and some were murdered. Photographs of the abuse were published by an American news channel in April 2004. Several of the personnel involved were eventually prosecuted and imprisoned and/or discharged from the military.

Zimbardo noticed some remarkable similarities between the behaviour of the personnel at Abu Ghraib and the guards in the Stanford prison study. One key factor was identification.

How do you think identification explains what happened at Abu Ghraib prison?

Specification content
B2 Social approach

Key concept:
- Types of conformity, including internalisation, identification, compliance.

Key study:
- Haney et al. (1973) A study of prisoners and guards in a simulated prison.

Content area B2: Social approach

Key concept 3 and key study

Key concept: Social categorisation

What is social categorisation?

We place individuals into social groups depending on their shared characteristics, often based merely on appearance (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age). We perceive people in a category to be similar, for example we think all young people are the same.

At the same time, we perceive the people in one category to be very different from the people in another, for example all girls are different from boys.

What is a stereotype?

A stereotype is a fixed view we hold of a person based on the fact that we have placed them into a social category. The obvious danger of this is that our assumptions may be wrong and unfair.

How are stereotypes formed?

Social learning theory (page 28) argues that we learn stereotypes from sources of social information (parents, peers, the media). We observe and imitate these sources. For example, if a child hears a parent telling a racist joke, he or she may enjoy the laughter the parent receives. This makes it more likely the child will repeat the stereotype (imitate the behaviour).

Many stereotypes reflect norms of appropriate behaviour that are rooted in culture. This is why they are so powerful – we learn them in the course of becoming a member of a culture.

What are the effects of stereotypes?

A positive effect is that stereotypes simplify our interactions with other people in a complex social world. We assume the individuals we meet have certain characteristics and this saves time and cognitive processing effort.

However, stereotypes can lead to prejudice (e.g. racism, sexism). We assume each person shares the stereotyped characteristics of their social group(s). So stereotypes distort and bias our social judgements. Stereotypes also affect our behaviour because they are self-fulfilling. We end up behaving towards other people in line with our stereotypes. The individuals may respond by behaving in ways that confirm the stereotype.

PSYCHO, RETARD, NUTTER, MENTAL

These are all words that are used to describe people with mental health problems. A recent survey found that two thirds of young people have heard these words (and worse) used in reference to people with mental health issues. These words have become almost normal, especially on social media (YMCA 2017).

Why is this bad news?

It's because words like these reflect widespread stereotypes of people with mental health issues. These stereotypes are completely negative. These words are harmful because their use makes it harder for people with difficulties to seek help.

Imagine how hard it must be to admit to your friends that you are depressed, when you know that they think a depressed person is a 'psycho' or a 'nutter'. The reaction you might get could be enough to put you off.

The musician and activist Professor Green has faced such language himself on Twitter after speaking about his own mental health issues. That's one reason he joined the YMCA's #IAMWHOLE campaign to encourage young people to challenge this language.

Specification terms

Social categorisation Putting people into social groupings based on their shared characteristics (e.g. ethnicity).

Stereotypes Fixed views of other people based on their perceived membership of a social category.

Gender stereotypes are still widespread, especially in childhood. Certain clothes, behaviours, language, toys and even colours are considered appropriate for one gender but not another.

Key study: Chatard et al. (2007) 'How good are you in math?'

Armand Chatard et al. carried out two studies – we are concentrating here on the second one.

Aims

Can gender stereotypes affect memory? If students are reminded of a gender stereotype (boys are better at maths and girls are better at arts subjects), do they recall their maths and arts test results incorrectly?

Procedure

French high school students rated their agreement (on a 7-point scale) with statements about the maths and arts abilities of males and females in general (e.g. 'Women are gifted in the arts'). This gave them a strong reminder of relevant gender stereotypes. They then rated their own abilities (e.g. 'I am gifted in the arts'). Another group rated their own abilities first, so the gender stereotype could not affect their ratings. All participants finished by recalling their last school marks in maths and the arts.

Findings

Boys and girls who were given the gender stereotype reminder overestimated their maths performance (boys much less so than girls).

Girls who were given the gender stereotype reminder underestimated their maths performance (while boys overestimated theirs).

Conclusions

When boys and girls accept a gender stereotype about maths ability, their recall of their past maths performance is biased in the direction of the stereotype. Accepting this gender stereotype could have consequences for career choices. Female students who believe the stereotype may avoid careers in science and maths, even though they show ability in the subjects (and the same is true of male students and careers in the arts).

Evaluation

Research supporting stereotyping

One strength is there is other psychological research that confirms how stereotypes can distort memory.

Gordon Allport and Leo Postman (1947) showed participants a drawing that reversed a well-known stereotype (see right). The image was viewed by a participant, who described it to another, and so on for six or seven participants. This procedure was carried out many times. In 50% of these sequences, the black man was described as holding the razor.

This shows that a racist stereotype (black men are more likely to be violent than white men) can bias memory in a way that supports the stereotype (at least in a substantial proportion of people).

Effects of stereotypes

One weakness is that stereotypes do not always result in prejudice.

For instance, many people are aware of stereotypes of ethnic groups within a culture and may even hold them themselves. But they do not necessarily agree with them, and in fact may strongly oppose them and ensure that they do not affect their feelings or behaviour towards others.

This suggests that stereotypes should not always been seen as 'bad' and inevitably resulting in prejudice.

In this drawing based on the one from Allport and Postman's (1947) study, a white man is holding a razor and is confronting a black man with it. This reverses a commonly-held stereotype of the time (still held by some people today) that black men are dangerous and more likely to commit violent crimes.

Evaluation

Tackling stereotypes

One strength of the key study is that it helps us become aware of the effects of stereotypes so we can take steps to overcome them.

Chatard et al. noted that women may be less likely to choose careers in science and maths because they underestimate their abilities in these areas. Because many of these women actually have high ability and achievement, this is depriving maths- and science-related fields of talented women.

This suggests that training can raise teachers' awareness of how their stereotyped expectations of male and female students can have negative impacts on students.
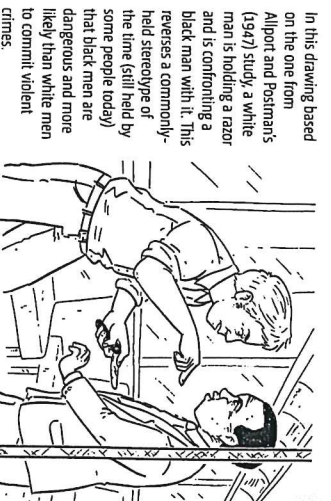
Role of participants' expectations

One weakness is that the findings of the key study might have been affected by participants trying to work out what the study was about.

The participants completed two questionnaires, one immediately after the other. They then wrote down what they recalled of their test results. Some participants would probably have wondered what the connection was between these two things. They may have realised that their responses to the questionnaires were supposed to influence what they wrote down for their test results.

Therefore, some of the participants might have written down grades they thought the researchers wanted instead of what they could really remember.

ACTIVE Our stereotypes

Social groups that are often stereotyped include: old people, teenagers, fat people, skinny people, students, nurses, politicians.

Write down some words you associate with each of these groups (please avoid extreme insults or slurs). Bear in mind that thinking about these stereotypes does not mean you accept them.

1. Compare your list with someone else's. What are the similarities and differences? Are any of the words you have used positive and some (most) are negative?

2. Why do you think some stereotypes are positive and some negative?

3. You probably know individual people who are members of these groups. Would you apply your words to them? Why or why not?

An issue to consider

TV programmes used to cast white men in the roles of doctors, judges etc. But now great efforts are made to use counter-stereotypes to change attitudes.

Do you think this works?

Specification content
B2 Social approach

- Key concept:
  - Social categorisation (formation and effect of stereotypes).
- Key study:
  - Chatard et al. (2007) 'How good are you in math?' The effect of gender stereotypes on students' recollection of their school marks.

Exam-style questions

1. State what is meant by the term 'social categorisation'. (1)

2. Using an example, explain what is meant by the term 'stereotype'. (3)

3. Sam hears his mum and dad having a conversation in which they use racist terms to refer to members of an ethnic group. The next day at school, Sam shouts the same words in the playground at a boy from that ethnic group and tries to pick a fight with him.
   (a) Explain to Sam's behaviour using the concept of stereotypes. (3)
   (b) Referring to Sam's behaviour, explain the formation of stereotypes. (3)

4. Describe one finding of the key study by Chatard et al. (2007). (2)

5. Explain what the findings of Chatard et al's (2007) study tell us about the effects of stereotypes. (3)

6. Explain one strength of the key study by Chatard et al. (2007). (3)

7. Tim has cerebral palsy and learning difficulties. He is bullied in and out of school by a boy who calls him hurtful names usually focusing on his disability. Other students are more supportive. But although their language is less harsh, they still often assume that Tim cannot do anything for himself.
   Evaluate social categorisation using the above scenario. In your answer you should consider both the formation and effects of stereotypes. (9)

Content area C1: Use of psychology to explain contemporary issues of aggression in society

Social approach to explaining aggression in society

BLACK LIVES MATTER
NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE
Stand Up to Racism
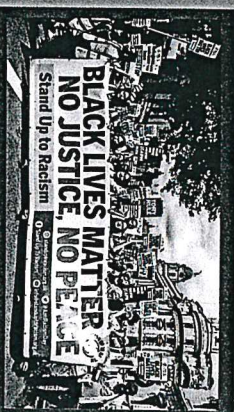
Can stereotypes have fatal consequences?

In 2014 Michael Brown, an 18-year-old African American man was shot 12 times and killed by a white police officer. Brown was unarmed. Other incidents in which young black men are killed by police officers have been continued since.

In these cases, it has been argued that the police officers involved held strong racist stereotypes of young black men and this influenced their behaviour. Because the police officers associate young black men with aggression, violence, threat and gun crime, they have expectations about what the young men will do (e.g. they expect them to pull out a gun). Therefore, the police get their defence in first and are more likely to resort to armed force than they would do in similar cases involving white men.

It was Michael Brown's killing that led to the #BlackLivesMatter movement becoming nationally recognised in the US and around the world.

Specification 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' (Aronson 2011).

Social norm Something that is standard, usual or typical of a social group.

Stereotypes Fixed views of other people based on their perceived membership of a social category.

There is a strong perception, mostly amongst white people, of Serena Williams as an 'angry black woman' because she brings an aggressive attitude to her tennis playing.

Social explanations

Conformity to social/group norms

As we saw on page 18, a *norm* is an unstated 'rule' about what behaviours are considered appropriate and inappropriate. Such rules are shared by members of a group (which could be a whole society or *culture*). Group membership, and the benefits stemming from that membership, depend upon accepting the group's norms (i.e. *conforming* to them). Aggression is closely associated with conformity to two sets of norms – gender and cultural.

Gender-role norms Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood (1991) argue that norms dictate that men should be independent and assertive and use aggression to achieve status, money or other social rewards.

Gender-role norms dictate that women, on the other hand, should generally not be aggressive, but there are exceptions. It is acceptable for women to be verbally aggressive as long as it releases anger (part of the gender-role norm that states women should be emotionally expressive).

Conformity to gender-role expectations varies depending on how much a person identifies with their gender. For example, women who identify with masculine traits are more likely to be physically aggressive (Reidy et al. 2009).

Cultural norms Cultures differ drastically in levels of aggressive and violent crimes. For instance recorded cases of 'intentional homicide (including murder) are 18.1 per hundred thousand population in Mexico, 5.0 in the USA, 2.9 in Korea, 1.1 in England and Wales and 0.3 in Iceland (OECD 2015). This implies that there are different cultural norms about aggression.

Even within cultures there are different norms about aggression. For example, in the United States, the southern states share a 'culture of honour', a cultural norm that condones aggressive responses to perceived insults. It is entangled with gender-role norms of masculinity – it is only men who are expected to respond with violence. Disputes escalate very swiftly so that dangerous and sometimes fatal violence arises from relatively minor threats to a man's social status.

Stereotypes and aggression

Stereotypes are cognitive 'shortcuts' that allow us to interact in the social world (see page 22). When we meet an individual we can label them (e.g. woman, old person, teenager) and then we think we know what they are like and how they will behave just because our stereotypes tell us they fit into a certain social category. Aggression is one example and it commonly features as part of gender and racial/ethnic stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes Men are often stereotyped as physically aggressive and women as verbally aggressive. Aggression is very strongly associated with stereotyped masculinity. Although the situation has improved, gender stereotypes are still frequent in TV programmes aimed at children. One of the most common is male cartoon characters presented as more aggressive than female characters (Hentges and Case 2013).

According to Melinda Burgess (2017), gender stereotypes of aggression are dangerous because they can lead to acceptance and tolerance of sexual harassment and intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetrated by men against women (i.e. because it is expected).

Racial and ethnic stereotypes Black people are often stereotyped as aggressive, more so than any other ethnic group. Tall black men are particularly stereotyped as threatening whereas tall white men are perceived as competent (Hester and Gray 2018). Other ethnic stereotypes are also linked with aggression. An Ofcom report from 2018 showed that Scottish people are more often portrayed as aggressive than English, Welsh and Northern Irish people in British TV programmes.

Again, ethnic and racial stereotypes are potentially dangerous because they may lead to tolerance of racist opinions and aggressive behaviour towards young black men (e.g. by the police, a concern highlighted by the #BlackLivesMatter movement, see top left).

Evaluation

Support for conformity to norms

One strength is that research shows aggression is linked to a culture of honour.

Dov Cohen et al. (1996) told a confederate to collide (individually) with male participants in a corridor and insult them. Participants from southern states (where the culture of honour operates) were more likely (than northern participants) to judge that their masculinity was threatened. They also showed higher levels of testosterone and were more aggressive towards another confederate later.

These findings support the view that conformity to cultural norms can partly determine aggressive behaviour in a society.

Role of biological sex

One weakness is that there is much debate in psychology about the influences of norms and biological factors.

Although norms are important in determining aggression, some psychologists argue that biological sex is at least equally influential. For example, as we saw earlier in the biological approach (page 34), the male sex hormone testosterone is linked in many studies to aggression in males and females. Castrating a male animal (removing its testes) is accompanied by a reduction in both testosterone and aggression (Giannmanco et al. 2005).

This suggests that conformity to gender-role norms is only part of the explanation for male aggressive behaviour.

Research support for the role of stereotypes

Another strength of social explanations is research showing aggression is associated with stereotypes of African Americans in reality TV programmes.

Jack Glascock and Catherine Preston-Schreck (2018) analysed one week's worth of the most popular American reality TV programmes from 2013. Black contestants, especially women, were depicted as more verbally aggressive than contestants from any other ethnic group. This is real-world evidence that racial stereotypes are associated with aggressive behaviour.

Contradictory evidence on gender stereotypes

Another weakness is that not all research supports the view that gender stereotypes are linked with aggression.

Steve Stewart-Williams (2002) asked students to read a description of an aggressive act. There were eight acts in total, read by different participants. They varied in combinations of male and female perpetrators and victims. The participants (including males) did not perceive more aggression in the acts when they were carried out by a man than a woman.

These findings appear to contradict the usually-held gender stereotype and suggest that the power of gender stereotypes to influence perceptions of aggression may be overestimated.

Do you find this image surprising? Is this woman failing to conform to gender-role or cultural norms? Does her behaviour violate commonly-accepted stereotypes about older people, especially women?

Exam-style questions

1. In the context of aggression, explain what is meant by the term 'social norms'. (2)

2. Explain how the social approach accounts for aggression in society. (3)

3. Give **two** features of the social approach that can explain aggression. (2)

4. Phil and Ryan were walking along the street when a man bumped into them and said something threatening. Phil immediately punched the man. After they had run away, Ryan asked Phil why he had been so aggressive. Phil replied, 'I had to because he insulted my family.'
   Use **one** aspect of the social approach to explain Phil's behaviour. (3)

5. Serena Williams played in the US Open tennis final in 2018. During the match, she deliberately broke her racket and was involved in a dispute with the umpire which led to her shouting at him. There was much discussion about Williams' behaviour. Some people thought she was very aggressive, others believed she was being stereotyped as an 'angry black woman'.
   Analyse the view that aggression in society is linked to social factors. In your answer you should consider: (a) conformity to social/group norms and stereotypes, and (b) reference to Serena Williams. (9)

Link it

This spread discusses conformity to social or group norms. Explain how this relates to the key study by Asch (1951). Haney et al. (1973) investigated conformity to social roles in the context of a mock prison. How do their findings relate to the examples of conformity on this spread? Chatard et al. (2007) concluded that stereotyping may limit career choices. Is there any evidence on this spread to support that view?

Specification content

C1 Use of psychology to explain contemporary issues of aggression in society

Learners should understand and apply knowledge of how psychological concepts and research can be used to explain aggression in society.

- Social, including conformity to social/group norms, stereotypes.

Content area C2: Use of psychology in relation to consumer behaviour

Social approach to consumer behaviour

Social explanations

In content area B2 we looked at social explanations such as *conformity to norms*, which we will use here to explain certain aspects of *consumer behaviour*.

Conformity to social norms

Social norms are beliefs, expectations and unwritten rules about the behaviours that any social group considers to be 'proper' behaviour. Most people have a strong desire to conform to these social norms and this is often exploited by advertising.

Behaviours that are publicly visible are ways we 'signal' our group memberships, such as the clothes we wear, our smoking (or non-smoking) habits, the phone we use. Therefore, campaigns and adverts try to influence us by promoting the message that 'if you do X you are like these other people'.

Conformity to social norms is partly explained by *normative social influence* (NSI), first explained on page 18).

Normative social influence and behaviour change

According to Morton Deutsch and Harold Gerard (1955), acceptance by other people is a powerful reason for conforming to the norms of a group. It appeals to our natural desire to be liked and to avoid being rejected. It leads to *compliance*, that is changing behaviour publicly even if privately we still hold a different view.

Someone subjected to NSI may buy products (or specific brands) in order to 'fit in' with their friends because not doing so might risk being rejected or ousted. The same goes for behaviour – we may be willing to change our behaviour (e.g. give up smoking, take up smoking, lose weight, recycle, etc.) if a group's social norms dictate that as the (unspoken) 'price' of membership.

Social proof

People do not just conform in order to fit in and be accepted (NSI). *Social proof* is another term for *informational social influence* (ISI). Often, going along with other people is the result of believing that those others know more than you do about the current situation (i.e. they influence you because you believe they are better informed). The more people who agree on a course of action or a belief, the more influenced we are.

According to Robert Cialdini (1984) in a situation in which we don't know what to think or do, we look to others for social proof of what is happening and how we should behave. For example, in the context of public health, a campaign to change behaviour might imply that lots of people like you are doing something ('72% of people lost weight after following this tip'). This is social proof of what people are doing.

Social proof also explains why rating systems on websites such as Amazon are influential, and why we are more likely to read Facebook posts with lots of likes than those with very few.

The bandwagon effect

This is a social phenomenon similar to NSI. It refers to the tendency most people have of doing something because other people are doing it (a 'herd mentality'). The bandwagon was historically a vehicle used in political rallies in 19th century America. It would carry musicians and dancers and people would jump on it to have fun.

Bandwagon advertising operates on the basis that 'success breeds success'. Once a product or brand is adopted by a 'critical mass' of people, many more join in. This is the motivation behind using 'social media influencers' such as Kylie Jenner to promote products. The hope is that once a trend is adopted by influencers and their followers it will 'go viral' and potentially be taken up by millions.

Adverts (and campaigns) exploit the bandwagon effect by trying to create the illusion that a product (or behaviour) is already popular, perhaps by showing lots of people using it or talking about it. It is a manipulation of consumer behaviour because it stimulates demand for a product that was not previously there. For example, up to 2017 the cosmetics company Rimmel used the slogan 'Get the London Look', implying that huge numbers of people in London were using it.

Baby Shark doo doo doo...

Make it stop, please!

'Baby Shark doo doo da-doo da-doo, Baby Shark doo doo da-doo da-doo, Baby Shark.' repeat until the end of time.

Quite possibly the catchiest song in history, *Baby Shark* has been around for a century and has cropped up occasionally on social media since the mid-2000s. But in 2018 it suddenly became massively popular with over three billion views on YouTube. Why?

Its success is a good illustration of how the concepts on this spread work to influence our behaviour as consumers. It appears to have 'gone viral' after a Twitter hashtag #BabySharkChallenge was created which instantly made the song something that had to be heard by everyone, even though it was originally aimed at toddlers. From there it spawned other hashtags, other videos and spread, until it took over the world...

Specification terms

Bandwagon effect Behaviour change or purchasing decisions can result from the perception that 'everyone else is doing it' (join the bandwagon).

Social proof In situations where we are not sure what to do or believe, we may look to other people for guidance because we think the others are better informed.

A bandwagon – a wagon with a band playing on top. P.T. Barnum (*The Greatest Showman*) invited people to jump on and join in!

Evaluation

Research support for conformity to social norms

One strength is that research shows that many people readily conform to norms once they are aware of them.

Jerry Burger and Martin Shelton (2011) placed signs next to lifts in university buildings. The notices said, 'Did you know? More than 90% of the time, people in this building use the stairs instead of the elevator. Why not you?' Compared to the week before, 46% more people used the stairs rather than the elevator (lift), a figure maintained for a week after the notices were removed.

This demonstrates the influence of social norms on health-related behaviours (it also supports the concept of social proof).

Research support for the bandwagon effect

Another strength of social explanations is research support for the bandwagon effect.

Małgorzata Niesiobędzka (2018) tested the bandwagon effect among a group of teenage Polish students. Some of the students saw an advert for a luxury product (a Ralph Lauren T-shirt) which was associated in the experiment with a famous person (e.g. Beyonce or Bill Gates). Compared with a control group of students who saw the advert without the famous person, the experimental group were willing to display a significantly bigger Ralph Lauren logo on their T-shirt.

This shows that the bandwagon effect can explain the sudden popularity of even expensive products in terms of conformity to social norms.

Cultural differences in social proof

One weakness is that social proof is not an equally effective influence technique in all cultures.

Robert Cialdini *et al.* (1999) compared social proof in an *individualist* culture (USA) and a *collectivist* culture (Poland). Participants in both cultures were more willing to agree with a request when told all their peers had agreed than when told none of them had agreed. This is evidence of social proof in both cultures. However, the level of agreement was much greater in Poland, suggesting that social proof is more effective in a collectivist culture. This confirms previous findings showing that conformity is more common in collectivist cultures.

This means that campaigners and advertisers who wish to use social proof must take cultural factors into account.

The boomerang effect

Another weakness is that attempts to use norms to positively change behaviour can backfire.

Carol Werner and colleagues (2008) used a group discussion to persuade students to replace environmentally-damaging (toxic) household products with non-toxic alternatives. When the students discussed their reasons for using the toxic products, none of them were persuaded to switch. Use of toxic products became the group norm and reminded the participants why they used them.

This shows that the social-psychological processes involved are 'neutral' and can have unintended consequences that undermine attempts to change behaviour.

GET ACTIVE Getting students to drink less

The level of drinking on some student university campuses is a cause for concern. Psychologists have tried to use the techniques explained on this spread to reduce alcohol use. Some programmes have been more successful than others.

One issue is that most students have completely the wrong idea about how much other students drink. They think other students drink a lot more than the other students really do. Ironically, this means that individual students drink more because they think they need to 'keep pace' with everyone else.

1. With reference to the concepts on this spread, what strategies could you use to reduce student drinking?

2. Are there any potential unintended consequences of trying to change drinking behaviour?

Specification content

C2 Use of psychology in business to explain and influence consumer behaviour

Learners should understand and apply knowledge of how psychological concepts and research can be used to understand and inform strategies aimed to change behaviour.

- Social – conformity to social norms (Bandwagon Effect, social proof).

Bandwagon marketing may have potentially dangerous consequences. The same bandwagon techniques that promote the benefits of vaccination can be used for the opposite purpose by so-called anti-vaxxers (see page 99).

Exam-style questions

1. Explain what is meant by the term 'social norms'. (2)

2. Explain how the social approach accounts for consumer behaviour. Use the concept of social proof in your answer. (3)

3. Explain **one** way in which the social approach can inform strategies to change behaviour. (3)

4. Give **three** features of the social approach that can explain consumer behaviour. (3)

5. Ranjana was staying in a hotel for three nights. When she used the bathroom, she noticed a sign saying, 'Please help us save water and protect the environment by reusing your towels. Most guests at the hotel reuse their towels at least once during their stay.' So Ranjana used the same towels through her whole stay.

   (a) Explain **one** example of the bandwagon effect in this scenario. (2)

   (b) Outline how social proof might have influenced Ranjana's behaviour. (3)

   (c) Evaluate techniques based on the social approach that are used to change behaviour. In your answer you should consider: (i) conformity to social norms, and (ii) reference to Ranjana. (9)

Link it

How could advertisers use the findings of Asch's (1951) key study?

Explain how Haney *et al.*'s (1973) study supports the link between conformity to social norms and consumer behaviour.

Chatard *et al.* (2007) researched gender stereotypes. How might this information be used by advertisers?

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Content area C3: Application of psychology to explain gender

Social approach to explaining gender

Do you still watch Friends?

A survey in 2019 by the charity Childwise found that *Friends* was the most popular TV show amongst five- to 16-year-olds in Britain.

Two of the reasons children gave for enjoying it were: 'It teaches me a lot about life' and 'Most people can relate to one of the characters.' It seems that some children perceive the main characters as role models.

Friends' popularity 15 years after it ended its run is astonishing but the show has been criticised for its rigid portrayal of gender. Most of the characters have gender-stereotyped jobs. Women without a date on Valentine's Day are to be pitied. Weddings mean everything to women but men are commitment-phobic. The supporting characters who do not conform to a conventional gender role are treated as figures of fun – the male nanny, Chandler's drag queen dad, men who carry bags, anyone who might be gay.

Is this one of the reasons why young children like the show, because it reflects the gender stereotypes they are familiar with?

Felt pressure for gender conformity.

Specification terms

Conformity to gender roles The extent to which a person identifies with a gender-typical (i.e. masculine or feminine) role.

Peer influences Refers to the effect that other people of the same age (and/or those with shared interest) have on how we think and behave.

Social explanations

The social approach focuses on how other members of our species influence our thinking and behaviour. Two of the concepts introduced in content area B2 were *peer influences* (which is also explained by *social learning theory*, see the next spread) and *conformity*.

Peer influences on gender

Childhood According to Susan Egan and David Perry (2001) *gender identity* in young childhood has just one element – *self-identification of gender membership*. This means that children are the ones who select their gender.

By the age of three years most children can state whether they are a boy or a girl (Egan and Perry acknowledge that identification may not be binary but this is an under-researched area). This age also sees the beginning of gender segregation, a preference for playmates of the same sex. By the time children reach primary school age they spend very little time with opposite-gender peers.

Adolescence Further elements of gender identity appear in adolescence. One of these is particularly sensitive to peer influence – *gender typicality*. This is the extent to which a person feels they are like other members of their gender category (i.e. typical). During childhood, peers contribute to the development of gender identity by acting as *models* for gender-typical behaviour (e.g. 'We don't play with dolls, they're for girls') and as a source of sanctions for gender-atypical behaviour (e.g. 'You're a tomboy because you like football'). These influences contribute to the child's developing identity as a member of a gender category.

This thinking means the individual has to reflect on their personal qualities and make a judgement about how closely they fit a gender category. Gender typicality is powerfully influenced by *social context*, including peer influence.

This is because the adolescent compares themselves with their peers in order to judge their typicality ('I am like my friends X and Y, but not like Z, so I am not a typical male').

Comparing themselves with their peers, some adolescents may become increasingly aware they are *transgender*, in that their expressed gender does not match their assigned (birth) sex.

Gender and conformity to gender roles

Felt pressure for gender conformity This is another aspect of adolescent gender identity according to Egan and Perry (above). It is an example of *normative social influence* (NSI, see page 18) because the person feels social pressure to conform to the norms associated with their gender role (e.g. how a male or female is 'meant' to behave or feel).

This includes pressure not to behave in gender-atypical ways (i.e. for boys *not* be feminine and for girls *not* to be masculine). The pressure comes from the individual themselves and from peers.

Peer pressure to conform increases with the amount of time spent with members of the same gender category. The more time girls spend playing with other girls, the more likely they are to identify as a girl and the more girl-like their behaviour becomes (the same for boys, Martin and Fabes 2001).

Gender non-conformity Peer pressure is a major cause of stress for adolescents who do not conform to gender role norms. This is because they are trying to cope with a role that many still feel is socially unacceptable. Peer groups tend to expect conformity and enforce this.

Some of the negative peer-related outcomes for non-conforming adolescents include teasing, bullying, and rejection by peers (Jewell and Brown 2014). The stress associated with a non-conforming identity (and not necessarily the identity itself) may explain the incidence of *gender dysphoria* and accompanying psychological ill health (Nagoshi et al. 2014).

Peer pressure to conform to gender-role norms is especially strong for boys in Western cultures. This is probably due to the differing values placed on masculine and feminine traits. Girls are allowed more flexibility in displaying masculine characteristics because male traits are valued more highly than feminine ones (e.g. independence, assertiveness, etc.). Therefore, boys who show feminine traits are particularly likely to be bullied and harassed by peers.

Evaluation

Gender segregation explains gender-typical identity

One strength is that gender segregation offers a plausible explanation of gender identity development.

Gender segregation is a self-fulfilling process. When children spend more time with same-gender friends (e.g. at nursery and school), they share interests and activities. Because they find this fun, they want to spend even more time together, which means they interact less and less with children of other genders. Same-gender children have many opportunities to influence each other's identities and behaviours.

This means that peer norms, and conformity with them, are likely to have a strong influence on developing gender identity in childhood.

This gender segregation cycle reinforces children's gender-typical interests, beliefs and biases (Martin et al. 2014).

Research into gender non-conformity

Another strength of social explanations is that research shows a strong link between gender non-conformity and being bullied.

Vicky Holt et al. (2016) found that half their sample of adolescents referred in the UK for gender dysphoria reported being bullied. Canadian research by Marc Shiffman et al. (2016) showed that gender-atypical young people were 4.5 times more likely to be bullied than gender-typical participants. The experience of gender-based bullying was also strongly associated with behavioural and psychological issues such as depression and self-harm.

This supports the view that peer influences on gender non-conforming adolescents are mostly negative.

Role of non-peer influences

One weakness is that being bullied and other negative outcomes of atypical gender may not be entirely explained by peer influences.

In a study of Finnish adolescents referred for gender dysphoria, Riittakerttu Kaltiala-Heino et al. (2015) found high levels of severe bullying at school. However, 75% of these participants reported the bullying began some time before they identified as gender-atypical. The bullying was also mostly not gender-related, but linked to other factors such as academic success.

This shows that many young people with gender dysphoria may have psychological and behavioural difficulties that are unrelated to the influence of their peers.

Recent research into direct effects of peer influences

Another weakness is that research on the direct effects does not fully support peer influence.

Most research into peer influences has been indirect. The research investigates the impact on gender-related beliefs or behaviours rather than identity. But recent research into direct effects has drawn different conclusions. For example, Olga Kornienko et al. (2016) looked at how peers directly influence aspects of gender identity in adolescence. As expected, they found that peers significantly influenced *felt pressure for gender conformity*. However, the researchers were surprised to find that peers were not a significant influence on *gender typicality*. It appears that some aspects of gender are influenced by peers and some are not.

The findings of this study highlight the fact that direct peer influences on gender are complex because gender identity itself is complex.

Boys and girls play together a lot in images like this one. In real life, not so much (see gender segregation, left).

Link it

How do Asch's (1951) findings about conformity to group norms help to explain gender?

Haney et al. (1973) investigated conformity to social roles. Explain the link with gender.

How does gender identity relate to Chatard et al.'s (2007) findings about gender-role stereotypes?

ACTIVE Tatiana

Whilst at primary school, Tatiana spent most of her time with other girls. She had two sisters but no brothers. When given the choice, she always preferred to play with other girls and with girls' toys. But by the time she was 13, Tatiana did not feel she was a 'real' girl and wanted to be a boy. But she felt a lot of pressure to behave like a girl. It made her so unhappy she saw a counsellor who suggested she might have gender dysphoria.

Use the social approach to explain Tatiana's gender identity as a child and as an adolescent.

Specification content

C3 Application of psychology to explain gender

Learners should understand and apply knowledge of how psychological concepts and research can be used to understand the typical and atypical gender of individuals in society.

- The influence of the following on gender:
- Social – peer influences (normative and informational), conformity to gender roles.