

**AQA A LEVEL
PSYCHOLOGY**

tutor2u 

TOPIC ESSAYS

Social Influence



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Joseph and Kate are two newly qualified teachers who recently joined Christ the King College. Their colleagues are going on a one-day strike due to pay and conditions. When Kate was asked why she went on strike, she said, "After sitting in the staff room and hearing the arguments from my colleagues, I realised they were right, and the conditions are definitely getting worse for teachers". When Joseph was asked, he said, "I just fancied a day off and didn't want to be the only one sitting in the office alone, so I thought I would join everyone else".

Discuss explanations of conformity. Refer to Joseph and Kate in your answer. (16 marks)

There are two key explanations of conformity: informational social influence and normative social influence. Normative social influence (NSI) is when a person conforms to be accepted and to feel like they belong to a group. Here a person conforms because it is socially rewarding, or to avoid social rejection; for example, feeling like they don't 'fit in'.

Key terminology defined from the outset with an appropriate example to illustrate the explanation.

Asch's (1956) study into conformity provides research support for NSI. He found that many of the participants went along with the majority and provided an obviously incorrect answer on a line judgement task. When questioned by Asch in post-experimental interviews, participants said that they changed their answer to avoid disapproval from the rest of the group which clearly shows that NSI had occurred, as the participants conformed to fit in. Furthermore, Asch demonstrated that when the pressure to publicly conform is removed, by asking participants to write down their answers on a piece of paper rather than say them aloud, the conformity rates fell to 12.5%. This provides further evidence for NSI because the reduction in public pressure reduced the rate of conformity.

Effective use of two research variations conducted by Asch to enhance the evaluative discussion for NSI.

Joseph is demonstrating NSI because he is conforming so that he isn't alone and so as to join in with everyone else. The extract doesn't suggest that he believes the strike is right, which would be linked to informational social influence, and therefore he is conforming to be accepted and belong to the group. Furthermore, Joseph is also demonstrating compliance, where he is only changing his public behaviour, but not his private beliefs in the short-term.

Appropriate reference to the context and how NSI explains Joseph's behaviour.

However, NSI is not the only reason that people conform and some people conform for informational reasons. Informational Social Influence (ISI) is when a person conforms to gain knowledge, or because they believe that someone else is 'right'. ISI is usually associated with internalisation, where a person changes both their public behaviour and their private beliefs, on a long-term basis. This

Well-detailed alternative

semi-permanent change in behaviour and belief is the result of a person adopting a new belief system, because they genuinely believe that their new beliefs are 'right' or that the majority are 'experts'.

explanation for conformity is presented here, striking a good balance between NSI and ISI descriptions.

Jenness (1932) provides research support for the role of ISI. Participants were asked to initially make independent judgements about the number of jelly beans contained in a jar and then discuss their estimates in a group. Following the discussion, participants then made another individual private estimate. Jenness found that this second private estimate moved closer to the group estimate and that females typically conformed more. This shows that ISI will occur in unfamiliar, ambiguous situations as the participants believe that they gain knowledge from the group and are now more likely to be right.

The second evaluation paragraph makes excellent use of Jenness' research to support the role of ISI.

Kate is demonstrating ISI because she is conforming because she believes someone else (her colleagues) are right. The extract states: "I realised they were right, and the conditions are definitely getting worse for teachers". Furthermore, Kate is also demonstrating internalisation as she has changed her public behaviour (by going on strike) and her private beliefs ('I believe they are right') which is likely to result in a long-term semi-permanent change in behaviour.

Finally, the discussion is tied back to the question to explain how ISI explains Kate's behaviour, with effective reference to the scenario.

[~525 Words]

Examiner Style Comments: *Mark Band 4*

This essay demonstrates an exceptionally clear understanding of two explanations of conformity – NSI and ISI – with explicit engagement with the scenario. The knowledge and understanding conveyed is both accurate and detailed, striking a balance between the two concepts in equal depth. The evaluation commentary is thorough, effective and focused on the demands of the question. The application skills demonstrated here are established and consistent throughout the response.

Outline and evaluate research examining conformity. (16 marks)

There are two key explanations of conformity: informational social influence and normative social influence. Normative social influence (NSI) is when a person conforms to be accepted and to feel like they belong to a group. Here a person conforms because it is socially rewarding, or to avoid social rejection; for example, feeling like they don't 'fit in'.

A strong start to the essay using specialist vocabulary.

Asch's (1956) study into conformity provides research support for NSI. He found that many of the participants went along with the majority and provided an obviously incorrect answer on a line judgement task. When questioned by Asch in post-experimental interviews, participants said that they changed their answer to avoid disapproval from the rest of the group which clearly shows that NSI had occurred, as the participants conformed to fit in. Furthermore, Asch demonstrated that when the pressure to publicly conform is removed, by asking participants to write down their answers on a piece of paper rather than say them aloud, the conformity rates fell to 12.5%. This provides further evidence for NSI because the reduction in public pressure reduced the rate of conformity.

Effective use of research evidence to create elaborated evaluative commentary.

While the Asch study provides support for the notion of NSI, more recent research has yielded different results. For example, Perrin and Spencer (1980) conducted an Asch-style experiment and found a conformity level of 0.25%. Therefore, it could be argued that the results of Asch are the results of a different era and do not represent conformity and the idea of NSI in 2017. However, it must be noted that Perrin and Spencer used a very different sample to Asch, consisting of engineering and mathematic students. Therefore, it could be that the lower levels of conformity were also influenced by the participant's expertise in problem solving tasks.

An interesting counter-argument to balance the discussion with further discussion provided.

However, NSI is not the only reason that people conform and some people conform to for informational reasons. Informational Social Influence (ISI) is when a person conforms to gain knowledge, or because they believe that someone else is 'right'. ISI is usually associated with internalisation, where a person changes both their public behaviour and their private beliefs, on a long-term basis. This semi-permanent change in behaviour and belief is the result of a person adopting a new belief system because they genuinely believe that their new beliefs are 'right' or that the majority are 'experts'.

Well-detailed outline of a second explanation of conformity, again using specialist vocabulary in an exemplary manner.

Jenness (1932) provides research support for the role of informational social influence. Participants were asked to initially make independent judgements about the number of jelly beans contained in a jar and then discuss their estimates in a group. Following the discussion, participants then made another individual private estimate. Jenness found that this second private estimate moved closer to the group estimate and that females typically conformed more. This shows that ISI will occur in unfamiliar, ambiguous situations as the participants believe that they gain knowledge from the group and are now more likely to be right.

Research support for the role of ISI is well-detailed and accurate.

While Jenness provides convincing evidence for the role of ISI, it must be noted that his experiment has been criticised for lacking ecological validity. Providing an estimate of the number of beans in a jar is a rather mundane task with no social consequences. Consequently, it is legitimate to question whether we would display such levels of ISI in tasks that have more significant social consequences, for example, hearing evidence in a court case from an 'expert' barrister. Therefore, until further research examining ISI is conducted in the real-world, these results remain confined to the laboratory.

Limitation of Jenness study creates a balance in the discussion for the role of ISI in conformity.

[~575 Words]

Examiner Style Comments: *Mark Band 4*

This is a well-structured essay which evidently followed a clear plan to outline and evaluate NSI and then repeat this formula for ISI. This has proved effective to create a response which effectively deals with several pieces of research examining conformity as a form of social influence. The use of specialist terminology is consistent throughout.

Discuss factors that can affect conformity. Refer to variations of Asch's experiment in your answer. (16 marks)

There are three main factors that affect whether a person conforms: group size, unanimity and task difficulty. Firstly, it is logical to assume that a larger group will increase the rate of conformity, because the size of the social pressure increases.

A swift introduction, naming the key factors that can affect conformity. Group size as a factor is clearly explained.

However, research by Asch has found that the effect of group size is not so straight forward. In Asch's original experiment, one real participant was placed among six to eight confederates. Asch found that the average conformity rate was 32%. Asch found that when there was only one confederate, conformity dropped to just 3% and when there were two, conformity dropped to 12.8%. However, with three confederates, Asch found that conformity remained the same at around 32%. Increasing the group size has limitations. When Asch increased the size of the majority to 15 confederates he found that conformity started to drop. This may be because the situation is seen as bizarre and the participants started to become suspicious, leading to demand characteristics. These results show that group size has a significant impact on conformity and that when a group has three or more people, conformity reaches its highest level at approximately 32%.

Well-detailed and highly accurate knowledge of group size and Asch's variations is presented.

This discussion is linked to the question and considers the possible impact of demand characteristics.

Another factor that affects conformity is unanimity, which is the extent to which the majority agree in their views or behaviour. If a majority is unanimous in their opinion, then they are more likely to have a significant impact.

The idea of unanimity is well-explained and accurate.

Asch examined the idea of unanimity in a variation where one of the confederates was instructed to give the correct answer throughout. In this variation, the average conformity rate dropped to just 5%. This shows that when a majority is broken, people are more likely to resist the pressure to conform. This is because they do not feel as though they are alone and they do not have to go along with the group.

Appropriate reference to Asch's variation which demonstrates support for the notion of unanimity affecting conformity rates.

The final factor that affects conformity is task difficulty. In the original Asch experiment the correct answer was always obvious; therefore, the participants were conforming due to normative social influence and a desire to fit in.

The third, and final, factor of task difficulty is well explained.

However, in one of the variations, Asch made the length of lines significantly smaller and more difficult to judge. In this variation, Asch found that the rate of conformity increased.

This is likely to be the result of informational social influence, as individuals look to another for guidance when completing the task, suggesting that as tasks become more difficult, people are more likely to conform. Furthermore, Jenness (1932) also provides research support for the idea of task difficulty. In Jenness' study, participants were asked to initially make independent judgements about the number of jelly beans contained in a jar and then discuss their estimates in a group. Following the discussion, participants then made another individual private estimate. Jenness found that this second private estimate moved closer towards the group estimate. Jenness concluded that this shift in judgement was due to the ambiguity of the task and therefore the difficulty of the task led people to conform for informational reasons, as they believed that the group were more likely to be correct.

The evaluative commentary is clear and draws on two supporting studies that are linked to informational social influence.

[~525 Words]

Examiner Style Comments: *Mark Band 4*

This is a well-detailed answer which accurately outlines the three factors which are named on the specification that can affect conformity, namely: group size, unanimity and task difficulty. Each section outlines the factor, draws on supporting research by Asch and provides a thorough and effective discussion linked back to the question. Furthermore, the answer integrates specialist terminology throughout, including references to normative and informational social influence.

Outline and evaluate research into conformity to social roles. (16 marks)

Zimbardo (1973) conducted a study on conformity to social roles, called the Stanford Prison Experiment. The aim of his experiment was to examine whether people would conform to given social roles when placed in a mock prison environment. His sample consisted of male university students who were randomly assigned to one of two social roles: prisoner or guard. The 'prisoners' were arrested by local police, given a numbered smocked to wear, and chains were placed around their ankles. The guards were given uniforms, sunglasses, handcuffs and a truncheon and were instructed to run the prison without using physical violence. The experiment was set to run for two weeks, although it was terminated after only six days.

Zimbardo found that both the prisoners and guards quickly identified with their social roles. Within days the prisoners rebelled, which was quickly crushed by the guards, who then grew increasingly abusive towards them. The guards dehumanised the prisoners, waking them during the night and forcing them to clean toilets with their bare hands; the prisoners became increasingly submissive, identifying further with their subordinate role.

A recent replication of the Stanford Prison Experiment, carried out by Reicher and Haslam (2006), contradicts the findings of Zimbardo. In this replication, the participants did not conform to their social roles automatically. For example, the guards did not identify with their status and refused to impose their authority; the prisoners identified as a group to challenge the guard's authority, which resulted in a shift of power and a collapse of the prison system. These results clearly contradict the findings of Zimbardo and suggest that conformity to social roles may not be automatic, as Zimbardo originally implied.

Furthermore, individual differences and personality also determine the extent to which a person conforms to social roles. In Zimbardo's original experiment, the behaviour of the guards varied dramatically, from extremely sadistic behaviour displayed by around one third of the participants in that role, to a few guards who actually helped the prisoners by offering support and sympathy, giving cigarettes and reinstating lost privileges. This suggests that situational factors are not the only cause of conformity to social roles, and dispositional factors such as personality also play a role, implying that Zimbardo's conclusion could have been over-stated.

A timely introduction naming appropriate research into conformity to social roles from the offset.

Accurate and detailed description of Zimbardo's procedure in assigning social roles to the participants.

Clear knowledge of the key findings from the Stanford Prison Experiment are presented.

An effective evaluation point drawing attention to contradictory research on the same topic.

An interesting factor to consider.

Zimbardo's experiment has been heavily criticised for breaking many ethical guidelines, especially protection from harm. Five of the prisoners left the experiment early because of their adverse reactions to the physical and mental torment. Furthermore, some of the guards reported feelings of anxiety and guilt as a result of their actions during the Stanford Prison Experiment. Although Zimbardo followed the ethical guidelines of Stanford University and debriefed his participants afterwards, he acknowledged that the study should have been stopped earlier. It has been suggested that he was responding more in the role of superintendent of the prison rather than as the researcher with responsibility for his participants. Furthermore, the fact that Zimbardo only used male participants in his sample shows a beta bias, as his research may have ignored or minimised the differences between men and women in relation to conformity to social roles and therefore we are unable to conclude whether females conform to social roles in a similar way.

Effective evaluative commentary including reference to ethical issues and the additional issue of beta bias.

[~525 Words]

Examiner Style Comments: *Mark Band 4*

This is a well-detailed and accurate account of Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment investigating conformity to social roles. The outline is concise, yet thorough. The evaluation commentary is effective in most places with the final paragraph highlighting the controversial nature of the study, culminating the high-level discussion of Zimbardo's work.

Discuss research into obedience as investigated by Milgram. (16 marks)

Milgram investigated whether ordinary people would obey an order to inflict pain on an innocent person. His sample of 40 male American volunteers went to Yale University, where they met the experimenter and another participant (a confederate). It was fixed so that the real participant was assigned the role of 'teacher' and instructed to give an electric shock of increasing strength (from 15–450 volts) to the 'learner' every time he made a mistake on a list of word pairs. At 300 volts the learner could be heard complaining, but after that there were no further responses. The experiment continued until either the participant refused to continue, or the maximum of 450 volts was reached. If they tried to stop, the experimenter would offer a verbal prod, e.g. 'The experiment requires that you continue'. Milgram found that all participants went to 300 volts and 65% administered the full 450 volts. In addition, qualitative observations report participants showing signs of distress and tension: sweating, stuttering and trembling.

One criticism of Milgram's study is that it broke several ethical guidelines. Milgram deceived his participants as they believed that they were taking part in a study on how punishment affects learning, rather than on obedience. They were also deceived by the rigging of the role allocation that was in fact pre-determined. Due to the nature of the task, Milgram did not protect the participants from psychological harm, since many of them showed signs of real distress during the experiment and may have continued to feel guilty following the experiment, knowing that they could have harmed another human being. Some critics of Milgram believed that these breaches could serve to damage the reputation of psychology and jeopardise future research.

Another criticism of Milgram's study is that it lacks ecological validity. This is because Milgram conducted a laboratory study, which is very different from real-life situations of obedience. In everyday life, we often obey far more harmless instructions, rather than giving people electric shocks. As a result, we are unable to generalise his findings to real life situations of obedience and cannot conclude that people would obey less severe instructions to the same degree. However, Milgram counters this claim, stating that the laboratory can reflect wider authority relationships seen in real-life situations. For example, Hofling *et al.* (1966) found that nurses were surprisingly obedient to unjustified instructions from a doctor in a hospital setting and this

Milgram's aim is clearly stated at the offset.

An accurate overview of Milgram's procedure is presented.

Thorough knowledge of Milgram's findings is evident.

An interesting start to the evaluative commentary considering the lasting impact of this infamous study.

Another well-measured limitation of Milgram's research on obedience is considered in the second evaluation paragraph.

However, the answer also provides an effective counter-

suggests that Milgram's findings do apply outside the laboratory.

criticism to develop this point further.

Another methodological criticism of Milgram's study is that it lacks population validity. This is because Milgram used a biased sample of 40 male American volunteers from a broadly individualistic society. Therefore, we are unable to generalise the results to other populations, particularly collectivist cultures, or to explain the behaviour of females since it cannot be concluded that those with other cultural experiences, or female participants, would respond in a similar way to that observed originally by Milgram. The fact that Milgram only used male participants in his original sample shows a beta bias, as his research may have ignored or minimised the differences between men and women in relation to the conclusions drawn regarding obedience to authority. It can also be criticised as being androcentric, since the results cannot be generalised to females.

The final discussion comment considers the issues of cultural bias and beta bias appropriately, relating back the evaluation back to the question.

[~550 Words]

Examiner Style Comments: *Mark Band 4*

This is an excellent response to this exam question. The answer shows sound knowledge and understanding of Milgram's original study investigating obedience to authority. The discussion is centered on three limitations and provides an in-depth commentary that is thorough and effective, embedding issues and debates, with consistent use of specialist terminology.

Outline and evaluate how situational variables have been shown to affect obedience to authority. (16 marks)

Situational variables focus on external factors that affect the likelihood that someone will obey orders, including proximity, location and uniform.

The three situational variables affecting obedience named on the specification are named from the outset.

Milgram conducted his original research in a laboratory of Yale University. In order to test the power of the location, Milgram conducted a variation in a rundown building in Bridgeport, Connecticut. In this variation, the percentage of participants who administered the full 450 volts dropped from 65% to 47.5%, highlighting the importance of location in creating a prestigious atmosphere generating respect and obedience.

Well-explained impact of location with accurate findings presented.

Likewise, Milgram demonstrated the power of uniform in a variation where the experimenter was called away and replaced by another 'participant' (confederate) in normal clothes, rather than a lab coat. Here, the percentage of participants who administered the full shock dropped to 20%. While this variation appears to suggest that uniform is an important factor that affects obedience to authority, it is unclear from this variation alone whether the uniform is the contributing factor or whether the experimenter also appears more legitimate due to his social status and role.

Well-detailed knowledge of Milgram's variations is used to support the notion of uniform.

However, there is additional research support for the role of uniform affecting obedience rates. Bickman (1974) conducted a field experiment in New York City where confederates stood on the street and asked members of the public who were passing by to perform a small task such as picking up a piece of litter or providing a coin for the parking meter. The outfit that the confederate was wearing varied from a smart suit, jacket and tie, a milkman's outfit or a security guard's uniform. It was found that in this final condition the members of the public were twice as likely to obey the order given by the 'security guard', which supports Milgram's idea that a uniform adds to the legitimacy of the authority figure and is a situational variable which increases obedience levels.

Effective evaluation drawing on relevant research support from Bickman to illustrate the power of the uniform in affecting obedience.

Proximity refers to how close someone or something is. In a variation of Milgram's experiment where the teacher and learner were in the same room, the percentage of participants who administered the full 450 volts dropped from 65% to 40% because the teacher could understand the learner's pain more directly. In another variation, the experimenter left the room and gave the instructions over the telephone. With this

variation the obedience levels fell even further to 20.5%. This shows that proximity affects obedience in two ways: 1) the closer a person is to an authority figure the more likely they are to obey; 2) the closer a person is to the consequences of their actions, the less likely they are to obey.

While situational variables like uniform and proximity are seen to be important, research suggests that other factors (e.g. culture) also play an important role. Kilman and Mann (1974) replicated Milgram's original study procedures in Australia but found that only 16% of the participants shocked the learner at the maximum voltage level of 450V whereas Mantell (1971), on the other hand, showed that it was 85% when conducted in Germany. This cross-cultural comparison shows that different societies follow alternative hierarchical structures and children may be socialised differently from a young age to be more, or less, obedient. This suggests that while situational factors like uniform and proximity are important, other factors may play a more significant role in obedient behaviour.

[~525 Words]

Examiner Style Comments: *Mark Band 4*

This response is of an appropriate length for a question which attempts to cover all three situational variables affecting obedience named on the specification. The elusive breadth and depth trade-off has been achieved through precise and accurate description and interesting and well-elaborated discussion. The enmeshment of issues and debates into the response demonstrates a high level of knowledge and understanding of the demands for those wanting to secure entry into the top mark band.

The notion of proximity is defined and then demonstrated with two appropriate variations from Milgram.

A well-detailed and effective evaluation point drawing on cross-cultural research is used to explore other contributing factors.

Outline and evaluate the authoritarian personality as a dispositional explanation for obedience. (16 marks)

Dispositional explanations for obedience focus on internal (personality) characteristics within humans that contribute to obedience. One particular explanation focuses on the authoritarian personality which was proposed by Adorno. Adorno *et al.* (1950) believed that the foundations for an authoritarian personality were laid in early childhood because of harsh and strict parenting. This creates resentment within the child as they grow up and, since they cannot express it at the time, the feelings are displaced onto others who are seen as 'weak' or 'inferior'. According to Adorno, this personality type is correlated with prejudice and discrimination as well as obedience.

Adorno *et al.* conducted a study using 2000 middle-class, Caucasian Americans to find out their unconscious views towards other racial groups by developing a number of questionnaires including the F-scale, which measured fascist tendencies. Those high on the F-scale were status-conscious, more obedient to authority figures and showed an extreme submissiveness and respect. They also believed that society requires strong leadership to enforce rigid, traditional values, hence their dispositional preference for obedient behaviour.

There is research support for the authoritarian personality as an explanation for obedience. Milgram and Elms (1966) conducted post-experimental interviews with participants who were fully obedient in Milgram's original study, to see if there was a link between high levels of obedience and an authoritarian personality. It was found that the obedient participants scored higher on the F-scale in comparison to the disobedient participants. Furthermore, the obedient participants were less close to their fathers during childhood and admired the experimenter in Milgram's study, which was quite the opposite for disobedient participants. It was concluded that the obedient participants in Milgram's original research displayed more characteristics of the authoritarian personality.

There may be individual differences that contribute to the development of the authoritarian personality. Research by Middendorp and Meleon (1990) has found that less-educated people are more likely than well-educated people to display authoritarian personality characteristics. If these claims are correct, then it is possible that it is not authoritarian personality characteristics alone that lead to obedience, but

Strong introduction identifying key researchers into the authoritarian personality from the offset.

Brief overview of the methodology used to assess authoritarian personality presented.

Key findings related directly to the question of explaining obedience.

Research support from Milgram and Elms used effectively to begin the evaluative commentary.

An interesting counter-argument suggesting that education is a mediating

also other factors, including levels of education.

factor.

There may be methodological criticisms associated with the measures used to determine authoritarian personality traits. It is possible that the F-scale suffers from response bias or social desirability, where participants provide answers that are socially acceptable. For example, participants may appear more authoritarian because they believe that their answers are socially 'correct' and consequently they are incorrectly classified as authoritarian when they are not. This, therefore, reduces the internal validity of the questionnaire research method used in determining the degree of authoritarianism, suggesting that other factors/explanations may be responsible for obedient behaviour.

A balanced discussion is provided with a limitation of the methods used to assess authoritarian personality.

Adorno *et al.* came to believe that a high degree of authoritarianism was similar to suffering from a psychological disorder, with the cause lying within the personality of the individual (nature) but originally caused by the treatment they received from their parents at a young age (nurture). Obedient behaviour is, therefore, determined by our socialisation experiences and not a result of free will. However, some psychologists (e.g. humanistic psychologists) would dismiss these claims and argue that humans have the capacity for free will and change and that dispositional explanations for obedience are overly deterministic.

The final paragraph concludes the essay with appropriate reference to issues and debates.

[~525 Words]

Examiner Style Comments: *Mark Band 4*

This is a well-structured and essay which provides an accurate and well-detailed outline of key research into the authoritarian personality as a dispositional explanation for obedience. The following evaluative commentary covers a range of effective points to support and critique this concept. Overall, the essay is clear, coherent and focused and specialist terminology is used throughout.

Two A level students were discussing the topic of social influence after their last psychology lesson.

Louise: "It's incredible how some people can resist social influence isn't it, Matt? They must have a strong personality with lots of confidence".

Matt: "I don't agree with you, Louise, I think people are more likely to resist social influence if the people they are with do so too".

Outline and evaluate two explanations of resistance to social influence. In your answer, refer to the views expressed by Louise and Matt in the conversation above. (16 marks)

There are two explanations of resistance to social influence that relate to Louise and Matt's conversation: social support and locus of control.

Louise suggests that a 'confident personality' is the reason why people resist social influence and therefore she is advocating a dispositional explanation, linked to the idea of locus of control. People with an internal locus of control believe that they have control over their life and are less concerned with social approval. Individuals with an internal locus of control are, therefore, more independent and find it easier to resist social influence. It could be inferred that a person with a 'strong' personality would be more likely to display an internal locus of control and therefore resist social influence.

There is research support for the idea that individuals with an internal locus of control are less likely to conform. Spector (1983) used Rotter's locus of control scale to determine whether locus of control is associated with conformity. From 157 students, Spector found that individuals with a high internal locus of control were less likely to conform than those with a high external locus of control, but only in situations of normative social influence, where individuals conform to be accepted. There was no difference between the two groups for informational social influence. This suggests that normative social influence, the desire to fit in, is more powerful than informational social influence, the desire to be right, when considering locus of control. These results suggest that Louise's view is partly correct: an individual with a 'strong' personality' (internal LOC) is likely to resist social influence, in particular, the pressure to conform, especially in situations of normative social influence. However, the results also suggest that Louise's view is not necessarily correct in cases of informational social influence, where a person conforms to be correct.

A swift introduction setting the scene for the rest of the essay.

Application to the context is embedded effectively from the off-set.

An accurate description of internal locus of control and how this relates to resistance.

Effective evaluative commentary drawing on relevant research support from Spector.

Selection of appropriate material from the scenario appropriately discussed in the context of this essay.

Matt, on the other hand, puts forward a situational explanation. Matt suggests that resistance is based on the presence of others which is linked to the idea of social support. People are more likely to resist social influence if they have an ally – someone else who supports their point of view. Having an ally can help an individual to build confidence and remain independent because it breaks the unanimity of the group and suggests that another point of view is possible.

The second factor named at the outset is described in suitable depth to achieve balance.

There is evidence to support the idea that social support can reduce social influence. In one of Asch's (1951) variations, one of the confederates was instructed to give the correct answer throughout. In this variation, the rate of conformity dropped to 5%. This demonstrates that if the real participant has support for their belief (social support), then they are more likely to resist the pressure to conform. This suggests that Matt's view that resisting social influence depends on whether others 'do so too' is also supported by research. Asch clearly demonstrates that social support lowers the pressure of the group making it easier to demonstrate independent behaviour.

Evaluative commentary completed with another discussion of research support.

Application to the scenario is consistent throughout the response.

[~500 Words]

Examiner Style Comments: *Mark Band 4*

This is an excellent response to what can sometimes be considered a complex question, given the focus on resistance. The response has correctly identified locus of control and social support as the noteworthy features from the novel context provided. These are both accurately described and appropriately applied to the conversation between Louise and Matt. Furthermore, the discussion is of an appropriate length given the division of marks across the three assessment objectives.

Outline and evaluate research into minority influence. (16 marks)

Different factors can enhance the effectiveness of a minority, including: commitment, flexibility and consistency. Consistency refers to the way in which minority influence is more likely to occur when the members share the same belief and retain it over time.

Moscovici (1969) conducted a study to see if a consistent minority could influence a majority to give an incorrect answer, in a colour perception task. His sample of 172 female participants were placed in groups of six and shown 36 slides, all varying shades of blue. The participants had to state out loud the colour of each slide. Two of the six participants were confederates. In the consistent condition, the two confederates said that all 36 slides were green; in the inconsistent condition, the confederates said that 24 of the slides were green and 12 were blue. Moscovici found that in the consistent condition, the participants agreed on 8.2% of the trials, whereas in the inconsistent condition, the participants only agreed on 1.25% of the trials.

Moscovici used a biased sample of 172 female participants from America. As a result, we are unable to generalise the results to other populations, for example male participants, and we cannot conclude that male participants would respond to minority influence in the same way. Moscovici's research can be criticised as being gynocentric as his research takes an exclusive focus on the conforming behaviour of female participants to a minority influence. Furthermore, research often suggests that females are more likely than males to conform and therefore further research is required to determine the effect of minority influence on male participants to improve the low population validity of this experiment.

Moscovici has been criticised for breaching ethical guidelines during his study. He deceived his participants, as they were told that they were taking part in a colour perception test when in fact it was an experiment on minority influence. This also means that Moscovici did not gain fully informed consent. Although it is seen as unethical to deceive participants, Moscovici's experiment required deception in order to achieve valid results, as if the participants were aware of the true aim, they might have displayed demand characteristics and acted differently. Thus, a cost-benefit analysis would deem that the insight gained from such research was worth the short-term cost to the participants which could be dealt

Several factors identified at the beginning.

The essay continues to consider research into consistency in relation to minority influence.

Accurate and detailed outline of Moscovici's research study.

Sound knowledge of the key findings from the investigation are presented.

The evaluative commentary is kick-started with a valid criticism of the research sample, with an issue embedded seamlessly.

The evaluation is developed with another limitation considering the ethical

with by means of a debrief following the study.

implications.

There are methodological issues with research into minority influence. Judging the colour of a slide is an artificial task and therefore lacks mundane realism, since it is not something that occurs every day. Research conditions are criticised as being too far removed from cases of real-world minority influence such as political campaigning. The implications of real-world cases are also grossly disproportionate to those seen in a lab setting as they can for some people literally be cases of life or death and as such Moscovici's research lacks external validity.

The essay concludes with a third drawback of Moscovici's research into minority influence.

[~485 Words]

Examiner Style Comments: *Mark Band 4*

This is a detailed and accurate account of Moscovici's study on minority influence investigating the impact of consistency. The outline provides sufficient balance between the procedure and findings. The evaluation considers three limitations of his research with the first paragraph embedding a reference to issues and debates in the form of gynocentric bias. All in all, an excellent essay.

Outline and evaluate the role of social influence processes in social change. (16 marks)

Social change refers to how, over time, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of a society are replaced with new norms and expectations. There are many processes that are involved, the first of which is consistency. Displaying a consistent viewpoint is beneficial in bringing about social change, as the message appears more credible and can help to convince a majority.

Key terminology is outlined, setting the scene for the rest of the essay to flow.

Another process is the Augmentation Principle. When the majority pays attention to selfless and risky actions being taken by the minority group, it is more likely to integrate the group's opinion into their own personal viewpoints due to the personal sacrifice made by the minority. Once the minority viewpoint has got the attention of some of the majority group members, more and more people begin paying attention and the minority viewpoint gathers momentum, which is called the snowball effect.

A second process involved in social change is accurately described.

Finally, Normative Social Influence can encourage social change by reporting the behaviour or attitudes of the majority, to urge others to follow suit to fit in with the group.

Specialist vocabulary is used effectively.

A fourth concept completes the outline element of the question.

Minority influence can often act as a barrier to social change. Bashir *et al.* (2013) were interested in investigating why so many people resist social change even when they believe it to be needed. It was found that some minority groups, such as environmental activists or feminists, often live up to the stereotypes associated with those groups, which can be off-putting for outsiders. This means that the majority often does not want to be associated with a minority for fear of being stereotypically labelled.

An interesting argument is presented to begin the evaluative commentary.

There is research support for the role of normative social influence as a process for social change. Nolan *et al.* (2008) conducted a study which spanned one month in California and involved hanging messages on the front doors of people's houses in San Diego, encouraging them to reduce energy consumption by indicating that most other residents in the neighbourhood were already doing this. As a means of control, some houses received a message about energy usage but with no reference to the behaviour of other people in the area. It was found that the experimental group significantly lowered their energy consumption, showing that conformity can lead to positive social change.

Effective use of research studies is used to support the point being discussed.

Minority influence and majority influence may involve

different levels of cognitive processing. Moscovici believes that a minority viewpoint forces individuals to think more deeply about the issue. However, Mackie (1987) counters this, suggesting the opposite to be true. She suggests that when a majority group is thinking or acting in a way that is different from ourselves we are forced to think even more deeply about their reasons. This, therefore, casts doubt on the validity of Moscovici's minority influence theory, suggesting it may be an incorrect explanation of social change.

An effective counter-argument is presented to create balance in the response.

Reports of social change within society can involve concepts that have not been, or cannot be, tested empirically, which means that they lack scientific credibility. Furthermore, many examples of social change rest on isolated case studies (e.g. Martin Luther King) and therefore, an idiographic approach is often taken. Consequently, there is a large amount of subjective interpretation involved in explaining the occurrences of social norms and such evidence should be treated with caution. However, there is also a large quantity of research that supports the processes involved in social change, such as that of Asch, Milgram and Moscovici which take a nomothetic approach, as they have each created universal laws to explain human behaviour under certain social circumstances. Taken together, these isolated case studies and relatively large scale studies provide credibility to the underlying processes involved in social change.

The essay is rounded off with knowledgeable discussion of relevant issues and debates.

[~537 Words]

Examiner Style Comments: *Mark Band 4*

This question can often act as a stumbling block for many students. However, this response navigates four key concepts involved as processes in social change with relative ease. Key terminology is used effectively and consistently throughout the answer. The evaluative commentary is well-supported with relevant research drawn to elaborate the discussion points. A superb effort.

NOTES

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SOCIAL INFLUENCE ESSAYS

1. Joseph and Kate are two newly qualified teachers who recently joined Christ the King College. Their colleagues are going on a one-day strike due to pay and conditions. When Kate was asked why she went on strike, she said, “After sitting in the staff room and hearing the arguments from my colleagues, I realised they were right, and the conditions are definitely getting worse for teachers”. When Joseph was asked, he said, “I just fancied a day off and didn’t want to be the only one sitting in the office alone, so I thought I would join everyone else”.

Discuss explanations of conformity. Refer to Joseph and Kate in your answer. (16 marks)

2. Outline and evaluate research examining conformity. (16 marks)

3. Discuss factors that can affect conformity. Refer to variations of Asch’s experiment in your answer. (16 marks)

4. Outline and evaluate research into conformity to social roles. (16 marks)

5. Discuss research into obedience as investigated by Milgram. (16 marks)

6. Outline and evaluate how situational variables have been shown to affect obedience to authority. (16 marks)

7. Outline and evaluate the authoritarian personality as a dispositional explanation for obedience. (16 marks)

8. Two A level students were discussing the topic of social influence after their last psychology lesson. Louise: “It’s incredible how some people can resist social influence isn’t it, Matt? They must have a strong personality with lots of confidence”. Matt: “I don’t agree with you, Louise, I think people are more likely to resist social influence if the people they are with do so too”.

Outline and evaluate two explanations of resistance to social influence. In your answer, refer to the views expressed by Louise and Matt in the conversation above. (16 marks)

9. Outline and evaluate research into minority influence. (16 marks)

10. Outline and evaluate the role of social influence processes in social change. (16 marks)