

CHAPTER

7

Social influence



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW FOR THE EXAMINATION

What you need to know for the examination:

- Conformity – its definition, description and evaluation of studies, and explanation of factors affecting conformity
- Obedience – its definition, description and evaluation of studies, and explanation of factors affecting obedience
- Social loafing – its definition, description and evaluation of studies, and explanation of factors affecting social loafing
- Deindividuation – its definition, description and evaluation of studies, and explanation of factors affecting deindividuation
- Bystander behaviour – description and evaluation of studies including those of Latané and Darley (1968), Bateson (1983), Piliavin (1969) and Schroeder (1995); explanation of factors affecting bystander behaviour
- Contemporary practical implications of research into social influence

How does other people's behaviour affect yours? Why do you often 'go along with the crowd'? Why do we obey teachers, parents and other figures of authority?

Psychologists call this particular part of psychology **social influence**: it concerns how other people affect our behaviour.

Have you ever put your hand up in class when asked to vote for something, not really knowing what your view is, but everybody else has their hand up? By doing this you are conforming to the norms of the group. Would you ever hurt another human being if a stranger in a white lab coat told you to? Research by Stanley Milgram supported the idea that the atrocities in Nazi Germany could have been performed by many of us. This chapter looks at some of the research that has tried to discover how and why other people influence our behaviour.



Figure 7.1 Adolf Hitler was regarded as a figure of authority

CONFORMITY

ACTIVITY

Do you always make your own decisions? Ask yourself what the reason might be for:

- Laughing at a joke that you don't find funny or understand because everyone else is laughing
- Looking around at other people in a restaurant if you don't know which knife and fork to use
- Buying the latest fashion because all of your friends are wearing it.



KEY TERM

Conformity – a change in belief or behaviour due to real or imagined group pressure.

All of the situations above are examples of **conformity**.

Although many of us like to think that we make our own decisions, in reality we often conform by changing our behaviour or opinions so that they fit in with those of other people in a group (whether it be friends or strangers). This is known as **conformity**, which can be defined as a change in belief or behaviour due to real or imagined group pressure.



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Outline what is meant by the term conformity.

Explanations of factors affecting conformity

When you completed the first activity, were your answers something like:

- To fit in, to be liked, to be accepted, or to not be ridiculed
- Because you are unsure of how to act, or the other people in the group might know more?

These are two ways to explain conformity; these are known as **normative social influence** and **informational social influence**.



KEY TERMS

Normative social influence – when we want to be liked by the other people in a group: we want to feel accepted by them and not be left out.

Informational social influence – using the behaviour of the people around us for information when we are in an ambiguous situation and are unsure of how to act. We might regard these people as ‘experts’ and may copy their behaviour.

ACTIVITY

Which examples in the first activity explain normative social influence?

ACTIVITY

Which examples in the first explain informational social influence?

Can you think of any other examples of when you have conformed?

Conformity can have both good and bad consequences; can you think of an example for each?



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Using your knowledge of psychology, outline two reasons why people conform.

Research into conformity



KEY STUDY

Asch (1951)

Aim: To find out if an individual would conform to the group even if they knew the group was wrong.

Method: Solomon Asch devised a number of laboratory experiments with groups of six to nine participants (all male college students). There was one naive participant and the rest were confederates who had been told to give wrong answers on certain trials.



KEY TERM

Confederate: an accomplice of the investigator who pretends to be a participant during an experiment.

KEY STUDY – (continued)

The task was for participants to judge the length of lines (they were told that it was a test of visual perception – this is an element of deception). Asch showed the groups lines of different lengths (see Figure 7.2) and asked them to match the test line to one of the comparison lines (A, B or C). As you can see, the answer is clearly obvious. The participant was one of the last to give his judgement.

Results: In control groups trials, when participants were tested alone (and so there was no pressure to conform), there were very few wrong answers. But Asch found that when they became part of a group, 25 per cent of participants conformed to the rest of the group on most of the occasions when the group was wrong. Overall, 75 percent of participants conformed to the wrong answer at least once. The average rate of conformity was 32 per cent.

Conclusion: Asch concluded that the participants' behaviour is representative of conformity. Participants conformed to fit into the group and not be ridiculed, even though the people in the group were strangers.



RESEARCH METHODS

The Asch experiment is an example of a laboratory experiment. A description of a laboratory experiment and its strengths and weaknesses can be found in Chapter 5: Research methods and ethics – part 1, pages 70–71.

ASK YOURSELF

Why do you think Asch made the answer so obvious?

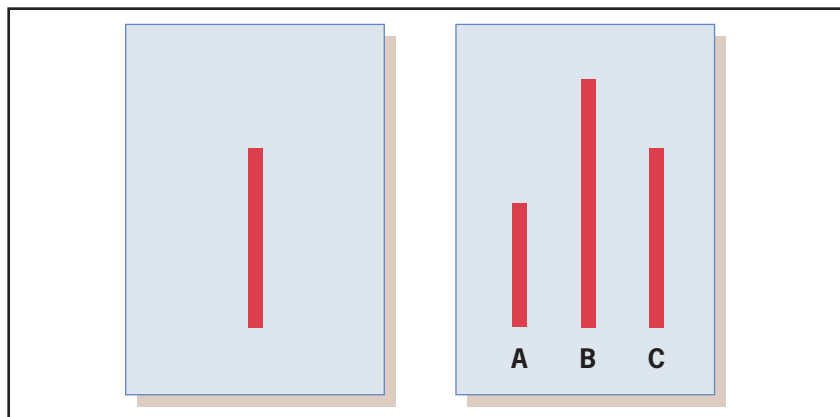


Figure 7.2 As you can see, the line on the left is clearly the same length as line C



ACTIVITY

Using the results of the Asch experiment, draw a bar chart to display the percentages described above. Provide a suitable title and fully label your bar chart.



ACTIVITY

Using the explanations of normative social influence and informational social influence, can you explain the behaviour of Asch's participants?

When participants were interviewed afterwards and **debriefed**, most of them said that they knew they were giving the wrong answer but, for example, did not want to look foolish or 'upset the experiment' (this is known as **demand characteristics**). In further trials, Asch found that the following factors influenced conformity:

- Group size – levels of conformity were affected by the number of people in the group; however, conformity does not increase in groups larger than four, so it is considered the optimal group size
- Anonymity – when participants could write their answers down as opposed to announcing them publicly, conformity levels dropped. This suggests that individuals conform because they are concerned about what other people think of them
- Unanimity – when one other person in the group gave a different answer to the others, and therefore the group answer was not unanimous, conformity dropped. This was true even if that person's answer also seemed to be wrong.



ACTIVITY

Below are some evaluation points for you to consider with regards to Asch's research. Try to complete and develop each point.

- 1 The participants were **deceived**: this is unethical because ...
- 2 The participants were confused and embarrassed during the investigation. This is unethical because ...
- 3 The method used was a **laboratory experiment**. This is an advantage because ... This is a disadvantage because ...
- 4 White, American, male college students were used in the original study. This is a limitation because ...
- 5 The nature of the task was artificial. This is a disadvantage because ...



EVALUATION BOX

- Participants were deceived about the true nature of the investigation: they were told it was a study on perceptual judgement. However, the deception was necessary: if they had been told it was a study of conformity the behaviour wouldn't have been natural and participants might have displayed demand characteristics.
- The participants were confused and embarrassed. It is wrong to cause participants any physical or psychological pain. This ethical guideline is known as the protection of participants.
- The method used was a laboratory experiment. An advantage of this is that variables can be controlled and it can be easily replicated (Asch did several variations of his original experiment). A disadvantage is that laboratory experiments lack ecological validity: this means that the findings cannot be generalised to other people, places or settings.
- The sample only consisted of white, American, male college students, which means that it is not a representative sample. Would women have conformed as much as the men? What about people who weren't in education?
- The nature of the task was artificial. It is not an everyday task to judge the length of lines, so it could be argued that both the task and the behaviour were artificial.

Practical implications of research into conformity

Why people conform and why others refuse to conform is an important question in society. Law makers and those that uphold and implement the law, such as the police, must encourage a degree of conformity; knowing how to do this and how best to proceed in certain situations is extremely useful.

It is also very useful for politicians and others who hope to change people's minds and encourage people to think in a certain way – for example, to save energy and water, or to recycle more – to know how best to do this.



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Describe and evaluate one study into conformity; try to include the method, results, conclusion and an evaluation point.



TEST YOURSELF

- 1 What is conformity?
- 2 What is normative social influence?
- 3 Give an example of when you conformed due to normative social influence.
- 4 What is informational social influence?
- 5 Give an example of when you conformed due to informational social influence.
- 6 In psychological research, what is a confederate?
- 7 What was the aim of the Asch study?
- 8 In the Asch study, how were the participants deceived?
- 9 What were the results of the Asch study?
- 10 What can you conclude about the Asch study?
- 11 Outline one strength and one weakness of the Asch study.

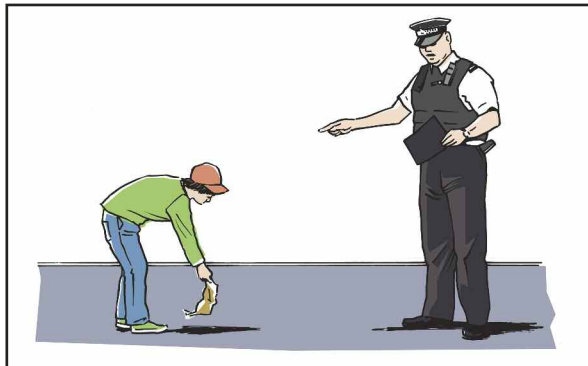
ASK YOURSELF

If a policeman asked you to pick up a piece of litter off the street, would you do it?

If a person wearing jeans and a T-shirt asked you to do the same, would you?

Why do we obey figures of authority? What are the consequences if we don't?

OBEDIENCE



Doing what a figure of authority asks is known as **obedience**.



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Outline what is meant by the term obedience.

One of the most famous pieces of psychological research into obedience was conducted by Stanley Milgram.



KEY TERM

Obedience – following an order, instruction or command which is given by a figure of authority.

ASK YOURSELF

How is obedience different from conformity?

What do you think the benefits can be of obedience in society?

Can you think of any atrocities that have occurred which involved people obeying figures of authority?

Research into obedience



KEY STUDY

Milgram (1963)

Aim: Milgram was interested in discovering why so many Germans were obedient to the Nazi authority figures during World War II. He wanted to test obedience in an American setting.

Method: He advertised in a local paper for male volunteers between the ages of 20 and 50 years to take part in a study of learning at Yale University. He then selected his participants from the volunteers.

When the participants arrived at Yale University, they were introduced to Mr Wallace, who unbeknown to them was a **confederate**. They were told that they were to be paired with Mr Wallace and that one would play the role of the teacher, and one would play the role of the learner, and that they would pick these roles out of a hat (it was actually fixed so that Mr Wallace was always the learner).

An experimenter (who was wearing a grey lab coat) took them into a room and strapped Mr Wallace into a chair and placed some electrodes on his arms. The teacher was told that Mr Wallace had a mild heart condition. The experimenter and the teacher then went into an adjoining room and the teacher was shown the shock 'generator' (see Figure 7.3). This contained a row of switches ranging from 15 volts (slight shock) to 450 volts (XXX). The teacher did not know that the shock 'generator' was fake. The only real shock that took place was when the teacher was given a 45-volt shock to make the whole procedure convincing.

The teacher was then told that the procedure for the investigation was to be for him to read out a number of word pairs, which the learner had to remember. If the learner gave an incorrect answer, or did not say anything, the teacher had to shock him (with the shock increasing each time by 15 volts).

The whole experiment was **standardised** so that all participants experienced the same procedure, and so that it allowed for a fair test.

The learner got the first few answers correct and then started to make mistakes. At 180 volts, the learner shouted that he could

KEY STUDY – (continued)

not stand the pain, at 300 volts he banged on the wall and begged the teacher to stop, and at 315 volts, there was silence. Despite this, the teachers still continued to shock the learner as he wasn't giving them an answer.

The participants were seen to sweat, tremble, and bite their lips; three participants even had a seizure during the experiment. A lot of them asked the experimenter if he could check to see if Mr Wallace was OK. The experimenter responded with a number of predetermined prods, such as: 'The experiment requires that you continue.' and: 'Although the shocks are painful, there is no permanent tissue damage.'

Results: Before Milgram started the experiment, he asked some psychiatrists to predict how many people they thought would administer the 450 volts, and they, like Milgram, predicted around 2 per cent. The actual results were that all participants administered 300 volts, and 65 per cent delivered 450 volts.

When the experiment had ended, by either the participant refusing to continue or they had reached the final voltage, they were **debriefed**. They were introduced again to Mr Wallace and told the real reason for the experiment. They were assured that their behaviour was normal.

Conclusion: Milgram concluded that people will obey a figure of authority, even if it means hurting another person.



RESEARCH METHODS

The Milgram study is an example of a laboratory experiment. A description of a laboratory experiment and its strengths and weaknesses can be found in Chapter 5: Research methods and ethics – part 1, pages 70–71.



ACTIVITY

Name the sampling method that was used in this study. Name one advantage and one disadvantage of using this type of sample.

ASK YOURSELF

Are you surprised at the results?

Why do you think it was important for the teacher to be introduced again to the confederate at the end of the experiment?

How would you feel if you had been one of Milgram's participants?

ASK YOURSELF

Why do you think so many people obeyed?



Figure 7.3 Milgram's 'learner' having the electrodes strapped on and the participant receiving a sample shock from the generator

When Milgram followed up the participants a year later, 82 per cent of them said that they were glad to have taken part, and that they had learnt a great deal about themselves; 1 per cent of them said that they deeply regretted it and the rest were of a neutral opinion.

ACTIVITY

Write one open and one closed question that Milgram could have asked the participants in the follow-up interviews.

Explanations of factors affecting levels of obedience

Milgram was surprised by his results and was interested to discover why so many people did follow the orders. He conducted some more research where he changed a few of the variables to see if they affected the levels of obedience.

ACTIVITY

Read the variations of the Milgram experiment below. Say whether you think the obedience levels would be higher or lower than 65 per cent and give a reason why:

- The setting was moved from Yale (a prestigious American university) to a run-down office
- The experimenter left the room during the experiment and told the teacher to continue with the shocks
- The experimenter gave orders via telephone
- The teacher and learner were in the same room
- The experimenter was not wearing a lab coat and did not appear to be a figure of authority
- The teacher had to force the learner's hand onto a shock plate.

In all variations, the obedience levels dropped. Let's have a look why:

- **Prestige** – when the setting was moved to a run-down office, obedience levels dropped as the original study was conducted at a very prestigious university
- **Surveillance** – when the experimenter left the room, and also when he gave orders via telephone, obedience level dropped. Participants were less likely to follow the orders as they didn't have the physical presence of the experimenter there
- **Buffers** – this is anything that prevents those who obey from being aware of the full impact of their actions. In the original study the wall was a buffer between the teacher and the learner; when they were both in the same room, obedience levels dropped
- **Authority** – when the experimenter didn't appear as a figure of authority and wasn't wearing a lab coat, obedience levels dropped. Milgram suggested that when individuals perceive another person as having authority over them, they no longer feel responsible for their actions ('I was told to do it') and become an agent of the authority
- **Personal responsibility** – when the participant had to force the learner's hand onto the shock plate, he had more responsibility for his suffering and so obedience level dropped.



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Using your knowledge of psychology, outline two reasons why people obey a figure of authority.



ACTIVITY

Below are some evaluation points for you to consider with regard to Milgram's research. Try to complete and develop each point.

- 1 The participants suffered distress during the experiment. Three of them had seizures. This is unethical because ...
- 2 Only white, American men were used in the investigation. This is a limitation because ...
- 3 The method used was a **laboratory experiment**. This is an advantage because ... This is a disadvantage because ...
- 4 Participants were **deceived**. This is unethical because ...



EVALUATION BOX

- 1 The participants suffered distress during the experiment and three of them had seizures. It is unethical to cause this much distress to participants and the experiment should have been stopped; however, Milgram argued that there was no way that he could have predicted the results.
- 2 The sample cannot be generalised to women and people in other cultures as he only used white, American men; however, when he replicated the study with women, the obedience levels were the same as for the men in the original study.
- 3 The method used was a laboratory experiment. An advantage of this is that it can be replicated (which Milgram did) and the variables can be controlled. The disadvantages include the fact that it is an artificial environmental and task (you are not asked to electrocute people every day), so the study lacks ecological validity, which means that it cannot be generalised to other people, places and settings.
- 4 Participants were deceived as to the true nature of the investigation, also to the fact that Mr Wallace was a confederate and that the shocks weren't real; however, deception was necessary as, if they had known the real aim of the investigation, there wouldn't have been any point in doing it.



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Describe and evaluate one study into obedience; try to include the method, results, conclusion and an evaluation point.



ACTIVITY

Answer the following questions:

- 1 Do you think that the Milgram study would be allowed to be conducted today? Why?
- 2 What does it tell us about obedience?
- 3 Were the Nazis in World War II different, or is any human being capable of doing this?

Practical implications of research into obedience

Knowledge of how and why people are obedient in different situations is extremely useful in helping us to understand individuals' behaviour, for example why the soldiers in charge of the Nazi death camps did what they did. As Philip Zimbardo says, while their behaviour was in no way acceptable, it is understandable.

Unfortunately, the lessons that should have been learned from World War II seemed to have passed us by: news about Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, for instance, where soldiers acting as guards behaved extremely badly to Iraqi prisoners, is chilling evidence that human beings can do the most terrible things in certain circumstances.



TEST YOURSELF

- 1 What is meant by the term obedience?
- 2 Outline one difference between conformity and obedience.
- 3 What was the aim of the Milgram study?
- 4 How were the participants deceived in the Milgram study?
- 5 The naive participant always played the role of the teacher. Why were the roles of the teacher and learner always fixed?
- 6 Why was the whole procedure standardised (the confederate's answers and responses were the same for all of the participants and the experimenter used the same prods)?
- 7 What were the results of the Milgram study? How many participants went up to 300 volts? How many participants went up to 450 volts?
- 8 What did Milgram and psychiatrists originally predict about how many participants would deliver the full 450 volts?
- 9 Name three of the variations of the original experiment and say how these affected the levels of obedience.
- 10 How can Milgram's results be used to explain obedience?

ASK YOURSELF

Have you ever noticed that when you are working in a group, compared with working alone, each individual tends to reduce their own effort?

ASK YOURSELF

Can you think of an example where you have done this?

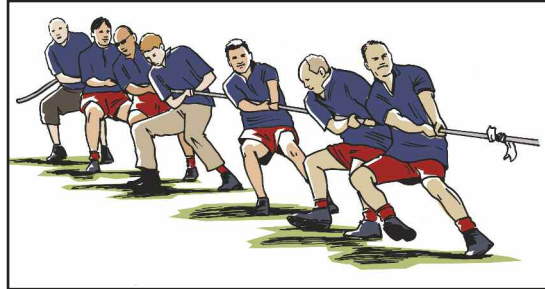


KEY TERM

Social loafing – when people put less effort into a task that is being performed with others.

SOCIAL LOAFING

Max Ringelmann (1913) conducted an investigation with men playing a tug-of-war task and concluded that the greater the number of men involved, the less effort each individual put in.



This is known as the Ringelmann effect and it forms part of the concept of social loafing.



KEY STUDY

Latané et al. (1979)

Aim: To test the idea of social loafing.

Method: Participants were split into two conditions that involved them shouting and clapping loudly. In one condition they were on their own; in another they were with four or six other people. Participants had to wear headsets so that they didn't know how much noise the others were making. Investigators recorded the amount of noise that was made.

Results: The results showed that the more people there were in the group, the less was the effort made by each individual. The output of sound when working with five others was reduced to about one-third of their output when alone.

Conclusion: The participants made less effort in groups because other people were contributing to the task. This is an example of social loafing.



RESEARCH METHODS

The Latané *et al.* study is an example of a laboratory experiment. A description of a laboratory experiment and its strengths and weaknesses can be found in Chapter 5: Research methods and ethics – part 1, pages 70–71.

Bibb Latané *et al.* suggested that the identification of an individual's effort in a group task eliminates the effects of social loafing. They also suggested that the reason for the results of the noise study was because participants thought that their own effort could not be measured.



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Outline what is meant by the term social loafing.



EVALUATION BOX

- Most of the research has taken place in a laboratory setting using artificial tasks; therefore, the studies can be said to lack ecological validity. Participants would behave differently in a real-life setting. Being asked to clap while wearing headphones is not an everyday occurrence.
- Participants may display **demand characteristics** as they are performing in front of the researchers and so may pick up cues as to how they should act.

Practical implications of research into social loafing

Knowledge of factors influencing social loafing can be useful when managing teams of people, perhaps in the armed forces, or in less physical environments such as a busy office. Knowing how to distribute tasks to a workforce and how the workforce will respond is an extremely important and valuable management skill, and can mean the difference between the success and failure of an organisation!



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Describe and evaluate one study into social loafing; try to include the method, results, conclusion and an evaluation point.

ASK YOURSELF

What does this suggest about other people influencing our behaviour?



TEST YOURSELF

- 1 What is meant by the term social loafing?
- 2 What were the results of the Latané *et al.* study?
- 3 How did Latané *et al.* explain the results of this experiment?



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Look at the examples of social behaviour below and state whether each is an example of social loafing, conformity or obedience:

- 1 Mary tidies her bedroom because her mother has told her to.
- 2 Joshua likes doing group work in class because he doesn't have to do as much work as he thinks the rest of the group will.
- 3 Ryan goes to the cinema to see a film that he doesn't really want to see, but all of his friends are going to watch it.

ASK YOURSELF

If you were invisible for the day, what would you do?

Have you ever been in a crowd at a concert or at a football match and found yourself swept along with the mood of the crowd?



KEY TERM

Deindividuation – the loss of self-awareness and sense of personal responsibility that occurs in members of a crowd.

DEINDIVIDUATION



This is known as **deindividuation**. A definition of it is: 'the loss of self-awareness and sense of personal responsibility that occurs in members of a crowd'.



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Define what is meant by the term deindividuation.

This may occur because we may feel anonymous in a crowd and so have fewer restraints on our behaviour. We are more likely to be impulsive and follow the behaviour of those around us.

When you were asked above about what you would do if you were invisible for the day, how many of your acts were antisocial?



KEY STUDY

Zimbardo (1969)

Aim: To test the idea of deindividuation.

Method: Using female participants in groups of four, participants had to give electric shocks to Philip Zimbardo's confederates.

The participants believed that they were taking part in a learning exercise. There were two conditions: in one the women wore hoods and identical coats (so that they were anonymous); in the other they wore their own clothes with name tags on and spoke to each other using their own names.

Results: Zimbardo found that the anonymous women were twice as likely to give shocks compared with the women wearing their own clothes.

Conclusion: Zimbardo concluded that if people know that they cannot be identified (have anonymity) they are more likely to behave aggressively.



RESEARCH METHODS

The Zimbardo study is an example of a laboratory experiment. A description of a laboratory experiment and its strengths and weaknesses can be found in Chapter 5: Research methods and ethics – part 1, pages 70–71.



EVALUATION BOX

- The method used was a laboratory experiment. An advantage of this is that it can be replicated and the variables can be controlled. The disadvantages include the fact that it is an artificial environment and task (you are not asked to electrocute people every day, especially wearing hoods and coats) and also the study lacks ecological validity, which means that it cannot be generalised to other people, places and settings.
- The participants may have experienced distress. It is unethical to cause participants psychological harm.



KEY STUDY

Diener *et al.* (1976)

Aim: To test the idea that if people are anonymous (cannot be identified), they are likely to commit antisocial acts.

Method: They asked 27 women to give out sweets to 1,000 trick-or-treaters during Halloween night. There were two conditions: in one the children were asked for their names and addresses (identifiable); in the other the children remained anonymous. While the women were chatting to the children, their phone rang and so they went to answer it. The women left the children at the door with the instruction to take one sweet each. A hidden observer recorded whether the children stole any additional sweets.

Results: The children were more likely to steal when they were anonymous.

Conclusion: E. Diener *et al.* concluded that people are more likely to steal when they cannot be identified.



RESEARCH METHODS

The Diener *et al.* study is an example of a field experiment. A description of a field experiment and its strengths and weaknesses can be found in Chapter 5: Research methods and ethics – part 1, pages 71–72.



EVALUATION BOX

The Diener *et al.* study is a field experiment, which means that most of the variables can be controlled and it is fairly easy to replicate. Because participants don't always know that they are taking part in an investigation (which makes consent an issue) they display more natural behaviour. Also, as the setting is a real-life one, it has higher ecological validity, so the findings can be generalised to other settings.



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Describe and evaluate one study into deindividuation; try to include the method, results, conclusion and an evaluation point.

Draw up a table showing the similarities and differences between a lab and a field experiment.

Explanation of factors affecting deindividuation

So, what factors affect deindividuation?

- **The mood of the crowd** – when people are in a crowd they tend to pick up the mood and respond to it (for example, football hooliganism could be explained in this way). It can also have a positive effect (for example, people dancing at a concert).
- **Anonymity** – this is supported by the research by Zimbardo and Diener *et al.* If participants are anonymous, they are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour. Leon Mann (1981) examined a range of newspaper articles about the behaviour of people in crowds who had watched somebody threatening to commit suicide, for example by jumping from a building. He noticed that, shockingly, on some occasions the crowds had tried to encourage the individuals to jump. This occurred when the crowd was large, when it was dark and when they weren't close to the person attempting to jump.

Practical implications of research into deindividuation

Research into deindividuation suggests that people cease to behave as individuals when in crowds. The implications are that the normal, acceptable rules and norms of society change when people are in crowds or when they conform to large groups by wearing uniforms or the same sports kit.

ASK YOURSELF

What does this suggest?

When crowds gather, we often find police present and tension building. Political rallies and marches often end in aggressive confrontation. Knowledge of deindividuation can help the police to deal with crowd situations, by splitting the crowd into smaller units, and building and maintaining calm while the crowd disperses; the police themselves can also behave extremely aggressively and violently to those protesting, however, because they themselves are uniformed and are, to some extent, deindividuated.

The US Army has applied the knowledge and principles of deindividuation to its rules governing the behaviour of troops who are on leave or who leave the army permanently. It used to be the case that soldiers could take their uniforms with them when they left, but now wearing a uniform is only allowed on special occasions. This is because the US Army believes that with the uniform comes a sense of deindividuation and, as such, the soldier may be attacked as an 'army member' rather than an individual. Also, the soldier may feel disinhibited by their uniform and act irresponsibly, bringing the army into disrepute.

ASK YOURSELF

Are you a helpful person? Can you give an example of when you last helped somebody?

Imagine you are on a bus and a blind man carrying a white stick gets on. After a few minutes he falls over. Would you help him? Would you be as helpful if a person that was drunk fell in front of you?

You would probably be more likely to help the blind person than the drunk, but why?



TEST YOURSELF

- 1 Outline what is meant by the term 'deindividuation'?
- 2 State one example of when this might occur from the research evidence above.
- 3 What did Zimbardo's research suggest about deindividuation?
- 4 What did Diener *et al.*'s research suggest about deindividuation?
- 5 Which study displays more natural behaviour and why?
- 6 What are the two factors that can affect deindividuation?

BYSTANDER BEHAVIOUR



Bibb Latané and John Darley were the first psychologists to start research into bystander behaviour after they were shocked and confused by a murder in the USA. Kitty Genovese was assaulted several times very early one morning by a man. Her cries for help ('Help, he's just stabbed me') woke the people living in the area where she was being assaulted. In the space of 30 minutes her attacker continued to assault her before eventually returning to kill her. The police found that 38 people living nearby had either seen or heard the attack but that no one had helped.

Why didn't anybody help Kitty? We would probably like to think that we would help, but psychologists have put forward a number of different explanations that might suggest otherwise. These explanations attempt to explain **bystander behaviour**. This term covers two different concepts: **bystander apathy** (when a bystander does not help the person in need) and **bystander intervention** (when a person does help the person in need).



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Outline what is meant by the term bystander behaviour.

Explanation of factors affecting bystander behaviour

Latané and Darley wanted to test this idea. They believed that as the number of bystanders increases, the less likely the victim is to get help. This is a concept called **diffusion of responsibility**.



KEY STUDY

Latané and Darley (1968)

Aim: To test the concept of diffusion of responsibility.

Method: They tested this concept by asking students to sit in booths and communicate with each other via an intercom. They had a number of different conditions, which were as follows:

- 1 The participant believed that there was only one other person in the booth.
- 2 The participant believed that there were two other people in the booth.
- 3 The participant believed that there were five other people in the booth.

After the discussion had started, one of the others (a confederate) mentioned that he was epileptic. After a few minutes, he pretended that he was having a seizure.

ASK YOURSELF

Why do you think this was the case? Would you have helped?



KEY TERMS

Bystander behaviour – bystander apathy and bystander intervention.

Bystander apathy – when a bystander does not help the person in need.

Bystander intervention – when a bystander does help the person in need.

Diffusion of responsibility – the more bystanders that witness an incident, the less likely it is that one of them will help.

ASK YOURSELF

Do you think the size of the group of bystanders has an effect on whether they will help or not?

KEY STUDY – (continued)

Results:

Condition	Percentage of participants that responded within the first four minutes
The participant believed that there was only one other person in the booth.	85%
The participant believed that there were two other people in the booth.	62%
The participant believed that there were five other people in the booth.	31%

Conclusion: When the participant thought that they were alone with the confederate, they were far more likely to help, compared with the participants who believed that they were in a larger group. This is an example of diffusion of responsibility, which supports the idea that as the number of bystanders increases, the less chance the victim has of receiving help, as the responsibility for the help is shared or diffused among them all.



RESEARCH METHODS

The Latané and Darley study is an example of a laboratory experiment. A description of a laboratory experiment and its strengths and weaknesses can be found in Chapter 5: Research methods and ethics – part 1, pages 70–71.



ACTIVITY

Draw a bar chart to represent this data. Be sure to give it an appropriate title and label the axis.



ACTIVITY

How would you investigate diffusion of responsibility?

Another explanation put forward to explain bystander behaviour is called **pluralistic ignorance**. In ambiguous situations (unknown or unclear), people often look to others for help in terms of what to do. In an emergency situation, if all other bystanders are also unsure of what to do, it is likely that this will have an effect on everybody else, and hence produce the wrong guidance.

This concept was effectively demonstrated by Latané and Darley again, in a well-known study called 'the smoke-filled room'.

ASK YOURSELF

How can you apply diffusion of responsibility to the case of Kitty Genovese?



KEY TERM

Pluralistic ignorance – When each bystander takes no action and thus misleads the others into defining the incident as a non-emergency.



KEY STUDY

Latané and Darley (1968)

Aim: To test the concept of pluralistic ignorance.

Method: There were two conditions. In the first condition participants were asked to sit in a room and complete a questionnaire on the pressures of urban life. The experimenter then arranged for smoke (actually steam) to pour into the room through a vent in the wall. The participants were watched through a one-way mirror and were timed as to how long it took them to report the smoke. The experiment was stopped after six minutes.

In the second condition the procedure was as above, but participants were in a group with two confederates. When the participant asked them what they thought was happening, they replied 'Dunno' to all questions.

Results: Only 10 per cent reported the smoke within six minutes when there were passive others in the room (compared with 75 per cent when alone).

Conclusion: This is a clear example of pluralistic ignorance. People didn't want to overreact in the presence of others. We use their behaviour as guidance: if they appear to be calm, then there mustn't be a problem.



RESEARCH METHODS

The Latané and Darley study is an example of a field experiment. A description of a field experiment and its strengths and weaknesses can be found in Chapter 5: Research methods and ethics – part 1, pages 71–72.



ACTIVITY

Why might pluralistic ignorance sometimes lead to a disaster?



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Read the following examples and state whether they are an example of pluralistic ignorance or diffusion of responsibility:

- Bob drives past a person who has broken down on the motorway; he doesn't stop because he thinks that other people will stop and help
- Janice isn't worried when the fire alarm goes off at work because nobody else is panicking.

Using your knowledge of psychology, outline what is meant by the terms 'diffusion of responsibility' and 'pluralistic ignorance'.

ASK YOURSELF

What do you think the costs of helping somebody are? Would this make you less likely to help them?

Think back to the question you were asked at the start of this section, where you were asked to say who you would be more likely to help, a blind or a drunken victim. No doubt you said the blind victim, as he cannot help his condition, whereas the drunken victim can. The characteristics of the victim are another concept that can also be linked to the 'costs' of helping.

Psychologists suggest that we weigh up the costs and rewards of helping somebody and, if the costs outweigh the rewards, then we are less likely to help. If it is the other way round, we will help.

Irving Piliavin *et al.* studied this concept in one of the most famous experiments in the field of psychology. The study, 'Good Samaritanism: an underground phenomenon', was conducted in 1969.



KEY STUDY

Piliavin *et al.* (1969)

Aim: To test how bystanders behaved when put in a situation where a 'victim' (a confederate) needed help. Piliavin *et al.* were also testing the concept of diffusion of responsibility.

Method: The procedure involved two male confederates playing a victim who collapsed on the subway in New York. The participants were the passengers on the train (an opportunity sample). The different conditions were as follows:

- The victim was either black or white
- The victim was either carrying a cane (blind) or appeared to be drunk
- In each condition there was a helper (confederate) who waited a certain amount of time before intervening if none of the participants did.

There were observers in the carriage who recorded how long it took people to help and if any comments were made.

Results:

- The cane victim was more likely to receive help than the other victim and was helped immediately in almost every trial regardless of his race
- The drunk victim was helped 50 per cent of the time before the helper model intervened
- The drunk victim was more likely to be helped by somebody of the same race
- The victim (who was always male) was more likely to be helped by males than females
- The number of bystanders had little effect on the rate of helping (so no diffusion of responsibility).

Conclusion: Piliavin suggested that the cost of helping is a factor affecting bystander behaviour. The person will help if the costs are low (for example, time, danger, inconvenience etc.). For example, the cane victim received far more help because the costs of helping were lower than the drunk victim (for example, danger, embarrassment).

There was no evidence of pluralistic ignorance in this study.



RESEARCH METHODS

The Piliavin study is an example of a field experiment. A description of a field experiment and its strengths and weaknesses can be found in Chapter 5: Research methods and ethics – part 1, pages 71–72.



EVALUATION BOX

- Ethical issues need to be considered here as participants (the passengers) did not know that they were taking part in an experiment and so there was no consent. Also, there wouldn't have been any debriefing as the participants would have got off the train and gone about their business. Protection of participants also needs to be considered. What if they didn't help? They may have felt guilty about this. What if they had been worried about the person that they did/didn't help?
- Advantages of a field experiment are that the researcher can study natural behaviour, because it is in a real-life setting; there is less chance of demand characteristics as the participants don't know that they are taking part in an experiment; and it is also higher in ecological validity.

In David Schroeder *et al.*'s (1995) book, a range of issues influencing bystander intervention are discussed. Schroeder extends the description of pluralistic ignorance, where people look hopefully towards others for guidance as to what to do in a situation, without realising that others are looking to them for exactly the same guidance. This means that when nothing is done in a situation (because people are ignorant as to how to act), those watching for guidance conclude that the situation must not be an emergency and do not act either.

Schroeder also concludes that people are less likely to intervene if they cannot decide on, or are not sure of, the type of action to undertake or the type of help to give. A person may be more likely to call an emergency service, such as the police or an ambulance, even though their own intervention may have been sufficient.

If they do decide to help, they can be very effective and can, because people are looking on for guidance, call on others to help directly once helping behaviour has been initiated.

Practical implications of research into bystander behaviour

Schroeder says that people are much more likely to begin to help if they have some training and feel more confident in the situation. The practical implication of this is that the more widely people are trained in basic medical assistance, in schools, colleges and places of work, the more likely people will feel able to intervene in an emergency and not suffer with bystander apathy.



EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

Describe and evaluate one study into bystander behaviour; try to include the method, results, conclusion and an evaluation point.

There are many reasons why people do or don't help others in need. The explanations above have considered factors that may affect people not helping.

Daniel Batson put forward a theory called the **empathy altruism hypothesis**. Altruism is a form of pro-social behaviour where the person helps another for no reward (that is, they do not benefit from the action). Some psychologists argue that this is not possible however, as there is always a reward, whether it be intrinsic (for example, feeling good about yourself) or extrinsic (praise from other people).

Batson suggested that if we feel empathy for a person (being able to experience the emotions of another person by imagining ourselves in their position) we are more likely to help them. Batson said that the higher the empathy, the more likely we are to help through altruism. He devised an experiment to test this hypothesis.



KEY STUDY

Batson (1981)

Aim: To test the idea that if people felt high empathic concern for another person, they would help another person who appeared to be in distress.

Method: Participants were introduced to a confederate called Elaine. The participants were told that they were either similar to Elaine (the high-empathy condition) or dissimilar to Elaine (the low-empathy group). Participants then watched as Elaine received a number of electric shocks. After a while, Elaine

KEY STUDY – (continued)

appeared to become distressed and upset. Participants were then asked to make a decision. They could either take Elaine's place and receive the electric shocks instead of her, or leave the experiment.

Results: Those participants that were in the high-empathy condition (those who were told that they were similar to Elaine) were more likely to take Elaine's place, even when they were given the chance to leave. Those participants in the low-empathy condition (those who were told that they were dissimilar to Elaine) were more likely to leave.

Conclusion: This demonstrates how being empathic (being able to experience the emotions of another person by imagining ourselves in their position) can lead to altruistic behaviour. The higher the empathy, the more likely that altruistic behaviour will occur.



TEST YOURSELF

- 1 What is meant by the term bystander behaviour?
- 2 What is meant by 'bystander intervention'?
- 3 What is meant by 'bystander apathy'?
- 4 What event caused psychologists to research bystander behaviour?
- 5 What is meant by the term 'diffusion of responsibility'?
- 6 What was being tested in the 'smoke-filled room study'?
- 7 How have psychologists researched pluralistic ignorance?
- 8 According to Piliavin *et al.*, which factors may affect bystander intervention?