



General Certificate of Education

Psychology 6181

Specification A

Unit 4 (PYA4)

**Social Psychology, Physiological
Psychology, Cognitive Psychology,
Developmental Psychology and
Comparative Psychology**

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - January series

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PYA4 Social Psychology, Physiological Psychology, Cognitive Psychology, Developmental Psychology and Comparative Psychology

Section A: Social Psychology

Question 1

This was not a popular question and the general standard of answers was not high, although there were some very competent candidate responses. Better answers referred to ideas such as cognitive economy, grain of truth, and illusory correlations, and obtained good AO2 marks by linking these ideas to real life issues such as prejudice and discrimination. Weaker candidates provided largely anecdotal material and occasionally insightful comments unsupported by psychological concepts or findings. Empirical research was rarely quoted even in better essays.

Question 2

A very popular question eliciting a range of answers. Most candidates were able to refer to issues in relationships across cultures such as individualistic/collective, voluntary/involuntary, arranged marriages etc. The level of understanding varied greatly. Another key differentiator was the use of research studies, as required by the question. Better candidates were able to describe several relevant studies, such as Hofstede, Moghaddam etc, evaluate them methodologically, and link findings to cross-cultural issues. Weaker candidates either failed to refer to studies, or described them briefly and without using findings effectively. At the top end of the mark range there was some excellent metacommentary and evaluation of cross-cultural research.

Question 3

Although most candidates were prepared for this general and popular area, a substantial number were caught out by the precise question. This required a focus on research studies, but many candidates instead discussed *explanations* of media influences on anti-social behaviour. This could be effective if linked to evidence from studies, but such linkage was rare. Better candidates reviewed studies with both positive and negative findings and discussed them appropriately. Better answers often used pro-social effects of the media as effective evaluation. Bandura's Bobo dolls were popular, but for significant credit candidates needed to make explicit and justified reference to the media. In a significant minority of answers the studies were simply described and not used effectively. This area also attracted a number of references to anecdotal material, such as everyday exposure to violent films or the Jamie Bulger case. Such material is rarely justified and earned few if any marks.

Section B: Physiological Psychology

Question 4

This part of the Specification seems to be becoming gradually more popular. Centres may be realising that the higher factual content may suit weaker candidates, although they may struggle with AO2 material. There were many good answers focusing on the early work of Broca and Wernicke, the Wada test, the classic studies of Sperry on the split-brain, and more recent neuropsychological findings. Although the focus of most answers was on language, some candidates also considered lateralisation of visuo-spatial functions (this was not necessary for marks across the range).

There was some excellent evaluation of individual studies, and occasional commentary on variations in laterality associated with gender and handedness. Weaker candidates tended to confuse laterality with localisation, and although outlining potentially relevant material did not reach the higher bands.

Question 5

This was an extremely popular question. Responses have shown a general improvement in standard over the years. There were few general essays on sleep functions/theories and the majority of answers contained relevant material. Description of studies varied from sketchy to detailed and accurate. There were frequent problems with AO2. A substantial minority of answers failed to bring out the relevance of findings to an understanding of the interaction between endogenous pacemakers and exogenous zeitgebers, a key part of evaluation. There were many methodological criticisms of studies, such as lack of ecological validity or ethical issues, that were not contextualised and made relevant, so earning few marks. Such rote-learnt AO2 is rarely effective. Better candidates focused on the relationship between pacemakers and zeitgebers and used research findings to illustrate this. There was also frequent reference to the effects of disrupting biological rhythms. Such material earned marks insofar as it was shaped to the question of the role of pacemakers and zeitgebers.

Question 6

There were very few answers to this question. On the whole the standard was quite good, with candidates generally choosing the James-Lange theory in (a) and providing accurate detail. They were also able to gain good marks for AO2 through the systematic comments of Cannon and others. Schachter's theory was the choice in (b). Presentation was sometimes confused with misunderstandings of the model's key features. AO2 was also patchy, with better answers using research findings but weaker candidates focusing on methodology without contextualisation and so earning few marks.

Section C: Cognitive Psychology**Question 7**

Not a popular question, with many examiners failing to see any examples at all. There were a few excellent descriptions of Kahneman's capacity model and supporting studies, but a large minority of answers confused divided and focused attention and instead covered the various models of selective (focused) attention. These could have been made relevant, especially as AO2, but usually were not.

Question 8

Although a number of theories could have been relevant to this question, including theories of development (eg nature or nurture), or theories of perceptual organisation such as colour or motion, most answers used Gibson's and Gregory's bottom-up and top-down theories. Description was often impressive, showing clear understanding of the principles behind the theories. AO2 was not as good. Research findings were used, sometimes effectively, and the relative success of each theory in explaining visual illusions was used in better answers. Most candidates did not present such material clearly and/or failed to understand the implications for the theories.

Question 9

There were not many answers to this question, and the range of quality was wide. Better answers referred accurately to the work of Labov and Bernstein and understood the implications of their findings on social and cultural aspects of language use. Some candidates, besides outlining studies, also commented on general issues related to social/cultural aspects of language. Weaker candidates provided very general descriptions of language and culture and largely failed to engage with the question. Others brought in the ideas of Vygotsky on language development. Credit was earned if the socio-cultural significance was explicitly emphasised, but this was, unfortunately, rare.

Section D: Developmental Psychology**Question 10**

This question required a consideration of the development of measured intelligence. The most appropriate material relates to the nature-nurture debate in relation to the development of IQ, and there were a number of excellent answers using twin, adoption, and enrichment studies extremely effectively. Evaluation of studies was often contextualised and appropriate, and commentary on the general relationship between nature and nurture was common. Some candidates focused on the history of IQ testing and/or the validity and reliability of IQ tests. Such material could earn AO2 credit but often did not refer to the *development* of measured intelligence and so earned few AO1 marks. A number of candidates discussed general cognitive development using Piaget and Vygotsky. If the content was shaped towards the development of measured intelligence such answers earned credit.

Question 11

A reasonably popular question with some excellent answers but also some clear centre effects. Most candidates outline Freud's psychodynamic approach and social learning theory. The accuracy and detail of descriptions of Freud was extremely variable across centres with some obvious misunderstandings characterising responses from a few centres. However the most common weakness was a failure to focus on the *personality* aspects of the chosen explanations, and a significant minority of candidates simply described, for instance, the stages of psychosexual development with no reference to personality at all. Evaluation of Freud also tended to be generic and not linked explicitly to personality development. Answers also tended to be unbalanced, with relatively little coverage of social learning theory. What coverage there was tended to focus on Bobo dolls and failed to refer directly to personality development. Mischel's situationism was mentioned by some candidates, but again the relevance to the question was often unclear.

Question 12

Not a popular question and the general standard was poor. Candidates often relied heavily on anecdotal material, and accurate references to the theories of eg Erickson or Levinson, were rare. Evaluation and commentary were conspicuous by their absence. Given that Erickson's theory, for instance, is relatively straightforward it is surprising that this section of the Specification often produces disappointing answers, with candidates failing to produce psychologically-informed material.

Section E: Comparative Psychology**Question 13**

A relatively popular question that produced a wide range of answers. Most candidates were able to give many examples of behaviours (sometimes from other subsections) such as self-recognition and theory of mind, social learning and imitation, and navigation and language. However the key discriminator was the extent to which these examples were discussed in the context of *intelligence*. Better answers considered the nature of intelligence and were able to make all their examples and studies relevant as either reflecting intelligence or not. Commentary was often sophisticated and impressive. Weaker answers failed to focus on intelligence and simply listed behaviours without any clear context or discussion. A few candidates discussed the evolution of brain and intelligence but rarely managed to shape such material to the question. This was a clear example of a question where many candidates could have done significantly better with only a slight adjustment in their approach.

Question 14

This question was quite popular and produced a wide range of answers. Variation was in the accuracy of detail of studies of animal language, and in particular attempts to teach language to primates (what species and methods were used). A broad range of examples of animal communication was used, varying from the bee dance and signalling in vervet monkeys to primate communication, but AO2 marks were often disappointing. Many candidates failed to consider the nature of language (eg using Hockett's design features) and relied mainly on Terrace's criticisms of the primate work. In the better answers candidates used Hockett's features to frame their answer and to evaluate a range of animal communication systems and attempts to teach language to primates. Weaker answers did not consider the relationship

between communication systems and language at all, but simply assumed they were the same thing.

Question 15

A very popular question with many answers of high quality. Candidates were able to produce impressive accounts of sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour, with a range of studies and framing ideas (eg parental investment, inter/intra selection). Better candidates were able to include some non-human animal work (eg the peacock's tail) and make it explicitly relevant to human sexual selection. Weaker answers either failed to distinguish human and non-human animal work or described general evolutionary theory without shaping it to the question of human reproductive behaviour. There was some excellent evaluation and commentary, with many candidates discussing social and cultural influences on human reproductive behaviour as a counterpoint to evolutionary approaches. This is an area where the quality of answers has steadily improved, with candidates able to organise a range of ideas and empirical findings into coherent and focused answers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.