

# Student responses with examiner commentary

A-level Psychology 7182/3  
Issues and Options in Psychology

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[First teaching: September 2015]

[First Examination: Summer 2017]

## Introduction

These resources should be used in conjunction with the Specimen Assessment Material (7182/3) from the AQA website. This document illustrates how examiners intend to apply the mark scheme in live papers. The question papers will be marked using a levels of response mark scheme. These answers and the accompanying commentaries have been produced to help you understand what is required to achieve the different levels and how the mark scheme is to be interpreted. These principles of marking apply across all papers.

While every attempt has been made to show a range of student responses, the following responses, and examiner comments provide teachers with the best opportunity to understand the application of the mark scheme. Responses have not been produced for every question but rather cover some of the extended writing questions.

\*Please note that the students' responses have been typed exactly as they were written.

**Topic: Gender**

**16** Describe and evaluate Kohlberg's explanation of gender development.

**[16 marks]**

**Mark scheme**

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 6 and AO3 = 10**

Level	Marks	Description
4	13–16	Knowledge of Kohlberg's explanation of gender development is accurate and generally well detailed. Evaluation is thorough and effective. The answer is clear, coherent and focused. Specialist terminology is used effectively. Minor detail and/or expansion of argument sometimes lacking.
3	9–12	Knowledge of Kohlberg's explanation of gender development is evident. There are occasional inaccuracies. Evaluation is apparent and mostly effective. The answer is mostly clear and organised. Specialist terminology is mostly used effectively. Lacks focus in places.
2	5–8	Some knowledge of Kohlberg's explanation of gender development is present. Focus is mainly on description. Any evaluation is only partly effective. The answer lacks clarity, accuracy and organisation in places. Specialist terminology is used inappropriately on occasions.
1	1–4	Knowledge of Kohlberg's explanation of gender development is limited. Evaluation is limited, poorly focused or absent. The answer as a whole lacks clarity, has many inaccuracies and is poorly organised. Specialist terminology either absent or inappropriately used.
	0	No relevant content.

**Possible content:**

- cognitive theory – relates to child's understanding of gender
- stages of gender development: identity (awareness of own gender), stability (understanding of (own) gender as fixed over time), constancy (consistency) understanding that gender is unchanged despite changes in outward appearance (clothing, hair etc) or context
- approximate ages: identity (2–3 yrs), stability (4–6 yrs) constancy (7+ yrs)
- processes involved in transition through stages: maturation, socialisation, lessening egocentrism.

**Possible evaluation points:**

- sensible focus on cognition (thinking governs behaviour) compared to, eg behavioural explanations
- use of evidence to support stages (eg Slaby and Frey 1975; Damon 1977)
- cross-cultural findings confirm the three stages (eg Munro et al 1984)
- Kohlberg's underestimation of age at which gender identity occurs, eg children seek out same-sex playmates earlier than the proposed gender identity stage
- focus on description rather than explanation
- inability to explain why boys show stronger sex-typing than girls
- comparison with other explanations, eg gender schema theory.

Credit other relevant evaluation points.

Only credit evaluation of the methodology used in studies when made relevant to evaluation of the explanation.

## Response A

Kohlberg's theory of gender development is cognitive i.e. it involves the brain and its' processes/ways of thinking. He argues that gender development starts at age 2 and finishes at age 7 in the form of 3 qualitatively different stages. Before a child can progress to the next stage there must be brain maturation i.e. the brain is ready to move on to the next stage.

The first stage is gender labelling. This happens between the ages of 2-3 and involves the child labelling gender. Children start to label their own gender correctly and also recognise other people as male or female. This is based on superficial characteristics e.g. hair length. At this stage the child doesn't understand their gender is fixed – they believe they can grow up into the opposite gender.

The second stage is gender stability and this happens between the ages of 3-5. At this stage the child understands their gender is fixed across time and that, for example, they are male now and will be male when they grow up. However they don't understand that gender is fixed across situations e.g. a man with long hair is seen as a woman by the child.

The final stage is gender constancy and this happens between the ages 5-7. At this stage the child understands gender is fixed across time and across situations and they have a more complex understanding of the permanency of gender. They will also observe models of the same sex to identify gender appropriate behaviours – this is referred to as 'self-socialism' by Kohlberg.

Kohlberg's theory of gender development is good because it explains the roles of both nature and nurture within gender development – the process of brain maturation is a biological factor and so nature is involved in gender development, and nurture is involved through the child's process of self-socialisation. As a result of this, Kohlberg's theory is less reductionist than other theories of gender development such as the gender schema theory, and so Kohlberg's theory provides a valuable insight into the development of gender.

Kohlberg's theory also has good face validity – it has been supported by numerous pieces of research – one piece has found that in 6 cultures (Western and Non-Western) children go through all of Kohlberg's stages in the order he claimed. As a result, Kohlberg's theory of gender development has higher external validity.

Further evidence to support Kohlberg's proposal that gender development is an active process. For example, Slaby & Frey found that older children with higher levels of gender constancy paid more attention to same-sex models than children with lower levels of gender constancy. This supports Kohlberg's theory that children understand gender differences at different ages, and that gender concepts develop through the active structuring of the child's social experiences. This contrasts with the passive learning process proposed by other approaches such as Social learning theorists.

On the other hand, critics argue that Kohlberg has underestimated children's abilities when it comes to gender. Research has found that children prefer gender-specific toys at age 2 and want same-sex playmates at age 3. This is way before the age Kohlberg claimed

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gender development ends at (7) therefore his theory is flawed and can't fully explain gender development.

A further criticism of Kohlberg's theory of gender development is that it is considered a good description of how gender develops but it does not offer any real explanation of how these processes occur. This limits the theory because it lacks depth.

**Examiner commentary**

Knowledge of Kohlberg's explanation of gender development is accurate and contains sufficient detail of the relevant stages. There is a slight inaccurate use of the term 'self-socialism' in paragraph 4, but the correct term 'self-socialisation' is used later.

There is effective evaluative comment, with the points generally explained rather than simply stated. There is also appropriate selection and use of evidence to support Kohlberg (eg Slaby and Frey).

The answer is clear and coherent with good use of paragraphing. Specialist terminology is used largely effectively throughout the answer (eg naming of the stages; qualitative nature of the stages; external validity; maturation etc.) and the answer is succinct and focussed.

**This is a Level 4 answer – it contains sufficient knowledge and effective discussion for this level.**

**Mark awarded = 14**

## Response B

Kohlberg's explanation of gender development is cognitive and focusses on how the child's thinking about their own and other peoples gender develops. Kohlberg proposed that gender identity occurs in three qualitatively different stages. In the first, gender labelling (2-3 years), the child understands gender based on superficial characteristics (e.g hair), but doesn't understand that it is constant across time and situations. In the second, gender stability (3-5) child realises that gender is constant across time but not across situations, for example they may think that a woman wearing trousers is a man. In the final stage, gender constancy (5-7) the child realises that gender is constant across time and situations. They will then start self-socialisation, where they develop gender roles and gender appropriate behaviours by observing and imitating members of the same sex (older members). The stages occur due to biological maturation of cognitive structures.

A strength of Kohlbergs theory is that it takes into account both nature and nurture, because it suggests that development of gender identity is due to biological maturation of the brain, but also that they learn gender appropriate behaviours. The theory is therefore multi-dimensional, and is more accepted because most psychologists agree that a biological and social approach is best to explain gender development.

Furthermore, another strength is that cross cultural research by Munroe found that the three stages of Kohlbergs theory occurred in the same order in five different cultures (America, Nepal, Burma etc.) which suggests that this theory explains universally how gender identities develop, increasing external validities as it can be generalised to many different cultures.

Finally, a weakness of this theory is that it underestimates children's ability to understand their own gender. Children have been seen to play with gender specific toys of their own gender from two years old, which contradicts notions of the theory that suggests that they have no understanding at that age.

### **Examiner commentary**

Knowledge of Kohlberg's theory is evident and the three stages are accurate although there is some detail lacking. For example, it is not explained that gender labelling means that a child recognises that s/he is male or female. The description includes some general information about the theory eg being 'cognitive' and developing in 'qualitatively different stages'.

The evaluative points are fairly well explained with respect to the theory and the points are therefore effective. The final point regarding underestimating children's ability to understand gender would have been enhanced with some evidence to support the claim.

The answer is coherent and succinct and uses specialist terminology reasonably effectively.

**This is a Level 3 answer – although the description and evaluation lack sufficient detail for the top level, the answer is well organised and the material is accurate with effective evaluation. Due to the brevity of the answer it is at the lower end of the mark allocation.**

**Mark awarded = 9**

### Response C

Kohlberg theory of gender development suggest that it occurs through cognition. He suggests that the development of gender occurs in 3 stages. The first stage being gender labelling. This is a basic form of gender identity and it happens at ages 2-3 years old – they start to know either male or female from superficial characteristics. The second stage is gender stability this is where the child believes that gender is fixed across time and not situations. This occurs at the age of 5. For example if a child saw a woman in pants they'll think it is a man. The third stage is gender constancy, this is where the child believes gender is constant over time and situations. This occurs at the age of 7. After these stages self socialisation begins to occur where the child observes same sex model and models this behaviour.

A strength of this study is that it provides evidence for nature and nurture, it provides the role of nurture when they learn through observation and self-socialisation and nature because they all 3 fixed stages go in order and are fixed.

Another strength is that it has good cultural validity as it has been found in 6 cultures that the 3 stages of the development of gender go in the same order. Cultures such as Nepal, belice, Samoa, and USA.

However it can be criticised for underestimating a child's ability in cognition because it has been found that gender constancy can occur earlier. It is been shown that at the age of 3 a child plays with the same sex playmates therefore this theory can be criticised for having underestimating a child's cognition in the development of gender.

### Examiner commentary

There is some knowledge of Kohlberg's theory of gender development evident, although there is a lack of clarity in parts. For example it is not clear what is meant by 'gender stability' from the expansion – "*if a child saw a woman in pants they'll think it is a man*".

There is an attempt to evaluate but this is only partly effective. For example, it is not explained why the point about nature/nurture is a strength; and there is no link back to the question with respect to cultural validity.

The answer lacks clarity and the meaning is sometimes obscured by poor spelling. There is occasional inappropriate use of specialist terminology eg the first sentence of the last paragraph refers to 'cognition' but probably means 'gender development'.

**This is a Level 2 answer – the description is largely accurate but lacks sufficient detail and the evaluation is only partly effective. There is a general lack of clarity and precision.**

**Mark awarded = 6**

**Topic: Aggression**

**35 Describe and evaluate the social learning theory of human aggression. [16 marks]**

**Mark scheme**

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 6 and AO3 = 10**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Marks</b>	<b>Description</b>
4	13–16	Knowledge of the social learning theory of aggression is accurate and generally well detailed. Evaluation is thorough and effective. The answer is clear, coherent and focused. Specialist terminology is used effectively. Minor detail and/or expansion of argument sometimes lacking.
3	9–12	Knowledge of the social learning theory of aggression is evident. Evaluation is apparent and mostly effective. There are occasional inaccuracies. The answer is mostly clear and organised. Specialist terminology mostly used effectively. Lacks focus on aggression in places.
2	5–8	Knowledge of the social learning theory of aggression is present. Focus is mainly on description. Any evaluation is only partly effective. The answer lacks clarity, accuracy and organisation in places. Specialist terminology used inappropriately on occasions.
1	1–4	Knowledge of the social learning theory of aggression is limited. Evaluation is limited, poorly focused or absent. The answer as a whole lacks clarity, has many inaccuracies and is poorly organised. Specialist terminology either absent or inappropriately used.
	0	No relevant content.

**Possible content:**

- emphasis on learning aggression through observation and imitation of role model
- concept of identification and influences on identification – status, attractiveness, similarity etc
- internalisation of aggressive model
- modelling of aggression is influenced by observation of consequences – vicarious reinforcement
- learning of aggression can be internal, taking place without immediate outward demonstration
- concept of self-efficacy – mediational processes, eg attention, retention, motivation, and motor reproduction affect learning, coming between observation of aggressive behaviour and demonstration of that behaviour
- credit detail of Bandura’s research on learnt aggression where they contribute to description of theory.

**Possible evaluation points:**

- use of evidence to support/refute the theory of aggression
- difficulty demonstrating cause and effect – although the Bandura research was able to control variables and did demonstrate that aggression was affected by modelling it is difficult to show cause and effect in real life aggression

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- explains some forms of aggression better than others, eg cannot easily explain impulsive aggressive behaviours
  - sees behaviour as environmentally determined whereas some behaviours may be innate
  - mediating cognitive factors have to be inferred so cannot measure extent of their influence
  - comparison with alternative explanations, eg deindividuation or biological approaches.

Credit other relevant evaluation points.

Only credit evaluation of the methodology used in studies when made relevant to discussion of the theory of aggression.

#### Response A

Social learning theory (SLT) is an approach to explaining aggression that focuses on environmental influences and argues that we learn aggression from observing and imitating a model. Like behaviourism, SLT suggests that behaviour that is positively reinforced will be more likely to be repeated. Social learning theorists also believe that if an individual sees someone else rewarded for a particular behaviour they are also more likely to imitate the behaviour. This is known as vicarious reinforcement. With respect to aggression, if a person sees someone else being rewarded (vicarious reinforcement) for behaving aggressively then that person is more likely to be aggressive themselves in the future.

According to SLT behaviour is not automatically imitated but it depends on mediating cognitive factors. There are four factors/stages:

Attention – first the child must observe the model aggression and pay attention to the aggressive acts.

Retention – Then the child stores the information in the LTM and remembers the aggressive behaviour.

Reproduction – The child must be able to produce the aggressive behaviour, they must have the skills and capabilities to show aggression.

Motivation – The child is motivated to produce aggression, for example through direct reinforcements where they learn from the consequences of imitating the aggressive behaviour or vicarious reinforcement where they learn through the consequences of others imitating the aggressive behaviour.

Psychologists also argue that the model must have similar or high status in order for child to observe.

To evaluate SLT, it has practical applications because it has been found that aggression can be learnt through observing and imitating models such as parents. Therefore this can be used by parents or siblings to show appropriate and calmer behaviour to children so that they can grow up to become less aggressive. Therefore, the research and the theory are important in the area of applied psychology.

There is empirical evidence to support SLT, for example Bandura carried out research where children observed an adult model behaving aggressively to a bobo doll and when the



children were then placed in the room with the toys and the bobo doll they too imitated the aggressive behaviour they had observed. The children in the control group who had observed the adult in the same room but not behaving aggressively, showed no aggressive behaviour towards the bobo doll. This offers support to the SLT of aggression by showing under controlled conditions that children do imitate aggressive behaviours observed. However, such studies have been criticised. For example, the use of an adult hitting a doll lacks ecological validity because it is highly unlikely an adult would behave in such a way in real life. Although the children did imitate this behaviour in Bandura's study, in real life they may not behave like this and show the same aggressive behaviour. This is a flaw in the research and weakens the support for SLT.

A further criticism of social learning theory is that it can be seen as environmentally oversimplified, as it has too much emphasis on the role of nurture (learning) and ignores the role of nature such as biology (testosterone levels). Research in prisons has shown that prisoners with high testosterone levels are more likely to have committed violent crimes and are more aggressive in prison, linking aggressive behaviour to testosterone levels and biology (nature) not nurture (environment). Therefore, a multidimensional approach should be considered as aggression is a complex behaviour.

#### **Examiner commentary**

Knowledge of the social learning theory of aggression is generally accurate and well detailed. There is sound knowledge of mediating cognitive factors, vicarious reinforcement and a comparison to the Behaviourist approach. Although there is some detail/expansion missing occasionally eg at the end of the description there is a sentence regarding the 'status' of the model that needs clarifying – this is unusual in the answer as a whole.

The evaluation is reasonably thorough, well-focused and used effectively. There is good expansion of the evaluative points chosen, eg with outline of supporting evidence to back-up the points made (eg Bandura). The evidence is presented succinctly and used effectively rather than a long description of the study. There are a number of strengths and weaknesses of Social learning theory discussed.

The answer is clear, coherent and focused with appropriate use of specialist terminology (eg mediating cognitive processes; vicarious reinforcement etc).

**This is a Level 4 answer – meeting all the criteria on the mark-scheme for this level.**

**Mark awarded = 14**

## **Response B**

Social learning theory of human aggression, suggests aggression is learnt and imitated via observations, which is environmental. The first process of this is attention. We need to pay attention to the model displaying the aggressive behaviour.

Then it's retention, where we store the information that is remembered into our long term memory. We then 'reproduce' this behaviour but need motivation, where if the model is the same sex or has a high status, it is more likely he would display the same behaviour. If they receive positive reinforcement, it motivates us to reproduce this behaviour, having the ability to do so. However, self-efficacy is required to ensure we have 100% confidence in ourselves that we will come out with the same outcome.

A study to support SLT was conducted by Bandura who got children to observe models. There was 2 conditions. In condition 1 models were not aggressive – ignoring the bobo doll, but in condition 2, models behaved aggressively including showing (verbal aggression) and punching the bobo doll. He found children in an aggressive condition imitated the behaviour and had shown high levels of aggression, compared to the non-aggressive condition, who showed fewer signs of aggression levels, supporting the theory that behaviour is learnt and imitated through observations.

To evaluate Bandura's study, it was conducted in an artificial setting, and the task was unrealistic therefore it is a weakness as bobo dolls purpose was to be hit so it doesn't provide clear evidence of aggression in the real world, therefore has low ecological validity. This means that support for the Social learning theory of aggression is weak.

Also, the reason for children's aggression could've been due to emotional distress, or other factors, not necessarily because of the bobo doll. This lowers the internal validity of SLT, providing little evidence for aggression.

A further criticism of Social learning theory is that studies show a short-term effect on children's levels of aggression. It is unclear whether the effects remain longterm which means that it is only a part explanation. The theory needs further research to see if learning through observation and imitation is the cause of longterm aggression.

## **Examiner commentary**

Knowledge of the social learning theory of aggression is evident in this answer. There are occasional inaccuracies eg using the term 'models' suggests that more than one person 'modelled' the aggressive behaviour in Bandura's study. However, there is a link to the 'environment', detail of the cognitive mediating processes and knowledge of Bandura's study.

The evaluation is mostly used effectively, with appropriate links to theory. There is a little inaccuracy evident eg the penultimate paragraph is unclear. It is a potentially sound point that there may be alternative explanations for the children's aggressive behaviour – but "not necessarily the bobo doll" misses the point. The point is that the aggression may not be due to observation and imitation (ie social learning) but due to other factors eg emotional

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distress. In addition, the final sentence in this paragraph should really be concerned with how this 'questions the evidence for the social learning **theory**' and not as stated "... evidence for aggression".

The answer lacks some coherence but is organised into paragraphs and uses specialist terminology appropriately eg ecological validity; self-efficacy etc.

**This is a Level 3 answer – there is enough description and evaluation to just take it into this level although a lack of accuracy and clarity in places prevents a higher mark.**

**Mark awarded = 9**

Response C

The Social Learning Theory (SLT) of aggression (agg) argues that agg is learnt through observing an aggressive model and imitating this behaviour. Bandura argues that there are a series of processes to this. Firstly, the learner must pay attention to an aggressive model by observing his behaviour. This information must then be stored in to the long-term memory for it to be retrieved later. Also, in order to reproduce Agg, the learner must possess the necessary skills and capabilities to do so. Lastly, the learner must be motivated to imitated the agg through reinforcement. Direct reinforcement involve learning the consequences of one's own agg whereas vicarious reinforcement refers to learning through the consequences of someone else's agg. Self-efficacy influences irritation; higher levels of self-efficacy result in a higher chance of irritation, one study to support this comes from Bandura and Walters who found that higher levels of agg were shown by children who observed an actor being rewarded for their agg whereas the lowest levels of agg were recorded in those who observed an actor being punished for their agg. This shows how agg is imitated according to specific models, but also how agg can be learnt through vicarious reinforcement.

One strength of this study is that it has practical applications as research has found that children can easily be influenced by watching an aggressive model. Clearly this research can be used in order to ensure that children's TV programmes are not aggressive or that any agg is punished to reduce children's agg. Consequently, the research can be argued to be an important area of applied psychology which benefits society.

Moreover, one weakness of the theory is that it is oversimplistic because it focuses solely on the role of environmental factors such as observation and imitation in the development of agg the theory ignores biological factors such as hormones (testosterone) that could also lead to agg, suggesting that agg is too complex a behaviour to be reduced. Therefore, a more multi-dimensional approach is needed to account for the interaction of nature and nurture in the development of agg in order to make the theory valid.

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**Examiner commentary**

There is evidence of knowledge of the social learning theory of human aggression, particularly the mediational processes involved. However there is an occasional lack of accuracy eg in the link made between self-efficacy and the Bandura and Walters study – which conflates two concepts – self-efficacy and reward/punishment.

The evaluation is only partly effective. The paragraph on ‘practical applications’ is a relevant point but is only linked to research and is not effectively used to support the theory of social learning of aggression. This could easily be rectified with a final sentence linking back to the question. A weakness of the theory is briefly but reasonably well argued in the final paragraph.

The answer lacks clarity, particularly on the description – not helped by the use of ‘agg’ for ‘aggression’ and presumably ‘irritation’ refers to ‘imitation’. There is also a lack of precision and coherence in the long description which would benefit from the use of paragraphs. Specialist terminology lacks precise usage eg “... too complex a behaviour to be reduced”. This begs the question ‘reduced to what’?

**This is a Level 2 answer – it is largely descriptive with the evaluation limited to one point and there is a lack of clarity/focus in parts.**

**Mark awarded = 6**