A-LEVEL
PSYCHOLOGY

7182/3 Issues and options in psychology
Report on the Examination

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General

This year's paper seemed to discriminate well, with students achieving marks across the range. This included many high-scoring scripts. Many students appeared well-prepared and produced impressively detailed and well-informed answers. Inevitably though, some students struggled. Questions that required skills of evaluation and analysis proved troublesome for many, particularly the compulsory extended response question within the Issues and Debates section. That said, there was an improvement in the standard of answers to Research Methods questions compared to previous series. There was very little evidence that students were rushing towards the end of the paper having run out of time.

Schizophrenia remains the most popular option topic on this paper and Eating Behaviour the least popular. As in previous recent series, a significant number of scripts included handwriting that was very difficult to interpret. As a result, this may well have affected the accuracy of the mark that was awarded. We would urge centres to explore alternative ways for students with illegible writing to produce answers, eg by using a keyboard.

Section A

Issues and Debates

Question 1

Marks were generally awarded for recognising that androcentrism involves male bias in the first instance, followed by some implication of this for the second mark. The notion that female behaviour would be seen as 'abnormal' or 'deficient' by comparison was the most popular elaboration. Marks were often lost through describing beta bias, or gender bias more generally.

Question 2

Most students were able to offer at least one way of dealing with gender bias; most commonly, the idea of using equal numbers of male and female participants. Recommending the involvement of both male and female researchers was also an often-seen answer.

Question 3

Although most students were able to match Bob's comments to the concept of biological determinism, and Mike's to environmental determinism, some students were unsuccessful in trying to make links to other forms of determinism, such as 'soft' or 'psychic'. Many answers offered little more than repetition of the stem by way of explanation. However, lots of students were able to access all four marks.

Question 4

This was a very difficult essay for most students. Most appeared completely unprepared to answer a question on 'levels of explanation' and would perhaps have offered little or nothing at all, had there not been reference to reductionism and holism in the stem. Consequently, many answers focused entirely on these two levels, usually in the form of a debate about which one was 'better'. Those students who did this very well were able to access up to 12 marks. However, in the absence of any explicit reference to levels of explanation, the top level was unattainable for most. There was much confusion between reductionism, holism and other concepts within this topic area, most notably determinism, and idiographic and nomothetic research. Application-wise, students did

somewhat better, and examples of psychological approaches were often used effectively to illustrate holism and different forms of reductionism.

Section B

Relationships

Question 5

Most students were aware that self-disclosure involves the reveal of personal information, but some definitions failed to elaborate beyond that.

Question 6

This question was generally poorly answered. Many students wrote about a strength and limitation of self-disclosure in a relationship, rather than the theory of self-disclosure, so answers were often not grounded in evidence. There were lots of unsubstantiated statements such as 'it would deepen the relationship' or 'it might put people off' that were judged to be anecdotal and so scored few marks.

Question 7

This was among the better answered 8-mark questions on the paper. Most students were able to offer a reasonable account of Duck's phase model, though occasionally stages were incorrectly named or in the wrong order. Evaluation was quite strong: many students wrote about the cultural bias in Duck's work and/or how the addition of a fifth stage rendered the original version incomplete.

Question 8

Students did less well when tackling the absorption-addition model. Description was often too short, or was too reliant on common sense understanding to score highly, and evaluations were often vague and underdeveloped.

Gender

Question 9

Most students picked up the first mark for a basic definition of gender dysphoria, and some the second, usually for suggesting that dysphoria may produce a state of discomfort in those who experience it.

Question 10

Students who scored highly tended to talk about evidence supporting brain sex theory as a strength. They then presented further evidence as counterargument for the limitation, typically questioning the causal relationship between dimorphic brain areas and gender dysphoria.

Question 11

Many found this question challenging. There were a significant number of basic and anecdotal accounts of the influence of media on gender, and a general lack of convincing evidence. Those students who did perform well tended to present social learning concepts linked to gendered role models. The Williams television study was often used effectively. Finally, several students confused the effects of media with the effects of culture on gender. This is perhaps not surprising as the two topics are part of the same section on the specification.

Question 12

This question produced some very good answers. Knowledge of Kohlberg's stages was generally sound, though there was occasional confusion between 'stability' and 'constancy'. Evaluation/discussion was of a good standard here. Most students could provide relevant evidence, as well as general discussion points – such as the universality of Kohlberg's theory, and the methodological difficulties associated with interviewing very young children.

Cognition and development

Question 13

Students were generally confident in their knowledge of the concept of 'conservation' and provided relevant examples for the second mark.

Question 14

Students were much better at explaining a limitation of conservation experiments than a strength. For the former, McGarrigle's naughty teddy experiments were often a feature. Those who were able to come up with a convincing strength tended to talk about the fact that Piaget's experiments can be replicated because of their standardised procedure.

Question 15

There were some impressive and detailed summaries of violation of expectation studies. Most students preferred to describe one experiment in detail – usually the carrot study – and then evaluate violation of expectation research in general. There was some reasoned comparison with Piaget's work on egocentrism, most notably the fact that Baillargeon was able to control for confounding variables such as lack of motor skills or lack of attention.

Question 16

This question was rather less well done. Despite the focus of the question, relatively few students provided effective definitions of theory of mind, and fewer still were able to make convincing links between the central concept and those deficits typically seen in cases of autism. Instead, there were many long-winded descriptions of supporting evidence, most commonly the Sally-Anne study. Consequently, evaluation often centred around the evidence, rather than the theory, which meant there were relatively few top-band answers.

Section C

Each of the optional topics in Section C began with a 4-mark multiple-choice question, none of which proved particularly problematic for students.

Schizophrenia

Question 17

Those who did score three marks, rather than four, tended to muddle 'classification' – an incorrect answer – with 'validity'.

Question 18

Most students preferred to present one strategy, the double-blind technique, rather than two. However, those that went down this route often lost marks because they failed to explain how this would reduce or eliminate both demand characteristics and investigator effects.

Question 19

The 16-mark essay on Schizophrenia was probably the best answered question on the paper. Most students adopted a 'breadth' rather than 'depth' approach here, helped by the fact that there were many and varied 'hooks' in the question upon which to make effective links. Those who scored marks in the top band usually offered four or five different explanations, concisely described and evaluated. In this sense, many answers were well-organised with little irrelevance, and many scored full marks.

Eating behaviour

Question 20

Many answers to this multiple-choice question were correct. Those who did make a mistake, commonly substituted 'restraint' for 'boundary', which was an incorrect option.

Question 21

Most students preferred to present one strategy, the double-blind technique, rather than two. However, those that went down this route often lost marks because they failed to explain how this would reduce or eliminate both demand characteristics and investigator effects.

Question 22

Overall, this 16-mark extended response question was answered well. The very open style of this question meant that many explanations could be included, and this 'breadth' approach lent itself well to application as there were many different 'hooks' within the question. Family systems theory was a popular choice, as was genetic transmission. Some students chose social learning theory and were able to make links both to the actors on TV as well as the influence of Elliot's mother. Use of evidence was best deployed in relation to the biological explanations: analysis of twin studies and the implications for treatment were the points seen most often.

Stress

Question 23

Most answers achieved all four marks, though there was occasional confusion between challenge and commitment. The incorrect option 'hassles' was very rarely seen as part of an answer.

Question 24

Most students preferred to present one strategy, the double-blind technique, rather than two. However, those that went down this route often lost marks because they failed to explain how this would reduce or eliminate both demand characteristics and investigator effects.

Question 25

This question was generally well-answered. But unusually, students seemed to struggle most with the descriptive content of the question. Having made the point that stress at work tends to be associated with high workload and low control, many students seemed unsure of where to go next. Therefore, most knowledge marks were accessed through description of evidence, such as Marmot et al's study of civil servants and/or Johannson et al's study of sawmill workers. Evaluation and application marks proved easier to come by, mostly because of the many 'hooks' in the question. This meant that any number of brief descriptive points could be linked to Carrie's situation.

Section D

Aggression

Question 26

Many students recognised the level of data as nominal and offered a sound justification for this, with reference to high and low aggression as the two categories. Marks for the other reason were more elusive. A surprising number of students talked about the type of design even though this was ruled out in the question. Many incorrectly identified the study as investigating a correlation, rather than an association, and whilst others did identify the study as a test of difference, their explanation for why was often vague or inaccurate.

Question 27

Full marks required a clear explanation of the likely outcome of the study described, but many students only talked about one of the conditions rather than both. In addition, explanations of the likely outcome were sometimes underdeveloped. Lots of students made brief reference to the idea of a 'script' or 'schema' but did not go beyond this by explaining how it would be triggered by a subsequent aggressive event.

Question 28

Most answers included an appropriate 'way' - usually changing the design to matched pairs or repeated measures. However, there was often a lack of detail in how this change would control for the problem outlined in the question. As this was a requirement for the top level, many answers ended up being capped at two marks.

Question 29

This question produced some very impressive answers. There were detailed accounts that made use of specialist terminology, these were coherent and clear, and included relevant examples of deindividuation. Weaker answers were constructed around rather long-winded descriptions of evidence, such as the Stanford Prison study.

Question 30

Students who did well in question 29 typically made an equally competent job of this question. The implications of a range of evidence were presented, most commonly the baiting crowd study, whereas Gergen's dark room study was often discussed effectively as counterargument.

Forensic psychology

Question 31

Many students recognised the level of data as nominal and offered a sound justification for this with reference to high and low accuracy as the two categories. Marks for the other reason were more elusive. A surprising number of students talked about the type of design even though this was ruled out in the question. Many incorrectly identified the study as investigating a correlation, rather than an association. Whilst others did identify the study as a test of difference, their explanation for why was often vague or inaccurate.

Question 32

Full marks required a clear explanation of the likely outcome of the study described, but many students only talked about one of the conditions rather than both. There were lots of answers that missed the point completely and instead described the top-down approach without really addressing the question. Those that scored well often made links between the study in the question and the way in which the top-down approach was developed through interviews with high-profile serial killers. A small minority asserted that there would be little or no difference in profiling accuracy and followed this line of argument though by giving recent evidence that suggests the approach can be successfully applied to non-violent crime. They were awarded all four marks on that basis.

Question 33

Most answers included an appropriate 'way' - usually changing the design to matched pairs or repeated measures. However, there was often a lack of detail of how this change would control for the problem outlined in the question. As this was a requirement for the top level, many answers ended up being capped at two marks.

Question 34

This question proved difficult for many students. Indeed, a substantial number of students left both Question 34 and Question 35 blank. Responses tended to be quite brief. Hostile attribution bias and minimalization were usually identified and outlined but there was little other information provided. Those students who were able to access the top level gave additional detail about cognitive distortions in general, and the purpose they serve for the offender. For example, legitimising criminal behaviour and reducing guilt.

Question 35

Higher scoring answers offered supportive or contradictory evidence for each distortion, and often talked about the implications for therapeutic intervention and possible rehabilitation. However, as documented, these were few and far between.

Addiction

Question 36

Many students recognised the level of data as nominal and offered a sound justification for this with reference to high and low stakes as the two categories. Marks for the other reason were more elusive. A surprising number of students talked about the type of design even though this was ruled out in the question. Many incorrectly identified the study as investigating a correlation, rather than an association. Whilst others did identify the study as a test of difference, their explanation for why was often vague or inaccurate.

Question 37

In this question, full marks required a clear explanation of the likely outcome of the study described, but many students only talked about one of the conditions rather than both. There were some answers that missed the point and suggested that those participants who had lost every bet would take the higher stakes gamble as they would be compelled by their lack of success first time around. Those that did predict the likely outcome correctly often gave vague or hasty explanations for this, usually through some brief reference to operant conditioning/positive reinforcement, which secured a further mark. Very few talked in terms of schedules of reinforcement.

Question 38

Most answers included an appropriate ‘way’ - usually changing the design to matched pairs or repeated measures. However, there was often a lack of detail in how this change would control for the problem outlined in the question. As this was a requirement for the top level, many answers ended up being capped at two marks.

Question 39

Generally, this question was poorly answered. Many students seemed to be unaware that cue reactivity is a behaviourist/learning theory. They could only talk very generally about examples of possible cues. There was much confusion with biological theories of addiction, and there were some lengthy accounts of neural pathways and dopamine. Those that did achieve marks tended to focus on classical conditioning and made little reference to how operant conditioning can be used to explain the maintenance of smoking addiction.

Question 40

Responses to this question were generally poor and vague. Although creditworthy, there was an over-reliance on application to treatment within these answers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.