UNIVERSITY OF LONDON | INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

# Course information 2015–16
# MN2079 Elements of social and applied psychology

This course provides an overview of key areas of social psychology and their application. It addresses issues of both theoretical interest and practical importance, thereby aiding our understanding of how people behave, think, interact and communicate in social settings.

## Prerequisite
None apply.

## Aims and objectives
This course has five major aims. To:

- provide an overview of the scope of social psychology and its major methodological approaches
- identify the key ideas and processes people use in understanding their social world
- assess the impact of group membership and social influence on people's behaviour
- evaluate the role of social relations in our societies
- illustrate how social psychological knowledge and principles can be applied to real-world issues, especially in organisational and management settings.

## Essential reading
For full details please refer to the reading list.

Hogg, M.A. and G.M. Vaughan *Social Psychology*. (Harlow: Prentice Hall)
Sanderson, C.A. Social Psychology. (New York:Wiley)

## Learning outcomes
At the end of this course and having completed the essential reading and activities students should be able to:

- ☑ describe key concepts, theories and methodological approaches used in social psychology
- ☑ outline the processes used in understanding our social world
- ☑ assess how people behave in groups and the role of social influence
- ☑ analyse the processes and phenomena involved in social relations
- ☑ critically evaluate how social psychology can be applied to social issues and can aid our understanding of human behaviour in real-life settings, especially those involving organisational and economic issues.

## Assessment
This course is assessed by a three hour unseen written examination.

Students should consult the *Programme Regulations for degrees and diplomas in Economics, Management, Finance and the Social Sciences* that are reviewed annually. Notice is also given in the *Regulations* of any courses which are being phased out and students are advised to check course availability.

## Syllabus

This is a description of the material to be examined, as published in the *Programme handbook*. On registration, students will receive a detailed subject guide which provides a framework for covering the topics in the syllabus and directions to the essential reading.

**What is social psychology?:** The nature and scope of social psychology; factors which influence social behaviour; theoretical perspectives and the role of theory in research. Research methods in social psychology; research techniques in organisational, management and economic psychology; reliability, validity and realism; ethical issues in research. Approaches to applying social psychology to real world issues; the challenges and benefits of applying the knowledge and principles of social psychology to practical problems, especially in organisations, workplace and economic settings.

**Understanding the social world:** Concepts of the self; self-perception; self presentation; performance style and self-presentation strategies; the dramaturgical model. Perception of others and impression formation**.** Individual decision making and moral judgments; social cognitive strategies: heuristics, biases and fallacies; the impact of schemata and stereotypes. Attributions and attributional style; attribution theory; sources of error and bias. Attitudes: their nature, formation and functions; cognitive consistency and dissonance; the relation between attitudes and behaviour; recent models of the attitude-behaviour link; the nature and impact of social representations.

**Social influence:** Groups: roles, norms and cohesiveness; altruism and pro-social behaviour. Group influence: task performance; problem solving; decision making. Differences between individual and group decision making in social, economic and organisational settings. Intergroup conflict and conflict resolution, strategic interaction and negotiation. Conformity; normative influence, majority and minority pressure and its impact; compliance and acceptance. Obedience to authority; experimental studies; factors affecting obedience and their implications. Social influence and contagious processes in settings involving uncertainty, such as crowds and economic environments. Attitude change and persuasive communication; analyses of the factors involved in the persuasion process, with special reference to the media, advertising and brand identity.

**Social relations:** Interpersonal communication: the role of language and non-verbal cues; the role of the internet and social networking in communication, relationships and cultural transmission; corporate communication, corporate social identity and reputation management. Diversity, with special reference to gender and culture. Relationships and theories of attraction. Prejudice and discrimination: the role of competition, social categorisation, social learning and social cognition. The work setting, organisational behaviour, job satisfaction, leadership**.** Personality assessment and personnel selection. Stress and illness; life events and work as sources of stress. Culture in organisations, multiculturalism, intercultural contact and globalisation.

# Examiners' commentaries 2015

## MN2079 Elements of social and applied psychology – Zone A

## Important note

This commentary reflects the examination and assessment arrangements for this course in the academic year 2014–15. The format and structure of the examination may change in future years, and any such changes will be publicised on the virtual learning environment (VLE).

### Information about the subject guide and the Essential reading references

Unless otherwise stated, all cross-references will be to the latest version of the subject guide (2013). You should always attempt to use the most recent edition of any Essential reading textbook, even if the commentary and/or online reading list and/or subject guide refers to an earlier edition. If different editions of Essential reading are listed, please check the VLE for reading supplements – if none are available, please use the contents list and index of the new edition to find the relevant section.

## Comments on specific questions

Candidates should answer SIX of the following FOURTEEN questions: FOUR from Section A (10 marks each) and TWO from the remaining Sections B, C and D with not more than one from any one of these three sections (30 marks each). Candidates are strongly advised to divide their time accordingly.

### Section A

Answer FOUR questions from this section (maximum of 10 marks each).

#### Question 1

**What is the ethical principle of valid consent, and what challenges does it create for social psychological research?**

**Reading for this question**

Chapter 3 of the subject guide.

**Approaching the question**

A sensible starting point would be to note that in order to collect data, social psychologists need to observe and carry out research with human beings and are, therefore, responsible for the welfare of those who participate. All social psychological research is thus governed by sets of ethical principles designed to protect the dignity and welfare of research participants. A key ethical principle is 'valid consent', which requires that potential participants are given enough information about the study to be able to make an informed decision about whether they wish to take part. A good answer would point out the broader set of principles articulated by the British Psychological Society and/or American Psychological Association.

Weaker answers would tend to list general ethical principles in social psychological research, without providing detail regarding the principle of valid consent. Others would be imprecise about how the principle leads to implications for carrying out social psychological research.

A good answer would note that consent is 'valid' when it is provided by appropriately able or responsible participants, when it is given without their being exposed to any pressure or coercion, and when it it understood that they can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without having to give a reason. This means that, for example, when conducting research with children under the age of 16, and for other persons where capacity to consent may be impaired, prior written consent must be obtained from parents or those with legal responsibility for the individual. The principle of valid consent replaced the earlier principle of informed consent in the updated British Psychological Society guidelines of 2010.

The principle of valid consent can lead to challenges for social psychological research because there is the danger that, if participants in social psychological research know its real purpose, they will change their behaviour, rendering the research valueless. A good answer would connect this to the concept of demand characteristics (Orne, 1962): features of a study or the situation which participants use to try to work out what is expected of them, and lead them to behave in a way that does not reflect their behaviour outside of that study. These features in a sense 'demand' a certain response, so that people may try to behave in a manner which confirms what they think to be the experimental hypothesis. A related way in which being aware of the research focus is particularly troublesome arises from the fact that social psychology often addresses issues that are controversial or sensitive in political or ethical terms; participants may, as a result, give responses that are socially desirable rather than reflecting their true beliefs. A good answer would note how such problems might be addressed by using deception, so that the participants do not know the reason for the study. It would point out that, although deception can be judged necessary when the demand characteristics of the research situation and/or socially desirable responses are likely to affect the results, and the study has a potentially important contribution to understanding, it use is nonetheless contrary to the principle of valid consent. Any use of deception should therefore be temporary and be countered by debriefing. Debriefing should provide participants with full information at the end of an investigation about the activities in which they have taken part, so that they understand the nature of the research. An overriding rule is that participants should be in the same or a better state at the end of the research than they were before they took part. A good answer might also note that the ethical principles that govern research have changed over time, so that some classic studies from the past would probably not be permissible today; it would also note that deception remains controversial despite the use of debriefing.

An excellent answer might point out that ethical considerations should be taken into account when designing and conducting any research study and that such considerations may constrain the research that can be carried out, perhaps leading to the alteration of the design or the research questions themselves. It might also note that this need not necessarily compromise the integrity of the results obtained – for example, Burger's (1999) partial replication of Milgram's classic experiment on obedience arguably demonstrates a similar conclusion to Milgram without being similarly ethically compromised.

## Question 2

**Which issues need to be taken into account in designing interviews and focus group studies?**

### Reading for this question

Chapter 4 of the subject guide.

### Approaching the question

A starting point would be to note that both semi-structured interviews and focus groups are non-experimental methods that use peoples' verbal responses as data. They are used to reveal peoples' beliefs about and attitudes towards socially significant phenomena. Semi-structured interviews involve an interviewer in a one-to-one meeting with a participant, in which the interviewer uses an open-ended set of questions to elicit the participant's views. Whilst the topic guide may be clear, the specific questions that are asked, the way they are asked and their sequence, are not predetermined, but depend on how the interview unfolds. The interview may also address emergent topics not anticipated in the topic guide, if relevant. They can therefore generate rich qualitative data about participants' perspectives on a phenomenon. Such interviews usually involve small, targeted samples, with the aim of understanding in depth the views of those particular people at that time. By contrast, focus groups are not particularly concerned with the viewpoints of individual participants, but rather with the ways in which people exchange views, justify their positions and possible alter their beliefs as a result of discussion. They usually involve between four and eight participants who are encouraged by a facilitator to discuss an issue openly and, as with semi-structured interviews, without restrictions on the kinds of connections that they make.

Weaker answers would fail to give sufficient detail about interviews and focus groups, merely noting them as two of a list of different methods. Others would list very general questions about the quality of research (e.g. reliability and validity) without indicating how those questions arise in particular ways for interviews and focus groups.

A good answer would note that both semi-structured interviews and focus groups are usually used to address descriptive research questions with the aim of providing a rich descriptive picture of a phenomenon. They are particularly useful when there is a less clear picture of the phenomenon in advance, where indirect probing of sensitive issues is. Semi-structured interviews achieve this by asking subtle questions, and allowing participants to expand on topics as they wish, and rephrasing questions in ways that facilitate the gradual emergence of a fuller picture of the participant's viewpoint. Focus groups achieve this by mimicking the kinds of social encounters and debates that take place in everyday life, so that the participants themselves – peers, rather than the social psychologist – provide most of the questions and prompts for each other.

A good answer would note that adequately addressing such research questions leads to particular design challenges. Most importantly, the questions and prompts need to be designed in such a way as to elicit relevant answers without leading or directing participants to give particular responses. This suggests that the sequence of questions and prompts should move from general issues to more specific ones, both to allow participants to become comfortable enough to answer honestly, and to not 'prime' them to give particular kinds of answers. It would also note that sampling or recruitment of participants is of particular importance in

these methods – not (unlike methods that yield quantitative data) with the aim of ensuring representativeness of the population, but to ensure that the issues are ones on which the participants could be expected to have some thoughts, and that there are no unwanted interactions between the qualities of the researcher and those of the interviewees or focus group members (e.g. holding interviews or focus groups on racial prejudice with participants solely from different ethnic backgrounds from the researcher). For focus groups an important aim is for its composition to not inhibit participants (so they may be balanced for sex, or all one sex, rather than with a majority of either sex).

An excellent answer might note that assessing validity (i.e. whether the method measures the phenomenon it claims to) and reliability (i.e. whether the method would yield similar results if applied to similar samples in similar locations) is relatively straightforward for the quantitative data generated by questionnaires, but more complex for interviews, which do not aim to provide generalisable or repeatable results. An excellent answer might also note that, since questionnaires and unstructured interviews have complementary advantages and disadvantages, research might utilise both in a 'triangulated' design.

### Question 3

#### How and why do organisations develop corporate communication programmes?

**Reading for this question**

Chapter 17 (17.2) of the subject guide.

**Approaching the question**

A sensible place to start would be by defining corporate communication, which is communication within a corporation (between its different departments or groups for example, senior management and manufacturing, sales or service delivery staff) and between a corporation and its external stakeholders (e.g. customers, investors, NGOs, regulators, etc.). In its connection to external stakeholders, it takes on the role of public relations (PR), a carefully designed and delivered set of communications that aim to present a specific public image of the corporation to the world.

Weaker answers would often list some of the public relations activities of organisations, but fail to indicate why organisations engage in them or fail to connect them to the specific channels that are used.

The main reason why corporations engage in this kind of communication is to try to establish and maintain positive relationships with those internal and external stakeholders. By doing so, they aim to create an environment that will help them to successfully implement their strategy and to accumulate a stock of goodwill as a defence during harsh times. This positive image, also referred to as corporate identity or corporate brand, will contribute to the development of a strong reputation for the organisation concerned, thus creating a stock of goodwill vis-à-vis its stakeholders and enabling it to fulfil its strategic objectives (e.g. establishing and expanding its market share) more easily. For instance, students from prestigious universities around the world compete for jobs with organisations that have developed a positive reputation as employers (referred to as 'employer branding').

A good answer would note that, as with interpersonal communication, business organisations use a variety of channels to communicate with their stakeholders. These range from specific, formal announcements by the CEO to a company website, through to its ongoing formal and

informal after-sales policies and procedures. Corporate communication thus encompasses numerous types of activities from public relations to crisis communication, internal communication and investor relations. While they may be the responsibility of different individuals within a company, they will all aim to develop a positive and unique public image for their organisations. So any one company simultaneously generates many different messages. This leads to the question of how those various messages are related – do they successfully reinforce each other or are there discrepancies? The alignment between the different messages communicated is key in projecting and protecting the reputation of a company: all communications need to be 'on message'. This is especially the case today, when corporate blunders or bad policies can be discussed around the world in a few minutes, given the power of social media such as Facebook or Twitter.

A good answer would note that the desire for a positive reputation has led many companies to develop a set of initiatives with their different local communities under the umbrella of 'corporate social responsibility' or CSR. These might involve setting up or contributing to local charitable concerns, engaging directly in other prosocial activies such as environmental or wildlife support. In this way, the intention is to communicate that the company has a sense of responsibility for the wider context in which it operates, so that it is actively 'putting something back' into the context from which it makes its profits. A good answer would also note that there might be a gap between a company's intentions when initiating CSR-related initiatives, what they will actually end up doing and how its stakeholders will interpret them.

An excellent answer might connect corporate communication to the ideas of Goffman in interpersonal impression management, where the controllability of some messages is contrasted with the uncontrollability of others. This suggests that corporate communication is likely to be a complex set of activities which try to ensure a 'working consensus' between the image the company would like to project and the image that the external stakeholders are willing to believe. It might also note that, as in impression management, the over- or mis-use of techniques can backfire. For example, some have labelled some corporate communications concerning environmental CSR as 'greenwashing' by analogy with 'whitewashing' – concealing a company's true intentions and actions behind an appearance of being environmentally friendly.

## Question 4

**Describe the main components of the self and how they relate to knowledge of the self.**

### Reading for this question

Chapter 5 of the subject guide.

### Approaching the question

A sensible place to start would be to note that the self is complex: we experience our self as coherent and unified – we feel like the same person across different times and situations, and we think of ourselves as the same person throughout the changes that occur in our life; but we also sense that there are different components to our self, or that we can view ourselves from different perspectives, that 'who we are' in one situation seems different from 'who we are' in another. Self-knowledge, or the self-concept, is the collection of beliefs and thoughts that we have about who we are as a person that lives in and acts in the world.

Weaker answers would fail to list the range of possible components of the self, whilst others would fail to make connections to schemas and knowledge of the self.

A good answer would note that one of the most basic distinctions between forms of knowledge of the self is related to two different ways of being aware of who we are. This is the distinction between private or subjective self-awareness and public or objective self-awareness – which are processes that use, respectively, our own private standards against which the self is evaluated, versus what we think are relevant public or external criteria for evaluating the self. Carver and Scheier (2001) relate this to two different components of the self: a private self, related to our own thoughts, feelings and attitudes that we do not necessarily share with others, and indeed may wish on occasion to keep hidden; and a public self, related to how we think that others see us, and which we do share with others.

A good answer would also indicate that self-knowledge, as with other forms of social knowledge, is organised into a set of self-schemata, which describe the dimensions or qualities which we use when thinking about ourselves. Schemata are knowledge structures that help us to make sense of the social world – to categorise, interpret and make inferences and predictions about people and situations; self-schemata make sense of our experience of ourselves. A self-schema represents your beliefs or feelings about yourself in relation to particular domains or aspects of your life. The set of self-schemata can be very complex, and can thus include clear ideas of who we are or what we are like on some qualities (e.g. we may have a clear idea that we are an honest person), but unclear ideas on other qualities (e.g. we may be uncertain about how ambitious we are). Our sense of who we are involves not only the here and now, but also how we project our self into the future or into new situations. Such thoughts – for example, about how our lives will be in the future, or how we would behave if we faced the life situations of other people, and regrets about past mistakes or missed opportunities – reflect the way in which our thoughts about the self are organised in a narrative manner. Hence, in addition to describing our current self, our self-schemata express beliefs about the kind of person we think we might become in the future (a range of possible selves) and about how we would like to be either now or in the future (ideal selves). It can also relate to a range of 'ought' selves, which indicate how we think we ought to be or act according to family, group or social norms (Markus and Nurius, 1986).

An excellent answer might note that self-schemata depend on context for their use. Only a part of the total stock of self-beliefs is brought into awareness at any one time: different self-schemata may be activated because they are relevant in different contexts. The set of self-beliefs that is brought into awareness is often referred to as the spontaneous or working self-concept (Markus and Wurf, 1987). This context-sensitivity is one of the ways by which our sense of self may seem to lack continuity over different times and places. It might also note the more radical idea that the self really is not stable at all. For example, Gergen (1991) has suggested that, in part as a result of the proliferation of communication technologies that increase and in some sense require social contact – such as social networking sites – people have a sense of their self being simultaneously drawn in multiple and conflicting directions. This 'social saturation' leads us to constantly reinvent ourselves in unpredictable ways, suggesting that the appearance of continuity and coherence in the self may be illusory.

## Question 5

**How do the processes involved in minority social influence differ from those of majority social influence?**

### Reading for this question

Chapter 12 of the subject guide.

### Approaching the question

A sensible place to start would be to define social influence as the change in our thoughts, feelings and/or behaviours as a result of the real or imaginary presence of other people. Majority influence involves adjusting behaviour/opinions to align them more closely with those of the majority in a group, and minority influence is the process whereby a new belief or attitude, originally held by only one or two people becomes widespread.

Weaker answers would simply list the different forms of social influence (including compliance and obedience) without directly comparing majority and minority influence. Others would describe differences without relating them to specific empirical findings.

A good answer would note the conditions under which the two forms of social influence arise. Concerning majority influence, this would point out that the extent of majority influence depends on a range of factors, such as the nature, size and unanimity of the majority to which the critical participant is exposed. It would briefly note the difference between the experiments designed by Sherif (on the autokinetic effect) and by Asch (comparing the lengths of lines). It would highlight the fact that yielding to majority influence of the type used by Asch (where there the decision to be made has a clear correct answer and the pressure on the critical participant is high), typically results in temporary, outward compliance to the group. By contrast, Sherif's study (where there the decision to be made has no clear correct answer and the pressure on the critical participant is weaker), the outcome is typically a more internalised and sustained conformity. It would also note the possible explanation of these two forms of influence in terms of Deutsch and Gerard's differentiation between the processes of informational social influence (relying on the group for information about the right answer to a question, as in Sherif's study) and normative social influence (relying on the group for a sense of belonging and positive identity, as in Asch's study).

A good answer would then outline the possible differences between majority influence and minority influence. Minority influence has been claimed to be the basis by which a new belief or attitude originally held by one or two people can become widespread in a group or society. Moscovici's 'genetic model' suggests the importance of perceived consistency among the minority in disrupting the majority norm. This is argued to produce uncertainty or conflict within the majority, which can lead to their experiencing a private opinion change or conversion of belief (as opposed to compliance), coming to align themselves with the minority so as to reduce that cognitive conflict. Minorities are also more effective if they are seen to be open-minded/reasonable (i.e. neither too rigid nor too flexible), making personal sacrifices and acting out of principle. It would also contrast the outcome of majority influence with the claim that, where minority influence is successful in producing opinion change, it may bring about a perceptual change in the critical subject.

An excellent answer might suggest the possibility of a further form of majority influence – referent normative influence, which blurs the distinction made be Deutsch and Gerard, since it claims that normative

factors are involved in selecting with which group a person compares their beliefs. An excellent answer might also note that both forms of social influence are present in all cultures, but that cultures seem to vary in the degree to which they view conformity to majority opinion as a positive thing; for example, collectivistic cultures (which emphasise interdependence and harmony between people) and countries with 'tight' cultures (which prescribe little flexibility in adherence to cultural norms) tending to view it more positively than individualistic cultures (which emphasise independence and autonomy of the individual) and countries with 'loose' cultures (which tolerate more variation in the degree of adherence to cultural norms).

**Question 6**

**Outline the main ways of resolving inter-group conflicts.**

### Reading for this question

Chapter 11 (11.3) and Chapter 15 (15.7) of the subject guide.

### Approaching the question

A sensible approach would begin by characterising inter-group conflict as conflict between groups and their members arising from their being members of the groups (and not from specific individual qualities). It would also note that there are broadly two kinds of inter-group conflict, based on the focus or origin of that conflict – conflict directed towards perceived disparity in possession of or access to real resources between the groups, and conflict directed towards the differences in social or cultural identity or symbolic resources between the groups. The different forms of inter-group conflict will tend to require different resolutions.

Weaker answers would focus on social conflicts in general (including resource and other social dilemmas) rather than inter-group conflicts specifically, or dwell for too long on symbolic conflicts and prejudice rather than realistic social conflict.

A good answer would note that attempts to resolve inter-group conflicts over resources generally involve controlled and regulated forms of inter-group contact that seek to build agreement and cooperation regarding resource use. The three main ways are: first, common ground: this is to encourage common ground between the parties, perhaps in the form of a shared goal. For example, after developing intense inter-group hostility, Sherif's summer camp participants took part in tasks that had superordinate goals (ones which could only be achieved via cooperation). This reduced the hostility and set the foundation for inter-group integration. The second is via negotiation and bargaining: bargaining involves aiming to arrive at an agreement between groups through direct negotiation between their representatives. Bargaining outcomes are affected by the parties' level of aspiration (the profit they think is just adequate to enable an agreement to be made). In general, a tough bargaining strategy results in a more profitable outcome, because this simultaneously indicates that one has a high level of aspiration while also lowering the opponent's level of aspiration (they can expect less if you demand more). The third is via mediation and arbitration: this is where two parties or their representatives appear unable to compromise through negotiation, so a neutral third party is invited to act as a mediator. The mediator's role is to attempt to help the negotiators find an agreement, so they need to have power and be trusted by both parties – though this also requires the two parties to already be reasonably close in their positions. Mediation contrasts with arbitration, where the third party imposes a

settlement on the parties. People who participate in mediation tend to be more satisfied with the process and its outcome, compared with those undergoing arbitration.

A good answer would also indicate that where conflict is symbolic, the attempts to reduce that conflict may be less concerned with altering facts about the resources garnered by each group and more concerned with altering the ways in which those groups think of each other. This change in symbolic understanding – combating the stereotypes that each group holds of the other – is an approach that is often viewed as a way of addressing inter-group prejudice. This suggests that prejudice may be maintained by inter-group ignorance; as a result, increased contact between the two groups might reduce that prejudice. The 'contact hypothesis' (Allport, 1954) proposes that this would be successful when: (a) the groups are of equal status; (b) contact is sustained and co-operative; and (c) it occurs in an environment of legal support for integration. However, evidence for the success of contact is mixed, and good relations between subgroups will only tend to generalise to the wider groups of which they are members if those subgroups are seen as typical members of the wider groups

An excellent answer might note that, rather than actually engaging in finding common ground in negotiation, or actually making contact between groups, there is some evidence that imagining the basis for common ground, and imagining contact can both be reasonably effective ways of addressing inter-group conflict. It might also note that many of the the proposed ways of resolving inter-group conflicts can be seen as methods for combatting some heuristics and biases of social cognition that would otherwise otherwise impede maintain the conflict. For example, contact encourages people to move away from schematic processing to consider the qualities of individuals. And mediation avoids direct confrontation between groups that might hold a negative view of the other party which might elicit negative responses from the other via negative reciprocity (exemplifying a self-fulfilling prophecy).

## Question 7

### How do the effects of group membership differ from those of the 'mere presence' of other people?

#### Reading for this question

Chapter 10 of the subject guide.

#### Approaching the question

A sensible place to start would be to define groups and group membership and contrast this with 'mere presence'. Johnson and Johnson (1987) suggest that a group is two or more individuals in face-to-face interaction, who are aware of their membership in the group, aware of the others' group members, and also aware of their interdependence in achieving their goals. Moreover, many groups are characterised by entitativity, whereby members (and often, non-members) think of and talk about the group as a distinct and coherent unit or entity. These conditions on being a member of a group contrast with the conditions on 'mere presence', in which people are simply aware that there are other people in their immediate vicinity, but with whom they have nothing else in common to create group membership. The differences between mere presence and group membership are most clearly seen in the performance of tasks.

Weaker answers would fail to make an accurate distinction between the effects of mere presence and the effects of group membership, whilst others would incorrectly assume that social facilitation and social loafing

are both effects of either group membership or mere presence.

A good answer would indicate that mere presence has a range of effects. One is social facilitation. People typically perform faster on a task if other people are present (either carrying out the same task but not competing, or merely watching), even if they are not interacting and are not members of the same group. However, this applies only to simple tasks or those at which a person is very experienced; performance on more complex or less well-learned tasks seems instead to be impaired by the mere presence of other people. An important instance of the effect of mere presence concerns pro-social behaviour and the 'bystander effect': peoples' willingness to help someone in need of assistance tends to decrease in the presence of other people, even when they are not members of a group. It has, however, been argued that social facilitation is less important than once thought: Bond and Titus's (1983) meta-analysis found that it accounted for, at most, 3 per cent of the variation in behaviour. Explanations for social facilitation show a contrast with group membership – they suggest that being in the presence of others increases 'drive' or arousal, and may produce a sense of 'evaluation apprehension' or concern about our performance being assessed by an audience; or that it distracts us from the task and creates a conflict between paying attention to the task or paying attention to the audience.

A good answer would also note the contrast between the effects of mere presence and the effects of group membership. Although we do perform many tasks in the mere presence of other people, in organisations we typically work together co-operatively on a task. This has some well-researched effects. One is 'social loafing': people do not seem to work as hard when in groups. Using pulling on a rope as the experimental task, in groups of eight participants, each person's average effort is about half what it is when they are pulling alone. Several reasons for this have been suggested – all of which relate to the interdependence and entitativity of the group: people may experience a diffusion of responsibility for the task if they feel that their own contribution cannot be identified; they may also loaf because they have no clear performance standards to attempt to match; they may be a 'free rider', making less effort because they believe that the overall group performance will not suffer as a result; or they may want to avoid being a 'sucker' who puts in effort when others do not. Social loafing is widespread: Karau and Williams' (1993) meta-analysis found loafing in 80 per cent of studies which compared individual performance with group performance. However, there are also cases in which the opposite effect – social labouring – occurs; again, for 'real' group reasons: people may work harder to compensate for the anticipated loafing or poor performance of others, or where the task is important to group members.

An excellent answer might note that the tendency to engage in social loafing is, overall, more pronounced in individualistic than in collectivistic cultures, since the latter cultures generate norms that encourage individuals to work towards the general benefit of the group. This difference may, however, be decreasing under pressure of globalisation. It might also suggest that the line between mere presence and group membership may be blurred – indeed, since we are often co-present with others for particular reasons (e.g. waiting for a train), there may be ready bases for the spontaneous formation of a group (e.g. to complain if the train is severely delayed).

## Question 8

**Describe the main aspects of the social exchange theory of relationships.**

### Reading for this question

Chapter 16 of the subject guide.

### Approaching the question

A sensible starting point would be to note the kinds of relationships that are of interest. These relationships are ones which are in a sense volitional – not family relationships or those defined by organisational roles, but friendships and other interpersonal relationships involving degrees of intimacy, exchange, possible variation in depth over time, including the possibility of termination. It would also offer a brief review of the various factors research suggests influence whether or not we like and are attracted to someone. For example, physical attributes are clearly important, while other factors include proximity, similarity and feeling liked.

Weaker answers would fail to adequately characterise the nature of the exchanges involved in social exchange theory of relationships, or would fail to show how the theory suggests the processes work beyond the simple statement that relationships involve a form of exchange.

Social exchange sees relationships as involving a form of 'trade' or exchange between people. It occurs when people trade things such as information, affection, support etc. For example, we exchange personal information – intimate or private details about our self – which is known as self-disclosure. Social exchange theory looks at the degree of reciprocity in relationships and conceptualises relationships in terms of the exchange of benefits and costs. It argues that whether or not we like someone else is determined by the ratio of rewards received to costs incurred (cost-reward ratio). Social exchange theory argues that, within certain limits, people try to maximise the rewards they receive and minimise the costs associated with the relationship – the minimax strategy. The theory suggests that a 'good' relationship develops when the rewards received – affection, help and information – exceed the costs – time, effort and expenditure. A relationship in which the costs outweigh the benefits will be unsatisfactory.

A good answer would also indicate that social exchange theory proposes that we assess the profit generated by our relationships against our own idiosyncratic standard or comparison level. This is seen to be based on our past experience and is the average value of all the outcomes of previous relationships. Social exchange theory also suggests that we compare new opportunities with current relationships and that we seek out relationships which appear to offer the greatest potential for most profit. This provides an explanation for why people may be tempted to leave an apparently satisfying relationship when offered the prospect of increased rewards over costs.

An excellent answer might note that a special case of social exchange theory is equity theory; this argues that a relationship will be stable and satisfying when the ratio of your outcomes to inputs is equal to the ratio of the other person's ratio of outcomes to inputs (i.e. both parties are content with what they get from the relationship given what they put into it). Equity is seen to be less important in close, intimate relationships than in acquaintanceships or less close friendships. An excellent answer might also note that, although social exchange offers a useful account of some of the principles that operate in the formation of relationships, it provides only

a limited explanation for the kinds of factors that we weigh in such an exchange. Other theories may be better able to explain these factors – for example, evolutionary theories give a more precise account of the factors that govern mate selection. This suggests that the interests of potential offspring govern choices of partners especially by women (who have an interest in ensuring that they have access to resources during pregnancy and whilst their offspring are young). For example, the differential body shape preferences displayed by men and women are explicable from an evolutionary perspective.

## Section B

Answer no more than one question from this section (maximum of 30 marks).

### Question 9

**How successfully do expectancy value theories extend earlier theories of the attitude-behaviour link?**

#### Reading for this question

Chapter 9 of the subject guide.

#### Approaching the question

A sensible place to start would be to characterise attitudes. Attitudes refer to the views we hold about people, groups, events and issues in our world and are the means by which we evaluate our social environment. Attitudes have been conceptualised in various ways. Many attitude theorists have taken a multi-component approach to defining attitudes, arguing that attitudes comprise three – or sometimes two – components. Other theorists take a uni-dimensional approach. The multicomponent ABCs of attitudes refer to their underlying components: affect (feelings), behaviour and cognition (beliefs). An attitude can be based on one, two or all three of these components. There is no definitive conclusion about which approach receives the most support from the available empirical evidence. However, the three-component model (cognition, affect and behaviour) is widely accepted as a theory, while the uni-dimensional model (affect) has provided the basis for much attitude measurement, via self-report measures.

Weaker answers would fail to characterise the empirical issues regarding the attitude-behaviour link; others would offer insufficient detail concerning the components and processes proposed by expectancy value theories.

Research has revealed large discrepancies between expressed attitudes – typically measured via self-report – and people's actions and it would be appropriate to outline La Piere's and others' findings which initiated the debate about the relation between attitudes and behaviour. A good answer would highlight possible reasons for the mis-matches between measured attitudes and observed behaviour (e.g. the general character of many attitude scales; whether attitudes are strong or weak; the more specific nature of most behaviour; differential expression of attitudes; social pressure; insufficient/inappropriate predictor variables; whether people are high or low self-monitors) and the methodological deficiencies of some of the studies of the attitude-behaviour link. A good answer would note Wicker's (1969) conclusion that the average correlation between attitudes and behaviour was 0.15 and the correlation was, at best, 0.3.

A good answer would note that these discrepancies were the motivation for the development of expectancy value models, which add in further

predictor variables that mediate between the attitude and behaviour. A description of the two main expectancy value models – the Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behaviour – should be given, noting their similarities and differences. In describing these models, it would be important to highlight the role of the additional predictor variables (subjective norms for the Theory of Reasoned Action and perceived behavioural control for the Theory of Planned Behaviour) in enhancing the models' predictive power. (Diagrams may be useful in describing the models.) A good answer would illustrate how these two theories have been applied.

A good answer would also outline criticisms of expectancy value models (e.g. lack of clarity of the notion of intention and its relation with behaviour, the assumption that attitudes are rational and that socially significant behaviour is reasoned/planned, and the fact that the models are limited to situations where people are highly motivated and capable of thinking deliberately about attitudes/behaviour). It would also consider some alternative models, such as the Rubicon model and Fazio's (1990) MODE model.

An excellent answer might point out that drawing a distinction between implicit and explicit attitudes, where the two offer different evaluations of an attitude object, allows the possibility that one may fail to predict behaviour whilst the other succeeds in doing so – but that expectancy value models typically rely on explicit measures of explicit attitudes. An excellent answer might also broaden the discussion by noting that attitudes are grounded in the settings, groups and contexts in which they develop. The study of social representations (Moscovici, 1984) focuses less on individual attitude variation and its connection to specific behaviours, and more on shared understandings of the world and their connections to patterns of social interaction and systems of relationships. Expectancy value models measure individual perceptions of social norms and perceived behavioural control, whereas social representations suggest that socially shared understandings of such factors may be more useful. If individual variables alone cannot predict specific behaviours, such a broader understanding of their context may be needed.

On the basis of this discussion, an excellent answer would reach a reasoned conclusion about expectancy value theories have extended earlier theories of the attitude-behaviour link.

## Question 10

**Our sense of who we are depends on how we are assessed by other people in social interaction. Discuss.**

### Reading for this question

Chapter 6 of the subject guide.

### Approaching the question

A sensible place to start would be to characterise 'our sense of who we are' as our sense of self. A good start would be to point out that, although we experience our self as being coherent and unified and that we remain the same person across different times and situations, we also sense that different qualities of who we are seem to be more relevant in different contexts, and that there are different components to the self. This essay concerns the possibility that those different context-dependent qualities may depend on how other people assess us, and that the different components of the self function to support this.

Weaker answers would consider impression management but fail to relate this to questions of self representation, or they would fail to broaden the discussion of impression management beyond strategic impression management.

One basic distinction is between the private self and the public self and this distinction has been articulated in various different ways. Mead (1934) argued that our ability to be aware of ourselves, and to form judgements of ourselves, develops as a consequence of becoming aware of other people's judgements of us. This distinction suggests that the sense of self always depends on assessing or evaluating ourselves, but that the criteria that we use can vary, with a broad distinction between processes that use our own private standards versus what we think are relevant public or external criteria for evaluating the self. The interpersonal or social nature of the self, which arises from our concern about other people's opinion, is a key aspect of Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. This proposes that we tend to want to compare ourselves with others who are broadly similar to us, but we may also try to enhance out self-esteem by engaging in selective comparison (e.g. 'downward' social comparisons with people against whom we are likely to appear successful, or 'upward' comparisons with people we would like to emulate).

A good answer would note that social comparison raises the question of how we know how well we match up to social standards. For some standards there are more or less objective, external criteria of valuation – socio-economic status, educational success, number of Facebook 'friends', etc. But for many qualities of personality, there are no such external criteria. For this reason, we rely on feedback from other people as a way of assessing whether our sense of who we are has validity. It would then note that this connects to the ways in which we attempt to understand and create impressions of who we are in interacting with other people. A good answer would differentiate between 'strategic self-presentation' (which aims to manipulate others' perceptions of us) and 'expressive self-presentation' (which aims to validate our self-concept through interacting with others). Both of these processes are relevant to the way in which our sense of self depends on how we are assessed by others. Strategic self presentation relates to impression management, and in particular to Goffman's (1958) dramaturgical theory of self-presentation. Goffman argued that people are concerned to produce a particular impression in the people they meet both for reasons of self interest and so as not to disrupt the working consensus between the parties involved in the interaction. The working consensus is an implicit agreement between people concerning the kinds of people they are – for example, that the other person agrees that the impression that we are trying to give of ourselves is plausible and coherent with the rest of our behaviour. Goffman suggests that self-presentation can usefully be likened to a theatrical performance and that people use their appearance, actions and sets and props in their dramaturgic displays. Usually the other person – the audience – will co-operate and accept the 'performance' at face value so that the interaction can proceed. When failures in self-presentation occur the interaction is disrupted, generating embarrassment both in the player and the audience. This may generate a range of negative consequences and lead to responses to restore the situation. Avoiding embarrassment is in the interest of all parties involved in an interaction, but especially the performer.

A good answer would go further and note that the flexibility of the sense of self raises complexities for those in a social interaction who are trying to predict what the other participant is going to do next. Swann has

suggested that people solve this problem through a process of identity negotiation, whereby people establish expectations of one another (see Swann, 1987; Swann and Bosson, 2008). The main point is that we are not passive recipients of other people's assessments of us – we are active negotiators. Identity negotiation reconciles two competing processes that may occur when two people interact. One involves an actor using their expectancies to guide behaviour, thereby encouraging the other person to provide confirmation of those expectancies. The other involves the actor behaving in a way that aims to make the other person treat them in a way that provides verification for the actor's self-views (i.e. self-verification arising from expressive self presentation). When there are differences between the expectancies of perceivers and the self-views of actors, each will try to persuade the other to see things their way, usually resulting in increased congruence between the participants' views.

An excellent answer might note that the extent to which people's self concepts depend on others – that is, the extent of their independence or interdependence – itself may be subject to cultural variation (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). It might also note that Bem (1972) took a somewhat different approach, arguing that we form impressions about our own characteristics on the same basis as we form impressions about others (i.e. we rely on behavioural evidence to make inferences about the self that was the cause of that behaviour).

On the basis of this discussion, an excellent answer would reach a reasoned conclusion about the proposition that who we think we are depends on how other people assess us in social interaction.

## Section C

Answer no more than one question from this section (maximum of 30 marks).

### Question 11

**What do studies of obedience tell us about the willingness of humans to carry out acts that are widely considered to be immoral?**

#### Reading for this question

Chapter 11 of the subject guide.

#### Approaching the question

A sensible place to start would be to indicate that this question is concerned with what research can tell us about the conditions under which people obey orders to carry out actions that are widely understood as immoral and the mechanisms involved. The question requires a definition of obedience (i.e. a person accepting the orders of another who is in apparent authority) and a description of relevant experimental work, such as Milgram's studies and more recent research. When outlining its key features, obedience should be distinguished from conformity and the importance of power – expert, legitimate and referent – should be highlighted.

Weaker answers would give a brief account of Milgram's investigations, but would fail to develop an account of the variations in experimental conditions that were used or would fail to relate those variations to specific aspects of Milgram's explanations of the origins of obedience.

A description of the key aspects of Milgram's (1974) main studies should be given. Milgram recruited participants, giving them the impression that they were to assist in an experiment on human learning. Participants

were required to administer electric shocks to a learner every time the learner made a mistake. Actually no shocks were given to the learner but participants were unaware of this and 65 per cent of them continued to punish mistakes until the learner was apparently receiving shocks of over 400 volts and had long ceased to respond to questions. Many participants were distressed by the experience, but continued because they believed that they were taking part in a genuine psychological experiment. Milgram varied a number of conditions which changed the proportion of participants who were willing to administer shocks at maximum intensity. The most important factors shown to affect obedience are: immediacy (i.e. proximity of the learner to the participant), which decreases it; greater proximity of the authority figure increases obedience; increased legitimacy of the authority figure increases obedience; and group pressure increases obedience. A good answer would note that these are all aspects of the situation, rather than qualities of the person who is obeying.

Milgram highlighted four reasons why people obey. First is the fact that we are socialised to obey authority. Second, he suggested that people in authority structures undergo an 'agentic shift', in which they abdicate personal responsibility for their actions and hand it over to those with greater power. Third, the situation may provide 'binding factors' that maintain the agentic shift – in particular, the social conventions that generate obligations to those in authority, and the fear that disobeying will be even more stressful than going on. Fourth, Milgram emphasised the importance of power in generating obedience.

A good answer would consider other studies of obedience – for example, the prison experiments (Zimbardo, 1971; Reicher and Haslam, 2002) and other less controversial studies (e.g. Meeus and Raajmakers, 1995). It would note the similarities and differences with Milgram's studies, and the overall parallel finding of the strong influence of the situation and the perception of legitimacy on the extent to which people will obey authority. It would also note that substantially similar results to Milgram were found using the same basic design, but without the extreme levels of apparent shock being applied. This is an important result for two reasons. The first concerns research ethics: Milgram's precise research design would be unlikely to be ethically acceptable today. The second concerns the theoretical implications: the factors that Milgram identified as driving obedience come into play for relatively anodyne levels of apparent shock, implying that the processes underlying obedience for highly immoral actions may be the same as for more mundane forms of obedience.

An excellent answer might note the possibility that 'the situation' that influences obedience not only refers to specific qualities of the location of the person obeying and the specific interaction between the person in authority and the person obeying, but also comprises the cultural-historical context that defines the norms regarding obedience to authority. Reicher and Haslam (2002) thus suggest that obedience may depend on the individual and collective definitions of the nature of the roles involved, which themselves depend on the historical and political relations between the specific groups in question (rather than personal factors, or general social psychological qualities of groups and authority). This suggestion is corroborated by findings of some cultural variations in the results of partial replications of Milgram's studies (Blass, 2004). An excellent answer might also relate experimental instances of obedience to 'real life' situations and discuss how such studies have informed our understanding of those factors which encourage people to obey orders.

On the basis of the available evidence, the answer should reach a conclusion about the extent to which it is not who you are but the situation you are in that determines whether a person will obey orders.

## Question 12

**Purchases are connected to consumers' identity as much as to their attitudes. Discuss.**

### Reading for this question

Chapter 14 and Sections 13.3-13.4 of the subject guide.

### Approaching the question

A sensible place to start would be to characterise consumer behaviour as a field of research which examines the thoughts, feelings and actions involved in the decision to buy certain products. A key point is that consumer behaviour involves a range of social psychological processes that are not specific to consumption per se, but have broader applications and causes. As a result, consumption draws on a range of relevant social and psychological processes (such as heuristics for decision making, attitude change, identity, impression formation, etc), and is also influenced by the larger social and cultural environment. To this extent, consumer purchases are likely to be connected as much to consumers' identity as to their attitudes. Marketing – as the set of strategies used by companies in order to try to influence people to consume their products – therefore attempts to develop and exploit these connections.

Weaker answers would focus either on the connections between consumption and identity or between consumption and attitudes, but not both; others would make both sets of connections but fail to relate them to theoretical approaches in social psychology.

Consumer purchases are examined in the field of consumer behaviour – assessing the reasons behind people's decision to buy certain products, their reactions towards the four 'P's of marketing (product, price, promotion and place). A major aspect of this concerns people's attitudes towards the product. A good answer would define attitudes (as an evaluation of an attitude object, which may connect to salient beliefs and behaviours), and note the application to consumer behaviour of Katz's distinction between attitudes that are instrumental (concerned with achieving goals) and those which are value-expressive (concerned with self-image and more deeply-held values). For example, some marketing experts differentiate between symbolic brands that are marketed so as to appeal to an individual's need for self- or social esteem, and functional brands that fulfil their material needs, though most products are likely to involve both.

Given this, a major aspect of marketing involves the use of persuasive communications whose aim is to change people's attitudes towards products – for example, by advertising. It would be reasonable to briefly describe models of persuasive attitude change – for example, dual-process models such as the elaboration likelihood model (which differentiates between 'central' processing of a message in terms of its content or argument, and 'peripheral' processing of the emotions it elicits, qualities of the sender and so on) and the heuristic-systematic model (which differentiates between careful, systematic processing of the message, and faster, heuristics-based processing). The specific ways in which these ideas have been applied in marketing should be noted. For example, the use of messages that involve 'peripheral' cues such as image, emotion, appeal to celebrity or credibility of a person delivering the message. More

systematically, Foot, Cone and Belding's distinction between message that involve 'feeling' and those that involve 'thinking' echoes dual-process model assumptions and gives rise to a range of marketing strategies. A good answer would note that, whereas advertising usually involves explicit communications that aim to change behaviour, marketing has more recently sought to influence the implicit or non-conscious processes that can lead to behaviour – for example in product placement (the placing of products in, for example, films, so as to implicitly communicate their quality or desirability).

A good answer would also show that consumer behaviour is also connected to social identity (the way in which our sense of who we are and our self-esteem draws on our membership of different social groups). People are attracted to products that are consistent with, and enable the enactment of, the various social identities that make up their sense of self. This allows them to affirm membership within a group, and differentiate themselves from other groups. Branding involves a systematic attempt to create an integrated set of explicit and implicit beliefs, emotions and associations for a product in order to encourage stronger identification between consumers and a product or its producer, and so to cement repeat consumption. Indeed, many companies have tried to exploit the connection between possessions and identities by modifying their branding strategy so as to move away from a narrow emphasis on functional attributes towards a focus on a consumer's lifestyle. A good answer would note that this connection between consumption and social identity offers opportunities for self-expression. It would relate consumption to Goffman's dramaturgical theory of impression management (e.g. noting products as emblems or props); it would also connect the effectiveness of marketing strategies to Snyder's theory of self-monitoring (e.g. the possibility that high self-monitors may be more persuaded by the symbolic and status-related aspects of goods, whereas low self-monitors may be more concerned with instrumental and quality aspects). It would also note that negative consequences may result: for instance, women pursuing unrealistic appearance ideals.

An excellent answer might note that the relations between identity and consumption also suggest that consumption will vary across cultures, with consequences for marketing. For example, marketing in Eastern Asian cultures tends to emphasise conformity (pursuing the emphasis on the interdependence of self), whereas in the West it highlights uniqueness (pursuing independence). It might also note that consumer behaviour is dynamic, with changes in consumption patterns connected to demographic forces (e.g. the ageing of population, globalisation) and trends and technological innovations (e.g. the rise of social media).

On the basis of this material, an excellent answer would give a reasoned assessment of the proposition that consumption depends as much on consumers' sense of identity as on their attitudes.

## Section D

Answer no more than one question from this section (maximum of 30 marks).

### Question 13

**The reduction of prejudice is difficult but not impossible. Discuss.**

**Reading for this question**

Chapter 16 and Section 4.2 of the subject guide.

### Approaching the question

A sensible place to start would be to offer a definition of prejudice. Some define it as a hostile or negative attitude towards a distinguishable group based on generalisations derived from faulty or incomplete information, whilst others take a broader view, defining it as the tendency to prejudge others on the basis of their group membership and therefore, how they are stereotyped. From this perspective, in the same way that stereotypes can be positive or negative, people can be prejudiced in both positive and negative ways. Prejudice should be be differentiated from discrimination (i.e. unfair or biased conduct), since there is no necessary relation between prejudice and discrimination. People who are prejudiced may or may not display discriminatory behaviour, while those who discriminate may or may not be prejudiced.

Weaker answers would list different theories of prejudice without drawing any systematic connections to the ways in which they might be used to attempts to reduce prejudice, or fail to give sufficient detail concerning how those attempts might be made.

A good answer would include consideration of theoretical accounts of the origins of prejudice. These can be classified in various ways but essentially there are four categories: person-centred theories, cognitive theories, inter-group theories and theories which emphasise societal factors. Person-centred theories focus on individual personality (e.g. authoritarian personality and dogmatism or closed-mindedness) or on the experience of frustration (i.e. frustration-aggression and scape-goating). Cognitive theories emphasise the role of cognitive processes and the resulting limitations and biases (e.g. categorisation, stereotyping, illusory correlation and out-group homogeneity). Inter-group theories emphasise the role of group membership in prejudice (e.g. relative deprivation, realistic conflict and social identity theories). Consideration of societal sources of prejudice would involve discussion of how conformity to social norms can affect expression of prejudice and the role of the media in creating and reinforcing prejudicial views. Discussion of the theoretical perspectives on the origins of prejudice should note their various claims and criticisms and an assessment of the extent to which they provide an adequate explanation of prejudice.

A good answer would go on to emphasise those theories that are best able to offer specific suggestions for attempting to reduce prejudice. Personality theories, for example, would suggest that prejudice would be hard to change, since personality itself is resistant to change; societal theories, similarly, would suggest that addressing prejudice is difficult because it would depend on changing the patterns of messages circulated by the mass media. By contrast, cognitive and inter-group theories offer more direct ways of addressing prejudice. For example, the emphasis on stereotypes in cognitive theories suggests that prejudice may be maintained by inter-group ignorance; as a result, increased contact between the holders of prejudice and the targets of prejudice might reduce it. Similarly, the emphasis on real and symbolic conflict in inter-group theories suggests that prejudice may be maintained by misplaced beliefs about threat from the outgroup; again, increased contact might then reduce prejudice.

This idea has been expressed as 'the contact hypothesis' (Allport, 1954). Allport proposed that contact between groups would be successful under the following conditions: (a) the groups should be of equal status; (b) contact should be sustained and co-operative; and (c) it should occur in

an environment of legal support for integration. Evidence for the success of contact is mixed. Having superordinate goals that reduce competition and promote co-operation, as in the Sherif summer camp experiment, is successful in reducing bad feelings between groups provided that the goal is achieved. One of the most positive initiatives may be Aronson's jigsaw method of teaching in schools. This involves groups of pupils (of assorted ethnic backgrounds) taking on separate parts of a group coursework task. The experience they all had of each member of the group making a contribution to the total task seems to have been very positive and had a significant role in improving inter-group relations. A good answer would note that good relations between subgroups will only tend to generalise to the wider groups of which they are members if those subgroups are seen as typical members of the wider groups.

A second approach to reducing prejudice can be seen as an extension of contact: affirmative action involves recruiting people from minorities (provided that they are appropriately qualified) to positions in which they are traditionally underrepresented, with the aim of making these positions more attainable for members of minority groups. Evidence from the USA suggests that such programmes have a complex effect on the target and non-target groups. Affirmative action has been found to lead non-target group members to view women and minorities selected via affirmative action programmes as less competent than those selected without such programmes, and had a negative impact on relations between target and non-target groups unless the affirmative action programme was seen as fair by both sides.

An excellent answer might raise the question of the possible efficacy of local efforts at contact and affirmative action, in the context of proliferation of international mass communication media, where representations of groups who are the targets of prejudice are not open to the same degree of local control. This links the maintenance of prejudice to the spread and influence of negative representations of target groups, which concerns the social psychology of persuasion and media effects. An excellent answer might also note the connections between the contact hypothesis and globalisation. On the face of it, globalisation generates increased inter-group contact, and so would be expected to reduce prejudice. However, it is open to debate whether the driving economic forces of globalisation reflect Allport's conditions for contact to successfully reduce prejudice.

On the basis of the material presented, an excellent answer would offer a reasoned conclusion about whether the reduction of prejudice is difficult but not impossible.

### Question 14

**Evaluate the claim that the workplace contributes as much to people's stress as to their wellbeing.**

#### Reading for this question

Section 5.2 and Chapter 17 of the subject guide.

#### Approaching the question

A sensible place to start would be to characterise the workplace as an organisation involving a group of people in ongoing role relationships with each other in order to achieve certain objectives. Seeing an organisation in this way has generated research into how the structure of organisations and organisational culture affect individuals.

Weaker answers would fail adequately to characterise stress or to indicate the range of social psychological issues which could contribute to it; others would fail to pay equal attention to the positive and negative impacts of the workplace.

One major area in which the workplace can have a *negative* impact on employees' wellbeing is in terms of stress. Stress can be seen as arising when the perceived demands placed upon individuals exceed the resources they perceive they have available to meet those demands. Stress can have negative effects on an individual's sense of wellbeing, their behaviour and their physical and mental health. Its impact on organisations can be costly in terms of lost productivity, high absenteeism and so on. In addition to the obvious physical stressors of the workplace (e.g. poor workplace design, long hours, risk and danger), there are specifically social psychological sources of stress, concerning the individual's role in the organisation, relationships at work, career development issues and organisational structure and climate. For example, stress frequently results from role ambiguity (i.e. lack of clarity about the scope, objectives and responsibilities of one's job) or role conflict (i.e. job demands which are in conflict with one another). The importance of stress has led many organisations to develop strategies for its reduction – usually in the form of either altering environmental sources of stress (e.g. physical working conditions), or implementing stress counselling and stress management training. A good answer would note, however, that not all stress is problematic. A certain level of pressure can be motivating, energising and exciting.

A way of considering the *positive* impact of the workplace on employees' wellbeing is to assess the sources of job satisfaction – the degree to which a job is perceived as rewarding. These include: pay and other benefits, working conditions, job interest and involvement and career prospects. Job satisfaction is also a function of organisational commitment (i.e. the extent to which an individual feels involved, loyal and able to identify with the company). A good answer would comment on theories of job satisfaction, including Hackman and Oldman's (1975) job characteristics model, which proposed that people's level of job satisfaction is determined by skill variety; task identity; task significance; autonomy; and feedback. The job content model (Warr, 2002) suggests that job satisfaction is a function of 10 factors. A good answer would note that job satisfaction can be a major contributor to our mental health and overall wellbeing.

A good answer would go on to note that group membership also affects how we feel about our work and our life more generally. What we do for a living, that is our work role, is also fundamental to our identity – our self-schemas that characterise who we are. We also rely on our co-workers for a range of benefits, such as social contact and stimulation, coping with boredom or work-related stress, and more general social support. For many people, the social aspects of their work are as important as the job content.

A good answer would also note the connection between diversity and the experience of the workplace. Diversity is a key feature of many organisations, and there is evidence, for example, that gender affects the ways in which men and women experience organisations. Such differences in experience – in particular, the experience of discrimination and prejudice regarding work opportunities and promotion – can have an impact on wellbeing. Women also often face additional challenges in organisations that are not always faced by men – such as a choice between developing their career and having a family, or at least being more

responsible for the family than males in similar positions. Some of the factors which affect the career paths of women – such as being perceived in stereotypical ways and the lack of role models – also constrain the advancement of people from ethnic minorities, and workers who are different in other ways from the majority (e.g. those who have a different sexual orientation or have some form of physical or mental disability). Since job satisfaction can be influenced by discrimination and a lack of opportunity for advancement, which are related to diversity, diversity is clearly connected to stress and wellbeing in the workplace.

An excellent answer might highlight the role of organisational culture (the dynamic system of implicit and explicit rules – attitudes, values, beliefs, norms and behaviours – that are shared by members of an organisation) as a major influence on workplace experience. An excellent answer might go on to note that the task of changing workplace experience to improve wellbeing is then related to the task of changing organisational culture.

An excellent answer would use this material to arrive at a reasoned conclusion concerning the ways in which experience in the workplace have an impact on employees' stress and wellbeing.