

The Sociocultural Approach

IB SL Study Guide

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Videos on this page: Watch: The Sociocultural Approach to Psychology · Watch: Conformity, Identity, and Culture

Introduction to the Sociocultural Approach

The sociocultural approach assumes that human behaviour cannot be fully understood without reference to the social and cultural context in which it occurs. Psychologists in this tradition argue that:

- Behaviour is shaped by the groups people belong to — their family, peer groups, communities, and cultures.
- Social norms, roles, and expectations exert powerful influence on individual action.
- Culture defines what is considered normal, acceptable, and desirable — and therefore shapes cognition, emotion, and behaviour.
- Identity is partly constructed through social group membership.

This approach is one of three core approaches in the IB Psychology syllabus (alongside the Biological and Cognitive approaches). Every claim must be supported with a **named study**.

IB TIP

Every answer in IB Psychology Paper 1 must link a specific behaviour to a specific sociocultural factor (social norms, group membership, cultural dimensions, observational learning, etc.) AND support it with a named study. A claim without a study receives no mark at the higher levels of the markscheme.

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner (1979)

Social Identity Theory (SIT) was proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner to explain intergroup behaviour — specifically, why people favour members of their own group (in-group) over members of other groups (out-group), even when those groups are trivial or arbitrary.

SIT proposes that social identity — the part of a person's self-concept derived from their perceived membership of social groups — is a fundamental component of the self. People are motivated to maintain a **positive social identity**, which they achieve through favourable comparisons between their in-group and relevant out-groups.

The Three-Stage Process

Stage	Description
Social categorisation	People categorise themselves and others into social groups (e.g., nationality, gender, school, sports team). This simplifies the social world but can reduce out-group members to stereotypes.
Social identification	People adopt the identity of the group they categorise themselves as belonging to, internalising the group's norms, values, and behaviours.
Social comparison	People compare their in-group favourably with relevant out-groups in order to maintain positive social identity and self-esteem. This comparison can drive in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination.

In-Group Favouritism and Out-Group Discrimination

SIT predicts that simply categorising people into groups — even on a completely arbitrary basis — is sufficient to produce in-group favouritism. This was demonstrated in the **minimal group paradigm**.

Tajfel (1970) — The Minimal Group Paradigm

Aim: To investigate whether mere categorisation into groups is sufficient to produce in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination.

Method: Tajfel allocated 64 schoolboys (aged 14–15 in Bristol, UK) into two groups, ostensibly based on their preference for Klee or Kandinsky paintings (though the allocation was actually random). No interaction between group members was allowed. Participants were asked to allocate points (worth money) to anonymous members of their own group and the other group using a matrix system. The key question was whether they would choose to maximise their own group's absolute gain or their group's gain *relative* to the out-group.

Findings:

- Participants consistently awarded more points to members of their own group than to members of the other group.
- Crucially, participants often chose options that maximised the **difference** between in-group and out-group points, even when this meant their own group received fewer points in absolute terms.
- This in-group favouritism occurred despite the groups being entirely arbitrary and participants having no prior relationship with group members.

Conclusion: Mere categorisation into groups is sufficient to produce in-group favouritism. Social identity — and the motivation to achieve a positive in-group comparison — operates even without competition for resources, history of conflict, or personal acquaintance.

Evaluation:

Strength	Limitation
Highly controlled experiment — arbitrary group assignment allows direct causal inference about the effect of categorisation alone	Artificial laboratory setting; allocation of points to anonymous strangers may not reflect real-world discrimination
Replicated across many studies and cultures; in-group favouritism is a robust finding	All-male, school-age sample in Bristol — limited generalisability
Directly supports Social Identity Theory — provides the empirical basis for the model	Participants may have responded to demand characteristics: the point-allocation task makes in-group favouritism the “obvious” response

⚠ EXAM ALERT

A common error is confusing the minimal group paradigm study (Tajfel, 1970) with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The 1970 study is the empirical evidence; the 1979 paper is the theoretical framework. Know both, and make clear which you are referring to.

📖 MEMORISE THIS

Social Identity Theory — three stages in order:

1. Categorisation (put yourself and others in groups)
2. Identification (internalise the group’s identity)
3. Comparison (compare your group favourably with others to maintain self-esteem) The minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, 1970) shows that categorisation alone is enough to produce favouritism — you do not need competition or prior conflict.

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura’s Observational Learning

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), developed by Albert Bandura, proposes that much human behaviour is learned through **observation** of others (models) rather than through direct experience. Unlike strict behaviourism, SCT gives an active role to internal cognitive processes — attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation — in determining what is learned from observation.

Key Processes in Observational Learning

Process	Description
Attention	The observer must notice the model's behaviour. Factors affecting attention: distinctiveness of the model, observer's arousal level, perceived relevance
Retention	The observed behaviour must be stored in memory as a symbolic or verbal representation
Reproduction	The observer must have the physical capability to reproduce the behaviour
Motivation	The observer must be motivated to perform the behaviour — reinforcement of the model (vicarious reinforcement) or anticipated rewards affect motivation

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their own capability to execute a specific behaviour successfully. Bandura proposed that self-efficacy is a central determinant of whether observed behaviour is actually performed:

- High self-efficacy increases the likelihood of attempting and persisting in a behaviour.
- Self-efficacy is built through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences (seeing similar others succeed), verbal persuasion, and physiological states.

Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961) — The Bobo Doll Study

Aim: To investigate whether children who observed an aggressive adult model would imitate that aggression — and whether they would do so even in the absence of the model.

Method: 36 boys and 36 girls (aged 3–5 years) at Stanford University Nursery School were divided into three conditions: (1) exposed to an **aggressive model** who hit, kicked, and verbally abused a Bobo doll (inflatable doll with a weighted base); (2) exposed to a **non-aggressive model** who quietly played with other toys; (3) a **control group** with no model. After the modelling phase, children were mildly frustrated (shown attractive toys then told they could not play with them) and placed in a room with a Bobo doll and other toys.

Findings:

- Children in the **aggressive model** condition showed significantly more aggressive behaviour (both physical and verbal imitation of the model) than children in the non-aggressive or control conditions.
- Boys showed more physical aggression overall; girls showed more verbal aggression.

- Children imitated the **specific actions** of the model (e.g., hitting the doll with a mallet or using the model’s exact verbal phrases like “Pow!”).
- Aggression occurred even in the absence of the model — demonstrating that the behaviour was learned, not merely triggered by the model’s presence.

Conclusion: Behaviour can be learned through observation (modelling) without direct reinforcement of the observer. Children imitated both the physical and verbal behaviour of an aggressive model. This supports the SCT claim that learning occurs vicariously through observation.

Evaluation:

Strength	Limitation
Controlled experiment — random assignment of children to conditions gives high internal validity and allows causal inference	Ecological validity concerns: a Bobo doll is designed to be hit, so hitting it may not represent real-world aggression
Established an influential theoretical and empirical basis for understanding how aggression (and prosocial behaviour) can be socially learned	Demand characteristics: children may have hit the Bobo doll because they thought that was expected in that context
Later extensions (with filmed models; Bandura, 1963) show that learning occurs even from film/television models — practically significant for media effects research	Short-term follow-up only; unclear whether observed aggressive behaviour persists or generalises to real-world aggression toward people
Cross-cultural replications support the universality of observational learning	Sample was from a US nursery school population; cultural and socioeconomic factors may moderate results

 **IB TIP**

The Bobo doll study is one of the most famous in social psychology. For IB, its value is as evidence for observational learning / Social Cognitive Theory. When evaluating it, make sure to discuss both methodological strengths (random assignment, controlled conditions) and the ecological validity limitation in depth — a one-line mention does not score marks.

► **Watch: The Sociocultural Approach to Psychology**

VIDEO

Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede’s Individualism vs. Collectivism

Geert Hofstede identified **cultural dimensions** — measurable, consistent patterns of values and behaviours that differ systematically between national cultures. The most important for IB Psychology is the **individualism–collectivism** dimension.

Dimension	Individualist cultures	Collectivist cultures
Core value	Personal autonomy, independence, self-achievement	Group harmony, loyalty, interdependence
Self-concept	Independent self-construal (“I am unique”)	Interdependent self-construal (“I am part of a group”)
Examples	USA, UK, Australia, Western Europe	Japan, China, many Latin American and African nations
Behaviour	Personal goals prioritised; direct communication; individual rights	Group goals prioritised; indirect communication; group cohesion valued

Hofstede originally collected data from IBM employees across 50+ countries in the 1970s, and identified four dimensions (later expanded to six). The individualism–collectivism dimension has been the most widely researched and applied in cross-cultural psychology.

How culture shapes self-concept and behaviour:

- In individualist cultures, people define themselves by personal traits and achievements (independent self-construal — Markus & Kitayama, 1991).
- In collectivist cultures, people define themselves through their relationships and group memberships (interdependent self-construal).
- These differences in self-concept influence cognitive processing, emotional expression, conformity, and decision-making.

Berry’s Acculturation Model

John Berry proposed that individuals from one cultural background who enter or live within a different cultural context (a process called **acculturation**) navigate this experience through one of four strategies:

Strategy	Attitude toward original culture	Attitude toward new culture
Integration	Maintain	Adopt
Assimilation	Give up	Adopt
Separation	Maintain	Reject
Marginalisation	Give up	Reject

Berry’s research suggests that **integration** is associated with the most positive psychological outcomes (highest well-being, lowest acculturative stress), while **marginalisation** is associated with the worst outcomes.

EXAM ALERT

Hofstede is often tested through a short outline or evaluation. Key evaluation points: (1) data from IBM employees is not representative of entire national populations; (2) nations are not culturally homogeneous — regional, class, and generational differences exist within countries; (3) cultural values change over time; (4) the model has been highly influential but is sometimes criticised for reducing complex cultures to a single score on a dimension.

Conformity

Asch (1951) — Line Judgment and Social Conformity

Aim: To investigate the extent to which social pressure from a majority could cause an individual to conform — to give an obviously incorrect answer.

Method: Solomon Asch recruited 123 male American college students. Each participant was placed in a group of confederates (actors who knew the true purpose of the study). The group was shown a “standard” line and asked to identify which of three comparison lines matched it in length — a task with an objectively correct answer. On 12 of 18 critical trials, the confederates unanimously gave a clearly wrong answer. The real participant always answered last or second to last.

Findings:

- On critical trials, 75% of participants conformed to the wrong answer at least once.
- Overall, 37% of all critical trial responses were conforming (incorrect) answers.
- Only 25% of participants never conformed on any trial.
- When interviewed afterwards, participants gave reasons including doubt about their own perception, desire to fit in, and not wanting to stand out.

Conclusion: The majority exerts powerful pressure to conform even when the correct answer is objectively obvious. Normative social influence (the desire to be accepted and avoid rejection) can override accurate perception.

Factors Affecting Conformity

Asch conducted variations of his original study to identify what moderates conformity:

Factor	Effect on conformity
Group size	Conformity increases as the majority grows from 1 to 3; beyond 3, little additional increase
Unanimity	If even one confederate gives the correct answer (a “social ally”), conformity drops dramatically from 37% to approximately 5%
Task difficulty	Conformity increases when the task is more ambiguous or difficult — people are more likely to look to others for guidance
Public vs. private response	Conformity is lower when responses are written privately rather than stated publicly (normative vs. informational influence)

Types of Social Influence

Type	Description	Example
Normative social influence	Conforming to fit in and be accepted by the group; driven by need for belonging	Going along with a group’s wrong answer to avoid standing out
Informational social influence	Conforming because you believe others know better; driven by uncertainty	Looking to experts or confident others in an ambiguous situation

Evaluation of Asch (1951):

Strength	Limitation
Well-controlled laboratory experiment; random allocation not required since the IV (confederate behaviour) was systematically manipulated	Androcentric and ethnocentric: all-male sample of American college students; conformity rates differ across cultures and genders
Demonstrated a striking effect — majority influence on an objectively clear task was unexpected	Demand characteristics: some participants may have suspected the true nature of the study
Generated a significant body of follow-up research on social influence, including Milgram’s obedience studies	Low ecological validity: line judgment is an artificial task with no real-world consequences — conformity in daily life may differ
Asch debriefed participants thoroughly and reported that most found the experience illuminating rather than distressing	Ethical concerns about deception: participants were misled about the nature of the study and experienced psychological discomfort

MEMORISE THIS

Asch (1951) — essential numbers for the IB exam:

- 123 male American college students
- 75% conformed at least once
- 37% of all critical trial responses were conforming (wrong) answers
- 25% never conformed

- Social ally (one dissenter): conformity dropped to approximately 5% Quoting specific figures distinguishes top-band from mid-band responses.

IB TIP

For IB SL, Asch (1951) is the primary conformity study. Milgram's obedience research is typically discussed in the HL content. If you see an SL exam question on "social influence" or "conformity," Asch is the right study. For evaluation, pair it with cross-cultural replications (e.g., conformity rates are higher in collectivist cultures) to show the sociocultural perspective's own complexity.

▶Watch: [Conformity, Identity, and Culture](#)

VIDEO

Enculturation and Acculturation

Enculturation

Enculturation is the process by which individuals learn the norms, values, behaviours, and beliefs of their culture — not through formal instruction alone, but through participation in everyday social life. It is largely unconscious: cultural norms are absorbed through observation, interaction, and immersion.

Enculturation operates through many of the same mechanisms described by Social Cognitive Theory: children observe cultural models (parents, peers, media figures) and learn which behaviours are rewarded, accepted, and valued.

Luhrmann, Padmavati, Tharoor, and Osei (2015) — Voice Hearing Across Cultures

Aim: To investigate whether cultural context shapes the experience of voice hearing in individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia, specifically whether cultural norms about the relationship between minds and external forces influence how voices are interpreted.

Method: Luhrmann and colleagues conducted in-depth interviews with individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia who reported hearing voices in three cultural settings: **San Francisco (USA)**, **Chennai (India)**, and **Accra (Ghana)**. Twenty participants were interviewed in each location. Participants were asked to describe the voices they heard, whether the voices had identities, and how they felt about the voices.

Findings:

- American participants tended to describe their voices in largely **negative, distressing** terms, consistent with a biomedical model in which voices are symptoms of a brain disorder.
- Indian and Ghanaian participants were significantly more likely to describe their voices as **positive, friendly, or known to them** — as family members, spirits, or God speaking to them.

- Cultural context — including beliefs about the relationship between persons and spiritual forces — appeared to shape whether voices were experienced as threatening or meaningful.

Conclusion: The experience of psychotic symptoms such as voice hearing is shaped by cultural enculturation. Culture influences not just how symptoms are interpreted but potentially how they are experienced. This challenges a purely biomedical account and supports the sociocultural approach's claim that cultural context is fundamental to psychological experience.

Evaluation:

Strength	Limitation
Cross-cultural design directly tests cultural influence on a significant psychological phenomenon	Qualitative interviews are subject to interviewer interpretation and cultural translation difficulties
Practical implications for culturally sensitive mental health treatment	Small sample (20 per site); cannot establish population-level generalisability
Real-world clinical population; high ecological validity	Diagnostic categories for schizophrenia may be applied differently across cultures, affecting sample comparability

EXAM ALERT

Luhrmann et al. (2015) is particularly useful for demonstrating that **even the experience of a serious psychological disorder is shaped by cultural context** — not just behaviour in laboratory settings. Use it as a strong evaluative example in ERQs on the sociocultural approach or on the role of culture in shaping behaviour.

Key Studies

You must know each study: aim, method, findings, conclusion, and evaluation.

Tajfel (1970) — Minimal Group Paradigm

See the full description in the Social Identity Theory section above. For exam review, the essential points are:

- **Study:** 64 Bristol schoolboys allocated to groups based on (ostensibly) Klee vs. Kandinsky preference.
- **Key finding:** In-group favouritism occurred even for completely arbitrary, meaningless group membership. Participants preferred to maximise the gap between in-group and out-group gain rather than maximise their own group's absolute gain.
- **Conclusion:** Mere categorisation into groups is sufficient to produce discrimination. Social identity motivation drives intergroup behaviour even without history, competition, or acquaintance.

- **IB use:** Evidence for Social Identity Theory (social categorisation and social comparison stages); intergroup discrimination; in-group favouritism.

Asch (1951) — Conformity to Majority Influence

See the full description in the Conformity section above. Key exam points:

- **75%** of participants conformed at least once; **37%** of all critical responses were conforming.
- Social ally condition: conformity dropped to approximately 5% — unanimity is a critical condition.
- Normative social influence = desire to be accepted; informational social influence = belief that others know better.
- Evaluation: high internal validity; low ecological validity; androcentric sample; deception raises ethical concerns.

Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961) — Bobo Doll Study

See the full description in the Social Cognitive Theory section above. Key exam points:

- **Observational learning** (modelling) can produce learned aggression in children without direct reinforcement.
- Both physical and verbal aggression were imitated.
- Children imitated the specific actions and phrases of the aggressive model.
- Evaluation: random assignment, high internal validity; ecological validity concern (Bobo dolls are designed to be hit); demand characteristics.

Additional Supporting Study: Luhrmann et al. (2015) — Voice Hearing Across Cultures

See the full description in the Enculturation and Acculturation section above. Use this study to demonstrate cultural influence on psychological experience in ERQ evaluation.

Evaluation of the Sociocultural Approach

Strengths

- **Ecological validity:** Many sociocultural studies use real-world settings and investigate real social phenomena — Tajfel's school participants, Asch's college students reacting to real-seeming groups, Luhrmann's clinical interview data. This gives the approach strong relevance to actual human experience.

- **Cross-cultural applicability:** The approach explicitly addresses how culture shapes behaviour, making it the most internationally applicable of the three core approaches. Cross-cultural replications can test whether findings hold across individualist and collectivist societies.
- **Explanatory power for group behaviour:** The biological and cognitive approaches struggle to explain why people conform, discriminate, or learn through observation. The sociocultural approach provides direct, well-evidenced explanations.
- **Practical applications:** Social Identity Theory has informed conflict resolution and anti-prejudice interventions. Social Cognitive Theory underpins media literacy education and behaviour change programmes. Enculturation research informs culturally sensitive mental health practice.

Limitations

- **Cultural determinism:** Overemphasizing sociocultural context can minimise individual agency, biology, and cognitive processes. Behaviour is not solely determined by culture or group membership.
- **WEIRD bias:** Despite its cross-cultural emphasis, many foundational studies (Asch, Bandura) used Western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic samples. Cross-cultural replications show that conformity, for example, varies substantially between cultures — findings cannot simply be generalised.
- **Reductionism:** Reducing behaviour to social roles and cultural norms can overlook the biological determinants of social behaviour (e.g., evolutionary accounts of in-group favouritism, or neurochemical correlates of social bonding).
- **Ethical concerns:** Some foundational sociocultural studies raised significant ethical issues. Asch's use of deception without fully informed consent is a standard example. **HL** Milgram's obedience research (Milgram, 1963) is the paradigm case for ethical issues in social psychology, but it goes well beyond what is required at SL.
- **Directionality:** Social identity and cultural norms evolve over time — the sociocultural approach provides less guidance on how social change occurs than it does on how established norms are maintained.

Paper 1 SAQ and ERQ Tips — Sociocultural Approach

What the Examiner Looks For

For SAQs (9 marks):

IB Psychology SAQs on the sociocultural approach typically ask you to:

- Describe or explain one sociocultural concept (social identity, conformity, observational learning, cultural dimensions).
- Describe one study related to a specific sociocultural concept.
- Explain how one sociocultural factor influences behaviour.

A top-band SAQ must:

1. Define or clearly describe the sociocultural concept.
2. Name and describe a relevant study (aim, method, key findings, conclusion).
3. Explicitly link the study to the sociocultural concept in the question.

For ERQs (22 marks):

ERQs on the sociocultural approach may ask you to:

- Evaluate one or more sociocultural theories (e.g., Social Identity Theory, Social Cognitive Theory).
- Discuss the extent to which sociocultural factors explain a specific behaviour.
- Evaluate a sociocultural study.

A top-band ERQ must include a clear thesis, at least two studies described in detail, genuine evaluation (strengths and limitations of both studies and theory), counter-arguments, and a balanced conclusion.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Model SAQ plan — “Describe one study related to conformity” (9 marks):

1. Identify the study: Asch (1951).
2. Aim: to investigate whether majority social pressure could cause individuals to conform to an obviously incorrect answer.
3. Method: 123 male American college students placed in a group of confederates; standard line compared to three comparison lines; confederates gave unanimously wrong answers on 12 of 18 trials; real participant answered last.
4. Findings: 75% of participants conformed at least once; 37% of all critical trial responses were conforming (incorrect); only 25% never conformed.
5. Conclusion: the majority exerts powerful pressure to conform even when the answer is objectively obvious — normative social influence can override accurate perception.
6. Link: this demonstrates sociocultural influence on behaviour — specifically, that group membership and the desire for social acceptance (normative social influence) shape individual judgement and behaviour.

EXAM ALERT

A frequent SAQ error: describing Asch’s study as showing that “people always conform” or that “conformity is inevitable.” The correct finding is that 75% conformed at least once, but 25% never did — and the social ally variation showed that unanimity is a critical condition. Precision matters in IB Psychology.

May 2026 Exam Predictions — Sociocultural Approach

Based on past paper patterns and the IB 2022 Psychology syllabus, the following topics are most likely to appear in the May 2026 Paper 1 sociocultural approach questions:

High probability SAQ topics:

- Social Identity Theory with Tajfel (1970) — a consistently examined combination; know the three-stage process and the minimal group paradigm findings in detail.
- One study related to conformity (Asch, 1951) — outline aim, method, key figures, conclusion.
- Observational learning with Bandura et al. (1961) — describe the Bobo doll study and link to Social Cognitive Theory.
- The role of culture in behaviour — describe one cultural dimension (individualism vs. collectivism) and link to a study.

High probability ERQ topics:

- Evaluate one study related to social identity (Tajfel, 1970) or Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) — requires full study description plus evaluation plus counter-argument (e.g., Luhrmann et al. showing cultural influence extends to clinical experience).
- Discuss the extent to which sociocultural factors can explain human behaviour — requires two studies, genuine evaluation of sociocultural explanations vs. limitations, and integration with other approaches.
- Evaluate Social Cognitive Theory with reference to one study (Bandura, 1961).

IB TIP

The sociocultural approach ERQ almost always requires you to go beyond describing studies and actually evaluate whether the sociocultural account is sufficient. Prepare a counter-argument: biological factors (evolved group psychology, oxytocin in social bonding) and cognitive factors (schema theory explains stereotyping) also contribute to group behaviour and conformity. Showing multi-perspective awareness earns marks in the top band.

Practice Questions

Short-Answer Questions (SAQs — 9 marks each)

SAQ 1. Explain Social Identity Theory with reference to one relevant study.

Model answer framework:

- Define Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979): the part of self-concept derived from group membership; people are motivated to maintain positive social identity through in-group favouritism.
- Describe the three stages: social categorisation, social identification, social comparison.
- Name the study: Tajfel (1970) minimal group paradigm — aim, method (random allocation to arbitrary groups; point allocation task), findings (in-group favouritism even for meaningless groups), conclusion.
- Link: the study demonstrates the social comparison stage — participants chose to maximise in-group advantage even at cost to absolute points, consistent with the motivation for positive social identity.

SAQ 2. Describe one study related to conformity.

Model answer framework:

- Name the study: Asch (1951).
- Aim: investigate whether majority pressure could cause individuals to conform to an obviously wrong answer.
- Method: 123 male American college students; line judgment task; confederates gave unanimously wrong answers on 12 of 18 trials.
- Findings: 75% conformed at least once; 37% of critical trial responses were conforming; 25% never conformed; social ally reduced conformity to approximately 5%.
- Conclusion: normative social influence is powerful enough to override correct perception.

SAQ 3. Outline one study related to observational learning.

Model answer framework:

- Name the study: Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961) — the Bobo doll study.
- Aim: investigate whether children would imitate an aggressive model's behaviour.
- Method: 36 boys and 36 girls (3–5 years); three conditions: aggressive model, non-aggressive model, control; mild frustration; Bobo doll available in test room.
- Findings: aggressive model condition produced significantly more imitative aggression; children reproduced specific actions and phrases of the model.
- Conclusion: behaviour can be learned through observation (modelling) without direct reinforcement — supports Social Cognitive Theory.

SAQ 4. Describe how culture can influence behaviour.

Model answer framework:

- Define the concept: individualism vs. collectivism (Hofstede); how self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) differs between cultures.

- Or use Luhrmann et al. (2015): aim (investigate cultural influence on voice hearing in schizophrenia), method (interviews in USA, India, Ghana), findings (American participants described voices negatively; Indian and Ghanaian participants described voices positively or as spiritual), conclusion (cultural context shapes the experience of psychological symptoms).
- Link: behaviour and psychological experience are not universal — cultural norms and beliefs (enculturation) shape them fundamentally.

Extended Response Questions (ERQs — 22 marks each)

ERQ 1. Evaluate Social Identity Theory with reference to studies.

Answer guidance:

- **Thesis:** Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides a compelling and empirically supported explanation of intergroup behaviour, demonstrating that even arbitrary group membership generates discrimination. However, it overemphasises group categorisation and underestimates the role of individual cognition, biology, and context.
- **Describe the theory** in full (three stages: categorisation, identification, comparison; positive social identity motivation).
- **Study 1:** Tajfel (1970) minimal group paradigm — describe in full; supports social categorisation and social comparison stages.
- **Study 2:** Luhrmann et al. (2015) — shows that cultural context (a sociocultural factor) shapes even clinical psychological experience, supporting the broader sociocultural claim.
- **Evaluate strengths:** robust empirical support; replicated cross-culturally; explains in-group favouritism without requiring competition or conflict; practical applications in conflict resolution.
- **Evaluate limitations:** artificial laboratory conditions (Tajfel 1970) — point allocation differs from real-world discrimination; the theory is better at explaining intergroup bias than predicting when discrimination will escalate to serious conflict; cultural variation in collectivist vs. individualist societies means social identity processes may operate differently.
- **Counter-argument:** Evolutionary psychology proposes that in-group favouritism has a genetic basis (kin selection, coalition formation) — the motivation for positive social identity may be proximately sociocultural but ultimately biological; cognitive processes (stereotyping via schema theory) also contribute to intergroup discrimination.
- **Conclusion:** Social Identity Theory provides a powerful and well-supported explanation of intergroup behaviour, but a complete account requires integration with biological and cognitive perspectives. The theory explains the process of discrimination but not its ultimate evolutionary or neural basis.

ERQ 2. Discuss the extent to which sociocultural factors can explain human behaviour.

Answer guidance:

- **Thesis:** Sociocultural factors — group membership, cultural norms, observational learning, and social influence — provide a rich and ecologically valid account of much human behaviour. However, their explanatory power is limited when biological drives and individual cognitive processes are not also considered.
- **Study 1:** Asch (1951) — conformity to majority influence; normative social influence shapes judgement and action even when the answer is clear.
- **Study 2:** Bandura et al. (1961) — aggressive behaviour is transmitted through observational learning, demonstrating the social transmission of behaviour patterns; high internal validity supports causality.
- **Evaluate strengths:** cross-cultural applicability; explains group-level patterns of behaviour (prejudice, aggression, norm compliance); practical applications in education, mental health, and conflict resolution.
- **Evaluate limitations:** ecological validity of laboratory studies (Asch, Bandura); WEIRD samples; cultural determinism that underestimates individual agency and biological factors.
- **Counter-argument:** Biological approach — aggressive behaviour has neurobiological correlates (testosterone, amygdala reactivity); the mere exposure to an aggressive model does not guarantee imitation — self-efficacy, biological arousal, and individual temperament moderate social learning. Cognitive approach — schemas mediate how social information is processed; conformity is partly a cognitive process (informational vs. normative social influence).
- **Conclusion:** Sociocultural factors provide an essential and empirically supported account of behaviour, particularly at the group and cultural level. But behaviour emerges from the interaction of sociocultural context, cognitive processing, and biological predisposition — no single approach is sufficient, and the IB three-approach framework reflects this complexity.