2.4 Social influence and attribution

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 16 marks**

KEY WORDS conformity • obedience • attribution • disposition

Objective

Explain conformity, obedience, and attribution using person and situation evidence.

You must be able to:

- distinguish conformity from obedience
- distinguish disposition from situation attributions
- identify the tendency to explain others differently from oneself

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

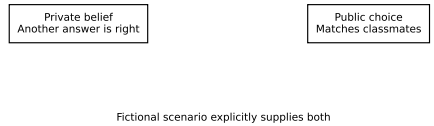
■ Explain the action carefully

Conformity changes behaviour to match a group. **Obedience** follows an instruction from an authority.

An **attribution** explains behaviour through a person's disposition or their situation. People often call another person rude but excuse their own shortness because of a difficult day.

■ Worked application: Separate the observed action from its explanation

Original fictional case: Rae gives a wrong answer after all three classmates choose it, although Rae privately thinks another answer is correct. This fits conformity: behaviour shifts toward the group without a direct authority instruction. A teacher ordering Rae to copy an answer would instead supply an obedience cue. Calling Rae "careless" is a disposition attribution; pointing to pressure to avoid being the only dissenter is a situation attribution. The observed choice alone cannot prove Rae's private belief: the scenario supplies it explicitly. In a real investigation, ask what evidence supports the inferred motive.



2 Practice

2.1 Define conformity. [1]

2.2 State whether following a teacher's direct instruction is conformity or obedience. [1]

2.3 Explain the difference between a disposition and situation attribution. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Explain why a student might follow a group answer they privately believe is wrong. [4]

3.2 Explain why someone may call a stranger impatient but explain their own impatience by a long queue. [4]

3.3 In a fictional case, Lee follows a direct instruction from a supervisor while privately disagreeing. Name the influence, contrast it with conformity and give one disposition and one situation explanation without treating either as proven. [4]

Solutions

2.1

- Changing behaviour to match a group.

2.2

- Obedience.

2.3

- A disposition attribution explains behaviour through personal qualities.
- A situation attribution explains it through circumstances.

3.1

- The student may want to match the group.
- They may fear being different or assume the group knows better.
- Their public response changes despite private disagreement.
- This is conformity rather than obedience to authority.

3.2

- The stranger's behaviour is explained as an impatient disposition.
- The person's own behaviour is explained by the difficult situation.
- This uses different explanations for similar behaviour.
- It shows a bias toward disposition for others and situation for oneself.

3.3

Obedience; conformity matches a group rather than a direct authority instruction; plausible disposition explanation, such as a tendency to defer to authority, qualified as a hypothesis; plausible situation explanation, such as risk of a workplace penalty, also qualified.