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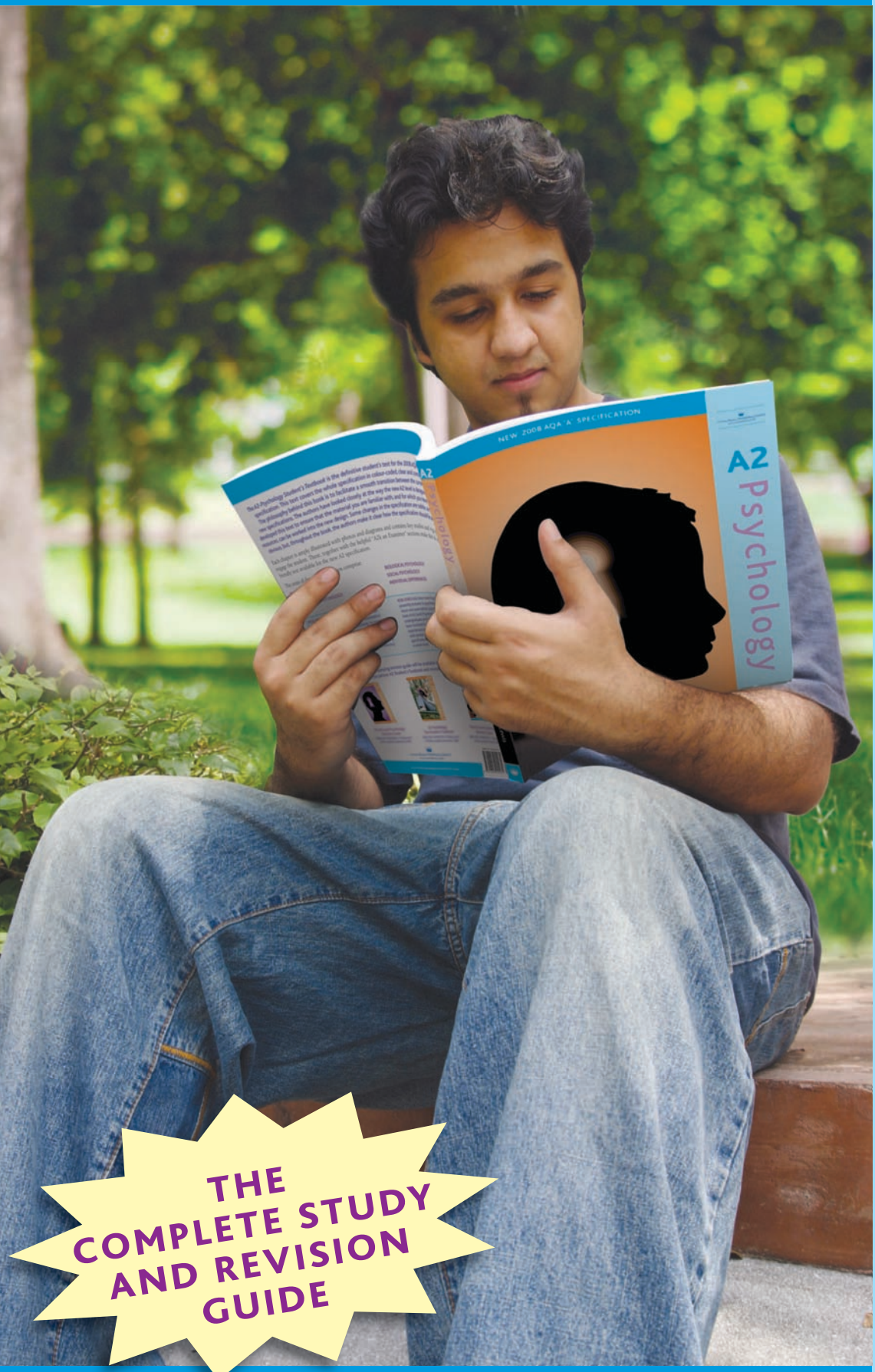

THE COMPLETE STUDY AND REVISION GUIDE

Nigel Holt and Rob Lewis

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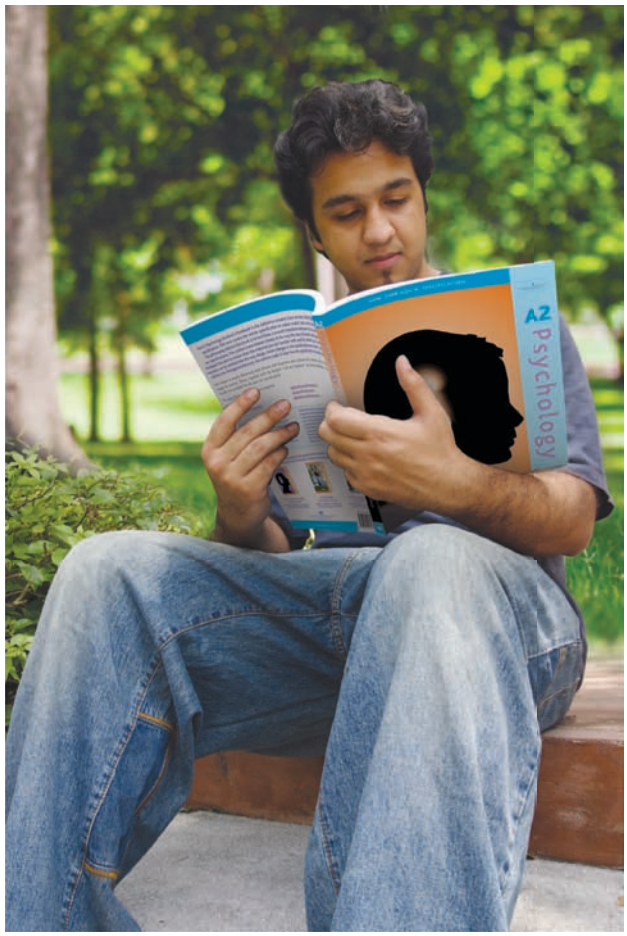
A2 LEVEL Psychology

the study guide



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KEY FEATURES

Each chapter covers a section of the A2 specification, presenting the key information needed for exam success. Full explanations and descriptions aren't provided, although you might find what is offered is sufficient for your understanding. Whilst this book stands independent of the full A2 Level Psychology textbook, you could find it useful to refer occasionally to the full book for a more in-depth treatment.

Ask an examiner

You will notice occasional green boxes in all chapters. These are there just to provide a little advice and guidance in areas where we think a friendly pointer from experienced examiners might be helpful. Sometimes these pointers will be reminders of something you are already very familiar with, but often they offer important tips and warnings about the exam, based on our experience as examiners.

Question time

It is important for you to understand how you will be tested in the examination. To this end, chapters have lots of carefully placed Question Time boxes, giving examples of the types of questions you could be asked. The range of possible questions is limited by the specification, as is their format. This means that if you plan these essays as part of your learning you really will have covered most questions you are likely to be asked.

Get to know your exam

We've included a chapter called 'Get to know your exam' at the back of this book. Our aim with this is to get you familiar with the examination, including advice on the kinds of skills that are being assessed. This chapter also includes some useful advice on how to prepare for your examination. You would be well advised to read this chapter sooner rather than later.

Further help and advice

Your best source of help and advice should be your teacher. However, if you feel you need some further support, you will find no shortage of people, places and resources out there. But proceed with caution. For example, websites are the obvious place to look but these can become out of date very quickly and the quality of material is either poorly monitored or not monitored at all. You could easily end up receiving advice from someone who is really not qualified to offer it, or using supplementary material that is out of date or even plain wrong. We don't want to put you off: we just want you to be aware of the risks. The website we feel most confident of recommending for further revision material is the official AQA one: www.aqa.org.uk. On here you will find copies of past exam papers (with mark schemes) which you can download and practise, and we recommend you do so as soon as possible.

ISSUES, DEBATES AND APPROACHES IN PSYCHOLOGY

Reductionism

Reductionism is the belief that we can explain behaviour by breaking it down into smaller constituent parts. It comes in many forms – e.g. physiological reductionists might reduce all causes of behaviour to our genetic inheritance, whilst reductionism at a social level considers the influence of others on behaviour.

Only looking at one level of explanations can lead to those explanations being incomplete – e.g. whilst we may gain an understanding of the biology of a mental disorder, we will not fully understand it without considering social influences. The complexities of human behaviour and experience are overlooked.

However, understanding the whole organism is too complex a problem; it is easier to test smaller parts of the whole. This is a scientific approach which has been very successful in increasing our understanding of aspects of behaviour.

Determinism

The determinism debate revolves around the extent to which our behaviour is the result of forces over which we have no control or whether people are able to exert free will and decide for themselves how to behave.

Deterministic explanations have been criticised because they reduce a person's responsibility for their own behaviour.

However, determinism is scientific, since science is interested in laws that determine events. Some argue that this should also be the goal of psychology.

The problem in psychology, however, is that behaviour is not absolutely determined – the everyday observation that people are unpredictable tells us that.

The nature/nurture debate

This revolves around whether our behaviour is predetermined by our genes or whether it is a result of learning from the environment.

The nature view argues that individual differences in behaviour are due to inherited differences in such things as neurochemistry, hormones and brain structure. The nurture view on the other hand states that we are born a 'blank slate' and all knowledge and behaviour is the result of experience.

Any view which takes an extreme position one way or the other can be criticised as being overly reductionist and as underestimating either genetic or environmental influences.

Nowadays it is accepted by most that both nature and nurture are important and discussion now revolves around the relative contribution of each.

Gender bias

If research is biased towards men or women then it doesn't provide a clear view of the behaviour being studied.

A male-dominant (*androcentric*) view can be biased so that male-female differences are exaggerated (*alpha bias*); or so that differences are minimised (*beta bias*), meaning that unique female life experiences are ignored. Gender bias may also be seen in how research results are reported (null results – i.e. that there are no gender differences – are less likely to be reported than ones which suggest a difference). There may also be a methodological bias – e.g. the sample or task may be biased towards one sex.

It has been argued that differences that do exist are subtle and appear when results are averaged over many participants. However, these differences may be exaggerated to emphasise them and contribute to male gender supremacy in society.

Cultural bias

Cultures differ in many ways and have a major impact on individuals within them. This means that findings of research conducted in one culture may not apply directly to another. To misapply research findings in this way would create bias, and such cultural bias serves to exaggerate cultural differences and misunderstandings.

Where one culture is judged in terms of the norms of another, there is *ethnocentric bias*, which can distort cultural differences.

Most psychological research is North American and uses largely white participants. Applying findings from such research to other cultures would be to take an *emic* approach. It has been argued therefore that research should only be conducted from the perspective of the culture in which it has taken place. This is called an *etic* approach (the investigation of a culture from within the culture itself), and is a way to reduce ethnocentric bias.

Research is not culturally biased because it has only looked at one culture; bias comes from the conclusions drawn from the findings. In many circumstances it may be reasonable to draw general conclusions, however – e.g. when there are assumed to be universal similarities such as in the functioning of the nervous system.

Ethical issues in research

Research has not been conducted ethically where there has not been sufficient care for its participants.

It is almost impossible to conduct psychological research which does not in some way raise an ethical issue. There are ways of dealing with many ethical issues, but rarely ways of completely eliminating them. Ultimately, psychologists must ask themselves whether the ends justify the means: i.e. all research with either humans or animals must be considered in terms of the value of the results when compared to the costs (both moral and financial).

Some departures from ethical norms – for example deception, where participants are not fully informed – are acceptable within a cost-benefit framework, and do not reflect badly on the research itself. The value of research becomes questionable when there is clear evidence of a significant departure from professional ethics or codes of practice. Whilst there are examples of this in psychological research, they are very rare.

Approaches in Psychology

APPROACH	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Behavioural *Basic assumption*: All behaviour is learned, e.g. through classical and operant conditioning.	The approach is able to explain a great many behaviours using few concepts, so is parsimonious. It uses a scientific methodology to explain behaviour.	The focus on observable phenomena means that important influences on behaviour are overlooked. The emphasis on the role of the environment in learning and behaviour (nurture) means that it does not take into account the impact of nature.
Biological *Basic assumption*: Behaviour is the result of our biology.	Provides scientific explanations based on sound methodology. Research has resulted in many effective practical applications – e.g. drug therapies.	Because of a reductionist approach, other levels of explanation (e.g. social) tend to be ignored. It has difficulty explaining aspects of behaviour that are not readily observable – e.g. emotion. Human behaviour is very complex and influenced by many factors, so there is a risk of oversimplification with just this approach alone.
Cognitive *Basic assumption*: Behaviour is the result of mental processes.	Focuses on hard-to-investigate aspects of behaviour using rigorous scientific methodology. Led to useful practical applications, such as therapy.	Can oversimplify very complex behaviours by just focusing on very specific aspects of cognition. Uses hypothetical constructs to explain behaviour – e.g. motivation is said to influence memory, but neither is directly observable. Theories are based on mostly artificial laboratory research, so may lack ecological validity.
Psychodynamic *Basic assumption*: Behaviour is the result of unconscious forces.	The theory provided a framework for understanding psychological phenomena that is not available by strictly scientific means. Encouraged psychologists to consider the importance of unconscious processes influencing behaviour.	The theory is untestable and therefore unscientific, so explanations based on the theory are similarly flawed. Explanations are very deterministic, in that a focus on the unconscious forces means that conscious deliberate behaviour is overlooked.
Social *Basic assumption*: Behaviour is heavily influenced by the presence of others.	Research often uses real-life situations to study behaviour. This means that explanations can have high ecological validity. Real-life research leads to real-life application of theory.	Research is often at the limits of what is ethically acceptable – e.g. deception is usually required. Because research is often very situation-specific, the findings may not be generalisable to other contexts and situations.

SECTION 3: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF 'CELEBRITY'

THE ATTRACTION OF CELEBRITY

Social psychological explanations

Parasocial interaction

Horton and Wohl (1950) use this term to describe the feeling of knowing a celebrity we have never met. Often the celebrity takes on an important part in the viewer's life. Factors that lead to a relationship in real life (attractiveness, similarity etc.) also influence a parasocial relationship, and it can feel very real to some people. Such relationships may be particularly important during adolescence.

Derrick et al (2008) – Parasocial relationships can help those with low self-esteem to see themselves more positively.

Giles and Maltby (2004) – When growing in independence, adolescents may find media figures more influential than parents or peers.

Religiosity

With the decline in organised religion comes the 'cult' of celebrity. It may be that humans have a fundamental urge to worship and celebrities can provide a focus for this. The theory here is that celebrity fills the same, or similar, criteria to a religion. The Jedi of *Star Wars* for instance, are monastic, have a 'creed' of sorts and practise an expressly ethical lifestyle, among other 'religious' characteristics. It has been claimed that over 300 thousand people stated 'Jedi' as their religion on the last UK census.

Giles (2000) – Celebrities are often viewed with a religious-like devotion.

Maltby (2004) – Found only a modest effect of the reduction in religious feelings as celebrity 'worship' increased. There must be more complex psychological processes in operation.

Houran et al (2005) – Non-religious people are more interested in celebrity than religious people.

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954)

We evaluate our opinions and abilities by comparing them with those of other people. Sometimes the comparisons are realistic (our friends and peers). Sometimes comparisons are with those lower-skilled than us: these are called 'downward-comparisons'. Comparisons with those whom we would 'like to be like', such as celebrities, are called 'upward comparisons'.

Wilcox and Laird (2000) – Negative body image and low self-esteem is related to upward comparisons.

Shorter et al (2008) – The greater the gap between females' perceived self body image and body image of favourite celebrity, the more likely they are to suffer with an eating disorder.

Jones (2001) – Adolescents used celebrities, not peers, for social comparison of physical attractiveness.

Chan and Prendergast (2007) – Upward comparisons can encourage materialism (Importance placed on material possessions).

Evolutionary explanations

Evolution states that behaviour that remains widespread today will have once had a useful survival purpose.

Entertainment as play theory – Vorderer (2001)

Entertainment experiences have a lot in common with play. Play has an evolutionary purpose. It engages us in exercise and allows us to practise skills that may be needed for life. Media were used in the form of Rock art over 40 thousand years ago, showing stories and plots indicating that energy was directed towards imagination and creativity.

Leisure time theory – Zillman (2000)

As communication and hunting/cultivation skills developed, more leisure time was available. Over thousands of years, the time available grew and was put to good use in developing a culture of entertainment.

Ornamental mind theory

Females choose to mate with males showing attractive traits. Through generations these traits are passed on. Miller (2000) says that the male brain is an 'ornament' used to attract females. Celebrity is the result of generations of sexual selection of males with creative, interesting minds. Most readers of celebrity media are females, and this could provide support for the theory.

Gossip theory – McAndrew (2008)

Exchanging information about people who are not present (gossip) is universal to human nature. Celebrities are a rich and available source for this. It can carry important information that may make someone more powerful than another; and shared secrets are a good way to build groups and show trust, just as grooming does in primates. Knowing who is doing what with whom may help ensure survival.

RESEARCH INTO INTENSE FANDOM

Celebrity worship

Some fans are vaguely interested in celebrities; others seem to 'worship' them, the fandom affecting their whole lives. The *Celebrity Attitude Scale* (Maltby et al, 2002) describes different levels of fandom.

CELEBRITY ATTITUDE SCALE (CAS)	
Entertainment-Social Approximately 20% of fans tested: McCutcheon et al (2003)	Attraction to celebrity is for their entertainment value, because it provides social functions such as talking to friends.
Intense-Personal Approximately 10% of fans tested: McCutcheon et al (2003)	Strong, intensive, compulsive and almost obsessional feelings towards their favourite celebrity are generated.
Borderline Pathological Approximately 1% of fans tested: McCutcheon et al (2003)	Uncontrollable fantasies and behaviours relating to the celebrity are developed.

Erotomania (Houran et al, 2005)

The belief that someone (in this case a celebrity) secretly has sexual feelings for them.

Poor body image (Maltby et al, 2005)

Strong association in females between poor-body image and intense celebrity worship. The association tends to disappear in adulthood.

Absorption-addiction hypothesis (McCutcheon et al, 2002)

Explains how parasocial relations can become abnormal. It may be that some people become absorbed and embroiled in their parasocial relationship because they have difficulties with their own identities. The absorbtion is an attempt to gain this identity and it has addictive characteristics so that more and more extreme celebrity-worship, and other extreme parasocial relationship traits, are demonstrated.

Stalking

Regarded by some as an extreme form of celebrity worship, stalking is a dangerous obsession. It can be 'private' where there has been a previous relationship between the stalker and the victim, or 'public' where there has not.

Attachment theory of stalking

There is a body of evidence to suggest that early attachment difficulties can lead to social and emotional problems in later life. Someone forming insecure attachments as a child tends to form less secure adult relationships. Kienlen (1998) says that the motivations of stalkers are different, depending on the kind of insecure attachment they have.

MOTIVATIONS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF STALKER (KIENLEN 1998)	
'Preoccupied' stalker	Poor self-image, constantly seeking approval from others. Results from a real or imagined rejection. Stalking is attempt to restore a positive sense of self.
'Fearful' stalker	Poor self-image, sees others as unsupportive. Stalking is a result of a cycle of wanting to have someone boost self-image, but always rejecting them because of lack of trust.
'Dismissing' stalker	Distant and aloof, allowing the maintenance of an inflated self-image. Stalking may, for instance, be a revenge because of a perceived maltreatment in their own relationship.

Kienlen et al (1997) – Majority of stalkers in a jail had experienced childhood attachment problems, and had lost a personal relationship just prior to the onset of the stalking

Lewis et al (2001) – Stalkers have personality traits typical of insecure attachment

McCutcheon et al (2006) – In a sample of students, those that had experienced childhood insecure attachment were more likely to excuse celebrity stalking than those that had not.

Rational goal pursuit theory of stalking

The goal here is to attain a certain type of relationship. If the relationship is thwarted, people try harder. If the effort is too great the goal is abandoned. In stalking, the rejection magnifies the efforts of the stalker, leading to further feelings spurring their actions on.

Goals are in a hierarchy. Lower goals (eat healthily) are needed to attain higher goals (get fit) and still higher goals (be attractive to others) and even higher goals (be attractive to, and marry a millionaire).

In celebrity stalking, a lower order goal (to be in a relationship with a celebrity) is linked with a higher order goal (to feel good about myself). The lower goal is blocked and the stalker constantly thinks about the unfulfilled goal. Because it is linked somehow to a feeling of self-worth, the obsessional thoughts result in very negative feelings. Efforts at attaining the original goal (a relationship with the celebrity) are doubled, and the stalking continues and worsens.

HOW WELL DO I KNOW IT?	NOT AT ALL	MAYBE	OK	WELL	SUPERBLY
MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY					
Explanations of media influences on pro-social behaviour					
Explanations of media influences on anti-social behaviour					
Effects of computers and video games on young people					
Persuasion and attitude change: Hovland-Yale model					
Persuasion and attitude change: Elaboration likelihood model					
Influence of attitudes on decision making: Role of cognitive dissonance					
Influence of attitudes on decision making: Role of self-perception					
Explanations for effectiveness of television in persuasion					
The attraction of 'celebrity': Social psychological explanation					
The attraction of 'celebrity': Evolutionary explanation					
Research into intense fandom: Celebrity worship					
Research into intense fandom: Stalking					

REVISION OF CORE KNOWLEDGE

If you can complete the following tables without referring to notes then you are well on your way to getting a good mark for this question in the exam. Remember, use your memory first and only refer to this section or a main textbook or notes as a last resort. Repeat the task until you can complete it without major error.

THE MAJOR FEATURES OF SCIENCE AND THE SCIENTIFIC PROCESS		
KEY PHRASES	DEFINITION	HOW IS THIS USEFUL TO ME?

(continued)

This complete study and revision guide provides all the key information needed to get the best possible grade in the A2 exam. It contains helpful hints, tips and advice throughout on how to answer the exam questions effectively and efficiently.

Exercises and step-by-step guidance are provided to develop practical research skills, and a focus on exam-style questions provides opportunities for essential practice. A full examination paper is included, complete with suggested answers, for exam practice, and there are plenty of opportunities for 'stretch and challenge'.

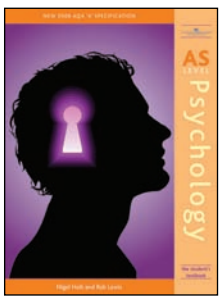
With sample questions and answers and a section on revision advice together with a comprehensive glossary, this really is the ultimate guide to improving grades!

"An excellent revision tool"
Betty Rudd GGSM, LRAM, PhD, Specialist Teacher, Chartered Counselling Psychologist

"Love the book – very clear and useful sections in each chapter which are engaging to the learner"
Karen J Duffy, Senior Lecturer Psychology and Social Sciences with Citizenship Education, Institute of Education, Manchester

"This is an essential text for anyone studying A level psychology through AQA and a delightful dip-in dip-out text book for users of other syllabuses"
Claire Barker, Head of Psychology, Wells Cathedral School

ALSO AVAILABLE



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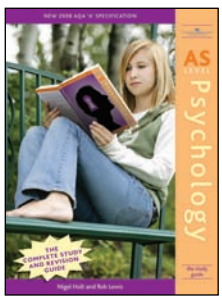

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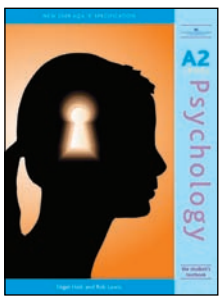

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