

SECTION C: ISSUES AND DEBATES

- 5 When commuting to college Sam notices that whichever form of public transport he uses strangers rarely communicate with each other. He notices that people tend to sit alone where possible and avoid eye contact with other commuters whilst listening to music or reading a newspaper.

One morning there is an incident on the bus when he is going to college. Following the event, Sam notices everyone is communicating and making eye contact. Later, when Sam discussed this change in behaviour with his friend, she argued that communication is a learned behaviour and that people are not born to communicate.

Evaluate the extent to which human behaviour such as communication can be explained by learning theories.

You must make reference to the context in your answer.

SLT
observe
imitate
OC reward punishment

(12)

Human behaviour, such as what Sam observed, can be caused by our environment as well as our biology. This varies based on the context and situation we find ourselves in.

Human behaviour can be learnt through social learning theory. This suggests that we learn behaviour through observation and imitation. For example, the people on public transport may have observed that no one communicated with each other or made eye contact. Once observed, they retain this information and reproduce it through imitation. Therefore, other commuters imitate this behaviour. After the incident that Sam reports, commuters may start communicating and making eye contact. If other commuters observe this, they are likely to imitate this behaviour as well. Studies such as Bandura's 1961 study found



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that you are more likely to imitate the same sex role model. If the majority of these commuters are men going to work, they are more likely to imitate each other.

However, behaviour can be argued to be innate according to the biological approach. Evolution suggests that we are born with the instinct to pass on desirable traits to our offspring through Charles* Darwin's theory of evolution. He suggests that the survival of the fittest causes us to be naturally aggressive to protect offspring, get food and mate. Therefore, he argues that males are more physically aggressive and women are more verbally aggressive. He argues that communication, such as what Sam witnessed, is innate in order for us to find a mate to pass on genes. Therefore, the communication that Sam witnessed after the incident may be an innate survival instinct we are born with.

In contrast, it can be argued that we learn through operant conditioning. This is based on rewards and punishments: we are more likely to do a behaviour if we are rewarded for it. For example, commuters may not make eye contact because it makes them feel uncomfortable. By being silent and not making



eye contact, this takes away something negative such as fear and anxiety as a reward. This is known as negative reinforcement. Being silent on transportation may make ~~you~~^{commuters} feel more secure therefore this ~~adds something~~ rewards the behaviour of keeping to yourself. This is an example of positive reinforcement. Because this has a positive reward, commuters are more likely to repeat this behaviour daily.

However, in contrast to Sam's friend's opinion, child psychology argues that we are born to communicate. Bowlby's theory of attachment argues that we are born with the innate behaviour to form attachments to a safe base (mother). In the 3 stages, a child first responds to everyone, it then develops social releasers which enable behaviours to form attachments such as crying. By 6 months +, a strong emotional bond is formed to the primary attachment figure. The critical period for attachment is 0-2 years old. Therefore, the theory suggests we are born to communicate unlike what Sam's friend believes.

In conclusion, behaviour is shaped by both nature and nurture. As Sam says, behaviour can be learnt from our surroundings but it can also be born with. Therefore Sam and his friend are both partly correct. Our behaviour is shaped by both nature and nurture.

(Total for Question 5 = 12 marks)

