

Sample Answer

The social learning theory (SLT) claims that behaviour is learned through observation and imitation usually of role models we identify with. **Bandura (1961)** demonstrated this with his experiment using the bobo doll. He showed that children would imitate the physical and verbal aggression of a role model they observed acting aggressively. Bandura suggested that children identify with role models particularly of those of the same sex, as he found boys were more likely to imitate the behaviour of male role models. This offers support to the SLT of aggression by showing under controlled conditions that children do imitate aggressive behaviours observed. However, such studies have been criticised for validity. For example, in one condition the aggressive adult was seen to be hitting a bobo doll, which is unlikely to occur in real life, and therefore lacks ecological validity. Although the children did imitate behaviour in Bandura's study, in real life they may not behave like this and show the same aggressive behaviour outside the artificial lab conditions. Like behaviourism, the SLT suggests that behaviour that is positively reinforced will be more likely to be repeated. Social learning theorists also believe that if an individual sees someone else rewarded for a particular behaviour they are also more likely to imitate the behaviour. This is known as vicarious reinforcement. With respect to aggression, if a person sees someone else being rewarded (vicarious reinforcement) for behaving aggressively then that person is more likely to be aggressive themselves in the future. This was also demonstrated in experimental research by **Bandura (1965)**. According to the SLT behaviour is not automatically imitated but it depends on mediating cognitive factors and **Bandura (1977)** suggested four stages or mediational processes; attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. For instance, to learn aggressive behaviour, firstly a child must observe a model acting aggressively and pay attention to the aggressive behaviour. They then store/ retain the information in memory and reproduce this when they are motivated to do so. Psychologists also argue that the model must have similar or high status for the child to be influenced. These mediational processes have been evident in real life copycat cases like that of the murder of Jamie Bulger. The SLT is a very deterministic explanation of aggression suggesting environmental factors such as upbringing are responsible for behaviour. However, this fails to account for individual differences in personality and free will in the decision-making process of behaviour. In the case of **Bandura's (1961)** study, the children could have simply chosen to be aggressive or already had a temperament prone to aggression or could have been influenced by the artificial nature of the experiment. The SLT does, however, have practical applications for the education of teachers and parents, particularly when considering their influences as role models. It could be used to teach parents or siblings how to show appropriate and calm behaviour to children so that they can grow up to become less aggressive. A further criticism of SLT is that it can be seen as environmentally oversimplified, as it places too much emphasis on the role of nurture/ upbringing and ignores the role of nature such as biology. Contrasting evidence on aggression suggests that genetics, hormones, or neurotransmitters are implicated in aggressive behaviour. **McGuffin and Gottesman (1985)** found an 87% concordance rate in MZ twins and a 72% in DZ twins, supporting the role of genetics in

aggression. Research from studies like **Dabbs et al (1987)** in prisons has shown that prisoners with high testosterone levels are more likely to have committed violent crimes and are more aggressive in prison, linking aggressive behaviour to testosterone levels and biology (nature) not nurture (environment). However, this evidence is correlational which raises issues with cause and effect. Nevertheless, when understanding aggressive behaviour, a more multidimensional approach should be considered as aggression is a complex behaviour.

