# 3.5 Learning Theory as an Explanation of Attachment: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

**Answer each question. At least four longer questions require full sentences. Complete the pack in about 80 minutes.**

**1** Evaluate the use of animal studies as evidence in attachment theory debates.

**(Total for Question 1 is 6 marks)**

**2** Apply learning theory to give two practical parenting suggestions and one further practical point.

**(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)**

**3** Identify the learning process in Yusuf scenario.

**(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)**


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**4** Use Harlow's findings as a brief evaluation of learning theory.

**(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)**

**5** Describe three strengths of the learning-theory explanation of attachment.

**(Total for Question 5 is 6 marks)**


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# Mark scheme · 3.5 Learning Theory as an Explanation of Attachment: 30-minute Pack

## Question 1

identifies ethical/methodological limitation: animals may involve procedures that would be unethical in humans, and animals differ from humans in cognition and social complexity oe — **M1**

explains consequence: this limits direct generalisation from monkey findings to human attachment, so such evidence should be treated cautiously oe — **A1**

identifies methodological limitation: controlled laboratory conditions in animal studies lack the social and cultural complexity of human caregiving contexts oe — **M1**

explains consequence: researchers should combine animal evidence with human studies (e.g. longitudinal human observations) before revising human attachment theories oe — **A1**

states recommended approach: use animal studies for suggesting mechanisms and hypotheses but seek converging evidence from ethically acceptable human research before drawing strong conclusions oe — **M1**

explains why this matters: triangulating evidence preserves scientific inference while respecting species differences and ethical constraints oe — **A1**

**Answer: Animal studies can suggest mechanisms but pose ethical and generalisability limits; researchers should treat them as hypothesis-generating and seek converging human evidence under ethical constraints before revising explanations of human attachment.**

## Question 2

classical conditioning suggestion: pair caregiver presence with pleasant stimuli (play, gentle voice, routine feeding) to make caregiver a signal of comfort oe — **M1**

justification: repeated pairing will condition the infant to feel comforted by caregiver presence, promoting approach and trust oe — **A1**

operant conditioning suggestion: positively reinforce desired behaviours (e.g. calm settling) with attention or soothing, and remove attention following harmful behaviours in an appropriate way oe — **M1**

justification: reinforcement increases the frequency of calm, secure behaviours and helps the infant learn reliable responses from the caregiver oe — **A1**

additional practical note: ensure responses are consistent and sensitive rather than mechanical, to avoid unintended negative consequences oe — **M1**

justification: consistent contingencies make learning clearer and support trust, but sensitivity recognises emotional needs beyond simple reinforcement oe — **A1**

**Answer: Classical: consistently pair caregiver presence with pleasant routines so the infant learns to associate the caregiver with comfort. Operant: reinforce calm settling with attention and soothing so calm behaviours increase; keep responses consistent and sensitive to support trust.**

## Question 3

identifies operant conditioning cao — **B1**

justifies by reference to reinforcement: the infant's crying is negatively reinforced because Yusuf's response removes discomfort, increasing crying in the future oe — **M1**

alternatively acknowledges reciprocal reinforcement: Yusuf's caregiving is positively reinforced by the calming of the infant, supporting the operant account oe — **A1**

**Answer: Operant conditioning. The infant's crying is negatively reinforced because Yusuf's comforting/feeding removes discomfort, making crying more likely when Yusuf appears; additionally, Yusuf's caregiving is positively reinforced by the reward of calming the baby.**

## Question 4

identifies Harlow's finding that infant monkeys preferred the cloth mother to the wire mother even when the wire mother provided food oe — **M1**

explains why this challenges learning theory: attachment was not based purely on feeding/food reinforcement, contradicting cupboard-love predictions oe — **A1**

links to relevance for humans: suggests contact comfort and emotional security are important in attachment and that simple stimulus-response accounts are insufficient to explain the emotional bond in primates, including humans oe — **A1**

notes that while animal studies have limits, the basic challenge to a feeding-based account remains pertinent to human attachment theory oe — **A1**

**Answer: Harlow showed monkeys preferred a soft, cloth surrogate to a wire one that fed them, challenging the idea that feeding alone causes attachment. This indicates contact comfort and emotional security matter, so simple feeding-based stimulus-response accounts cannot fully explain human-like attachment.**


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## Question 5

strength 1: offers a clear, parsimonious mechanism (conditioning and reinforcement) that can be operationalised and tested experimentally oe **M1**

explains why this is a strength: the theory's clarity allows specific predictions (e.g. pairing caregiver with feeding should increase attachment behaviours) and makes it relatively straightforward to design studies or interventions based on reinforcement principles oe **A1**

strength 2: the theory has practical applications, for example informing behaviourally based parenting strategies that reinforce desirable behaviours and reduce undesired ones oe **M1**

explains why this is a strength: such applications can be used in clinical or educational settings to encourage secure caregiving routines and predictable responses, which may benefit infant regulation and learning oe **A1**

additional support: learning mechanisms are known to operate across species and contexts, giving some generalisability to the idea that reinforcement shapes social behaviour oe **M1**

explains why this matters: cross-species evidence for basic conditioning increases the plausibility that some aspects of attachment behaviour may be learned via reinforcement processes oe **A1**

**Answer: Strengths include a clear, testable mechanism (conditioning) that leads to precise predictions and experimental tests, and useful practical applications in parenting or intervention by reinforcing desirable behaviours. Also, basic learning mechanisms operate across species, supporting some generalisability of reinforcement effects.**


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