8.6 The Nature-Nurture Debate and the Interactionist Approach: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Explain what is meant by the diathesis-stress model and give one brief example of how it links nature and nurture in explaining a psychological disorder.

(Total for Question 1 is 3 marks)

2 A school counsellor suggests that children who are naturally sociable will seek out friendship groups, clubs and other social situations and so gain more social practice, improving their social skills further. Which gene-environment interaction process does this describe, niche-picking or evocative interaction? Explain your answer.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 Explain two evaluation points that could be made about the diathesis-stress model as an interactionist account of mental disorder. Each point should be developed and state why it matters.

(Total for Question 3 is 6 marks)

4 Discuss the nature-nurture debate in psychology. In your answer, describe the interactionist approach, including the diathesis-stress model and epigenetics, and evaluate the usefulness of interactionist explanations compared with extreme nature or nurture accounts. Refer to theory, evidence and practical application where appropriate.

(Total for Question 4 is 16 marks)

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Mark scheme · 8.6 The Nature-Nurture Debate and the Interactionist Approach: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

defines diathesis-stress model: a genetic or biological vulnerability (diathesis) interacts with an environmental stressor to produce a disorder or behaviour oe	**M1**
gives an example of interaction, e.g. a genetic predisposition to mood disorder may lead to depression only after a major life stress such as bereavement oe	**A1**
identifies this as linking nature (vulnerability) and nurture (trigger) oe	**A1**

Answer: The diathesis-stress model says a biological vulnerability plus an environmental stressor together produce a disorder; for example, someone with a genetic vulnerability to depression may develop the condition after severe life stress, showing both nature and nurture are needed.

Question 2

identifies the process as niche-picking cao	**M1**
explains that the individual actively selects or creates environments matching their genetic tendency, e.g. seeking out social situations oe	**A1**
explains outcome: selection leads to further development of the trait through increased practice/opportunities oe	**A1**
contrasts with evocative interaction where others respond to a trait rather than the person actively selecting the environment oe	**A1**

Answer: Niche-picking: sociable children actively seek out social environments, which provides more practice and reinforces social skills; this differs from evocative interaction where others merely respond to a trait.

Question 3

evaluation point 1: model is useful clinically, leading to matched interventions targeting stressors and vulnerability oe	**M1**
explains why it matters: it supports prevention and personalised treatment, e.g. reducing stressors can prevent disorder in those at risk oe	**A1**
evaluation point 2: the model can be vague about specifying the exact biological diathesis and threshold, making precise prediction difficult oe	**M1**
explains why it matters: limited predictive power reduces the model's utility for identifying who will develop a disorder and raises issues for testing the model empirically oe	**A1**
further development: mention empirical support or limitation, e.g. some studies show gene by environment interactions but measurement issues and replication problems remain oe	**M1**
explains consequence: supports cautious use of the model and need for more precise biomarkers and measures of stress to improve application and testing oe	**A1**

Answer: The diathesis-stress model is clinically useful because it suggests interventions that target environmental stressors as well as biological vulnerability, supporting prevention and personalised treatment. However, it is often vague about the specific diathesis and the threshold for disorder, limiting prediction and empirical testing; this matters because without precise markers we cannot reliably identify who will develop a disorder and replication of interaction findings is often challenging.

Question 4

Level 4 Knowledge of the nature-nurture debate and interactionist approaches is accurate and detailed, covering relevant concepts such as diathesis-stress and epigenetics. Evaluation is thorough, well developed and balanced, integrating empirical evidence, methodological critique and practical implications. The answer is coherent, well structured and uses specialist terminology correctly.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge is clear and generally accurate, covering key interactionist ideas and some evidence. Evaluation is evident and competent, with some balance between strengths and limitations, and some application to practice. The answer is mostly well organised with appropriate use of terminology.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge is present but limited in depth or range. Evaluation is superficial or one-sided, with limited integration of evidence or application. The answer may lack organisation or precise use of specialist terms.	**5-8**
Level 1 Limited knowledge and minimal evaluation. Responses may be list-like, unclear or largely irrelevant. Little or no use of evidence or application. Specialist terminology is largely absent or misused.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**

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Indicative content:

- AO1: Define nature-nurture debate: the extent to which behaviour is determined by genetic inheritance versus environmental influences.
- AO1: Describe extreme positions: nativist/biological determinism emphasises genes, empiricist/environmentalist emphasises learned experience.
- AO1: Describe interactionist approach: genes and environment interact in complex ways; cannot be separated cleanly.
- AO1: Explain diathesis-stress model: genetic vulnerability plus environmental stressor produce disorder; includes threshold idea and protective factors.
- AO1: Explain gene-environment interaction processes such as niche-picking and evocative interaction.
- AO1: Explain epigenetics: environment-induced chemical modifications of gene expression, e.g. methylation, that can alter risk without changing DNA sequence.
- AO3: Evaluate theoretical usefulness: interactionist accounts avoid biological determinism and permit multiple causal pathways; better fit to complex human behaviour.
- AO3: Evaluate empirical support and limitations: cite that some studies find gene by environment interactions but replication is variable and measurement of stress and diathesis is challenging; longitudinal and mechanistic studies strengthen claims but causal inference is sometimes limited.
- AO3: Methodological critiques: difficulties measuring genes, epigenetic markers, and environmental exposures accurately; confounds and reverse causality possible; ethical limits on experimental manipulation.
- AO3: Practical applications: interactionist models inform prevention and treatment by targeting environment and resilience, and suggest personalised interventions; epigenetics raises possibilities for biomarkers but also ethical issues around stigma and determinism.
- AO3: Compare with extreme accounts: pure nature struggles to explain environmental effects and individual differences in identical genetics; pure nurture cannot account for inherited tendencies and biological constraints. Interactionist approach offers a more comprehensive explanatory framework.
- AO3: Conclude with balanced judgement: interactionist approach currently offers the most useful scientific and clinical framework, but requires rigorous research, careful communication to avoid deterministic misinterpretation, and attention to ethical implications.

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