15.2 Ethological and Evolutionary Explanations of Aggression: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Outline one empirical piece of evidence, from Daly and Wilson or allied research, that supports an evolutionary link between jealousy and male aggression. State the finding and how it supports the evolutionary account.

(Total for Question 1 is 3 marks)

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2 Discuss ethological and evolutionary explanations of aggression. In your answer, refer to the idea of innate releasing mechanisms and fixed action patterns, the evolutionary accounts such as cuckoldry risk and resource/status competition, and consider evaluation points including extrapolation from animals to humans, cross-cultural variation and potential bias in evolutionary theorising.

(Total for Question 2 is 16 marks)

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3 A workplace scenario: Kwame discovers messages suggesting his long-term partner has become emotionally close to a colleague and sometimes meets them outside work. Kwame is distressed and confronts the colleague angrily in front of others, later explaining he feared losing his partner and not knowing whether any sexual infidelity had occurred. Using Daly and Wilson's account of sexual jealousy and cuckoldry risk, explain why Kwame's aggressive confrontation could be interpreted as an evolved adaptive response. Refer to specific elements of the evolutionary explanation in your answer.

(Total for Question 3 is 6 marks)

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Mark scheme · 15.2 Ethological and Evolutionary Explanations of Aggression: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

states a genuine empirical finding, e.g. higher rates of male violence associated with suspected infidelity or evidence that men show more distress at sexual infidelity compared with women in some studies oe	**M1**
links the finding to the evolutionary claim, e.g. men are more likely to respond aggressively to perceived sexual infidelity because of paternity uncertainty and the costs of cuckoldry oe	**A1**
may note the study/source, e.g. Daly and Wilson's comparative analyses of homicide or survey evidence on reactions to sexual versus emotional infidelity oe	**A1**

Answer: For example, Daly and Wilson report patterns where male violence is often triggered by suspected partner infidelity and survey evidence shows men report greater distress at sexual infidelity than women, supporting the idea that paternity uncertainty underlies some male aggression.

Question 2

Level 4 Knowledge of ethological and evolutionary explanations is accurate and detailed. Discussion is thorough and balanced, integrating AO1, AO2 and AO3 material effectively. Evaluation considers strengths and limitations with clear, developed reasoning and relevant evidence. Counterarguments and applications are addressed and specialist terminology is used accurately.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge of the explanations is sound, with clear description and some detail. Discussion includes relevant evaluation and some integration of evidence, but may be less developed in places. Application to human behaviour is present and mostly appropriate. Specialist terms are used correctly.	**9-12**
Level 2 Some relevant knowledge of ethological or evolutionary accounts is present but limited. Discussion and evaluation are basic or partially developed. Application to humans is attempted but may be superficial or occasionally inaccurate. Answer may show limited organisation.	**5-8**
Level 1 Knowledge is very limited and answer tends towards unsupported assertions or lists. Evaluation is minimal or absent. Little or no relevant application is provided. Specialist terminology is largely missing or used inappropriately.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Ethological concepts include innate releasing mechanisms (IRMs) that detect specific external releasers and activate fixed action patterns (FAPs), innate stereotyped sequences of behaviour. In animals these explain ritualised fighting and appeasement displays.
- AO1: Evolutionary explanations argue aggression can be adaptive by securing resources, status and mating opportunities, and that specific forms such as male sexual jealousy evolved to reduce cuckoldry risk, as argued by Daly and Wilson.
- AO2: Application to humans includes mate-retention behaviours, male-male competition for status and resources, and culturally variable expressions such as honour-related aggression in some contexts. Describe how an IRM/FAP model might map onto human ritualised aggression such as formalised duels or status displays.
- AO3: Strengths include explanatory power for cross-species similarities, the ability to generate testable hypotheses and empirical support such as correlations between suspected infidelity and male violence in some datasets.
- AO3: Criticisms include the problem of extrapolating from animals to humans because humans have culture, complex cognition and social institutions that alter behaviour; animal FAPs are more rigid than human actions which are flexible and learned.
- AO3: Cross-cultural evidence shows wide variation in forms and frequency of aggression, challenging simplistic universal genetic claims; some societies have low levels of lethal violence, suggesting cultural moderators.
- AO3: Beta bias and gender issues: many evolutionary accounts emphasise male competition and may underplay female strategies or context-dependent female aggression, risking biased theorising.
- AO3: Ethical and practical implications: evolved tendencies may be used to justify aggression unless tempered by recognition of cultural and moral controls; modern social costs can make formerly adaptive behaviours maladaptive.
- AO3: Balanced conclusion might argue ethological and evolutionary accounts offer valuable frameworks but must be integrated with social, cultural and individual explanations for a full account of human aggression.

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Question 3

identifies the key feature of Daly and Wilson's account applied to the scenario, e.g. fear of cuckoldry or threat to paternity certainty as the adaptive problem oe	**M1**
explains that aggression or mate-guarding behaviours would be predicted where cues suggest partner's emotional closeness to another, as these cues may have indicated infidelity risk in ancestral environments oe	**A1**
links Kwame's public confrontation to a deterrent function, showing aggressive action might reduce rival access or signal commitment, consistent with evolved mate-retention strategies oe	**A1**
considers male-specific costs: explains that males face the unique adaptive problem of paternity uncertainty which can lead to stronger jealousy-based aggression in some contexts oe	**M1**
applies this to Kwame by noting his distress at possible loss of reproductive opportunity and how aggression could be a proximate behavioural response aimed at protecting that opportunity oe	**A1**
may note limitations briefly, e.g. modern social norms can make such aggression maladaptive today, but this does not contradict the evolutionary explanation for why the impulse arose oe	**A1**

Answer: Kwame's angry confrontation can be interpreted with Daly and Wilson's account as an evolved mate-retention response to cues suggesting possible infidelity, addressing the adaptive problem of paternity uncertainty. Emotional closeness or secret meetings may be perceived as cues of cuckoldry risk; aggressive deterrence can reduce rival access and signal commitment. Because males historically faced costs from investing in unrelated offspring, such aggression would have been selected as a proximate mate-guarding tactic, although in modern society the behaviour may be maladaptive or socially unacceptable.

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