1.6 The Nature versus Nurture Debate: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Show your understanding by using sociological vocabulary and, where asked, your own examples.

1 Evaluate the view that human behaviour is best explained by nurture (social experience) rather than by nature (biology). In your answer you should refer to evidence and views on both sides of the debate.

(Total for Question 1 is 12 marks)

2 Explain one reason case-study evidence, such as Davis's studies of children raised in extreme isolation, cannot fully settle the nature/nurture debate on its own.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

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3 Sociologists generally emphasise the nurture side of this debate. Explain why sociologists generally emphasise the nurture side of the debate.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 The sociologist Kingsley Davis published case studies, in 1940 and 1947, of children who had been raised in extreme social isolation, with very little human contact during their early years. Explain what Davis's case studies suggest about the importance of socialisation.

(Total for Question 4 is 6 marks)

5 Give one everyday example of a human ability or behaviour, and explain how both nature and nurture might contribute to it.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 1.6 The Nature versus Nurture Debate: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 4 A detailed, well-balanced evaluation that accurately explains BOTH the nurture case (e.g. sociological emphasis on socialisation, evidence such as Davis's case studies) AND a genuine nature-leaning case (e.g. sociobiology), supported by accurate reference to named sources. Strengths and limitations of the evidence on both sides are analysed, and a reasoned, supported judgement is reached that does not claim biology is irrelevant. Sociological terminology is used accurately and consistently throughout. **10-12**

Level 3 A clear evaluation that explains both the nurture case and a nature-leaning case, with some accurate reference to named sources. Some analysis of strengths/limitations. An attempt at a conclusion, which may be only partly supported. **7-9**

Level 2 Some relevant explanation of nurture and/or nature, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation or comparison, and/or an unbalanced treatment that ignores one side of the debate. **4-6**

Level 1 One or two isolated, undeveloped points about nature or nurture, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail. **1-3**

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Indicative content:

- Nurture case: sociology's core evidence is that behaviour varies across cultures and time periods, which a fixed biological explanation cannot easily account for; Davis's case studies of children raised in extreme social isolation are often cited as evidence that basic social skills depend heavily on early social contact.
- Nature case: sociobiology (E.O. Wilson, 1975) argues some social behaviour has an evolved biological basis, and that biology should be given real weight in explaining human behaviour, not dismissed.
- Twin-study evidence: comparisons of identical twins raised in different environments can be used to argue for both nature (similarities despite separation) and nurture (differences due to environment), showing that evidence is genuinely mixed rather than one-sided.
- Evaluation of the nurture case: critics such as Rose, Kamin and Lewontin (1984) still had to argue directly against sociobiology, which shows the biological case cannot simply be dismissed; case-study evidence like Davis's also has limits, since it comes from a very small number of uncontrolled real-world cases.
- Evaluation of the nature case: critics argue sociobiology can risk presenting unequal or harmful social outcomes as natural and unchangeable, when they may instead be the product of social conditions, and that isolating a 'pure' biological cause is very difficult in real human lives.
- A balanced conclusion should avoid claiming either side has been proven false: most sociologists today argue nature and nurture interact, with biology setting some potential and range, and social experience shaping how, whether and to what degree that potential is expressed.
- A convincing top-level answer treats this as a genuine, unresolved debate rather than a settled sociological victory for nurture, using specific named evidence from both sides to support its judgement.

Question 2

identifies that case studies involve a very small number of individuals, often in unusual and uncontrolled circumstances **B1**

development, e.g. other factors specific to each case (health, the exact nature and length of the isolation) make it hard to draw firm general conclusions that would apply to human development as a whole **B1**

Answer: Case studies involve a very small number of individuals in unusual, uncontrolled circumstances, so other factors specific to each case make it hard to draw firm general conclusions that would apply to human development as a whole.

Question 3

identifies that sociology as a discipline is mainly interested in how society, culture and social relationships shape human behaviour **B1**

development, e.g. sociologists therefore look for evidence that patterns of behaviour vary between different societies, cultures or historical periods **B1**

explains that such variation would be difficult to explain if behaviour were fixed entirely by biology, since biology does not differ systematically between societies in the same way **B1**

development, e.g. this is why sociologists study socialisation, culture and social structure as major influences on behaviour, without necessarily claiming biology plays no role at all **B1**

Answer: Sociology studies how society and culture shape behaviour; because patterns of behaviour vary between different societies and historical periods in ways biology alone would struggle to explain, sociologists emphasise socialisation and social structure as major influences, without claiming biology plays no role at all.

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Question 4

identifies that Davis studied children who had experienced extreme social isolation in early childhood, with very limited contact with other people	**B1**
explains that these children were found to lack basic social skills usually expected by their age, such as language and everyday social behaviour, when they were later found	**B1**
development, e.g. some skills developed to some degree once the children received social contact and support, suggesting learning was still possible, though outcomes varied and were affected by many factors	**B1**
explains that Davis used these findings as evidence for the importance of social contact and socialisation in normal human development	**B1**
development, e.g. the cases suggested that skills often assumed to be 'natural', such as language and basic social interaction, may depend heavily on early social experience rather than developing automatically	**B1**
appropriate care/caution, e.g. noting these were real individual cases and that other factors (health, the exact circumstances of the isolation) make firm general conclusions difficult	**B1**

Answer: Davis's case studies of children raised in extreme social isolation found they lacked age-typical social skills and language when found, though outcomes varied once they received social contact; Davis used this as evidence that skills often assumed to be 'natural' may depend heavily on early social experience, while noting that individual case studies make firm general conclusions difficult.

Question 5

a plausible everyday example, e.g. language ability, sporting talent or musical ability	**B1**
a correct explanation of a possible nature contribution, e.g. some inherited biological capacity or predisposition	**B1**
a correct explanation of a possible nurture contribution, e.g. exposure, practice, encouragement or teaching from family and society	**B1**
development linking the two, e.g. explaining that the final outcome likely depends on an interaction between the two, rather than either alone	**B1**

Answer: Musical ability may involve both nature (an inherited capacity for pitch or rhythm) and nurture (access to instruments, encouragement and years of practice), with the final level of skill likely depending on the interaction between the two rather than either alone.

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