Worksheet 8.4

Additional practice questions for Chapter 8

1 Evaluate two studies relevant to the study of human relationships. [22 marks]

2 Contrast the role of biological and cognitive factors in explaining prosocial behaviour. [22 marks]

3 To what extent do sociocultural factors explain interpersonal violence? [22 marks]

Answer guidelines

1 This is a very clear question. You should begin by choosing two studies that you know in sufficient detail to provide a meaningful evaluation. Studies that might be good for this include Madsen et al. (2007) and Toi and Batson (1982), but there is a range of other possibilities. The studies do not need to be related to each other, but you may find it easier to evaluate them if you are able to compare and contrast their strengths and limitations.

Plan your answer so that you begin initially with a description of the study. Do not go into too much detail but provide enough information that the aim, procedure and findings are clear. The procedure is likely to be particularly important for this question as that is where many of the strengths and limitations can be found.

Following the description of the study, evaluate it by explaining strengths and limitations (see Chapter 2 for how you can best evaluate studies). Consider (where appropriate) how the sample was obtained, whether there were ethical problems with the study or if in avoiding ethical problems the study has low ecological validity, if participant or researcher expectancies may have altered the results, and so on. Bear in mind that it is not sufficient to state that a study lacks ecological validity – you need to make it clear how the study is lacking and show that you understand why it is important. Using correct terminology is a good start, but by itself is not enough.

Repeat this for your second study. You should come to a conclusion as the definition of the command term suggests you need to make an appraisal. Make sure you provide this after evaluating each of the studies: a few sentences to explain what your judgement is about the quality of the study and the validity of the conclusions will be sufficient.

2 This question requires you to choose a set of biological and cognitive factors to contrast their role in prosocial behaviour. It is a good idea to begin by listing the cognitive and biological factors in a table and to add the names of researchers that you can remember. There is an online resource available for this chapter that can help you check if you have done so adequately.

After identifying the material you are going to write about, you can begin with an introduction that
details what factors you are going to address and in what way biological and cognitive factors are different. Key differences include a different emphasis on decision to act (cognitive) and an instinct to act (biological) and the kind of people that are likely to be helped as a result of these. It is also important to note that biological and cognitive factors are both likely to be involved in any person’s decision to intervene and it would be a good idea to demonstrate how they might interact with each other: they are complementary forces. Remember: to gain marks for knowledge and comprehension, you need to refer to studies; to gain marks for critical thinking, you need to include evaluation of research and theory. This is why a brief consideration of the quality of the research available for the biological and cognitive factors chosen is important, preferably spread all through your answer and summarized at the end.

3 Specify in your introduction that you will deal with sociocultural factors relating specifically to domestic violence and explain how your answer will be set out. You should begin with an explanation of what domestic violence is and what factors are known to affect it.

The most important ideas to include are social learning theory and the culture of honour. There is more information about social learning theory and violence in Chapter 4. Don’t forget to make frequent reference to research and let your evaluation of this research influence your decision about how powerful the effect of these factors is on domestic violence.

You might also like to consider some other factors that are sometimes thought to influence violence. Check your online resource detailing cognitive and biological ideas about violence, including the genetic explanation. You could also make reference to homicide adaptation theory from Chapter 2. Although biological theories attempt to explain the instinct for violence, they tend not to be well supported by good quality research and there is a compelling argument made by sociocultural theorists that your evaluation should result in the conclusion that sociocultural factors have a very important role in psychologists’ explanations for violent behaviour.