Outline and evaluate the social learning theory approach. Refer to evidence in your answer (12 marks).

Model answer: Evaluation

Evidence to support the SLT is provided by Bandura and Ross + Ross whose Bobo Doll study demonstrated observational learning of aggressive treatment and replication of behaviours as a result thus supporting and providing empirical evidence for the SLT.

The Bobo Doll study however had several ethical and methodological issues that affect the weight of evidence as demand characteristics were clearly shown. One child commented "Look, there’s a doll we are meant to hit" This therefore raises questions to the validity of the Bobo Doll studies which in turn weaknesses its value as empirical support.

Whilst SLT explains how much behaviour can be learned through observation, there are other ideas or concepts that show it is very difficult to learn in. It could therefore be suggested that SLT has limited real world application.

One example of SLT application in practice is the use of parenting courses for parents of anti social children where they have modeled socially unacceptable behaviour. By modeling appropriate and socially acceptable behaviour, the parents help to modify their child's behaviour. This provides support for the theory.

A criticism of the theory is that it fails to sufficiently acknowledge the role of heredity and biology influences on human behaviour. For example, aggressive behaviour may be demonstrated as a result of an increased testosterone surge or because of low levels of serotonin and the SLT would not account for such explanations.

Finally, whilst there is significant evidence for the SLT of aggression we cannot establish causality whilst observation of deviant role models may increase aggression or deviant behaviour. The individual may already have shown deviant traits and this may lead to the contact with the role model.

Overall SLT clearly has explanatory power for certain types of behaviours and can therefore be used in the media to adapt the behaviour of society, thus demonstrating it's application and effectiveness in behaviour modification. We should however consider that to assume all individuals would blindly imitate perceived role models would be environmentally deterministic, deny free will and ignore the complexity of human existence.