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| **Psychopathology Learning Table 3: The Behavioural Approach to Explaining Phobias** | | | |
| **AO1** | | | |
| **The Two-Process Model**  *Hobart Mower (1960) proposed a two process model based on the behavioural approach to phobias. This states that phobias are acquired (learned) by classical conditioning and then continue (are maintained) by operant conditioning.* | | | |
| **Classical Conditioning (Acquisition)** | | **Operant Conditioning (Maintenance)** | |
| * Learning to associate something of which we have no fear (**neutral stimulus**) with something that already triggers a fear response (**an unconditioned stimulus**). * For example a phobia of rats may develop when we come to associate something that initially does not produce any response (**neutral stimuli – a rat**) with something that already produces the desired response (**unconditioned stimulus – loud bang, naturally produces fear**). * The neutral stimulus of the rat is paired with the loud bang which produces fear. * Over time, through association and repetition, the person will soon display a **conditioned response** of fear at the sight of the rat in the absence of a loud bang. * This will then result in a phobia of rats as demonstrated by Watson and Rayner’s (1920) lab experiment involving a 9 month old baby known as ‘Little Albert’. | | * **Operant conditioning** takes place when our behaviour is **reinforced** (rewarded) or punished. * **Reinforcement** tends to **increase** the likelihood of us displaying that behaviour again. * **Negative reinforcement** can result in a phobia if an individual **avoids** a situation that is unpleasant. They are rewarded by feelings of relief if they have avoided a potentially scary situation and so are more likely to repeat the behaviour (avoid it again). * If avoidance behaviour continues a person will never face their fear object and so the phobia continues. | |
| **AO3: Evaluation of the Behaviour Approach to Phobias** | | | |
| **Empirical Evidence**  **P: One strength** of the classical conditioning explanation is **empirical evidence to support its claim that phobias can develop through association**.  E: **For example**, Sue et al (1994) found that people with phobias often recall a specific incident when their phobia appeared e.g. being bitten by a dog or experiencing a panic attack in a social situation.  E: **This supports classical conditioning because** it verifies the suggestion that phobias occur when a person associates a previously neutral stimuli (e.g. a dog) with a fear response.  L: **As a result this strengthens the behavioural explanation and its explanatory power in explaining phobias.** | **Diathesis-Stress Model**  **P: However,** a weakness of the behavioural explanation of phobias is that not everyone who has a phobia can recall a traumatic incident. (Though it may be that such traumatic incidents have been forgotten, Ost, 2001).  **E: For example,** Di Nardo (1998) suggests that not everyone who is bitten by a dog develops a phobia of dogs.  E: He argues that it could be **only those with a genetic vulnerability for phobias would be affected** by such events **(diathesis-stress model)**.  **L: Therefore this reduces the support for classical conditioning as an explanation for phobias which reduces the credibility of it overall because it doesn’t offer a full explanation.** | | **Reductionist**  P: A negative aspect of the behaviourist approach is that it can be accused of being **reductionist**.  E: This is because it **reduces** phobias down to the simple processes of **classical or operant conditioning**.  E: Although being reductionist allows researchers to study phobias in **greater depth**, it fails to consider the individual as a **whole person**. It fails to recognise other factors which could cause phobic disorders such as the way a person perceives the fear stimulus (cognitive factors).  L: A more useful explanation would include the experiences of the individual, their genetic and their thoughts – a more interactionist approach to explaining phobias. |