3.5 Learning Theory as an Explanation of Attachment: Test Pack

AQA 7182 · about 20 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer each question. At least four longer questions require full sentences. Complete the pack in about 80 minutes.

1 Outline the classical conditioning account of attachment.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Identify the 'cupboard love' assumption and one implication.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 Explain two reductionist critiques of learning theory.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Use Schaffer and Emerson as evidence against cupboard-love predictions.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 3.5 Learning Theory as an Explanation of Attachment: Test Pack

Question 1

food is an unconditioned stimulus (UCS) that produces pleasure as an unconditioned response (UCR) oe — **B1**

caregiver (initially a neutral stimulus) becomes associated with food through repeated pairing and becomes a conditioned stimulus (CS) that elicits a conditioned pleasure response, producing attachment oe — **B1**

Answer: Food is the unconditioned stimulus producing pleasure; the caregiver becomes associated with feeding and becomes a conditioned stimulus producing a conditioned pleasure response, forming attachment.

Question 2

identifies the 'cupboard love' assumption: attachment is primarily based on feeding and the provision of food as the main source of reinforcement oe — **M1**

states implication: the person who feeds the infant will become the primary attachment figure, since they provide the primary reinforcer oe — **A1**

explains consequence: this predicts feeding frequency or provision of food should predict attachment strength, so the feeder is likely to be the main attachment figure oe — **A1**

notes explicitly that this assumption originates from Dollard and Miller's learning-theory view of attachment oe — **A1**

Answer: Cupboard love assumes attachment arises from feeding and the provision of food as the main reinforcer. An implication is that the person who feeds the infant most often should become the primary attachment figure because they provide the primary reinforcement; this idea derives from Dollard and Miller.

Question 3

identifies reductionist point 1: learning theory reduces attachment to basic conditioning processes and reinforcement, ignoring complex emotions and cognitive processes involved in human bonds oe — **M1**

explains why this matters: it fails to account for the emotional quality of attachment such as comfort-seeking, secure-base behaviour and internal working models, limiting its explanatory scope for human attachment oe — **A1**

identifies reductionist point 2: learning theory treats all attachments as formed by the same simple mechanisms, overlooking individual differences, cultural factors and the role of caregiver sensitivity oe — **M1**

explains why this matters: it cannot explain variation in attachment patterns or the importance of caregiver responsiveness shown in human studies, making the theory incomplete for real-world social development oe — **A1**

Answer: Learning theory reduces attachment to conditioning and reinforcement, ignoring emotions, cognition and individual or cultural variation. This limits its usefulness for explaining the complexity of human attachment, including secure-base behaviour and differences linked to caregiver sensitivity.

Question 4

identifies evidence: many infants in Schaffer and Emerson's study formed specific attachments to caregivers who were most responsive and who played with them, not necessarily the person who fed them most often oe — **M1**

explains how this contradicts cupboard love: if feeding were the key reinforcer, the feeder should be the primary attachment figure, but Schaffer and Emerson found responsiveness predicted attachment instead oe — **A1**

links to implication: this suggests attachment involves sensitivity and interaction, not just food-based reinforcement oe — **A1**

states that this reduces the explanatory power of a pure stimulus-response feeding account for human attachment behaviour oe — **A1**

Answer: Schaffer and Emerson found infants often attached to the most responsive, interactive caregiver rather than simply the person who fed them most. This challenges cupboard love because it shows feeding frequency alone does not predict attachment; sensitivity and responsiveness better explain who becomes the attachment figure.

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