The learning theory of attachment

Theories of 'drive reduction' suggest that behaviour is motivated by the need to reduce 'drives' (states created from an imbalance in the body).

Primary drives (for example, hunger) are innate.

Pleasant consequence of being fed is rewarding.
↓
Positively reinforces the baby's crying behaviour.

Unpleasant stimulus of the baby's crying is removed, which is rewarding.
↓
Negatively reinforces the caregiver's feeding behaviour.

OPERANT CONDITIONING

Negative reinforcement = something unpleasant removed, means behaviour is *more* likely to recur.

Positive reinforcement = receiving something pleasant, means behaviour is *more* likely to recur.

Primary drive
Hunger → **Crying** → **Feeding (UCS)** → **Pleasure (UCR)**

1. Primary drives (for example, hunger) are innate.
2. Baby is motivated to reduce its state of hunger. Therefore begins to cry.
3. Caregiver is motivated to stop the crying. Therefore feeds baby.
4. Feeding gives the baby pleasure. Therefore baby stops crying.
5.

CLASSICAL CONDITIONING

Caregiver (NS) → no response
Feeding (UCS) → Pleasure (UCR)
Feeding + caregiver (UCS + NS) → Pleasure (UCR)
Caregiver (now CS) → Pleasure (now CR)

NS Neutral stimulus
UCS Unconditioned stimulus
UCR Unconditioned response
CS Conditioned stimulus
CR Conditioned response

Secondary drive
Attachment → **Caregiver (NS → CS)** → **Pleasure (CR)**

6. The caregiver becomes a conditioned stimulus and elicits a conditioned response of pleasure.
7. Secondary drives are learned through classical conditioning. Attachment is a secondary drive because it is learned by association with the primary drive of hunger.

Key
Operant conditioning
Classical conditioning

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