



PERGAMON

Behaviour Research and Therapy 40 (2002) 279–287

**BEHAVIOUR
RESEARCH AND
THERAPY**

www.elsevier.com/locate/brat

Mother knows best: effects of maternal modelling on the acquisition of fear and avoidance behaviour in toddlers

Friederike C. Gerull, Ronald M. Rapee *

Department of Psychology, Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW 2109, Australia

Accepted 24 January 2001

Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the influence of parental modelling on the acquisition of fear and avoidance towards novel, fear-relevant stimuli in a sample of 30 toddlers. The toddlers were shown a rubber snake and spider, which were alternately paired with either negative or positive facial expressions by their mothers. Both stimuli were presented again after a 1- and a 10-min delay, while mothers maintained a neutral expression. The children showed greater fear expressions and avoidance of the stimuli following negative reactions from their mothers. This was true for both genders although the degree of modelled avoidance was greater in girls than in boys. The strong observational learning results are consistent with views that modelling constitutes a mechanism by which fear may be acquired early in life. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Anxiety; Aetiology; Modelling; Social referencing; Infants

1. Introduction

In a recent model of the development of anxiety disorders, Rapee (2001) has pointed to several factors of potential importance. Some factors (e.g., genetic bases, temperament, parent/child interaction) have received extensive investigation (e.g., Andrews, 1996; Hudson & Rapee, 2000; Kagan, Snidman, Arcus, & Reznick, 1994; Rapee, 1997) while others (e.g., peer relationships) are yet to receive much empirical attention. Parent modelling is one factor that to date has received little empirical investigation. According to the model, anxious behaviours are likely to be acquired following observation of parents (or significant others) acting in an anxious manner in response to specific stimuli. This fear learning is more likely to occur in a child who is vulnerable to

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61-2-9850-8032; fax: +61-2-9850-8062.
E-mail address: ron.rapee@mq.edu.au (R.M. Rapee).

anxiety based on their temperament characteristics. In addition, opportunities for modelling of anxious behaviours are more likely with anxious parents who are known to show anxious behaviours more frequently (Muris, Steerneman, Merckelbach, & Meesters, 1996).

The importance of modelling as a method of acquisition of fears has been suggested by previous authors (e.g., Rachman, 1977). Indeed, following these suggestions, a number of studies have examined the acquisition of specific fears via modelling of stimulus-threat associations. Most of these studies have used retrospective self-reports as their method and have focused primarily on adults with specific phobias (e.g., Öst, 1987; Öst & Hugdahl, 1981) although, more recently some studies have begun to address broader fears such as panic disorder, hypochondriasis and anxiety sensitivity (Ehlers, 1993; Watt, Stewart, & Cox, 1998). Most studies have supported the role of modelling with a consistent minority of subjects reporting their fears to have commenced following observation of threat in the presence of a particular stimulus. However, the development of anxious reactions is likely to be far too complex and subtle to be assessed via simple retrospective report and several aspects of this method have been criticised (Menzies, 1995). In addition, it is likely that the critical period for acquisition of many fears is early in life (Öhman, 1985). Most anxiety disorders have their onset during childhood or adolescence (Öst, 1987) and, in many cases, these are preceded by a vulnerable temperament that develops during the first few years of life (Rapee, 2001). Thus, research needs to be conducted at earlier stages in the life cycle.

A few studies have examined fear acquisition following observation of stimulus-threat associations via questionnaires given to children or their parents (Menzies & Clarke, 1993; Merckelbach, Muris, & Schouten, 1996; Ollendick & King, 1991). Similar, to the data from adults, these studies have also shown a consistent percentage of reports of vicarious acquisition. However, the same criticisms described earlier (especially their retrospective, self-report nature) limit the conclusions that can be drawn from these studies.

Surprisingly, very few studies have examined vicarious conditioning of fear reactions or avoidance behaviour through the use of direct, laboratory observation. In a series of studies, Bandura and colleagues demonstrated clear, short term effects of observational learning in both adults and children (Bandura, Blanchard, & Ritter, 1969; Bandura, Grusec, & Menlove, 1967; Bandura & Rosenthal, 1966). The majority of these studies were aimed at the demonstration of fear reduction via observational learning rather than at the acquisition of fear. However, there was also some evidence that brief, conditioned emotional reactions could be acquired observationally.

No doubt the strongest research in this area was conducted by Cook and Mineka (1989) who demonstrated clear acquisition of fear in response to fear-relevant stimuli in rhesus monkeys following exposure to a fearful model. In this study the model was presented via a video screen and fear acquisition was demonstrated only for fear-relevant stimuli (e.g., a toy snake) and not for fear irrelevant stimuli.

Some very interesting information on modelling of fearful reactions can be found in the developmental psychology area. Social referencing is a process of emotional communication where one's perception of the other person's interpretation of a stimulus or event is used to form one's own appraisal of that stimulus or event (Feinman, 1992). Some studies have demonstrated that toddlers will show fear toward a novel stimulus following a fearful facial expression shown by their mothers (Hornik, Risenhoover, & Gunnar, 1987; Mumme & Fernald, 1996; Repacholi, 1996). These studies have thus shown a clear demonstration of fear modelling from mother to child. However, they have typically not assessed whether this fear reaction lasts well beyond the model-

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات