

Describe and Evaluate the Biological and Cognitive explanations
Of Eating Disorders (18 Marks)

The Biological explanations of eating disorders can be split into two categories which are genetic inheritance and the biochemical dysfunction of neurotransmitters in the brain. The cognitive explanation says there are 3 reasons explaining eating disorders. It explains that people suffering with anorexia nervosa will have incorrect beliefs about their weight problem; they will have distorted thoughts about their body which involves their shape and appearance. This will lead to an exaggeration of the consequences of losing weight; they will selectively attend to information about losing weight which leads to excessive dieting and weight loss causing the anorexia nervosa. Also the cognitive explanation suggests another reason for eating disorders, this is called dichotomous reasoning this is when a person thinks in terms of the extreme, and the other reason to do with the cognitive explanation is called magnification this is when someone exaggerates the importance of something, for e.g an anorexic may be suicidal when they put on weight whereas someone without anorexia wouldn't be bothered.

There are many evaluations that can be made about these two explanations.

The biological explanation has had research to investigate its reliability; Holland et al did a study on MZ (identical) twins and DZ (non-identical) twins. He did this study to see whether he could support the genetic inheritance explanation and to see which type of twin had a higher concordance rate of anorexia. He found that 56% of MZ twins had anorexia and only 5% of the DZ twins had anorexia. From this research this study supports the reliability of the biological explanation and genetic inheritance. But on a negative side the research is only based on small samples therefore it lacks population validity which means the results are difficult to generalise to the

wider population. From analysing this study it is also difficult to disentangle the effects of a shared environment, as twins are brought up together. This study does however have high ecological validity as it is true to life this makes the results valid and reliable and can be used to show genetic inheritance.

The cognitive explanation of eating disorders also has strengths and weaknesses, strength of this explanation is that it explains eating disorders for boys and girls; where as other explanations ignore one sex which is often the males, because of this the information explained can be generalised to more of the population. The cognitive explanation also explains the problem in the view of a sufferer of an eating disorder, this makes it more valid and reliable, as it really helps you to understand why they think the way that they do. But on a negative side this explanation only really explains anorexia nervosa in great detail rather than bulimia nervosa and the explanation doesn't explain why people with eating disorders have cognitive errors and it doesn't explain why they have eating disorders, because of this the information is hard to generalise to everyone and it is hard to tell the true validity of it. Also this explanation doesn't consider the biological explanation it only explains eating disorders by the way someone thinks and perceives themselves.