A01
Initiation – One theory that explains the initiation of gambling is social learning theory which states that people learn behaviour through vicarious reinforcement. So if a gambler is observed as being positively rewarded through winning, then the observer may imitate and internalise this behaviour so that they too can receive this reward and this behaviour now becomes their own. They may also learn gambling behaviour from peers or even media role models.

Operant conditioning may also explain gambling because the person gets positive reinforcement through winning money and therefore continue the addiction for this reward. Griffiths (2009) believed people became addicted because of the positive “buzz” people received from almost winning and the financial rewards of winning which helps to reinforce this behaviour and describes maintenance. Whilst gamblers often lose, research found that gamblers were not always rational and placed a greater value on winning and therefore the behaviour is maintained through intermittent reinforcement.

Classical conditioning suggest that addicts may begin to associate certain stimuli with this gambling behaviour. For example, if a person always plays on the slot machines on a night out, when they go out they may find if they try to go out after they have stopped gambling, that cue is there and so it becomes difficult to resist. This also explains maintenance as this specific activity is associated with the behaviour making it harder to stop. The cue has become a conditioned stimuli to the positive buzz of gambling on the slot machines.

Relapse occurs if the individual is consistently faced with the cues even after they have stopped the behaviour. This means that a daily occurrence with these cues may lead to the relapse as the memory of the positive feelings of nicotine are reinforced by the cue.

A02
Classical conditioning seems useful to explain peoples motivation to begin gambling but struggles to explain why a person would maintain a gambling addiction. Conversely whilst operant conditioning might explain ongoing behaviour, it appears less useful in explaining why people commence gambling or relapse after a prolonged period of abstaining. (Griffiths, 1995)

A weakness of this is that social learning theory doesn't explain why the behaviour is maintained after many losses. Since gamblers tend to lose more than they win.

It cannot explain how people exposed to similar stimuli respond differently.