BEHAVIOURISTS BELIEVE THAT PHOBIAS ARE LEARNED RESPONSES TO STIMULI.

WHY?

BEHAVIOURISTS BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE ARE BORN AS 'BLANK SLATES'. THE ENVIRONMENTS THEY DEVELOP IN MAKE THEM WHAT THEY ARE BY CONDITIONING THEM TO RESPOND IN PARTICULAR WAYS.

HOW?

LEARNING THE PHOBIA MEANS ASSOCIATING A PARTICULAR STIMULUS WITH TWO RESPONSES: ANXIETY AND AVOIDANCE.

LEARNING BY ASSOCIATING TWO STIMULI/EVENTS TOGETHER (CLASSICAL CONDITIONING).


ONCE THE PHOBIA HAS FORMED, THE PERSON QUICKLY LEARNS TO AVOID THE PHOBIC STIMULUS AS GOING NEAR IT MAKES THEM ANXIOUS (PUNISHMENT) AND AVOIDING IT MAKES THEM CALMER (REINFORCEMENT).

LEARNING BY THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEHAVIOUR (OPERANT CONDITIONING).

TREATING THE PHOBIA REQUIRES BREAKING THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN THE PHOBIC STIMULUS AND THE ANXIETY/AVOIDANCE RESPONSES.

THE PERSON MUST BE EXPOSED TO THE PHOBIC OBJECT WITHOUT THE ANXIETY-PROVOKING STIMULUS (E.G. PATTING A DOG AND NOT GETTING BITTEN) IN A PROCESS OF EXTINCTION.

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INTENSE EXPOSURE IN ONE SESSION UNTIL ANXIETY SUBSIDES (FLOODING).

GRADUATED EXPOSURE OVER SEVERAL SESSIONS, USING TAUGHT RELAXATION TECHNIQUES (SYSTEMATIC DESENSITISATION).