ANXIETY DISORDERS: PHOBIAS – BEHAVIOURIST THEORIES & TREATMENT

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.

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

HOW?

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

TWO PROCESSES OF LEARNING.

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

A **NEUTRAL STIMULUS** (E.G. A DOG) IS ASSOCIATED WITH AN ANXIETY PROVOKING ONE (E.G. PAIN) WHEN THE TWO OCCUR TOGETHER (E.G. A PERSON GETS BITTEN). THEREAFTER, THE DOG WILL ELICIT THE SAME RESPONSE AS THE PAIN.

LEARNING BY THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEHAVIOUR (**OPERANT 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**).

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**.

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

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

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