

Dr. Joseph Wolpe essay



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Dr. Joseph Wolpe, born in 1917, he was a South African Psychiatrist, and during wartime he worked in a military psychiatric hospital. There he observed soldiers who mentally suffered from what they went through and observed while in war, better known today as post-traumatic stress syndrome. Dr. Wolpe decided to dedicate his work at the time, towards finding more effective means of dealing with this mental problem.

Dr. Wolpe also founded the Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy and the Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry. (Source 1) (Source 3) Dr. Wolpe's understanding of mental illness may be best described when he wrote in, *The Practice of Behavior Therapy* that, "behavior therapy is an applied science, in every way parallel to other modern technologies, and in particular those that constitute modern medical therapeutics." (Source 2) Thus this essay will describe Dr.

Wolpe, a theorist in the realm of cognitive behavior therapy. Dr. Wolpe believed that since some phobias could be, "learned through classical conditioning," (Text book pg. 74) then fears and phobias are essentially learned and thus consequently can be unlearned.

This is the basic concept that he uses for not only understanding the illness but also for treatment. Thus cognitive behavior therapy essentially entails innovative forms of thinking, acting, and feelings using different, research-based techniques. (Text book pg. 74) His invention for treatment was based on the idea of breaking the association between stimulus and response. For example someone whose phobia may of spiders, he used the idea of dividing

the line between the fear what stimulating it and how the individual responds to it for his research in the subject.

It is known as systematic desensitization and in our Abnormal Psychology textbook it defines this technique as one that eliminates fears. Systematic Desensitization is comprised of three key elements: first-relaxation training that uses progressive muscle relaxation, second- construction of a hierarchy of fears, and thirdly- learning process. (Text book pg. 74) More specifically the first key element of systematic desensitization which involves relaxation is a physical element because it undertakes the direct action of tightening and loosening major muscle groups.

It makes sense, doesn't it? In order for people to truly lose their phobias and calm down their fears they must begin to physically relax their bodies and minds. The second element is a construction of hierarchy of fears and it essentially is the gradual intensification of levels of fears so that individuals can gradually experience and confront their phobias. And finally the third key element of systematic desensitization is the learning process. This is the, " gradual pairing of ever-increasing fears in the hierarchy with the relaxation response. Wolpe had his clients carry out this pairing in their imagination. (Text Book page 74) Thus systematic desensitization is the process of inducing gradual fears while sustaining a persistent feeling of relaxation.

Similar to desensitization is what Dr. Wolpe later discovered, another gradual move into new behavior called assertiveness training. Many individuals have phobias in public speaking, confrontation, human contact, rejection and more and assertiveness training essentially trains people to increase their, "

confidence, relax in formerly stressful situations, and conquer their fear. ”

(Source 1) Dr.

Wolpe determined the cause of these treatments with extensive research and experiments. His initial experiments were with cats. Cats were given mild shocks that was given at the same time as a specific sound or visual image. The cats began to associate the shock with that particular sound and image. Then Dr. Wolpe replaced the shocks with food and soon realized that he could gradually “ unlearn” their fear.

He also researched later and concluded that some problems may not be fear with a particular object within itself but instead a negative association stemming from another source or person. For example there was this woman that supposedly had an enormous fear of insects. Dr. Wolpe was trying to desensitize her and none of his methods were actually working.

He then realized later that the woman’s husband was nicknamed after an insect and that instead of desensitizing her on her supposed phobia of insects that the wife and her husband should go through marriage counseling and soon the phobia gradually disappeared. (Source 2) Evidence has proved that systematic desensitization is a credited as an effective treatment of fears and phobias. (Text Book pg. 74) Dr. Roger Poppen, a psychologist from Southern Illinois University and author of, “ Joseph Wolpe,” said, “” He [Dr. Wolpe] was a major force in steering psychotherapy in the direction of empirical science.

He inspired and encouraged the direct comparison of carefully specified psychotherapy procedures by means of clear measurements of the therapy’s

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outcome. " (Source 2) Bibliography: Textbook: Abnormal Psychology, fifth edition Source (1): http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_g2699/is_0006/ai_2699000655

Source (2): <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9401EEDE163CF93BA35751C1A961958260>

Source (3): <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9114945/Wolpe-Joseph>