

1999

Counterconditioning

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Recommended Citation

Bufford, Rodger K., "Counterconditioning" (1999). *Faculty Publications - Grad School of Clinical Psychology*. 299.
https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac/299

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Counterconditioning. In counterconditioning a maladaptive response is eliminated by establishing a new response in the presence of the stimulus that initially controlled occurrence of the maladaptive response. In a classical study crying in the presence of a rabbit was eliminated by feeding the fearful child and gradually bringing the rabbit into the child's proximity while he ate.

The critical components in counterconditioning are the maladaptive stimulus-response pattern and a new stimulus-response interaction. This new pattern is usually developed through replacing the maladaptive response with a more acceptable response—in other words, response substitution. By contrast, punishment and extinction weaken present responses without developing alternative responses to the controlling stimulus.

Although it is rarely discussed in recent behavioral literature, counterconditioning is a basic process underlying many behavior therapy techniques, including such procedures as covert sensitization, differential reinforcement of alternative behavior, aversion therapy, systematic and in vivo desensitization, assertiveness training, and sex therapy.

Despite neglect of the concept, there is general agreement that the research evidence indicates that replacing problem behaviors with adaptive behaviors is an effective treatment approach. An interesting parallel noted by Adams is that a number of biblical teachings suggest the value of replacing sinful practices with godly behavior (Adams, 1973, pp. 176–216).

Reference

Adams, J. E. (1973). *The Christian counselor's manual*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

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See BEHAVIOR THERAPY.