Phobias

Psychology 311
Abnormal Psychology

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Background

- Derived from the Greek God of fear, Phobos
  - Was painted on shields and masks to scare enemies
  - Name came to mean dread, panic, fear, fright
- Usually individuals with phobias know exactly what they are afraid of.

Overview continued

- Fears are out of proportion with reality
- Seem inexplicable and beyond their voluntary control
- Arousal stimuli tend to be
  - Animals
  - Objects
  - Events
- Stimulus does not need to be present to evoke a response
  - Imagining the situation is enough

Sex/Racial differences

- Occurs more in females than males
  - Two times as much
- More African Americans than Caucasians or Hispanics
- Often begins in childhood or young adulthood.

How Named or Categorized

- Traditionally named with Greek or Latin prefixes
  - Acrophobia - Fear of heights
  - Agoraphobia - Fear of open spaces
- Today
  - Not used as much
  - Now grouped into three categories
    - Specific
    - Social
    - Agoraphobia

How they Develop

- May grow from
  - Generalized anxiety
  - Panic attack
  - When the fear is connected to something specific
- May grow progressively broader
  - Generalization
  - Fear of snakes to eels to worms
Specific Phobias
- Miscellaneous category
  - Marked by persistent and irrational fear
- Is the most common type of phobia
  - 11% of the population meet the criteria at some point in their lifetime
- Examples
  - Animal phobias – dogs, cats, snakes, etc
  - Claustrophobia
  - Acrophobia
  - Water
  - Public transportation

DSM
- Phobia diagnosis when
  - There is excessive and persistent fear
  - Recognize the fear is unreasonable and the person continues to avoid the situation
  - Distressed of fear situation
    - Creates problems in
      - social relations
      - Work
      - Carrying out normal routines

Social Phobias
- Are less common than specific phobias
- Can be as bad or severe
- Characterized by
  - Fear/Embarrassment in dealing with others
- Most often person is concerned tremors, blushing, sweating, quavering voice etc. will be detected by others

Issues
- May have a fear of eating or speaking in public
- Can start in early adolescence
- Shyness
  - Often is mistaken as a phobia
  - Difference, the person doesn't experience terror

Results
- Have fears of
  - asserting themselves
  - Criticism
  - Rejection
  - Making a mistake
  - Others
- Tend to be overly involved in work and school
  - Dismiss success
- Also tend to be lonely

Agoraphobia
- More common in women than men
- Fear of entering unfamiliar situation
  - Accompanied by panic attacks
  - 50% of people who suffer from panic attacks go on to develop agoraphobia
- Is unlike social phobic who is afraid of scrutiny from others
- Agoraphobic is afraid
  - Of themselves
  - Of panic attacks
  - Loosing control in public
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Examples

• Slight agoraphobia
  • Will not go to the mall
• Extreme
  • Will not go out of the house

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Conclusions

• Is a very common disorder
• Generally is maintained by negative reinforcement
  • Escape from aversive conditions
  • Avoidance of potentially aversive conditions
• Can be easily treated with behavioral techniques