

This Week's Citation Classic

Wolpe J. *Psychotherapy by reciprocal inhibition*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958. 239 p.

This book describes how the anxiety central to experimental neuroses is lastingly eliminated by the competition of feeding responses. On the basis of this finding, methods emerged for eliminating human neuroses, using the calming effects of muscle relaxation, anger, sexual arousal, and other competitors with anxiety. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] (SSCI[™]) indicates that this book has received over 1340 citations since 1966. The *Science Citation Index*[®] (SCI[®]) indicates that this book has received over 160 citations since 1961.]

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July 20, 1979

"This book's story began in 1943 when I was a medical officer in the South African Medical Corps, stationed at a base hospital in Kimberley that received soldiers disabled in the North African campaign. Many were cases of battle neurosis. A popular treatment in those days was narcoanalysis. It was believed that in the stuporous state induced by intravenous thiopentone, recovery should result from the emergence of painful 'repressed' battle memories. In fact, it became apparent after a few months that narcoanalysis was providing practically no lasting results at all.

"This, coupled with the knowledge that the Russians had never accepted psychoanalysis, caused me to explore the possibility that neurosis might be a phenomenon of emotional conditioning. I immersed

myself in the conditioning literature, and wrote commentaries on all Pavlov's experiments published in English. I paid particular attention to the experimental neuroses which Pavlov was the first to report,¹ and which were later produced by several experimenters in the United States. What I found extraordinarily instructive was Masserman's studies of experimental neuroses in cats,² even though he steadfastly psychoanalyzed his animals instead of learning from their behavior.

"Upon my discharge from the army in June, 1946, I began experiments to clarify the nature of neurotic behavior of cats. I was able to show that experimental neuroses were actually conditioned anxiety-response habits, and that they could be eliminated by systematic programs of counterconditioning, using feeding as the counter-anxiety behavior. On the basis of these experiments, I wrote a thesis to obtain an advanced degree in psychiatry.³ In 1949, Leo J. Reyna persuaded me to revise and expand my thesis for possible publication. Late that year, I sent the revision to Clark L. Hull at Yale for his advice, since my work owed much to his. He suggested that I offer the manuscript to Appleton-Century, but neither that publisher, nor, later, McGraw-Hill, judged it suitable for publication.

"Subsequently, several of the theoretical parts of the thesis appeared in *Psychological Review*,^{4,10} and the main findings of my work on experimental neurosis in the *British Journal of Psychology*.¹¹ The derived clinical methods first entered the psychiatric scene in 1954.¹² A fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in 1957-58 made possible the preparation of this book, which combined the substance of the previous publications and greatly extended the clinical ramifications of the reciprocal inhibition principle which continues to be the main source of behavior therapy techniques."

1. Pavlov I P. *Conditioned reflexes and psychiatry*. New York: International Publishers, 1941. 199 p.
2. Masserman J H. *Behavior and neurosis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943. 269 p.
3. Wolpe J. *An approach to the problem of neurosis based upon conditioned responses*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Johannesburg, South Africa: University of Witwatersrand, 1948.
4., An interpretation of the effects of combinations of stimuli (patterns) based on current neurophysiology. *Psychol. Rev.* **56**:277-83, 1949.
5., Need-reduction, drive-reduction, and reinforcement: a neurophysiological view. *Psychol. Rev.* **57**:19-26, 1950.
6., Primary stimulus generalization: a neurophysiological view. *Psychol. Rev.* **59**:8-10, 1952.
7., The neurophysiology of learning and delayed reward learning. *Psychol. Rev.* **59**:192-9, 1952.
8., Formation of negative habits: a neurophysiological view. *Psychol. Rev.* **59**:290-9, 1952.
9., Learning theory and "abnormal fixations." *Psychol. Rev.* **60**:111-6, 1953.
10., Theory construction for Blodgett's latent learning. *Psychol. Rev.* **60**:340-4, 1953.
11., Experimental neuroses as learned behavior. *Brit. J. Psychol.* **43**:243-68, 1952.
12., Reciprocal inhibition as the main basis of psychotherapeutic effects. *Arch. Neurol. Psychiat.* **72**:205-66, 1954.