Anxiety

Fear Lives in the Hearts of Men and Women and Danger is a Universal Human Experience
Anxiety: A Universal Concern
Why So Little Interest from Behavior Analysts?

Imprecise term
Metaphorical
Categorical error
Imprecise Term

• Difficult to Define
  - Freud (1917)
  - Sidman (1964)
  - Levitt (1967)
  - McNaughton (1989)
  - Barlow (2002)
  - Friman (2007)
A Behavior Analytic Definition

- Negatively reinforced behavior emitted in the presence of events that evoke or elicit the biology of stress or fear but that pose minimal risk of harm.
My definition

Fear of stuff that is really unlikely to hurt you.
Metaphorical Basis
Categorical Errors
Anxiety as “Category”

- **Specific**
  - Conditioned suppression
  - Conditioned activation

- **General**
  - Mental
  - Physiological
  - Motoric
Some Common Occasions for Anxiety

1. Impossibility of escape
2. Anticipation of punishment
3. Separation from support
Pavlov’s Contribution
Signs of Clinical Anxiety

- Impairment
  - Excessive:
    - Avoidance
    - Emotion
    - Catastrophizing
    - Need for control
- Unresponsive to reason
- High frequency
Select Anxiety Disorders

- Separation-Anxiety Disorder
- Specific Phobia
- Social Phobia
- Panic Disorder
- Agoraphobia
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
Downside of Avoidance

1. Reinforces notions of danger
2. Generalizes
3. Shrinks life
Fear and Non-fear Based Avoidance

- Avoidance is the cardinal behavioral component of anxiety
- Avoidance is a cardinal behavioral component of ASD
- Not all avoidance is fear based
The Threat-based Stress Response

• Prepares body for action

• Bodily
  – Release stress hormones
  – Obtain fuel
  – Metabolize
  – Distribute
Prevalence of Anxiety in the ASD Population

- Prevalence 40%
- Overlap Between ASD and Anxiety
Developmental Implications of ASD and Anxiety

- Secure attachment
- Interactive play
- Learning interpersonal boundaries
- Learning formal social roles and rules
Signs of Anxiety in Social Interactions

- Bossiness
- Scripting
- Frustration at shifts in play
- Interrupting the play of others
- Avoiding play altogether
Signs of Anxiety in the Play of Young ASD Children

- Excessive:
  - ordering
  - movement of objects
  - body movements
  - echolalia
  - emotional reactions
Signs of Anxiety in Elementary School Aged ASD Children

• Excessive
  – Need for control
    • Correcting, bargaining, arguing, taking over play
  – Social avoidance
  – Emotional reactions
Signs of Anxiety in ASD Adolescents

- Social confusion
- Low distress tolerance
- Dependence on adults
- Excessive emotional reactions
Parent and Caretaker Anxiety

- Helicoptering
- Cocooning
- Low distress tolerance
Unintentional Danger/Anxiety Signals

- Questioning
- Checking
- Overprotection
- Reduced independence
- Enabling avoidance
- Attention to fear
Dilemmas for Parents and Caregivers

- Encourage participation, exposure, and bravery or...
- Allow avoidance or withdrawal
Dilemmas for Professionals

• Encourage participation, exposure, and bravery or...

• Allow avoidance or withdrawal
Strategies for Parents and Caregivers

1. Praise and attend to brave behavior; ignore more non brave behavior
2. Model brave behavior and use role reversal
3. Allocate responsibility; encourage independence; allow mistakes
4. Emotional coaching
5. Set reachable goals and use proportional rewards
6. Create opportunities for change
7. Schedule worry time
8. Incorporate intense or unusual interests
9. Exposure, extinction, desensitization
Strategies for Professionals

- Medication
- Behavioral treatment
Medication

- Three primary types
  - Benzodiazepines
  - Antidepressants
  - Beta blockers
Behavioral Treatment

Health education
Externalization
Relaxation
Irrational thinking
Escape extinction
Incentives
What is anxiety?
Externalization

• To name it is to tame it
• Give it a name
  – Goofy
  – Disparaging
  – Insulting
  – Sarcastic
Relaxation

- 4 X 4 X 4 X4
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Focused breathing
- Meditative practices
- Mindfulness
Target Irrational Thinking

- All or nothing
- Magical thinking
- Filtering
- Overgeneralization
- Magnification
- Emotional reasoning

“THE HAPPINESS OF YOUR LIFE DEPENDS UPON THE QUALITY OF YOUR THOUGHTS.”
- MARCUS AURELIUS
Incentives

Grab bag
Dot to dot
Points
Privileges
Praise
Etc.
Exposure Based Treatments

- Escape extinction
- Exposure and response prevention
- Systematic desensitization
- Behavioral and emotional inoculation
Exposure Treatment

Real Life Examples
Effective Treatment

Actual Examples
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Tourette’s Syndrome

Fig. 1 Touching attempts across clinic sessions.
Figure 1. Discomfort ratings and frequency of behaviors during home behavioral exposure tests.
Clinical Description

- Above average IQ
- Suspicious of adults
- Socially anxious
- Pervasive fear of public failure
- Uncomfortable with attention
- Controlling; manipulative
Social Phobia and Conduct Disorder

Figure 1. Monthly school referrals before and after treatment.
Insect Phobia

The graph shows the relationship between math calculations per minute and sessions. The x-axis represents sessions, and the y-axis represents math calculations per minute. The graph compares different conditions: BL, G-E, G-E+RF, and BL again. The conditions are represented as 'No Bugs', 'Say Bugs', and 'Bugs'.
Initial Graduated Exposure
Steps

- Holding jar with crickets
- Touching cricket with foot
- Close eyes for 60 sec in room with crickets
- Pick up cricket with tissue
- Pick up cricket with gloved hand
- Hold a cricket for 20 sec with bare hand
- Allow cricket to crawl on pants leg
- Allow cricket to crawl on bare arm
- Hold cricket in each hand for 20 sec
The Worry Scale

10
Extremely Worried

9
Very Worried

8
Worried

7
A Bit Worried

6
Not Sure

5

4

3

2

1

0

Very Relaxed
Typical Treatment

- Demystify
- Change parenting/caregiving
- Name it
- Exposure steps
- Incentives
- Relaxation
- Breathing skills
- Sell it