

# Classical Conditioning - *Exposure Therapies*

Mary Cover Jones (Associate of John Watson)



## Treatment of Peter

Three-year old Peter was petrified of rabbits and other furry creatures. This fear arose during his time at home and is very intense. Jones aimed to replace Peter's fear of rabbits with a conditioned response that is *incompatible* with fear. Her strategy was to associate the fear-invoking rabbit with the pleasurable, relaxed response associated with eating.

As Peter began his mid-afternoon snack, Jones introduced a caged rabbit on the other side of the huge room. Peter, eagerly munching away on his crackers and eating his milk hardly notices. On succeeding days, she gradually moves the rabbit closer and closer. Within two months, Peter is tolerating the rabbit in his lap, even stroking it as he eats. Moreover, his fear of other furry objects subsides as well, having been "countered" or replaced, by a relaxed state that cannot co-exist with fear.

Unfortunately for those who might have been helped by her counter-conditioning procedures, Jones' story of Peter and the rabbit did not immediately become part of psychology's lore. (Perhaps because she was a woman.)

Joseph Wolpe



## Exposure Therapies

Based on the work of Jones, Wolpe established what has become the most widely used method of behavior therapy, exposure therapy. The primary tenet of this therapy is to expose people to what they normally avoid. Just as someone can habituate to a sound of a train passing their apartment, so to can they become less anxiously responsive to things that once petrified them, with repeated exposure.

This is the primary tenet of systematic desensitization, which was illustrated by Mary Cover Jones. Wolpe gave the process its name, and perfected the therapeutic procedure.