

Extinction resistance refers to the phenomenon where a learned response, such as a conditioned fear response, persists despite attempts to extinguish it. In the context of psychology and behavioral neuroscience, extinction is a process in which a previously learned association between a conditioned stimulus (CS) and an unconditioned stimulus (US) is weakened or eliminated.

Here's a brief overview of how extinction typically works:

Conditioning: During the initial learning phase, a neutral stimulus (CS) becomes associated with an aversive or appetitive stimulus (US), leading to a conditioned response (CR). For example, a tone (CS) might be associated with a shock (US), leading to a fear response (CR).

Extinction: In extinction training, the CS is presented repeatedly without the associated US. Over time, the organism learns that the CS no longer predicts the US, and the conditioned response weakens or diminishes.

However, extinction is not always complete, and the term “extinction resistance” is used to describe situations where the learned response persists. Several factors contribute to extinction resistance:

Contextual Factors: The context in which extinction occurs can influence its effectiveness. If the extinction training occurs in a different context than the original learning, the extinction may be less effective.

Spontaneous Recovery: After a period of time following successful extinction, there can be a reappearance of the extinguished response. This is known as spontaneous recovery.

Renewal Effect: If the context is changed back to the original learning context after extinction has occurred in a different context, the conditioned response may reappear. This is known as the renewal effect.

Reinstatement: If the organism is exposed to the unconditioned stimulus again after extinction, the conditioned response may return. This is referred to as reinstatement.

Understanding extinction resistance is important in the context of treating anxiety disorders and phobias, where maladaptive learned responses can significantly impact an individual's daily life. Researchers and clinicians study ways to enhance the effectiveness of extinction training and reduce resistance to improve therapeutic outcomes.

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