

Correspondence

BEHAVIOUR THERAPY TECHNIQUES

DEAR SIR,

In his article that appeared in the *Journal* for April 1966, Dr. Marmor says:

"Wolpe, in a statement intended to demonstrate the wide applicability of such techniques, states that they are 'applicable, in fact, to almost any source of neurotic anxiety *not involving inadequacies in the handling of interpersonal relationships*' (Wolpe 1963) [Marmor's italics]. One can only be astonished that Wolpe does not realize how stringently his statement *limits* the applicability of these techniques."

What does not emerge at all from this quotation is that my reference was purely to systematic desensitization, which, of course, is only one of many behaviour therapy techniques. There are others that are explicitly applied to overcoming anxieties that do involve inadequacies in interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the techniques are applied to neuroses of all kinds and all degrees of complexity, and not just "phobias and circumscribed symptom complexes", as Marmor elsewhere suggests (cf. Wolpe, 1958; Wolpe and Lazarus, 1966).

One should surely master at least the elementary facts of a topic before delivering oneself of pronouncements about it.

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THE EL-ZAR CULT

DEAR SIR,

I should like to congratulate Dr. Okasha on his most interesting paper on the El-Zar Cult in Egypt (December 1966). However, I feel that the Pavlovian model which he uses provides an inadequate explanation of the therapeutic benefit derived from participation in such cults. Dr. Okasha states for instance that "the drums and dancing induce a state of nervous excitement and the patients are worked into frenzy, exhaustion and finally collapse followed by paradoxical inhibition, after which they may lose their abnormal patterns and return to their healthier ones". While it is true that most accounts describe frenzied dancing to the sound of rhythmic drums, the pattern is not always so stereotyped, with excitement rising to a pitch and followed by collapse. One classical account given by the authoress Zainab Fawwaz (in *The Tibb Al-Rikka or Old Wives' Medicine of Abd Al-Rahman Ismail*) makes it quite clear that the participants are often left in suspense until the next week: "Then all the ladies rose from every side . . . coaxing her to forgive them, which only made her more refractory and terrifying until the chief Kudiya rose and made her agree to come again the following week." There are other very striking features which are also ignored by neo-Pavlovians:

(1) Men are always excluded from such reunions, which meet in secret and which in many ways resemble the meetings of the secret societies that form such an important part of early British Trade Union history. This resemblance is not limited to the mere getting together of a group of underprivileged individuals but extends also to much of the ceremony involved. It would be interesting to trace the changes in the El-Zar ritual that may have occurred concurrently with the alteration in the status of women in the U.A.R.

(2) The drinking of a sacrificial animal's blood is an important part of the ceremony. Here, the parallel with other rites and rituals, e.g. the Christian mass and witch cults of various kinds, is obvious.

(3) During the ceremony one or more of the women participating adopts the role of a man, often an important sheikh who wears rich and beautiful clothes and carries a sword. I quote from the account

cited above since this is relatively inaccessible: ". . . one of them came with a bundle of clothes consisting of a change of men's clothing, namely a cloak embroidered with gold and silver thread in the best style . . . a robe of Indian silk, its ends wrought with silver, a tarbush crowned with pearls, and added to that a sword and dagger both covered in silver. She girt herself with the sword and took the dagger in her hand . . . They said 'Welcome. Who are you?'. She replied, 'I am the Sheikh Abd-el-Salam.'"

(4) Later this same participant may "regress" and act childishly. Often she is acting the part of a child who may be the son of the Sheikh whom she previously impersonated. "Then her circumstances

altered and she returned to the state of childhood, and sat upon the ground playing like a child and speaking like a child and lisping."

I feel that to apply such terms as excitation and paradoxical inhibition in these circumstances is not doing justice to the extremely complex and interesting psychological phenomena involved.

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