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Habituation

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The "Get Used to It" Concept

Habituation is a psychological learning process wherein there is a decrease in response to a stimulus after being repeatedly exposed to it. This concept states that an animal or a human may learn to ignore a stimulus because of repeated exposure to it.

When we enter a room, we may feel distracted about the noisy sound produced by an old air conditioning unit. But when we spend more time inside the room, we tend to ignore the annoying and sound although it is still present. This situation is an effect of habituation. It does not require the animal or person to be aware of this process; it may occur naturally and unconsciously.

A. Basics of Habituation

Habituation is actually a basic process of biological systems. Without it, we would not have the ability to identify the meaningful and changing information from stagnant and irrelevant ones.

Habituation is said to be present in every species of animal, including humans.There are many factors that influence the emergence of habituation in an organism. The two most important factors are:

1. The amount of time in between the first presentation of the stimulus to the organism up to the second presentation, known as **inter-stimulus interval.**
2. The length of time during which the stimulus is presented, known as **stimulus duration.**

Suppose there are two stimuli: A and B. The stimulus duration of A is 10 seconds, while that of B is 20

seconds. The concept of habituation holds that the longer the organism is exposed to the stimulus, the faster habituation occurs. Therefore, comparing the stimulus duration of A and B, we can conclude that habituation happens faster in B than in A because the organism is exposed to it. It can be said that the organism got used to B more than to A, and “habit” may be developed in the presence of B than A.

One of the most interesting facts about habituation is that the decrease in response is specific only to the stimulus with which the habit is developed. For example, if you are habituated to the taste of chocolate flavored ice cream, your degree of responding to vanilla flavored ice cream will significantly increase because you have not developed a “habit” of it yet.

B. Significance in Humans

Habituation has a scientific importance in terms of testing psychological phenomena in both animals and humans. For example, an infant may gaze upon a visual stimulus that has been presented to him for 1 minute. After habituation to that stimulus, the observer will determine the amount of time the infant spends in looking at a new stimulus. Then, the observer will compare the results and see if there is a similarity between the two stimuli presented.

Habituation simply means that a person tends to ignore the stimulus to which he has been exposed too many times. For instance, after you wear pants, you will ignore the clothing stimulus as you continue on with doing other things. This is because the pants stimulus has already disappeared perhaps due to neural adaptation in the sensory nerves. If you are habituated to wearing pants when going outside, but you suddenly wear a skirt today, your degree of response to the change in clothing stimulus is increased. This may explain the reason why you may become a bit shy or “not yourself” and often thinks if you look good on that clothing. But after several hours, you feel as though you "got used to it" and no longer puts your attention on it.

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