Regression is the display of earlier, less mature behavior after more mature behavior has been learned. Regression appears to be both a return to habits learned in childhood and a primitive, irrational response to the environment. In general, it is a dysfunctional reaction to a frustrating or fearful situation.

Regressive behavior is often found in young children facing emotional distressing situations. For example, a child who is lost at a carnival or one who is anxious at the birth of a sibling might regress to crying, talking baby talk, or displaying other infant-like behaviors.

Regression is not limited to children. Frequently, one hears of movie stars having childish fits of anger over minor difficulties. Or, someone who comes down with a slight cold and enjoys being pampered might regress to childlike behaviors.

DEVELOPING A GLOSSARY AS YOU LEARN NEW TERMS

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Learning New Terms Exercise

1.) Generalization occurs when one responds to similar situations in the same way. For example, if a dog was once kicked by a garbage collector, he may growl every time someone comes to the house to collect garbage. Or, a child frightened by lightening during a thunderstorm may cry when it threatens to rain. Sometimes generalization is shown in very complex behaviors. For example, someone who tries to please everyone – peers, teachers, even strangers on the street – may be generalizing from early attempts to please his parents. Or, someone who fears heights may be generalizing from a childhood experience of falling from a tree. The process of generalization can be very helpful in learning. For example, a child who burns his hand on a hot stove will be less likely to touch another stove.

2.) Fixation is a tendency to reject alternatives in favor of a specific goal or object. When a person often finds a given object to be satisfying, he or she may come to prefer – in fact, demand – that object, regardless of whatever other possibilities exist. For example, a small child may go through a period when he will eat only peanut butter sandwiches. Or, a young woman might develop a fixation for tall men if she once had a crush on a basketball player. Examples of fixation can be found in every aspect of life: in a preference for a certain kind of clothes, a fascination with a particular kind of entertainment, and so on. What distinguishes fixation from simple choice is one’s inability to regard similar objects as having value equal to the object of one’s fixation. In this sense, fixation is the opposite of generalization.

3.) Extinction occurs when a positive consequence is systematically withheld after a given action is performed. For example, if you put quarters in your corner newspaper box and always lost your money, you’d stop using the newspaper box. Or, if meetings at work always started late, you would stop coming to meetings early. In both cases, extinction changed your behavior.