

This chapter describes the role of learning processes in fear and anxiety. After introducing the fear conditioning model, we evaluate the external validity of this model. This relates to the question of whether fear conditioning experiments can inform clinical practice. Although there are clear similarities between the fear conditioning model and clinical anxiety at face value, some important critiques have been formulated with regard to whether the same etiological processes are at play. Specifically, early learning models provided an overly simplistic view on anxiety disorders and are insufficient to explain why some individuals develop an anxiety disorder and others do not. Extending the seminal work of Mineka and Zinbarg (2006), we demonstrate how contemporary learning theory can overcome these critiques. In addition, complex learning procedures are described that better mimic the etiological processes at play in anxiety disorders. In the last section, we describe evidence with regard to the predictive value of the conditioning model. In particular, we discuss environmental and individual-level factors that exert a similar influence in the conditioning model and in real life, demonstrating that the fear conditioning model allows for translation to real-life situations that pertain to clinical anxiety.