

The Story of a  
Kettle  
Dr Gill Le Page



# Behaviorism (John Watson, 1913)

- Focus on actions as a result of learned behaviour
- We learn new behavior through classical or operant conditioning (collectively known as 'learning theory').
- All behavior, no matter how complex, can be reduced to a simple stimulus-response association).
- Through learning, behaviours become automatic or conditioned responses

# Operant Conditioning (B. J. Skinner, 1938)

- Method of learning where the consequences of a response determine the probability of it being repeated.
- Operant conditioning:
  - Positive Reinforcement: behavior which is reinforced (rewarded) will likely be repeated
  - Negative Reinforcement: removes adverse stimuli to support or encourage certain behavior
  - Punishment: Discourages unwanted behavior which in theory will then occur less frequently.

# Operant Conditioning and the Military

- Use of lethal force in conflict situations
- Operant Conditioning & Paired Association
  - When two things occur together it triggers both an automatic and trained reaction
  - Lethal Force are learned behaviours
  - Conflict triggers feelings of threat and fear

# Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

- Fear or threat triggers sympathetic nervous system response
- Part of the ANS
- prepares the body to  
    Fight – Flight – Freeze
- Fear protects:
  - chance to take action / eliminate the danger.

# Operant Conditioning (Training)

- Use of lethal Force
- Follow orders
- Automatic / programmed reaction
- Kill or be killed
- Positive reinforcement = You get to fight another day
- Negative reinforcement = You avoid death
- Punishment?

# Transition into Civilian World

- The ANS response remains in 'threatening' situations in civilian world
  - evolutionary response to help us survive
  - governed by an old 'reptilian' part of the brain
  - allowed us to survive and evolve over millions of years, successfully responding to threats in the environment and in our bodies.
  - ANS response may be heightened in Veterans

# Transition into Civilian World

- Operant Conditioning
  - The training and associated learned behaviour of using lethal force in situations of threat and/or fear

Does not transition well into civilian Life

No positive or negative reinforcers  
Only Punishment



# Extinguishing Operant Conditioning

- Complicating factor of learned behaviours unique to the Armed Services

Do you:

- Unlearn the behaviour by simply not responding to the trigger?
- Learn that the behaviour is no longer associated with either a positive or negative reinforcer?

Or:

- Use higher brain functions, like rational thought combined with learning skills to switch off the SNS?

# Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Aaron Beck, 1967)

- Relationship between Actions - Beliefs - Consequences
- We cannot change Actions or Events
- We can change what we think about actions or events
- Dysfunctional or irrational thoughts lead to negative consequences
- Rational thoughts reduce or extinguish negative consequences
  
- If we change the way we think, we can change the way we feel and alter the consequences.

# VCN Guided Self Help Work-Books

- Psychoeducational tools
- Evidence based
- Skills based
- Problem solving
- Thinking focused
- Physical symptoms recognition
- Underpinning principles of:
  - ✓ Stop - Think - Defuse - Adjust