

Embrace Your Inner Rat



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It is important to recognize and embrace your inner laboratory animal so that you can better influence your own behavior once you decide what you want to do. Rats are particularly good for conditioning experiments because they exhibit complex innate behavior and they are uncontaminated by culture or by thinking. These rat features allowed psychologists to determine the mathematical rules of positive and negative reinforcement half a century before the neural mechanism of conditioning was properly understood. You establish a reinforcement schedule for yourself when you learn to play golf or quit smoking, master a new subject, recover from an addiction or overcome a fear. You are reconditioning yourself intentionally all the time; or trying to

without exactly knowing the rules. You are trying to embrace your inner rat.

Targets for behavior modification are not so clear when we are talking about intimate relationships, personal aspirations, kids, parents, sexuality, love, money, retirement, security, attachment or existential angst. Contrary to the strict behaviorists, humans have extremely complex language and symbolic instincts that are genetically coded and literally embodied in the wetware of our brains and vocal cords. Speech is one product of this system and thinking is another. Everything we think, say and do is conditioned on this foundation by our culture, language and situation. This is the essential postmodern insight and it is also the key to counseling and psychotherapy. From a sufficient distance many of our strongest beliefs turn out to be quite arbitrary, especially the dysfunctional ones that are causing you grief. Culture and language define who we think we are and what we think is going on, including the problems we think we have and their solutions. This is why certain kinds of thinking and talking can be especially helpful.

Depression and anxiety reflect your belief that your situation is dangerous and hopeless, that everything is a big deal, and that this is never going to change. None of these things is actually as true as it seems when you are depressed or anxious, and this insight itself provides immediate relief from depression and anxiety. This insight needs to be reinforced. Trust me. Call me.

Concise Personal Counseling

\$225 per 70-minute session ~ Walking Distance From St. John's College
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