### Abstract

The paper suggests an analysis and evaluation of the case study involving the victim of abuse called Kendra and her fifteen-year-old son Austin. The analysis of the case through the prism of learning as changes in the nervous systems results in the following conclusions: (1) Both Kendra and her son learned anxiety through classical conditioning in which previously neutral stimulus such as the sound of the motorcycle were paired with the unconditioned stimulus of violence. However, the difference between Kendra and Austin is in the fact that the woman has learned through classical conditioning alone, while her son learned through the combination of classical conditioning and observational learning. The difference can, probably, explain why Austin gets aggressive when people around him drink or take drugs. (2) The smell and taste aversion reported by Austin can be attributed to classical conditioning where the previously neutral stimulus of a meatloaf was paired to the stimulus of witnessing his mother unconscious. (3) The difference in Kendra’s and Austin’s memories can be attributed to different experiences involved in their learning.

### Conditioning and Abuse Case Study

The paper analyzes the case study by paying attention to relevant psychological factors involved in learning and memory. In particular, the paper examines the sources of Kendra’s and Austin’s conditioning, identifies the source of Austin’s smell aversion, and suggests reasons for differences in Kendra’s and her son’s memories.

### Types and Source(s) of Conditioning

The case allows assuming that Kendra’s and Austin’s learning occurred through classical conditioning. Coon and Mitterer (Ref-f063042) in their book Psychology: A Journey suggest the following description of classical conditioning: “In classical conditioning, an antecedent stimulus that doesn’t produce a response is linked with the one that does (a horn is associated with a puff of air to the eye, for example). We can say that learning has occurred when the new stimulus will also elicit (bring forth) responses” (p. 234). For example, Kendra feels scared every time she hears the motor of a specific type of motorcycle because she has learned the association between the sound and her abusive partner. The woman is anxious because she associates the sound with the trauma caused by the man.

Classical conditioning is also the reason why Kendra’s son Austin gets aggressive when people around him drink or take drugs. Due to witnessing his mother’s abusive relationships, Austin learned the association between substance abuse and violence. However, Austin’s case is considered to be somewhat more complicated than that of Kendra because the boy’s learning involved both classical conditioning and observational learning. The latter was the result of Austin’s witnessing abusive relationships and learning to be aggressive.

Despite the mentioned difference, it is possible asserting that in both cases, Kendra’s ex-husband was the main source of conditioning. By either falling the victim of or witnessing the abusive relationships, Kendra and Austin learned the man was the source of danger. Therefore, they report anxiety every time they encounter something reminding them of the aggressor.

### Reasons for Austin’s Smell Aversion

Based on the case study, Austin reports smell aversion which can be the reason for classical conditioning. The case suggests that the woman was cooking meat the day when Austin found her laying unconsciously on the floor. In the described case, witnessing his mother unconscious created an association between the previously neutral stimuli, such as the smell of a meatloaf, and smell and taste aversion as a response to it.

## Reasons for Kendra’s Memories Being Different from Austin’s Memories

The case suggests there is the difference between Kendra’s and Austin’s memories. In particular, Kendra asserts the ex-husband abused her twice during the six-year period, while Austin claims his mother was abused daily. The differences in the memories might be attributed to the fact that the woman and her son were conditioned by different factors such as being a victim of abuse and witnessing abuse.