

Learning through conditioning (operant conditioning)

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Learning Through Conditioning (Operant Conditioning) In the mid-twentieth century psychologist B. F. Skinner advanced the notion of behaviorism. Behaviorism contends that fundamental human actions are the result, not of unconscious impulses as Sigmund Freud had theorized, but by conditioning aspects of existence (Myers). Within this spectrum of understanding, Skinner proposed two separate modes of conditioning: operant conditioning and classical conditioning. The primary difference between these types of conditioning is that operant conditioning functions by altering existing behavior through an outside stimulus; conversely, classical conditioning considers behavior as reflexive aspect of past conditioning actions. It follows that operant conditioning is utilized most thoroughly in psychology as a means of altering unwanted or dysfunctional behaviors. This essay functions by considering one such aspect of behavior and proposing a solution to it based on Skinner's operant conditioning methods. The specific behavior in question involves my cat Chester. During household meals, when the food is on the dinner table, Chester will jump from the ground onto the table. Chester will then attempt to eat the food that is there, disturbing the individuals who are eating. While the exact reasons Chester learned this behavior are not clear, it seems apparent that his behavior is responding through classical conditioning to the stimulus of food on the table. It is the goal of this essay to implement operant conditioning to alter Chester's behavior away from jumping on the table to go after food. In implementing operant conditioning to alter Chester the cat's behavior, three of the important considerations involved are reinforcement, punishment, and extinction. Currently whenever Chester jumps on the table while we are eating the only response we have to his actions are to chastise him and then <https://assignbuster.com/learning-through-conditioning-operant-conditioning/>

move him to the ground. While this constitutes a general form of negative reinforcement, it clearly has not gone far enough in conditioning his behavior away from these actions. It seems that in large part his behavior is being reinforced by the rare instances where he has actually attained food by jumping on the table. In altering Chester's behavior, it's clear that reinforcement mechanisms must be utilized as a means of extinguishing Chester's current behavior and replacing it with a more functional behavior during times when we are eating or have food on the table. The first step in altering Chester's behavior is through implementing punishment techniques as a means of extinguishing the behavior. Within this spectrum of understanding Skinner proposes both positive and negative punishment techniques (Reynolds 1980). In the case of Chester's behavior, positive punishment will be implemented, as after he jumps on the table he will receive the punishment. In these regards, whenever Chester jumps on the table, he will immediately be placed in his cage. In addition to positive punishment techniques, reinforcement techniques will be implemented. Skinner articulated both positive and negative reinforcement techniques; positive techniques represent techniques where behavior is reinforced through the addition of a positive stimulus (Reynolds 1980). For Chester, positive reinforcement will be utilized. If he responds to the punishment conditioning mechanisms and does not jump on the table, then he will receive positive reinforcement through a cat treat. At this point it is believed that Chester's behavior will be conditioned away from jumping on the table. Rather than jumping on the table when people are eating and trying to access food, Chester's behavior will be changed and he will instead be involved in more functional behavior, such as playing with his toys, sleeping,

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or other such daily actions he regularly participates. Even as it is believed Chester's behavior will change, it's possible that the positive punishment, or positive reinforcement he receives will ultimately result in his satiation of the stimulus. In these regards, the same sorts of punishment and reinforcement will be utilized, except with different stimulus tools. In conclusion, this essay has considered B. F. Skinner's theory of behaviorism in relation to operant conditioning. Specifically, this essay has considered the means by which operant conditioning can be implemented to change my cat, Chester's, behavior away from jumping on the table and going after food. In these regards, positive punishment is first be utilized through putting Chester in a cage whenever he jumps on the table. As this conditioning begins to take hold, and Chester demonstrates instances of not jumping on the table, then he will receive positive reinforcement through receiving cat treats. In following these actions and gradually conditioning Chester's behavior away from jumping on the table, the behavior will ultimately be extinguished. Ultimately, these techniques follow Skinner's theory of operant conditioning in reshaping Chester's behavior. References Myers, D. G. Psychology, Ninth Edition in Modules. Reynolds, George. (1980) A Primer of Operant Conditioning. New York: Foresman.