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BUSTER**

## Psychology

“ Failure to escape traumatic shock” by Seligman and Maier” (1967)

The importance of the study was to ascertain whether or not dogs that were used in the experiment would try to escape if they were placed under undue stress (electric shock). Seligman and his colleague tried to determine the ways in which the dogs could learn by exposing them to three types of electric shock experiments. They found that in the groups, the dogs, who were placed in three groups, escape, yoked and control, were able to learn the escape/avoidance training that was administered to them. The set in the escape group and those in the yoked group were able to learn more than those in the control group. They found out that some were able to escape, while some just resorted to enduring the shocks. This study was famous because it could also be applied to humans who endured depression. In fact, a reformulation of depression in humans was done from this study. I learned that dogs bore some similarity to humans, because in the same way as humans, the dogs were able to either change their situations that were not to their liking (the electric shock), or just give up and go through whatever it was that they were going through because they felt that there was no way out of that situation. The dogs are a true representation of people and even though they are unable to speak, they display the same mannerisms as people. This study was effective in gaining an insight into the mannerisms of the dogs so that they could co-relate it to that of humans.

B. If you were able to revise this study so that it involved humans, what methods would you implement to try to see if humans would behave the

same way as the dogs?

If I was able to, I would revise the study and included humans who were in certain situations, such as abuse or domestic violence. I would place some individuals in an atmosphere that included the abuser, with no way to escape, as well as a way to escape. Alternately, I could study several individuals who were caught in one of these situations to see if, and how long it would take them to realize that they could do better. My method would create learned helplessness by letting me see how many would try to leave the situation and how many would think that it was their fate, that they could not do better and accepted the situation that they were in. I would be able to see whether or not these individuals had learned helplessness by the same way in which the dogs responded. I perceive that the humans would respond in the same way and if they became rebellious, or submissive, then I would know if they had acquired learned helplessness. I do not think that in these situations, I would have to drug the humans for them to display certain behaviors. Humans create their own misery by failing to look at every aspect of their situation and developing a black or white perception, instead of one that has many colors.

C. The results of this study showed a clear difference in behavior between dogs that escaped and dogs that continued to be shocked. Explain why this happened. In other words, why did some dogs leave, and why did some dogs stay?

In the experiment that involved the shuttle box apparatus, the dogs were able to escape if they jumped over a partition, the only dogs that performed poorly were the ones that had gone through the inescapable shock

experiment. They refused to try to escape and were passive in their acceptance of their shocks. The control group dogs and those that were exposed to controllable shocks were the ones who jumped the partition to escape. Seligman and Maier were of the opinion that the dogs thought the shocks were inescapable, so they became passive. Those that went through the inescapable experiment acquired learned helplessness as they thought that the outcomes were independent of their efforts. Additional research tried to ascertain whether or not the poor performance of the dogs that were shocked was because of interference. While the dogs struggled with their harness in the inescapable shock experiment, they learned afterwards that they could respond, and it would interfere with their normal escape method. The dogs were immobilized with a drug that caused paralysis, known as curae, which was a possibility of what caused their helpless behavior. Dogs are not able to display negative or positive tendencies and they are aggressors and born survivors. They would try anything to escape if they were able to.

D. Based on these results, what can you infer about how this may relate to human behavior? Specifically, how could this explain how people respond to negative events in their life?

Human behavior is somewhat similar in nature to the dogs in the experiment. If the human perceives that the situation is inescapable they become passive and accept their fate. If however, they perceive that there is a way out, they will go to any means to find that way out of their situation. It all boils down to being positive or negative, negative people will perceive that they cannot do better, while the positive ones will know that they can.

People respond to negative events in their lives in a negative way. They are of the mindset that they are unable to do better and become depressed as a result, instead of trying to envision a way out. Seligman and Maier accurately depicted this scenario with their experiment and the outcomes.

E. Although this study used intense methods, such as causing animals unavoidable pain, think about how these methods could relate to people in an everyday real world situation. What types of situations could someone be in that would relate to this study? Do you think that these results would only apply to a person who is constantly having very negative experiences, or could these results also apply to anyone during any time of conflict? Explain. The methods are similar to that of a soldier who was captured and subjected to torture. He would be subjected to ongoing torture until he gave his torturers the information that they wanted. He would be shocked as well, but if the soldier felt that there was a way out, he would try to find it. If he decides, on the other hand, that the torture was inescapable, he would submit to the pain and anguish. It could also bear similarity to people caught in domestic violence or abuse. Instead of trying to get out, many become depressed and accept their fate. People who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are also examples, as they either seek help, or become recluses because of their situation. I think it would more apply to those who are constantly negative. These are the ones who believe that they are unable to get past a situation. Other, more positive people would not think, but know that they can do better in any given situation. Many of these people who have learned helplessness become depressed, as they feel

helpless in their situations. They will either seek help for their condition, or continue to endure it.

## **References**

Seligman, Martin E., and Seven F. Maier. 'Failure To Escape Traumatic Shock.'. *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 74. 1 (1967): 1-9. Web.