

Example of essay on classical and operant conditioning

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



For quite a long time, psychologists sought to understand the mechanism behind the various ways through which people acquire their behaviors. There are various studies done to investigate this phenomenon. The essay below describes two of the theories that have been derived.

Classical and Operant Conditioning

Classical Conditioning

This is a theory that was discovered by a Russian Scientist Pavlov. He was experimenting on the digestive patterns in dogs, and therefore gave them meat powder with tubes attached to their bodies so that the response of the various organs can be ascertained. However, he started noting that the dogs would start salivating the moment they saw the meat powder. Later, they started salivating when they saw the person who used to feed them entering the room. In the long run, he became interested in this new phenomenon.

Operant Conditioning

This is a theory that was discovered by Skinner. He had a rat placed in a cage with a lever inside. Whenever the rat stepped on the lever, food would be released into the cage. With time, this reward system made the rat used to the fact that when it presses the lever there will always be food. The operant conditioning therefore claims that if an individual believes that a certain behavior rewards, there is the possibility to uphold it as there is a belief that there will always be a reward (Boeree, 2012). The condition that helps in maintaining the behavior is known as the reinforcement.

The positive aspects of the classical and conditioned theories are that they can be used in acquiring the desired behaviors in individuals. All that is needed is commitment to ensure that the correct behavior is enforced, and all goes well. The disadvantage with operant conditioning is that there always has to be the reinforcement, otherwise the behavior will cease, or what is called the extinction. On the other hand, the conditioned behavior is disadvantageous on the basis that the individual tends to associate a given stimulus with a specific behavior. As such, if the same stimulus was given under different circumstances, there is the possibility that the same behavior would result, which would be inappropriate for the context at hand.

Despite the shortcomings of the theories, they are still in use by theorists (Counseling Collection. com, 2012). For instance, the classical conditioning can be employed by babysitters, where they give a crying child a piece of clothing that belongs to the parent. Due to the scent in the cloth, the child feels comfort by thinking that the parent is near. Operant conditioning is also still in use. For instance, students at school can realize that whenever they do something good, the teachers always reward them. As such, they would always strive to do good so that they can get the reward. In other words, they realize that doing good is an operant behavior that is associated with a reward. They thus take it up and perfect it as well.

Allpsych Online. (2003). Classical and Operant Conditioning. Retrieved on 24th May 2012 from <http://allpsych.com/psychology101/conditioning.html>

Boeree, G. C. (2012). B. F. Skinner (1904-1990). Retrieved on 24th May 2012 from <http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/skinner.html>

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