

Analysis and discussion

Business



Skinner's theory on learned behavior is basically based on the concept of behaviorism, which seeks to understand behavior as a function of environmental histories of experiencing consequences. In his works he proposed the widespread use of psychological behavior modification techniques, primarily operant conditioning, in order to improve society and increase human happiness; and as a form of social engineering.

He conducted research on shaping behavior through positive and negative reinforcement and demonstrated operant conditioning, a behavior modification technique which he developed in contrast with classical conditioning.[1]Operant conditioning is defined as the use of consequences to modify the occurrence and form of behavior” and is distinguished from Pavlovian conditioning in that the former deals with the modification of voluntary behavior through the use of consequences, while Pavlovian conditioning deals with the conditioning of behavior so that it occurs under new antecedent conditions. It is sometimes called instrumental conditioning or instrumental learning and was first extensively studied by Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949), who observed the behavior of cats trying to escape from home-made puzzle boxes. Thorndike then had his Law of Effect, where he theorized that successful responses, those producing satisfying consequences, were “ stamped in” by the experience and thus occurred more frequently and that unsuccessful responses, those producing annoying consequences, were stamped out and subsequently occurred less frequently. Thorndike found that some consequences strengthened behavior and some consequences weakened behavior.

Skinner conducted further studies and used Thorndike's ideas to construct a more detailed theory of operant conditioning based on reinforcement, punishment, and extinction. [2]The work of Hall, Lindzey and Campbell[3] explained also Skinner's operant conditioning saying that the strength of one's responses of several responses occurs when followed by responses. The authors said that this is where the use of 'operant' comes in as they defined an operant as a response that operates on the environment and changes it. They said, "The change in environment affects the subsequent occurrence of the response. In operant conditioning therefore, the reinforcer is not associated with eliciting the stimulus as it is when the respondents are conditioned.

Instead it is associated with the response. When a salivary response is conditioned to the sound of a bell, the presentation of the meat does not depend on the prior occurrence of the response. On the other hand when the operant responses are conditioned, it is essential that the reinforcer be presented after the occurrence of the response. Only in this way does the frequency of the response increase." [4]Skinner in effect made modification on Thorndike's position in two key respects.

First, it must be stated that Thorndike (1898) had summarized his position in terms of law of effect. Said states that responses that produce a satisfying effect become more likely to occur again in that particular situation and that responses that produce an unsatisfying effect become less likely to occur again in that particular situation. Skinner wanted to build a psychology using observable phenomena rather than making reference to internal events within the organism. Skinner then rejected any reference to the satisfying <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-and-discussion/>

and unsatisfying effects, as Thorndike had based. Skinner chose to refer to the observable effect of stimulus on behavior where he proposed the empirical law of effect. Under said empirical law, Skinner found that reinforcing the stimulus is an event that increase the frequency of behavior with which it is paired with no reference to satisfaction or any internal event.

[5]The second way Skinner modified Thorndike is about the model by Thorndike which required the organism to produce the full behavior before the environment could act on it. Hall, Lindzey and Campbell observed that in the real world however, many behaviors are so complex that it is extremely unlikely that the organism would ever produce them in the first place making the law of effect not being able account for the strengthening of the behavior that is too complicated to occur by itself. They explained that adult might be prepared to reinforce a child for riding or bicycle or for reading a book or a dog for rolling over, but such behaviors are highly unlikely to occur by themselves. It is here where Skinner had proposed that organisms can learn such complicated behaviors through shaping using the principle of successive approximations and this can be done by starting to reinforce behaviors at the first step toward the final behavior and then gradually reinforcing successively closer approximations to the final behavior[6]In support of reinforcement theory, Wikipedia said that Skinner did not advocate the use of punishment where its was found in his research suggesting that punishment was an ineffective way of controlling behavior, leading generally to short-term behavior change, but resulting mostly in the subject attempting to avoid the punishing stimulus instead of avoiding the behavior that was causing punishment. It illustrated using a simple example

in the case the failure of prison to eliminate criminal behavior. Wikipedia argued that if prison (as a punishing stimulus) was effective at altering behavior, there would be no criminality, since the risk of imprisonment for criminal conduct is well established.

Hence, Skinner found that individuals still commit offences, but attempt to avoid discovery and therefore punishment. This is on the premise that punishing stimulus does not stop criminal behavior; the criminal simply becomes more sophisticated at avoiding the punishment. Skinner posited then that reinforcement, both positive and negative (the latter of which is often confused with punishment), are more effective in bringing about lasting changes in behavior.[7] Skinner conducted experiment where he examined the formation of superstition in one of his favorite experimental animals, the pigeon. Wikipedia described it saying, “ Skinner placed a series of hungry pigeons in a cage attached to an automatic mechanism that delivered food to the pigeon “ at regular intervals with no reference whatsoever to the bird’s behavior.” He discovered that the pigeons associated the delivery of the food with whatever chance actions they had been performing as it was delivered, and that they subsequently continued to perform these same actions.

” [8] With responses that he got, “ Skinner suggested that the pigeons believed that they were influencing the automatic mechanism with their “ rituals” and that this experiment shed light on human behavior: The experiment might be said to demonstrate a sort of superstition.”[9] Skinner thus observed that the bird behaves as if there were a causal relation between its behavior and the presentation of food, when in truth and in fact <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-and-discussion/>

there is no relation at all. By analogy, he compared this with human behavior where rituals for changing one's fortune at cards are good examples.[10] This also explains why people continue to behave in a certain way especially when they attribute some success in making such behavior. Conclusion: Skinner's theory of learning still applies up to this time.

His reinforcement theory appears more effective than punishment in really influencing behavior. His theories have wide implications since human behavior is not only limited in educational psychology but also to criminology, business management and other related fields of study. Work Cited Calvin, H. Gardner and Campbell, Theories of personality, John Wiley and Sons, Inc New York, 1998 Wikipedia, Operant Conditioning, 2006, {www document} URL http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operant_conditioning#Factors_that_alter_the_effectiveness_of_consequences, Accessed October 12, 2006

wikipedia.

org/wiki/Operant_conditioning#Factors_that_alter_the_effectiveness_of_consequences, Accessed October 12, 2006 Wikipedia, B. F. Skinner, 2006 {www document} URL http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._F._Skinner, Accessed October 12, 2006