

Operant conditioning by b. f skinner assignment

[Psychology](#)



Introduction People do on a day to day basis, many actions without realizing it, and most of the time, they don't know why they do them. Certain reinforcements, some positive, and some negative have conditioned their actions and thoughts. In this essay, I chose Burrhus Frederic Skinner who came up with the theory of operant conditioning. B. F. skinner,(March 20, 1904 ??? August 18, 1990) is an American psychologist who believed that we do have such a thing as a mind, but that it is simply more productive to study observable behavior rather than internal mental events.

As Skinner's theory was based on the earlier work of Thorndike, he also believed that the best way to understand a behavior is to look at the causes of the action and its consequences. He called this approach operant conditioning. Skinner's most well known and respected contribution to behaviorism and psychology in general was his findings to do with behavior and the effect of reinforcement on responses and the role of operant conditioning in learning. Main Assumption The main assumption that Skinner's theory is based on is that human behavior follows ' laws' and that the causes of human behavior is something in their environment.

He came up with the four possible consequences (Appendix 1) which show how behavior can be reinforced to make it more or less frequent, or even extinct. It is basically learning from the consequences of our behavior which are: ??? Positive reinforcement ??? Negative Reinforcement ??? Punishment (Positive and Negative) Skinner's theory of operant conditioning states that when a behavior is followed by a reinforcing agent that behavior is more likely to be repeated in the future under similar circumstances, when the behavior is followed by a negative reinforcement agent that behavior is less

<https://assignbuster.com/operant-conditioning-by-b-f-skinner-assignment/>

likely to be repeated in the future. In the language of operant conditioning, reinforcement occurs when a consequence strengthens a response, or makes it more likely to reoccur. ” (Sigelman and Rider , 2006, P. 37) Case study: John, a 9 years old boy is often lazy to complete his homework and revise his studies, and had rather watch the drama serial on the television which is religiously followed by his mother during his study time in the afternoon. In the evening, he rushes out to play soccer with his neighbourhood mates. His mother is a housewife whilst his strict father is working during daytime.

Let's us apply the four consequences of our behavior to this case study and see the outcome: ??? Administer pleasant stimuli: John's mother allow him to watch television as he wishes during his study time. This will actually increase his laziness in completing the homework. ??? Withdrawn pleasant stimuli: John's mother will remove his privilege of playing soccer in the evening with his neighbourhood mates. This will motivate John to get his homework completed on time so he will be able to go out to play in the evening. ??? Administer unpleasant stimuli: John's mother threatens to tell his father regarding his laziness.

John will feel threatened as he is afraid of his strict father thus will complete his homework. ??? Withdrawn unpleasant stimuli: John's mother will sacrifice watching her favourite drama serial during John's study time. This will make John lazy to complete his homework every afternoon as he know his mother would have to miss her favourite drama serial because of his laziness.

Recently, a humorous tagline has been attached to Singapore as a ' Fine'

city. This basically refers to the laws of summon for actions like littering, jay-walking, spitting and even smoking in enclosed areas.

This basically illustrates administering unpleasant stimuli to weaken our actions or behavior in a Singapore context. “ Whereas reinforcement increase the strength of behavior that preceded it, punishment decreases the strength of, or weakens, that behavior. ” (Sigelman and Rider , 2006, P. 37) Skinner also believed that psychology is similar to science, as he study and derive his theory under science methods. For example he studies the behavior of rats under carefully controlled laboratory conditions. Skinner Box Skinner illustrated positive reinforcement by placing a hungry rat in his Skinner box (Appendix 2).

The box contained a lever in the side and as the rat moved about the box it would accidentally knock the lever. As the lever move, a food pellet would drop into a container next to the lever. The rats quickly learned to go straight to the lever after a few times of being put in the box. The consequence of receiving food if they pressed the lever ensured that they would repeat the action again and again. Skinner illustrated negative reinforcement by placing a rat in his Skinner box and then subjecting it to an unpleasant electric current which caused it some discomfort.

As the rat moved about the box it would accidentally knock into the lever. Immediately as it did so, the electric current would be switched off. The rats quickly learned to go straight to the lever after a few times of being put in the box. The consequence of escaping the electric current ensured that they would repeat the action again and again. Human and animals are not alike

<https://assignbuster.com/operant-conditioning-by-b-f-skinner-assignment/>

Based on the Skinner box, we are able to conclude that Skinner actually conducts and derived his theories from rats and other animals such as pigeon.

The experiment on pigeon was referred to as the “ Superstition in Pigeon” in which a pigeon was kept in a cage and at regular intervals with no reference whatsoever to the bird’s behavior, the bird was delivered food. Skinner discovered then that the pigeon 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. He applied directly the theories he derived from his conduct of experiments on this animals to human beings. He did not take into account that human beings are much more complex compared to a rat.

He also did not extend his studies to real-life situation. Skinner proposed that the way humans learn behavior is much the same as the way the rats learned to press a lever which is not true to a certain extent as the relevance to human behavior is minimal. He did not consider that people are unique and cannot be compared to animals as humans have free-will and can self-actualize whereas an animal does not have that capability. Abolish other factors Another criticism would be that Skinner never consider other factors aside from environment in deriving his theory.

He only concentrate on the observables that is the environment and the behaviour only. He over-emphasise on environment almost deem as if he abolish all other factors which can affect behavioural learning. For example, human being tend to relect on the consequence of their action before

deciding it is right or wrong. But Skinner did not mention on reflection or self-awareness in his studies. He believed mind and feelings does not play any part in determining behaviour. He also applied the exact same principle to all span of life regardless of age. He did not take into account the cognitive abilities to analyze the consequences of an action.

He also ignored social values and complex emotional structures of a human being. On a biological approach, Skinner doesn't recognize how hormones and chromosomes affect behavior. For example, testosterone makes a person more aggressive. He believe that everyone regardless of upbringing, genes and educational background can be related to operant conditioning similarly. " Yet some developmentalists believe that Skinner placed too much emphasis on a single type of learning and too little emphasis on the role of cognitive processes such as attention, memory, and reflection in learning. (Sigelman and Rider (2006, P. 38) Working with children and families In Singapore context, the theory of operant conditioning can be applied in more ways than one. In a school setting in Singapore, many children nowadays have major problem speaking proper English or mother tongue. As reading vastly improves the language usage, libraries could come up with incentives like receiving stamps for every book review the student submits. This would encourage students to read a book and at the same time, improve writing skills while doing the book review.

When they have received 5 stamps, they will be entitled to a free gift such as a book mark. This is an example of administering pleasant stimuli (bookmark) to enhance behavior (reading books). For families in the Singapore context, there is an upward trend of both parental figures working <https://assignbuster.com/operant-conditioning-by-b-f-skinner-assignment/>

and resulting in lack of quality time being spent with children. In order to promote more time bonding as a family, the government could implement compulsory leaves for parents to apply such as ' Family Activity leave' each year so that parents will have to take time off from respective works to engage in activities with their loved ones.

This is also another example of administering pleasant stimuli (compulsory leave) to strengthen the behavior which is spending time with family.

Conclusion Operant Conditioning is widely used in Singapore context to create family cohesion and improve education in our children. Skinner gave a new aspect to behaviorism that has outstanding contribution to psychology and humanity as a whole. B. F. Skinner has and will always be one of the most brilliant American psychologists and an influential exponent of behaviorism.