

# Bobby fischer psychology flashcard



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The main character, Josh Waitzkin, in the movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, has learned about the game of chess and the consequences of winning and losing through operant and observational conditioning. Operant conditioning, according to *The Free Dictionary*, is “ a process of behavior modification in which the likelihood of a specific behavior is increased or decreased through positive or negative reinforcement each time the behavior is exhibited, so that the subject comes to associate the pleasure or displeasure of the reinforcement with the behavior”.

Observational conditioning, according to *Princeton*, is “ a type of learning that occurs as a function of observing, retaining and replicating novel behavior executed by others”. Many scenes demonstrate concepts from the psychology of conditioning, such as reinforcement, overjustification effect, punishment, and modeling. These concepts are methods used by Josh’s friend, teacher, and parents to help Josh become a better chess player.

Reinforcement is used constantly throughout the movie to aid Josh in becoming a better chess player.

The different types of reinforcement used in this movie are primary reinforcement and secondary reinforcement. Reinforcement is a method is operant conditioning to reinforce a behavior by associating a behavior with positive outcome. Primary reinforcement is reinforcement with an outcome that satisfies a basic need such as food, water, affection, etc. In the movie, Josh’s father and teacher reward him verbally when Josh does the correct move and wins the championship game against Poe.

Verbally rewarding Josh is a type of primary reinforcement because it is a type of affection, a basic human need. Secondary reinforcement is a type of reinforcement that the subject learns to appreciate, such as money and luxury. Josh receives chess points for doing well in his class in order to receive his master certificate. Receiving points is a secondary reinforcement because he learned to treasure the points. When a subject receives excess reinforcement, overjustification effect can happen and the subject does the activity for the incentive and not because of own motivation.

Josh already enjoyed playing chess and by giving him more reinforcement, by giving Josh points whenever he won, caused Josh's mindset to change from wanting to play for enjoyment, to playing to get a certificate.

Punishment is also an important aspect of operant conditioning to discourage a behavior by associating it with a negative outcome. There are different types of punishments, positive and negative punishment. Positive punishment is receiving a negative consequence to discourage a behavior; while on the other hand, negative punishment is omitting a positive outcome.

Josh's father yelled and alienated Josh in the rain when he lost his first championship match by throwing the game. Yelling and alienating is a form of positive punishment because it adds stress and makes Josh miserable. Other than using operant conditioning to teach in the movie, Josh also learnt through observational conditioning. A subject learns observational conditioning through modeling, which is learning by watching an activity and understanding the logic behind the activity.

Josh is first taught by mimicry as he watched people in the park play and tried to understand why the pieces were placed the way they did. Josh's friend, teacher, and parents used operant and observational conditioning throughout the movie to teach Josh to become a better chess player.

Concepts of conditioning used in the movie were primary and secondary reinforcement, overjustification effect, positive punishment, and mimicry. It is through these concepts that Josh Waitzkin became the best under eighteen chess player in the country.