

Free essay on learning and conditioning

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About five years ago, I had an unpleasant experience while driving with my friends. We got in a car and drove all over the city. At one point, while I was sitting in the back seat, a friend who was driving caused an accident. Fortunately, nobody was injured. However, I got very scared and couldn't calm down for a while. Soon after that a friend offered to drive me home and I had to sit in the back. When I entered the car, I felt enormous fear. This can be explained by classical conditioning. In fact, this is a special type of classical conditioning called emotional conditioning. Here, sitting in the back seat of the car represents neutral stimulus that later became conditional stimulus. The car accident is the unconditional stimulus because it naturally triggers a response. It causes fear, and that is why the fear is the unconditional response. Pairing these two stimuli (sitting in the back seat of the car and the accident) caused the appearance of conditioned response. In this case, it is the emotion of fear when sitting in the back seat of a car. I felt certain discomfort even when driving in the front seat which indicates that generalization occurred. To some extent, fear switched to other stimuli that are similar to the conditional stimuli. Unfortunately, I didn't notice any extinction so far. I still feel discomfort while driving a car and very distressed while sitting in the back seat.

The experience of my cousin represents another example of classical conditioning. She was eleven years old when she had pneumonia. She had high temperature and felt very noxious. The illness caused the loss of appetite. She barely ate anything. When she got a little better she asked her mother to make her a pie because it was her favorite food. Her mother made her what she asked for. My cousin was so hungry that she ate the whole pie

by herself. However, a few minutes after she ate the last piece, she felt noxious and had to throw up. Her stomach wasn't used to a large amount of food and that caused troubles. Even though she was aware of that, the next time she smelled an apple pie she felt noxious and was disgusted. In this example, a pie represents the neutral stimulus. This neutral stimulus will later turn to conditional stimulus. Unconditional stimulus is overeating and it causes unconditional response, which is, in this case, nausea and disgust. When the pie and overeating were presented together, classical conditioning appeared. My cousin learned to react just by smelling a pie. This learned reaction is a conditioned response (disgust on the smell of a pie). After a while we had a family gathering and my grandmother baked some cookies with apples for the occasion. My cousin wanted to try those cookies but when she put it in her mouth she couldn't swallow it. She felt sick and had to run to the bathroom. The smell of baked apples triggered the conditioned response. This occurred due to the generalization of the conditioned stimulus. Similar smell and taste caused the conditioned reaction. When my cousin completely recovered from pneumonia her appetite was normalized. She was eating all her favorite foods again but couldn't eat anything with baked apples. However, after some period of time, the smell that caused nausea was no longer that repulsive. This conditioned response decreased in intensity, and now she eats apple pie, and even enjoys in it. There was no repetitive pairing of conditioned and unconditioned stimulus which caused extinction. Although it is known that taste aversions last for a long period of time due to biological preparedness, the extinction, in this example, probably occurred because she was familiar with the taste prior to the

learning. Maybe, if the taste was new, the extinction would not have occurred.

Work cited

Franzoi, Stephen. Psychology: A discovery experience. Cengage Learning, 2010. Print.