

# Operant conditioning and superstitions

Psychology



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The Operant Conditioning The operant conditioning is a psychological theory invented by Thorndike while he researched to understand the intelligence quotient of animals. In this experiment Thorndike studied the external situation and the response of mouse when locked in a puzzle box. He was studying the process of transformation of the conscious mind to the science of behavior. The instrumental learning of Thorndike is termed as “operant conditioning” where the individuals accustomed with new responses in align with that “operate on” the environment. Operant conditioning is a theory which suggested the effect of punishment on the stimuli response of an individual. It also states that the response stop as the reinforcement stops. The operational conditioning was on rise because it allowed the psychological world to study the cognitive processing of animals and humans. According to (Labrador, 2004, pg. 178-187)“ Quickly, operant conditioning application began to increase and a trend developed into what we called BM” The factors for its rise is due to its ability in performing control and behavior modification, treating individuals , studying individual’s response in social and non-social environment, concentrate on consequences of behavior and so on. As per (Goldman, 2012)“ The tools used in operant conditioning are known as positive and negative reinforcement and positive and negative punishment”. It is a known fact that the operant conditioning gives way to superstition behavior in people. It is the principle of operant conditioning which associates action with consequences that lead to development of superstition and the process of maintaining it. Superstitions are part of many people’s life and there are different types of superstitions which individual nurture in order to get gain or happiness to oneself. One of the superstitions is the wearing of lucky charm while gambling in order to

<https://assignbuster.com/operant-conditioning-and-superstitions/>

win. Here looking from operant conditioning theory, the gambler is working on positive reinforcement by utilizing variable ratio schedule of reinforcement. According to (Krigman, 2004) “ The most powerful feature of the slots for encouraging desired behavior, Professor Creed believes, is the reinforcement function”. The operant conditioning theory believes that superstitions are caused when an individual connect his actions with consequences. When certain action reinforce positive or negative outcome, then a person avoid or perform the particular action to reduce loss or reap benefit. The mind is conditioned to believe that certain operations rule the consequences of certain actions which are deemed as superstition. When a random set of actions are rewarded, people tend to reinforce actions to get same outcome from the same action. So as the operant conditioning mentions, the individual reinforce the action to get the repeated consequences . If an action gives negative result then the person will avoid that action in order to stop loss. So the principle of operant conditioning reveals why the superstitious beliefs get long ingrained in the minds of the people. Operational conditioning is a psychological process where in an individual associates his action with consequences which can be bad or good. If a person experience that certain action can bring bad consequences then he avoid it and when it gives good results he reinforce it. The person looks at the result and performs the action repeatedly to gain or avoid loss. A superstition is arisen when a person is rewarded or punished for a random set of actions. The way to stop superstition is to continue behaving superstitiously without getting reward or punishment until the association of the action with result is extinguished. As per(Vyse, 1997, pg. 3)“ Our understanding of the natural world tells us that these signs and gestures

<https://assignbuster.com/operant-conditioning-and-superstitions/>

cannot possibly affect the events at which they are directed, yet superstition is extremely common, if not universal". Thinking about superstition, I recall one of my friends had this unusual way of wearing a silver chain with cross on his exam days in order to win a high score. He states that twice he wore this chain and he got score beyond 70 percentages. Here we can associate this instance with the operant conditioning behavior, where the friend is wearing the silver chain for the third time to get good scores in exam. The action is being reinforced in order to have a positive consequence. This repetition of the behavior take the form of superstition wherein he blindly believes that wearing chain can increase his score despite of his hard work. As per (Spencer, 2000)" Superstition is also associated with more impractical and random occurrences. For instance, a person might see a black cat and minutes later they find they have lost their purse or wallet". Bibliography Goldman, J. G. (2012, December 13). What is operant conditioning?. In <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com> . Retrieved July 3, 2013, from <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/thoughtful-animal/2012/12/13/what-is-operant-conditioning-and-how-does-it-explain-driving-dogs/> Krigman, A. L. (2004, April 12). If Pavlov Played the Slots, He wouldn't Have Needed a Dog. In <http://krigman.casinocitytimes.com>. Retrieved July 3, 2013, from <http://krigman.casinocitytimes.com/article/if-pavlov-played-the-slots-he-wouldnt-have-needed-a-dog-10510> Labrador, F. J. (2004). Skinner and the Rise of Behavior Modification. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 7(2), 178-187. Spencer, P. (2000). Conditioning and Superstition. In <http://thedivinenature.blogspot.com/2009/09/conditioning-and-superstition.html>. Retrieved July 3, 2013, from <http://thedivinenature.blogspot.com/2009/09/conditioning-and-superstition.html> Vyse, S. A. <https://assignbuster.com/operant-conditioning-and-superstitions/>

(1997). *Believing in Magic: The psychology* (p. 3). Oxford: Oxford University Press.