**PS360: Applied Behavior Analysis I**

**Discussion Board Lecture: Unit 2**

**Introduction to Unit 2: Behavior Analysis – Repertoire – Reinforcement: Negative Reinforcement**

Welcome, students! Unit 2 focuses on aversive stimuli and our responses to them. You will learn:

* + The definition of “aversive stimuli.”
  + Negative reinforcement has a powerful effect on behavior.
  + Escape and avoidance behaviors are maintained by negative reinforcement.
  + Contingencies do not have to be expressed for them to exert control over human (and animal behavior).

**Let’s take a closer look!**

An “aversive stimulus” is any condition or stimulus that, upon its removal, reinforces the response that facilitated that removal. In other words, an “aversive stimulus” is something you wish to escape and the behavior response you emit that removes that stimulus will be increased – or repeated – in the future when that aversive stimulus is again present.

Behavior, both animal and human, is learned through consequences. In many cases, those consequences amount to negative reinforcement, i.e., the contingent removal of an aversive stimulus after a response that increases the future probability of that response, i.e., an **escape contingency**.

**Example: Applied Behavior Analysis Explanation**

Think about driving down the highway. You’re going the speed limit, but you happen to look over and see a highway patrolman on the hill. Uh oh! Better slow down! So, you press the brake and slow down about 5-miles-per-hour. You have just engaged in escape behavior! You saw the patrolman, pressed the brake, and escaped a speeding ticket!

Much of the behavior we engage in every day works to escape something aversive – we are **negatively reinforced** for the behavior, which means the behavior will be repeated in the future.

**Example: “Mentalistic” Explanation**

Now, we could explain the behavior of pressing on the brakes with lots of “mentalistic” theories, such as, “She saw the patrolman and it triggered a memory of her uncle being pulled out of his car by a policeman when he was stopped for speeding.” Or, we could explain the behavior by saying that “The man was paranoid that all cops were out to get him.”

* These explanations are really reaching, don’t you think? Behavior analysts explain behavior in very concrete terms. We don’t use unnecessary concepts, principles, or assumptions. We go by the mantra, “**Just the facts, Maʹam**!” This direct approach to explaining behavior is called, “parsimony.”
* Similar to an escape contingency is an avoidance contingency. Avoidance is just more proactive! Basically, it is a response-contingent ***prevention*** of an aversive stimulus or condition. In other words, you engage in a behavior that allows you to avoid something that is unpleasant.
* For example, Sarah works for 24-hours straight to finish the report for her boss so she can avoid a reprimand. We can certainly understand Sarah’s behavior that serves to avoid the boss’ wrath!
* The difference between avoidance and escape is that avoidance behavior is engaged in to ***prevent*** something aversive and escape behavior is engaged in to ***escape*** something aversive that is already occurring.
* Human behavior is maintained or diminished by consequences – contingencies. An antecedent is presented, you respond, and a consequence is delivered. If that consequence is reinforcement (negative or positive), the behavior will increase or be maintained. If the consequence is punishment, the behavior will diminish.
* **But, what if those contingencies are not stated? Does it still work in the same way?**
* Absolutely! If we engage in a behavior that results in a desired consequence – whether that contingency was stated or not, the response will occur in the future. The same is true of punishment. If a response is followed by punishment, its presentation will be diminished in the future (Malott & Shane, 2016). Think of Thorndike and his “Law of Effect.” Thorndike did not explain the contingencies to the cat, yet the cat learned that only the lever press would get him what he wanted, i.e., to be released from the puzzle box. ☺

Thank you for viewing your Unit 2 Lecture!

**References**

Malott, R. W., & Shane, J. T. (2016). *Principles of behavior* (7th ed.). New York,

NY: Routledge.