**PS360: Applied Behavior Analysis I**

**Discussion Board Lecture: Unit 1**

**Unit 1: Behavior Analysis – Repertoire – Reinforcement: Positive Reinforcement**

Welcome, students! This lecture will focus on some of the fundamental principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA).

* We will explore positive reinforcement and how it is used to increase or maintain behavior.
* We will also talk a little about the timing of the presentation of reinforcement and how timing impacts reinforcer effectiveness.
* If you have any questions about the material covered in this lecture, remember, I’m just an E-mail away!
* Edward Thorndike conducted experiments on learning. One of his famous experiments was the “cat in the puzzle box” in which the cat, after much trial and error, learned that pressing a lever opened the door of the box. Soon, the cat stopped engaging in behaviors that did not lead to the opening of the door and just pressed the lever. Behaviors that did not help the cat – or responses that did not receive reinforcement, were extinguished. From this, Thorndike formulated his “Law of Effect,” which basically states that behavior that is rewarded is strengthened – or repeated, and behavior that is punished is not strengthened – not repeated. Now, enter B. F. Skinner . . . .

**Skinner’s Influences:**

* Thorndike’s work and the “Law of Effect”
* Pavlov’s Classical Conditioning (Salivation in dogs)
* Watson’s stimulus-response (Classical Conditioning) (Little Albert)

Dr. Skinner believed that Classical Conditioning and stimulus-response could not explain all of human learning and behavior.

***Operant conditioning: Behavior is reinforced and strengthened, or punished and diminished, by its consequences.***

Our focus in Unit 1 will be one of the principles of Operant Conditioning and applied behavior analysis, i.e., positive reinforcement.

* Positive reinforcement is a stimulus that, when presented within 60 seconds of a response, increases the future probability of that response.
* We know that immediate reinforcement has more influence on behavior than does delayed reinforcement.
  + The ***Delay Gradient*** tells us that the effect of reinforcement or punishment is diminished in direct relationship to the amount of time between the response and the consequence, i.e., the longer the delay in presenting a consequence, the less power the consequence will have (Malott & Shane, 2016).
  + Another problem with delaying reinforcement is that the person presenting the reinforcement might inadvertently reinforce a behavior that occurs in the interim – that is, he/she may reinforce the wrong behavior.
  + We cannot talk about positive reinforcement without discussing “contingencies” of reinforcement. Basically, positive reinforcement describes a functional relation between a response and a consequence – in this case, positive reinforcement. This is a “two-term contingency” in which a response is followed by a positive reinforcer, which increases the probability of the same response occurring again in the future.
  + Unconditioned reinforcers are stimuli that function as reinforcement without requiring a learning history. These may include food, water, warmth, procreation, i.e., stimuli that are required for survival of the species.
  + Conditioned reinforcers are stimuli that were previously neutral but that gained reinforcer status by pairing them with an unconditioned reinforcer or a previously conditioned reinforcer.

**Skinner’s work with behavioral consequences and his development of Operant Conditioning led to the birth of behavior analysis.**

* Behavior analysis is the study of the principles of behavior, which includes Operant Conditioning and Classical Conditioning.
* Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is the application of the principles of behavior in the world.
* The principles of ABA are derived from learning theory and the experimental analysis of behavior.

***What is the difference between “bribery” and “reinforcement?”***

The best way to tell the difference between “bribery” and “reinforcement” is to identify when the item was delivered.

* If the item was presented after an unwanted behavior in order to gain the desired response, it is bribery.
* If the item was presented after the desired response, it is reinforcement.

Example:

*If a child is screaming, crying, and laying on the floor – kicking the floor and walls, because Mom said he could not have candy before dinner and then Mom said, “Tommy, if you will just stop crying and acting like this, you can have some candy,” then Mom is bribing Tommy.*

*If, however, after Tommy asked for candy and Mom said he would have to wait until after dinner, Tommy said, “Okay,” and Mom gave Tommy two pieces of candy after dinner, that would be reinforcement.*

She’s reinforced Tommy’s compliance.

Thank you for viewing your Unit 1 Lecture!

**Reference**

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