**PS385: Targeted Topics in Applied Behavior Analysis**

**Discussion Board Lecture: Unit 3 Media Lecture**

**Unit 3: Functional Behavior Assessment**

**Lecture:**

Welcome, students! In Unit 3, you will learn the fundamental principles underlying the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), i.e., the assessment of choice of behavior analysts. The FBA is a vital approach to discovering the variables that trigger and maintain behavior – the antecedents and consequences. Through the analysis of these variables, you will learn to hypothesize the probable function the behavior serves for the individual. Once you are able to identify the probable function the behavior serves – essentially, the purpose of the behavior, you can design function-based behavior intervention plans (BIPS), which have been proven to be much more effective than random approaches to the modification of behavior.

The FBA consists of four steps:

* The behavior analyst gathers information using indirect assessment, which may include interviews, rating scales, checklists, and record reviews. Information gathered during the indirect assessment phase of the FBA is obtained from those familiar with the client or the client him/herself. The behavior analyst can gain important insights into the topography of the behavior and the usual setting, situation, and time of occurrence. This information can guide the behavior analyst when scheduling direct observations and when operationally defining the target behaviors. The indirect assessment can also provide information as to diagnoses, medications, and previous treatments for the target behavior.
* Direct descriptive assessment is the second phase of the FBA. Typically, using the antecedent-behavior-consequence (A-B-C) data collection form is the best approach to identifying the antecedents and consequences of the target behavior, which will lead to the identification, over time, of the probable function of the behavior.
* If the function of the behavior is elusive, the behavior analyst may choose to conduct a Functional Analysis (FA), although this is rarely needed “in the field.” A FA requires the methodical manipulation of the variables believed to maintain the target behavior. While the FBA allows a hypothesis to be made regarding the function of the target behavior, the FA proves function.
* Once the FBA is complete, the behavior analyst can design a function-based behavior intervention plan.

Thus far in the course, you have learned about positive and negative reinforcement and punishment, but you haven’t explored, at least very deeply, the principle of automatic reinforcement.

There are behaviors that are engaged in that do not require the action of others for reinforcement. Some behaviors produce their own reinforcement as a result of physiological stimulation. Automatic reinforcement can be negative or positive. For example, scratching would allow an individual to escape an uncomfortable itch, so the behavior of scratching an itch would be maintained via automatic negative reinforcement. A behavior that is maintained through automatic positive reinforcement would be thumb sucking.

The Behavior Analyst Certification Board’s (BACB’s) Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts, Code 3.0 and its subsections, requires behavior analysts to conduct evidence-based assessments before designing behavior change programs. The type of assessment used will be guided by the client’s needs and consent. If there is any possibility that a medical condition could be influencing the client’s behavior, a medical consultation would be requested. If medical causes are ruled out, the behavior analyst can move forward with assessment after obtaining informed consent from the client or the client’s parents/guardians. Informed consent can only be given if the procedures of the assessment are explained fully, and in terms that the client or parents/guardians can understand. Then, the client, parents, or guardians should be given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. It is only after this full disclosure that informed consent can truly be provided.

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is uniquely suited to improving the quality of life of individuals through the design of function-based behavior interventions, but the effectiveness of those interventions depends upon the methodical assessment of the behaviors one wishes to modify. It can be a time-consuming process, but the benefits far outweigh the costs!

Thank you for viewing your Unit 3 lecture!