Learning: Operant Conditioning and Social Learning

Chapter 7 (continued)

Classical & Operant Conditioning


2. Operant conditioning, on the other hand, forms an association between behaviors (responses) and the resulting events (consequences).

Response-Consequence Learning

Learning to associate a response with a consequence.

Classical & Operant Conditioning

- Classical conditioning involves respondent behavior that occurs as an automatic response to a certain stimulus. Operant conditioning involves operant behavior, a behavior that operates on the environment, producing rewarding or punishing stimuli.

B.F. Skinner: Master of Pigeons

Classical & Operant Conditioning

Skinner’s experiments extended Thorndike’s thinking, especially his law of effect. This law states that rewarded behavior is likely to occur again.
Operant Chamber

Using Thorndike's law of effect as a starting point, Skinner developed the Operant chamber, or the Skinner box, to study operant conditioning.

The operant chamber, or Skinner box, comes with a bar or key that an animal manipulates to obtain a reinforcer like food or water. The bar or key is connected to devices that record the animal’s (rate of) response.

Types of Reinforcers

Any event that strengthens the behavior it follows. A heat lamp positively reinforces a meerkat’s behavior in the cold.

Shaping

Shaping is the operant conditioning procedure in which reinforcers guide behavior towards the desired target behavior through successive approximations.

Shaping Application - Minesweeping

Rats can be trained to detect buried mines via the scent of TNT.

Learning to Bar Press: Shaping through Successive Approximations
The Skinner Box: Not Just for Rats

“Lost” episode

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS1KXYpRZbM

Free vs. Earned Food Phenomenon

Big Bang Theory: Operant Conditioning

• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euINCrDbD4&feature=related

Primary & Secondary Reinforcers

• Primary Reinforcer: An innately reinforcing stimulus like food or drink.

• Conditioned (Secondary) Reinforcer: A learned reinforcer that gets its reinforcing power through association with the primary reinforcer.

Immediate & Delayed Reinforcers

• Immediate Reinforcer: A reinforcer that occurs instantly after a behavior.
  • A rat gets a food pellet for a bar press.

• Delayed Reinforcer: A reinforcer that is delayed in time for a certain behavior.
  • A paycheck that comes at the end of a week.

We may be inclined to pursue small immediate reinforcers (watching TV) rather than large delayed reinforcers (getting an A in a course) which require consistent study.

Instant Gratification and Procrastination

• Immediate Smaller Pay, or Delayed Larger Pay?
  – Many chose to accept an immediate smaller amount after participating in an experiment for money.
  – Yet, most of those who received the smaller amount (in the form of a check) did not cash that check until after those who chose the larger delayed amount received their check!

  – Application to lottery winners
Reinforcement Schedules

1. Continuous Reinforcement: Reinforces the desired response each time it occurs.

2. Partial Reinforcement: Reinforces a response only part of the time. This results in slower acquisition than continuous reinforcement. But, more resistant to extinction (e.g., Skinner’s pigeon).

Ratio Schedules

- **Fixed-ratio schedule**: Reinforces a response only after a specified number of responses.
  - Piecework pay, frequent flyer miles, coffee cards

- **Variable-ratio schedule**: Reinforces a response after an unpredictable number of responses (averaged around some mean).
  - Fishing, door to door sales

Interval Schedules

- **Fixed-interval schedule**: Reinforces a response only after a specified time has elapsed.
  - Preparing for an exam only when the exam draws close

- **Variable-interval schedule**: Reinforces a response at unpredictable time intervals (averaged around a mean), which produces slow, steady responses.
  - Pop quiz, in-class extra credit

Schedules of Reinforcement

Question

- Say I want to instill a behavior that is MOST resistant to extinction (that is, the behavior persists even after the reinforcer is removed). Which schedule of reinforcement should I apply?
  a) Fixed Ratio
  b) Fixed Interval
  c) Variable Ratio
  d) Variable Interval

Where Do We See Variable Reinforcement?

Gambling Rewards on a Variable Ratio Schedule

Skinner discussing schedules of reinforcement

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AepqpTtKbwo
Punishment

An aversive event that decreases the behavior it follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Punisher</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Possible Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Administer an aversive stimulus</td>
<td>Spanking; a parking ticket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Withdraw a desirable stimulus</td>
<td>Time-out from privileges (such as time with friends); revoked driver's license</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Although there may be some justification for occasional punishment (Larzelere & Baumrind, 2002), it usually leads to negative effects.

1. Results in unwanted fears.
2. Conveys no information to the organism as to what to do (just, what not to do).
3. Justifies pain to others.
4. Causes unwanted behaviors to reappear in its absence (e.g. spanking).
5. Causes aggression towards the agent.
6. Causes one unwanted behavior to appear in place of another or in other settings (e.g., modeling aggression).

Review of Rewards & Punishments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Desirable Example</th>
<th>Aversive Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Add or Give</td>
<td>Positive Reinforcement</td>
<td>(Positive) Punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(strengthens behavior)</td>
<td>(weakens behavior)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Away or Remove</td>
<td>Negative Punishment (i.e., time-out)</td>
<td>Negative Reinforcement (strengthens behavior)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distinguishing Reinforcement from Punishment

Remember that all reinforcers (both positive AND negative) are meant to increase the likelihood of a behavior occurring.

On the other hand, all punishments (both positive AND negative) are meant to decrease the likelihood of a behavior occurring.

Cognition & Operant Conditioning

Evidence of cognitive processes during operant learning comes from rats during a maze exploration in which they navigate the maze without an obvious reward. Rats seem to develop cognitive maps, or mental representations, of the layout of the maze (environment).

Extending Skinner’s Understanding

Skinner believed in inner thought processes and biological underpinnings, but did not feel it was necessary to consider them seriously in psychology (because they were unobservable).

Many psychologists criticize him for discounting them.
Latent Learning

Such cognitive maps are based on latent learning, which becomes apparent when an incentive is given (Tolman & Honzik, 1930).

Motivation

**Intrinsic Motivation:** The desire to perform a behavior for its own sake.

**Extrinsic Motivation:** The desire to perform a behavior due to promised rewards or threats of punishments.

Biological Predisposition

Biological constraints predispose organisms to learn associations that are naturally adaptive. Breland and Breland (1961) showed that animals drift towards their biologically predisposed instinctive behaviors.

Skinner’s Legacy

Skinner argued that behaviors were shaped by external influences instead of inner thoughts and feelings. Critics argued that Skinner dehumanized people by neglecting their free will.

Applications of Operant Conditioning

Skinner introduced the concept of teaching machines that shape learning in small steps and provide reinforcements for correct responses.

Applications of Operant Conditioning

Reinforcement principles can enhance athletic performance.
Applications of Operant Conditioning

Reinforcers affect productivity. Many companies now allow employees to share profits and participate in company ownership.

At work

Applications of Operant Conditioning

In children, reinforcing good behavior increases the occurrence of these behaviors. Ignoring unwanted behavior decreases their occurrence.

Still, ignoring has other negative consequences that make it aversive; not just removing positive attention

Little Known Fact: Project Pigeon

During WW II, Army approached Skinner to determine if pigeons could be used as guidance systems for missiles

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lMsSCyrLMOg

While Skinner felt that he had some success, the idea quickly became obsolete with the invention of radar

Operant vs. Classical Conditioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classical Conditioning</th>
<th>Operant Conditioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Voluntary, operant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition</td>
<td>Operant response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extinction</td>
<td>Operant response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive precocession</td>
<td>Operant response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological predispos.</td>
<td>Operant response</td>
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Learning by Observation: Social Learning

Higher animals, especially humans, learn through observing and imitating others.

The monkey on the right imitates the monkey on the left in touching the pictures in a certain order to obtain a reward.

Mirror Neurons

Neuroscientists discovered mirror neurons in the brains of animals and humans that are active during observational learning.
Imitation Onset

Learning by observation begins early in life. This 14-month-old child imitates the adult on TV in pulling a toy apart.

Bandura's Experiments

Bandura's Bobo doll study (1961) indicated that individuals (children) learn through imitating others who receive rewards and punishments.

Applications of Observational Learning

Unfortunately, Bandura’s studies show that antisocial models (family, neighborhood or TV), if reinforced, may have antisocial effects.

Positive Observational Learning

Fortunately, prosocial (positive, helpful) models may have prosocial effects.

Television and Observational Learning

Gentile et al., (2004) shows that children in elementary school who are exposed to violent television, videos, and video games express increased aggression.

Modeling Violence

Research shows that viewing reinforced media violence leads to an increased expression of aggression.