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Unit 6 - Skinner

1. Skinner brought to our attention four types of operant conditioning. The methods of conduct control he presented were positive and negative reinforcement, and positive and negative punishment. Positive reinforcement pertains to the adding of a positive reinforcer (an enjoyable stimulus) after a behavior which will increase the likelihood of said behavior happening in the future. Negative reinforcement creates the same effect. The only difference is that a negative reinforcer (an unpleasant stimulus) is taken away.

Positive punishment is an action that intends to discourage undesirable behavior by introducing an unpleasant repercussion. On the other hand, negative punishment proceeds to take away a favorable stimulus in order to decrease the likelihood of an undesirable behavior

2. Discrimination is an organism's means of recognizing the difference between two similar stimuli. Discrimination of stimuli enables the organism to form new associations. The organism is then capable of responding to new stimuli in new and suitable ways.

Conversely, when an unfamiliar stimulus is similar to the known stimulus, and they share like associations, a successful type of relationship with the familiar stimulus may be applied to the unknown stimulus. This approach to learning is referred to as generalization.

5. Skinner believed that punishment had the ability to bring about immediate desirable behavior, but it was not effective in the long run. The individual would revert to poor conduct when an event or circumstance contingent upon satisfactory conduct was removed. Here, he introduced a

term called, “extinction,” which means total eradication of unwanted behavior. He went on to say that penalization is capable of bringing about emotional dysfunction.

I have tried to extinguish someone’s obnoxious behavior by ignoring it - a four year old student in our Pre-K class who has had a habit of throwing temper tantrums when she does not want to follow rules. She is never moved to do as she is told or desires to do away with the emotional outbursts, regardless of how the lead teacher and I respond. But, Skinner mentions the limitations of this technique, explaining that if the unwanted behavior has been strengthened (or reinforced) a significant number of times in the past, it will be very hard for her to stop. Or as Ryckman (2008) puts it, it will be “highly resistant to extinction.”

Reference

Ryckman, R. (2008). *Theories of Personality* (9th Edition). Thomson Wadsworth.

