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PSY 441
Chapter 15 Questions

Skinner Questions

1. Define and explain the differences between positive and negative reinforcement and positive and negative punishment.

The positive and negative reinforcement to modify behavior comes from Skinner's reinforcement theory. The various examples of positive reinforcement are to give praise, a reward, money, a trophy, or any award that can be given by the repetition of that particular behavior. If a student is given verbal praise by parents or teachers for scoring an A on a test, that student is most likely to work towards achieving another A grade. Positive reinforcement is a tool that can motivate an individual to get the anticipated reinforcement of required behavior. This is a technique I used frequently when working with autistic youth and adults. For example my client Allison would have outbursts in class for attention. Allison was told that if she could work quietly in class for 20 minutes straight at a time, she would be rewarded with a 5 minute youtube break. Once Allison saw that she was being rewarded with the ability to watch her favorite cartoon, the outbursts in class decreased. A negative reinforcement is when an undesired behavior is reinforced with an undesirable reinforcer. Allison would receive a punishment of not partaking in recess, or being able to use her Ipad during lunch. From observation that coincides with Skinner's theory Allison's behavior increased more frequently once she was rewarded with what she desired. When given a punishment Allison would either have further outbursts, cry and the negative behavior would decline at minimum. Skinner believed that Positive reinforcers motivate

the individual to achieve set behavior/goal rather than negative reinforcement. Negative reinforcement only suppresses the behavior and does not completely eliminate it.

4. What is the operant analysis of personality? Is there a place for free will within such an analysis? Do you believe in free will? Why or why not?

Operant conditioning was an experiment done by B.F. Skinner. Skinner conducted research trials and came up with the operant conditioning theory of learning. Operant conditioning is a learning process in which a behavior/action can be repeated or strengthened by positive or negative reinforcements. I believe free will is still in place regardless of this analysis. Being rewarded or given a punishment are just incentives to ensure that the particular behavior/action can be achieved. An individual still has the ability to decide on acting on that action or not. However, that action will come with consequences or rewards. I believe given a reward/punishment is just an accessory to whatever we choose to act on freely. An example is that we all have the free will to not commit crimes, not doing so results in jail/fines or remaining a free person. The reward of not going to jail is not enough to control an individual's decision not to commit a crime, there are those who still do. Therefore, this theory and how we condition people to learn, is something that operates as an aid to decision making. Operant conditioning is not a theory that has the full power to control people, or remove our right to self determination

5. What is Skinner's view on the use of punishment to control socially undesirable behavior?

Punishment is different from negative reinforcement. It is when you would add something negative to discourage the desirable behavior. Negative reinforcement simply just removes something negative to encourage the desirable action. Spanking a child, yelling or being

grounding are a few examples of punishment. Lately in society certain laws are being put in place to protect children from physical consequences or yelling. There is a new term called *gentle parenting* due to the latest research along with Skinner's theory. Which has shown that punishment less likely leads to the lessening or extinction of undesirable behavior.

What is extinction?

Extinction is when a behavior no longer needs a reinforcer negative/punishment. The desired behavior is achieved on its own without having to be conditioned. Example a student in my class works effectively without any outbursts regardless of needing to receive praise in order for it to be continued. This can be experimented by ceasing any rewards to see if the desired behavior continues to remain the same.

Have you ever tried to extinguish someone's obnoxious behavior by ignoring it? What happened? What are some of the limitations of the technique?

Yes, when working with autistic individuals and youth with no neurodevelopmental disabilities, this was an action I did to reduce attention seeking behavior. Ignoring very often reduced the negative behavior, and resulted in the child continuing their work in the classroom. I would say the limitations to this, especially those with special needs, is to not ignore on a consistent basis. There is a fine line for ignoring to turn into a punishment/negative reinforcement. I was trained to ignore by redirecting the behavior using physical cues with my hands, and not being verbal. Example, if the child had an outburst while doing class work I would not give eye contact to the individual. I would point to the paper they were working on and continue working on my own tasks. If another outburst continued further I would ignore it altogether. This led to the child working silently on their own. I did not treat the child negatively in any way I would continue teaching or working as if the outburst never occurred. I noticed that by doing this the child would

give me a look of confusion, and then cease the behavior once realizing it had no results for them. That result being to be given attention.