

Behavior modification II

2.1 Behavior modification is the traditional term for the use of empirically demonstrated behavior change techniques to increase or decrease the frequency of behaviors, such as altering an individual's behaviors and reactions to stimuli through positive and negative reinforcement of adaptive behavior and/or the reduction of behavior through its extinction, punishment and/or satiation. It is similar to operant conditioning but does not search for the antecedent. Behavior modification is now known as Applied behavior analysis (ABA) which is more analytical than it used to be.

Description

The first use of the term behavior modification appears to have been by Edward Thorndike in 1911. His article *Provisional Laws of Acquired Behavior or Learning* makes frequent use of the term "modifying behavior". Through early research in the 1940s and the 1950s the term was used by Joseph Wolpe's research group. The experimental tradition in clinical psychology used it to refer to psycho-therapeutic techniques derived from empirical research. It has since come to refer mainly to techniques for increasing adaptive behavior through reinforcement and decreasing maladaptive behavior through extinction or punishment (with emphasis on the former). Behavior modification is a form of Behavior therapy now known as Applied behavior analysis. Emphasizing the empirical roots of behavior modification, some authors consider it to be broader in scope and to subsume the other two categories of behavior change methods.

In recent years, the concept of punishment has had many critics, though these criticisms tend not to apply to negative punishment (time-outs) and usually apply to the addition of some aversive event. The use of positive punishment by board certified behavior analysts is restricted to extreme circumstances when all other forms of treatment have failed and when the behavior to be modified is a danger to the person or to others (see professional practice of behavior analysis). In clinical settings positive punishment is usually restricted to using a spray bottle filled with water as an aversive event. When misused, more aversive punishment can lead to affective (emotional) disorders, as well as to the receiver of the punishment increasingly trying to avoid the punishment (i.e., "not get caught").

Martin and Pear indicate that there are seven characteristics to behavior modification, They are:

- There is a strong emphasis on defining problems in terms of behavior that can be measured in some way.
- The treatment techniques are ways of altering an individual's current environment to help that individual function more fully.
- The methods and rationales can be described precisely.
- The techniques are often applied in everyday life.
- The techniques are based largely on principles of learning specifically operant conditioning and respondent conditioning
- There is a strong emphasis on scientific demonstration that a particular technique was responsible for a particular behavior change.
- There is a strong emphasis on accountability for everyone involved in a behavior modification program.

Some areas of effectiveness

Functional behavior assessment forms the core of applied behavior analysis. Many techniques in this therapy are specific techniques aimed at specific issues. Interventions based on behavior analytic/modification principles have been extremely effective in developing evidence-based treatments.

In addition to the above, a growing list of research-based interventions from the behavioral paradigm exist. With children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), one study showed that over a several year period, children in the behavior modification group had half the number of felony arrests as children in the medication group. These findings have yet to be replicated, but are considered encouraging for the use of behavior modification for children with ADHD. There is strong and consistent evidence that behavioral treatments are effective for treating ADHD. A recent meta-analysis found that the use of behavior modification for ADHD resulted in effect sizes in between group studies (.83), pre-post studies (.70), within group studies (2.64), and single subject studies (3.78) indicating behavioral treatments are highly effective.

Behavior modification programs form the core of many residential treatment facility programs. They have shown success in reducing recidivism for adolescents with conduct problems and adult offenders. One particular program that is of interest is *teaching-family homes* (see Teaching Family Model), which is based on a social learning model that emerged from radical behaviorism. These particular homes use a family style approach to residential treatment, which has been carefully replicated over 700 times. Recent efforts have seen a push for the

inclusion of more behavior modification programs in residential re-entry programs in the U.S. to aid prisoners in re-adjusting after release.

One area that has repeatedly shown effectiveness has been the work of behaviorists working in the area of community reinforcement for addictions. Another area of research that has been strongly supported has been behavioral activation for depression.

One way of giving positive reinforcement in behavior modification is in providing compliments, approval, encouragement, and affirmation; a ratio of five compliments for every one complaint is generally seen as being effective in altering behavior in a desired manner and even in producing stable marriages.

Of notable interest is that the right behavioral intervention can have profound system effects. For example, Forgatch and DeGarmo (2007) found that with mothers who were recently divorced, a standard round of parent management training (a program based on social learning principles that teaches rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior combined with communication skills) could help elevate the divorced mother out of poverty. In addition, parent management training programs, sometimes referred to as behavioral parent training programs, have shown relative cost effectiveness for their efforts for the treatment of conduct disorder. Thus, such intervention can have profound effects on socializing the child in a relatively cost effective fashion and help get the parent out of poverty. This level of effect is often looked for and valued by those who practice behavioral engineering and results of this type have caused the Association for Behavior Analysis International to take a position that those receiving treatment have a right to effective treatment and a right to effective education.

Behavior modification in job performance

The use of positive reinforcement to change behavior has many applications to organizational training. An assessment called performance audit is conducted first, to determine the problems or behaviors that can be modified for more efficient job performance. A program of positive reinforcement is then introduced to reward employees for displaying the desired behaviors, such as reducing errors or production time per unit. Punishment or reprimands are not used: although these may temporarily eliminate an undesirable behavior, they may leave in its place anxiety, hostility and anger. Providing positive reinforcement is much more effective in improving employee productivity and behavior.

Criticism

Behavior modification is critiqued in person-centered psychotherapeutic approaches such as Rogerian Counseling and Re-evaluation Counseling, which involve "connecting with the human qualities of the person to promote healing", while behaviorism is "denigrating to the human spirit". B.F. Skinner argues in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* that unrestricted reinforcement is what led to the "feeling of freedom", thus removal of aversive events allows people to "feel freer". Further criticism extends to the presumption that behavior increases only when it is reinforced. This premise is at odds with research conducted by Albert Bandura at Stanford University. His findings indicate that violent behavior is imitated, without being reinforced, in studies conducted with children watching films showing various individuals "beating the daylights out of Bobo". Bandura believes that human personality and learning is the result of the interaction between environment, behavior and psychological process. There is evidence, however, that imitation is a class of behavior that can be learned just like anything else. Children have been shown to imitate behavior that they have never displayed before and are never reinforced for, after being taught to imitate in general.

Several people have criticized the level of training required to perform behavior modification procedures, especially those that are restrictive or use aversives, aversion therapy, or punishment protocols. Some desire to limit such restrictive procedures only to licensed psychologists or licensed counselors. Once licensed for this group, post-licensed certification in behavior modification is sought to show scope of competence in the area through groups like the World Association for Behavior Analysis. Still others desire to create an independent practice of behavior analysis through licensure to offer consumers choices between proven techniques and unproven ones (see Professional practice of behavior analysis). Level of training and consumer protection remain of critical importance in applied behavior analysis and behavior modification.

While behavior analysis continues to grow as a science by including more environmental factors and behaviorism grows as a philosophy, some continue to criticize it for being reductionist.

2.2 Five Factors

There are lots of different discipline options parents can use to manage behaviors. Each child is unique and discipline techniques should be tailored to meet your child's specific needs. Discipline strategies that work for one child may not work

for another. Examine several key factors that are unique to your child to help determine what strategies will be most effective in managing your child's behaviors.

1. Child's Characteristics

Your child's characteristics are one factor that determines how he will respond to various discipline strategies. These characteristics include personality, temperament, physical abilities, talents, skills, strengths and weaknesses. For example, parenting a defiant child who is easily frustrated requires different discipline strategies when compared to a calm child who is eager to please. Also, a child who is clumsy and is teased by peers at school will benefit from different interventions when compared to an athletic child who is popular with peers.

2. Parent Characteristics

Consider the fit between your characteristics and your child's characteristics. Take note of the similarities and differences between your personalities, temperament, and preferences. This can point to areas where you may have less tolerance for average behaviors. For example, a parent who has low energy and prefers a quiet household may struggle to parent a loud, hyperactive child. Or, parents with low frustration tolerance may struggle to help a child with a learning disability complete his homework. Examining these factors can increase your awareness of steps that will be more effective in accommodating and disciplining your child. More »

3. Life Changes and Stressors

Life changes and stress influence a child's behaviors. Moving to a new home, attending a new school, or adjusting to a new baby in the family are examples of factors that influence behaviors. Take note of any recent changes and how this affects your child. For example, a child who is struggling to adjust to a new baby in the home, may be feeling left out and may not respond well to a time out that separates him from the family and leave him feeling even more left out. He may require some different disciplinary strategies as he adjusts to the situation. More »

4. Consequences for Positive Behaviors

The consequence a child receives for positive behavior determines the likelihood that these behaviors will occur again. Examine how you respond when your child follows the rules, listens, and behaves respectfully. Does your child receive praise? Are there any rewards for following the rules? Does your child gain any privileges for making good choices?

Sometimes good behaviors go unnoticed. It is important that your child receives positive reinforcement for good behaviors. For example, if a child is playing quietly, a parent may be tempted to avoid praising the child so as to not interrupt the quiet play. However, offering positive reinforcement can encourage it to continue. Offer praise, attention, and rewards that will motivate your child to follow the rules. If you find that your child is not getting enough positive reinforcement for good behaviors, adjust your discipline strategy to increase your child's motivation to behave. More »

5. Consequences for Negative Behaviors

Determine if you may be inadvertently encouraging your child's negative behaviors. Sometimes, children receive reinforcement for negative behaviors, which encourages them to continue misbehaving. For example, a child who receives a lot of attention for whining learns that whining is an effective way to get attention. Negative attention can be very reinforcing. If you spend a lot of time yelling, arguing, or pleading with your child, these responses may actually be encouraging your child to misbehave. Negative behaviors need a negative consequence in order to discourage them from continuing. Sometimes ignoring mild misbehavior is the most effective consequence

Negative consequences also need to be consistent. If you are inconsistent with giving time out or taking away a privilege, your child will continue to misbehave in hopes he won't get a consequence this time. Providing consistent consequences will teach your child that each negative behavior results in a negative consequence. Evaluating the consequences your child receives can help determine which discipline strategies seem to be working and which strategies need to be changed.