Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Differentiate between the principles of classical conditioning and operant conditioning.
2. Discuss examples of classical conditioning and operant conditioning in real life.
3. Define behaviorism and explain its influence on the field of psychology.
4. Assess how social roles and rules influence our behaviors.
5. Explain how our attributions and attitudes affect behaviors.
6. Describe the concepts of conformity, obedience to authority, and groupthink.
7. Appraise how group identity can affect our perceptions of other people.
8. Determine the origins, nature, and measurement of prejudice and describe different techniques to reduce prejudice.

Written Lecture

Chapter 7: Learning and Conditioning

Is it possible to change behaviors based on one’s learning history? If behaviors can be learned, can they be unlearned as well?

Wade & Tavris (2011) explain that behaviorists use two types of conditioning to describe our actions: classical and operant. But, what can be done to overcome negative fears and behaviors? Many scholars posit that fearful behaviors can be conditioned. For instance, a person who is bitten by a dog may develop a fear of all dogs due to the fact that the dog (stimulus) is now associated with a negative attack. One way to overcome such fears is by embracing systematic desensitization in which the person is slowly exposed to the fear-evoking stimulus in a safe environment. This form of therapy can be compared to extinction. What do you think? Can you learn to overcome a certain fear by associating it with a new thought? As you read this section, you will learn more about classical conditioning, and the various attempts to shape behaviors.

As you continue throughout your readings, begin to examine your own thoughts in relation to operant conditioning. What prompts one to approach certain behaviors? Conversely, what issues might encourage one to avoid other behaviors? Edward Thorndike’s law of effect purported that we are more prone to repeat certain behaviors that receive reinforcement. What do you think? Have you ever given a reinforcer to a child to promote a certain behavior? As you read this section, take note of the various behavior modification techniques associated with operant conditioning. Which is the most effective, in your opinion? Which technique has the potential to create negative reactions? How could these be used in a positive way to enrich educational experiences?

Further examination of this section will reveal more information on learning and the mind. Do all individuals learn the same way? Can perspectives differ even
when the same event is experienced by different individuals? Much research has been conducted to ascertain the intricate workings of the mind. Edward Tolman (1949) focused on latent learning. Tolman posited that six types of learning exist: drive discrimination, field expectancies, cathectic, motor patterns, field-cognition modes, and equivalence beliefs. For example, in motor patterns Tolman suggested that an animal would repeatedly shake a fencepost in order to gain access to more grass for his meal. Tolman’s various schools of thought were a culmination of the works conducted by Clark Hull, various Gestaltists, and Edwin Guthrie. As you examine this section you will learn more about how one’s perceptions, social interactions, and personality traits can shape his/her responses.

As you conclude your study of this chapter, take a moment to reflect upon your personal opinion in regards to violence. Has society become so desensitized that we do not think twice when we view aggressive acts on television or in games? What implications will this have on future generations?

Chapter 8: Behavior in Social and Cultural Context

What do you think you are doing? Why are you standing so close to me? Why do you do whatever she says?

In this section, Wade & Tavris (2011) share research conducted by several scholars that provides insight into social attitudes, behaviors, and group roles. Social psychologists seek to examine group influence on one’s behaviors. Additionally, cultural psychologists study the impact of cultural influences on one’s actions. In a particular study conducted in the 1960’s, Stanley Milgram sought to uncover the reasons why individuals obey authority figures, even if the orders violated one’s ethics. The controversial study revealed some alarming findings. What do you think? Does one have the tendency to hurt another individual if directed to do so by an authority figure? Read this section to discover the shocking truths.

John is yelling at Bob. What characterization about John immediately comes to mind? Do you think John is a hostile individual? Does he have a short temper? What if you knew that Bob had just punched and insulted John? Would you still think badly of John? This is a prime example of the fundamental attribution error. This occurs when one overestimates a personality trait as a source of behavior while underestimating the influence of a particular situation. Have you ever been guilty of judging another individual simply based on observations alone? As you read this section, carefully examine the various social influences on one’s beliefs and behaviors.

As you continue your examination of this chapter, pay particular attention to the section related to the influence of groups. We have an innate need to belong, but how far will we go to be accepted? Have you ever noticed that you behave differently when in the presence of others, versus when you’re all alone? If you are in a close-knit group, are you more likely to voice your opinion if it goes against the opinions of others in the group? Are you more willing to trust the judgment of a crowd than that of your own instincts? This section will reveal some fascinating findings in regards to the powerful influence groups have on us each day.

Did you accept my friend request on Facebook? How many followers do you have on Twitter?

Social networking has become the norm in the twenty-first century. According to many scholars today, these networking websites have drastically altered the size
of our social networks. Known as Dunbar’s number, Robin Dunbar estimated the average human’s social network to consist of approximately 150 people in 1992. How does that number compare to your circle of friends? Do you actually have effective social relationships with all of your “friends”?

Does racism still exist? Are there individuals who still embrace acts of prejudice in the twenty-first century? Has racism actually declined or taken on a new face? As you read this section, critically examine your own beliefs and biases. Were you taught to judge certain groups of people based on skin color alone? Do you hold some negative, unconscious thoughts against certain groups because your family taught you to do so? Much can be learned when examining the influence groups have on racism and acts of prejudice. What possible strategies could be embraced to move beyond these negative behaviors?

As you conclude your examination of this unit, begin to reflect upon your viewpoint of human nature. Do you think individuals are inherently good, or evil? If someone does something nice for you, should you automatically repay the favor? We are all influenced by varying social processes including entrapment, conformity, and stereotyping. Challenge yourself to examine your own beliefs while reviewing this section. Are there areas in which you need to alter your thinking?

References

Tolman, E. C. (1949). There is more than one kind of learning. Psychological Review, 56, 144-155.


Supplemental Reading

Click here to access a PDF of the Chapter 7 Presentation.

Click here to access a PDF of the Chapter 8 Presentation.

The following are two articles on psychology found within the Academic OneFile database located in the CSU Online Library. The articles discuss the topics of Operant Conditioning and Classical Conditioning.


Learning Activities (non-graded)

Various movies exist that illustrate aspects of learning. The movies listed below relate to operant and classical conditioning, as well as observational learning.
For additional enrichment, take a couple of hours to review one or more of these movies to identify the learning concept portrayed.

- *As Good as it Gets* (1997)
- *Crocodile Dundee* (1986)
- *Planet of the Apes* (1968; 2001)

As you review the film, ponder the following questions.

1. Which type of learning was depicted in the film?
2. Did learning occur as predicted by the theory? In essence, was the learning effective?
3. Were any ethical concerns raised in the film? If so, what were they?