

WTF?

(What's The Function?)

Richard Stock, PhD, BCBA-D
Applied Behavior Analysis – Autism Department





Learning Objectives

1. Attendees will describe historical conceptualizations of problem behaviour and their inherent limitations on treatment.
2. Attendees will learn to conceptualize and describe problem behaviors by (4) maintaining function(s).
3. Attendees will describe the value of a functional approach to problem behaviors.

Acknowledgements

- Dr. Joe Lucyshyn BCBA-D, The University of British Columbia
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The Problems with Problem Behavior

- Is a barrier to quality of life and dignity
- Is a barrier to learning – interferes with teaching
- Is stigmatizing and a barrier to social interactions
 - Is a barrier to community involvement
 - For both home and school
- Is a barrier to vocational settings and quality of life as an adult



Problem Behaviour Cycle...



1. Problem occurs
2. We react and put out the fire
3. Peace and harmony is restored to the galaxy... until...
4. Next problem behavior occurs
5. We react and put out the fire
6. Peace and harmony is restored...
7. Repeat
8. Repeat
9. This is my life ☹️

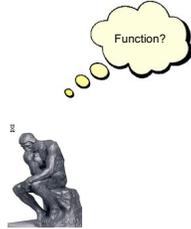
Breaking the cycle



- **STOP** asking *how* to respond to problem behaviors
- **START** asking the right questions...
 - “Why is this happening?”
 - “How is it benefiting the person?”
 - “What purpose is it serving for the individual?”

THE TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

- All behavior serves a **FUNCTION**.
- Be scientific in your approach
 - DETERMINISM
- Understanding *before* acting increases your chances of acting effectively.



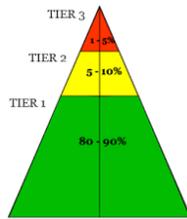
My message this morning...

The message of **FUNCTION**...

Applies to problem behavior at ALL 3 TIERS!

Apply this conceptual logic to...

- Your students
- Your own children
- Everyone around you



In the Past....



Problem behaviour was considered

- **Inevitable** (i.e., if you have a "label")
- **Within the person** (i.e., just a "bad boy")
- **Maladaptive** (nonfunctional or meaningless)

What's the problem with where all of these place the focus/blame?

The Traditional Goal

“Behavior Management” techniques

• If you do something bad, something bad happens to you:

- Scolded / Reprimanded
- Timeout
- Sent to the office
- The Strap
- Detention, Expulsion
- Etc.



Traditional Interventions

- Business as usual, and then... REACT
- Focus on *what happens after* the problem has already occurred (i.e., punishment).
- This means most intervention effort is targeted after the problem has already occurred.
- Putting out fires!
- AVOID being a Fire Fighter!



Why is that a Problem?

- Because *intervention is focused on punishment*
- There are **problems** with punishment...

NOTE: We are NOT talking about corporal punishment



First, why is punishment so attractive?

- It's easy... BAU Baby!
 - Don't have to do anything but wait
- It works... quickly and effectively
 - Immediately reinforces the punisher
- It's ubiquitous
 - Reprimands, timeouts, loss of privileges, response-cost, restitution



Potential Negative Effects of P+

- **Aggressive Behavior**
 - Two decades of studies have shown for children who received physical punishment an association with higher levels of aggression towards family members and peers (Durrant & Ensom, 2012; Martin & Pear, 2015).



Potential Negative Effects of P+

- **Emotional Behavior**
 - Punishment may be associated with emotional side effects including crying and fearfulness in general (Martin & Pear, 2015).
 - These side effects interfere with desirable behaviors at school, like learning.



Potential Negative Effects of P+



- **Escape and Avoidance** (Martin & Pear, 2015)
 - The use of punishment may cause the associated people/situations to become punishers.
 - Consider punishment for mistakes in math. The math classroom, teacher, and materials may become aversive causing the child to escape or avoid math = interferes with learning an important skill.

Potential Negative Effects of P+

- **Modeling** (Martin & Pear, 2015)
 - Kids copy adults... especially influential adults.
 - If adults punish students, then students may be more likely to apply aversives to others in the future.

Potential Negative Effects of P+

- **Over-use of Punishment** (Martin & Pear, 2015)
 - Because P+ can work quickly, the punisher may become over-reliant on it.
 - This may lead to neglecting the use of SR+
- Also, there is a tendency to resort to increasingly larger magnitude/dose of P+ = problematic cycle

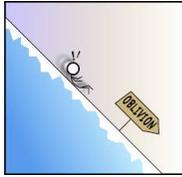


Potential Negative Effects of P+

• **Over-use of Punishment**

• Question: What's the future of this tactic?

• If a student's problem behavior is controlled by an aversive contingency in high school, how will it work when they graduate?



Potential Negative Effects of P+

• **Behavioral Contrast** (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007)

• If students problem behavior is punished in math class and decreases, there may be a corresponding increase (i.e., contrast) in another class, like Music, English, etc.

• PERSON AND PLACE SPECIFIC



Potential Negative Effects of P+

• **No New Behavior** (Martin & Pear, 2015)

• What is a defining characteristic of a student with ASD = they lack behaviors many of their NT peers have. That's why they are in school and have IEPs... to learn new skills/abilities.

• **Focus should be on increasing behaviors.**

• **Punishment only focuses on suppressing a behavior. It does not teach anything new.**



The BIGGEST Problem

- Punishment may work in the short term but the effects are typically *not permanent*
- The effects of punishment are often *person and/or place specific*
- Perhaps most importantly, punishment **does not teach WHAT TO DO...**
- instead... only what *not to do*

THE TAKE-HOME MESSAGE



So What Now?



- Behavior is *learned... NOT inevitable*
- It occurs as a function of the interplay *between the person and his/her environment*... Not primarily within the person
- The behavior is often highly ADAPTIVE from the perspective of the person doing it
i.e., It works for the person doing it
 (so *don't* call it "maladaptive"!)

THE TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

A Helpful Analogy?



That's where this question comes in to play...

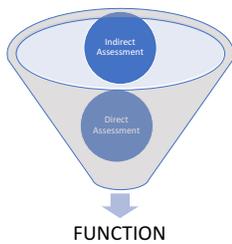


Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

- Goal is to identify:
 - The problem behavior(s) of concern
 - Relevant setting events (SEs)
 - Antecedent(s) that trigger problem behavior
 - Consequences that reinforce problem behavior
 - **Answer the question: What is it eating?**
 - **Answer the question: WTF?**

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The FBA Process Is FUNNEL SHAPED



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Functions of Behavior

- Behavior serves a function, or purpose, for the individual engaging in it - - This is "the gospel truth"
- FBA assists in identifying the function(s) of problem behavior for a given individual in specific contexts
 - We seek to determine what the individual gets or avoids by engaging in problem behavior
 - In other words, how is it working for him/her?
- Functions are defined in terms of the reinforcer(s) that follows the behavior and maintains its occurrence

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Escape



"When the teacher asks Kent to read out loud in class, Kent swears. The teacher sends him to sit in the hallway. Kent swears now more often than he used to in this situation."

"When her SEA asks her to put away her lunch bag and garbage, Tess sits on the floor and refuses to get up. Her SEA does not ask her again. Tess sits on the floor more often than she used to in this situation."

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Attention (R+): Social Interaction



"When the class is doing independent seatwork, Allison pokes students sitting nearby and makes silly faces. When she does this, the students tell her to stop and the SEA comes and sits with Allison. Allison pokes students and makes silly faces more often now than she used to in this situation."

"In the hallways between classes, Thomas tells dirty jokes. Other students stand around Thomas laughing. Thomas is now telling dirtier and dirtier jokes more often."

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Tangible (R+):
Item, Activity,
Etc.

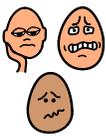


“When Jennifer is asked to stop using her iPad, she screams. Her SEA usually allows her to use the iPad for a few more minutes before turning it off. Jennifer now screams more than she used to in this situation.”

“When Jack’s teacher tells the class to put their basketballs away at the end of gym class, Jack takes his ball and runs to the other side of the room. Jack’s teacher usually lets him continue to play with his basketball while the rest of the class cleans up. Jack runs to the other side of the gym with his ball more often than he used to in this situation.”

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Automatic
(R+, R-)



“When Roxanne has nothing to do and no one to interact with, she makes noises and flaps her hands. No one responds when she does this. This happens more than it used to when Roxanne has nothing to do and no one is around.”

“After solving a few difficult math problems, Garrett rubs his eyes and rocks back and forth quietly in his seat for a minute. No one notices him and, after a minute, he goes back to work. Garrett rubs his eyes and rocks now more than he used to in this situation.”

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TAKE-HOME MESSAGE “THE BIG IDEAS”

- Problem behavior is not random.
- Problem behavior happens for a reason. To solve the problem you need to understand the reason(s).
- To address problem behavior, your first question should be, “What’s the function?”
1) ESCAPE 2) ATTENTION 3) TANGIBLE 4) AUTOMATIC REINFORCEMENT
- This will lead to a functional approach to addressing problem behavior = a scientifically informed approach that is more likely to be effective for you.

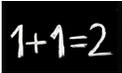


POWER : OPTIMISM



- ANTECEDENT – **teacher** control
- (Student Problem) BEHAVIOR – student control
- CONSEQUENCE – **teacher** control

• Do the math... you have control over 2/3 of the teaching/learning interaction!





Resources:



- PBS Canada
 - <https://pbisspcanada.wordpress.com>
- PBIS – OSEP Technical Assistance Center
 - <https://www.pbis.org>
- Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions
 - <http://pbi.sagepub.com>
