

## **Behavior Modification**

I have a horrible habit of tugging strands of my hair, twirling them until there is a single strand, and then intentionally pulling the strand out. My insight on the habit is hereditary considering my grandmother and baby sister do the same thing. The behavior has gotten so bad that it irks my mother and friends around me when I seem to get nervous, bored, or jittery around them, because they know I will eventually start to tug at my hair. I have chosen to modify this behavior because people say it's bad for me; they go to extremes that I will one day be bald, and that thought alone is overwhelming. The rationale of choosing this behavior is to inform myself that this is a problem and a behavior that I need to stop completely, considering the fact that I do it so unconsciously that it irks me also. Based on Operant Conditioning, I will try to voluntarily emit my target behavior; my reward will be contingent on my emitted behavior which will depend primarily on mental processing of stopping the behavior.

During the observation week, the frequency of my behavior was rather high. I noticed that depending on my stimulus generalization, or an original stimulus that provoked the behavior, depended on the location and physical conditioning of my body. For instance, if I was at home on a weekday studying on the couch for a long period of time, it was a lot easier for the behavior to be executed and practiced more frequently. Since it would be too traumatizing for me to count the number of hairs I actually pulled out of my head, I just made a tally mark for each time I began to tug

at a strand of hair. On the days that I had a lot of studying, more so weekdays, I observed that I performed the behavior more often. If I was at the library reading, either on a computer or from a book, this behavior still occurred. But in a lecture hall, taking notes from a power point, not so much. Staying in the same location for a longer period of time caused me to feel more tired, bored, and allowed more time to daydream, hence the behavior occurred. On the other hand, during the weekend, when studying wasn't as rigorous, the behavior wasn't executed as frequently and actually decreased.

My habituation of the repeated behavior caused me to respond less as the modification program started to take effect. I decided to use positive reinforcement to increase the frequency of my new response and decrease the old behavior. Based on movie clips we saw in lecture about positive reinforcement, I used Werther's Original Hard Candies (5.5 oz bags) as my reinforcement on modifying my behavior from Monday-Wednesday. Every five minutes, I would reward myself with one of these candies. The consequence then made my new behavior of eating candy more likely to occur. Even though it only took about 3 ½ minutes to eat one of the candies, the law of effect dealing with S-R psychology caused my reinforcement to accumulate. Even when I finished the candy and did not consciously consider the old behavior, I was still rewarded with one of my favorite candies. For Thursday-Sunday, I changed to a different kind of candy (only because I did not want to increase the frequency of my old behavior with boredom from the taste of the stimulus), Twizzler's (180 count in each bag), which resulted in similar modification but were eaten every 2 minutes because chewing is faster than sucking on caramel. I

consider this positive reinforcement because I administered a stimulus or added something negative, in this case the different candies. I consider this stimulus negative because it wasn't healthy for me to eat 2 ½ bags of Werther's Original Hard Candies and almost 3 packs of Twizzlers. My rationale for choosing this program was to initiate something I liked (eating my favorite candies) in replace of something I enjoyed to do (pulling at strands of my hair). I chose two of my favorite candies because I knew that I would love to eat them, they were easy to consume (not messy), and didn't take much time to open. I didn't want anything (like chocolate candy or chips) that would distract me from studying because of the noise or messiness. I also wanted to use some type of food/candy to keep me focused on studying.

The effect of behavior modification on my behavior caused the frequency of my old behavior to slowly decrease. I noticed after the first two days of performing my modified behavior on my behavior, I continued to feel as if I was constantly being rewarded for something. I convinced myself that I deserved the candy every time I thought about continuing the positive reinforcement. I still would occasionally tug at the strands of my hair but the behavior went down drastically. Both candies caused a change in the original behavior because of the continued reward I experienced, but the Twizzlers allowed the frequency to decrease more. I feel that this happened because my hands were busy holding the Twizzler, whereas with the caramel, my hands were free to tug on strands of my hair. As a conclusion of the behavior modification program, the positive reinforcement stimulus did not completely stop my behavior. It decreased the frequency, but when I am bored, tired, or need to

move my body in some type of way, I tend to unconsciously perform the old behavior. I don't feel that picking up Werther's Hard Candies or a packet of Twizzler's would help me every time, only because it's not healthy for my body to consume every 2-5 minutes. I feel that the behavior didn't work to the best of my ability because it got tiresome too quickly. I was tired of eating the candy after about the second day, which would result back to my old habit. Sure it wasn't half as frequent but it still occurred. Possibly an enhanced behavior modification program would be to choose a different favorite snack to be my positive reinforcement every few days to get my mind off of my old behavior, and maybe one day the frequency will stop completely. I would just have to pick healthier snacks.