

Feature

6-1

"DON'T WALK UNDER THAT LADDER!"

Reinforcement leads to an increased frequency of the responses that occurred just before the reward. What happens to irrelevant, or random, responses that just happened to occur prior to a reinforcement? Do they increase in frequency? Are these irrelevant responses learned?

For example, suppose you are using operant conditioning to train your dog. Suppose as you reward her for the first time for the complete act of sitting up and barking ("speaking"), your dog touches her nose to the ground at your feet. And suppose that just by accident your dog happens to touch her nose to the ground just before barking correctly the second time.

By now your dog is beginning to learn that sitting up and barking leads to a small piece of food. However, she is also touching her nose to the ground just as often and just as regularly. Yet the nose touching the ground

has nothing to do with getting the food. Your dog has been rewarded for sitting up and barking, but she's also been rewarded for touching her nose to the ground. In short, your dog has accidentally conditioned herself in error.

The late Vince Lombardi was a highly successful coach of the Green Bay Packers (and later the Washington Redskins). He always wore a brown suit to the Sunday professional football games he coached. Neither that suit nor its color had anything to do with winning, yet he continued to wear it. Knocking on wood or throwing salt over your left shoulder for good luck are other examples. They are behaviors that are not related to reinforcement, yet they continue to occur anyway. It's probably due to an accidental earlier reinforcement. They are, in short, superstitious bits of behavior with no demonstrated impact on daily events.

Explaining Superstitions

Part A.

Using the model of classical conditioning, design two examples of how actions become superstitions. Indicate the unconditioned stimulus, the neutral stimulus, and the conditioned response. Then write the superstition. A sample is given.

Unconditioned Stimulus + **Neutral Stimulus** = **Conditioned Response**

Sample

Throwing good pitches + Touching your cap = Strike out the batter
Superstition: Touching your cap before you pitch ensures strikes.

1. _____ + _____ = _____

Superstition:

2. _____ + _____ = _____

Superstition: