

Conditioning

Conditioning is a fascinating subject that is often overlooked, despite being a part of every one's lives. It is around us from the day we born, teaches us how we fit within our society, and shapes who we become. There are three types of conditioning, cultural, chosen, and forced upon. Depending on which, or which combination, someone goes through will shape how it changes a person and how said person will react. Breaking away from conditioning though difficult, is not impossible, and sometimes necessary.

Conditioning is the art of the teaching someone how to behave or act in a specific situation through repetitive training. Whether this is cultural, through individual choice, or force we all have gone through some sort of conditioning. Depending on how such conditioning is applied it can be used to make our society more intelligent, kind, and safe. Though conditioning is a double-edged blade, on the opposite side conditioning can also be used to control, segregate, brainwash, and destroy other societies through petty misunderstandings and warfare. "In the Balkans, for example, there were heated debates over the origin of gingerbread hearts- cookies in the shape of hearts. The Croats insisted the cookies were Croatian. The Serbs angrily countered that the cookies were Serbian" (Hedges, 32). In this example it shows a misunderstanding between two societies that are very similar. This misunderstanding comes from their political leaders conditioning their societies to differentiate from each other, create individualism, but also to set up for war and control. These same societies went through a much more severe forced conditioning to "carve out separate, antagonistic identities" (Hedges, 32) by changing their language, creating confusion and conflict.

Forced conditioning has been seen all over the world, by any conquered nation, any dictator, and any individual who forcefully teaches someone or people to act in a certain manner. *A Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley gives a very well written fictional example of how conditioning can control a society. In his book, children are conditioned from birth forward to train them their duties and what class they belong to: “One hundred repetitions three nights a week for four years, thought Bernard Marx, who was a specialist on hypnoaedia. Sixty-two thousand four hundred repetitions make one truth” (Huxley, 47). This type of conditioning is an extreme form of brainwashing choosing how people live, act, and behave.

“Eighty cots stood in a row against the wall. There was a sound of light regular breathing and a continuous murmur, as of very faint voices remotely whispering... ‘what’s the lesson this afternoon?’ he asked. ‘We had elementary sex for the first forty minutes,’ she answered. ‘But now it’s switched over to Elementary Class Consciousness’... At the end of the room a loudspeaker projected from the wall. The director walked up to it and pressed a switch. ‘... all wear green,’ said the soft but very distinct voice, beginning in the middle of the sentence, ‘and Delta Children wear Khaki. Oh no I don’t want to play with Delta Children. And Epsilons are still worse. They’re too stupid to be able to read or write. Besides they wear black which is such a beastly colour. I’m *so* glad I’m a Beta.” (Huxley, 27).

In *Brave New World*, Huxley paints a clear picture of forced conditioning through segregation, slavery and above all classism. This society is build off the foundation of cloning, one egg can be split and up to ninety-six times, then each when each embryo becomes a child they are segregated by class. Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon. Dressed in a color code,

taught differently, and hypnotized in their sleep to believe and act a certain way. Some of the forced conditioning is truly brutal. The Director at the Hatchery Center observes a batch of Epsilon babies, a lower slave class, being taught that they were not to like books or flowers. Books so they would not learn unless taught, and flowers so that they would hate taking vacations in the countryside and return to work.

“The Head Nurse, who was standing by a switchboard at the other end of the room, pressed down the little lever. There was a violent explosion. Shriller and ever shriller, a siren shrieked. Alarm bells maddeningly sounded. The children started, screamed; their faces were distorted with terror. ‘and now we proceed to rub in the lesson with a mild electric shock’books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks—already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly” (Huxley, 21-22)

In the real world, we do see conditioning, though not to the same extremes on a day-to-day basis. Rather we are conditioned differently in our day to day lives, with some freedoms. “The songs, books, poems, and films... National symbols—flags, patriotic songs, sentimental dedications—invade and take over cultural space. Art becomes infected with platitudes of patriotism” (Hedges, 63). Influenced by social media, schools, signs on the road, murals, the propaganda that we think nothing of has become an accepted part of a given society.

Though not all conditioning is societal or forceful, it can also be of an individual’s own choosing. An example of chosen conditioning is enlisting in the military, you go to special training to teach you how to think, speak, and act in a certain way. This training is pertinent for

making you 'prepared', at least more prepared, to go to war. In the military you are required to go to boot camp for a minimum of thirteen weeks, each day filled with specialized conditioning directed at keeping you alive. You are taught how to move and when to move, strategy, and maintenance of one's weapon, along with many other lessons. "The training methods that increased the firing rate from 15 percent to 90 percent are referred to as 'programming' or 'conditioning' by some of the veterans I have interviewed, and they do appear to present a form of classical and operant conditioning" (Grossman, 36). Chosen conditioning is very broad and individualized to whom is being conditioned. Choosing to enlist in the military, spending hours in a dance studio perfecting ballet technique, listening to audio tapes on repeat to learn a new language, and so much more are all forms of training that a person willingly goes through.

But what of the most common, baseline conditioning that we all begin with? Everyone is brought up with cultural conditioning, though the specific training varies between cultures. This starts on the first day someone is born, from how their family speaks to them, in what language, and what is or is not allowed in one's household. In the American culture most people go through conditioning from their community in the subjects of social standing, education, and what is or is not taboo within a society. Educational training consists of, but is not limited to Math, English, Science, History, Social Studies, and the Arts. Starting as children we go to these buildings away from home, filled with strangers, and surrounded by new ideas and experiences to learn. While in school students learn not only what is taught to us by our teachers, but also: what is acceptable to say, how someone will act in a group, what interests a person, and the many social complexities of behavior. This part of conditioning is subconscious, we do not always realize what we learn from our peers, what we pass on to our children and what we teach

others in our day to day lives. Though each society and culture have its differences, we learn from a very young age that things are expected of us.

All of this is particularly interesting because it brings up the question of nature versus nature. We go through conditioning all our lives, shaping who we are, act and see the world. “In accordance with radical behavioral tradition, behavior means everything an organism does. Behavior is not only what we easily can see another person doing, such as lifting an arm or talking to someone, but also the things we do on the inside, such as when we think, feel, or remember” (Ramnero, Jonas, and Niklas Törneke, 5). In the search of understanding these ‘behaviors’ and how they are trained into us *The ABCs of Human Behavior* states “a behavior can only be understood when considering the specific environmental circumstances within which it occurs. Topographically identical behaviors can be different behaviors from a functional perspective” (Ramnero, Jonas, and Niklas Törneke, 8). These are actions, behaviors, that we learn naturally from our communities. Human beings often will feel awkward or uncomfortable if they do not feel that an action was done correctly, for example; a person may feel sad or concerned if their neighbor who waves a ‘good morning’ every day suddenly does not for several days in a row. In Italy it is common to move ones hands around while speaking, and to not use your hands is considered rude and stiff.

“Every act performed exists in space and time. When a person describes behavior, there is always a “where” and a “when.” In order to gain an understanding of the function of behaviors, we need to know how the behaviors “move.” When do they increase in frequency? When do they decrease? The variation in any given behavioral event supplies us with important clues when searching for the factors that govern the event. But there is an additional purpose in observing and measuring behavior. It will supply a point of

reference for considering the extent of a problem. We will also have a basis for making comparisons between individuals. A person who isolates himself in his apartment seven days a week, in a sense, has a bigger problem than one who does it three days a week. And we might not consider the person who does it once a week as having an ‘isolation problem’ at all” (Ramnero, Jonas, and Niklas Törneke, 31). Our behaviors, a mix of our instincts and how we have been conditioned within our society. Being as that we are taught how to behave, based on social interactions, what is appropriate within our society and “a person’s thoughts, feelings and actions are fully conscious and aware and there is a sense of responsibility for the “cause and effect” of one’s action” (Wiesner, 21). This is true whether the training is societal, chosen, or forced.

Jane Wiesner writes in her book *Freedom Beyond Conditioning* “Psychoanalytic theory proposes that human beings are driven by unconscious drives (desires, wishes) but whether or not this constitutes a perpetual state of un-freedom is unclear.” Using the argument that you can use yoga as a way of breaking free of conditioning because yoga is based in self-reflection and improvement. “Although the external world remains unpredictable and unsettled, with major problems such as war and poverty— influences that are often uncontrollable— this book concentrates on the internal world of thoughts and feelings, as seen in terms of attitude: something that the individual has a possibility of controlling” (Wiesner, 21). By reflecting on our own actions, we are able to make our own decisions about how something sits with us, if we feel it is right or immoral, despite opinion of the mass body. “Conditionality is a cyclic pattern of thought...It represents an emotionally fragmented state, where an individual’s thoughts are conditioned by negative

aspects of the past...It is a process that undermines freedom on a cognitive level.”

(Wiesner, 22). To an extent we are bound by our conditioning, it is our base, what we refer to when we are uncertain. Breaking free of our conditioning by learning new things (having alternate options rather than just following what is publicly accepted), and by reflecting upon the information that you have is possible. Often the way we are raised and trained culturally is something beautiful, the accent in one’s language, the food, the style of dances and art. There are also situations where we must break free, stand up for what is right, and break away from what we are being told. Forced conditioning is used to gain or keep power, often through making certain peoples lives harder so others will have it easier.

Of the three types of conditioning, cultural, chosen and forced, things can go very badly, or very well depending on the outcomes of the training. This applies not only to how an individual behaves but also how a group behaves. With time, thought, reflection, we are able to improve upon what has been learned through various trainings and make conscious decisions. Through training, and change we shape our world, and though it is not always good can change what we do and what we teach to the next generations.

Bibliography

Hedges, Chris, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*

Grossman, David, *On Killing*

Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World*

Ramnero, Jonas, and Niklas Törneke. *The ABCs of Human Behavior : Behavioral Principles for the Practicing Clinician*, Context Press, 2011. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unm/detail.action?docID=776103>

Wiesner, Jane. *Freedom Beyond Conditioning : East-West*, Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2015. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unm/detail.action?docID=4534874>