

PSYC 281 – REFLECTIVE ASSIGNMENT – EXAMPLES

To give you a sense of what I'm looking for in the reflective assignment, here are examples (slightly modified from the original) of some good reflections that have been submitted by past students. This is not to say that these reflections are perfect, however; for example, some of them include a few too many direct quotations from the textbook, rather than the concept being described in the student's own words.

Remember that you are required to submit three such reflections, with all three being submitted in the one document. Make sure that you also carefully read the instructions regarding the reflective assignment in the course outline and well as the marking rubric that has been posted. And you can always send reflections or drafts of reflections to me for feedback.

EXAMPLE 1:

I notice that, when I resume my exercise routine in the summer months, for the first few weeks I am quite sore after each workout, which is not surprising. I have also noticed that, even after the initial soreness subsides, the workouts remain much more mentally unpleasant than I remember them being. This mental discomfort is always strongest earlier in the workout, yet as the workout progresses, and I become more engaged, the mental discomfort is replaced by a sense of well-being. This sense of well-being usually persists for a period after I have finished my workout as well. Interestingly, as the summer progresses, this sense of well-being that I experience increases. Moreover, I find that towards the end of the summer, this sense of well-being persists for a much longer duration after the workout has finished.

I now believe that the opponent-process theory can explain this phenomenon. As noted in the textbook, the opponent-process theory involves “two competing processes: (1) an a-process

(or primary process) that is directly elicited by the event, and (2) a b-process (or opponent process) that is elicited by the a-process and serves to counteract the a-process”. The physical strain of the workout seems to be responsible for the mental discomfort I experience, and this mental discomfort could be described as the a-process. However, as the workout progresses, the b-process begins to counteract the a-process leading to a sense of well-being. As also noted in the textbook, “the b-process is slow to increase and slow to decrease”. This would explain why my workouts are initially uncomfortable, as it takes a while for the b-process to counteract the effects of the mental discomfort. This would also explain why I experience a sense of well-being even after the workout is finished; as the b-process decreases more slowly than the a-process. What I have found most fascinating, is that opponent-process theory effectively accounts for why my workouts become more enjoyable as the summer progresses. As the b-process increases in strength, it is better able to counteract the feeling of discomfort I initially experience, and this counteractive effect gets progressively stronger with each workout.

EXAMPLE 2:

In general, classical conditioning is when a neutral stimulus is followed by an unconditioned stimulus which elicits an unconditioned response and through repeated trials, the neutral stimulus becomes the conditioned stimulus which elicits a conditioned response. I experienced a good example while I was volunteering at an optometry clinic where I handle the pre-test procedures for all patients prior to eye exam. The pre-test procedure consists of two machines: the autorefractor and the non-contact tonometer (NCT). The autorefractor is the machine has patients stare at a picture (such as a hot air balloon or a red house) as it takes the measurements. The NCT is a machine that measures eye pressure and puffs a small air into the

person's eye. A good example of classical conditioning was when one patient came every Saturday and Wednesday from the beginning of September to the end of October for follow-ups due to a severe eye infection. Due to the repeated exposure to the NCT, the patient tended to blink every time I clicked both machines. Therefore, I think the click sound became a stimulus that indicated to the person a puff of air might come, resulting in a blink. Since both machines look very similar and both produce a click sound, therefore the patient also blinked on the autorefractor as it also makes a click sound. I believe the puff of air is an unconditioned stimulus that elicits blinking and the click sound acts as a neutral stimulus (eventually became a conditioned stimulus). This could be an example of classical conditioning as I think the patient associated clicking with blinking. Therefore, on both machines, whenever I pressed the button (producing a click), the patient would blink (which is undesirable as it causes me to repeat the measurement).

EXAMPLE 3:

My study habits at the beginning of the semester were much different to what they are now. Like many students, I often procrastinated and justified my time-wasting with excuses. Throughout the process of reading the textbook and becoming cognizant of the lack of self-control involved in procrastination and the many ways to enhance the quality of my study sessions, I was able to implement a few techniques to reduce procrastination. One of the ways in which I facilitated better studying habits within myself was to change my study environment. Over the summer, my desk had become a dumping ground for mail, receipts and other miscellaneous papers and files, so my first step was to clear the clutter. After a couple of weeks of consistently doing my homework at my desk, it started to become a cue that it was study time.

I then made a commitment response, that if I manage to keep my desk clutter free for the semester, I will treat myself to a nice dinner out at the end of the semester. If I clutter my desk, I will no longer go out for dinner. I also made smaller commitment responses throughout the semester using similar contingencies. For example, during busy weeks I would strike a deal with myself that, if once I got home from classes, I committed to 15 minutes of quality studying for two subjects, or completed a certain portion of an assignment, that at the end of the week I would treat myself to a manicure. If I did not fulfill these contingencies, I would not go for a manicure. This process worked to ensure better study habits in two ways: the first was establishing an exclusive study zone, which resulted in my behavior of studying as being under stimulus control where my desk became a discriminative stimulus for studying. According to the textbook, stimulus control is when the probability of a behavior is affected by the presence of a discriminative stimulus. The second way in which I bettered my study habits was to use the commitment response as a means of rewarding for myself for successful studying, and negatively punish myself for unsuccessful studying. I also used a commitment response to ensure my desk would be kept tidy, so as to make for a more pleasant experience studying.

EXAMPLE 4:

After we left Indonesia, my friend and I flew to Vietnam where we landed in their southernmost city, Ho Chi Minh. After spending several days there, we decided to rent motorbikes and drive 1800 kilometers along the coast all the way to the countries' capital of Hanoi in the north. About half-way through our trip, we reached a long stretch of road (several hundred kilometers) between major cities. About an hour into this last stretch we found ourselves on a very busy two-lane highway with the sun set behind the mountains in the distance leaving incredibly poor

visibility for the final hour of our drive. As we were passing through a tiny village, a semi-truck turned left directly in front of us, forcing us to veer off the road into a patch of gravel at the approximate speed of 50 KM/H. The bikes tilted over, and we slid through the gravel carving up the left sides of our bodies, gliding to a halt just before the back tires of the truck rolled in front of us. We were lucky enough to receive medical attention from a nurse that witnessed the whole scene. The next two days we remained in the bed of a nearby hotel, dreading the moment we would have to get back on our bikes to continue our tour. For us the bikes were the neutral stimulus that was paired with the unconditioned stimulus of road rash for one trial, making the bikes a conditioned phobic stimulus. During the two days that we were recovering, whenever we had covert exposure to riding the bikes, such as thinking about riding them or thinking about the crash, it caused incubation as our phobias of riding grew in magnitude. When the time came that we had to jump back on our bikes and start riding to the train station, we were extremely stressed initially, but after 200 accident-free kilometers, our overall anxiety about riding was drastically reduced to the point that we are both considering purchasing a motorcycle in the future. I do not believe that we would have ever considered buying bikes of our own or have even ridden bikes again if we weren't in a situation that forced us to ride for an extended duration after our crash. It seems we were forced into in vivo flooding for enough time that extinction of our phobia was achieved.

EXAMPLE 5:

Phobias are a classically conditioned fear response that often generalize to many other inappropriate stimuli, which is called overgeneralization. When I was about 7, I was waiting for my parents outside of a local restaurant when a massive dog came charging at me barking and

bearing his teeth. I slid myself between a mailbox and a stand that dispenses newspapers and cried, yelling for my parents to come help me. The owner of the dog heard my cries and came to get her dog, but by then I had already developed a phobia. We had two small dogs at home, and because I was familiar with them, I was not phobic towards them, although I did show some fear in the first few days after the encounter. I was, however, highly phobic toward other big dogs. From that day onwards, anytime I saw a big dog I would try to hide or get away from it as fast as possible. My phobia underwent incubation, in which my fear response strengthened after only a short encounter with the dog. This fear was biologically relevant as it was adaptive of me to be scared of any large dogs after being attacked by one. This is also known as preparedness. As noted in the textbook, preparedness is “a genetically based predisposition to learn certain kinds of associations more easily than others”. The problem came from my phobia becoming overgeneralized to most dogs aside from my two at home. This phobia was treated through a type of flooding therapy. An old friend of mine had two big Doberman Pinschers at her house. They were clingy and had no clue how big they were, so they would follow me everywhere and wouldn’t leave me alone. In this way, I was exposed to my feared stimulus for long periods of time without any further incidents. I came to love all dogs after my phobia was extinguished.