Behavior Modification Project

Summary Paper

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Goal for change and description of target behavior

For this semesters project, I choose to use both my dogs Coco and Chanel. My goal was to decrease Coco and Chanel's reaction to outside stimulus while they are inside my home, and I selected not barking as the target behavior. As a result of our pandemic and the increased deliveries from online orders, I choose this behavior as both dogs have become hypersensitive to outside noises and would bark uncontrollably. This behavior became distracting while studying and interacting with others virtually. My goal was to increase the target behavior of both remaining calm by not barking when the Ring alerts are heard.

Method of Data Collection

The method of data collection for measurement of the target behavior (TB) was a fixed ratio schedule (FR) as this schedule aligns with my measurement technique. The measurement technique used to measure the TB was the duration of time for each dog to not bark for ten seconds. Previously this semester I identified using a variable ratio schedule (VR), as I planned to collect data when deliveries arrived. Soon after my baseline data was collected and as I began reinforcement-positive, I learned in order to achieve a successful countable behavior, I needed the specified ten seconds duration of time that included a set number of times throughout the day in order to provide reinforcement-positive, and that aligned with FR and no longer VR.

In my journal where I documented my measurements collected each day, I specified five specific times throughout the day. Once in the morning (8am), once before I left the house (12pm), 6pm, 7pm, and 8pm. The left side of the page I collected Coco's measurements and on the right side I collected Chanel's measurements, and was the only collecting measurements for this project. Next to each time listed I noted if Coco and/or Chanel achieved a successful countable behavior or not for the measurement and whether the reinforcement-positive was provided based on their TB.

The reinforcement-positive I choose for successful countable behavior was one dog treat, a dog biscuit. My baseline data consisted of twelve-days, meaning no reinforcement positive. On the thirteenth day I introduced the reinforcement-positive and continued collecting measurements for the next 29 days, with the exception of a few days while they were in the care of my father, while I was recovering from surgery.

Description of Intervention

I used Skinner's principle of operant conditioning as a foundation to strategize the operant behavior process I created for this intervention and that their successful countable TB would increase over time during this intervention strategy and strengthen future probability. To accomplish this, I presented the stimulus of activating the Ring alert at five specific times throughout the day, each time followed by myself walking to the dog treat container next to the front door; as if I were going to see who was at the front door, waiting a duration of ten seconds to measure the TB. I choose to encourage the TB by the intervention strategy of positive reinforcement.

I choose this strategy of positive reinforcement by choosing a dog treat to encourage the TB. Both dogs have become conditioned previously that if they respond correctly to a command or

task that they have learned, they are immediately presented a positive reinforcement of a dog treat. More so with Coco as she performs many tasks, as for Chanel it is only if she sits or goes potty outside since she is old and set in her ways.

The reinforcement schedule I used was Fixed Ratio (FR) as I was able to accurately have five set times and a set duration of ten seconds for each measurement during the intervention. I choose three consecutive hours in particular each evening, in hopes they would both possibly realize this FR schedule and achieve the ten second silence of TB not barking and receive the reinforcement-positive. The goal for success was partly for myself to remain consistent and that is why I was careful of the five particular times I choose and factored in the goal of having each dog achieving the TB, which meant converting my original VR schedule used during my baseline data and realizing I had to change to a FR schedule.

Data Analysis

Intervention data table below, shows daily data measurements for Coco and Chanel of successful TB of not barking for ten seconds followed by reinforcement-positive, during each of the five specified times the Ring alert sound activated for each day for a duration of 29 days. Coco successfully achieved the TB for an overall score of .03%. This was an improvement from her baseline data score of 0%. Chanel successfully achieved the TB for an overall score of 68%. This was an improvement from her baseline data score of 23%. In the case of Coco, the TB did not change as expected unfortunately. I was pleased with Chanel's TB, as it changed from what I had originally expected. I feel that possibly since Coco is my service dog and her having to take an overnight flight with me for a medical procedure and possibly my level of stress trying to manage doctor's appointments, academics, surgery, and being away from me while I recovered from surgery, that it most likely was a factor that affected her behavior in the course of my data collection.
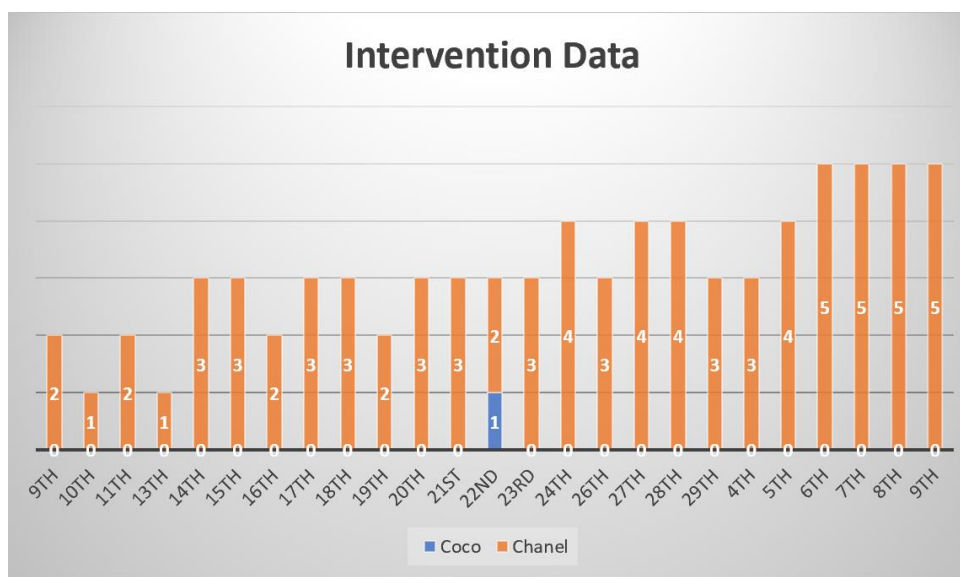
Evaluation & Synthesis

I felt I met my goal with Chanel as she has consistently demonstrated the TB each of the five specific times, the ten second duration of TB not barking, and receives reinforcement-positive consistently this past week. Coco did not meet my goal, but I attribute this to what she has been conditioned and trained to do medically for me and that one specific intervention strategy may not work for all dogs, as I learned each are unique. My assessment of the effectiveness of the intervention is that this plan was a success for Chanel. I know this to be especially true since she has demonstrated in the past week out of the five specified time windows, that she has demonstrated the TB of not barking when deliveries occur followed by the Ring alert. She just has laid there calm and looked to me, knowing she will receive her dog treat.

If I were to do this again, I would still need to include both dogs. But knowing now what I learned from this intervention, I would keep the FR schedule and change from reinforcement-positive of rewarding a dog treat for a ten second duration of TB not barking when the Ring alert is activated but change to adding positive punishment to discourage behavior. To do this I would keep all systems in place and change the steps proceeding once the Ring alert is activated, wait for a five second duration to achieve the TB of not barking and if TB is not a successful countable measure, I would send Coco and/or Chanel to their dog crates for a duration of ten minutes.

The ways that I was able to implement what I learned this semester over the course of this project was initially it provided me the vision of the general direction for my project topic that I was interested in learning and that would both help academically and personally, since my dogs are apart of my everyday life. I learned to trust the process and to slow down, as each step in the learning process is vital and intricate in the study of behavior. When I found myself in a difficult spot after baseline data, due to the VR schedule I initially choose; I was able to identify switching to the FR schedule that worked well with my daily schedule during the intervention phase. Also, the lectures provided real-life connections to concepts learned, so I feel comfortable with terminology and confident with having to explain or write papers and assignments related to my project.

In the future I will be using what I learned in this course and also from this project, during my doctoral program coursework and research. I feel that all SLO apply to everyday life and social interactions as well. I have become cognizant of my interactions with others at times and have been able to identify concepts to label a situation or experience. I hope in future down time I am able to try out different theories from notes I made this semester that interested me. I found this course quite interesting, and I see things from a new perspective.