



# *New York State Association for Behavior Analysis*

## *Student Ambassador's Blog*



### **Melissa Jackson**

*Hunter College*

This blog was written by a NYSABA Student Ambassador and is intended to supplement a recently published video on ABA with the individual experiences of students in the field. [The video is titled \*ABA is Everywhere Part 1\* and can be watched by clicking here.](#)

 My name is Melissa Jackson, and I work as an administrator at a private school for children with special needs by day...and a doctoral student and adjunct lecturer by night in New York City (NYC). Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is relevant not only in my school and work environments but in my everyday life. It is relevant in all of our lives as our environment shapes how we interact with the world around us. NYC, for example, is a fast-paced environment with so much happening all of the time. The old idiom, “in a New York Minute,” refers to the pace at which things happen here. They are known to

happen right away, quickly, and without hesitation. Here are some glimpses of a few of my “New York Minutes” on a regular day and the principles of ABA I encounter within them.

#### **6:00 - 6:45 A.M.**

In the morning, the sound of my alarm clock wakes me up, requiring more of a response effort to actually get out of bed, or hit snooze a few times if you're like me! I have manipulated the environment to pair the act of waking up with something that is reinforcing to me, COFFEE! I have my husband pre-set the coffee in the morning to brew right before my alarm goes off, pairing

the sound of the alarm with the scent of freshly brewed coffee. I typically go downstairs and grab a cup immediately, and since my body has been in a state of deprivation, that first cup is especially reinforcing. I thank my husband and compliment how great the coffee tastes, which he enjoys hearing, which has reinforced his action of setting up the coffee on a timer the night before thus far...

Next, I start my morning routine, which is essentially a large chain of responses, each step serving as the S<sup>D</sup> for the next step. I brush my teeth (negative reinforcement comes into play here since brushing my teeth takes away my coffee breath!), followed by showering and getting dressed. As an antecedent tactic to make my mornings go smoother, I pick out and lay out all of my clothes the night before. I get dressed then head downstairs to grab my pre-packed bag of work

Lesson of the Day

*Rule-governed behavior refers to behavior influenced by verbal antecedents and delayed, if any, consequences. On the other hand, contingency-governed behavior is sensitive to the immediate non-verbal contingencies. The firefighter who goes into the burning building when all signs point to imminent danger would be said to be engaging in rule-governed behavior. The behavior of the firefighter who runs and hides is contingency-shaped.*

and school materials (another

antecedent manipulation of the environment) and head to the subway!

**6:45 - 8:00 A.M.**

Now, if you have ever been to NYC, you know that the subway operates on a very variable schedule. Some mornings the visual schedule of train times will indicate that the next downtown train is coming in 2 minutes and some mornings, 14 minutes. For the most part, it always comes, which keeps me riding it every day to work as opposed to taking another means of transportation. As I ride the subway, I engage in rule-governed behavior to follow a specific set of rules as well as engage in contingency shaped behaviors. I swipe my MetroCard to enter, which involves a token economy where I trade in a metro card swipe to get access to my train for my commute to work. When I enter the subway car, I move to the middle, which is not an official rule of the subway but more of contingency-governed behavior for most New Yorkers. If the train is crowded, and no one moves to the middle to make room for others, someone is likely to push or yell “move to the middle.” Most of us have learned to do this proactively as a social norm to avoid

altercations with others, which typically works and increases the likelihood of us doing it across subway rides.

### **8:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M.**

Once I get to work, my calendar reminders pop up and serve as visual prompts for me to complete tasks (sometimes audible, too, I can't figure out how to turn them off!). I use behavioral momentum to get all of my work done, starting with smaller and `easier tasks to get myself warmed up and begin crossing things off my "to-do" list (which is highly reinforcing for me) and eventually work up to completing harder tasks. Sometimes the harder tasks require a bit more motivation, so I set up contingencies for myself for their completion, often in the form of positive reinforcement. Good old grandma's rule (Pre-Mack) works very well here! First, do the hard task. Then, eat cheese-doodles. However, it's not as simple as that. I typically make sure to isolate my reinforcers, putting myself in a state of deprivation for cheese doodles to alter their effects to be highly reinforcing. If I ate them all the time, I wouldn't necessarily be as motivated to complete the hard task since I would be getting something I

already have free access to. I complete the email, check it off my to-do list, and dig into my cheese doodles (double reinforcement there)! Now, although I have had a few cheese doodles, I forgot to eat breakfast (I should probably add that as a step in my chain of morning routine activities), so I am starving. Luckily, it's time for lunch, but I don't really have a lot of time. So I do what any New Yorker does, and I grab a quick slice of pizza! Now, as a native New Yorker, I know pizza is not only yummy, but it is a quick and relatively inexpensive lunch. I have had lots of experience with the reinforcing value of pizza throughout my life, so it is a regular go-to for me when I need a quick bite. As soon as I get to my local pizza shop, I am presented with a large field of choices, there are about 16 different types of pizza to choose from. As I stand and wait, I debate on getting a plain cheese slice or a mushroom slice. I had chicken marsala the night before, so I am pretty satiated with mushrooms, for now, so I made a choice and went with an old favorite, a cheese slice. As I wait in line, the person in front of me moves up when the person in front of them moves up, everyone serves

as an S<sup>D</sup> for each other to move up in the line. A verbal prompt is provided to customers paired with a point prompt toward the person who the directive of “Next! What can I get ya?” is meant for. I order my cheese slice and continue to move in the line as other customers move up until I get to the cashier. I hand over my \$3.00 worth of tokens (dollars) for my pizza (backup reinforcer). Once I trade in my tokens, I get my slice of pizza and sink my teeth into the first bite (which is the most reinforcing bite, in my opinion). I am no longer hungry, my taste buds are going

wild, I got my pizza quickly, and it didn’t cost me a lot! I will totally be going back here next week for some more pizza. However, now I need to return to work to earn more tokens to trade in for more pizza.

So far, we have only made it to noon, and as you can see, there is so much ABA, even in the hustle and bustle of a New York minute! As you go through the rest of your day, see how many of the principles of ABA you see in your daily routine and environment!



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*The NYSABA Student Ambassador Award recognizes future behavior analysts, or students, who help to disseminate the usefulness and versatility of behavior analysis in various settings. The award is supported by:*

*Comprehensive Behavior Support*

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### **Sally Warnock**

*The Sage Colleges*

This blog was written by a NYSABA Student Ambassador and is intended to supplement a recently published video on ABA with the individual experiences of students in the field. [The video is titled \*ABA is Everywhere Part 1\* and can be watched by clicking here.](#)

 Applied behavior analysis is the science in which methods are derived from the principles of behavior and applied to improve socially significant behavior. Behavior is defined as anything a person does. As Ryan Sain states in the corresponding video, “if it’s a verb it can be considered a behavior.” Since behavior is anything that a person does, ABA can be applied to everything we do. When we think about behavior, people tend to think of maladaptive or negative behavior, but behavior can be both good and bad. ABA focuses on what the behavior is, how the behavior occurs, and why the behavior occurs.

When we talk about applied behavior analysis, a lot of times the first thing that comes to mind is autism. ABA has been used for many years to make socially significant behavior changes for individuals with autism, but this is not the only context in which ABA can be of use. ABA therapy has also been used to help individuals with conditions such as: obsessive compulsive disorder, substance abuse, eating disorders, fears and phobias, ADHD, and anger management. In addition, ABA can be used in everyday life for anyone because we all engage in behavior.

Since I started studying the principles and applications of

behavior analysis, I've started incorporating some methods into my everyday life. In ABA we use prompting, token systems, first/then statements, schedules, ABC data (antecedent, behavior, consequence), and reinforcement to increase desired behaviors and to decrease undesired behaviors. These are several ABA strategies that I use everyday. I say that I used first/then statements in my day-to-day life and some people may find that odd, but this is something everyone does. First/then is often a rule synonymous with the Premack Principle. I would say at least once a day I think to myself or say to someone, "before I can do \_\_\_\_, I need to \_\_\_\_." For example, if a friend asks me to meet them for coffee but I'm in the middle of completing an assignment for a class, I would say "First I need to finish this assignment, then I can meet you." This is something people do on a regular basis and don't even realize.

Lesson of the Day

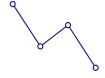
*Motivating operations (MOs) refers to antecedent variables that alter the value of consequences and the rate of behavior related to those variables. MOs that increase value are said to be "establishing" (e.g., deprivation of a preferred snack), whereas those that decrease value are said to be abolishing (e.g., satiation of a preferred snack).*

In ABA, we discuss four general functions of behavior a lot, which are access to attention, access to tangibles, escape/avoidance, and automatic reinforcement. Why are the functions of behavior so important? Because this can help explain why someone engages in a specific behavior and, therefore, improve treatment outcomes. This relates to ABA being everywhere because again, everything we do is a behavior. The functions of behavior ask the question of "why am I engaging in this behavior?" In my day-to-day life, I engage in behaviors that will most likely fit each of these functions with, more often than not, serving multiple functions at one time. One example could be when I procrastinate doing a tedious chore, such as putting laundry away. I avoid this task by finding a different activity to occupy my time that is more enjoyable. This could be considered an escape/avoidance maintained behavior and access to other tangible activities.

Applied behavior analysis can be used in anyone's everyday life and can be applied to any behavior. Whether we realize it or not, there are behaviors we engage in because

there are motivating operations that evoke our responses and consequences that can be said to reinforce those responses. Similarly, we often avoid or try to escape activities we don't enjoy by finding

other behaviors to engage in to postpone the unenjoyable activity. Awareness of these contingencies are not required but it sure helps my studies to know!



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