

Superstitious Behaviour

Superstitious behaviour arises when the delivery of a reinforcer or punisher occurs close together in time (temporal contiguity) with an independent behaviour. Therefore, the behaviour is accidentally reinforced or punished, increasing the likelihood of that behaviour occurring again. For example, you walk under a ladder and a minute later you trip and fall. It is easy to attribute your accident to "bad luck" and the irrelevant ladder. The reason an association is easy to form is because your cultural beliefs that walking under a ladder will bring bad luck is positively

reinforced by your fall that occurred soon after walking under the ladder. Most behaviours we learn through reinforcement involve a reasonably straightforward process linking cause and effect. This is the basis for operant or instrumental conditioning. With superstitions behaviours we perform an extraneous action that happens to accompany the behaviour that's truly being reinforced. Superstitious beliefs can have a negative impact on the social well-being of people in society because they are highly associated with financial risk-taking and gambling behaviours. These studies look at the effects of different types of superstitious beliefs (proactive

vs. passive) on consumers' risk-taking behaviours. It is possible that the fear of the negative consequences from a negative superstition drive faster choice making than blessings of a positive superstition when both superstitions are irrelevant. When the superstitions are irrelevant, there is less fear even when a they are negative and hence, do affect choice.