

Behavioral Conditioning Methods to Stop my Boyfriend from Playing *The Witcher 3*

Dr. Tiffany Love¹

¹Department of De-Gamification, Cranberry-Lemon University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Abstract

Every winter, my boyfriend [Chad Broman](#) plays [*Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*](#). Each year, though he has memorized all the side quests and dialogue options, he spends progressively more time playing through this fantasy based open world game. As forecasted and modeled in [1], once the weather turns too cold to leave the house, Chad gets tired of whatever home improvement project he said he was going to do over the holiday break and starts a playthrough of *The Witcher 3*. He's on his 10th play through. If these predictions are true, and he does purchase all the DLC, I might not spend quality time with him until March and actually break up with him this time like I should have when he bought that speedboat without asking. In this paper, I will present methods and results for implementing six different [operant conditioning](#) effects to decrease my boyfriend's *Witcher 3* play time.

Keywords: Psychology, Operant Conditioning, The Witcher 3, Behavioral Modification, Relationship Tips

1. Introduction

Chad has too much of a [Contrarian](#) personality to ever willingly be told what to do. As shown in [2], direct approaches and interventions to behavioral addictions have little to no effect on my boyfriend. However, new evidence shown in [3] showed that Chad could be trained with Reese's peanut butter cups to wash his dishes after using them and not just letting them 'soak for a while'. While many [classical conditioning](#) techniques have not worked, operant conditioning has. Likewise, while direct externalities may be ineffective, subtle influence is.

When news broke that there was even more DLC for Chad to purchase and download for *The Witcher 3*, lessons and methodologies learned from [3] were then adapted to not only positive but also negative reinforcement techniques before the December winter break arrived. I do not want to have to break up with Chad, I do love him, but more importantly, we own a house together and breaking up after being together for ten years [would be an enormous pain even though we're not married](#).

The worst issue with my boyfriend's gaming problem is that he is an addictive through-player of games which is particularly dangerous when dealing with a world as immersive as *The Witcher 3*. This advised the overall behavioral modification goal to influence Chad to maximize

finishing the game as soon as possible as to make the lower level side quests too unpleasant to complete once associated calculated external stimuli. With this framework, positive stimuli were introduced when turning off the game as well as completing main missions. Otherwise, negative stimuli is introduced or positive stimuli is taken away.

2. Background

[The Witcher 3 is my boyfriend's favorite card game](#) which is attached to an open world action adventure game. Since the game came out in 2015, he has consistently made a yearly pilgrimage to the couch to sit for hours and replay this, as he calls it 'masterpiece'. During this pilgrimage which was shown to take him on average [330 hours](#) in a recent meta study [1], I am stuck watching him complete an endless series of side quests. By the end of the playthrough I physically cringe when I hear Geralt's cheesy voice say "wind's howlin" or "what now you piece of filth!?" I still don't even know why Geralt has cat eyes because for the past 7 years, it's been 'too complicated to explain.'

Back in 2019, the problem had been identified and the research effort began in earnest. At first Pavlovian methods were formulated. An attempt was made to develop an involuntary response to set down the controller using a conditioning method of sneaking a shock device into his controller. Before Chad was able to be conditioned to drop

the controller involuntarily due to the shock associated with a specific iPhone text alert sound I programmed into his phone, he died in the game when he swore he hit the ‘take potion’ button and threw his controller against the wall in frustration. The shock device was irreparably damaged and the experiment was a failure [4].

The only other method for creating an involuntary response appeared to be to [implant an LED into Chad’s head to use optogenetics](#) as done in mice to make them nicer drivers [5]. It appeared that operant conditioning might be more realistic as there were no ways to associate an involuntary dropping of the controller. These methods first saw success in [3] with the great dishes experiment, and again in the follow on study [6], in which he finally had a pleasant conversation with my parents without being asked.

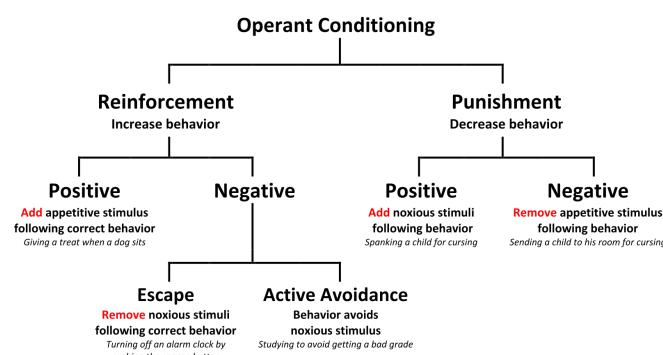


Figure 1: Operant Conditioning Hierarchy [Box73](#) (recreated and converted to svg) and Curtis Neveu (source), CC BY 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

In operant conditioning, both pleasant and unpleasant stimuli can be utilized to increase or decrease behavior. For instance in [6] when I consistently touched Chad’s lower thigh in that way that he likes when he made pleasant conversation with my parents, he did not leave the thanksgiving dinner when my dad said that cryptocurrency is a pyramid scheme. In terms of *Witcher 3* Operant Chad Conditioning or WOCC methods, pleasant stimuli can be administered when he puts down the controller, ignores a sidequest, plays Gwent, or decides to stick to the main story missions instead of spending [twenty minutes trying to figure out the best potions he can make right now](#). Likewise, those game behaviors which prolong his game time can be punished with negative stimuli.

3. Pleasant Stimuli

To increase the behavior of faster game play, and the likelihood of taking a break from the immersive world of *The Witcher 3*, pleasant taste, visual, and odorous stimuli were used across Chad’s sensory perceptions whenever he isn’t playing the game or quickly playing through a main mission.

3.1 Aunt Esther’s Salt Water Taffy

Aunt Esther is a tourist trap that Chad always wants to stop at whenever we are driving back from my parents house in Louisville KY about an hour past Columbus. It’s filled with all manner of snow globes, bins of colorful rocks and central Ohio trinkets that haven’t been sold since the McCarthy Era. He tells me driving to that rustic looking gift store and snacking on their signature ‘Aunt Esther’s Salt Water Taffy’ is something he looks forward to all year. I’ve never been able to tell if it’s more about the taffy or driving home from my parents house but there is no question he loves that taffy. They make it in the store. He always brings that up. After talking girl to girl, Aunt Esther started shipping me a monthly package of the taffy and I have been slowly orally administering to Chad at prescribed moments for the most simple WOCC.



Figure 2: Aunt Esther’s Salt Water Taffy [Bob Snow](#), CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

3.2 Poofy Sweater Removal

While it is a classic Pittsburg winter, perfectly appropriate for my blue poofy cat sweater, taking it off to visually distract Chad from [finding a virtual old woman’s frying pan](#) is worth it. As shown in [7], it can be quite distracting. I may miss the comfort of the poofy sweater more, but there are just some things a virtual girlfriend can’t replace. Trust me. There is no other academic proof needed for this WOCC.

3.3 Blueberry Scented Candle that Smells like his Mom’s Place

Chad has always been unusually fond of his mother. I think it’s cute. The third positive stimulus is a blueberry scented candle similar to those his mom seems to keep lit in practically every room of their home. As postulated in [8], Chad is probably a momma’s boy. This unusually high view of his mother allows the implementation of similar Blueberry scented candles as a psychologically pleasant stimulus.

Due to the lingering stimuli of a scented candle, when Chad inevitably picks his Playstation controller back up, I blow out the blueberry candles and quickly light vanilla ones to cover up the scent, effectively removing the psychologically pleasant odor as a negative punishment. Vanilla candles only remind Chad of Bed Bath and beyond and arguing about which type of Waffle Iron to get. This coverup scent may additionally act as a positive punishment as well.

4. Unpleasant Stimuli

Counter to the use of the pleasant Stimuli, unpleasant stimuli can be used to decrease unwanted *Witcher 3* behavior such as starting up his game as soon as he gets home, spending hours playing Gwent, or chasing after obscure and repetitive side quests for hours each night. In the past metaanalysis, without any negative stimuli, Chad was found to play on average three hours of side quests before advancing the main story [1].

Unfortunately, some negative stimuli may be dangerous if not timed correctly. If overused, the stimuli may be associated with myself and not *The Witcher*. Because Chad plays *The Witcher* the majority of waking hours at home whether or not I am there to implement the unpleasant stimuli. For this reason, unpleasant stimuli should be automated or only used during long sidequests and Gwent when there is an immediate danger of extending game play time.

4.1 Talking on the Phone

One easy WOCC to subtly elicit an unpleasant experience for Chad is to talk loudly over the phone. To fein politeness, it's best to talk in the kitchen but not far enough for him to not overhear me arguing with my mom about when I'll finally have kids or telling Jessica about how inept and rude my coworker was today. Generally, the more petty the complaining is, the more it annoys Chad. I don't even need my friends on the other end of the phone to administer this WOCC but they usually like to join anyway. For a longer duration punishment, it's best to discuss the plots of TV shows about upper class British culture like *Bridgerton* or *The Crown*. They may be great show's, but Chad hates anything like that, especially if it involves the Royal family.

4.2 Instagram Scrolling through his Friend's Beach Pics

He may not ever want to admit it, but Chad can be extremely jealous. This appeared to be an easy and subtle negative stimuli to exploit through his guy friend's instagram profiles. Though it doesn't bother me that much, Chad has lost some of his gains through the pandemic and it gets in his head. While scrolling through his friend's beach pics on

instagram from last summer's fourth of July trip, Chad has a chance to glance over and see what I'm looking at. He's too self conscious to say anything. All I have to do is make sure he notices me looking, and that's all it takes.

4.3 Mambo No. 5

This WOCC, strictly reserved for when my boyfriend decides to play a game of Gwent in the game, is brutal. Lou Bega's [Mambo No. 5](#) is possibly one of the most irritating songs to have ever been conceived. Whether it's the dumb lyrics about partying, the worse melody, or most likely the horrendous beat that sounds like it came from a kid song, [Mambo No. 5 is the most annoying song](#) to associate with the worst part of *The Witcher 3*. While it is not subtle at all, extreme measures have to be taken when Chad spends a full hour playing a dumb card game inside of the game. This external stimulus must be used with caution. In a recently declassified report from a FOIA request, Mambo No. 5 has been shown to cause advanced headaches, extreme psychosis, and false confessions to deadly terrorist attacks. [9]



Figure 3: Typical response to more than two hours of Mambo No. 5

5. Results and Discussion

After three weeks of WOCC conditioning, one week was used for data collection in which WOCC external triggers were tested twenty five to fifty instances. Each external trigger and the results were tracked in terms of pleasure-pain, and in the change in game play time when compared to the indexed meta-analysis of Chad *Witcher 3* play through times for each quest, mission, and general game play [1]. The positiveness and negativeness of the WOCC's stimuli are tracked in *Hey Babe, do That Again's* (HBDTA) and *Mega Groans* (MGs) in decibels. The results can be seen in Figure 4 below with the corresponding medium and [Highest Probability Density Interval \(HPDI\)](#) game time based on previous Bayesian analysis from Witcher game play modeling [1].

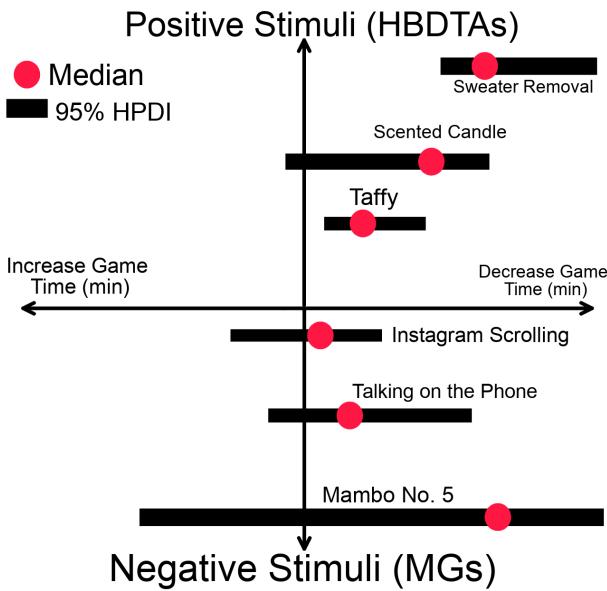


Figure 4: WOCC performance Results.

The largest trend observed is that, not only were the positive stimuli slightly more effective, but they were also much more predictable. Other than the extreme subtlety of the scented candle, most of the pleasant WOCC's created statistically significant reductions in my boyfriend's gametime. The negative stimuli, while each median showed decreased game play time, were so variable in response that they often disastrously increased game time as well.

As the best example of the variability in the results of the negative stimuli, Mambo No. 5 so infuriated Chad that half of the time, he finished his quest-mission-fight as fast as he could to run across the room and make me turn the song off. However, the externally induced haste did appear to often get Chad killed in the game forcing him to redo quests, missions, and more often Gwent games due to mistakes caused by extreme distress. To a lesser extent, this behavior was seen through the talking on the phone WOCC and there was nearly no significant change from the instagram scrolling. The implementation of that method was either too subtle, or Chad has officially accepted his Dad-Bod now that he's almost 30.

In the extreme opposite example, whenever I took off my sweater, Chad knew what he had to do, focused and got to a stopping point as fast as he could. This resulted in the most reliable and efficient means of decreasing game time. The taffy trick indeed decreased game time, however, the percent increase may still not be high enough to stop me from dumping him. Aunt Esther also charges way too much for that taffy. The candles being the cheapest and easiest method on average worked, but once the home consistently started

smelling like vanilla and blueberries, it rapidly began to lose its potency.

6. Conclusion

While the results obviously support the use of more positive stimuli in reducing *The Witcher 3* game play time in my boyfriend, negative stimuli adds the additional benefit of expressing that I am mad at him. He also deserves it. The results may objectively be worse, but the lingering threat may prevent such obsession over a fictional universe which he has played so many times already. Early indications show that while the Taffy and candle WOCC's do lose their effectiveness, more unpleasant stimuli may not just decrease gameplay time but prevent it in the first place which is the ultimate goal. The forecast model of this playthrough is already predicting nearly fifty less hours of game play. With this level of progress, I might be able to get my boyfriend to only spend one hundred hours playing this stupid game and I won't have to watch this stupid game anymore.

7. Future Work

A large amount of metadata has been captured in this study which will need more analysis work in comparison to the previous dataset in the Chad Witcher 3 Play through database. Theoretically, with enough modeling and maybe an overly complicated ML model, the WOCC's can become optimally prescribed to maximally reduce game play on a sidequest specific level. This task is possible but will require additional and extensive follow on simulations and analysis.

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