The Effects of Preferred Stimuli on Trends of Dissent Behaviors In Adults with Autism

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INTRODUCTION

Practitioners in the field of behavior analysis have been increasingly concerned with issues of assent and dissent displayed by the people they serve. Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often lack effective communication skills and for these individuals, the expression of assent and dissent is often in the form of challenging behavior. This is often more difficult to determine than in someone who can effectively communicate assent or dissent. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify preferred stimuli that might decrease dissent behaviors displayed by adults with ASD during non-preferred activities.

METHOD

Participant and Setting:

- N = 1
- 64-year-old man who had a behavior support plan (BSP) for aggressive behavior
- Sessions were conducted in an empty conference room at the day habilitation program

Data Collection:

- Dependent measures – percentage of intervals in which assent or dissent behaviors occurred, and the percent of intervals of item engagement
- Data were collected via pen and paper

PROCEDURE

Phase 1: Preference Assessment

- Four question survey was sent to the participant's guardian and staff member
  - Three preferred and two non-preferred activities were chosen
- Paired stimulus preference assessment was conducted (*see Figure 1)*
  - 60 trials
  - Most preferred activity and least preferred activity was selected to be used in phases 2 and 3

Phase 2: Assent/Dissent Baseline Analysis

- Five-minute sessions were conducted
  - Broken into 5-second intervals
- Partial Interval Recording and Momentary Time Sampling
- Assent and dissent behaviors were tracked during preferred (P) and non-preferred (NP) activities (*see Figure 2)*

Phase 3: Preferred Stimulus Intervention

- Reversal Design
- Five-minute sessions were conducted
  - Broken into 5-second intervals
- Assenting and dissenting behaviors were tracked during the non-preferred activity along with engagement with preferred activity during the non-preferred activity (*see Figure 2)*

Figure 1, Preference Assessment

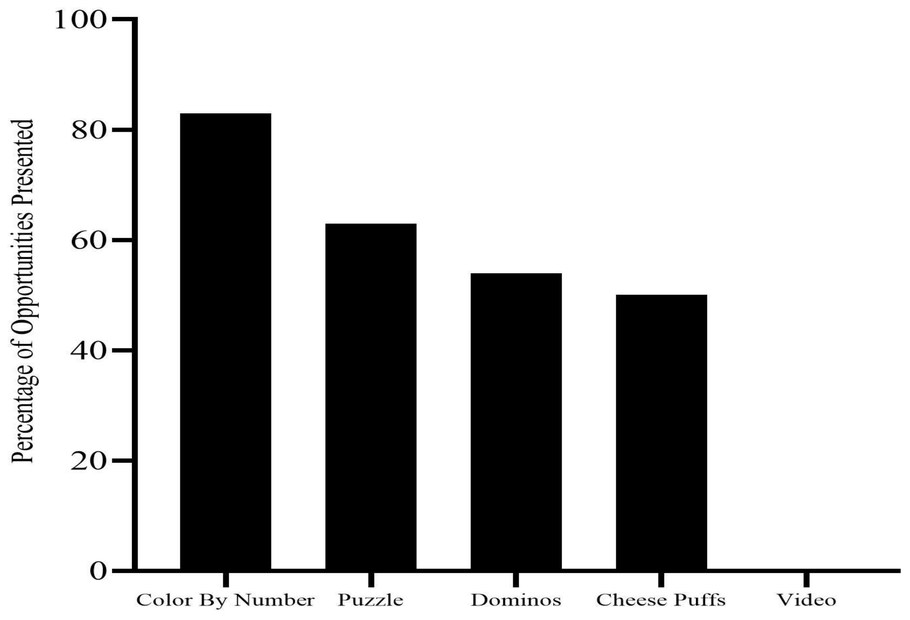
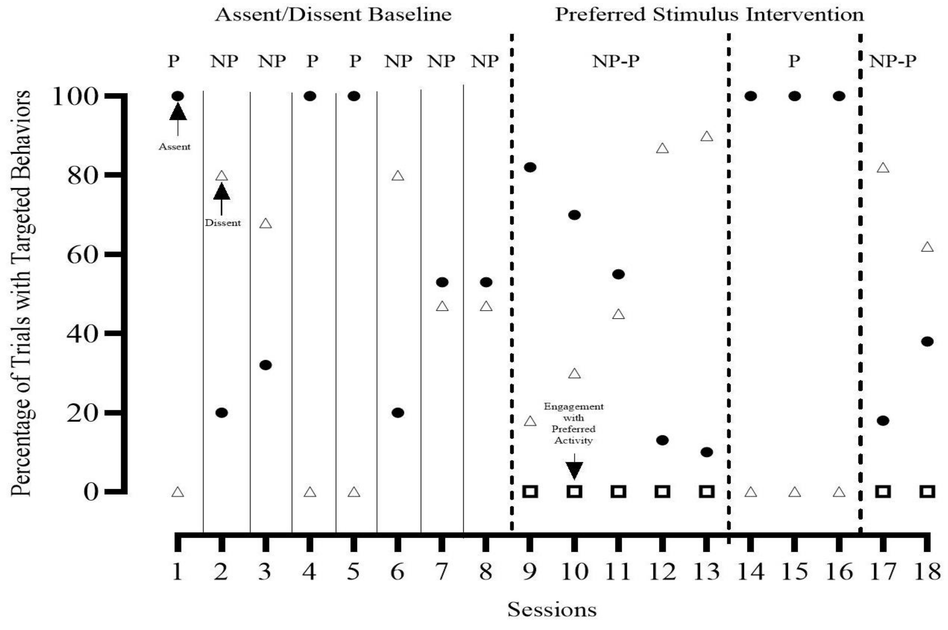


Figure 2, Assent/Dissent Baseline Analysis and Preferred Stimulus Intervention



RESULTS

Phase 1: Preference Assessment

- Most preferred activity was color by number
- Least preferred activity was watching a video

Phase 2: Assent/Dissent Baseline Analysis

- During all preferred sessions dissenting behaviors were not observed
- During non-preferred sessions 2, 3, and 6, dissenting behaviors were observed at a higher percentage than assenting behaviors
- During non-preferred sessions 7 and 8, assenting behaviors were observed at a higher percentage than dissenting behaviors
- IOA = 90%

Phase 3: Preferred Stimulus Intervention

- During the non-preferred with preferred present sessions (NP-P), assent behavior was on a decreasing trend and dissent was on an increasing trend
- There was a significant increase in assenting behavior and decrease in dissenting behavior is sessions 12 and 13
- IOA = 90%

DISCUSSION

- Having non-contingent access to a preferred activity while doing a non-preferred activity did not increase assenting and decrease dissenting behavior over multiple sessions
- A potential limitation to this study is that we did not take into consideration the function of the behavior
- Another potential limitation is the preferred items that were tested were selected based off a survey completed by staff and guardians
- Future Research Question - Can prompting engagement with a preferred activity during a non-preferred activity increase assenting behavior and decrease dissenting behavior?

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