

Psych 502
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No *Raison* for Visiting

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Last summer, grandmother moved so close that now I can visit her often. Unfortunately, during my visits, she always showers me with food and gifts. Perhaps she is using the food and gifts to reinforce visiting. Although that interpretation appears plausible, the gifts are no longer reinforcers. For example, she always gives me a loaf of fantastically delicious raisin bread, but I have eaten so many loaves that they have become aversive.

To stop grandmother from making excessive amounts of bread for me, I sought my mother's advice. She said that asking grandmother to stop baking would much upset her as she is very emotional. Mother's point was valid. For example, whenever I have not thanked grandmother for a gift, she has cried. Even though I sought to modify her behavior, I needed to thank her for the unwanted bread.

By the holidays, I had formed a plan: I would give her a bread-making book as a Christmas gift and mark the recipes I preferred. Although I would continue reinforcing her bread-making, I would be reinforcing making different breads. In hindsight, my plan was possibly my worst idea ever. Because I could not stop reinforcing her making raisin bread, my gift produced an unexpected outcome. Each time I visited, she gave me two loaves.

I came to recognize that grandmother did not always make bread for me when I visited. This was significant because I had enrolled in an applied behavior analysis course that focused on attributing the variability of behavior not to free will but to the environment. Because I

normally called her before visiting, I suspected that whether grandmother did or did not make bread depended on her having at least one hour of lead time. To test my theory, I called grandmother and asked her if I could visit in forty-five minutes. She agreed and I did not receive any bread on my visit.

I no longer provide one hour of lead time, and I no longer receive excessive amounts of raisin bread when I visit grandmother. Of course, I cannot realistically maintain this procedure as planning in advance is sometimes necessary. However, I sought to decrease and not terminate her bread-making. I was successful because I viewed the variability of my grandmother's behavior as due to circumstances that I could change and not to a free will that was beyond my control.