

A Pragmatic Approach to Functional Assessment: Improving Outcomes by Not Determining the Function of a Problem Behavior

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I will first discuss the historical contributions of the core assumptions, aims, commitments, and procedures associated with traditional functional assessment of problem behavior. In the context of recent findings, I will then review their present-day limitations and introduce a different set of assumptions, aims, and commitments derived from a pragmatic approach to assessing problem behavior. New relationships between old concepts relevant to functional assessment will then be developed. The idea that demonstrating strong control over an inferred class of problem behavior is more important than attempting to identify the adaptive function of problem behavior will be closely examined along with the realities that the former may be evident in only minutes of analysis and the latter may be an illusion. In sum, I will attempt to illustrate that a pragmatic approach to analyzing severe problem behavior is possible, accessible, defensible, and most capable.

Objectives

1. An attendee will be able to describe the assumption, aims, and general procedures associated with a practical functional assessment of problem behavior.
2. An attendee will be able to describe the critical aspects of contingencies that influence problem behavior in analyses designed from interviews and allow for socially meaningful treatment outcomes.