

*DOES LOVE OR DIFFERENTIAL REINFORCEMENT OPEN DOORS?*

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There is a story about Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, which, although charming, has not been verified as historical fact (Strachey, 1921). Whether true or not, the story illustrates the use of differential reinforcement.

As the story goes, shortly after their marriage, Prince Albert and Queen Victoria had a quarrel. Albert walked (or stomped, depending on the telling) out of the room and locked himself in his study. Victoria ran after him and pounded on the door. "Who's there?" called Albert. "The Queen of England, and she demands to be admitted." Albert did not respond. Victoria pounded again. One version of the story has it that Victoria shouted, "I am the Queen of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, the Empress of India and of the entire British Commonwealth, I am the Commander-in-Chief of all the British armed forces, and I order you hereby to open this door!!!" Albert still did not respond. More furious knocking was followed by a pause. Then there was a gentle tap. "Who's there?" Albert asked. "Your wife, Albert," the Queen replied. The prince immediately opened the door.

This story is told on various Internet sites to extol the virtues of love or to make the point

that it is more important to resolve conflict through nonviolent than violent means. But for behavior analysts, it is a fairly simple example of Prince Albert using good old-fashioned differential reinforcement (of alternative behavior) on the Queen's behavior, although we must assume her calmer, more solicitous behavior actually occurred more often under similar circumstances. Moreover, the immediate increase in the magnitude of her behavior (i.e., the extinction burst) suggests that such behavior had been reinforced in the past, either by Albert, or, more likely, by others.

And what about the effect of her capitulation on his behavior? When they quarreled in the future, was he more likely to storm out of the room and hole himself up in his study? We don't know, but we might predict so.

## REFERENCE

- Strachey, L. (1921). *Queen Victoria*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.

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