Undermining intrinsic interest from the standpoint of a behaviorist.

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AB The proposition that the use of contingent, "extrinsic" reinforcement undermines the rate at which "intrinsically interesting" behaviors occur is examined from a behavior-analytic viewpoint. Review of the literature suggests that environmental stimuli control the rates of behaviors rather than interest intrinsic to the organism. Reduced rates of behavior typically attributed to the undermining of intrinsic interest are more objectively accounted for by environmental stimuli functions, including instructional control and by R. J. Herrnstein's (1970) matching law. When the hypothetical version of intrinsic motivation is contrasted with a physiological version, the hypothetical version makes the opposite prediction of every effect that occurs. Recommendations based on the concept of undermining intrinsic interest are flawed and possibly dangerous.