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COMMUNITY OR SOCIETAL HUMAN BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS
AND APPLIED BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS

by

Steven D. Weitzenkorn

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Psychology and Measurements

Under the Supervision of Professor Royce R. Ronning

Lincoln, Nebraska

March, 1977

TITLE

COMMUNITY OR SOCIETAL HUMAN BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

AND APPLIED BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS

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SDW

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PREVIEW

The role of the psychologist is expanding. No longer are his tasks limited to working with individual problems in clinical, educational, or industrial settings. Skills of behavioral scientists are now being used to change environments which prompt and allow undesirable behavior patterns to be (unintentionally) reinforced. Models currently exist to guide such efforts in institutional and organizational environments. The purpose of this dissertation is to show how similar analytic procedures can be systematically applied to deal with community and societal human behavior problems.

Analytic models can be constructed to deal with societal behavior problems. The first step is to determine the need for such development and to resolve potential ethical considerations associated with these proposed efforts. Chapter 1 is devoted to these topics. Writings of prominent social scientists on these issues will be used to support the position that behavioral scientists should, and indeed can, significantly improve the way societal behavior problems are analyzed and programmatically attacked. The specific theoretical ideas of one social scientist, John H. Kunkel, will be described and discussed in terms of their current usefulness and potential for leading to these developments.

Historically, applied behaviorism has progressed into more natural and less controlled environments than the laboratory, where these principles were first observed. In Chapter 2 this functional development is traced from Thorndike (1913) and Watson (1925) into the 1970's, where it is being used in increasingly more complex environments. Sample studies which represent uses of operant techniques at each level

of complexity will be described. The significance of each of these sample studies will be delineated in terms of their contribution toward showing that behavioral technology may be effectively used in situations with progressively fewer constraints.

Relatively new links in this historical chain of events include work in the area of organizational contingency management and energy and environmental conservation. Recent speculation as well as hypothetical discussions on how behavioral technology may be used to alleviate community and societal problems seems to indicate that behaviorism is moving in these directions.

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to examine how a number of different programs have been directed toward solving human behavior problems on a societal or community level. Each strategy will be analyzed from a methodological perspective to attempt to discern how various methodologies contribute to each strategy's reported impact on the problem. The primary methodological characteristics to be examined are (1) the use of antecedents such as discriminative stimuli and cues, to prompt behavior change; (2) the behavioral contingencies employed and their consistency with established operant technology; and (3) the consequent events used to bring about and maintain desired behaviors.

Through such an examination, events in each strategy which contribute to or detract from the alleviation of the problem situation will be identified. This will be done through a post hoc functional analysis. Such analyses are performed by observing which antecedent and consequent events tend to accompany elicitation of specific behavior patterns.

Cases selected for examination are those in which it is believed a well planned and implemented intervention strategy, consistent with

behavior principles, could substantially alleviate the problem in some fundamental way. Many societal problems are so complex and the contingencies controlling them so diverse and undefined that it is doubtful they could ever be completely eliminated. However, they may be alleviated and in some manner kept in check through the use of behavioral technology. Most of the problems which are discussed in this thesis are of this type.

In Chapter 4 similarities between the apparent effective strategy components identified in Chapter 3 are described and contrasted to apparent ineffective strategy characteristics. Events which seem most useful for changing societal or community behavior patterns are identified and discussed from an operant orientation. These include using various antecedents or setting devices, modeling procedures, behavioral commitments and shaping, and reinforcement techniques and schedules.

The culmination of Chapter 4 is a set of hypotheses and behavioral techniques which suggest how societal and community human behavior patterns may be analyzed, in terms of their relationship to environmental stimuli, and subsequently altered so as to alleviate the problems associated with them.

To individuals and organizations designing social programs and consuming social legislation, the world of theory is remote. To these people the usefulness of "ivory tower ideas" is often visualized as limited to academic self-serving purposes and such ideas appear to have little bearing on or relationship to the "real world". It is critical, however, that the developments in academia be used in this "real world". Social scientists can contribute to national and community strategies for analyzing, alleviating, and preventing societal human behavior problems by presenting their ideas in a usable form.

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to provide a general guide for the designer and implementor of societal or community behavior change strategies. This guide will be developed by extrapolating from the conclusions of previous chapters for the purpose of constructing a behavioral system for analyzing these complex problem situations. The effective strategy characteristics identified and discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are fitted into an applications-oriented approach. Its purpose is to serve as a pragmatic tool for analyzing environmental problems stemming from mass human behavior patterns and designing behavioral strategies to alleviate them.

PREVIEW

THE PROBLEM AND THE APPROACH

CHAPTER 1

This introductory chapter is devoted to a discussion of the need for more systematic ways of analyzing community and societal problems stemming from human behavior patterns. The concerns which may be associated with the development of scientific methods to alleviate these problems by changing mass behavior patterns are included in this discussion as are the expressions of prominent psychologists on the topic. Potential benefits of such behavioral technology are also delineated and some potential problems which may result from a failure to arrive at a more effective means of ameliorating pressing societal and community problems are discussed. The theoretical model of one social scientist is offered as a starting point for developing a general applications-oriented system for analyzing these problems and designing strategies to alleviate them.

PREVIEW

Chapter 1 THE PROBLEM AND THE APPROACH

The Problem: An Introduction

Many serious problems confront our society. Change occurs rapidly. Technology advances our standard of living and changes our methods of operation. Social legislation is frequently drafted by the Congress to change and/or solve our problems. As illustrations, one is reminded of the changes wrought by recent appearances of new developments such as the birth control pill, new law enforcement technology designed to "combat crime", high speed mass transportation systems, computer technology, massive social relief programs (welfare and unemployment compensation), and innovative public education programs, to name just a few. All of these have, in some way, changed the way millions of people live. Unfortunately, they have not solved the problems for which they were designed. Modern police equipment has not lowered the crime rate. In fact such rates continue to rise yearly (Kelley, 1975). Public transportation systems are still grossly under used and economically dependent on local governments. Unemployment rates are still unacceptably high, (so have stated the last three federal administrations), and welfare roles continue to lengthen. The Educational Testing Service reports that College Board Scores have dropped for the past several years, yet new education programs such as the open classroom and computerized instruction are now common and new teachers are presumably equipped with knowledge of the latest educational technology.

Despite new innovations in almost every facet of our society our problems remain and are becoming more complex. It is now evident that many of the designed changes in our environment do not represent solutions

to the problems they were intended to address. Some of them may have even created additional problems such as larger government deficits at both national and state levels (New York City's close brush with financial default in 1976-76 is but one example). Excess environmental pollution is another example of an unintended consequence of Congressional legislation, tax laws, and massive government programs. This environmental destruction is frequently the price of new mechanical technology, which is often billed as a social panacea. We have failed to solve some of our most pressing problems because we have neither adequately analyzed them, nor predicted the consequences of our intervention strategies.

In order to cope with the enormous social problems facing our society policy makers and program designers must first recognize that mechanical technology is not a complete answer. It is only a tool and like any tool it may be used constructively or destructively. Secondly, they must recognize that our problems are not, for the most part, mechanistic, but rather human behavior problems. It is human behavior which is responsible for over population, crime, insolvent mass transportation systems, unemployment, government dependency, and inefficient education. Birth control medication, police equipment, computers, buses or monorails are at present only (inadequate) tools.

The use and development of mechanical devices may be an important part of an intervention strategy but these devices cannot by themselves solve our problems. To solve human behavior problems requires use of behavior change technology. Zifferblatt and Hendricks (1974) support this position. They write:

Applied behavior analysis, in conjunction with technology, can provide the powerful tools needed to deal with critical societal problems. The challenge to psychology is clear. An effective behavior change methodology must be employed to address the most serious crisis yet to face mankind. (p. 756)

The problem is that the applied behavioral model has not been systematically applied to the analysis of societal human behavior problems. At least this is not evident in the social intervention strategies observed by this writer. Theoretical speculation by sociologists and psychologists has been more common. Unfortunately, most of the theory and speculation has been based on tenuous assumptions and relatively weak data. Perhaps, the first really visible "social scientists" who tried to show how social science theory may be applied to relieve pressing societal conditions were the Social Darwinists. Sociologists such as Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner postulated that the process of natural selection occurred within civilizations as a consequence of individual fitness to environmental conditions. Both the moral and practical implications of this theoretical position have been discussed and debated for close to 100 years. The major contribution of the Social Darwinists is not the idea that there are differences among men in the ability to adapt to societal conditions but the observation that man's environment somehow affects behavior, in the sense that people must behave in certain ways in order to adapt and survive in society.

Discussing the role of the environment in affecting human behavior, Skinner (1971) states that this has "remained obscure" as the environment "does not push or pull, it selects, and this function is difficult to discover and analyze". Probably less is known about the environment's

role in shaping mans' behavior than most other aspects of it. If man is to learn how to solve societal human behavior problems, it is critical that he begin to investigate how the environment affects behavior and how certain elements in the environment can be systematically controlled.

Kenneth B. Clark (1974) succinctly argues this position:

The choice for society as a whole, as well as for social science, is between capricious lawlessness, prescientific in its random patterns of change, and rational law, scientific in its plan for controlling the reality, rate, and direction of change. Social science has a stake in such rational planning, for without research into the consequences of alternative actions and without imaginative theories derived from or stimulating such research, society cannot predict what its choices will achieve and cannot make reasonable decisions as to the best strategy for the fulfillment of human needs.

Given this position, Clark states "the behavioral sciences are now the critical sciences". If the behavioral sciences are to rise to the task and move in the direction that Clark suggests, the role of the behavioral sciences in society needs to be more clearly defined. Again, Clark (1974) posits that:

...the critical questions for the contemporary science of psychology and for other behavioral sciences are these: What are their contributions to the understanding and control of the behavior of human beings? How can the knowledge, the insights, and the related technology contribute directly or indirectly to the effectiveness of individual human beings and to stability in human society, and increase the chances of survival of the human species?

The focus of this dissertation is on examining parts of this issue and postulating how the behavioral sciences can contribute to the alleviation of community or societal problems stemming from patterns of

human behavior. Although there are a number of approaches to systematically analyzing these problems and designing programs to address them, the one suggested here represents an alternative to those traditionally considered or used in either the social or hard sciences.

The Approach: An Introduction

Skinner has been instrumental in the development of a technology for behavior control. His research has shown how environmental events affect behavior and how these may be systematically analyzed. His operant model is based on the analysis of behavior as a function of behavioral-environmental contingencies. A contingency in this context refers to the consequences of a behavior in terms of what occurs in the environment after the behavior is emitted. A behavior-produced change in stimulation which increases the frequency (probability of reoccurrence) of the behavior(s) it follows is known as a reinforcer. Behavior is under the control of the environment to the extent that the environment provides for the reinforcement or punishment of certain activities.

The orientations of Clark and Skinner are different on a very fundamental point. Clark's position is that societal conditions ought to be studied and changed so as to solve the problems of the individual. His concern is expressly for the individual. Skinner's emphasis is on how conditions in the environment may reinforce individual behaviors which are inherent to solving societal problems. Skinner's suggestion is that the societal environment ought to be structured so that human behavior, which contributes to societal problems, is modified in order to alleviate those problems. He posits that this may be accomplished

by designing societal reinforcement contingencies which increase the probability that behaviors which lead to the problem solution will be elicited.

It is Skinner's orientation which is most consistent with the problems discussed in this paper. Skinner's model for the experimental analysis of behavior is based on determinations of the effects of reinforcement contingencies. The use of a behavioral model for explaining human behavior, in terms of its relationship to the social environment, has been suggested by some sociologists. Examples include Bolton (1963) and Adler (1960). Kunkel (1969) discusses how a functional analytic model may be used for such a purpose.

Kunkel's model is basically an operant experimental paradigm with broad consideration given to the "social context" as the key to explaining societal behavior patterns. To Kunkel, the social context, composed of the groups, community, and society of which an individual is a member, is an important determiner of behavior. The behavior patterns reinforced by the family, educational institutions, churches, neighborhoods, and governments form this mesh known as the social context. It functions to establish a certain behavioral order conducive to perpetuating the society or community. To the extent that it solves problems facing the community it is functionally successful.

In the United States the social context has sometimes been referred to as a "melting pot" of various ethnic and religious groups. However, the social context in this country is, for the most part, dominated by the cultures indigenous to Britain and Western Europe. Insofar as the national language is English, our laws were originally patterned after British law, the great majority of Americans are Christians

(many of whom have been converted by the missionary activities of the dominant culture), and that our dress and working habits have always been similar to those of European countries and Britian point to this fact. Many of the values, norms, and mores found in those nations are also found here. Thus, it is no accident that many of our behavior patterns and problems are similar. Let us now look at how this social context influences our behavior.

Unequal treatment of women is an example of how the social context affects behavior. It would be difficult to attribute this problem to any one or two environmental contingencies as the problem is affected by events in several areas. Many religious practices and teachings illustrate the female role and place as subordinate to the male. The English language uses collective nouns such as "mankind" or "man" to refer to humanity in general, and God is referred to as "He." All of these events, as well as others not mentioned, have fostered an environment which reinforces men for treating women in an unequal fashion and reinforces women for submissive-to-male type behavior. Note that these stimuli are a part of the social context. They are enmeshed in the cultural environment of the society and consequently influence behavior. While these stimuli are not themselves reinforcement contingencies, they are events in the environment which singularly and collectively contribute or lead to the development of such contingencies. For example, events such as those described above may account, to some extent, for employers being reinforced for offering and paying women a lower wage than men for the same work. Individuals on graduate and professional school selection committees may have been reinforced for limiting the number of females admitted to their programs. Husbands

may be reinforced for discouraging their wives from working or pursuing careers.

Changing only one or two of the social contextual stimuli which contribute to this problem would probably have little effect on the scope of it, as each event is probably responsible for only a small portion of the problem variance. Consequently, a number of changes in the environment are necessary to solve such complex problems as unequal treatment of women in this country. Legal changes can bring about equal pay for equal work but problems such as the reinforcement of children for characterizing females in inferior or submissive roles are not so easily solved.

Contingent stimuli, events which occur as a function of a specific behavior pattern, act as reinforcers or punishers for community members. However, a specific event may have different effects on different people. The case of unemployment benefits and welfare for able-bodied adults serves as an example. For some of these persons receiving an unemployment or welfare check functions as a reinforcer for behaving in ways other than working or looking for work. To these individuals the unemployment or welfare check may be reinforcing because it may not be substantially less money than they might earn if they did have a job. Therefore, they are receiving approximately the same amount of income only they don't have to work for it. Others, however, on "unemployment" may be receiving considerably less money than if they were working and this situation may be sufficiently aversive that they will look for a job and try to work. Events in a person's social context, which is in essence the core of an individual's reinforcement history, play a

major role in determining the function an unemployment check (or any contingent stimuli) will have on individual behavior.

Kunkel states that different behavioral reactions to the same contingent stimuli are a function of group values and norms (thus, a function of group reinforcement histories; although not explicitly stated as such by Kunkel). Rewards and punishment which operate as societal contingencies are perceived as functions of societal or group values and norms. The reinforcing or inhibiting effect of rewards or punishment is a function of deprivation states which, in turn, are relative to the social context. These secondary or learned deprivations may be attributed to norms and values. This is evident from the fact that deprivation levels exist within a society which are not attributable to failure to meet primary needs but, rather, are associated with accumulated status symbols. These levels of deprivation Kunkel calls state variables.

Discriminative stimuli, stimuli which mark the occasion on which a particular behavior will be reinforced, play a central role in Kunkel's scheme. Kunkel writes:

By reinforcing particular behavior patterns when they appear in a specific context, the normative system of a society determines which aspect of the individual's context will eventually take on controlling properties.

If the "normative structure" is nebulous or conflicting then discriminative stimuli may not be clearly defined, resulting in uncertainty as to how individuals should appropriately behave.

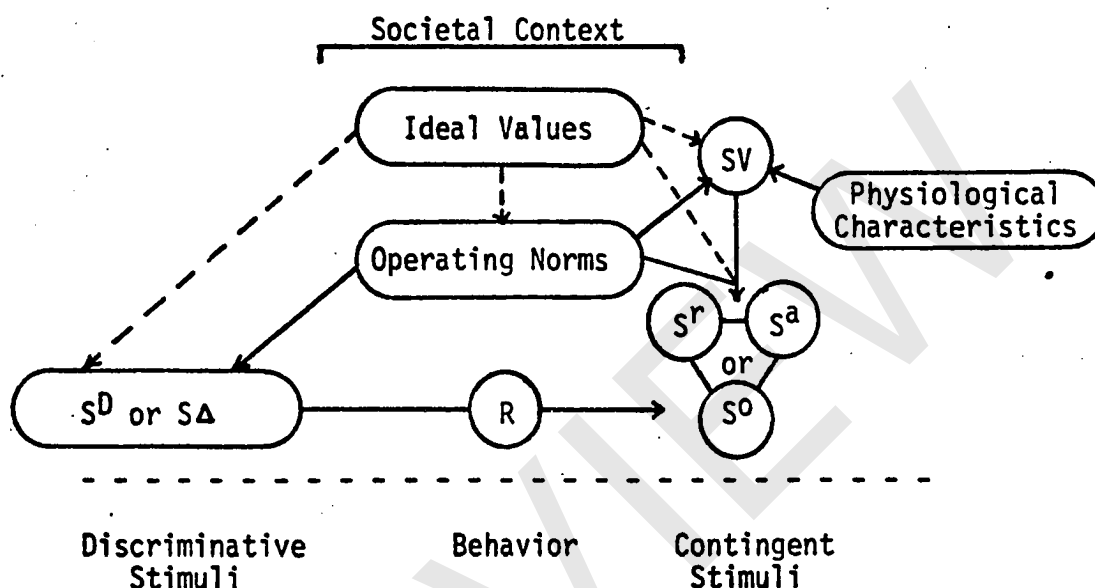
This hybrid model of man is based on the sociological concepts of norms and values and their effect on reinforcing and punishing behaviors

in society. Kunkel asserts that without the operation of the social context, which is determined by the historical rewarding and punishing effects that norms and values have had within a society, "human behavior...cannot be understood." Kunkel's model is graphically displayed in Figure 1.

The model describes how behavior may be affected by societal values and norms and how environmental conditions (i.e. the social context) serve as cuing mechanisms for certain behaviors. In other words, norms and values define many of the reinforcing contingencies in a society. Kunkel describes how behavior patterns and "complex social phenomenon" are composed of chains similar to those Skinner (1969) describes. These are long chains of responses which are reinforced by the environment. An example of this is the chain of behaviors (secondarily) reinforced with a payroll check. Many behaviors must be performed over a period of two weeks or a month before a worker receives a pay check. The behavior chain may begin with arriving at the work place at designated times and performing assigned tasks within parameters set by the employer. Of course, many intermediate behaviors between the first link in the behavior chain and the receipt of a pay check are reinforced in other ways, but the reoccurrence of the entire behavior chain is contingent upon receiving the agreed remuneration (usually on a fixed interval schedule). However, the primary reinforcing value of the wage is dependent on how well it meets the worker's needs in the society at large.

To Kunkel, the social structure consists of a huge network of these chains which involve a great number of individuals in many

FIGURE 1
KUNKEL'S MODEL FOR ANALYZING HUMAN BEHAVIOR



Glossary of Terms. R: any activity. SR: reinforcing stimulus (loosely speaking, rewards). SA: aversive stimulus (loosely speaking, punishment). SO: absence of any consequences. SD: stimulus in whose presence R has been reinforced. SA: stimulus in whose presence R has not been reinforced. SV: state variables (i.e., conditions of deprivation and satiation).