ESTABLISHING A FUNCTIONAL SOCIETY: PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS AND BEHAVIORISTS IN SOCIAL EXPERIMENTATION AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION

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"Will a culture evolve in which no individual will be able to accumulate vast power and use it for his own aggrandizement in ways which are harmful to others?" (Skinner, 1974, p. 206)

Social experimentation represents the ultimate attempt of human kind to solve both old and emerging problems. Industrial excesses, human exploitation, racial discrimination, and human conflicts form large classes of problems hiding individual pain and worries. Political and economic problem-solving strategies directed at these problems have only created political and economic power struggles. Power struggles result in rigidity and dogma at the loss of a flexible and experimental problem-solving process. Fairweather and Tornatsky (1977) sketched the basic ingredients of an adequate social policy. Among these a humanitarian value orientation (see Nicolaus, 1979, for a detailed discussion of this item), an active social role for the scientist, the emergence of innovations, a scientific evaluation of these innovations, and democratic participation of the members of society in planning and implementing the innovations are at the core of the present paper.

In recently published article Calvert (1979) isolated one of the many problems that threaten the establishment of a revolutionary society by comparing the authoritarian tendencies of radicals participating in democracy with "the dominance-subordination syndrome of everyday life" (p. 29). In behavioral terms (Lague, 1979), such tendencies are expressed through verbal rejections of reforms, monopolization of decision power, harsh criticisms of non-compliance to official party doctrine, continuous repetition of both prescriptions and slogans, and finally pretentions to the possession of ultimate answers. Lague (1979) attempted a qualitative analysis of the effect of such behaviors among radicals in two experimental social organizations: food Co - ops and popular kindergartens in a large city. He concluded that the final result of this authoritarian pattern is the same as the one produced by a repressive state. People renounce and escape previously cooperative environments transformed into punishing settings. These observations accord well with many of the points underscored in Calvert's analysis. Both authors suggest that authoritarian tendencies lead to a reliance upon political rules and to the loss of experimental flexibility. To counteract these tendencies Calvert suggests that the participation behaviors of the masses should be increased through the experiences of self-management and through the use of shaping. It seems that the first suggestion requires the creation of appropriate behavior settings necessary for the implementation of the second.

Calvert's proposal for "the institutionalization of effective means of counter control by the non-elite" (p. 29) takes shape through an "effective participation in political life." But what is specifically meant by "effective participation" needs to be translated into behavioral terms. The problems of authoritarian behaviors will not be resolved in any new behavior setting as long as: 1) specific "participation behaviors" of the non-elite necessary for a proper counter control are not specified, and as long as 2) behaviors incompatible with authoritarian tendencies are not learned by the leaders. The objective of the present paper is twofold: first to attempt to specify what is effective participation in social life and second, to pose the problem of the behaviorists' own participation behaviors in the context of establishing self-management units. Briefly stated, this paper suggests that one fundamental prerequisite for the establishment of participation behaviors of the non-elite is their access to the same tools used by the behaviorists to analyze the behaviors of the leaders (including the so-called professional behavior analyst) in terms of the various social systems of contingencies. In addition, this paper claims that the training given to behaviorists, and the methodology which they usually adopt, render their own participation in an experimental society very difficult, if not completely ineffective.

The Participation Behavior Chain

In current society democracy is equated with participation and participation with voting. To vote is to participate. Without even questioning the validity of a national vote held every four of five years as a means of establishing working contingencies on the behaviors of the leaders, we can postulate that voting is only one of the many ingredients of an effective social participation sequence. This chain of activities ideally contains the following behavioral clusters: accessing necessary information and discussing it, proposing alternatives, evaluating them, and influencing the social regulators (leaders) by indicating a choice among the alternatives (voting). In other words, participation expresses itself in the identification and definition of a proposal and in the acceptance or rejection of the proposal. Formulating the participation behaviors in terms of a stimulus-response chain compels us to accept that each of the behaviors is necessary but not sufficient for effective participation. Accessing pertinent information, and proposing and evaluating alternatives without any possibility of influencing social policy may lead to what sociologists call "anomy." Anomy entails a loss of the "psychological sense of the community" (Sarason, 1976) or, in individual psychology terms, a "learned helplessness" syndrome (Seligman, 1975). Voting proposals without access to information, without discussion and evaluation of new proposals, and without any chance of influencing become merely arficial expressions of participation. Such behavioral artifacts reflect a predominantly passive reception of information and are often subtly (or not so subtly) influenced by marketing behaviors of the originators of the proposal.

The first step in creating a permanently evolving society would be to establish the entire stimulus-response chain which starts with "accessing information, discussing, proposing and evaluating alternatives." In a culture where the quasi totality of knowledge is possessed and developed by the specialists of all sorts, these very first steps are forbidden to the general citizen. The modern "class struggle" is expressed in terms of the power of knowledge. As a trained and skilled behavior analyst, the
behaviorist is part of this struggle and his/her own behavior will encourage the establishment of a total participation behavior chain, or on the contrary, the partial and ineffective utilization of this chain by the non-elite.

One way the behaviorist can stimulate the effective participation of citizens in the community life is to facilitate their acquisition of necessary abilities for competently analyzing their own behaviors and the behaviors of their leaders in terms of pertinent controlling factors. It would indeed be naive to affirm that every member of a community should become specialized in planning and managing the community. But to increase every member's abilities to identify and analyze contingency systems is a step toward a more cooperative decision making process. In discussing the various ways a culture can strengthen itself and can survive, Skinner (1971) referred to this notion: ... a culture will have a special measure of survival value if it encourages its members to examine its practices and to experiment with new ones." (p. 145)

Illich (1973) proposes that a remedy to the non-participation of the inhabitants of our very technocratic and specialized society is to give people the access to tools which they can understand and manipulate, tools which they can use and adapt to create their own life environment. Illich calls such an instrument a convivial tool and defines it as being to "the service of the person in a society, and not to the service of the specialists' own objectives" (translated from p. 13.). In the context of establishing a chain of participation behaviors, this convivial tool must entail the use by the non-specialist of techniques and concepts related to behavior analysis. At the very least, I would propose that the analyses of the contingency systems made by the non-trained inhabitants must be considered a part of the total source of information gathered for specialized analysis of specific contingency systems controlling behavior. By including these non-expert analyses in the process, not only would the behaviorist protect himself against over-simplifications, dogmatic generalities, and tranquil possession of the truth, but he may help create a society where citizens' identification of the currently gross or subtle active contingencies in their life settings provides the permanent core of social experimentation leading to a functional society.

Some examples will help clarify this point. In education research, Winett and Winkler (1972) stressed how the behaviorists have a tendency to subscribe to the definition of problems proclaimed by social regulators. The tradition of considering the points of view of non-specialists does not then appear as a new practice for the behaviorist! However the points of view of those controlled (students) has often been forgotten in the analysis of the contingencies. In other words, the inhabitant controlling factors. It would indeed be naive to affirm that in the areas where concerned non-specialists made their voices heard when being the object of scientific analysis, the nature of the measures switched from individual to milieu or system variables. This is particularly obvious in the areas of rape and work satisfaction where advocacy groups have both formulated their own hypotheses about the macro-contingency systems in action, and directly influenced research questions of specialists in the social sciences.

This last example underscores two points: first, that non-specialists, as concerned inhabitants of the community, can produce their own analysis of the contingency systems and second, that taking such points of view into account helps redefine the problems to be analyzed in the social sciences. To work this type of information and to use it in behavior analysis could be the necessary first step for behaviorists trying to establish and institutionalize a counter control system based upon a chain of participation behaviors. At least, behaviorists, who as leaders accept and use this non-specialized contribution, may encourage and help maintain two of the first activities in the participation chain; accessing the information and discussing it.

The third behavior in the participation chain, "proposing alternatives", requires that participants be able to empirically analyze possible alternatives to a problem or situation. This activity is closely related to the specialists' concerns with research dissemination and program evaluation. Research dissemination involves the step of developing an innovation and implementing it. What is most important of all is that disseminating implies testing this innovation before implementing it on a large scale (Fairweather, 1977). Here again functional analysis of behavior has to be minimally understood and manipulated by the non-specialist if we choose to establish a complete chain of responses in an experimental society. The behaviorist may either have to "market" a new world with the help of his sophisticated technology (social persuasion) or to help the development of general social participation in suggesting and studying new solutions to social problems. My opinion is that the first option relies on behaviors incompatible with those required in the structuring of a permanently experimental society; the non-specialist inhabitant will be a passive receiver of a new solution if he has been uninvolved in either its development or its evaluation. The second option demands that the behaviorist be available not only in the phase of explaining alternatives, but also in the phase of training the non-specialist in the techniques of functional behavior analysis, or at the minimum, of integrating the approximate evaluations of the non-specialist in the experimental evaluation of the new alternatives (Weiss et al., 1977).

Accessing information, discussing it, proposing and evaluating alternatives form the first part of the chain leading to effective participation. However authoritarian tendencies of leaders (Calvert, 1979) could transform these constructive responses of citizens into a chain of submission behaviors. Unless these activities lead to a real influence on the social regulators (leaders, experts, etc.), they will again result in social anomie and in a lack of community participation. Obviously,
such authoritarian tendencies must also be understood by analyzing the contingencies favoring the emergence and maintenance of this leadership style. Effective participation must include influencing leaders by creating contingencies on their behaviors; experiencing this influence is the ultimate reinforcer which can help maintain a chain of participation behaviors among citizens.

As an expert, the behavior analyst who is willing to participate in a revolutionary society may be tempted to replicate the often seen pattern of “consulting but not considering”. This pattern is only possible in environments where the expert’s behavior is not a function of the behaviors of those consulted. Protecting oneself against such temptation requires building or selecting environments in which the load of responsibilities is larger than the amount of power. Using the “technology of behavior” to convince rather than to solve problems cooperatively can be avoided (or escaped) through choosing environments where inhabitants have equal access to the same tools. Again the basic necessity is to make power and tools of knowledge available to the inhabitants of the community so as to guarantee that as many citizens as possible can identify the contingencies of the behaviors observed in their environments. In this manner the behaviors of the expert analyst also become “target behaviors” (as these experts call them!) to be analyzed. Working with advocacy groups teaches us that this is a possible goal. Those groups have often developed their own internal rules based on almost systematic analyses of contingencies of leaders’ behaviors and are more sensitized, and often more resistant to leaders’ expert behaviors that are incompatible with the practice of a chain of participation behaviors. But as these settings may occasionally provide learning environments for the behavior analyst they may also discourage his learning by punishing inappropriate responses without giving him opportunities to acquire new behaviors. Training is not a priority within advocacy groups. The behaviorist is forced to rely upon his already existing repertoire of behaviors that would enable him to collaborate with such groups, if he is to avoid social punishment.

**Shaping the Behaviorist in Participation Behaviors**

I have assumed in the first part of this paper that the behaviorist, being in a leading social role, can contribute to the establishment of a permanently evolving society. However, often his contribution is less effective because his existing repertoires are too limited and favor the adoption of an authoritarian role. The authoritarian tendencies of the behaviorist can be counteracted by creating and adopting environments which would help him learn new participation behaviors and maintain them. But entering these environments is often a very painful and negative experience for the behaviorist who not only has to learn new behaviors but also has to unlearn a whole repertoire of inappropriate behaviors arduously acquired in academic settings. Such behaviors may be appropriate for the acquisition of scientific expertise and production of scientific knowledge. However, the behaviors of the prolific expert may often be incompatible with the behaviors required in self management settings. In the academic setting the student of behaviorism learns to “fit” the supervisor’s proposals (due to the reinforcing power of diplomacy), to simplify environments, to produce scientific results as quickly as possible, to emit “expert consultant” behaviors such as identifying ad hoc solutions to problems as opposed to teaching abilities he she uses for analysing the problem (intellectual strategies, therapies, etc.), to communicate the results of research in a formal sophisticated language to a population whose needs are the same as his own (scientific recognition), and to apply already made solutions for individuals who are often or usually the passive and controlled receivers of those solutions (Holland, 1978). In other words, the behaviorist trainee is reinforced for responding adequately to stimuli which are far removed from community self-management. Often this goes as far as creating artificial solutions for artificial problems! How can we expect such a behaviorist to respond differently in his working environment? Analysis of his learning history should convince us that he will select those stimuli which have been previously reinforced and neglect those for which he has no ability to react efficiently. An appropriate repertoire of behaviors is certainly one of the key elements missing in the behaviorist’s efforts to adequately participate in self-management organizations. As noted previously, the lack of reinforcement and the punishment for superficial, asocial or anti-social analysis of behavior may not teach new behaviors but rather force the behaviorist to escape self-management groups since he lacks a repertoire of behaviors requested by these self-management settings. Clearly, efforts are to be made to help students of behavior analysis to acquire this repertoire of behaviors. Holland (1979) in Pittsburgh is currently at work in this area. In Montreal, a small training center has been created where another attempt is being made in the same direction (Bouchard, 1979). There is an urgent need for those involved in such areas to exchange and cooperate in these matters and to make the development of the curricula known to the large community of behavioral scientists.

In addition to the lack of an adequate repertoire of behaviors, another problem which impairs the performance of the behavior analyst in a self-government environment relates to the epistemology of the learning paradigm itself.

**Objectivity, Micro Contingency Systems and Self-government**

I have previously stated that accepting and using the non-expert contributions may be a way of encouraging and helping some of the participation behaviors of the citizens. In practice, though, we can verify that the usual methodological approach borrowed by the behaviorist to gather information isolates him from the rest of the group with which he is pretending to work. Our stand for objectivity tends to “deter those who have a unique understanding” (Sampson, 1979) of the conditions which determine their behaviors, that is those we are supposed to serve in our social action. Behaviorists have too often equated and restricted the need to scientifically analyze behavior and contingency systems with the method of systematic observations. A few words now seem appropriate on this issue. First, the direct observation of behaviors does not always imply acceptance of the most systematic approach to behavioral analysis. There are steps in the collection of facts where non-systematic recording not only is permitted but is essential for an adequate formulation of the real analytic problem. Very seldom do we see these steps reported in the behaviorists’ work and less often are we informed about the procedures used in these steps. The trainees in behavior analysis become convinced that such areas are reserved to social workers, community organizers or anthropologists. This conviction often leads us to a premature rejection of interviews, questionnaires, recording of first hand impressions, group discussions and various techniques of need assessments. Such restrictions deny us the privilege of unparalleled sources of information and drastically reduce the diversity of settings and groups with which we can collaborate. In addition, isolating ourselves from interactive verbal behaviors and contemplating the actors of our studies without contacting them may lead to the formulation of erroneous
hypotheses and ultimately invalid conclusions. The systematic observation procedures are but one step in a scientific process; interactional methods may be part of other steps that would help us combat a pretension to a unique access to objectivity. If we wish to maintain an objective scientific approach we must search for an objectivity that would be the result of both the analyst's and the citizens' contribution. This appears as a necessary contingency for obtaining the collaboration and the effective participation of the inhabitants of a community in their experimental and functional society.

Involving ourselves in such a venture demands that we also become competent in analyzing behavior contingency units which are part of an intricate social system. We may question here our readiness to confront such complicated research activities. Students of behaviorism learn very early that inhabitants' behaviors in *Walden Two* are positively reinforced, that there is no need for aversive control. The very difficult task for the student is not to identify the contingency systems which are immediate and very well circumscribed to the discrete behaviors. As an example, students easily identify that learning behaviors of the *Walden Two* children are adequately reinforced by the availability of good material and settings, well planned guidance, intrinsic and social reinforcers. The problem is of another order: how macro contingency systems (organizational systems, values, norms, etc.) render those micro contingency systems available and effective? What scientific methodologies are available to analyze adequately the effects of these macro systems on micro behavior contingencies? In other words, what scientific tools and possibilities do we have to analyze how social norms influence the appearance of an individual's action, are largely determined by the values and norms of a society (ibid, p. 326), what operations can we perform to scientifically study the functional links between macro and micro contingency systems? Burgess and Bushell (1969) compare the function of these rules and norms on the establishment of the micro contingency units to the ones performed by the experimenter in the laboratory. What does the experimenter do? She/he establishes the overall environment (that is the physical and functional elements) that will influence the appearance of a reinforcer. In a social system, the actual working dimensions of the environment far exceed those manipulated by the laboratory experimenter in number and levels of organization. The characteristics of the social system are economic, legal, political, geographical, cultural, etc. Indeed these are dimensions covered by other areas of psychology such as environmental (Proshansky et al., 1970), ecological (Burker, 1977, and socio - ecological psychology. (Catalano, 1979; Dooley and Catalano, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1975). It seems very clear now that if the behaviorist wants to escape “living-room chat - chat” (conversation de boudoir) she/he will have to answer the empirical questions concerning the identification and utilization of methodologies more appropriate for studying macro contingency systems in intricate social systems. The answers could be found in an integration of our experimental approach with the more descriptive approaches used in ecological psychology. This borrowing (because of the actual research operations encompassed in this other tradition, i.e. interviews, questionnaires, etc.) may help us to associate more people of more disciplines with our research objectives of an ultimately functional society.

In summary, this paper shares the notion that a permanent revolutionary society needs to adopt an experimental approach rather than a political approach. This society demands the “effective participation” of the citizen in the community life. This participation expresses itself in a stimulus response chain encompassing numerous clusters of behaviors such as accessing information, discussing it, formulating new alternatives, evaluating them and influencing the leaders. It is proposed that to help shape and maintain this stimulus-response chain the behaviorist has to encourage and to consider contributions of the not yet specialist to the analysis of behavior contingency systems, he also has to make the tool of his knowledge available to the numbers of various self - management units. This endeavor is especially difficult due to the limited training usually offered to the student of behaviorism and to the restricted scientific methods predominantly and almost exclusively cherished within our circle of colleagues. This paper suggests that there is an urgent need to formulate and examine new curricula of training and new methodologies designed to help study and establish an experimental society.

Notes
1) Part of this paper was presented at the ABA convention. Dearborn 1979, as a segment of the BFSA symposium: “Solutions to social problems: Suggested methods and analysis.”

2) The helpful detailed comments of Fred Strayer are gratefully acknowledged. I also want to thank Monique Perreault for her patient and supporting typing work.

3) A painful and ineffective attempt was made to solve the language problem related to the area of specialist and non-specialist. In this text the words “people,” “citizen,” “non-elite,” “non - specialist” are used indifferently and are opposed to “specialist,” “expert,” “behaviorist,” “professional analyst” and “leaders.”

4) The terms “units” and “settings” are borrowed from ecological psychology and sociology. Their use refer to the necessity of considering various characteristics (size, manning, etc.) of the self - management environments. Although this paper does not explicitly analyse these characteristics, part of it underlines the urgency of a paradigmatic widening (see text).

5) Voting is an activity indicating to the leaders citizens' preference for an alternative; it is quite different from voting for a person or for a slate.

References


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