



Human Behavior and Its Control

AAAS Symposium

30 December 1970

Chicago

The postwar decades have seen tremendous advances in the behavioral sciences that have increased our understanding of man's behavior, given us new hopes for its control, and left us with the social and ethical problems such control always entails. In sponsoring a symposium on "Human Behavior and Its Control," Section I of the AAAS hopes to illuminate the diversity and complexity of the various fronts on which the problems of human behavior currently are being attacked. The attendant possibilities for control which are opening up range from surgical, genetic, and pharmacological techniques through the standard reinforcement procedures of modern learning theory to the use of values and atti-

tudes, manipulation of the social milieu through small group experiences of the "encounter" or "sensitivity" variety, and manipulation of the actual physical environment itself.

Thus the behavioral psychology of the middle-century period has shown an increasing stress on environmental factors as determiners of behavior and on their manipulation as a means of its control. Here witness the importance in current psychiatry of the social interaction concepts introduced by Harry Stack Sullivan (a point of view represented in our symposium by Carson) and the ecological psychology of Roger Barker developing from the earlier topological approach of Kurt Lewin (a position espoused here by Stern).

In part this concern with the importance of the milieu in which the individual finds himself as a determiner of his behavior has been forced on us by the weight of empirical evidence. In part it may well reflect contemporary clinical disillusionment with a therapeutic philosophy based upon the production of radical change within the patient himself, and a resulting stress on an alteration of the interactional and transactional patterns of the total situation—patient and environment together. In part it may reflect an increasingly humanitarian orientation in our culture, a feeling that if individual and environment conflict it is the environment and not the individual that must adapt. In any case the concern with



context or environment is there and will furnish a recurring, underlying theme for our symposium.

We could not hope to present the teeming diversity of investigative approaches in the behavioral sciences in any detail in a single symposium so we have selected our contributors from widely differing fields of interest, hoping that the novelty and contrast in approach that they show will accentuate the common underlying trends mentioned above.

Thus George Stern will tackle "People in Context" and discuss the importance of behavior settings in determining behavior, comparing the relatively simple institutional parameters with the more complex personal ones, and suggesting two basic and independent dimensions of institutional settings; they are devoted to the self-actualization of the participants, and to the maintenance of the institutional structure. The selective distribution of personalities among them is witness to their influence on behavior.

Ray Mack points out that, with the population increase and the development of modern communications, strictly "rural" populations no longer exist and the new generation is the first in this country to be completely urbanized. The demands of urbanization for conformity are balanced by the opportunities for differentiation presented by the contrasting peoples and cultures in the urban mix. It is against this background of demands for conformity and opportunities for individualization that the new generation must work out its potential for maximum individual development.

Expressing the growing dissatisfaction with conventional concepts of mental illness, Carson will present an alternative formulation of behavioral deviance, and both more "naive" and yet more powerful, based on an integration of behavioristic and social exchange perspectives, a formulation within which even the more "severe" classical entities can be assimilated.

"Experimenter Bias" is a popular concept in behavioral science these days and we are all aware of the unwitting influence an experimenter may have upon his experimental data. We are also aware, but have much less understanding, of the unfortunate biases and behaviors that our subject populations may bring with them into the experimental laboratory. Walker will discuss

these, among others discussing the "recidivist" who performs in a continued series of like experiments, and the "second guesser" who attempts to "dope out" the situation in order that he may facilitate or hinder the experimenters.

Over the years few subjects have had the fascination that adheres to the control of involuntary bodily processes, and Rechtschaffen will introduce the afternoon sessions on the control of behavior by discussing the recent research bearing on the ability to control sleep and dreams. Anatomical, chemical, electrophysiological, and environmental "controllers" will be considered and special attention will be given to conceptual "traps" which confuse the meaning of the control achieved.

In contrast, Rokeach will deal with the more intangible controls introduced by attitudes and value systems. Using a self-confrontation technique design to create self-dissatisfaction he has produced changes in an individual's values concerning "equality" and "freedom" that were shown to influence the individual's behavior in a real life situation 3 months later. Other experiments to be reported will demonstrate significant changes in behavior, attitudes, and values 15 and 21 months after a half-hour experimental session.

Contracts, written and unwritten, verbal and implicit, govern much of man's interactions with man. By illustration Egan will discuss their use in the behavioral modification procedures such as the encounter group in "laboratory" or "sensitivity" training where they can be used to give focus to what can become a quite diffuse process and to provide a desirable degree of psychological safety that might otherwise be lacking. In research, explicit contracts are one way of maintaining uniformity as the researcher treats with different groups.

In closing, Perry London will discuss the ethical complexities of our increased potential for behavior control. As he points out, since our control methods are typically only used for benevolent purposes, their political implications are subtle, and we may overlook the dangerous erosion of an individual's freedom when the decision to use them comes from another. The ethical challenge of behavior control, therefore, is the common problem of how to maintain personal liberty in situations where its suppression may be rationalized by both the common welfare and the individual's happiness.

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Speakers and Topics

Chairman: William A. Hunt
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30 December (morning)

George G. Stern (Syracuse University), *People in Context*.

Raymond W. Mack (Northwestern University), *The Urbanization of Behavior*.

Robert C. Carson (Duke University Medical Center, Durham, North Carolina), *Disordered Interpersonal Behavior*.

Ronald E. Walker (Loyola University, Chicago), *The Behavior of Experimental Subjects*.

30 December (afternoon)

Alan Rechtschaffen (University of Chicago Medical Center), *The Control of Sleep and Dreaming*.

Milton Rokeach (Michigan State University), *Long-Range Experimental Modification of Values and Behavior*.

Gerard Egan (Loyola University), *Contractual Approaches to the Control and Modification of Behavior in Encounter Groups*.

Perry London (University of Southern California), *Ethical Problems in Behavior Control*.