BEHAVIORISM IN SOCIOLOGY

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TOWARD A BEHAVIORAL SOCIOLOGY

. In the last decade, the behavioral perspective of psychology has entered the field of sociology, largely because a group of sociologists became impressed by the principles, procedures, and practical utility of behavioral psychology and its potential for sociology. This, and other developments, such as the work of George Caspar Homans, has led to a new paradigm, behavioral sociology, which provides a bridge to link individual and structural approaches to explanations of social behavior. Adherents believe that this new approach, based on the tenets of behavioral psychology, when applied to issues and problems of sociology can enhance sociological understanding. It could also provide a unifying framework for all of the social sciences.

. Since Durkheim established the identity of sociology by performing a sociological analysis on suicide, which had been considered a psychological phenomenon, sociology and psychology have coexisted with little concern for progress or discoveries in the related science. They maintain different approaches to the analysis of human social behavior. Each has tended to remain content with its own paradigms and conceptual core. The hiatus has been detrimental to our understanding of social phenomena and to explanations of human social behavior.

. That few adherents go beyond the bounds of their own discipline in search of new paradigms indicates a condition called discipline--derived myopia (Kunkel 1975). Within a discipline, this situation is confounded by a second ailment: model-derived myopia. These conditions restrict intellectual orientation with concomitant ignorance and disregard of similar paradigms in other sciences. Discipline-derived myopia, along with the seemingly ominous specter of reductionism and psychological imperialism sustained the hiatus. A growing group of sociologists who identify with the behavioral orientation have shed their myopia, and have developed a major perspective, borrowing heavily from psychology, which has been underestimated and ignored by many sociologists.

THE BEHAVIORAL PERSPECTIVE

. Behaviorism has a long history in psychology, evolving from research in learning and memory. Recently, it has led to the development of behavior therapy and applied behavior analysis. Behaviorism has entered the field of sociology due to the influence of behavioral psychologists, and behaviorists, and the prospect of a scientifically rigorous model for significant practical applications. Like behaviorism in psychology, behavioral sociology is a broad perspective ranging from the more radical Skinnerian viewpoint (1953) to Bandura's softer social learning approach (1963).

. In a recent survey, behavioral sociologists explained why they were attracted to the behavioral perspective. Typical responses were: it is a rigorous scientific approach, methodologically strong, theoretically parsimonious, and sound; it makes sense and is a useful alternative for studying human social behavior; and it is objective, replicable, experimental, and cumulative, offering techniques that can be used to make significant changes in social behavior (Green 1975).

. Behavioral sociologists have studied a variety of social phenomena, such as teaching public speaking skills to low-income adults (Fawcett & Miller 1975), behavioral principles in small group research (Conger & Kileen 1974), and an attempt to synthesize social control and social

learning models of delinquent behavior (Conger 1976).

. Jeffery (1965) discussed behavioral theory in terms of explaining criminal behavior. Burgess & Akers (1966) reformulated Sutherland's differential association theory of criminal behavior into 7 behavioral propositions. Franklin (1971) discussed how behavioral principles could be altered to fit instances of social interaction.

BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS

. Ritzer (1975 145) defined behavioral sociology as "the theoretical effort to apply principles of psychological behaviorism to sociological questions." Thus, a behavioral sociologist is a sociologist who uses concepts and principles of operant behavior to examine, explain, or alter social behavior. Operant behavior is behavior which operates in the environment to produce a consequence which modifies subsequent behavior. An operant is behavior shaped and maintained by its consequences. The functional relations between operant behaviors and their consequences provide foundations for operant analysis. These functional relations are considered principles of behavior, and are usually expressed as contingency statements.

. Formulating a contingency requires 3 elements: the (1) occasion on which (2) consequences are contingent on (3) behavior. The contingency concept means that the consequences are dependent on the occurence of the behavior. The sequence is: (1) occasion; (2) behavior; and (3) consequence (Goldiamond 1976 6).

. Behavioral analysis applies to socially relevant behavior of persons, the interaction of persons in groups, or the behavior of groups, organizations, and societies as behavioral units. "There is growing evidence that principles developed by experimental analysis of behavior have considerable relevance for the analysis of patterns of socialization, of the development of normative as well as deviant behavior, or personal and group values, and of organizational structure and for the development, persistence, and change of institutional forms." (Burgess & Bushell 1969 25). A basic distinction between behavioral and traditional sociology is that the former is applied, and focuses on variables that can be used to shape or alter behavior, rather than on variables that "cause" or "relate" to behavior. The applied aspect of behavioral sociology sets it apart from other approaches (Ritzer 1975 150).

. Its origin was the work of George Caspar Homans, who was influenced by Skinner. He is the most persuasive spokesperson for social exchange theory, and the leading behavioral sociologist. He was the first major sociologist to use behavioral psychology in sociology, and the one who used behavioral principles in sociological explanations (1961; 1964a). This orientation is traced to his first major work in 1941 and to a more elaborate expression in collaboration with Schneider in 1955 (Turner 1978 224). Homans reminded us that such theoretical constructs as society and social behavior involve human behavior. Hence, psychological principles are appropriate to explain social phenomena. "If a serious effort is made to construct theories that will even begin to explain social phenomena, it turns out that their general propositions are not about the equilibrium of societies but about the behavior of men. ... The institutions, organizations and societies that sociologists study can always be analyzed, without residue, into the behavior of individual men. They must therefore be explained by propositions about the behavior of individual men." (Homans 1964a 818; 1964b).

. A second origin of behavioral sociology arose at Washington University, St. Louis, in the early 1960's from the influence of Professors Robert Hamblin and L

Keith Miller on such graduate students as Ronald Akers, David Buckholdt, Robert Burgess, Don Bushell, and Daniel Ferritor. This group later diffused behavioral sociology widely in the discipline. The third origin was at Arizona State University in the same period, where behaviorist psychologists Israel Goldiamond, Jack Michael, and Arthur & Carolyn Staats influenced such members of the sociology faculty as Jeffery, Jones, and Kunkel.

VARIATIONS: A ROSE IS A ROSE

. The term behavioral sociology was first used by Burgess and Bushell (1969). They were concerned with a growing field in experimental psychology which had much to offer to sociology, and they traced the intellectual heritage of behavioral sociology to the writing and research of experimental psychologists Ferster, Keller, Schoenfeld and Skinner. However, the term behavioral sociology is not the only label for the behavioral paradigm. Ritzer (1975) notes that the social behavior paradigm includes two major theoretical schools: behavioral sociology and exchange theory. Turner (1978) refers to it as exchange theory consisting of the exchange behaviorism model of Homans and the exchange structuralism of Blau.

. Some prefer the more neutral social learning approach (Akers 1977; Kunkel 1975). The terms behavior analysis, and applied behavior analysis are also used. These terms are not specific as to discipline, and they are used almost exclusively by applied researchers investigating and altering individual behavior in complex organizations. Cundy (1977) uses the term social conditioning approach, while Friedrichs (1974) prefers neo-behaviorism. Gordon (1978) refers to his own approach as heuristic or practical emergentist. Other labels include social exchange theory, sociological behaviorism, behaviorism, and behavior modification.

. Just as psychological behaviorism is a general term referring to many approaches, behavioral sociology in its emergent state, is already diversified, and the label used at present is a cue to a particular behavioral orientation. Michael & Green (1978) outline the emergent forms of behavioral sociology as 1) applied behavioral analysis in complex organizations; 2) experimental analyses of social exchange and social process; and 3) behavioral macro sociology and theoretical extensions.

EXEMPLARS: MODELS & FOUNDERS

. In discussing a new paradigm it is worth while to note the exemplars. The task becomes complex as one discovers that there are several referents. The term exemplar refers to a person who serves as model or example; but it also refers to an "ideal model". Sometimes its use extends to such meanings as "most important in the field", "model whom most adherents follow", or "founder". The indisputable exemplar of behavioral sociology is B F Skinner, who is the source of the recent resurgence of behaviorism in all of the social sciences, particularly sociology (Ritzer 1975 142; Friedrichs 1974 3). Finally, Hamblin and his associates (1971), who wrote one of the earliest empirical monographs from the behavioral sociology perspective, note that they were influenced by Skinner, who was also recognized as influencing the Burgess & Bushell reader. And Tarter (1976) argues that sociology should examine the behavioral approach. According to Hamblin & Kunkel (1976) Homans must also be recognized as sharing the rank of exemplar with Skinner.

TOWARD A CRITIQUE

. Behavioral sociology is indentified as one of the three major paradigms in sociology, but its significance and potential have often been overlooked or denied. Tarter wrote that "sociology is hesitant to examine this carefully

developed body of information which offers so much promise .. maintaining a disciplinary ethnocentricity with its continued fear of psychological reductionism." (1973 153) Many analyses of the state of sociology have neglected or underestimated the significance of behavioral sociology (Ritzer 1975 226). Articles critical of behavioral sociology began to appear following Homans' early statements in the 1960's. The concern focused on such issues as relevance for sociology, reductionism, and the tautological aspect of the behavioral model. An underlying concern seemed to revolve around the intrusion of behaviorism into sociology.

. Articles critical of behavioral sociology are illustrated by those of Morris & Hesslink (1974) and Pepinsky (1975). While some of the concerns such as the issue of tautology, the omission of internal states as relevant data, the atheoretical orientation of some adherents, and the ethics of behavioral control are shared with some psychologists, others, such as reductionism, nominalism, psychological imperialism, and the possibility of planned social intervention are of special concern to sociologists. Behind many of the critical responses is the belief that behavioral sociology is antithetical, divergent, and even alien to traditional sociology. Some might even argue that the discipline has ben invaded, and that the incursion if unchecked, is likely to contaminate every level and type of analysis.

. The discipline should be more tolerant of any new approach that promises some possibility of advancing sociological explanation and understanding of human social behavior. Gordon argues that ".. we must combine sociological with psychological variables to raise the explanatory power of our generalizations." He says variables with explanatory utility should be taken wherever found (1978 43).

DIFFUSION OF THE BEHAVIORAL PERSPECTIVE

. Sociology is not the only discipline to experience the diffusion of the behavioral perspective. Goldiamond suggests that several of the social sciences use the basic operant contingency formulation to analyze social relations. This includes transactional analysis in anthropology, exchange analysis in sociology, decision theory in economics, and operant contingency analysis in psychology, from which much of the terminology and procedures were derived. Though these models cover overlapping terrain, each also considers variables specific to its own discipline. Also, ".. differences in metaphors -- that is, the language they use and the concepts they relate to, as well as differences in variables considered -- derive from the different requirements of the .. disciplines." (1976 7)

. Cundy (1977) points out that examples of a behavioral orientation can also be found in social work, criminology, anthropology, and jurisprudence (Fischer & Gochros 1975; Wodarski & Bagarozzi 1978: Jeffery 1965; 1971: Jones 1971: Jones 1971: Wexler 1973; 1975).

TOWARD A FUTURE SYNTHESIS

. WIth the diffusion of the behavioral perspective across the social sciences and related disciplines, one might expect a theoretical convergence leading toward a unifying framework for all of the social sciences. Homans has long argued in terms of a unifying framework, claiming that the empirical propositions generated from study of social behavior may most easily be explained by behavioral psychology and elementary economics. He says that ".. behavioral psychology is fundamental to all the sciences concerned with the social behavior of men ..", including sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, and history (Homans 1961 12; 1969 1).

"Social behaviorism contains the seeds for a general integration with the principles and findings of the social sciences." (Staats 1976 60)

. At present, the wide diffusion of the principles, procedures and concepts of behaviorism seem to lead directly toward a general theoretical and empirical synthesis which, we hope, will expand our understanding of the social world, and simultaneously allow greater cooperation among the disciplines concerned with human behavior.

CONCLUSION

. The example of cross-fertilization provided by the diffusion of behaviorism into sociology will allow sociology and psychology to exist more comfortably together, and more important, lead to more fruitful and more complete explanation of social behavior. There is nothing to be gained by the nebulous charge of reductionism. "A behavioral analysis cannot remain psychological, but naturally becomes sociological. A nation's stratification system, its educational and economic institutions, and religious and governmental organizations are all part of the analysis of social behavior." (Kunkel 1975 177) We must not ignore or underestimate the strengths of sociology in terms of what it can bring to behaviorism. It can offer a wealth of demographic and other pertinent background data, a body of detailed knowledge of the social world, and an understanding of the interrelatedness of the components of the social world.

. It could well be that the entire issue of behaviorism in sociology revolves around two related issues: 1) Does it fit within the scope of sociology? 2) Does it have any explanatory utility? Since behaviorism deals with social behavior, it is well within the scope of sociology. The question of explanatory utility seems to have been answered in terms of all of the empirical studies in sociology that have emanated from the behavioral perspective. Behavioral sociology seems able to offer the way to a viable technology of behavior for sociology.

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