Chapter 9 Applied Behaviorism

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction
   A. Shakespeare’s question in Hamlet “To be or not to be?” might be rephrased by applied behaviorists as “To act or not to act?” Behaviorists emphasize punishment for unacceptable behavior, rewards for appropriate and effective action.

II. Related Dialects, Associated Schools of Thought
   A. Behaviorism – theoretical tradition promoting the study of human and animal behavior
   B. Social behaviorism – a sociological approach pioneered by Mead that considers social aspects of behavior
   C. Radical behaviorism – championed by B. F. Skinner, attempts to account for human behavior without using concepts about mental events
   D. Social learning theory – a variation developed by Albert Bandura includes consideration of the cognitive and environmental determinants of behavior while emphasizing learning by modeling
   E. Applied behavioral analysis and behavior modification are applications of behavioral concepts, methods, and principles

III. Applied Behaviorism: Exemplary Models
   A. Ivan Pavlov was a Russian physiologist who studies digestive processes of dogs and created a science of conditioned reflexes
   B. John Watson is considered the founder of behaviorism. He was influenced by Pavlov, committed himself to studying only observable behavior, and argued that the laws of behavior are the same for animals and humans
   C. B. F. Skinner was a very influential psychologist. He studied the relationship of consequences to behavior, and the shaping of behavior by altering negative and positive reinforcements. He applied his theories to many public problems and issues.
   D. Bruce Thyer is a social worker committed to the behavioral approach. He has conducted behavioral research, summarized the evidence supporting behavioral practice, and written about behavioral assessment and intervention

IV. Applied Behaviorism: Root Metaphors
   A. The person is like animal. Humans are similar to rats, pigeons, dogs, monkeys
      1. all animals learn via similar processes
      2. the study of animals (and humans) focuses on public, observable behavior (like with dog trainers who don’t speculate about what poodle is thinking)
      3. animals learn or perish; humans must learn or fail
      4. maladaptive behavior for both animals and humans is extinguished
      5. environmental factors cause changes in patterns of both animal and human behavior
      6. behaviorists prefer simple explanations of HBSE (one theory for animal and human behavior is better than two theories) except Bandura
   B. The social environment is like a laboratory in psychology department. Lab scientists (and community leaders) must
      1. control all conditions
2. manipulate variables
3. conduct animal experimentations to increase knowledge (and social experimentations)
4. Since society has structures like mazes and laboratories; societal leaders reward the “human” rats, and there are smart, quick learning versus dumb rats
5. Skinner’s Walden II was his attempt to describe a community organized according to behavioral principles

C. The social worker as behavioral engineer / lab scientist who
   1. assembles subjects in controlled setting
   2. assumes complete authority
   3. use conventional scientific method
   4. analyzes all contingencies
   5. shapes subject’s behavior

D. Critics - reject authoritarian approach, prefer respect for human dignity and rights and decision making

V. Core Assumptions of Applied Behaviorism
   A. Prioritize understanding, controlling, predicting observable behavior
      1. Less priority to non observables
      2. Interest – what is the person doing? (McPhail’s crowd behavior example of identifying numerous observable behaviors)
      3. extension of theory to covert behavior like self-designations
   B. Human behavior is learned, by
      1. almost all behavior is learned
         a. classical conditioning
         b. operant conditioning
         c. observational learning
      2. biological factors are important is specific and limited ways – capacity for intelligent behavior, for example
   C. The basic learning processes are universal
      1. Learning processes transcend history and geography
      2. There is diversity in terms of what is rewarding and punishing and preferred behavior modification procedures
   D. The best practice is scientific in conventional / quantitative sense
      1. Use of standardized laboratory procedures, valid and reliable measures, evidence-based interventions, continuous practice evaluation, etc.

VI. The Social Learning Theory of Human Development: Learning Histories
   A. Albert Bandura: exemplary role model was interested in overt and covert learning processes, and interested in evidence-based practice
   B. Assumptions
      1. Individual development is best understood in terms of a person’s learning history
      2. People use cognitive processes to generate novel behavior
      3. Development is gradual and dependent on learning opportunities not on predictable stages
      4. Current problems are explained by reference to learning experiences
   C. Root metaphors
      1. Learning involves imitating or modeling others
      2. The learner is like a semiautomatic camera
   D. Bandura’s theory
1. Includes concepts such as observational learning, consequences and their functions (reinforcing, informative, motivational), components of modeling (attentional processes, retention processes, reproduction processes), modeling types (abstract, creative), and types of models (live, symbolic)

E. Critical comments –
1. Bandura’s theory is a useful extension of behavioral approach, it considers social sources of learning, and is supported by research but does not explain how cognitive processes change as person matures

F. Applications – to policy realm (television violence), to education via modeling programs, and to therapy

VII. Selective Propositions from Applied Behaviorism
A. Preferences for work pay can be explained by schedules of reinforcement
   1. fixed ratio reinforcement refers to preference for pay per specified number of responses
   2. fixed interval reinforcement refers to pay after an amount of time has passed

B. Schedule type evokes different patterns of response – like way students are rewarded for field internship work on fixed interval schedule so they perform fewer hours in beginning, more in middle, and increase hours toward semester’s end to meet deadline

VIII. Mapping Applied Behaviorism
A. Figure 9.1: Eco-Map: The Applied Behaviorism Version
B. Applied Behaviorism Translations
   1. How are connections conceptualized?
      a. as exchange of contingencies, the linkage of antecedents, stimuli, behavior, consequences
         1. reinforcers
         2. aversives
         3. role models
         4. antecedents (prompts) – alert us to particular stimuli within a stimulus collage
   2. How is the quality of connections differentiated? – linkages evoking socially acceptable, appropriate, desirable behavior
      a. positive connections – contingencies that increase desired behavior and decrease undesirable behavior
      b. negative connections – contingencies that decrease desired behavior and increase undesirable behavior
      c. tenuous connections – those with little strength in shaping or changing behavior
   3. What is the typical unit of attention or focal system?
      a. the behaving person (not inner self) including
         1. total repertoire of behavior
         2. behavior excesses
         3. behavior deficits
   4. How is the environment conceptualized?
      a. a stimulus collage – all those antecedents and consequences that influence behavior
         1. primary reinforcers and aversives – related to our biologically-based preferences
2. secondary reinforcers and averives – established as influential during our learning history
3. behavioral models – those we observe and imitate
4. prompts
5. instructions
b. the person learns how to discriminate between all stimuli and respond to certain stimuli
c. types of environments
  1. the imposed physical environment
  2. the selected environment
  3. the constructed environment
5. Is particular emphasis given to any systems?
a. organizations, groups, and people that control our behavior
  1. couples
  2. groups
  3. organizations like schools using behavioral contracts and token economies
b. correctional facilities
c. minimal attention to larger social systems like society or its culture and institutions
6. How are resources and their flow conceptualized?
a. resources include
  1. all activities, people, objects, events (and experiences) that can be associated with a behavior as a punisher or reinforcer are potential resources
  2. conditions and supports that facilitate behavior change
b. Behavioral modification by means of these resources is bidirectional but often powerful control agents are favored (like jailers not prisoners) and resources flow in one direction
7. What descriptive words are used?
a. a psychological language derived from lab research and science
b. there are few words for larger social systems or system processes other than learning
8. How is Change Conceptualized?
a. systematic and scientific
b. step-by-step process
c. social worker as expert
d. example of my VA COOL project – students learning to become volunteers through modeling and receiving rewards
9. How are actual and ideal eco-maps contrasted?
a. ideal – conditions (and practices) that support desired behavior
  1. at workplace, in classes, at home
  2. many positive models
  3. people have knowledge of contingencies, self-efficacy, self-monitoring and change abilities
b. actual
  1. overuse of punishment
10. How are issues of diversity, color and shading addressed?
a. race and ethnic-based behavioral differences are best explained as resulting from difference environmental influences
b. communities and cultures vary in preferred rewards, preferred consequences, available models and desired behaviors (differential association theory can be transformed into a behavioral theory)

11. What would be added or deleted?
   a. details regarding behaviors, reinforcers, aversives, models
   b. no larger circles for large systems
   c. retrospective eco-map for learning history

IX. The Limits of Applied Behaviorism: A Social Work Appraisal
   A. too little on cultural differences in learning content and processes
   B. root metaphor of human as animal like underestimates human’s capacities
   C. minimizes self-determination
   D. can be misused for sake of injustice and oppressive social control

X. A Model of Behavioral Treatment for Substance Abusers
   A. Behavioral conception of problem – substance abuse triggered by certain stimuli and maintained by certain consequences; hard to break behavioral chains
   B. Behavioral conception of assessment – identification of nine different triggers of substance use
   C. Behavioral conception of intervention – break linkage between stimuli or trigger and substance using behavior, change environment to eliminate problematic triggers, and change consequences so substance using is punished and abstinence is rewarded