

## ***PSYCHOLOGY AROUND THE WORLD***

### **BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS AROUND THE WORLD: BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA --A PERSONAL MEMOIR**

EL ANÁLISIS DEL COMPORTAMIENTO ALREDEDOR  
DEL MUNDO: GRAN BRETAÑA Y ESTADOS UNIDOS DE AMÉRICA  
--UNA MEMORIA PERSONAL

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#### **ABSTRACT**

A considerable portion of the development of behavior analysis in Britain occurred during a period when the writer was an active participant. Here, in a personal account, these developments and the present state of behavior analysis in Britain are described. Further, the development of a graduate program in behavior analysis in the USA is described, with some observations on the present state of behavior analysis in that country. Some comments are made on the dramatic changes that are now taking place in universities in the USA and in some other countries, and the prospects of behavior analysis in the context of those changes are briefly discussed.

Key words: behavior analysis in Britain and the U.S., university reform, prospects of behavior analysis

#### **RESUMEN**

Una parte considerable del desarrollo del análisis conductual en la Gran Bretaña ocurrió durante un periodo cuando el autor participó activamente. En este trabajo se hace un relato personal de este desarrollo, así como del estado actual del análisis conductual en la Gran Bretaña. Además se describe el desarrollo de un programa

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graduado en análisis conductual en los Estados Unidos, con algunas observaciones sobre el estado presente del análisis conductual en ese país. También se comentan algunos de los cambios dramáticos que ocurren hoy día en las universidades de Estados Unidos y en algunos otros países, así como los prospectos del análisis conductual en el contexto de tales cambios.

Palabras clave: análisis de la conducta en la Gran Bretaña y en Estados Unidos, reforma universitaria, prospectos del análisis de la conducta

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I first met B.F. Skinner in 1962. I was a student at the University of London, and he had come to give a series of talks at the invitation of the University. Most people I know in behavior analysis trace the origin of their interest in the area to reading *Science and Human Behavior*. Mine has its beginnings in personal encounters with two individuals, one rather brief, with Skinner, and the other with Harry M.B. Hurwitz. From that beginning, my friendship with Harry has lasted to the present, and with Skinner until, sadly, his death. Harry was one of my teachers at the university. A few years previously he had spent a year at Indiana University, teaching there and working with Skinner. He was, as people said at that time, a Skinnerian. At Birkbeck College of the University of London he had built the earliest laboratory in England entirely devoted to operant research. It occupied the top floor -rather more accurately, the attic- of the college building. Harry had started the laboratory by converting several 'biscuit boxes,' as they are called in England, into Skinner boxes<sup>2</sup>. These are large, cubical metal boxes, about the size of a Skinner box, made to hold large amounts of biscuits ('cookies,' in American English). By the time I got there the laboratory was well established with separate rooms for home cages for rats, pigeons, and occasionally spider monkeys, for electronic control apparatus, for Skinner boxes, and with a large work area. It was always buzzing with activity, all day and most of the night, with post-doctoral fellows, numerous visiting scholars, and graduate students. Harry was, and is to the present, a dynamic individual who had built all that in a few years. Prior to Skinner's visit, I had been undecided about whether to work with Harry, or with John Brown, another of my teachers, who is a distinguished scholar in memory research, and whose publications and the 'Brown procedure' are classics of that area. A brief personal note from Skinner created a turning point: it led me to read more of his writings, and increasingly to operant research.

At the time there was another distinguished figure in England working

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<sup>2</sup> I say 'Skinner box' here, knowing that Skinner himself did not like that term, and with apologies to him in memory. It was, however, the term everyone used at the time I am describing.

in operant research, and teaching graduate students who were to continue the growth of behavior analysis in Britain. That was Leslie Reid at the University of Exeter. I believe the earliest operant research papers published in a British journal were by him. Leslie was a personal friend of Skinner who visited him when he came to England. The wedding party of Deborah Skinner, the younger daughter for whom Skinner built the famous 'crib' and who, by the way, is an intelligent, attractive, and talented person, was held at Leslie Reid's home. Hurwitz and Reid were the fountain-heads of behavior analysis in England, though there were, no doubt, others who conducted some experiments using Skinner boxes.

When I graduated from the University of London in 1963, I was appointed to be the first member of a newly established department of psychology at the North Wales campus of the University of Wales in Bangor. Tim Miles had been a lecturer in psychology in the philosophy department there, and he had been appointed to head the new department of psychology. He was a student of Gilbert Ryle, and his views of psychology were in harmony with, though at the time different from, mine which rested on Skinnerian influence. I learned a great deal from Miles, the value of which I have increasingly appreciated over the years. We wrote a book together, entitled *Conceptual Issues in Operant Psychology* which, I believe, has stood the test of time (Harzem & Miles, 1978).

Almost the first thing I did in Bangor was to find a way to establish a laboratory. I was given the totally empty basement of a large Victorian house. The floors above were occupied by the music department. My first act in building an almost four-decade career in operant research was, I fear, theft: One evening I went upstairs, and stole a couple of chairs and a table to start my laboratory. Soon afterwards this was embellished by a grant from the British Medical Research Council which enabled me to buy home cages for rats, Skinner boxes, control equipment, and some tools. Within a year we were able to hire an electronics technician and an animal caretaker, and in a few more years we had four technicians, numerous graduate students, and undergraduate students who conducted their honors projects in the laboratory. We had visits from a number of distinguished researchers including Bernard Weiss, Michael Zeiler, Stan Pliskoff, Jerome Bruner, and B.F. Skinner who came to visit accompanied by his daughter Deborah. We organized several international symposia, and the participants included Skinner, and Gilbert Ryle<sup>3</sup>. By late 1960s University of Wales-Bangor had become a major center of operant research in Britain. I was privileged to have a number of graduate students who

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<sup>3</sup> Ryle was unable to come due to illness and his paper for the symposium was read by Tim Miles. It was, I believe, the last paper written by Ryle.

went on to become distinguished in the area. They included Chris Cullen who received an endowed professorship at St Andrews University in Scotland, Peter Priddle-Higson and Peter Woods who have developed fine careers in the health service in North Wales, and C. Fergus Lowe whose work is, perhaps, better known to readers of this journal. Fergus completed his Ph.D. in 1974. After that we were able to appoint him to an assistant lectureship in the department, where he has remained since then. Three years later, when I moved to Auburn University, he inherited my laboratory and various honorary positions such as the running of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior Group, and directing research at Broughton Hospital for the Mentally Retarded in North Wales. Since then he has developed an outstanding career both as a researcher and as an administrator. Under his leadership the department is now a School of Psychology where substantial emphasis is on behavior analysis. It is the main center of behavior analysis in Britain.

In the same period there were others in Britain also conducting operant research: Richard M. Gilbert at the University College, London, Derek Blackman at the University of Nottingham, Stephen Lea at the University of Exeter, Michael Morgan at Cambridge University, and Christopher Kiernan at the University of London<sup>4</sup>. However, just two years after I went to Wales Harry Hurwitz left the University of London, taking a position at the University of Tennessee, USA<sup>5</sup>. For many years Harry had conducted weekly seminars which served as a gathering place for those interested in operant research. These were taken up by Richard Gilbert and developed as national meetings with the informal title, 'Experimental Analysis of Behaviour Group.' Later they were organized by Derek Blackman, and then by myself. These meetings served to give a wider identity to our work, and encouraged students. They had a characteristic to which I look back with nostalgia: There was no grand structure, no membership dues, etc. Simply, a mailing list was maintained. The organizer's duty was to arrange the annual meetings, call for papers, and invite visiting speakers. When money was needed for mailing, printing, etc. the organizer said so at an annual meeting, and participants made voluntary contributions. At one meeting the proverbial hat was actually passed round. We never fell short of money to run the organization, and the friendly atmosphere was most enjoyable. By the time I left for the USA, the list had

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<sup>4</sup> Almost all of these colleagues have now moved to other British universities. Richard M. Gilbert moved to Canada, and in due course became a full-time politician in Toronto.

<sup>5</sup> Moving to the USA has been a common phenomenon amongst British academics, including several psychologists. At one time it was called 'the brain drain.' In Harry's case it was, I think, due in part to the universal but unfortunate fact that operant work did not receive due appreciation, and those working in the area were accorded little recognition.

grown to some 150 names. I understand it has grown substantially more since then, with some 500 members, but I am sad that apparently it had to become rather more formalized, due to the increase in membership.

To sum, in Britain behavior analysis steadily grew during the years I was there, and continues to do so now. The Experimental Analysis of Behavior Group is flourishing, and the School of Psychology at the University of Wales, Bangor is providing a sound basis for the presence of behavior analysis in British academic life.

In 1977 I moved to the USA<sup>6</sup>. It seems, in retrospect, that I was fated to build behavior analysis programs from scratch. When I arrived at Auburn University a graduate program in experimental psychology was almost nonexistent. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that in preparation for my arrival the department had voted to designate the experimental program to be built as 'Experimental Psychology with emphasis on the Experimental Analysis of Behavior.' In the ensuing several years I was able, with that support, to attract to the program William Buskist, and later, James Johnston and Chris Newland. I was happy, in due course, to pass on the administrative duties to others, and in recent years several behavior analysts have joined us and some have moved on to other places. Such movement of faculty is much more a characteristic of academic life in the USA than in Britain. Building the program has been a slow and arduous process, despite strong but sporadic support from the department and the university administration. The behavior analysis program at Auburn University is not the largest of such programs in the USA. There are others with much longer history and substantially more resources, such as the programs at the Western Michigan University, West Virginia University, and the University of Florida. However, each of these have their own distinguishing characteristics, focusing on different sorts of graduate education, some with a very strong concentration on behavior analysis to the relative exclusion of other areas, and some where the focus is rather more broad. Beyond these programs, in many other universities there are, of course, many distinguished researchers in behavior analysis and in its applications, although those universities do not have explicitly designated behavior analysis programs.

The universities in the USA are now in a state of dramatic change. There are many social and political reasons for this, and the issues are complex and not yet clear enough for anyone to provide a coherent picture. Amongst the causes of these changes are the development of technologies which make possible learning by taking courses on the Internet, and a pervasive emphasis

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<sup>6</sup> There were numerous personal reasons for my move to the USA, including one that is not unlike the reason for my teacher and friend Harry Hurwitz's move.

on the measurement of productivity which often focuses on numbers and money rather more than on quality. These two factors together lead to the question of whether it would economically be better to expand universities into Internet degrees, thereby reducing the size and cost of university campuses. There are quite vocal and influential sources favoring that direction. It seems possible that these trends will go against small programs which may appear not 'viable' in terms of how much money they cost. If so, this is likely to work to the disadvantage of behavior analysis programs which are small relative to others. However, this is a socially dangerous trend because it makes difficult, if not impossible, the creating of anything that is new and novel and is, therefore, small. There is the possibility, therefore, that those influential in setting directions to universities will see this threat, and will redirect the present trend. This may be no more than a hope. The next several years will provide a murky picture of what is happening, and it is hard to predict where behavior analysis will be when the picture clears.

I believe there is a good possibility that at least in the early part of the next century the major development of behavior analysis will move to several countries beyond the USA; possibly to Norway, Italy, Spain, Mexico, Brasil, and others. However, one caution must be sounded: Some of these countries seem to be copying the steps taken in the USA as regards the shaping and 'reforming' of their universities. To take one example, the rapid emergence of 'private' universities in Brasil and elsewhere may get in the way of developments those countries, too. These universities save money for the state by reducing the state universities, and receive, therefore, substantial political support. However, they are run as commercial enterprises which are primarily concerned with existing demand for courses and programs, rather than long-term social need and academic importance. Existing demand, on the other hand, arises from immediate attractiveness of an area to prospective students, often based on job availability and expectation of future earnings. But these are fleeting values that are likely to change by the time the student graduates. Thus, neither the needs of the society, nor the life-long prospects of the students are served in universities whose course offerings are subject to the whims of ever-changing economic demands. If this state of affairs does prevail in one particular instance, namely in Brasil, and behavior analysis loses its presence there, this will be cause for very special regret. Behavior analysis in that country was established by Fred S. Keller.

These times of rapid cultural change, when no one can tell where we are headed, are the very times when behavior analysis can provide some understanding of what is happening. It is an irony and a loss to our societies that these changes themselves may prevent behavior analysis from making that important contribution. Personally, the best I can hope is that I will be wrong

in that prediction.

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