

## **WESTERN CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS AS SEEN FROM A WALDEN TWO<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** Some reflections made from a Walden Two about the dissemination of behavior analysis and behaviorism are presented. Although the progress of behavior analysis and its philosophy has been great, it has been seriously obstructed by the characteristics of a mentalistic Western culture. Our behavior as behavior analysts is exposed to multiple interrelated macrocontingencies. These macrocontingencies punish or extinguish behaviorist behaviors and reinforce mentalistic behaviors. Some western macrocontingencies which act against the progress of behavior analysis are described as well as strategies to reduce their effects. Making behavior analysis and behaviorism more accessible for the general public is emphasized since it is the public who finally shape the content of educational curricula. If behavior analysis becomes reinforcing for the public, it will be taught in more universities.

*Keywords:* Cultural design, dissemination of behavior analysis, macrocontingencies, Walden Two

Good morning. On behalf of Los Horcones I want to thank those who decided to give our community this award. We also thank all of you for being here. It is not mere behavioristic rhetoric to say that this award is also for those who in one way or another contributed to the foundation of Los Horcones. It is important to us to recognize the following people: Sidney and Janet Bijou, Ivar Lovaas, Francisco Cabrer, Angela Herrera, Francisco Montes and Maria Irueste, who introduced the founders of Los Horcones to behavior analysis thirty years ago.

Throughout this 20 minute presentation, we will share with you some reflections made from a Walden Two about how behavior analysis and behaviorism can be more effectively disseminated. First, we want to point out the significant progress made by the behavior analytic community in the dissemination of behavior analysis. In a few decades much has been accomplished, especially considering that what is being disseminated is not only an alternative view to human behavior but one that is incompatible with the dominant concept of human behavior in the current culture.

In 1985, B. F. Skinner wrote the article "What is Wrong with Daily Life in the Western World" (Skinner, 1985). He mentioned five cultural practices which are operating against the survival of our species. We believe that all these practices are related with mentalism, the basis of Western and Eastern cultures. Unfortunately, all behavior analysts are exposed to cultural contingencies where mentalistic behaviors are reinforced and behavioristic behaviors are extinguished or punished. We are all exposed to mentalistic macrocontingencies or cultural practices

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(Horcones, 1998). This is the cultural environment with which we interact, where our science and philosophy are trying to develop but with serious difficulties.

Two pertinent questions are: What can we do to effectively disseminate behavior analysis under such adverse cultural conditions? Which are the adverse cultural conditions and which are those that could promote its dissemination? We believe the best way to obtain answers to these questions is by experimentation.

### **LOS HORCONES: AN EXPERIMENTAL SPACE OF CULTURAL DIMENSIONS**

Back in 1973, when we founded Los Horcones, we asked ourselves: Can we use behavior analysis to design a better culture? Can we build a culture that really promotes and takes into account the science of behavior in its design? (Horcones, 1982). In order to answer these questions, we needed to build a laboratory. But the lab we needed was not a place in a building. It was an experimental space at a cultural scale. We needed a group of people who could live 24 hours in this lab for many years, designing cultural practices, observing and measuring their effects on their own and their children's behavior and on the rest of the environment. In October 1973, we started such laboratory. Some years later, we realized that the very activity of designing a cultural lab became the most relevant subject matter of our research project.

#### ***Comparing Skinner's Early Work with Los Horcones***

Let us make some analogies between B. F. Skinner's early work and Los Horcones' work. We don't know how long it took Skinner to build an experimental chamber, maybe a few weeks or months. Los Horcones, however, after 26 years is still building its chamber. It was Skinner himself, not the rats, who built the cage. At Los Horcones, it has been we who are building it. Skinner placed a lever, a light, and a food dispenser. He turned on the light and activated the dispenser. Rats only looked at the light and pressed the lever. In the case of Los Horcones, we placed a large number of lights, levers, dispensers. We are who turn the lights on and off, press the levers, and action the dispensers. We do practically everything. Skinner remained outside of the experimental chamber—well, at least outside of the one he built. At Los Horcones, we live in the chamber all the time. In summary, it is relatively easy to build an experimental chamber compared to building an experimental culture.

#### ***Contingencies Do Not Operate in a Vacuum***

Our behavior as behavior analysts does not occur in vacuum. It always occurs within contingencies. Neither do these contingencies operate in vacuum, they always interrelate with other contingencies (Horcones 1991, 1998). Behaviors, just like contingencies, are not self-initiated or self-maintained. Acting to change a contingency without changing other interrelated contingencies is like trying to change a behavior without changing the environment. A culture is defined as a set of interrelated macrocontingencies (Horcones, 1998). Three pertinent questions

arise: To which macrocontingencies is our behavior as behavior analysts exposed? To which other macrocontingencies are they interrelated? How do these macrocontingencies promote or interfere with the dissemination of our science and philosophy? We believe that if we want to effectively disseminate behavior analysis and its philosophy, we need not just to analyze but also to change macrocontingencies. In other words, we need to change the current culture. Behavior analysts are members of a mentalistic culture. Our scientific practices have been and continue to be selected by the consequences. They do not just include those originated in our behavior-analytic community but also those originated in the rest of the culture where we live—a mentalistic culture.

### **SOME NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF WESTERN MACROCONTINGENCIES ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS.**

Let us to examine some Western macrocontingencies that we think interfere with the dissemination of behavior analysis. Let us also propose some strategies to modify them or at least to reduce their effects. Some of these proposals are not new. What is new is that they were derived from a cultural laboratory—from a Walden Two culture.

#### ***Institutionalizing Macrocontingencies***

The practice of inventing institutions prevails in the West. By institution we refer to any type of organization where the effect of its members' behavior on others is not direct (face-to-face) but mediated by the behavior of others. For example: the behaviors of learning and teaching have been institutionalized by schools. The organization of cities has been institutionalized by governments.

The problem with institutions is that they eventually end up operating for their own benefit instead for the benefit of those for whom they were created. Thus, educational institutions operate more for their own benefit, than for the benefit of teachers and students. Eventually it does not matter whether teachers teach or not and students learn or not. Governmental institutions generally create an ineffective bureaucracy that does not operate in favor of people but in favor of the government. The explanation of why people build institutions is clear: those who design and keep them are reinforced by their maintenance (Horcones, 1998).

Behavior analysis has been exposed to institutionalizing macrocontingencies, mainly in universities. We think that this institutionalization was useful for the dissemination of behavior analysis up to a point, and now the contingencies of institutionalization are acting against its dissemination. We consider that in our effort to promote behavior analysis in educational institutions, we have not promoted it enough among ordinary people outside of these institutions. We believe the promotion of our science among ordinary people could be a pivotal strategy for its dissemination even for its dissemination at the universities. We are not suggesting to withdraw behavior analytic work from institutions, but rather disseminating it outside of them, making it available to the general public. But how

can we achieve this? There are various strategies, some of which we have successfully implemented within the Los Horcones culture.

Our first strategy consisted of teaching behavior analysis to all members of the community. Children and adults, members and newcomers study behavior analysis. Children learn it from elementary school. We have a textbook on behavior analysis for children in basic grades. It is written in PSI format and it includes practical applications of behavioral principles (Keller, 1968). Behavior analysis is taught to all the members and newcomers. Since most newcomers are not familiarized with this science, we have written instructional materials in colloquial language for them. Making behavior analysis friendly and accessible is a priority in Walden Two. The time members devote to studying behavior analysis is considered as work.

We have observed there are three effective ways of learning behavior analysis:

- By using an experimental chamber in a lab.
- By teaching children with behavioral problems, especially children with autistic behaviors.
- By applying behavior principles to our own behavior (self-management programs).

At Los Horcones, children and adults learn to record their own behavior. The first behavior a child learns to record is his/her own recording behavior. Generally this happens between the age of 3 or 4 years. All the adult members of the community also record their own behavior. Each has a clipboard with their own behavioral self-management records. In the summer camps we offer to children who live outside Los Horcones we teach them the basics of behavioral principles. It is very reinforcing to observe them at the end of the camp, understanding more about their own behavior and analyzing their parent's and friend's behaviors from a behavior-analytic perspective.

There are several reasons why it is important to teach behavior analysis to all. One reason related to the effective dissemination of this science is that in the western culture, educational macrocontingencies are closely related to economic macrocontingencies. Education is a business. Students buy educational products and people buy the repertoires shaped in students by educational institutions. Thus, it is people, the general public and not only those in charge of schools who select what is to be taught. When the public requests a particular knowledge or skill, universities find ways to teach them. If ordinary people learn about the relevance of behavior analysis in the solution and prevention of their personal problems, they will eventually shape the educational institutions into teaching behavior analysis. Consequently, it is the general public and not only students to whom we need to teach behavior analysis. The influence of ordinary people in the dissemination of mentalistic psychology is an illustrative example of how people shape universities so they keep teaching it.

### ***Reactive Macrocontingencies***

Western practices are more reactive than proactive. We believe that applied behavior analysis has been affected by these practices. It has been more focused on the remedial of personal and social problems than to their prevention. When will we have an ABA convention with as many presentations about normal children as there are now about autism? Of course this is a way to illustrate our argument and not to diminish the importance of presentations on autism.

### ***Effects of Elitist Macrocontingencies in the Dissemination of Behavior Analysis***

Another western macrocontingency that can be negatively affecting the dissemination of behavior analysis is the elitist macro. Western as well as Eastern cultures are deeply elitist. Behavior analysts have been exposed to these macrocontingencies. Thus keeping behavior analysis within the behavior-analytic community could be more reinforcing than sharing it, making it available to more people.

What type of contingencies have limited our production of articles and books for ordinary people? Which contingencies keep us publishing articles and books that are only read and understood by us and sometimes by not many of us? Why are there thousands of books on mentalistic psychology and only one or none on behavior analysis, in bookstores around the world? On his book *About Behaviorism*, B. F. Skinner says: “Unfortunately, very little is known about this analysis outside the field. Its most active investigators, and there are hundreds of them, seldom make any effort to explain themselves to nonspecialists.” (Skinner, 1974, p. 8). This observation was made twenty-six years ago and still is applicable today.

But, let me clarify. When we propose sharing the science of behavior analysis with the general public we do not mean to oversimplify it or substitute behavioral concepts by ordinary mentalistic jargon. It means applying behavior-analytic principles to shape behaviorist repertoires in ordinary people and in this way promoting an effective dissemination of behavior analysis and its philosophy.

### **SHAPING BEHAVIORIST REPERTOIRES**

It seems ironic that we behavior analysts have not effectively applied behavioral principles to disseminate our science. In some way, mentalistic psychologists have done a better job in disseminating their discipline without knowing these principles. For example, instead of applying shaping to teach behavioristic repertoires, we frequently punish or ignore mentalistic behaviors. We use the term “ignore” and not “extinction” because behavior analysts are not who reinforce mentalistic behaviors; it is the general public.

We can not blame people for explaining behavior by referring to mental events. Mentalism is a behavior and as such it is shaped and maintained by the environment. What we need to teach people is behavioristic behaviors and an effective procedure to do it is shaping. We need to reinforce successive

approximations towards a behavioristic repertoire. In Walden Two, we believe that success in disseminating our science and philosophy depends on the extent to which we apply behavioral principles to disseminate them. We need to act behavioristically in order to effectively disseminate behavior analysis.

Let us use some anecdotes to illustrate how we shape behaviorist repertoires in our daily life. An astrologer came to Los Horcones and asked to talk with the behavior coordinator, saying: "Look, I can explain the behavior of the members by using an astral analysis, do you allow me to do it?"

"There is no problem if members agree," answered the behavior coordinator, "but tell me, could you also help us to change behavior besides explaining it?"

"I don't understand," he said.

"Well, could you teach a member who always arrives late to meetings to be on time by using astral analysis?" asked the behavior coordinator.

"Well," he said, "I'm afraid not, in order to teach him to be on time, you need to do other things."

"Like what?" asked the coordinator.

"Well, motivating him in some way," answered the astrologer.

"And according to you, what could we do to motivate him?" asked the behavior coordinator nicely.

"I need to think about it."

"Well, I will give you some ideas and you can help me think about others."

"Fine."

This astrologer was a member of Los Horcones for a couple of years and although he never became a totally convinced behaviorist, at least he never rejected the usefulness of behavioral principles to change behavior, including his own, despite the predictions of his astral analysis.

Another example is from a cognitive psychologist who proposed that we need to teach members "a sense of community" or a "communitarian attitude."

Instead of punishing his mentalistic proposals we asked him:

"O.K., but how could we do it?"

"By promoting their communitarian thoughts and feelings," he answered.

"But how?" we asked.

"Well, through meetings where people talk and reflect about community issues."

In the next meeting we described the reinforcing effects of communitarian behaviors and the aversive effects of non-communitarian behaviors. The cognitive psychologist listened attentively. He even gave very behavioral suggestions. A month later he left the community. He never became a behaviorist but neither was he an anti-behaviorist. Having fewer enemies may be as good as having more friends.

### ***"Behavior Analysts Are Few, But We Can Have Many Friends"***

Behavior analysts are few, but we can have many friends. Friends promote behavior analysis. For example, our friend Catherine Maurice, with her book, "Let

me hear your voice” (1993), has contributed more to the dissemination of behavior analysis than many articles and books written by behavior analysts. We could have more friends if we apply shaping and stop punishing mentalistic behavior, if we talk and write for non-specialist people, if we show them the practical beauty of our science and its profoundly humane philosophy (Horcones 1999).

Let us tell you another story. Once a group of Christians who were visiting Los Horcones asked us:

“Could we pray to thank God for the food?”

“Sure,” we answered.

They stood up and prayed, thanking God.

A seven year old boy—a member of Los Horcones—sitting close to them asked: “Aren’t you also going to thank the cook who prepared the food?”

From that day on our religious visitors also thanked the cook. Thus, instead of criticizing religious people for believing in supernatural events, we can teach them to believe in natural events.

The mother of an autistic child with whom we had worked several hours teaching him to follow instructions told us: “I pray every day for him and now at least he starts to follow your instructions, I will keep praying so he eventually obeys me.”

“You can pray if you want,” we answered, “but you also need to start responding in a different way so he can follow your instructions.”

### ***Improving Teaching of Behavior Analysis and Behaviorism***

Undoubtedly, the dissemination of behavior analysis largely depends on those who now teach behavior analysis. Students of today are the behavior analysts of tomorrow. They will continue maintaining the scientific and philosophical macrocontingencies of behavior analysis. There are at least two important questions when teaching a subject: *What* and *how*. Let us start with *what to teach*:

1. In Los Horcones we have observed that in order to effectively teach behavior analysis and behaviorism we need to teach other subjects that also deal with behavior. There is nothing of better value to understand behavior analysis than comparing it to other psychological approaches and studying related fields like sociology, political science, anthropology and philosophy. To us, it is essential that the student’s decision to study behavior analysis be a result of a comparative analysis between various approaches to explaining behavior. Students from Los Horcones who take psychology, sociology, anthropology and political sciences courses at universities in Mexico, the US, and Europe, tell us, “After listening to so many fictional explanations, now we feel more behaviorists.” Some fictional explanations they hear are: In political science “Citizens do not participate in politics because they lack political conscience.” In psychology: “Autism is caused by a loss of mind theory.” In education: “To improve education we need to change the mental attitude of the teacher,” etc.

2. We need to teach our students to talk and write about behavior analysis not just for behaviorists but also for the general public. It is good to teach them to

write for a behavioral journal or a paper for an ABA convention, but they also need to learn to write an article for the newspaper and be able to explain behavior analysis to their family and friends.

3. Especially in the introductory courses, we need to teach behavior analysis in a way that students can discover that it improves their quality of life. Teach students to apply behavior analysis to their own behavior, not only in animals or to others. Of course, in order to do it effectively it is required that those who teach behavior analysis also apply it to their own behavior. It is very sad to hear students from all over the world say: "Behavior analysis is only for rats and pigeons."

4. Teach behavior analysis and behaviorism as a world view, as a way of living in the world. We think that behavior analysis and behaviorism must be lived to be more completely understood. We call our version of behaviorism "living or applied behaviorism." We need to teach that behavior analysis and behaviorism are not only academic subject matters but also a way of seeing the world and a way of living.

5. Teach critical behavior analysis. Behavior analysts are necessarily critics of the larger culture. Not a single behaviorist can agree with the practices of a mentalistic culture as practiced in either the West or the East. We need to teach our students to apply behavior analysis to analyze and change the present culture and not merely to maintain it as it is now.

Now some remarks about *how to teach*:

1. Apply behavior principles when teaching behavior analysis. Unfortunately, not many behavior analysis teachers apply behavioral principles in their teaching. We frequently hear behavior analysis students say: "It is strange that our teachers do not apply behavior principles when teaching us behavior analysis. Although they say behavior principles are very effective in teaching."

2. Prevent misunderstandings, not just try to clarify them. It is obvious that the way behavior analysis and behaviorism are presented affect how they will be understood. I remember the first time I heard a behaviorist. It was back in 1967. I was a psychology student and attended a conference. The speaker said things like: "The mind does not exist," "What we think and feel is not important," "the goal of the science of behavior is control and prediction." All these statements deeply affected my friends and me. We had just learned that psychology was the science of mind and we were studying psychology to know the mind. On that particular day the number of students who agreed with Rogers and Freud increased. I was among them.

Fortunately a year later, Dr. Bijou gave a talk that I was not going to attend due to my history with behavior analysis. But I was interested in children and Dr. Bijou was to speak about child development. He said: "People think and feel but those are not the causes of behavior. Behavior is a product of the interaction of the individual with his/her own environment." From that day, the number of psychoanalysts and Rogerians decreased. I was among them. This happened to some of my friends and to me a long time ago. But the problem is that it is still happening to many students in many countries. It is clear that the terms we use

when we talk and write about behavior analysis and behaviorism can make a big difference.

4. We need to teach behavior analysis with passion. Students need to fall in love with behavior analysis and behaviorism, not only learn about them, not only study them to pass exams or obtain a degree. We need them to realize that a scientific understanding about human behavior represents a great improvement in the quality of their lives and not just more academic knowledge. Teaching behavior analysis with passion implies a strong commitment of the teacher with the subject matter.

Well, time has gone. There is still much to say. Thank you for your attention. I also want to remind you that Los Horcones is the beginning of a behaviorist culture, a Walden Two that exists and it is also for you. You are always welcome. Thank you.

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