The Case Against Social Validation
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The field of applied behavior analysis has seen an increase in the use of what are referred to as social validation procedures (Wolf, 1978; Kazdin, 1977). The development of such measures of social validity has been viewed as important to the field of applied behavior analysis (O'Leary, 1978). Measures of social validity determine the extent to which consumers are satisfied with the techniques used in an intervention, and/or the focus of the intervention (Wolf, 1978; Kazdin, 1977 will be included under "focus," since the results must be satisfactory in order for the focus to again be chosen.).

A False Issue

Social validation has gained strength most recently with the attempt to establish the issue of Scientist versus Layman as crucial. Wolf (1978) has done this, as careful scrutiny of his manuscript reveals. First he presents a pompous image of himself and his scientific colleagues by calling them "the Gods." Then, he tells us psychologists are the "most qualified judges of what is best for people," apparently not because of scientific methodology, but just because they are psychologists. And, a request by a community he is working in for "warm" teaching-parents is the occasion for derisive jokes among Wolf and his colleagues.

This image is then blended with a picture of the scientist as a short-sighted, inept sort. Naively, Wolf tells the above community that to bring about some appropriate behavior "all you need is someone to give and take away points at the right time." And he is unaccountably baffled when a colleague is unable to predict some complex verbal behaviors prior to any experimentation, seemingly confusing science with soothsaying.

In the final scene, the humbled scientist, who no longer makes decisions "by oneself" (who ever said that was how science progressed, or applied behavioral programs were developed?) realizes that the helpfulness of a program can "be evaluated only by the consumer," and yields to "the community's common sense wisdom." Although even granting the ignorance of a science for a minute, we must wonder why non-scientific means would emerge as superior.

Having created his "science monster," who not only is oblivious to the interests of "the people," but often in opposition to them, Wolf is able to capitalize on fears of being controlled by one person or group. He quotes Levi and Anderson (1975):

We believe that each individual can be assured to be the best judge of his own situation and state of well-being. The alternative is some sort of "big brother" who makes the evaluation for groups and nations. Work, history provides many examples of such "expert" or "elitist" opinions being at variance with what was expected by the man in the street.

Indeed, following this frightening buildup anything seems a good alternative to "big brother" who is apparently played by scientists in disguise. But what has been ignored here is that there are literally an infinite number of possibilities between these two extremes, including most present systems of social control. Not that we do not need to ask "who is controlling us?" for when the answer is anything other than "nobody" a troublesome situation exists. But the question relevant to the use of science is "what is controlling us?" It is possible to base the distinction roughly on whether the verbal stimuli would control practical action if it were the result of someone else's verbal behavior. Simply stated, if what is said wouldn't be listened to if said by someone else, the question of "who" becomes relevant. At Jonestown, Guyana anyone's request to "close the door" would have been effective, but only one person's request to "kill yourselves" could have been effective. Of course the elimination of personal characteristics as troublesome controlling variables is never complete, as the phrase "getting by on his reputation" suggests. Science however, opposes contingencies which make verbal behavior effective under such conditions and once beyond this elementary concern we must take the advice of Skinner (1971): "To prevent the misuse of controlling power, we must look not at the controller himself but at the contingencies under which he engages in control" (emphasis added).

The awkward sound of "what is controlling" is an outgrowth of our society's failure to consider controlling contingencies. The society's awareness of contingencies seems for the most part to be limited to a realization that people who do the same things often will have similar interests, and may be induced to behave in the best interests of those from similar backgrounds, possibly to the detriment of others. Opposition is heard today to our government being "run by lawyers," even though when controlled by different contingencies there may be no homogeneity among them. The public feels safer with a mixture of teachers, doctors, businessmen, and even lawyers. We must, however, resist having a legislative body established as part of the methodology of a science of human behavior.

Problems With Social Validation

So far social validation has served only to protect the public from a "menace" which is based on a misunderstanding of the issues involved. But, there are problems with social validation, and they can be categorized into three areas: (1) competence—does the validator possess the required repertoire? As the science of human behavior advances, the technological applications become more complex. If anything this would suggest the need for a more rigorous training of scientists. Instead, those not controlled by scientific contingencies, as in social validation procedures, are made an integral part of the methodology of our science. There are instances where a special repertoire is not necessary, as when validators are asked to determine the appropriateness ("naturalness") of a subject's speech pattern (Jones & Azrin, 1969), but this is clearly distinguishable from having lay people validate the techniques used to teach speech. In the former a special repertoire is not necessary, as when validators are asked to determine the appropriateness of a retarded subject's clothing would want the subject to look foolish, it would be unwise not to question the motivation of a business consumer when employees' production is the target of the intervention. Alarmingly though, the social validation literature lacks guidelines for determining when a validator's motivation might be adverse to subjects of the intervention. And, (3) as a result of these two, is there a tendency for the status quo to be maintained?

Logically such is inevitable (Stoltz, 1977) due to the emphasis by proponents on the use of norms as the criterion...
for determining which intervention strategy to employ. Norms, of course, are defined by the fact that the majority “does things that way.” We can expect, therefore, that when we ask for social validation our only certainty will be that we will get a measure of the apparent majority practices, without (a) any consideration of the appropriateness of those practices relative to other practices in reaching specified ends, or (b) any consideration of the ends themselves. This would not be necessarily harmful were it not for the widespread equating of such normative measures with “social importance” (Wolf, 1978).

“Norm” carries with it the implication that there are other possibilities. When we speak of, for example, “norms for interactions between the sexes,” it is with the awareness of other, and perhaps better, possibilities. Unfortunately, the term “norm” is often absent in instances where it might be helpful. We do not speak of capitalism, for example, as a mere norm, and so the search for alternatives to contingencies prevailing under capitalism is never begun.

One frightening aspect of the emphasis on norms as criteria for the success of an intervention is that judgment be based upon the socio-economic standing and intelligence quotient of the subject (Kazdin, 1977). With the use of the intelligence quotient all failures can be thereby excused, and when socio-economic standing is seen as a criterion for success we can presume a lesser standard for some will often be justified sooner than necessary.

Questions of validator competence are central in explaining why the status quo would be served. It is proper to assume a validator’s repertoire is not increasing at a rate comparable to that of the scientist; were this so he/she too would be a scientist. Of course, the scientist could educate the validator (Wolf, 1978), but then, who would validate what was taught? This question is warranted, since to the extent that what is taught effects the validator’s decision, he/she is not “free” of the scientist’s influence.

A further danger which could occur due to the change in motivational variables controlling the scientist is the possibility of a reduction in the scope of research. As the pressure mounts for all research to be socially validated (see O’Leary, 1978), it is doubtful that much open-ended research will be done (Dietz, 1978; Fuqua, Reference Note 1). The disadvantage of doing research to confirm an inflexible hypothesis has been greatly elaborated upon by Sidman (1960). More specifically, the likely harms of social validation upon the nature of applied research has been detailed by Dietz (1978):

Changing the purpose of its applied behavior analysis’ efforts can only limit what is discovered. If the goal is to cure rather than investigate, it will become more difficult to discover new cures. Behavior analysts will concentrate on using the technology as it currently exists, but for solving new problems. Studies will be redundant in their independent variables but new and different in their dependent variables. Scientific research will be replaced by technological demonstrations. New information can be gained from seeing effects on different dependent variables or by studying implementation, but his new information is of a noticeably different type and may not be useful to a science of behavior. If so, knowledge concerning the variables of which socially important behavior is a function can only grow in limited ways. Changing the purpose from science toward technology, then, could influence the extent and the manner through which knowledge about human behavior increases.

Another harmful result of social validation seems likely. Many behavioral analyses, which would be strong in analogous situations, are simply not made when the approval of the lay popula­tion is necessary. This points to the effects of punishment upon the verbal behavior of the scientist. The punishment may be one or both of the following types: First, the scientist may simply be punished by someone else for emitting a verbal response. Secondly, the “demands” of the situation could act as an “establishing operation” (Michael, 1978) which provides for the “automatically” (not dependent upon the mediation of another organism) punishing effects of the verbal stimulus (Skinner, 1957). Evidence for the latter phenomenon would involve, for example, an isolated scientist feeling the effects of punishment (perhaps sweating and increased heart rate) when he “thinks” “maybe I’m exploiting these employees by getting them to work so hard.”

Harms Resulting From Social Validation

The three problems discussed generally above can be examined for their effects upon the field of applied behavior analysis, which can be broken into three areas identified on the basis of exclusion. “Non-clinical” involves business and industry, as well as government insofar as the function of the latter is to protect the contingencies governing the former (Hunt & Sherman, 1975). “Non-economic” involves those areas not included under the first category, and is further broken down into “self-referred,” involving clinical-type self-referrals, and “other-referred,” including prisons, mental institutions, and other agencies. The categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, however. Contingencies established by government in the “non-economic” area, for example, involve regulations protecting self-referred subjects, and funding for the care of other-referred.

Non-Clinical

The use of social validation to determine the proper focus for, and techniques of, an intervention in the area of business/industry has the damaging effect of lending scientific legitimacy to the demands of business, and ending inquiry into alternate economic contingencies. When those who are called upon to validate interventions are none other than those who have the greatest interests in maintaining the prevailing economic contingencies, there is no reason to believe a fundamental change of these contingencies will occur. Thus, the status quo will be preserved.

Proponents of social validation can argue that asking for an intervention to be validated does not actually add to existing ills. Furthermore, it has often been pointed out to the author as behavior analysts we are all limited by what the job market has to offer. The first statement is, as we shall see, only true in a manner of speaking. Concerning the second, the objection raised here is not to a behavior analyst accepting a job, but rather to the inclusion of employer demands made through social validation procedures and justifying the demands in the name of science. Obviously behavior analysts do not have their pick of jobs, and interventions are limited to what the employer will allow, regardless of worth. But to fail to distinguish between the principles and practices of a science of human behavior, and the application of a technology resulting from these practices under a particular set of economic contingencies (i.e., a job) (Dietz, 1978) leads to the illusory belief that social validation acts as the “final word,” that once validated, an intervention is no longer open to questions of its appropriateness.

Unfortunately, it is a belief which is gathering support from many individuals in our field. O’Leary (1978) in a Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis editorial recently called for authors to socially validate whenever possible. The
lack of accompanying guidelines for exclusion establishes social validation measures as unconditionally preferred. Aside from the obvious limitations this puts on research possibilities in the clinical area (Deitz, 1978), it further minimizes the possibilities for experimentation involving economic contingencies. Although in order to experiment with economic contingencies the approval of those in power will be needed, the approval itself has no bearing on the appropriateness of the proposed manipulations. It indicates only that the manipulations can be made. When social validation proponents fail to respect this distinction, and see social validation as a legitimate aspect of the methodology of a science, rather than a mere necessity for implementation of a technology; and when those called upon a validate have special interests in the maintenance of the status quo, we can see that there is no way for a science of human behavior to enter into an analysis of economic contingencies. Our science will stagnate, and worse, the dangerous illusion—that we know all we need to about broad-scale economic contingencies—is created.

The importance of broad-scale contingency analysis cannot be overestimated. Skinner (1971) has said, "A culture will have a special measure of survival value if it encourages its members to examine its practices and to experiment with new ones." While a culture must change as the conditions under which it exists change or face extinction, cultural evolution in and of itself is no guarantee that we are moving towards a better world. (Skinner, 1971).

(While Skinner uses "cultural survival" as an ultimate criterion of the appropriateness of the contingencies, the analysis is equally useful when "elimination of suffering" is substituted. It is an important substitution for two reasons: First, "cultural survival" is obscure, and current events leading to eventual non-survival cannot obviously be pointed to. Secondly, suffering can, at least for some time exist in a culture whose survival is not immediately in doubt. This being so, we must wonder why survival of that culture should emerge as a value.)

The literature of social validation hides the fact that our society is not composed of united members all striving towards common goals. Instead, proponents ignore the facts of conflicting interests of the members of our society. The notion of a unitary "society" is promoted through verbal sleight-of-hand. Consider Wolf (1978):

When we ask questions about social validity, we are really asking questions about society's reinforcers. When we say that we want to make contributions that are socially important, we are declaring our desire to provide reinforcers to society.

And:

It seems that if we aspire to social importance then we must develop systems that allow our consumers to provide us feedback about how our applications relate to their values, to their reinforcers.

By equating "social importance" with consumer satisfaction Wolf has created an illusion which hides some important points. According to Holland (1978), "Our society is highly stratified, and at any level there is a struggle to increase status and happiness through individualistic competitive efforts... The competitive system praises those who acquire even at the expense of others." Holland goes on to detail the problems inherent in such a system. What is relevant to consideration of the use of social validation is that by presenting "society" as a unitary thing, all worries of aiding a consumer to the detriment of someone else vanish.

But important questions do remain. When "providing reinforcers to society," we must ask "what reinforces?" and "for what people?" "in what proportions?" and "to what ends?" Most importantly, we should ask "what harm might come to others as a result of an intervention made to benefit a consumer?" This last question is an important one because it carries with it the implication that the proper subject matter of a science of human behavior is all behavior and the controlling variables responsible for it. There is no reason that the effects of an intervention upon nonconsumers should be excluded from consideration by a science of behavior. In other areas of the applied field a similar disclaimer would not be tolerated. It is hard to imagine a practitioner justifying a disruptive classroom intervention by pleading, "Only two of them are my subjects." This does not mean, as has been suggested to this author, that "Perhaps we shouldn't do anything, because we can never know of all the effects of an intervention." That is true; but we never know of all the effects of any intervention, and we have not been "frozen" in other areas. The reluctance to press forward with respect to this question in the area of business provides evidence for the inadequacy of the contingencies controlling psychologists.

The process called for here is not as difficult as many psychologists believe, and perhaps not nearly so difficult as business consumers, for good reason, would like psychologists to believe. In fact, the basic analysis of the extra-intervention effects to be expected in the area of business is so straightforward that one must be suspicious of the variables responsible for its absence (which will be reviewed in the next section). We need first to see that contingencies supporting competition have been established.

Competitive contingencies result in an imbalance of reinforce distribution for the simple a priori fact that when the size of the pie is limited, what one person has another cannot have. Naive behavior analysts must get hip to the fact that even if "any person can make it," the competitive contingencies insure that "every person cannot make it," the competitive contingencies insure that "every person cannot make it." Or, as Holland (1978) has said, "If wealth is to accumulate at the top, it must be sparingly distributed among the controllees at the bottom." Oddly, most psychologists who in a classroom setting would easily recognize contingencies maintaining competition and decry one student gaining at the expense of another are blind to such contingencies and their efforts when they are being paid by a business consumer.

There is often misunderstanding as to what "imbalance of reinforce distribution" refers to. It is often hastily pointed out that if everyone received the same pay there would be no reason to work hard. Three points are relevant here: (1) it would be naive to think in terms of pay as the only available reinforce; (2) we must remember that reinforcement can be made contingent upon behavior; (3) finally-in speaking of an imbalance of distribution, we need not restrict ourselves to absolute amounts. We gain an advantage when our determinations are based upon a finding of what is necessary to get someone to perform a given function (Skinner, 1948). We can then to a greater degree eliminate any waste of resources. Even such an elementary analysis allows us to view the payment of $1,400,000 yearly to the Chairman of the Board of Xerox/International Harvester in a very different light. Interestingly a salary this large is never spoken of as a "drain on the economy," a phrase which instead is reserved for the pittance a welfare family receives.

This imbalance of distribution has for some led to an accumulation of reinforcers. This gives them both a greater
ability to distribute reinforcers and also to further acquire reinforcers. The former means that the beneficiaries of the competitive contingencies are those who now establish the contingencies of reinforcement for others. This allows them to induce others to behave in ways which benefit themselves. Not that the behavior goes unreinforced; but he/she is nonetheless induced to behave in ways which allow for the controller to gain more. Skinner (1971) has elaborated on contingencies which, while reinforcing all involved, are more for the benefit of one party over another. The surprising strength with which one may be so induced to support these contingencies is dramatically evidenced by the steadfast defense of capitalism given by a skid row "bum."

The increasing ability to acquire reinforcers as a function of a greater accumulation is a contingency which would not elsewhere be tolerated. Let the following example illustrate: A teacher sets up a token economy whereby rates of work being equal, students 'A' and 'B', each with a small accumulation of tokens, can acquire more tokens every 10 minutes. Student 'C', with a large accumulation can acquire two additional tokens per minute. A behavior analyst, seeing this disparity would not be expected to call 'A' and 'B' lazy, not shrug off the fortune of 'C' with "that must be what he's worth." Instead, he/she might warn the teacher that, "This could be very discouraging for 'A' and 'B.' And certainly, the contingencies would be changed.

Unfortunately, behavior analysts do not seem so perceptive in viewing current economic contingencies. It is not that behavior analysts call anyone "lazy" or that they don't search for environmental causes. The problem arises in looking at only a limited part of the environment, and declaring a limited population as the proper subject matter for a science. If in the above classroom the depressed behavior of 'A' was a target, we would not expect the behavior analyst to take tokens from 'B' to solve the problem. Yet, this is the situation faced by those behavior analysts working for business consumers.

Even when business is not the consumer the lack of a fundamental analysis of present economic contingencies can cause the ultimate futility of a well-meaning intervention to be missed. The efforts of Azrin (1976) to teach people job-seeking skills serves as a good example. The manner in which the challenge is formulated is what ultimately leads to a judgment of success or failure. Again, even if it were possible for such a job-seeking "club" to get anyone a job, it would be impossible, faced with prevailing economic contingencies, to get everyone a job. The statement would be useless negativism were it not for the likelihood that such job-finding clubs may actually produce the conditions which make them necessary. When young "executive material" discovered through the club results in forced retirement of an older executive with a desire to remain active, one problem has merely been replaced by another.

Sadly, many of the efforts made at the level of the societal analysis have been poorly conceived. Holland (1978) has shown that this is a result of attempts to set up special limited environments to "fix" subjects rather than to change societal contingencies. It is shocking that behavior analysts working in a prison, who would not expect behavior to be the same from room to room, or within the same room across time alone, would expect that behavior brought about even under so-called positive contingencies (armed guards and fences make this a misnomer) would be maintained in the face of a gross change in contingencies. Consideration of the means by which populations from alcoholic to psychotic are "fixed" shows us what the ineffective treatments the present economic contingencies will lead people to socially validate. When "tax revolt" movements cause social validation proponents to lose their jobs, making no treatment possible, we will have seen the ultimate irony. Proponents should bear in mind that if social validation had come about two decades ago applied behavior analysis might already be extinct.

Still, some see the potential for fundamental change through social validation. Stoltz (Reference Note 2) has said that if a proposed study were not socially acceptable, perhaps a new goal not previously seen as necessary might be to change society's values. But this survey, then, could not properly be called an instance of social validation. The term is reserved for situations where a consumer's approval is sought as part of the science's methodology. With social validation the direction is given, not questioned.

From what we have seen from an analysis of prevailing economic contingencies, and the types of intervention which are validated, it appears as though social validation will not allow for an analysis of economic contingencies the science of human behavior. It may not seem necessary to meddle in such affairs in light of the seeming improvement of economic conditions. This would be true if we could show that the rate and magnitude of change were great enough, perhaps even sufficient to function as a sort of naturally occurring experiment. But a glance at changes in personal income over the 60 year period from 1910 to 1970 is cause for pessimism. In that time the incomes of the wealthiest one fifth dropped only two per cent, from 46% to 44%, while the incomes of the poorest fifth actually dropped from 8% to 5% (Hunt & Sherman, 1975).

Non-Economic

Other-referred. The fear that social validation proponents are confusing science with democratic capitalism grows from the inclusion of measures of "cost-effective" under social validation (Kazdin, 1977; Wolf, 1978). It is not that such measures are useless. It is that their usefulness is only within the context of limited resources. Cost effectiveness can tell us only the most effective means of using 'X' dollars; it tells us nothing of the adequacy of the appropriation. Failure to make this distinction has led to social validation proponents equating their measures with measures of "social importance." Of course, as with everything else, resources will be limited at some point. But it is the manner in which that point is reached which tells us how valid a determinant it is. When the question of limits is answered through the methods of a science, rather than put to a vote or determined by a single individual, e.g., a governor or a president, we should have more reason to trust the contingencies controlling the controllers.

Anyway, talk of cost effectiveness of cost-benefit analysis seems ludicrous when we consider the true potential for treatment of "other-referred" subjects. While the literature does have an impressive jargon (see, for example, Krapfl, 1974) the reality is more often a raging debate over whether or not to raise "therapist's" wages a dime past minimum wage. This is what we should expect, though, having seen the types of interventions the public has supported in this area. Birnbrauer (1978), for one, is weary of the trend: The increasing emphasis on cost-effectiveness is one sign that Behaviorism will continue to repeat past mistakes... Since many problems exist in the first place because of misappropriation of resources, it is difficult how we can fathom to solve them 'on the cheap').
It is only within the realm of limited resources that there has been concern for the best interests of the subject. Recent widespread exposures of abuse have aided awareness, and have no doubt lent strength to social validation. The public rightfully fears the alignment of a scientist with a sadist, and the scientist is fully willing to do whatever is necessary to avoid suspicion. But, having the psychologist clear his/her intervention with the lay public in no way insures that the best interests of the subject are served, and the opposite effect may be seen. When the use of electrical stimulation to punish severe vomiting behavior is suggested as a last resort (Whaley & Malott, 1971) and is avoided, or delayed through social validation, the public is spared its revulsion, the child’s health continues to deteriorate.

Social validity proponents have provided no guidelines for the psychologist who finds that only less effective, or even harmful interventions will be validated. Examples are widespread, although apparently unrecognizable. The use of differential reinforcement for other behaviors (DRO) to the exclusion of all forms of punishment can only lead to less effective treatments in some cases. Concerning the need to use punishment in these latter cases, Skinner (1957) has said, “The conditions under which verbal behavior is reinforced are so extensive and so confusing that something more (than extinction) is probably needed.” And in “open ward” situations, where reinforcement for bizarre behavior is unpreventable, exclusion of punishment as an alternative is not in the best interests of the subject.

Self-referred. This is the area where social validation appears to be on surer ground. What could be a better means of insuring against abuse than to ask the subject if he/she is getting what he/she wants? Unfortunately, the scientist cannot assume that the question of whether an intervention is in the best interests of the subject, is not a sufficient condition, as events at Jonestown dramatically showed.

Voluntariness could serve as a criterion only if the individual person was autonomous (Stoltz, 1977). The cumbersomeness of holding a position so disparate with Behaviorism is seen in a subtle contradiction by Wolf (1978). After quoting Levi & Anderson’s (1975) assertion that each man is “the best judge of his own state of well-being,” Wolf begins the next paragraph with “Therefore, we may have to develop better ways of teaching people to observe their behavior and their conditions and to make more accurate decisions about their improvement.” However, if each individual does know best, what needs to be taught?

We should not expect that each person is his or her own best judge either in determining whether a change should be made, or how that change should be accomplished. Rather than being autonomous, “client’s decisions about treatment alternatives are just as much behaviors under the control of environmental contingencies as are the behaviors targeted for change by the intervention program” (Stoltz, 1977). Skinner (1957) too has pointed out, that in order to more appropriately react to verbal behavior it is necessary to go beyond an analysis of form alone, and take into account the variables responsible for the behavior. For example, the homosexual who appears at therapy in order to escape his father’s wrath, clearly should be regarded differently from the homosexual who has been happily married and enjoyed sexuality with both sexes, even when their initial requests for re-orientation are identical. An advantage is gained by analyzing the extratherapeutic contingencies responsible for the subject “volunteering” for therapy, and at least partially responsible for keeping him there.

Social validation proponents make no provisions for treatment of a subject who requests an ineffective, or even harmful intervention. This raises an interesting issue: If the psychologist does not provide treatment (assuming capability) then the purpose of validation must be questioned. The allegation could then be made that social validation serves only to create the illusion of control by the subject in instances where treatments are interchangeable. If the psychologist does provide the treatment, then aside from divorcing himself from his/her science, she is doing the subject a disservice.

In this case the psychologist would be too strongly under the control of personal reinforcers. The somewhat bizarre nature social validation takes here is revealed by constructing a hypothetical parallel in medicine, another human services science. We would be shocked if an M.D. consulting an obese patient delayed recommendation of a diet until after he had asked the patient, “Do you want candy bars to be good for you?” Proponents would argue that the question they pose is closer to, “Do you want ‘X’ treatment, which is good for you?” However, in the absence of any guidelines which would provide for this distinction to be made, the door is left open for both forms of the question.

Contingencies Favoring Social Validation

We have seen to this point that social validation is in large part justified by a need to avoid control by a group of scientists, who are perhaps ill-motivated. The transparency of the Scientist versus Layman argument was shown, and problems of motivation, competence and the tendency to support that status quo posed by the use of social validation were examined in several areas. Now it is time to turn our attention to the contingencies controlling the scientist who uses measures of social validity.

Before embarking on the analysis we must again remember to examine not only what the psychologist says, but also the variables responsible for his or her saying. Since we will not have the benefit of manipulating variables in the present case, we must rely upon analyses based upon what we know of human behavior from instances where variables have been manipulated (Skinner, 1957). We can thereby advance beyond the point of equating the psychologist’s justifications with the causes of his behavior.

The most salient contingency favoring use of social validation is the avoidance of punishment. Consider the following excerpt from a warning against a science of behavior meddling in the affairs of society: “At the locus of major social change—the community psychologist may be used by others to achieve evil goals...” (Levine, 1974).

When a truism finds its way into supposedly scientific writing we must look for a second source of strength for the behavior. Here the function of the statement seems to be to “allow for inactivity” and thereby avoid the inevitably punishing consequences of activity directed toward “major social change.” Two statements by Wolf (1978) point to the avoidance of punishment: He tells us that since a consumer feedback system was implemented “the Achievement Place program has not been seriously ‘fired’ from a community as it was in the first attempt at replication.” Also, we are told that social validation allows us to “soften our image.”

It is not avoidance contingencies themselves which are objected to. Such contingencies exist virtually everywhere, including the scientific community. The harm is in the lack of awareness of these contingencies by psychologists who socially validate, without which a determination of their appropriateness cannot be made.
Sometimes punishment cannot be avoided. Two ways in which punishment does occur have already been seen. When punishment does occur the contingencies need to be questioned. Was the punishment appropriate? Did it occur for the right reasons? We must also wonder what has been “lost” due to punishment. When Wolf was fired from an attempted Achievement Place replication there is reason to believe that the behaviors involved in “questioning the judgment of the community” were weakened.

Relevant contingencies are not all aversive. A contingency of reinforcement is revealed by Krapfl (1974) in the following passage:

...viable cost-benefit analysis can be carried out using only expenditures and potential expenditures within the mental health system itself. The argument here is that we evaluate programs in terms of their impact on the system under study and not in terms of the overall impact on the society. This narrowing of focus may be one of the ways to increase the credibility in the cost-benefit ratios generated, and consequently increase the likelihood that the decision-maker would use that information in making decisions.

It is just such contingencies, however which oppose broad-scale contingency analysis, and have lead to our present short-sightedness.

The contingencies which induce a psychologist to use social validity measures are distinguishable from the contingencies he comes under subsequent to their use. The latter are more immediate in their troublesome effects on the scientific community. The discovery of “overcorrection” serves as a good example. The term is used to refer to a procedure which is said to be both “non-punitive” and “educative” (Foxx & Azrin, 1972). Both claims, though, were premature and in fact have since been convincingly refuted (Roberts, et al. 1977). The premature claims were undoubtedly related to the increase in staff compliance due to the descriptions of, and rationale for, the over-correction procedures. But the failure to distinguish between verbal behavior reinforced by the mere ability to implement a technology, and verbal behavior established by the methodology of science has led to scientists being deflected towards research which should not have been necessary were there no special consequences for abandoning the original analysis.

It is the special consequences for psychologists’ behavior, brought about by the use of social validation measures, which leads to an abandonment of further contingency analysis. It is only when the manner in which the present contingencies oppose the practices of science becomes fully recognized, that the urgency of “lifting ourselves by our bootstraps” will emerge.

Reference Notes
Fuqua, R.W. Personal communication, March, 1978. It was also pointed out that as implications for research findings becomes more distant, that type of research may be curtailed. This could have destructive effects on “basic” research.

An earlier version of this article was presented at the meeting of the Midwestern Association of Behavior Analysis, Chicago, May 1978.
B.F.S.A. Organizational Decisions

The 1978 B.F.S.A. organizational meeting was held in Chicago at the May MABA meetings. It was decided to publish both a semi-annual journal and a quarterly newsletter, and elect an editor of each and a national secretary. While these offices would be up for election at each midyear ABA meetings, tenure in each office would be by calendar year.

Harry Kent of Western Michigan University was elected editor of the newsletter for the remainder of 1978 and for 1979. Joe Morrow of California State University, Sacramento was elected editor of the journal for the remainder of 1978 and for 1979. Gary Gant of Western Michigan was elected National Secretary for 1978 and Saranne Oberman, University of Kansas was elected National Secretary for 1979.

Election for these offices for 1980 will be conducted at the 1979 BFSA organizational meeting to be held at the June 15-19, 1979 A.B.A. meetings in Dearborn, Michigan.