

## COMMENTARY

### Behavioral Self-Management: Developing the Skills for Attaining Personal Freedom and Dignity

---

There has long been a concern that our increasingly mechanized and technological society may deprive individuals of a sense of control over their own lives. Many writers have eloquently stated the limitations of a society preoccupied with productivity and material consumption, and have poetically illustrated the sense of alienation, isolation, and loneliness that may result.

But where do we turn to rediscover values of a personal, interpersonal, and even spiritual nature? How can we learn the skills necessary to regain control of our lives? Part of the search in our society has taken the form of trying to formulate a new vision of health and healing, a new vision of human potential. Some aspects of this vision have come from the Eastern esoteric and mystical traditions; others have come from models and teachers, whether living or dead, whom we would like to emulate and whom we feel we can believe in and trust.

The other part of the search involves what to do once we have formulated the vision. Can we actually develop the skills to enhance our will power, our interpersonal grace, our sensitivity and openness to ourselves, to nature, and to other people?

#### **An Assumption: We Can Learn These Skills**

In the ancient Indian text, the **Bhagavad Gita**, the man of wisdom is described as one who has not a hair's-breadth between will and action. "Who sees inaction in action and action in inaction, he is enlightened among men—he does all actions disciplined."

How does the person of enlightenment gain this discipline? Can we learn to do the same?

The first assumption is that these skills can be learned. Social learning theory assumes that will power is a learned skill and that individuals who exhibit it are acting in certain ways that all of us can learn to emulate. Behavioral self-control strategies are an attempt to precisely formulate the skills that constitute this will power. These skills, based on a learning model, are derived from experimental laboratory and field research.

When we assume that we can learn certain basic self-regulatory skills, many exciting applications become possible. These may extend not only to the medical and health sciences, or to clinical and educational areas, but also to personal growth. New methods of research using subjects as their own control allow us to teach individuals how to be their own personal scientist, i.e., how to teach themselves the skills of self-control and how to evaluate the effectiveness of their self-change efforts.

#### **Skill Number One: Awareness**

The first skill that people with will power have is a precise awareness. They seem to very aware of the external environment—what is going on around them—and the internal environment—what is going on within them. "The external environment" refers to interpersonal relationships and to the physical setting; "the internal environment" refers to physiological cues and cognitive self-statements (what we say inside our heads). Individuals with will power have learned that many things in the internal and external environments strongly influence their behavior. For example, the early research of Asch (1958) suggests the enormous effect the social environment (peer pressure) has on our actions. Research by Adams and Biddle (1970) and Sommer (1969) suggests that the physical environment has a significant effect; for example, the arrangement of a classroom plays a role in determining which students speak and which don't—regardless of the students' ability. Other research suggests that the internal environment (i.e., the kinds of things we say to ourselves—our hopes, our expectations, our hurts, our concerns) influences our actions, from the intensity of our depression or our effectiveness in approaching other people, to the amount of creativity and risk-taking behavior we engage in.

Individuals with will power have learned, as the research above suggests, that in fact they are strongly determined and influenced by certain kinds of events in the environment. This realization of our determinism is the first step in learning to develop personal freedom. When B. F. Skinner (1972) talks of going "beyond freedom," he means that as long as we live with the illusion that we have freedom, we may fail to develop an awareness of the things that in fact are influencing our lives, and thus we may never learn to attain a true freedom. As Nasudrin, the wise fool in many Sufi stories, has pointed out, our perception of reality, though it may appear natural, is merely a perception. Until we can realize how we are conditioned, we will believe in an illusion of freedom. Behavioral self-management strategies involve a precise method for attaining awareness about our conditioning. This method is called behavioral self-observation, and it involves performing a very careful analysis of the relationship between our actions and the environment—how we affect those around us, and how the environment influences us.

#### **The Element of Choice in Personal Freedom: Choosing Our Vision**

Once we have realized what kinds of things influence our behavior, we can begin to choose how we want to live. This choice gives us the potential to free ourselves from past habit patterns, past reflex emotions, and past or current environmental situations.

Gaining awareness of our past conditioning gives us the potential to evaluate our past habits and to choose new ways of acting and a new vision of ourselves. Thus the second skill that individuals with will power have is the ability to set goals for themselves, to choose a vision of what directions they would like to grow in and what kind of person they would like to become. These goals are set through a very careful process of decision making and self-evaluation—evaluating where one is currently and where one would like to be as one looks to the future.

#### **The Skills for Attaining the Vision**

Once having set goals for themselves, individuals with will power seem to engage in certain actions and use certain techniques that help them attain these goals. These techniques are nothing mysterious, and we all can learn them. Social-learning theorists (e.g., Thoresen and Mahoney, 1974) have divided these techniques into two groupings.

The first may be referred to as environmental planning (stimulus or cue control). This refers to changing the environment in such a way that it facilitates our acting in ways we want to act. This environmental planning is done prior to the occurrence of the target behavior (the behavior to be changed). For example, if we are trying to reduce our weight, we may put only healthy foods in the refrigerator and cupboards, put a weight chart on the kitchen cabinet with a warning about the dangers of being overweight, etc. All these actions occur before we eat, and are examples of environmental planning.

The second strategy may be referred to as behavioral programming. This comes after the occurrence of the target behavior, and involves the kinds of consequences that occur for a particular action. These may involve self-punishment or self-reward of a symbolic, verbal, or material nature. For example, when we perform an action we admire, do we praise ourselves for it? If so, what kind of praise? Is it a verbal pat on the back? A visit to a concert we've wanted to attend? The purchase of a new item of clothing? If we don't perform as we would like, do we punish ourselves? If so, what kind of punishment (e.g., giving a dollar to our most hated charity)?

#### **Unanswered Questions: Concluding Thoughts**

Self-management skills seem to provide exciting possibilities for the health sciences, education, and psychotherapy, but these skills are by no means definitive answers. One of the hallmarks of a social learning approach is its emphasis on evaluation. Although these techniques may be the most powerful yet developed, they need to be refined and expanded. With the recent realization that learning can take place within the autonomic nervous system, and as we learn more about the brain's capacity for self-regulation, the applications of the

current techniques, as well as the body of techniques themselves, will expand. Further, the overlap between behavioral self-management strategies, meditation, and biofeedback strategies is an important and necessary area for exploration. Are these self-regulation techniques merely different names for the same strategy, or are there in fact important differences between them? If there are differences, is there some combination of self-regulatory strategies, as yet untried, that may be even more effective?

As people in the healing professions, as behavioral scientists, as educators, we must maintain an openness to an expanded vision of the human potential, we must continue to use our past knowledge and our intuition to develop more effective techniques for attaining that vision, and we must be willing to honestly evaluate the success of our endeavors. In this way, we may truly aid in the development and teaching of skills that give "freedom and dignity."

July 1976

**Deane H. Shapiro, Jr.,**  
Ph.D.

Clinical Faculty,  
Department of  
Psychiatry and  
Behavioral Sciences,  
Stanford University  
Medical School;  
Academic Faculty,  
Pacific  
Graduate School  
of Psychology

#### References

- Adams and Biddle, **The Realities of Teaching**, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970
- Asch, S. E., "Effects of Group Pressure Upon Modification and Distortion of Judgment," in Maccoby, E. E., Newcomb, T. M., and Hartly, E. L. (Eds.), **Readings in Social Psychology**, 3rd Ed., New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1958
- Skinner, B. F., **Beyond Freedom and Dignity**, New York: Bantam Books, 1972
- Sommer, R., **Personal Space**, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974
- Thoresen, C., and Mahoney M., **Behavioral Self-Control**, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1974



# Psychology and Human Services

Conferences and Workshops  
Berkeley/San Francisco  
September and October, 1976

---

## LIFELONG LEARNING

Vol. XLVI, Berkeley, August 18, 1976, No. 14  
Published weekly by University Extension,  
University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720,  
except during July and August, when issued  
twice weekly, and January, when issued  
three times weekly. Second-class postage  
paid at Berkeley, California. Sent free of  
charge to those desiring information of  
University Extension activities.

---

## WEEKEND CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP

### Behavioral Self-Management

X 484 (1)

Co-sponsored with the Northern California  
Behavior Therapy Association

Behavioral scientists are becoming in-  
creasingly knowledgeable about the deli-  
cate and important interaction between  
individuals and their environment. At the  
same time they have begun to develop  
effective strategies by which individuals  
can learn to take control of their own lives.  
This course explores the practical applica-  
tions of these strategies in several  
different areas.

*Educational:* Self-control with children and  
adolescents, including hyperactive and ag-  
gressive children; relaxation (stress and  
tension management) for teachers.

*Psychotherapeutic:* Some therapeutic sys-  
tems place primary emphasis on having the  
individual take responsibility for his or her  
actions and behavior; social learning the-  
orists have developed the skills and strat-  
egies by which this can be done. The com-  
plementarity of these approaches are  
explored and practical therapeutic appli-  
cations suggested.

*Medical:* Behavioral strategies for control  
of hypertension; for increasing patients'  
adherence to treatment programs; for  
weight reduction, abstinence from cigarette  
smoking, cardiovascular problems; and for  
fears and phobias.

*Personal Growth:* Relationship between  
behavioral self-control strategies and self-  
regulation techniques from Eastern esoteric  
and mystical disciplines; exploration of  
value and ethical questions involved in  
self-control research.

Course chairperson and coordinator:  
DEANE SHAPIRO, JR., Ph.D., member of  
the clinical faculty, Department of Psychi-  
atry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford  
University Medical School, and the aca-  
demic faculty, Pacific Graduate School of  
Psychology, Palo Alto.

He is the author of *Precision Nirvana: When  
the Zen Master Meets the Grand Inquisitor*  
(in press); and co-editor (with D. Giber)  
*Zen and the Art of Psychotherapy* and *Clini-  
cal Applications of Meditation*; co-editor  
(with R. Walsh) *Transpersonal Behaviorism*.

## THE PROGRAM

### Saturday, October 23

9-9:30 a.m. Registration

9:30-  
9:45 a.m. **Introduction to the  
Conference**  
DEANE SHAPIRO

9:45 a.m.-  
noon **Behavioral Self-Management:  
An Overview**

CARL E. THORESEN

Discussion of "will power" as  
a learned skill, and ways in  
which self-management skills  
can be applied in clinical and  
educational settings as well  
as in our own lives.

1-3 p.m.

### WORKSHOPS

**Research in Self-Control,**  
CARL E. THORESEN

**Relaxation Training,** JOHN  
MARQUIS

Practice of basic relaxation  
skills with emphasis on learn-  
ing to relax as well as teach-  
ing others to relax.

**Behavioral Self-Control with  
Hyperactive Children**  
LAURA PHILLIPS

Presentation of self-control  
strategies for management of  
hyperactive children as an  
alternative to use of drugs in  
the classroom.

**Personal Growth: Applying  
Self-Control Strategies to Our  
Own Lives,** DEANE SHAPIRO,  
ROGER WALSH

Practical experiences leading  
toward "transpersonal be-  
haviorism"—an integration  
of meditative and behavioral  
self-control strategies; appli-  
cations to personal freedom;  
holistic health.

**Self-Control Strategies for Women, HELEN KRUMBOLTZ, JOHANNA SHAPIRO**

Discussion and practical experiences demonstrating the advantages of teaching women skills that will give them a sense of competency and control over their lives.

3:30–  
5:30 p.m.

**Health Applications: Behavioral Medicine, STEWART AGRAS**

A discussion of the ways in which behavioral principles can be applied in the health and medical sciences.

**Sunday, October 24**

10 a.m.–noon

**Self Change: Charting New Frontiers in Education, DWIGHT GOODWIN**

Description of means of providing skills to permit greater self-control over problems interfering with learning, and stimulating more effective decision making in setting goals and achieving personal objectives.

1–3 p.m.

**WORKSHOPS  
Problems in Clinical and Applied Behavioral Self-Control Research, ALAN KAZDIN**

**Cognitive Restructuring, JOHN KRUMBOLTZ**

Exploring ways in which we can learn to formulate consistent, healthy “rules” to guide our lives.

**Health Applications: Patient Persuasion, JAMES SCHMIDT**

Techniques of involving patients so that they become participants in their health care.

**Teaching Self-Management in the Home, LAURA PHILLIPS**

Practical ways in which parents and educators can learn and apply the techniques of self-control in the home.

**From Research to Practice: Behavioral Self-Control in the Treatment of Obesity, G. T. WILSON**

Practical demonstration and discussion of evidence of effectiveness of applying behavioral strategies to weight reduction.

3:15–  
4:30 p.m.

**Summary: Behavioral Self-Control and Beyond, DEANE SHAPIRO**

Value and ethical questions; self-control for what? Interface with self-regulation techniques from Eastern “esoteric” and “mystical” disciplines.

BERKELEY: Oct. 23–24; Sat. 9:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m., Sun. 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m.; 155 Dwinelle Hall; \$30 noncredit, \$45 credit, \$20 reduced fee to members of co-sponsoring agency (edp 101675)

**SPEAKERS AND WORKSHOP LEADERS**

STEWART AGRAS, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University Medical School; Editor, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Analysis*; author of *Behavior Modification: Principles, Clinical Application*.

DWIGHT GOODWIN, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology and coordinator of the school psychology program at San Jose State University; senior author of *Helping Students Help Themselves*. As a panel member for the commission on teacher preparation and licensing, he was directly involved in framing behavioral competencies for the California credential for school psychologists.

ALAN KAZDIN, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, Pennsylvania State University; Associate Editor of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Analysis*; author of *Behavior Modification in Applied Settings*; and co-author (with Mahoney and Craighead) of *Behavior Modification: Principles, Issues, and Applications*.

JOHN KRUMBOLTZ, Ph.D., Professor of Education and Psychology, Stanford University; Resident Fellow, 1975–6, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences co-author (with Helen Krumboltz) of *Changing Children's Behavior*; and co-editor (with Carl Thoresen) of *Behavioral Counseling and Counseling: Techniques and Applications*.

HELEN KRUMBOLTZ, Ph.D., co-author of *Changing Children's Behavior*; has taught courses at Stanford University on self-control for women.

JOHN MARQUIS, Ph.D., Staff Psychologist, Palo Alto VA Hospital; private practice, Los Altos; President, Santa Clara County Psychological Association; currently writing a practical instructional manual on relaxation.

LAURA PHILLIPS, Ph.D., Director, Institute of Human Behavior, Berkeley; has had many years experience working with childhood problems such as autism and delinquency.

JAMES SCHMIDT, Ph.D., staff psychologist and Assistant Chief, Psychology Service, Letterman Army Medical Center, Presidio, San Francisco.

JOHANNA SHAPIRO, Ph.D., Consultant, Center for Research on Women, Stanford University; adjunct faculty, Pacific Graduate School of Psychology; private practice, Menlo Park.

CARL E. THORESEN, Ph.D., Professor of Education and Psychology, Stanford University; co-author (with M. Mahoney) of *Behavioral Self-Control and Self-Control: Power to the Person*; currently editing a series of books on applications of self-management skills to problems of phobias, obesity, insomnia, overcoming fears, and stopping smoking.

ROGER WALSH, M.D., Ph.D., is currently an NIMH Fellow, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University.

G. T. WILSON, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, Rutgers University, New Jersey; co-editor (with C. Franks) of *Annual Review of Behavior Therapy: Theory and Practice*; co-author (with T. O'Leary) of *Behavior Therapy: Applications and Outcome*.