

Behavior mod: How to keep the good?

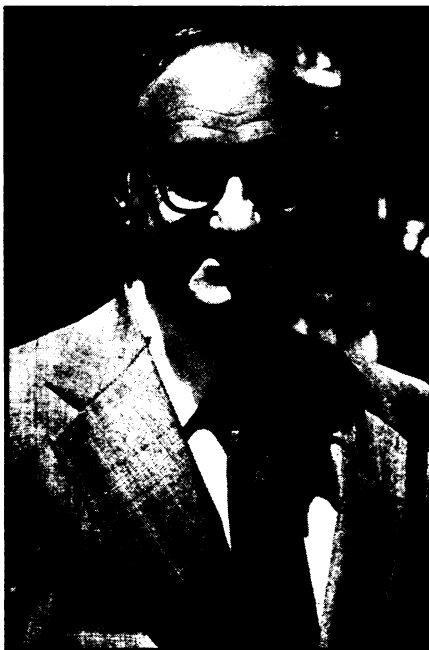
Stuttering, nail biting, thumb sucking, skin picking, nervous blushing, hair pulling, knuckle cracking and a variety of nervous habits have been eliminated or greatly reduced by simple behavior modification techniques. Nathan H. Azrian and Robert Gregory Nunn of Anna State Hospital in Illinois treated more than 200 clients obtained in response to a newspaper advertisement. The results of the treatment were presented this week in New Orleans at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. During a single counseling session, the patients were taught to become aware of their habit and of situations provoking it. By substituting a competing reaction in such situations, most clients were able to reduce the appearance of the nervous habit by 90 percent on the first day and by 95 percent after one week. A six-month follow-up showed that the benefits continued for almost all clients.

Similar results were reported not only for changing nervous habits but also for modifying almost every type of human behavior imaginable. Teachers, students, parents, sex partners, people afraid of medical examinations or of public speaking, people with emotional problems and a variety of types of sex offenders—behavior modification therapies seemed to have something for everyone.

An especially promising treatment was outlined for people prone to heart disease. A Type A personality has been defined as a person with a high drive toward poorly defined goals, a persistence of work toward recognition and advancement, an eagerness to compete and a heightened mental and physical alertness. The Type A personality is considered to be as much a contributor to heart disease as cholesterol, poor exercise, poor diet, weight and smoking.

Richard M. Suinn of Colorado State University described a behavior modification program for helping Type A people to better control stress situations. Patients undergoing physical rehabilitation for cardiovascular disease were treated. Instead of being told to avoid all stressful situations, the patients were taught how to recognize such situations and how to physically relax their muscles before going into a stress situation. In this manner, stress is kept physically under control while the patients are allowed to retain their levels of productivity. In two separate studies the effects of behavior training worked. After learning to control stress situations, patients showed a significant decrease in cholesterol and triglyceride levels, major contributors to heart disease.

With behavior modification programs



Bandura: 'Odious imagery' has hurt.

producing such beneficial results, why is behavior modification usually equated with 1984 or *A Clockwork Orange*? APA President Albert Bandura of Stanford University attempted to answer such questions in his presidential address. "Over the years," said Bandura, "the terms behaviorism and conditioning have come to be associated with odious imagery, including salivating dogs, puppetry and animalistic manipulations. As a result, those who wish to disparage ideas or practices they hold in disfavor need only to label them as behavioristic or as Pavlovian precursors of a totalitarian state."

Part of the problem stems from the fact that conditioning was originally thought to be an automatic response that could be used to control just about any human behavior. But, says Bandura, this type of "reflexive conditioning in humans is largely a myth." Conditioning is not automatic, it is mentally mediated.

The image of behavior modification as a totalitarian tool has even prompted some psychologists to suggest that the term behavior modification be changed. But changing the name does not change the image. And certain behavior modification programs seem to have deserved the image they earned. The Special Treatment and Rehabilitative Training (START) program, for instance, was declared to be unconstitutional and in violation of prisoners' rights (SN: 3/16/74, p. 180). A behavior modification program for imprisoned child molesters was shut down in Texas last week for similar reasons, and funds are being withheld from many programs

around the country because of the bad publicity behavior modification has been receiving.

To date, the legal profession has been attempting to protect prisoners' rights by closing down programs. But behavior modification programs can be beneficial, and prisoners do have a right to treatment. Michael Lerner, a Kansas City lawyer, told an APA session that the law can be used to keep behavior therapy programs in operation, not just to shut them down. Lerner has been working with psychologists involved in a treatment program for sexual psychopaths.

Lerner's prescription is simple—work within the law. The only way to have valid consent for treatment, he says, is to have the courts involved at the very start. A written consent specifying the nature of the treatment and a written description of the purpose, risks and effects of the treatment must be obtained from the patient. Accompanying these consents must be a certification by a qualified physician or psychologist that the patient has read and understand all the terms of the consent and that the patient is mentally competent to understand fully all of the provisions. Also, the consent may be revoked at any time by the patient. A judge can validate such statements and the courts can make periodic checks on treatment programs.

In conclusion, Lerner says that if behavior therapists are to continue doing their thing, they will have to work well within the law. In this way they will be able to keep their programs alive and they may avoid expensive malpractice suits. □

For the record: 1 hour 55 minutes

A U.S. Air Force SR-71, a supersonic aircraft that has not been in production since the 1960's, has obliterated the previous official eastbound transatlantic speed record by flying from New York to London in 1 hour 55 minutes and 42 seconds, an average speed of 1,817 miles per hour. The official record for the same route was a comparatively snail-like 4 hours 46 minutes, set five years ago by a British Royal Navy Phantom fighter, although the Anglo-French Concorde this June set a Paris-to-Boston record for commercial aircraft of 3 hours 9 minutes.

The Lockheed-built SR-71, fastest aircraft in the U.S. repertoire, set the record Sept. 1 in a deliberate attempt on the way to the Farnborough International Air Show. The record time, certified by the Federation Aeronautique Internationale, was measured at speed from a point over New York to a point over London. □