

THE BEHAVIOR PATTERN AND THE SITUATION

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ABSTRACT

The behavior pattern and the situation. — The paper refers to four standpoints which may be employed in the investigation of behavior problems: (1) the attitudes, (2) the values, (3) the forms of adaptation, (4) the total situation, and indicates the interaction of these factors in any concrete process. The situational procedure is emphasized and illustrated from the fields of child study, psychology, psychiatry, delinquency, education, and mass-psychology, with a statement of types of problem which it is desirable that sociologists should approach through the situational procedure.

The lines of social research have largely converged on the question of behavior reactions and the processes involved in their formation and modification. It appears that the particular behavior patterns and the total personality are overwhelmingly conditioned by the types of situations and trains of experience encountered by the individual in the course of his life. The question of heredity remains a factor, but this is also being studied in terms of behavior; it is, in fact, defined as the phylogenetic memory of experience — memory organically incorporated.

In approaching problems of behavior it is possible to emphasize—to have in the focus of attention for working purposes — either the attitude, the value, or the situation. The attitude is the tendency to act, representing the drive, the affective states, the wishes. The value represents the object or goal desired, and the situation represents the configuration of the factors conditioning the behavior reaction. It is also possible to work from the standpoint of adaptation—that is, how are attitudes and values modified according to the demands of given situations.

Any one of these standpoints will involve all the others, since they together constitute a process. But I wish to speak at present of the situational procedure as having certain experimental, objective, and comparative possibilities and as deserving of further attention and elaboration. As I have said, the emphasis of this standpoint by no means obscures the other factors; on the contrary, it reveals them. The situations which the individual encounters, into which he is forced, or which he creates, disclose the character of his adaptive strivings, positive or negative, progressive or regressive, his claims, attainments, renunciations, and compromises. For the human personality also the most important content of situations is the attitudes and values of other persons with which his own come into conflict and co-operation, and I have thus in mind the

study of types of situation which reveal the role of attitudes and values in the process of behavior adaptation.

The situational method is the one in use by the experimental physiologist and psychologist who prepare situations, introduce the subject into the situation, observe the behavior reactions, change the situation, and observe the changes in the reactions. Child rendered one point in the situation more stimulating than others by applying an electric needle or other stimulus and made heads grow where tails would otherwise have grown. The situational character of the animal experimentation of the psychologists is well known. The rat, for example, in order to open a door, must not only stand on a platform placed in a certain position, but at the same time pull a string. A complete study of situations would give a complete account of the rat's attitudes, values, and intelligence.

The study of behavior with reference to situations which was begun by Vervorn, Pfeffer, Loeb, Jennings, and other physiologists and was concerned with the so-called "tropisms," or the reaction of the small organism to light, electricity, heat, gravity, hard substances, etc., was continued, or paralleled, by the experiments of Thorndike, Yerkes, Pavlov, Watson, Köhler, and others with rats, dogs, monkeys, and babies as subjects, but until quite recently no systematic work from this standpoint has involved the reactions of the individual to other persons or groups of persons. That is to say, the work has not been sociological, but physiological or psychological. Recently, however, there have developed certain directly sociological studies of behavior based on the situation. These are either experimental in the sense that the situations are planned and the behavior reactions observed, or advantage is taken of existing situations to study the reactions of individuals comparatively.

We may notice first the significant work of Bühler, Hetzer, and Tudor-Hart¹ upon the earliest social reactions of the child. Working in the Vienna clinics they divided 126 children into 9 groups of 14 each, the first group containing children 3 days old and under, and the last group containing those 4–5 months old, and experimenting with sound-stimuli they observed the rate at which the child learns to separate out and give attention to the human voice among other sounds. All the children noticed all the sounds (striking a porcelain plate with a spoon, rattling a piece of paper, and the human voice) sometimes, but the reaction of the newborn to noises in the first weeks is far more positive than the reaction to the voice, even to loud and noisy conversation: 92 per cent of frequency to the noises and 25 per cent to the voice. But in the third week the proportion is about the same, and in the fourth week the reaction is more frequent to the voice. The first positive reaction to the voice, other than listening, is a puckering of the lips, a sucking movement. The quality of the voice or the person speaking is at first of no significance. A child of three months when scolded angrily laughed gleefully. As yet angry tones had not been associated with punishment. A voice of any kind meant feeding.

¹ Charlotte Bühler, Hildegard Hetzer, and Beatrix Tudor-Hart, *Sociologische und psychologische Studien über das erste Lebensjahr* (Quellen und Studien zur Jugendkunde), Jena, 1927.

Working with another group of 114 children, not newborn but borrowed from nursing mothers at a milk depot, placing them together in groups of two or more, and giving them toys, the most various reactions were disclosed in the unfamiliar situation. Some were embarrassed and inactive; others were openly delighted; some pounced upon the toys and paid no attention to the children; others explored the general environment; some robbed their companions of all the toys; others proffered, exchanged, or exhibited them; some were furious in the new situation, already, in the first year, positively negativistic. It is impossible to say to what degree these children had been conditioned by association with their mothers and how far the reactions were dispositional. But it is plain that by the end of the first year the most positive personality trends had been established. At this early age the experimenters think they distinguish three main personality types: the dominant, the amiable or humanitarian, and the exhibitionist, or producer.

Situational work of this type is now being carried on in several child-study institutes in the United States, and is foundational for the work in which we are more directly interested. Anderson and Goodenough, for example, and their associates, working in Minneapolis and observing the reactions of children among themselves in spontaneous play, found that a given child participating in play actively with all the other members of the group successively might be found leading or dominating in 95 per cent of the situations, whereas another child, under the same conditions, was found to be in the leading position only 5 per cent of the time. That is, within a constant period one child is getting twenty times as much practice in meeting social situations in a given way as a second child. We have here a type of organization of behavior where not only the lack of practice but the habit of subordination will have the most far-reaching consequences in the development of efficiency and personality. Observations will now be undertaken by the same observers on the effect of the alteration of the composition of groups with the object of giving the less dominant children opportunity to assume more important roles.²

Another item in the program of this institute is the study of habit formation in connection with games of skill. It has appeared that the children develop idiosyncrasies in their technique of throwing a ring at a peg. If an effort, however awkward, happens to be successful, the child tends to adopt and persevere in this method, regardless of his later insuccesses.³ Evidently the fixation of many undesirable social habits has this origin. Whimpering, crying, lying, vomiting, bed-wetting have had an initial success in dominating the mother, and may become a part of the child's behavior repertory. It is to be remembered also that the initiation of one mode of reaction to a situation tends to block the emergence of other types of reaction. Moreover, it appears from other sources that children are capable of developing dual and contrasting behavior reactions in different types of situations. Miss Caldwell, in Boston, working mainly with Italian children, has astonishing records

² John E. Anderson, "The Genesis of Social Reactions in the Young Child," *The Unconscious: A Symposium*, pp. 69-90.

³ *Ibid.*

showing consistently defiant, destructive, negativistic behavior in the home and relatively orderly behavior in the nursery school. And this duality of behavior is carried on for years—bad in one situation, good in another.

Freeman and his associates in Chicago are now publishing a situational study of the greatest importance based on the placing of about six hundred children in foster homes, in response, apparently, to the following challenge by Terman: "A crucial experiment," Terman says, "would be to take a large number of very young children from the lower classes and after placing them in the most favorable environment obtainable compare their later mental development with that of the children born into the best homes." In this experiment comparisons were made between results on intelligence tests which had been given before adoption, in the case of one group, and the results after they had been in the foster home a number of years. Another comparison was made between children of the same family who had been placed in different homes, the home being rated on a scheme which took into consideration the material environment, evidence of culture, occupation of foster father, education and social activity of foster parents. Both of these comparisons had held heredity constant, letting the situation vary. A third comparison held environment constant, letting heredity vary, that is, concerning itself with a comparison of the intelligence of the own children of the foster parents and of the foster children. The results, stated in a word, show that when two unrelated children are reared in the same home, differences in their intelligences tend to decrease, and that residence in different homes tends to make siblings differ from one another in intelligence. This study is limited to the question of intelligence, but it is obvious that a fundamental study of behavior could be made by the same method.

Esther Richards, of the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic in Baltimore, has been experimenting with psychopathic children by placing them in homes and on farms and moving them about until a place is found in which they are adjusted. She discovered that there were whole families of hypochondriacs showing no symptoms of organic deficiency. To be "ailing, and never so well" had become a sort of fashion in families, owing, perhaps, to the hysterical manifestations of the mother. These attempts are rather uniformly successful as long as the parents remain away from the child. One boy had been manifesting perfect health and robust activity on a farm, but conceived a stomach ache on the appearance of his mother, which disappeared with her departure. And it is the prevailing psychiatric standpoint that the psychoneuroses—the hysterias, hypochondrias, schizophrenias, war neuroses, etc., are forms of adaptations to situations.

Dr. Harry Stack Sullivan and his associates, working at the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital, Baltimore, are experimenting with a small group of persons now or recently actively disordered, from the situational standpoint, and among other results this study reveals the fact that these persons tend to make successful adjustments in groupwise association between themselves.

The sociologist has found the behavior document, the life-record, a very useful aid in exploring the situation and determining the sources of maladjustment. It is true that this introspective method has the disadvantages encountered in the taking of legal testimony. It has been shown by students of testimony that in case of false testimony the witness frequently brings a preconception, a behavior schema, to the situation, that he testifies ego-centrally, overweighting certain aspects and adding perceptual elements and interpretations as a result of his own memories and experiences; his perceptions of the events of which he testifies are thus anticipatory and reminiscent. And he has also excluded from perception factors which he did not anticipate. The same holds in varying degrees of the human document. Shaw, working with the Juvenile Research Institute in Chicago, has pointed out that some of his subjects prepare dry and objective chronicles while others are mainly self-justificatory and exculpatory. A document prepared by one compensating for a feeling of inferiority or elaborating a delusion of persecution is certainly as far as possible from objective reality. On the other hand, this definition of the situation is from one standpoint quite as good as if it were true. It is a representation of the situation as appreciated by the subject, "as if" it were so, and this is for behavior study a most important phase of reality.

The psychologists and social workers connected with the juvenile courts and child clinics, the visiting teachers, and other organizations are now preparing extensive records tending to take the behavior of the child in connection with all the contacts and experiences which may have influenced the particular delinquency or maladjustment. And finally the regional and ecological behavior surveys with which Park, Burgess, Thrasher, Shaw, Zorbaugh, and others are identified attempt to measure the totality of influence in a community, the configuration and disposition of social stimuli, as represented by institutions, localities, social groups, and individual personalities, as these contribute to the formation of behavior patterns.

The merit of all these exploratory approaches is that they tend to bring out causative factors previously neglected and to change the character of the problem. Thrasher's study of 1,313 gangs in Chicago changes the character of the crime problem, and this study merely opens up a new situation. Other researches, not yet published, will show that, recruited from the gangs, criminal life is as definitely organized in Chicago as the public school system or any other department of life, the criminals working behind an organization of "irreproachable" citizens. Shaw has studied the cases of boys brought before the juvenile court in Chicago for stealing with reference to the number of boys participating, and finds that in 90 per cent of the cases two or more boys were involved. It is certain that many of the boys concerned were not caught, and that the percentage of groupwise stealing is therefore greater than 90 per cent. This again throws a new light on the nature of the problem of crime. Again, Burgess and Shaw have studied the incidence of delinquency for different neighborhoods and find that in the so-called "interstitial zones," lying along the railroad tracks and between the better neighborhoods, the boys are almost 100 per cent delinquent, while in other neighborhoods there is almost no delinquency. Burgess found one ward

in a city of 12,000 population with about eight times as many cases of juvenile delinquency as in any of the other wards.⁴

These are examples of factors of delinquency which turn up or come to the front in the course of the exploration of situations. But with reference to the relationship of the factors, their distribution in the ratio of delinquency, or even the certitude that we are aware of all the factors, we are in one respect in the position of the person who gives false testimony in court. We overweight the standpoint acquired by our particular experience and our preconceived line of approach. In the literature of delinquency we find under the heading "causative factors" such items as the following: Early sex experience, 18 per cent for boys and 25 per cent for girls; bad companionship, 62 per cent for both sexes; school dissatisfaction, 9 per cent for boys and 2 per cent for girls; mental defect, 14 per cent; premature puberty, 3 per cent; psychopathic personality, 14 per cent; mental conflict, 6.5 per cent; motion pictures, 1 per cent, etc. Now it is evident that many young persons have had some of these experiences without becoming delinquent, and that many mentally defective persons and psychopathic personalities are living at large somewhat successfully without any record of delinquency; some of them are keeping small shops; others are producing literature and art. How can we call certain experiences "causative factors" in a delinquent group when we do not know the frequency of the same factors in a non-delinquent group? In order to determine the relation of a given experience to delinquency it would be necessary to compare the frequency of the same experience in the delinquent group and in a group representing the general non-delinquent population. It is now well known that the findings of Lombroso in his search for a criminal type went completely to pieces when Goring and others compared a series of criminals with a series taken from otherwise comparable non-delinquents. Lombroso's "criminal stigmata" are simply physical marks of the human species distributed pretty uniformly through the general population. Similarly, it is obviously absurd to claim that feeble-mindedness or psychopathic disposition is the cause of crime so long as we have no idea of the prevalence of these traits in the general population. No subject is perhaps in so naive and grotesque a position in this respect as psychoanalysis. The "Oedipus complex" and the "Electra complex"—the "fixation" of son on mother and daughter on father—are discovered and weighted by Freudians and made prominent sources of the psychoneuroses and of delinquency, whereas the clinical records show a multitude of cases where children with behavior disturbances are either indifferent to the parents or directly hate them. Again, with regard to economic factors as cause of crime, we find, for example, in the records of the White-Williams Foundation of Philadelphia (an organization dealing primarily with non-delinquent children) the same unfavorable economic conditions, broken homes, etc., which are usually assigned as "causative factors" in the studies of delinquency, but in this case without delinquency.

The psychiatrist Kempf, speaking of the diagnosis and classification of nervous diseases, has given the opinion that if twenty cases were given to twenty psychiatrists

⁴ E. W. Burgess, "Juvenile Delinquency in a Small City," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, VI, 726-28.

separately for diagnosis and their findings were sealed and given to a committee for a comparison of the results the whole system of diagnosis would blow up. And something of this kind would happen if students of delinquency, under the same conditions, attempted to name the causative factors in a crime wave or in the heavy incidence of delinquency in a given locality. The answers would certainly be weighted on the side of bad heredity, gang life, poverty, commercialized pleasure, decline of the church, post-encephalitic behavior disturbances, etc., according to the different standpoints represented.

Since the establishment of the first juvenile court in 1899 there has been a very careful elaboration of procedure with reference to the treatment of the young delinquent—systematic study of the case, oversight in the home or in a detention home, placing in good families, psychiatric social workers, visiting teachers, attempts to improve the attitudes of parents toward children, recreation facilities, children's villages and farm schools—and there is, I think, a general impression that there is a steady improvement, an evolution of method, and a gradual approach to a solution of the problem of delinquency. But there is no evidence that juvenile-court procedure or any procedure tends to reduce the large volume of juvenile delinquency. This is not surprising in view of the present rapid unstabilization of society connected with the urbanization of the population, the breakdown of kinship groups, the circulation of news, the commercialization of pleasure, etc. But it is more significant that the methods of the juvenile courts, when applied by their best representatives and in the most painstaking way, cannot be called successful in arresting the career of children who once appear in court, that so many first offenders become recidivists and eventually criminals. Healy and Bronner, who were the first court psychologists, and whose work commands the highest respect in the world, have recently reviewed this point on the basis of the records of their cases during the past twenty years in Chicago and Boston. They say:

Tracing the lives of several hundred youthful repeated offenders studied long ago by us and treated by ordinary so-called correctional methods reveals much repetition of offense. This is represented by the astonishing figures of 61 per cent failure for males (15 per cent being professional criminals and 5 per cent having committed homicide), and 46 per cent failure for girls (29 per cent being prostitutes). Thus in over one-half the cases in this particular series juvenile delinquency has continued into careers of vice and crime. ... This is an immense proportion to be coming from any series of consecutive cases studied merely because they were repeated offenders in a juvenile court. It represents a most disconcerting measure of failure.⁵

They mention that no less than 209 of the 420 boys whom they knew when they appeared in the Chicago juvenile court had later appeared in adult courts, and of these 157 had received commitment to adult correctional institutions 272 times. The

⁵ Healy and Bronner, *Delinquents and Criminals: Their Making and Unmaking*, pp. 201-2.

first court appearance is thus not to be regarded as the initiation of a reform, but in many youthful offenders it appears as a sort of confirmation or commencement ceremony initiating a criminal way of life. There are, indeed, many records of positive successes under juvenile court treatment, especially among the cases of Healy and Bronner, but the most successful workers confess that they do not know how they obtained their successes, whether through their own efforts or through spontaneous changes in the child.

Now there is reason to believe that we are deluded or not properly informed as to the efficiency of other behavior-forming situations and agencies on which we are confidently relying for the control of behavior and the development of normal personality. We assume that good families produce good children, but certain of the experimental nursery schools, selecting their children carefully in order to avoid material already spoiled, find nevertheless, that they have drawn from the best families a large percentage of problem children. Our school curricula, based on reading ability and lesson-transfer, drive many children gifted along perceptual-motor lines into truancy and delinquency. It would be possible to show by cases that the home and the school are hardly less unsuccessful behavior-forming situations than the juvenile court.

Naturally the greatest amount of attention, up to the present, has been given to the study of abnormal behavior in the forms which come to public attention, become a nuisance; but behavior difficulties are widespread in the whole population, and it is certain that we can understand the abnormal only in connection with the normal, in relation to the whole social process to which they are both reactions. The same situation or experience in the case of one person may lead this person to another type of adjustment; in another it may lead to crime; in another, to insanity, the result depending on whether previous experiences have formed this or that constellation of attitudes.

The answer is, we must have more thoroughgoing explorations of situations. In our planning we should include studies and surveys of behavior-forming situations, measurements of social influences which will enable us to observe the operation of these situations in the formation of delinquent, emotionally maladjusted, and stable personalities and determine the ratios. A plan of this kind, which has been discussed by some of the sociologists present, proposes to take selected localities or neighborhoods in given cities, including, for example, the interstitial zones where delinquency is highest and the good neighborhoods where delinquency is lowest, and study all the factors containing social influence. A survey of this kind would involve a study of all the institutions—family, gang, social agencies, recreations, juvenile courts, the daily press, commercialized pleasure, etc.—by all the available techniques, including life-records of all the delinquent children and an equal number of non-delinquent children, for the purpose of tracing the effects of the behavior-forming situations on the particular personalities.

It is known also that cities and other localities differ greatly as total behavior-forming situations. Healy and Bronner estimated, for example, that their failures in Chicago were 50 per cent and in Boston only 21 per cent. The difference is certainly not due in the main to differences in juvenile-court procedure, but to differences in the attitudes of the population, and this in turn to differences in the configurations of social influence. The juvenile court of Cincinnati has excited interest by the fact that it institutionalizes very few children, uses foster homes rarely, has only a nominal probation system, and is thought nevertheless to have greater success than other cities. The court procedure in Cincinnati is not elaborate; the co-operative agencies are not well organized. Nearly all the youthful offenders are simply turned back into the community. Is the relative success in this situation due to lack of too much zeal, to a refusal to treat and classify the child too promptly as delinquent? Is the large and stable element of German and German-Jewish population a factor in the situation? Rochester, New York, is the only city in the country where the visiting-teacher organization is incorporated in the public school system. What is the efficiency of this effort to treat the child in the predelinquent stages of his behavior difficulties? An inventory and measure of the social influences of selected cultural centers taken comparatively is thus very desirable.

There is a type of behavior reaction going on every day before our eyes which has to do with the participation of masses of the population, often whole populations, in common sentiments and actions. It is represented by fashions of dress, mob action, war hysteria, the gang spirit, mafia, omertà, fascism, popularity of this or that cigarette or tooth paste, the quick fame and quick infamy of political personalities. It uses language—spoken, written, and gesture. It is emotional, imitative, largely irrational and unconscious, weighted with symbols, and sometimes violent. It is capable of manipulation and propagation by leading personalities and the public print. Its result is commonly and publicly accepted definitions of situations. Its historical residuum constitutes the distinctive character of races, nationalities, and communities. This is the psychology of the evolution of public opinion and of social norms. As long as the definitions of situations remain constant and common we may anticipate orderly behavior reactions. When rival definitions arise (as between the wets and dries at the present moment) we may anticipate social disorganization and personal demoralization. There are always constitutional inferiors and divergent personalities in any society who do not adjust, but the mass of delinquency, crime, and emotional instability is the result of conflicting definitions. When, as Justice McAdoo says, a large number of young men in New York City have made up their minds that they will live without working, this is a new definition of the situation and the formation of a criminal policy.

Now these expressions of public opinion, the rise of common attitudes, the establishment of a group morale, the culmination of emotional outbursts, and the formulation of more deliberate policies have also a situational origin—one in which the situation is weighted with pre-established attitudes, with conflicts arising over definitions of situations and influenced by the propaganda of word, print, and

gesture, and it is desirable that selected types of behavior-forming situations should be studied along these lines.

And, finally, I will not here emphasize the point which I have attempted to exemplify in a particular study, that it is desirable to extend our studies of this situational character to the large cultural areas, to the races and nationalities, in order to understand the formation of behavior patterns comparatively, in their most general and particular expressions.

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