Encore

Some Old Work for the Behavior-Analytic Community: Introduction

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Perhaps the most informative way to begin an introduction to the paper reprinted below is to quote from the author: "It is evident that every science has a stake in the definition of its terms, and this is as true of behavioral science as of any other. In its continuous efforts to keep its theory abreast of its experimental findings, every science may find that it must return again to its beginnings, to the terms and definitions with which it started" (Schoenfeld, 1976, p. 148). "'Reinforcement' in Behavior Theory" is one of a group of papers in which Schoenfeld does just that. He discusses the history, definitions, and use of terms basic to behavior theory and what he calls "some old work for modern behavior theory" (Schoenfeld, 1966, 1972, 1976; Schoenfeld & Cole, 1975; Schoenfeld, Cole, Lang, & Mankoff, 1973).

To Schoenfeld, rigorous research is inseparable from the development of a theory of behavior and a continuing reassessment of the basic terminology in the experimental analysis of behavior. Students in the operant laboratories at Columbia University from the 1940s to the 1960s had two mentors whose contributions to their development were complementary and indivisible: Fred Keller and Nat Schoenfeld. Schoenfeld's contributions are less well known. His courses and seminars that followed Keller's were ones in which the participants were constantly being challenged to be rigorous in the use of terms and to consider basic concepts in behavior theory. "I'm not sure I understand" or "what do you mean

by that?" or "what does that tell you?" or "why is that important?" or "why do you want to do that?" were common questions in the classroom and in the laboratory. Participants were also expected to be conversant with other views in order to articulate better the concepts of the science of behavior. They were taught not to be complacent but to question and to reassess in the light of research findings. The informal lunchtime discussions were wide-ranging. Schoenfeld's research was also wide-ranging. In addition to schedules of reinforcement, topics included avoidance, secondary reinforcement, response variability, and operant–respondent interactions. He has written research and conceptual papers on these topics. After leaving Columbia University, Schoenfeld continued teaching, research, and training students at Queens College until his retirement in 1985. He then moved to Israel, where he taught at the Hebrew University and Bar-Ilan University. Currently, he resides in the United States.

The reader might be curious as to why this paper was selected from among those cited above. It is perhaps most fitting to start with the reinforcing stimulus and the concept of reinforcement, which some might call the basis of our science. The paper on reinforcement is one of a number of classic papers that appeared in journals not usually read by behavior analysts. These papers deserve a wider audience. The republication of this paper may encourage members of the behavior-analytic community to read other papers

devoted to "some old work" for modern behavior theorists and researchers wherever these articles may appear and to write some of their own.

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