The View From the Inner Eye: Personal Management of Inner and Outer Behaviors

ANN DELL DUNCAN

Ann Dell Duncan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Special Education, Ferkauf Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Yeshiva University, New York City.

---

"Teacher, I sure get angry with my brother sometimes." "I don't want to try. I'm afraid I'll get it wrong." These are children reporting the current state of their inner behavior, in a way the view from their inner eye.

The investigation of those thoughts, feelings, and inner urges which man experiences has intrigued mankind for centuries. Many great philosophers and scientists brought to bear the full power of the descriptive methods of their day in attempting to describe inner behavior.

We have moved along in our scientific endeavors to describe functionally and demonstrate empirically the personal management of a person's inner world. For the first time a behavioral approach has developed tools which permit sharing information about the thoughts, feelings, and inner urges of mankind striving to know itself. Just recently children and adults have begun to record, chart, and use precise personal management tools to share their view of their own inner life directly with the rest of the world.

It has been difficult to find a concise term to describe looking at and changing oneself. At one time we used "self-control" to refer to self-application of behavior modification procedures (Duncan, 1969). However, it soon became evident that the term "self" was highly biased in our English language. Next we tried "personal control." Yet, somehow control evokes images of robots—cold mechanical 1984isms. With these management tools, people were finding an increase in empathy for themselves and others—a warm kindness too dynamic to be described by so mechanical a term. As a talented high school student stated, "These tools let you make a choice about whether or not you want to do something." Hence, the current descriptive term: "personal management."

The term "inner" behavior also has a history. Skinner (1953) used "private event" when he stated, "We need not suppose that events which take place within an organism's skin have special properties.... A private event may be distinguished by its limited accessibility but not, so far as we know, by any special structure or nature [p. 257]." Other terms have been suggested such as "covenant" which is a play on the words covert and operant (Homme, 1965). However, the behavior under consideration is certainly not covert to the behaver, so we moved on in our search. Finally, the working term which seems to be the most precise is "inner" behavior—a behavior which occurs within the skin of the person. This term allows a flexible and ready comparison with "outer" behavior, or those movements which can be observed by others.

The scientific dictum calling for "observability" had guarded the door to the inner world. The traditional approach states that in order for a behavior to be the subject of scientific investigation, several people must be able to observe...
and describe it in a similar fashion; in fact, one’s total experiment must be reproducible using the same methods to produce similar results. This tradition kept us from using our best methods to describe and change our thoughts, feelings, and urges—in short, our inner behaviors. The multitude of personal management projects which obey all the known laws of behavior, self-recording, and interreliability on similar pinpoints, places us on the threshold of a new era. Some of the youths of the new era are described in this report.

Christine is a 3½ year old who attends nursery school. Ray Vane (project advisor) and her mother (project manager) talked about finding a child who would count inner and outer behavior. When Christine heard about the project, she volunteered. She chose to count her selfish acts and selfish thoughts and counted on two wrist counters while she was in school (300 minutes). She used one wrist counter for acts (outer behaviors) and the other for selfish thoughts (inner behaviors). She counted both concurrently.

Saying or doing something selfish. When Christine first began counting, her selfish acts increased slightly (Figure 1). After 2 weeks, she and her mother decided what they might do to decrease Christine’s selfish acts. Christine selected her aim: if she did 15 or less selfish things, she would earn 10 cents; for 10 or less selfish acts, she would earn 20 cents. Christine’s selfish acts began
Although Christine's selfish thoughts began increasing shortly after she started telling them aloud, overall they are lower in frequency than they were before this and they began going down again when she went back to only counting them.

Figure 2 Although Christine's selfish thoughts began increasing shortly after she started telling them aloud, overall they are lower in frequency than they were before this and they began going down again when she went back to only counting them.

Christine decided to see if she could keep her selfish acts at a comfortable level without the incentive of a cash reward. For 7 days she only counted her acts. Figure 1 shows she succeeded.

Selfish thoughts. Figure 2 shows that when Christine only counted the daily frequency of her selfish thoughts, they were lower than her selfish acts. The line drawn through her daily frequencies, however, shows that her selfish thoughts were increasing slightly more than her acts (compare the phases of Figures 1 and 2 before Christine tried to decrease her selfish acts.)

To decrease the frequency of her selfish thoughts, she decided to tell them aloud whenever they occurred. After she revealed each selfish thought, her nursery school teachers chided her gently by saying approximately, "It's not nice to be selfish." After Christine began telling her thoughts, they decreased sharply immediately. Although they soon began increasing again, her overall daily frequencies during this phase of the project remained lower than they were when she only counted her thoughts.

When she stopped telling her thoughts and only counted again, they increased slightly on the second day but began decreasing again (see Figure 2). Comparing Christine's outer and inner behavior charts (Figures 1 and 2) indicates she was more successful in decreasing her selfish acts than her thoughts.

Spring • 1971 154
Susan is a 12 year old neighbor of a graduate student, Rachel Schulman, who served as Susan’s project advisor. Susan chose to count inner and outer anger on two wrist counters for 500 minutes a day. In the beginning she noted that several of her angers were about her brother who is 10.

During the first several days of only counting, there was a decrease in both outer and inner anger (see the before phases of Figures 3 and 4).

During the fifth week in which Susan only counted, she decided to try to decrease her outbursts and see what happened to her inner angers. She decided to hit herself on the wrist if she had an angry outburst. Three weeks later when Rachel (her project advisor) saw Susan’s chart (Figure 3), she asked Susan if she were hitting herself every time she had an outburst. Susan replied that she only hit herself occasionally. Rachel suggested that if Susan’s outbursts did not get where Susan wanted them, she might try one self-hit for every outburst.

When she did, her outbursts decreased greatly. However, when she stopped giving herself one self-hit for each outburst, they increased slightly. Although Susan’s angry feelings did not change much in overall frequency, by the end of the project her anger was less variable from day to day (see Figure 4).
Discussion

These two youths have shared their inner and outer behavior charts with you. The success or failure of each project is in reality determined by the person himself. Thus we have Christine’s success and Susan’s moderate success.

The relevance for the classroom teacher is that she now has a means of (a) facilitating communication with a child in need, (b) checking out her hunches (e.g., “I think he doesn’t read well because he is anxious”), and (c) teaching a child a means of personal management which he can use to his advantage, not only in her classroom but for the rest of his lifetime.

References


Homme, L. Control of coverants, the operants of the mind. Psychological Record, 1965, 15, 501-511.


The author is indebted to Ogden R. Lindsley for his elegant strategies and compassion for all mankind. Appreciation is extended to the teachers and graduate students who facilitated this report but especially to Christine and Susan for sharing their inner life with the rest of the world.