RECULER POUR MIEUX SAUTER OR, WHY CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGISTS NEED A GENERAL MODEL OF ACTION

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Abstract

Applied psychologists face professional assignments orienting them to actions i.e., the real-world impacts that people use their resources to effect. They need a concept of action to aid directly in their tasks, and to assess the great constructs of academic psychology for appropriateness to applied uses. Absence of "human action" among psychology's subdisciplines left consumer psychologists facing multiple conceptual tasks, in their early attempts to model action. For real-world assignments, deficiencies of existing approaches, dispositional and situational, and advantages of modeling action are discussed. Behavioral processes allocating an individual's resources are proposed as an appropriate context for studying action.

Focusing on Action: Why? and How?

For this second in the series of programs "Models of Action for Action," [1] it is appropriate -- if not overdue -- to discuss the series' significance and the title's meaning in the context of consumer psychology.

Simply stated, the series springs from the fact that applied psychologists may be primarily concerned with real-world action. They are likely to have to deal in some manner with the things that people do, the real-world impacts that people make. The applied psychologist's objective may be to: (1) Participate with the actor in achieving an effect, or (2) affect the frequency, up or down, with which people try to or, in fact, secure particular kinds of effect. Those whose professional interests are thus focused on real-world events need a concept of action -- some notion of action's context, its antecedents and consequents.

At another level, the series is in a tradition of studying the natural world by trying to understand it in its own terms — as laypersons and scientists have done, over the centuries. In the past, psychologists have equated respectability with the ways they believe physical scientists do science. Yet they largely overlooked the physical scientist's instinct to focus first on studying a phenomenon as it operates left to its own devices. In the behavioral domain, such an orientation would have directed psychologists' attention not to changing, but to participating in, behavior as one finds it. In the physical and biological domains, scientists demonstrate undertanding by participating in some fashion in a system of interest, later using that understanding to put the system's processes to work for their purposes. If psychologists aspire eventually to change the frequency with which certain kinds of actions occur in the real world, the best approach may be to focus first on studying action as it naturally occurs. We may demonstrate our understanding of the process in which action is embedded by showing that we know how to participate without changing what the system would have effected, left to its own devices. We must, then, retrace our steps focusing first on a general model of action that is not formulated for a particular substantive domain or applied purpose. This is an endeavor that regroups now, to make progress later. Accordingly, panelists invited to address our topic are asked to bring their diverse perspectives to bear in conceptualizing everyday action, without regard to specific domain or purpose.[2]

Doing Justice to the Nature of Action

Coming to the task of conceptualizing action at this stage in the development of psychological science, one may experience a certain tension. It arises from believing it desirable to conceptualize action in its own terms, while simultaneously being aware of existing constructs in mainstream psychology and models in consumer psychology that may make it difficult to conceptualize action truly from scratch, i.e., to avoid both being coopted by existing ways of thinking and unduly concerned to break free of them. My personal tension in the enterprise of conceptualizing action is a variant of the above, in that I arrive at the task looking back. For more than a decade now, I have been developing conceptualizations for marketing's function in business and society, i.e., to guide producers make goods/services that reflect characteristics of contexts of use. What seemed, as the work progressed, to be a series of independent conceptual tasks, today appear to be related. They are elements of a fundamental reorientation in perspective that arises from focusing on everyday action. For example, to model the marketer's task, two models of action are needed: A general model, to represent naturally-occurring action, and an applied model, to represent the producer participating in the user's action already underway (Fennell, 1980, 1985a, 1986a). Similarly, it was necessary to distinguish various kinds of behavioral influence (Fennell 1983, 1985a, 1986a); to address questions of defining a universe of interest (Fennell 1982) and differentiating focal and nonfocal universes (Fennell, 1986b, 1987a); all the while noting that psychological concepts are poorly tailored for the

[1] For papers in the series' first program, see Churchill 1986, Fennell 1986a, Geller 1986, Sirgy 1986.

[2] A practical reason came to the fore for making such a naturalistic focus explicit, especially when inviting speakers from outside the division of consumer psychology. Graciously offering to be relevant to our concerns, panelists have asked about adapting presentations to our applied interests. This can lead to misdirected effort when the distinction between marketing and selling is not widely understood, and when "consumer psychology" may evoke images of selling rather than marketing e.g., a dyad comprising seller-buyer rather than producer-user, and a model of inter-personal influence in which the characteristics of the message/offering are determined outside the system. A selling model is an untoward distraction, given interest in developing behavioral science that is appropriate to the marketer's task (e.g., Fennell, 1985b,c)

marketer's highly specialized assignments.

Many such, essentially basic, tasks would be addressed by scientists approaching human action as a phenomenon of nature.[3] The similarity between the scientist's and marketer's tasks became apparent: Each must know enough to be able to participate in the process in which action is embedded. It then seemed imperative to tap the viewpoints of colleagues with diverse perspectives. Multiple orientations converging on the same phenomenon are one way to provide against falling prey to implicit choices and unexamined assumptions -- the legacy of specialized professional training. My personal objective for these special programs, then, is twofold: As psychologist pursuing the task of conceptualizing action, by tapping diverse perspectives, to compensate for possible bias arising from my own applied focus; as marketer responsible for describing contexts of use for producers, in working toward a comprehensive representational framework for everyday actions, to do full justice to the nature of our subject matter -- diverse as human activity itself.

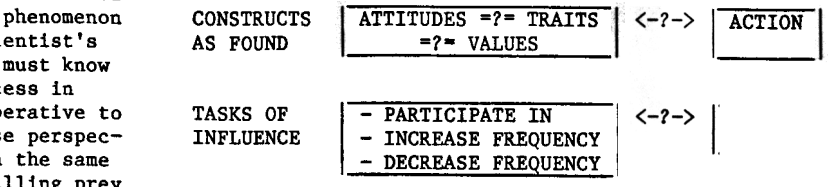
Plan for This Paper

The paper is mainly addressed to the unconverted -- to colleagues who have not yet felt the lack of a model of action, and who react with bemusement or resistance to the notion that remedying psychologists' neglect of action is overdue. Discussing deficiences in existing approaches, and benefits to accrue from focusing on action, requires covering much ground, and calls for treatment here at a level of generality unaccustomed for those whose interests lie squarely within one or a few of psychology's subdisciplines. Accordingly, consumer psychology's comprehensive buyer behavior models, dispositions of the person as behavioral determinants, and the quest for "situational influences," are sweepingly reviewed to establish, minimally, that action as a focus of interest casts old topics in a new light. In a final section, psychological processes allocating an individual's resources are discussed as appropriate conceptual context for studying action.

Retrospect: Comprehensive Buyer Behavior Models

A consumer psychologist does not come to the subject of modeling action with tabula rasa. As examples of conceptualizing real-world action, we may reflect upon the comprehensive buyer/consumer behavior models of the 1960s (e.g., Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell, 1966, Howard and Sheth, 1969, Nicosia, 1966). Precisely because mainstream psychology had neglected the domain of everyday action, the authors of those early models found themselves addressing simultaneously a number of conceptual tasks that, seen now with the benefit of hindsight, had preferably been tackled separately. In trying to model "buyer behavior" rather than a less specific "action," the authors of the comprehensive models embarked on an enterprise that may well have been doomed to fail. Given the absence among psychology's subdisciplines of one devoted to modeling action, in a very real sense their undertaking was akin to trying to run before one had learned to walk. We can appreciate today that there are at least three elements that need to be differentiated and then considered relatedly: The nature of action, of psychological constructs, as found in the subdivisions of academic psychology, and of behavioral influence. Having made these initial distinctions we need a two-prong approach, twice over (Figure 1): First, to consider the characteristics of constructs in two contexts -- in relation to each other, and to the characteristics of everyday action, as people live their lives in real time and space. Note that such an undertaking involves attempting to identify characteristics of action independently of psychology's constructs so that, insofar as possible, we may be able to evaluate existing constructs for appropriateness to the task of conceptualizing action. Second, to consider the characteristics of assignments of attempted influence in two contexts -- in relation to each other, and to the characteristics of everyday action. Assignments of attempted influence differ qualitatively in their behavioral objectives (Fennell, 1983, 1986a). Agents of influence may plan to participate in action already underway, or they may plan to change significantly the the kind of action that occurs, i.e., compared to a baseline of nonintervention, reducing or increasing the frequency of certain kinds of action.

FIGURE 1 MODELING ACTION FOR ACTION: TASK COMPONENTS



Action and Constructs of Academic Psychology

The applied psychologist's need to model action was evident early on in the comprehensive buyer or consumer behavior models of the 1960s. Such work bears witness to a first grasp of the nature of the consumer psychologist's task, where one's attention is immediately focused on the everyday activities of real-world people. From that vantage point, the consumer psychologist addresses a question to the entire domain of psychology: What do you have to offer that will help me understand, predict, control, in a word, find order in, behavior as it naturally occurs? Such a perspective is unaccustomed, for those of us who received our training as research psychologists within one or more of psychology's major subdisciplines e.g., social, personality, learning, developmental, cognitive. Historical accident and considerations of manageability have contributed to the compartmentalizing we find in academic psychology. When we confront everyday activity we need a conceptual bridge from one domain to the other. The comprehensive buyer behavior models reflect their authors' sense that the task of consumer psychologist transcends the reach of any one subdiscipline -- that we find ourselves facing potentially every aspect of an individual at some points in space and time. We observe our subject in everyday contexts, using time, space, music, coffee, writing paper, or whatever. We want to describe and analyse. Within a subdiscipline, we find neither rationale nor discussion relative to choosing one over another to help us in our task. Whether explicitly or implicitly, comprehensive buyer behavior models reflect an attempt to order psychology's major subdivisions -- and, more broadly, the constructs of the social sciences -- in relation to each other and to real-world action.

[3] In the sense I intend here, "nature" includes influences acquired through imitation and learning.

But consider what might have happened had the authors of the comprehensive models found "action," or "human action," or "action systems" among psychology's subdivisions. They would have found that others before them had addressed the task of considering how psychology's constructs may relate to each other and to an individual acting in real time and space. Presumably, they would then have turned to adapting such basic work to their notion of the tasks and interests of consumer psychologists. Later in this paper, we discuss some examples of the fresh perspectives that are associated with focusing on action.

Action and Tasks of Behavioral Influence

Apparently unexamined by the authors, the comprehensive models of buyer behavior implicitly take a position on the likely orientation of the agent of influence. Specifically, the consumer is conceptualized as reacting to marketplace stimuli whose characteristics are determined outside the system. These are not the models that one would develop in order to guide an agent of influence who wants to participate in ongoing action. With participation in mind, the models would be designed to show how the characteristics of marketplace stimuli e.g., goods/services and promotional messages, are systematically related to elements that preexist in the context for action (Fennell 1985b).

In sum, setting out to develop the comprehensive models, the authors in fact confronted the tasks of conceptualizing both action and behavioral influence, and they did so in the context of an existing body of work in psychology that may or may not be relevant or useful for either task. In effect, the authors confronted multiple conceptual tasks, which they addressed simultaneously when it may have been preferable to accord separate treatment to each.

Fresh Perspectives from Focusing on Action

The remainder of this paper presents in turn each of three examples of fresh perspectives that an interest in action brings to psychological studies. Thinking of action, a theorist: A. Construes the behavioral landscape in a manner that is strikingly different from the orientation that goes with thinking about dispositions of the person; B. Sees the person-situation debate inappropriately casting persons and situations as competing or complementary sources of behavioral influence when, more properly, they may be viewed as alternative ways of slicing through the behavioral domain; C. Is compelled to ask about the conceptual context in which studies of action are properly located and, perforce, enters terrain that psychologists have so far largely ignored or neglected. Reflecting extent of treatment elsewhere, the three topics are discussed here in ascending order of length.

A. Action and Dispositions of the Person

Interest in action places one face to face with multiple aspects of the person — what an individual brings to the point in spacetime at which the context for action is located and, given that unique structure, what the individual senses, feels, believes, and considers.

Compared with the way psychologists have studied dispositions of the person, interest in action entails a focus that is both broader and narrower in scope. One is impressed with the twofold fact: Action reflects some significant nonpersonal contribution i.e., from the environment, and although all that an individual is, is potentially present in the context for action, he or she employs only a tiny portion. Minimally, the student of action questions the strategic wisdom of employing concepts such as personal dispositions that purport to characterize an individual across different kinds of actions and over time. Indeed, the question arises if a student of action would consider adopting constructs of such scope but for accidents of culture and history whose effect in psychology is a tradition of characterizing persons rather than actions.

The constructs that we find in a psychology that has focused on personal dispositions such as traits, values, needs, attitudes, are not tailored for the purposes of a student of real-world action interested, for example, in the simple instrumental acts of everyday life. They cloud the picture by providing a conceptual orientation and research instruments that are two comprehensive. Moreover, they predispose one to defining the universe of interest inappropriately for studying action. Rather than consider actions within a single individual, for some purposes it may be appropriate to define a universe of actions across individuals in some geographic space and during some period of time, as discussed in greater detail elsewhere (e.g., Fennell 1982, 1986b).

Moreover, the study of personal dispositions itself would likely benefit from the prior existence of action as a focus of psychological study. Psychologists use behavioral observation as the criterion for assessing dispositional formulations: They characterize subjects in terms of traits or attitudes, make behavioral predictions accordingly, and check their formulations by observing behavior. Low observed relationships are often interpreted as calling traits/attitudes into question. But failing to find strong evidence in support of personal dispositions may mean only that researchers do not understand the manner in which dispositions affect action. A general model of action, even in the rudimentary form described elsewhere (e.g. Fennell, 1980, 1986a), helps to clarify why it would be unrealistic to expect traits, as typically operationalized, to relate strongly to action. Moreover, it suggests a role for traits in affecting action that is more differentiated than researchers appear to have envisioned and, at the same time, compatible with a literal understanding of Allport's (1937, p. 295) words defining "trait:"

"...a generalized and focalized neuropsychic system, (peculiar to the individual), with the capacity to... initiate and guide consistent (equivalent) forms of adaptive and expressive behavior."

The role of enduring orientations may be considered in regard to an abbreviated account of action, presented later (Figure 4). Briefly, dispositions may affect whether or not change occurs, allocating an individual's resources to effecting counterchange. To predict action, and its form, requires additional information including: What the individual knows about actions appropriate to dealing with the prevailing circumstances, and believes about the availability, likely outcomes, and costworthiness, of such actions in the immediate environment.

B. Action and "Situational" Variables

Within academic psychology, intermittently throughout

the century and more intensely during the past twenty years, the dispositional approach has been vigorously challenged, largely in the context of emphasizing "situational" factors. Ironically, the form challenge has taken provides its own implicit testimony to the hegemony of person-centered orientations in psychological theory. In general, protagonists in the recent exchanges appear not to have questioned that the debate was about ways to improve on the degree of explanation that dispositional approaches provide. Such an orientation is discernible in various forms, both direct and subtle, including the oft-encountered formulation: B = f(P x S), meaning, roughly, that behavior is a function of the person and the situation, with interest focusing on how best to express the way "persons" and "situations" combine.

Similarly in the consumer behavioral literature, situational and personal influences are contrasted [4] and, in some treatments, roughly equated with transitory and lasting.[5] Such categories cannot withstand scrutiny, cutting across, as they do, other potentially significant features. For example, "lasting" features of persons may be abstract or concrete. As possible elements in the context for clothing oneself, compare narcissism with eye color; in the context for shaving one's beard, compare dominance with skin sensitivity and beard toughness. Abstractions (e.g., narcissism, dominance) must be distinguished from concrete features (e.g., eye color, skin sensitivity, beard toughness). Because they are based on observations abstracted over time and across diverse activities, traits lack content until translated back into the concrete contextual elements of a focal act. A confusing conceptual state of affairs is poignantly reflected in the words of Bourgeois, Haines, and Sommers (1981, p 44), concluding a review of situational effects: "It could be said, in summary, that it is known situation is important, but it is not known, in general (rather than specific), what situation is."

To learn "what situation is," we adopt two strategies here: Examining, in a project's overall context, the operations that researchers use when studying "situational" effects and, then, daring to ask if the operations reflect what authors may truly have had in mind. What we find permits us to rediscover distinctions among the terms: environment, situation, and behavior.

The Operations and What They Stand For

At the most literal level, "situation" has meant variation in (1) kind of activity and (2) observable context for activity (see examples of "situational" items in Figure 2). Similarly, Leigh and Martin's (1981) review reports these two forms of "situational" manipulation. Dickson, for example, varies: (1) Activity (sunbathing, snow skiing); within the activity of sunbathing he varies (2) aspects of the objective environment for sunbathing e.g., as to location (beach/boat, at home/poolside, indoors) and kind of light (natural, artificial). Moreover, in varying activity (sunbathing, snow skiing), he implicitly varies environment as well e.g., altitude, temperature, and season of year. From the fact that such variation in the meaning of "situation" was not of formal interest to any of these authors, we may conclude that "situation" was meant simply to show (3) within-individual variation. In the context of all such research: In general (rather than specific), "situation" is a demonstration of intraindividual variability.

FIGURE 2 "SITUATION": SOME OPERATIONS

Endler et al. (1962) -- You are:
- starting off on a long automobile trip.
- going to meet a new date.
- going into a psychological experiment.
- crawling along a ledge high on a mountain side.
- getting up to give a speech before a large group.
- going to a counseling bureau to seek help in solving a personal problem.
- starting out in a sail boat onto a rough sea.
- entering a competitive contest before spectators.
- alone in the woods at night.
- going on an interview for a very important job.
- entering a final examination in an important course.

Belk (1974) -- You are:
- going on a long automobile trip and are thinking you should bring along some snacks to eat on the way.
- thinking about a snack to have with lunch at noon.
- shopping for a snack that you or your family can eat while watching television in the evening.
- planning a party for a few close friends and are wondering what to have around to snack on.
- thinking about what type of snack to buy to keep around the house this weekend.

Snacks at your house have become a little dull lately and you are wondering what you might pick up that would be better.

Dickson (1982)
- Beach/boat sunbathing
- Home/poolside sunbathing
- Sunlamp bathing
- Snow skiing

Demonstrating within-individual variability is useful, given that we received from our conceptual heritage an orientation to approach psychological studies with an assumption of within-individual consistency. But simply showing an assumption to be faulty is of limited value, and Bourgeois et al.'s question remains to be answered at a more profound level. We may ask, then, does "situation" have an explanatory contribution to make that goes beyond demonstrating intraindividual variability? How could it be that Endler et al., then Sandell (1968) and, later, Belk, and Dickson operationalized "situations" in the language of activities?

Researchers' Intuitive Sense of "Situation"?

Most obviously, "You are crawling along a ledge high on a mountain side" (Endler et al. 1962) presents a brief, observable, description of activity. The item is a "situation" by virtue of our ability to put ourselves in the actor's place. To the extent they tried, empathetically, to become the actor in each item, sub-

[4] A situation comprises "all those factors particular to a time and place of observation which do not follow from a knowledge of personal (intraindividual) ... attributes (Belk 1975 p. 158); "Situational variables may account for considerably more variance than actor-related variables" (Ward and Robertson, 1973, p. 26).

[5] For Belk (1975 p. 156), "lasting" features include "personality, intellect, sex, and race"; For Lutz and Kakkar (1975 p. 439), a situation comprises: "An individual's internal responses to, or interpretations of, all factors particular to a time and place of observation which are not stable intraindividual characteristics or stable environmental characteristics . . ."

jects may have invented situational content -- reasons for being on the ledge (e.g., approaching an outlook point to enjoy a magnificent view, escaping evil pursuers, Fennell 1975), details of the surrounding terrain, weather conditions, degree of danger, beliefs about their chances for rescue or escape, actions considered, and so on. Variation among subjects in the specifics and psychological import of such constructions may be substantial. Perhaps, it was just such added meaning, which each of us brings to descriptions of activity, that led authors to think of their items as "situations." But none of this (imagined) situational content was the focus of research interest. Its systematic relation to the dependent measures was not studied. By varying activity, Endler et al. may have demonstrated intraindividual variation. They did not systematically vary "situation" i.e., the subjective contextual details for each activity they describe. Similarly, if one's job is to produce snacks that are appropriate when, "You are thinking about what type of snack to buy to keep around the house this weekend" (Belk, 1974), details of the considerations that enter the user's deliberations are needed. To help investigate such details systematically, a conceptualization of the experienced context for action -- of the "situation" -- is needed. Just as the absence of the person in personality studies has been lamented (Carlson, 1971), so too the situation has not been studied in research that investigated "situational" influences.

In sum, Bourgeois et al.'s provocative question may be answered as follows: In general (rather than specific), "situation" is a construct that researchers used in demonstrating the untenability of an assumption of intraindividual consistency, construed as a simple relationship between (assumed) dispositions of the person and behavior. By varying activity and observable context for activity, researchers demonstrated within-individual variation. What "situation" stood for in the research may be designated directly by other words such as activity, observable context for activity, occasion for intraindividual variation. Communicative clarity demands that we use those words, where appropriate. "Situation," then, is available to be used in the sense that may have been intuitively grasped, but not operationalized or investigated, by the authors of "situational" inventories: The subjective context for action or, more generally, the subjective experience of all contemporaneous influences. Equivalently, any intersection of personal and environmental systems that engages an individual's attention. An observer may meaningfully refer to the "situation" in which another finds him or herself, without being able to specify the situation's key features. Furthermore, observers may possess information relative to an individual's "situation" that is not yet available to the actor and, realizing they do, regard the individual's appreciation of his or her situation as deficient.

Person, Environment, Situation, Action

"Situation," then, is a construct that represents significant intersections (at a point in time and space) of some from all possible systems, with significance found in the structure of a focal individual or entity. Depending on the extension given to the "point" in time (e.g., instant, hour, century) and space (e.g., space occupied, room, hemisphere), an individual may be considered to be in more than one situation at the "same" time. For the purposes of one who studies situations, situational determinants may be characterized in many ways as, for example: immediately available only to the focal individual/observer; studied by behavioral/nonbehavioral scientists; enduring/transitory, abstract/concrete, features of the individual or the environment, each of which may be further characterized (e.g., cognitive/affective; economic/political). A key problem for its students is identifying the intersecting systems that constitute a specific real-world situation. Accordingly, conceptual work directed to specifying theoretical types of systemic intersections is urgently needed.

Thus understood, enduring or transitory features of persons -- and of environments -- may enter the definition of a situation. This is the essence of Lewin's (1936, p. 11) formulation: $S = f(P\ E)$; $B = f(S)$, which the nonsensical $B = f(P \times S)$ mysteriously displaced. By allowing both personal and environmental elements to contribute to a situation, which gives rise to behavior, Lewin brings clarity where there has been confusion. Personal and environmental systems intersect to form a situation, the context in which action may occur. The roles of person, environment, and situation in an explanation of action are clarified.[6]

In historical context, then, something of a contest arose between persons and situations (read: activities; observable contexts for activity) as behavioral determinants, obscuring: (1) The fact that all behavior is situational in the sense of being unique to an individual, time, and place; and (2) the systematic significance of "situation" as an individual's structure reflecting some, from all possible, influences, and constituting the context in which action may occur. Starting from an assumption of intraindividual consistency, "situational" research shows, and at best tries to pin down the source of, intraindividual variability. (For recent reviews, see Bonner 1985, Cote 1986). Unburdened by an assumption of intraindividual consistency, "situational" research -- otherwise, research on action -- directly addresses the question: How state the determinants of action? It prompts the researcher to see the relevant universe as comprising actions extended in space and time e.g., all instances of shaving in a some region (e.g., US) in some time period (e.g., 1987). In consumer psychology a practical issue is likely to be this: Will the researcher sample a universe of person-activity occasions or of persons i.e., is intraindividual consistency within activity such as to permit respondents to summarize across all occasions in a given time period?

C. The Context for Action

Among many facets of action that its students may consider are its context, components, and determinants. Our focus here is on its function as a means of effecting adjustments in the systems that are under behavioral control. To understand action, then, we must conceptualize the behavioral processes of resource allocation and use, the former in focus here.

Allocating Resources

To begin, we assume that the individual has resources

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[6] I use "action" where formerly I have spoken of "behavior," because words such as "behavior" and "response" have lost their connotation of observable effect in the physical world. "Behavioral" is now often used synonomously with "psychological;" "response" may refer to perceptual, cognitive, or affective events.

FIGURE 3 ALLOCATING RESOURCES: OUTLINE

Behavioral Episode
1. Activating Change
   a. Theoretical Perspective
   b. As-Lived Perspective
2. Automatized Routines
   a. Efficiency
   b. Humane Considerations

Resource-Allocation and "Free Will"
   a. Activating a Dormant System
   b. Automatized Actions

to allocate. The organism is alive, apparently healthy, and functioning normally. Included among its resources are time, energy, and physiological processes, the ability to process, store, and retrieve information and to act i.e., to use bodily movements to change the relationship between the individual and the environment. From consideration herein, we exclude disposing of resources not normally susceptible to voluntary control (e.g., physiological reactions). Tasks and interests that are susceptible to voluntary control include those that bear on individuals' staying alive, in good health, participating in various social systems, perpetuating the species, learning about, rendering predictable, and gaining control over their world, and finding rest and renewal. As outlined in Figure 3, we consider here each of two ways in which allocating an individual's resources is effected:
1. Activating change, which interrupts ongoing behavior and raises the issue of effecting some adjustment;
2. Automatized routines. First, a behavioral episode is briefly described as context for reviewing activating change, which is considered from two perspectives, theoretical, and as-lived. Automatized routines are then considered as arising for reasons of efficiency and to avoid discomfort. Finally, resource-allocating processes are considered in the context of "free will."

Behavioral Episode: Change-Counterchange(?)-Learning

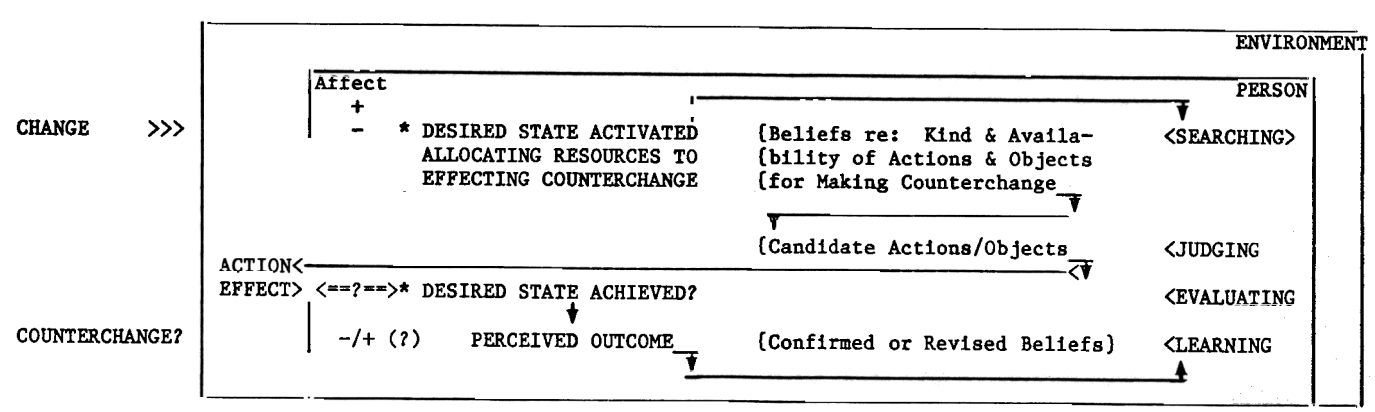
There are different ways to cut into the behavioral stream. With resource allocation as the focus of interest, it is useful to consider a behavioral episode comprising activating change, attempted counterchange, and learning. Briefly, a change occurs in some aspect of the relationship between individual and environment that presents itself as a quality of consciousness signifying, minimally, Attend! Attempted counterchange may take various forms including the individual's considering the changed conditions and finding that they require no further attention (cf "benign reappraisal," Lazarus, 1968). Otherwise, depending on whether or not the individual has experienced similar circumstances before (Figure 4), actions for making an adjustment may present themselves along with the interruption; if so, the individual selects one and envisages using it to make the adjustment and, judging it worth the effort, attempts to act; if performed, the individual evaluates the act's outcome, assessing the extent to which the desired adjustment has been achieved. In any event, learning occurs in that the outcome of performing such an act in such circumstances is stored. If the desired adjustment has not been achieved, the individual may select another action and try again, or (re)evaluate the importance (e.g., actual or potential harmfulness) of the activating conditions. Many variants of the preceding narrative may be generated, by changing one's assumptions about, for example, the previous experience of the individual, the degree to which the present environment is the same as before, and the individual's information about relevant aspects of the environment. They include, significantly, cases where the individual is not able to identify what is discomfitting or, knowing that, which kinds of actions would deal with what is causing his/her discomfort, or knowing that, the extent to which such actions are likely to be possible, or successful, in the immediate environment.

The point we emphasize is that individuals are equipped with a behavioral mechanism for making adjustments appropriate to their structure. A characteristic quality of consciousness interrupts behavior and remains in effect, reallocating the individual's resources — of time, thought, and ability to act — until the interruption has been dealt with. Let us examine the nature of interruption that may lead to action.

1. Activating Change

A complex organism needs a mechanism for interrupting ongoing behavior in order to reallocate resources in line with changing conditions. Such an interruptive process is sometimes discussed in the context of environmental threats to life and limb, but it is useful in other contexts: To enable the individual to avail of nonthreatening opportunities and potentially relevant information, and to permit the individual to do various kinds of informational processing as needed. Trying to understand the interrupting process, there are different kinds of question we may ask, including how the process: (a) May be hypothesised to operate

FIGURE 4 A SIMPLE MODEL OF INSTRUMENTAL ACTI N: ACTIVATING CHANGE & ATTEMPTED COUNTERCHANGE



i.e., including information that may not be available to the individual; (b) Is experienced to operate by the focal individual. It is important to keep separate the theoretical and as-lived perspectives, since much confusion in the domains of cognition and affect results from failing to distinguish the two vantage points as evidenced, for example, in the exchanges between Lazarus (1981) and Zajonc (1980). Compared to other domains of psychological inquiry, the topic of interrupting ongoing behavior renders self-evident the need to address the "as lived" perspective. A mechanism for redirecting resources can scarcely be regarded as fully explored without studying how interrupting and redirecting present themselves in subjective experience. Accordingly, we discuss theoretical and then as-lived perspectives on activating change.

Theoretical Perspective: Redirecting Resources. Activating change has two main components: (1) Occurrence of significant change in some aspect of the relationship between individual and environment; (2) Informing the individual that significant change has occurred. "Significant" may be defined for the species e.g., a moving object in peripheral vision and, more broadly, anything capable of producing an orienting reflex, or by an individual's unique structure. More substantively, significant change may be stated as change beyond threshold in the value or patterning of a physical variable, or change in perceived, or sign of perceived, self-relevance of some event.

If the species is highly adaptable, its individuals need a mechanism that permits them to reflect in their structure the threats and opportunities of their environment. This means that the significance for the individual of classes of events should be registered in the individual's structure, and the occurrence of an instance of a significant class should be able to divert attention to itself, overriding whatever allocation of behavioral resources is ongoing. For this to occur, people must be equipped with the capacity to carry out preattentive processing that identifies significance in environmental stimuli. The process must be such that a wide range of events can acquire the ability to interrupt. A priori, there seems to be no good reason to deny to any class of event the ability to interrupt ongoing behavior. In addition to evolution's legacy and individual learning by experience, societal institutions, such as science and culture, play their part in sensitizing people to the environment's threats and opportunities.

As-Lived Perspective. How an individual whose behavior is being interrupted actually experiences such a process is a separate issue to which we now turn. The effective interrupting mechanism is the presence in consciousness of a characteristic emotional state comprising unpleasant affect and a cognitive component that signifies: Attend! or, This state must be ended! We hypothesize that the presence of this characteristic state in consciousness is always associated with some significant change in the relationship between individual and environment. However, the nature of that change may not be accessible to the individual. Accordingly, there is an asymmetry in our account of the interrupting mechanism as-lived, relative to its theoretical counterpart. Interruption is defined by the presence of its characteristic emotional state, whether or not the reason for the state's existence is accessible in consciousness.

When they are accessible in consciousness, the reasons may include poor conditions for receiving sensory information so that, for example, the individual is in doubt about what letters or sounds are impinging on the sensory receptors; the sensory information may not be in question but, absent contextual information or, because of its amount and heterogeneity, the meaning may be ambiguous; meaning may be unambiguous but may conflict with existing information or with the individual's general or specific expectations (cf collative variables, Berlyne, 1960), meaning may be unambiguous but its self-relevance may be in question. In such cases, an individual may be more cognizant of the task of trying to obtain information than of the accompanying state of unpleasant affect. In other circumstances, awareness of being uncomfortable is salient, with (e.g., hunger, cold) or without (e.g., anxiety), a clear sense of the reason. Accordingly, as-lived, sometimes interruption is more obviously a cognitive than an affective experience; when affect is salient, the substantive reason may or may not be readily accessible to the individual. In other words, depending on the nature of the interruption, unpleasant affect, or some sensory-perceptual, or cognitive, task may be more salient.

2. Automatized Routines

Besides interruption, resources may be allocated by automatized behavioral routines. There are at least two reasons why people should be equipped with a mechanism that renders resource allocation automatic. The argument from efficiency considers conserving resources, and states that, if there are recurring instances of a broadly similar nature, it is desirable to set up an automatic process that makes demands on focal attention only in special circumstances. The argument from efficiency receives support from more humane considerations. If the resource-allocating mechanism operates by instating unpleasant affect i.e., discomfort — a state individuals dislike and would end — we should expect they would not want to experience it too often. In this light, automatized routines not only conserve resources but spare individuals from occasion-by-occasion discomfort. Once in place, routines are maintained by interruptive emotion that occurs only if the individual omits, or contemplates omitting, the automatized sequence.

Probably much action is under the control of such routines — whether tailored to an individual (It's Tuesday, so I wash the car), or instated by family/culture (It's bedtime, so I brush my teeth; My steak and potatoes in front of me, I reach for the salt; High school graduation is on the horizon, so I plan my future; I'm in my twenties, time to get married). From the trivial to the serious, automatizing the initiation of action spares the individual from discomfort that: (1) Otherwise may occur later (e.g., If I don't get the car washed on Tuesdays, I have to waste time in long lines at the car wash, or I won't do it at all for weeks until seeing the car actually pains me; Believing experts in oral hygiene, my parents trained me to brush regularly, and passed on the belief that I thereby get rid of conditions that would otherwise result in my experiencing pain -- plaque leading to tooth decay, extractions, offending others with mouth odor); (2) Occurs as part of the process of activating change itself.

Automatization reflects learning, at the level of the individual, of family/culture, and of science. At a deeper level, it reflects the fact that individuals

must allocate their resources to deal with a wide range of intersecting systems, some of which require attention recurringly. It means that although, in principle, some tasks of resource allocation are subject to active human disposition, for practical purposes they are handled by a process that operates by default i.e., an interrupting mechanism goes into effect only if the individual fails to act. When resource allocation operates in a fully automatic manner, i.e., with no charge on focal attention, many of the functions attributed here to a process called activating change are by-passed: Attention is not allocated to ascertaining what has to addressed; how it may be addressed; within possible ways, how it shall be addressed; whether or not action is costworthy, or its outcome, once performed, truly addresses what needs to be done. However, in contrast to resource allocation that does not normally come under behavioral control (e.g., physiological processes), automatized routines may be retrieved for focal attention.

Resource-Allocating Processes and "Free Will"

The present analysis of resource-allocating processes provides a framework for considering what the concept of "free will" may mean in psychological terms. As described here, resource allocation is automatic mainly in two respects: (a) It brings up nonactive systems to be attended to and possibly adjusted; (b) It leads to the emergence of automatized actions.

Activating a Dormant System. The fact that individuals are equipped with a process operating outside their immediate control that automatically allocates resources to a particular substantive domain would seem to offer no challenge to the notion of "free will." Being equipped with such a process can only be advantageous, conferring, as it does, the ability to do two things at once — pursue a focal task or interest while keeping watch for significant events in one's environment. Such a process helps to clarify one sense in which individuals may "choose" the situation in which they act, a position that some authors have emphasized in the person-situation debate (e.g., Bowers 1972, Snyder 1983). Some stimulus characteristics that interrupt ongoing behavior (e.g., Berlyne's collative variables) probably affect in similar fashion all people, or all within a particular culture. Others (e.g., Berlyne's affective variables) are likely to be differentially effective depending on an individual's history (Fennell, 1979). In the case of such affective variables, an individual's unique structure may be said to select the situations in which he or she may then consider acting. However, these would not be kinds of contexts in which the issue of "free will" usually arises.

In contrast, "free will" is usually at issue in circumstances where individuals appear to have choice. In the present context, some of these are: At the point where, upon experiencing interruption, and re-evaluating the interrupting conditions, the individual decides no further attention or any action is warranted; or accepting that the conditions warrant further attention and possibly action, proceeds to consider and choose among adjustive options, eventually deciding that action is, or is not, worth its cost, or that more candidate actions must first be generated. Clearly, in making such choices we bring to bear some of what we are — parts of our resources of information, belief, time, of our ability to reason, to see analogies and connections, to use converging and diverging kinds of analysis and, from the totality of what we know and believe, to select certain considerations as being relevant to the focal decision. So doing, our "freedom" is at least bounded by the limits of what we can do with what we have available within ourselves. Within such limits, two kinds of question arise: (1) What does it mean to ask, whether or not, or the extent to which, we are free i.e., what are some operational definitions of "freedom"? (2) Are policy considerations independent of resolving debate on the existence of "free will"? Either way, is society obliged to make individuals understand that some kinds of outcomes or choices, should they become publicly known, will incur its disapproval i.e., that it holds individuals accountable, and will express its disapproval in the form of unpleasant consequences for individuals who disregard its view of order?

Automatized Actions. Two ways in which automatization arises are: (1) Imitating actions and internalizing views that the individual observes in others e.g., in one's family, circle of friends, or culture, and (2) custom-tailoring to the circumstances of individual lives through repeated encounters. Routinized action has implications for the actor's autonomy in that, to the extent it is present in significant aspects of a life, the individual is abdicating choice to unexamined contingencies. However efficient, the behavioral fact of automatized sequences points to the need for critical reflection as a personal and societal imperative. It suggests we should cultivate a welcoming attitude to the unsettling commentary of individuals who sometimes irritate by asking us to examine our most accustomed ways.

Reprise

To maintain life, and quality of life, individuals must allocate their resources among numerous systems and, if highly adaptable, be endowed with a flexible process for doing so. The individual's structure, comprising susceptibilities both unique and shared by others of the species, determines the kinds of intersections to which he or she allocates resources. A human life may be viewed as multiple intersections through time of numerous personal and environmental systems, each commanding its share of the individual's resources, and possibly leaving its mark in his or her structure and leading to action i.e., to the individual's making environmental impacts of various sorts.

We have discussed resource allocating processes that serve two main purposes: (1) The process initiated by activating change introduces various forms of flexibility in the way in which individuals apportion their resources. Ineluctably interrupting ongoing behavior, activating change, thereafter, affords numerous points at which individuals may allocate, or withhold, further resources, for example, after they review: The activating conditions, for significance; such candidate actions as initially present themselves or are subsequently generated, for relevance; a candidate action or repeated action, for costworthiness. (2) Automatized routines may approach the efficiency of a completely automatic process while, in principle, leaving a particular allocation of resources open to retrieval for scrutiny and critical reflection.

We have suggested that psychological processes of resource allocation are an appropriate conceptual context for studying action, and that action as an explicit focus of study is an essential facet of behavioral

science. However tautological the latter assertion may be, the need to argue its case is apparent, directly, in action's failure to emerge as a distinct subdiscipline and, indirectly, in the poor fit between the great constructs of academic psychology and those that studying action makes necessary.

Consumer psychologists may approach understanding real world action from various perspectives. In a marketing context, they study how to participate in ongoing action as they find it — advising producers on the characteristics of goods/services designed to realize individual purposes. In the context of social advocacy, they may be called upon to recommend how actions that would-be change agents consider "desirable" or "undesirable" may be increased or decreased in frequency, respectively. The present analysis springs from the belief that understanding action as it naturally occurs is the route to understanding the ramifications of real-world assignments.

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