



Editorial: The Path Forward

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In September 2021, the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) sent an email to members, reminding them that it was time to renew their annual membership, adding that in the new membership year, the organization is focused on “encouraging the use of behavior analysis to promote positive behavior change in the following areas:

- Sustainability/climate change
- Social/environmental justice
- Community/global health care
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

This emerging emphasis on these four global challenges speaks to a real advance for behavior science. In his 2003 Association for Behavior Analysis presidential address, “Behavior Analysis, Mentalism, and the Path to Social Justice,” Jay Moore emphasized that “behavior analysis offers a constructional alternative to the mentalistic views of traditional psychology and allows our society as a whole to move down the path” (p. 181). Progress down that path has been uneven (or “piecemeal,” as once described by Day, 1976, p. 535) and sometimes disappointing; the extent of focus on these priorities has, however, advanced significantly since Moore’s presentation. A key factor supporting this work has been this journal, *Behavior and Social Issues* (BSI),¹ which, under multiple titles and sponsorships, has been published since 1978 and—as detailed in Luke et al. (2017)—has maintained a continuous commitment to social and environmental justice, human rights, and sustainability, with a particular emphasis on advocacy.

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ABAI's Global Challenges and BSI

The current editor, Mark Mattaini, has filled that role since 2000; this is his final issue. Traci Cihon will take over as editor in chief at the beginning of 2022. In this joint editorial, we look back at some of the advances on the path up to the present and plans to expand that work in the future, paying particular attention to the four foci to which ABAI has committed. Initially, we explored the content of the 27 editorials the journal has published over the past 20 years, as related to the four identified focal challenges listed. To provide examples here, we discuss examples of each, including two editorials related to each of those areas, accompanied by two previously published articles related to each. (Over a dozen members of the editorial staff and board have contributed as listed authors in the editorials discussed here.) We then turn to envisioning the next steps for BSI over the next several years.

Sustainability/Climate Change

Not surprisingly, sustainability and climate change have been discussed extensively in BSI, with attention in at least 8 editorials and 60 articles. A 2011 editorial by Alavosius and Mattaini (2011), “Behavior Analysis, Sustainability, Resilience, and Adaptation,” begins by quoting Theodore Roosevelt (1916): “Our duty to the whole, including the unborn generations, bids us restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations” (pp. 299–300). The editorial then outlined the severity of the challenges involved and the particular place of behavior science in addressing them. In a subsequent editorial, “Constructing Justice,” Mattaini (2013) referred to, among others, the work of world-renowned physician Paul Farmer, including his edited collection, *To Repair the World* (Weigel, 2013), as well as our own Israel Goldiamond (2002), advocating for a constructional approach for addressing our most urgent global challenges—including climate change.

Two particularly valuable examples of related articles from the journal include Grant's (2010) “Sustainability: From Excess to Aesthetics” and Gelino et al.'s (this issue) “Going Green: A Systematic Review of Proenvironmental Empirical Research in Behavior Analysis.” In his article, Grant took a hopeful (constructional) perspective, indicating that “key issues in attaining sustainability are addressing the problems of overconsumption of resource-intensive reinforcers, underconsumption of resource-light reinforcers, and lack of consumption skills that yield an enduring source of intrinsically reinforcing challenges and pleasures” (p. 7). This is crucial work that deserves much more attention than it has received. In their data-based study, Gelino et al. found a renewed interest in sustainability and climate change among behavior scientists, while clarifying the profound challenges involved in entering that work in a significant way. Clearly this is an area in which behavior science's contributions have been “piecemeal” up until now, but it is becoming clear—even beyond our discipline—that human behavior is largely responsible for the climate emergency and is critical for achieving anything approaching a stable, sustainable, and just outcome.

Social/Environmental Justice

Social (including economic) and environmental (including ecological) justice and human rights have been a consistent focus in the journal—in fact, going back to 1978. Over the last 20 years in BSI, there have been at least 40 articles that included the term “social justice,” 40 including “human rights,” and 8 including “environmental justice” (there are overlaps among these). It is difficult to set boundaries for this focus, given that sustainability and climate change; community/global health; and diversity, equity, and inclusion all are matters of social and environmental justice. Two editorials selected here demonstrate that cultural-analytic guidance for shaping public policy is essential in supporting justice. In the first, operationalizing the challenges, Mattaini (2001) described a

world of interlocking cultural practices, in which some practices may produce rich reinforcers for the few, but only minimal reinforcers for many others, often despite high levels of behavior. This is also a world in which establishing operations are often manipulated through marketing to increase motivation to work for reinforcers that may, in the long run, produce poor individual and collective outcomes. (p. 1)

This article (titled “The Science of Behavior and Human Rights”) then encouraged behavior science to participate in shifting such patterns of contingencies toward the construction of cultures, and a world, of justice. Twenty years later, during a period in which local and global justice are under tremendous pressures, Ardila Sánchez et al. (2020a) offered a collective editorial titled “Ten Guidelines for Strategic Action,” providing specific, data-based guidance for defending and supporting justice and human rights in challenging times.

Two exemplar articles selected from the many related to the social justice/environmental work published in BSI include Dixon et al.’s (2003) article, “Terrorism and Relational Frame Theory,” and Levy et al.’s (2019) article, “Addressing Social and Global Issues,” using the Syrian refugee crisis as an example. Dixon et al. argued that relational frame theory can explain the behavior of both terrorists and those affected by terrorist acts, as well as the expanse of cultural practices supporting such acts. They also, based on early data, suggested that interventions grounded in relational frame theory may be of value for shifting the identified patterns. In “Addressing Social and Global Issues: Viewing the Syrian Refugee Crisis Through a Behavior-Analytic Lens,” Levy et al. proposed a nine-step conceptual model for the analysis and intervention of complex social issues through a behavior science lens, both for the Syrian example and potentially much more broadly. (Personal and collective violence, and nonviolence, have been discussed in the journal at least 94 times, including as a special issue in Volume 12, Issue 2.)

Community/Global Health

Third on ABAI's list of foci is "community/global health care." Here we make an adjustment, as "health care" to us suggests a crucial, but relatively narrow category. We therefore expand the focus to "community/global health," as improving and supporting health requires dimensions of prevention, community-level interventions, and broader policy-level advocacy at cultural levels. Again, there are simultaneous connections to each of ABAI's other three goal areas. Particularly important in improving health are transdisciplinary efforts in which behavior scientists work in programs and teams with other disciplines, including public health and medicine—and crucially the general public—to develop effective programs at the community and cultural levels. In the editorial "Human Rights, Pragmatic Solidarity, and Behavior Science," Mattaini (2006) conceptualized our work within a public health framework as outlined in Paul Farmer's (2003) book, *Pathologies of Power*. Particularly explored in the editorial are (a) Farmer's concept of "pragmatic solidarity"—standing with, and working with, those who are struggling in ways that realistically improve the lives of marginalized persons, rather than simply claiming the title of "ally"; (b) the ethical responsibilities of professionals working with oppressed and marginalized populations; and (c) the extent to which the (often far distant) actions of powerful persons and collectives are responsible for the conditions experienced globally by marginalized communities faced with limited resources for health care—and for living. In a paper delivered in 2006 at the Union Theological Seminary, Farmer (2013) noted that "if we believe in *praxis* as pragmatic solidarity—then it is best to strive to perceive structural violence as we try to accompany the destitute sick and advance social justice" (p. 180). In a later editorial titled "We Are Not Powerless," Mattaini (2016) indicated that communities struggling with poverty, poor health, economic exploitation, and marginalization, and their supporters can construct conditions providing real power through applications of behavioral/cultural systems analysis. The editorial includes a summary of potential science-based interventions to operationalize that power.

Two recent articles in BSI provide examples of promoting community health with the support of behavior science. The first, "Managing Environmental Policies: Lessons From Traditional Communities," by Freitas Lemos et al. (2019), is a particularly strong example of the integration of environmental, economic, and social factors to support often ignored, marginalized communities through cultural-behavioral extensions of the work of Elinor Ostrom (1990) on the management of common pool resources. Concerns regarding natural resource conservation with serious impacts on health are prevalent around the world, and a number of approaches addressing those concerns have been implemented to prevent these resources' depletion. This study presented the dynamics of "RESEXs"—Brazilian "area[s] of land, generally state owned, where access and use rights, including natural resource extraction, are allocated to local groups" (Freitas Lemos et al., 2019, p. 269) for management to strengthen protections from privatization by personal or corporate entities. A second study (Freitas Lemos & Todorov, 2020), also from Brazil, described and tested the design of public policies focused on a large-scale intervention across multiple actors

and sectors, with the goals of increasing school attendance and early entry into the job market among young people from impoverished families. Both articles are strong examples of the possibilities, and challenges, of contributing at a community level to collective health. Given their applied nature, they have much to teach about the realities of working in partnership with other disciplines—and directly with the people in the community.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In recent years, actions supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been increasingly recognized as critical practices within institutions, disciplines, and all forms of cultural collectives. An ongoing special section (the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Forum) was introduced several years ago in BSI and continues today. Systemic racism, gender inequities, and other forms of discrimination have often appeared as topics in BSI over the last 4 decades and have been approached in increasingly sophisticated ways at conceptual levels. Two recent BSI editorials have addressed some of the related issues, including Mattaini's (2017) "Standing for Science Is Standing for Justice" and Mattaini and Rehfeldt's (2020) "Rendezvous With Truth and Discovery." In the first, BSI and Behaviorists for Social Responsibility (at that time the sponsoring agency for the journal) joined the American Psychological Association (APA) and many other scientific organizations in challenging practices like forbidding the use of words with social justice dimensions, including "vulnerable," "entitlement," "diversity," "transgender," "fetus," "evidence-based," and "science-based," in federal agency budget documents and other federal government activities (APA, 2017). Such restrictions referring to vulnerable persons and groups (including the specifically targeted transgender population) offer clear, though camouflaged and deniable, guidance for what research will, and will not, be valued in funding decisions. The "Rendezvous" editorial drew its title from a speech given by Martin Luther King Jr. to the APA in 1967, in which he asked the APA to partner in efforts to understand and reduce racist behavior and practices. The editorial goes on to discuss what has been learned since that time, and what further work is needed, with special attention on police violence directed toward members of racialized populations.

We also highlight here two recent articles in BSI, the first being "Systemic Racism and Cultural Selection: A Preliminary Analysis of Metacontingencies" (Saini & Vance, 2020). The authors pointed out that much of the existing work on racism focuses primarily on individual behavior, rather than cultural level dynamics. In this article, they expanded that view to incorporate recent research on metacontingencies, offer novel solutions emerging from such cultural analysis, and explore barriers to those solutions based on correlations between metacontingencies and individual operant contingencies. A second article by Miller et al. (2019) tracked with Saini and Vance in identifying "Inherent Tensions and Possibilities: Behavior Analysis and Cultural Responsiveness." In this article, the authors explored present conditions surrounding diverse populations, with a particular focus on access to culturally responsive practice in behavior-analytic services, an area in which existing DEI

issues have recently been broadly acknowledged. They then discussed how synergistic activities (and years of research) in two related disciplines, public health and anthropology, support social justice—and what behavior analysis can learn from them to improve practice by increasing cultural responsiveness when confronting social and human problems while embracing the collaboration and participation of those involved.

Troubles and Issues in 2021

In 1989, Malagodi and Jackson brought Mills's (1959) distinction between *troubles* and *issues* to the attention of behavior scientists. Citing Mills, Malagodi and Jackson defined *troubles* as

a personal matter: they occur in the individual within the context of the local contingencies of [their] immediate social setting . . . [and issues as] a public matter. They have to do with contingencies that go beyond the individual's local environment. They pertain to the organization of many social contingencies and social settings into the larger sociocultural structure. (p. 18)

Malagodi and Jackson advocated for behavior scientists, particularly those behavior scientists interested in building a cultural analysis to adopt “an *issues* orientation” (p. 17). Since 1978, BSI (and its predecessor titles) has been the primary outlet for behavior scientists interested in, and striving toward, extending the natural science of behavior to mitigate social *issues*.

As BSI reaches its 43rd year of publication and its 3rd year as an ABAI journal, the interest from behavior scientists and others taking an *issues*-focused orientation is growing. The most recent Publisher's Report, for example, indicates that the number of full-text article requests for BSI jumped from 16,554 in 2019 to 55,046 in 2020. The current issue contains nearly 40 articles, featuring three special sections highlighting contributions from presenters at the ABAI Culturo-Behavior Science for a Better World Conference (Malott, this issue); articles focused on international considerations (Richling et al., this issue); and several articles with the aim of revitalizing community behavioral psychology (Watson-Thompson et al., this issue); as well as a number of regular articles related to social issues. Collectively, the articles in this issue of BSI exemplify the issues-focused work that is being done by behavior scientists and those from complementary disciplines. It also serves as a clear reminder that there are multiple pathways that have been and can be assumed in the construction of interventions addressing pressing social challenges (see also Malott, this issue).

Like the articles in each of the special sections, the additional articles published in this volume bring behavior science to the forefront on issues important to both the discipline and society at large. Sandoz and the Louisiana Contextual Science Research Group (this issue), for example, offer a behavioral conceptualization of affirmative sexual consent. Catrone and Koch (this issue) consider tactics for increasing the perceptions of capability toward people with disabilities. Paliliunas and Frizell (this issue) apply the Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure in

an analysis of college students' implicit biases to determine if they influence the believability of claims of sexual harassment. Brunkow and Dittrich (this issue) offer ways in which Skinner's concept of cultural survival might be refined. Each of these important contributions lays the groundwork for additional efforts from behavior scientists to develop interventions, refine conceptualizations, and further impact education and research in behavior and social issues.

This issue of BSI serves as a clear example of its long-standing commitment to "encouraging behavior analytic contributions to the remediation of social problems" (Rakos, 1989, p. 3). It is essential that interest in the journal and contributions from behavior scientists in understanding and mitigating social issues continue to grow in the years ahead. Much of the world continues to face numerous and systemic social issues due to an ongoing global pandemic (see Confer et al., this issue; Harman, this issue; and Shawler & Blair, this issue), increasing political tensions (e.g., Marques & de Almeida, this issue), a higher frequency and intensity of climate change disasters (Gelino et al., this issue), increasing rates of violence, and greater attention to matters of inequity (e.g., Castro-Hostetler et al., this issue; Mizael, this issue; Mizael et al., this issue). Perhaps, for each contributor to this issue of BSI, finding ways to address their social issue of interest has become their personal *trouble*. Each article within serves as a clear reminder that behavior science can help.

Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

Although the growing interest and contributions from behavior scientists described and published here are good news for BSI, they also serve as a stark reminder that the issues of interest to the readers and contributors of BSI are the challenges faced by countless individuals and communities. As much of the world has experienced in recent years, these challenges are not easily resolved. They involve complex sets of interlocking contingencies that evoke and maintain the interlocked behaviors of several, and often many, individuals. Often, these issues are sustained by multiple contingencies deeply embedded in our social and cultural institutions (Cihon & Mat-taini, 2020).

These challenges, however, also serve as opportunities for behavior scientists to advance their knowledge and understanding of effective strategies to disrupt such interlocks. Addressing social issues often requires the combined efforts of inter- and transdisciplinary teams working toward the same outcomes, a long-standing commitment of the journal. As behavior scientists continue to work toward change, their work will become increasingly salient to other disciplinary partners; new inter- and transdisciplinary partnerships will be forged, and existing partnerships will be strengthened. These combined efforts will support the journal in further developing its interdisciplinary focus.

The articles that compose the special section focused on revitalizing behavioral community psychology serve as just one example of the benefits of interdisciplinary work. In addition to introducing the articles in this issue that compose this special section, Watson-Thompson et al. (this issue) announce that the special section on revitalizing behavioral community psychology will continue in the coming years,

joining the cadre of ongoing special sections in BSI (BSI maintains ongoing special sections on both activism, advocacy, and accompaniment and DEI). This is an exciting opportunity for BSI to strengthen its interdisciplinary focus, as efforts will be made to recruit articles focused on behavioral community approaches to assessment and interventions grounded in prevention and implementation science, and to foster the integration of behavior science with community psychology, public health, and other related disciplines. Community-based assessment and intervention are critical endeavors for behavior scientists, as individuals and communities are increasingly facing multiple, intersecting social issues simultaneously.

The incoming editorial team could not be better positioned to embark on the path forward. As the incoming editor for BSI, I (Traci Cihon) am grateful for the strong foundation Mark and countless others have established through the journal's tenure. In addition, I am pleased to announce that this path will rely on the continued support of both Rich Rakos and Jomella Watson-Thompson. Rich, a former editor of BSI (1982–1993), will continue to serve as both consulting and associate editor. His commitment to BSI is illustrated by his contributions of over 20 articles and editorials in BSI and its predecessors (e.g., Rakos, 1980, 1983, 1989, 1993, 2001; Rakos & Switzer, this issue). Rich's extensive history with the journal and the depth of his expertise spanning a wide range of social issues will be a great asset moving forward. Jomella brings her wealth of knowledge, experience, and partners in behavioral community psychology to her continued service as an associate editor. I can think of no one better to lead the journal's efforts in building the ongoing special section on behavioral community psychology. She is enthusiastic and committed to this task. This already-exemplary team is further enhanced with the addition of our third associate editor, Sarah Richling. Sarah served as a coeditor for the incredibly successful special section on international considerations (Richling et al., this issue) and was one of the contributors to the inaugural special section on activism, advocacy, and accompaniment (Brogan et al., 2018; see also Ardila Sánchez et al., 2020b and Mattaini et al., 2020, for recent examples of Sarah's work on behavior and social issues).

The editorial team has much to do, and we are already creating plans and beginning actions to increase the journal's visibility, develop mentorship opportunities for emerging scholars and new editorial board members, and advance the analysis of human social behavior. Relatedly, we are working toward increasing the diversity of the editorial board and creating opportunities to amplify diverse voices. In addition to developing strategic mentoring practices for authors who aspire to become reviewers and reviewers who aspire toward editorial appointments, we hope to further engage in partnerships with organizations who are at the forefront of such work (e.g., the Latino Association for Behavior Analysis, Black Applied Behavior Analysts, the Asian Pacific Islander Association for Behavior Analysis, and Behaviorists for Social Responsibility).

Finally, as an ABAI journal, BSI and the editorial team are also provided with continued institutional support from both Springer and ABAI. This support will bring about opportunities to align the journal with industry standards and widely accepted quality indicators such as publishing more than one issue each year, obtaining an impact factor, becoming indexed in Scopus, increasing the reproducibility of

published works, promoting greater transparency through the inclusion of supplementary digital files, and upholding findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable principles, to name only a few possibilities. Such efforts will contribute to our goals to increase the visibility of the journal both internationally and interdisciplinarily and to encourage submissions from emerging scholars as, although sometimes controversial (Hantula, 2006), such metrics are often important for promotion and tenure requirements both nationally and abroad.

With the type, frequency, intensity, and combinations of social issues facing greater and greater numbers of individuals, it can be easy to feel discouraged. The recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2021), for example, reminds behavior scientists of the urgency in finding strategies to quickly reduce CO₂ emissions. The ongoing global pandemic has required many behavior scientists to slow down, intensifying the already-lean schedules of reinforcement and increasing the number of demands and the effort required to engage in what used to be simple and routine behaviors and practices. Many who hold positions that are critical to efforts to mitigate significant social issues (e.g., educators, essential workers, health care providers, academicians) are experiencing high levels of burn-out, creating workforce shortages, often because of a growing disconnect between individual and institutional values.

It is important to note, however, that these conditions and the changed behaviors and practices of many have also served and continue to serve as a motivating context for increasing numbers of behavior scientists to turn their attention toward understanding and addressing these issues. Consider the accomplishments of the behavior scientists who have recently contributed to numerous special sections across the ABAI journals (e.g., Direct Instruction, Heward & Twyman, 2021a, b; Precision Teaching, Bulla et al., 2021; and racism and police brutality in a forthcoming issue of the journal *Behavior Analysis and Practice*, as well as the first book in the ABAI series focused on cultural and community applications to behavior science (Cihon & Mattaini, 2020), with others forthcoming (e.g., a volume focused on organizational change; Houmanfar et al., *in press*; and one amplifying the voices of women in behavior science; Rehfeldt et al., *in press*, expected in 2022); a new ABAI verified course sequence and certificate program in culturo-behavior science (Cihon et al., this issue); and a conference emphasizing contributions from many culturo-behavior scientists working toward a better world (Malott, this issue).

An Invitation

As the behaviors and practices of behavior scientists turn toward developing and understanding behavior as it occurs in its social environments, cultures, and systems and the basic processes and principles that motivate, evoke, and sustain it, they will also begin to harness the complexity inherent in the issues and focus on the “variables responsible for the replication of those contingencies throughout a population” (Malagodi & Jackson, 1989, p. 19). After all, “these social issues are all rooted in human behavior and the contingencies that support it” (Cihon et al., this issue, para. 8), a subject matter with which behavior scientists are quite familiar. Contingencies

are the basic unit of analysis for behavior scientists; thus, behavior scientists are well positioned to contribute to work focused on understanding and mitigating the challenges facing humanity now and in the future. BSI joins ABAI in its call to members, encouraging the use of behavior analysis to promote widespread, positive behavior change in areas of social importance. As the incoming editorial team begins the journey on the path forward, we invite you to join us as active participants, readers, reviewers, authors, and more.

Throughout its history (first published under the title *Behaviorists for Social Action Journal* [1978–1981] and then *Behavior Analysis and Social Action* [1982–1989]; see Luke et al., 2017, for more detail), including changes in publishers and editors, BSI (1991–present) has maintained its commitment to remediating social issues. Inherent in the journal’s title is the explicit link of *behavior* with *social issues*. Moving forward, the journal and its incoming editorial team remain committed to a vision that advances the “contributions of a natural science of behavior to constructing cultures of social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability” (BSI, n.d., para. 1). Fortunately, “It’s not a question of starting. The start has been made. It’s a question of what’s to be done from now on” (Skinner, 1948, p. 257).

Declarations

Conflict of interest We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

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