EDITORIAL: "SAVING THE WORLD" WITH A MATRIX

> Most thoughtful people agree that the world is in serious trouble … Why is more not being done? (B. F. Skinner, "Why we are not acting to save the world," 1982/1987)

The issues are so well known as to be tedious to restate: income and asset inequalities; extraordinary rates of incarceration; war and terrorism; racial, ethnic, and religious strife; street and family violence; poverty, health disparities and other forms of structural violence; neocolonialism; climate change, and more (Mattaini & Aspholm, 2015). These are all issues grounded in human behavior and behavioral systems dynamics, of course. Skinner (1982/1987) recognized this, and noted why little was being done:

> If the futures of governments, religions, and capitalistic systems were congruent with the future of the species, our problem would be solved….Unfortunately the futures are different. Governments, religions, and capitalist systems, whether public or private, control most of the reinforcers of daily life; they must use them, as they have always done, for their own aggrandizement…. Those institutions are the embodiments of cultural practices that have come into existence through selection, but the contingencies of selection are in conflict with the future of the human species. (p. 7)

Asking whether we might not design better arrangements, he stopped to ask "who 'we' are," and suggested "the uncommitted—to governments, religions, and capital—[who] are therefore free to consider a more remote future" (p. 8). He suggested "scholars, scientists, teachers and writers for the media" as among these. Previous editorials here and elsewhere have argued that those groups are overall much less uncommitted, particularly to government and capitalist systems than was the case in 1982, when Skinner first presented his paper.

In this editorial, however, we are specifically exploring why behavior analysts are not acting more aggressively to have an impact on these larger problems. Even recognizing the political and funding issues that make doing so challenging, a number of other disciplines are much more active in these areas. Despite Skinner's (perhaps somewhat ambivalent) statement in his paper that behavioral technologies could design and arrange better cultural practices, and strong assertions by other behavioral analysts that this could be done (Chance, 2007; Rumph, Ninness, McCuller, & Ninness, 2005) very few of are working in the areas of behavioral systems analysis outside of corporate and government systems, particularly in systems-level work related to social and sustainability issues. This is not to say that none are, but a quick review of the 2014 Association for Behavior Analysis: International Convention program suggested that at most 13 of the 1632 presentations could be viewed as focused primarily on larger system issues. Clearly "we" behavior analysts are not yet saving the world in the ways once imagined by Skinner. There are other issues; many behavior analysts with interests in these areas are approaching

retirement age, or have moved on to other areas of work. One indicator is that attendance at the annual convention meetings of Behaviorists for Social Responsibility (previously Behaviorists for Social Action) once numbered in the hundreds, but now averages about 20.

The lack of behavior analytic work in these areas begs the question of why—what are the obstacles? At a very gross level, some challenges are evident. Neither governments nor financial interests—who have contributed to many of the most serious issues—are eager to fund work that may challenge current cultural arrangements, and universities are increasingly dependent on both. There are concurrently other very lucrative (and important) paths that are much more easily accessed—the demand for autism and developmental disability services being the most obvious example. Outside of organizational behavior management, behavior analysis is likely largely unknown to organizations working on societal or cultural issues. All of these challenges clearly contribute.

Behavior analysts, however, generally rely on more precise and fine-grained analyses. We have, for that reason, initiated a small project to go deeper. While it is useful to recognize current obstacles, given the potential power of constructional approaches (Goldiamond, 1974/2002), in support of Behaviorists for Social Responsibility we are currently pursuing two concurrent explorations that may suggest constructional behavioral systems approaches for:

(a) increasing the number of behavior analysts and behavioral systems scientists doing experimental, applied, and conceptual work related to systems level issues,

(b) increasing the number of behavior analysts having a positive impact on societal issues on a large scale, and

(c) increasing the rate at which organizations, communities and other disciplines seek out behavior analysts to help with issues of societal importance on a large scale.

Dr. Luke is currently interviewing high-profile behavior analysts with an extensive history of working in the areas of behavioral systems science, sustainability, and social issues, exploring factors that have shaped and maintained their involvement, as well as obstacles that they have faced. These data will provide some initial hypotheses. We are also developing a conceptual matrix, grounded in those interviews and other data where available, that will detail practices among multiple sets of actors in multiple sectors that may support or discourage systems-level work. When complete, this matrix will suggest multiple testable hypotheses regarding how to proceed from here.

For example, our very tentative first analysis suggests that university behavior analysis programs wishing to increase attention to systemic issues might:

• Include social issues and sustainability in mission statements and course objectives, ensuring these are regularly included in program reviews,

• Offer courses specific to behavioral systems analysis and systemic and structural social issues,

• Encourage students to enroll in courses in other disciplines related to this content, as well as courses in social marketing and social entrepreneurship,

• Develop internships with organizations working on systemic and structural social issues,

- Establish interdisciplinary mentorship and visiting faculty arrangements,

- Establish interdisciplinary degree programs (e.g., PhD/MPH),

- Recognizing that the most important scientific advances are generally occurring at or across disciplinary boundaries (cf. National Academies, 2005), develop interdisciplinary programs with related fields,

- Establish related scholarships,

- Build media connections to draw attention to behavioral work in these areas, and

- Bring in guest speakers and consultants in social and sustainability areas, incorporating discussions with speakers about how behavioral systems analysis could contribute

Beyond just identifying such supporting practices, the matrix analysis will also include opposing practices, as well as potential establishing operations and reinforcers for shaping and sustaining the first, and reducing the second.

The matrix currently includes possible practices that could be embedded systemically into 26 potential sectors, including universities, related disciplines, behavior analytic student groups, behavior analytic organizations, individual behavioral mentors, businesses, journals, community-based and non-governmental organizations (CBOs/NGOs), religious groups, and many others. This preliminary analysis will suggest many testable hypotheses for determining whether the practices listed (a) can successfully be institutionalized, and (b) increase attention to major societal issues among behavior analysts. This testing itself would be valuable behavioral systems research, and as a side benefit could put behavior analysts in direct contact with others working on such issues.

This is obviously not a two-person project; we hope that extensive collaboration will emerge from among behavior analysts and students, behavior analytic programs and organizations, and other partners. We will also integrate the project into our social media work, which is expanding in 2015. We also encourage interested behavior analysts to make contact with us at the EXPO booth and SIG meeting sponsored by Behaviorists for Social Responsibility at the 2015 Association for Behavior Analysis: International Convention in San Antonio at the end of May.

Mark A. Mattaini
Jane Addams College of Social Work
University of Illinois at Chicago

Molli Luke
Behaviorists for Social Responsibility

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