Review of
Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage
by L. B. Schorr with D. Schorr

Ilene S. Schwartz
University of Washington

Lisbeth Schorr's book provides an interesting, and sometimes highly personal, narrative about some of the most devastating and pervasive social problems facing our nation. Schorr describes programs that are effective in combating these problems, and suggests widespread adoption of these types of programs. It is a book about health care, education, nutrition, early intervention, housing, and family planning. But, more importantly for behavior analysts, it is a book about program planning, replication, dissemination, and social validity.

In the first two chapters, Schorr identifies risk factors that affect children. Some are concrete, such as inadequate prenatal care and health care for children; poor nutrition, or, in many cases, malnutrition; and homelessness. Others, more difficult to quantify, are just as virulent: risk for educational failure that is compounded by attending schools that are ill-equipped, both physically and in human resources, to deal with community needs; living in a home with abusive or neglectful parents; and living in a chaotic environment with a parent who is mentally ill or addicted to drugs or alcohol. Schorr is not the first author to identify these risk factors; regrettably, they are all too familiar to us. They are often the topic of books (e.g., Edelman, 1987; Kozol, 1991), newspaper headlines, and political rhetoric. Unfortunately, they are rarely the focus of effective, long-lasting intervention programs.

Schorr describes the interaction of these

risk factors, and how the interactions, often coupled with ineffective or nonexistent programming, are antecedents of "rotten outcomes." The rotten outcomes Schorr describes are also frighteningly familiar. They include violent life-styles, helplessness, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and children dropping out of school, or, perhaps worse, graduating from high school as functional illiterates. She maintains that we have the knowledge not only to identify the children who are most at risk but also to provide intervention that will break the cycle of disadvantage with this generation. If we can break this cycle, we may be able to change the odds for these children, so that rather than adding to the problem, they will become adults who are healthy and productive members of society.

Schorr argues eloquently and convincingly that as a society we can no longer afford not to intervene with children who are at risk. Using an interesting approach to make her case, she outlines programs that work, describing essential components for program development and survival. Her case studies illustrate common components of the most successful intervention programs; success involves comprehensiveness, intensity, and a focus on the family and community. These features allow programs to be flexible and to provide interventions that address the issues of most importance to families in the context in which the problems occur. For example, she describes a program called Homebuilders that works with families in crisis to preserve the family unit while addressing the urgent needs of the family. This program responds to all referrals within 24 hours, conducts meetings in the home, and addresses a wide range of needs ranging from home maintenance to family therapy. This inten-

Schorr, L. B. (with D. Schorr) (1988). *Within our reach: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage*. New York: Anchor Books. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to the author at CDMRC, Experimental Education Unit, WJ-10, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195.

sive, flexible, and comprehensive program has been successful in helping families through times of crisis and has provided families with the support they need to maintain these new skills in the long run. The Homebuilders program is an excellent example of the fact that simple, one-pronged intervention strategies that address a single component of a problem in isolation are not effective. Although these types of programs may be more convenient for staff, administrators, and program evaluators, they will not enable us to break the cycle of disadvantage.

In the subsequent seven chapters, Schorr provides case studies of programs that address important social issues (e.g., family planning, health care, child care, education). In each chapter she thoroughly discusses a specific social problem and provides an interesting history and background information on current public policy affecting that issue. At the end of each chapter, she highlights programs that have been effective in addressing the specific social problem. The informative and enlightening case studies help to support Schorr's claim that existing interventions can be used to break the cycle of disadvantage with this generation.

Much of this information is provided from an insider's point of view. Schorr tells interesting stories of Head Start volunteers working long hours in offices in converted hotel rooms with makeshift desks of boards over bathtubs, and of Office of Economic Opportunity staff convincing Sargent Shriver, while he was "flanked by two Roman Catholic priests in clerical garb" (p. 37), that more government support for family planning services was a necessary component of the program. These stories are woven into a well-documented and clearly presented discussion of social problems and possible solutions. The overall effect is an interesting, educating, and important contribution.

Schorr suggests that we learn how to improve the design and implementation of interventions from these successful programs and adopt a comprehensive and transdisciplinary approach to providing

human services. In order to change the odds for children and families at risk, she argues that we must provide a solid and comprehensive base of support in the context of the community in which the family lives, not just a series of isolated and unrelated service programs. This fragmented approach may be effective with middle class families or families with single specific needs; however, it is inappropriate for families with a myriad of needs, those who are most at risk for "rotten outcomes."

For behavior analysts, the most interesting parts of the book are the final three chapters. Although Schorr is not a behavior analyst and does not use technical behavioral terms in her book, she presents a clear case for the importance of functional analysis, both of the behaviors targeted for intervention and of the bureaucratic structure that supports the program. Using lay language and examples from effective programs, Schorr argues convincingly that structural analyses are ineffective for planning and evaluating intervention programs unless they are accompanied by an ongoing functional analysis. In this final section of the book, Schorr provides a component analysis of successful programs and suggests lessons to be learned by program planners and policy makers.

One of the primary lessons that we can learn from successful programs is the importance of being responsive to the needs of consumers, as identified by the consumers. Schorr provides many examples of successful programs that expand the types of services, and the form of services, provided on an ongoing basis in order to match the changing needs of their clients. Her excellent examples demonstrate the importance of assessing the social validity of treatment programs (Schwartz & Baer, 1991; Wolf, 1978). She reminds us that even the most elegant intervention programs are useless if their consumers believe that the goals, procedures, or outcomes are not acceptable or important.

Schorr points out that there is little correlation between program survival and successful outcomes. These different is-

sues are affected by different contingencies. Whereas program survival may depend on serving a large number of consumers in the most efficient manner (e.g., through center-based intervention that is the same for all participants), successful outcomes depend on providing a comprehensive program of intensive, individualized services. These services are expensive in dollars and effort.

Although the issues Schorr raises are overwhelming and simplification is attractive, she is too thoughtful to take a checklist or cookbook approach to them; these are not simple problems, and there are no simple solutions. Instead, she provides elegant descriptions of contingencies that are in operation, and how they may differentially support or destroy effective programs. For example, Schorr points out that any type of replication involves some bureaucratization; however, until we know how to develop flexible managerial structures, this bureaucratization may impede the very qualities of an intervention program that made it successful in the first place. This is important information for behavior analysts. Like Schorr, we know that many current programs successfully address some of the most serious social problems facing our nation. One lesson we can learn from this book is how to convince policy makers, the ultimate consumers of these interventions, that these programs are important, effective, and necessary.

This book is valuable for behavior analysts because it gives us an in-depth look at socially important problems and provides guidelines for disseminating effec-

tive solutions that are acceptable and durable. Schorr acknowledges that "cookie-cutter" replications of successful programs will not work. Each replication site must analyze its local concerns and resources and tailor its programs to meet individual needs. As behavior analysts, we have a technology uniquely suited to analyzing environments and interactions within those environments. Increasingly, behavior analysts are called upon to work cooperatively with members of other disciplines; Schorr's book outlines methods for interdisciplinary collaboration. We should establish partnerships with colleagues from other fields within the social and behavioral sciences to address the problems of serving this challenging population of children and families who are at risk. *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage* provides a timely lesson. One hopes that it will inspire us to build coalitions for disseminating and adopting effective transdisciplinary behavioral programs for this population.

REFERENCES

- Edelman, M. W. (1987). *Families in peril: An agenda for social change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Schwartz, I. S., & Baer, D. M. (1991). Social validity assessment: Is current practice state of the art? *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 24, 189-204.
- Wolf, M. M. (1978). Social validity: The case for subjective measurement or how applied behavior analysis is finding its heart. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 11, 203-214.