In Response

The Spread of Behavior Analysis to Social Work

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We read with great interest the Fraley (1981) paper, "The Spread of Behavior Analysis to the Applied Fields." The author pointed out important fundamental obstacles to the acceptance of behavior analysis in applied areas and extrapolated that the spread of behavior analysis into applied fields will be enhanced if there are credentialed professionals, who are trained behavior analysts, in those fields. He concluded that the "science of behavior analysis transcends the role of the consulting specialist who comes in to reverse impending disasters and, having set things right for awhile, rides off into the sunset" (p. 41). As trained behavior analysts who teach in a graduate school of social work, the issues in Fraley's paper are personally and professionally important to us. This response is intended as an addendum rather than a criticism.

We have attempted to induce students to adopt a scientific approach to their profession. In our attempts to attract students to behavior analysis, we have tried various methods of reinforcement, propaganda, and chicanery but have had only limited success. We can easily parallel social work with Fraley's description of the field of education: both are firmly entrenched in a non-scientific base.

In a casual survey of recent social work publications, (*Social Service Review*, *Social Work with Groups*, *Social Casework* and *Social Work*) only 2 out of 89 articles were behavioral, and perhaps worse, not a single article reported any observable behavior change. Rather than any scientific approach to behavior, the

topics addressed included, "Testing a Theory of the Borderline-Narcissistic Personality" (Carrilio, 1981) and, "Notes from a Pregnant Therapist" (Rubin, 1980). Both of these articles appeared in the publication *Social Work*, the journal of the National Association of Social Workers.

A further example of social work's less than enthusiastic acceptance of behavior analysis is apparent in a review of the employment listings in a recent issue of the National Association of Social Workers Newsletter. Of 102 positions asking for applicant characteristics ranging from "strong clinical skills," "group, individual, or family therapist," "vivaciousness," "self-starter," "commitment to Jewish communal life," to "experience in Oriental cultures," only one position asked for knowledge of "behavioral techniques."

In spite of this bad news for behaviorists who would like to see behavior analysis spread to other fields, there is some good news. As behavior analysts in social work we are not alone. There are quite a few social workers who belong to the Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis (SABA) and to the Association for Behavior Analysis (ABA) and present their data at the annual ABA Convention. (We may be hard to recognize since our data makes us look more like behavior analysts than social workers.) Many of these behaviorists are busy trying to influence other social workers to adopt a scientific approach in their work.

Nevertheless, when compared to the number of other social workers, the relative number of social workers who presently reside in the behavioral ranks is small and the reinforcement schedule for adherence to a rigorous behavior analysis

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base may be lean. This is, therefore, an injunction to behavior analysts in social work to keep plugging away at spreading a scientific approach in social work and to resist cognitive behaviorism, pseudo-behavioral models, and other social work clap-trap.

In conclusion, we have seven recommendations for directing the spread of behavior analysis in social work. First, faculties in schools of social work should provide strong support to those students and colleagues interested in behavioral methods. Second, we should identify behavioral practitioners in the community so we can develop networks of referral sources, field placements for students, and mutual social reinforcement. Third, we should use our influence to encourage employers to hire only carefully trained behavioral social workers. Fourth, we should seek out and encourage employers to advertise at the ABA Convention for well trained behavioral social workers. Fifth, we should in some way indicate

those students and fellow practitioners who in fact are competent behavior analysts rather than pseudo-behaviorists. Sixth, we should educate consumers to request behavior analysts when seeking social services. Finally, we should encourage membership in SABA and ABA and presentation at ABA Conventions.

The time has come for us to apply behavior change technology to the problem of training and marketing behavior analysts within applied fields. We agree with Fraley (1981) that the spread of behavior analysis can best be accomplished from within each profession.

REFERENCES

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