In Response

Comments on Baer's "A Flight of Behavior Analysis"

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Don Baer's Presidential Address (Baer, 1981) is interesting but discomfoting. His apparent lack of concern for the "applied people" being content with what they already know about psychology concerns me the most as a director of clinical training. Baer provides two anecdotes to illustrate his points regarding the ability of technicians to do their work without the benefit of extensive training in more basic areas. He recounts the beautiful photographs made by his photographer at his wedding without the need for the basic knowledge of optics² and the physics of light. Using his anecdote, let us assume that the photographer came to the location for the wedding with the same equipment, only to find that the room was lighted by incandescent light rather than the sunlight he had expected. Photographic film is manufactured in such a way that the chemicals are balanced for the color spectrum of sunlight or incandescent lights. Photographs taken with the same film under the two different lighting conditions yield vastly different color renditions. If the photographer were knowledgeable about the properties of light and lenses, he could attach a color filter to the lens of his camera which would compensate for the differences in color spectrum of the incandescent light sources and capture the wedding ceremony in all its natural color. I would liken Baer's own photographer to a more technically trained behavior analyst and the more knowledgeable photographer to one who was trained both as a technician and in the basics of psychology and the

experimental analysis of behavior. Which one would you prefer to have taking photographs at your wedding ceremony?

Baer's second illustration affords a similar opportunity to illustrate the differences between a technologist and an applied behavior analyst. What would have happened if Baer's daughter was not helped by the medication prescribed by the first physician? The physician admitted that he did not know precisely what was causing the problem. Had Baer's daughter not recovered by the time they reached the next town, Baer would have been faced with seeking another physician. Would he have been satisfied with a physician similar to the one whose approach just failed? I believe that he would have found a specialist, someone whose knowledge and skills surpassed those of the general practitioner whom he first saw, one who is intimately in touch with the latest developments in the field, one who gleans material from the most current basic research for developing innovative treatment approaches, and one who is accustomed to dealing with difficult and puzzling cases that required elaborate analyses. Could not the first physician be likened to a technician and the specialist to an applied behavior analyst who remains tied to the basic literature? Which one would you seek if your daughter were sick?

I seriously doubt that we will ever be able to settle the issue of whether we should train either skilled technicians *or* sophisticated applied behavior analysis. The field of clinical psychology has been wrestling with a similar issue at least since Shakow (1945) elaborated what has become known as the Boulder Model of clinical training. It is called the scientist-professional or scientist-practitioner

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model because it calls for a balance of training in basic psychology and technical intervention skills. The more scientifically oriented individuals argue that our clinical students are not getting enough training in the basic areas of psychology and that there is too much emphasis on applied skills. The more practice oriented individuals argue that we are training clinicians that are not prepared to deal with the clinical problems they will face and placing too much emphasis on basic psychology which is relatively unrelated to being a good clinician. Clinicians and applied behavior analysts would undoubtedly like to train students who are both excellent scientists and practitioners. There is some question as to whether sufficient time exists for accomplishing this.

Baer's fascination with the question of whether "... the applied people can get away with it for long" (p. 91) without attending to the basic literature troubles me because I think that they *can* get away with it. The principles of reinforcement and punishment can be applied with moderate sophistication and with considerable effectiveness. Moreover, there are many problems which could be handled in the world today with little sophistication on the part of the technician. My question, which relates back to Baer's physician illustration, is would you send your sick child to a physician who was still practicing 1920's internal medicine? We have to decide on the level of sophistication we want in light of the contingencies of the real world that cries

for help and the science of psychology which demands attention.

A tentative solution seems to be available if the Michael (1980) and Baer (1981) camps are willing to compromise. Why cannot we find ways of bringing the applied behavior analyst under the control of the current basic experimental analysis of behavior literature? Why cannot basic researchers learn a bit more about the applied problems which plague the applied behavior analyst? Why cannot the basic researcher suggest applications of principles discovered in the lab? Why cannot experimental and applied behavior analysts talk with each other and share the contents of their problem areas and research? Why cannot each take into consideration the needs of the other? Why cannot we begin to study and analyze the behaviors of the experimental and applied behavior analysts in order to bring about these situations? I am still convinced that we can train good applied behavior analysts with a sound knowledge of psychology and the experimental analysis of behavior. That is what I thought some of us were doing here at West Virginia University.

REFERENCES

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