

EDITORIAL: THE DATA ARE COMING!

Those who expect that cultural analytic science can make real contributions to addressing social, cultural and environmental issues have noted repeatedly that while interpretation and conceptual analysis are valuable components of an emerging science, the science cannot survive without data (Mattaini, 2006). I am extremely pleased to be able to note that such data are now appearing; there are several data-based articles in this volume. João Claudio Todorov (2009) shares with readers reports on several studies conducted in Brazil that rely on data from field observations and existing sources, in ways that allow prediction and confirmation. Essentially, those studies use the methods that have long proven their value in ecological and astronomical science, among others, in which experimental manipulation is not always possible. Todorov and his colleagues are also involved in experimental efforts on a cultural level, reports of which we hope to be able to share before too long.

Elsewhere in this volume, Christian Vichi, Maria Amalia Andery, and Sigrid Glenn report on a metacontingency experiment conducted in the laboratory, and Todd Ward, Raymond Eastman, and Chris Ninness on another related experimental laboratory investigation. Both studies are real advances for the field, and are likely to point the way toward a more rigorous cultural science. Anthony Biglan's article, "Increasing Psychological Flexibility to Influence Cultural Evolution" reviews recent data on interventions to increase psychological flexibility, and explores the potential for such work at a cultural level. Each of these papers is itself a real contribution; in the aggregate, this work speaks to a maturing science, and we encourage others to pursue such work and share it in these pages. At the same time, historical interpretation, the conceptual analysis of cultural behavior continue to be important, and applied behavior analysis continue to have much to contribute to our science, and these are also well represented in this volume.

BEHAVIORAL SYSTEMS ANALYSIS?

The first references to "behavioral systems analysis" that I have run across in the behavior analytic literature (which may not have been the first written) were in various pieces of work by Richard and Maria Malott, perhaps two decades ago. At the time, the term was an outlier. Recently, however, behavioral systems analysis and the analysis of complex systems are appearing frequently in both the

cultural analytic and the organizational behavior management literature (e.g., Glenn & Malott, 2004; Ludwig & Hounmanfar, 2009; Malott, 2003; Sandaker, 2006).

The integration of systems analysis with behavior analysis, as noted by Krapfl, Cooke, Sullivan and Cogar (2009) begins with a recognition of complex sets of reciprocally controlling relations. “Cultures,” they note, “are systems of behavioral practices that evolve by selection” (p. 138). Skinner defined a culture as the “contingencies of social reinforcement maintained by a group” (1987, p. 74)—not quite the same thing, but clearly a similar understanding. Consistent with General Systems Theory (GST), Krapfl and colleagues indicate that, “These organizational cultures function within a larger cultural context and have subcultures nested within them”—in GST terms, they are holons, which may be viewed as the focal system, as a subsystem of higher level systems, and as a suprasystem emerging from subsystems. Sandaker (2009) makes the connections between the selection of cultures and the analysis of complex behavioral systems particularly explicit.

I have noted previously that behavior analysis has been appropriately cautious about importing whole bodies of theory into our work, which has accumulated through careful, progressive experimentation (Mattaini, 2006). There certainly are risks; two decades ago, behavior analysts with cultural interests became enamored of the cultural materialist anthropology of Marvin Harris, and for a time many believed that approach would be fully integrated into cultural analytic science. Harris’ work is little mentioned today, but it did prove useful in expanding our vision, and clarifying certain cultural dynamics.

Still, it appears that there are two advantages to experimenting with the integration of systemic perspectives into our work. First, GST and other rigorous forms of systems theories are themselves grounded in science. Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s (1968) aim in proposing GST was breathtakingly ambitious—“the Unity of Science”—but utterly scientific. There may therefore be much we can learn from the decades of work done across disciplines by systems theorists. It is important to note that the word “system” comes up constantly in the literature on cultural analysis (380 times in the two special issues of *Behavior and Social Issues* on cultural analysis published in 2004 and 2006). This verbal behavior is clearly being selected for apparent utility, but needs to be continuously evaluated for its rigor in our usage.

Second, on a practical level, the terms “cultural analysis” and “cultural analytic science,” very meaningful to those of us who know B. F. Skinner’s three level framework (natural, operant, and cultural selection), do not carry the same meaning for others. In many cases in fact they suggest something completely

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different. It may be that terms like “behavioral systems analysis,” “behavioral systems science,” and “behavioral dynamics” can communicate what we are doing to a broader audience; this certainly appears to be the case in organizational behavior management. It may be worth experimenting with these terms in some contexts, although the terms “cultural analysis,” “cultural entity” and “cultural practice” have a generality that has and likely will continue to serve us well within the behavior analytic culture.

Mark A. Mattaini, Editor
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