DISCUSSION ARTICLE

Creating Inclusive and Equitable Cultural Practices by Linking Leadership to Systemic Change

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Abstract
From a global pandemic to the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, and others in the Black community, the year 2020 has cast light on long-standing social injustices. With this has come a critical social movement and a call for change—specifically, a call for transformative solutions that address not only new challenges but also centuries of systemic issues, such as systemic oppression and systemic racism. Leadership across the globe has scrambled to answer the call, some issuing statements committed to change, others engaging in necessary action. What is critical, however, is that leadership understands the cultural factors that have given rise to centuries of oppressive practices, and that leaders are held accountable for the commitments they have expressed. Leadership must promote, create, and maintain prosocial, inclusive, and healthy work environments. This requires new cultural practices and a focused organizational model. Equally important is the need to resolve ambiguity and communicate effectively, with strategic consideration of constituent perspectives and needs. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to discuss the contribution of behavior analysis to addressing systemic oppression, as well as the pivotal role leadership communication plays in occasioning social change. It is our hope that this conceptual work will inspire behavior scientists to advance the field of behavior analysis and social movements in the direction of equitable, prosocial change that dismantles systemic oppression.

Keywords Systemic oppression · Racism · Diversity · Inclusion · Equity · Leadership · Communication

Researchers, policy makers, politicians, and concerned citizens have long been focused on creating and maintaining cultural practices that adequately address systemic issues: civil rights, income and asset inequities, mass incarceration, and many more. Unresolved, these issues have serious ramifications and require committed leadership and organization if change is to be initiated. It seems to be the case, however, that instrumental stakeholders (e.g., leadership, politicians, and large corporations) are rarely convinced a solution is necessary, even when an intervention is within reach. Moreover, when a leader is committed to addressing these issues personally, other stakeholders may prevent reform by imposing aversive consequences. This creates a divide among groups of individuals—many of whom claim to be guided by the same mission and aligned values—stalling necessary action and perpetuating systemic problems. Though diversity is critical to the success of any organization, the perpetuation of inequities and systemic oppression justified by the façade of ideological diversity has been the anchor preventing social movement for decades.

Many institutions have implemented policies to address systemic oppression, the inequitable treatment of specific social groups through laws, policies, and institutional practices. Yet, despite good intentions, these policies are often unable to overcome long-established oppressive practices. For example, to promote inclusive recruitment practices, academic institutions have implemented affirmative action plans—programs and policies

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that consider race and ethnicity as part of the evaluation of an application. One common finding across institutions is that there is much skepticism about the benefits of diversity, and many resist the idea of affirmative action plans (Herring, 2009). In fact, affirmative action plans have been so widely controversial, that 10 states have adopted bans, deeming them unconstitutional. Of note, is the effect these bans have had on marginalized students, decreasing their admission and enrollment in higher education (Long & Bateman, 2020). Thus, efforts to redress centuries of oppression die at the hands of power structures and White fragility (DiAngelo, 2018), masked by the guise of constitutional rights, and reinstate inequitable practices that benefit those who oppose the policies in the first place. Unfortunately, it does not end there. Isms have been so long established in the United States—and worldwide for that matter— that "colorblindness" and "meritocracy" have become the public ideologies used to justify broken and discriminatory practices, hiding one's unwillingness to see problems for what they are: racism, sexism, ableism, and more. Accordingly, even when new policies and leadership rhetoric are formed to combat prejudice and discrimination, they produce the same outcomes, resulting in what is called preservation through transformation (Alexander, 2010).

The process of creating and implementing any systemic intervention requires careful research and planning, proper representation through genuine inclusion, and effective communication. One person alone does not initiate change, and effective change does not transpire from the maintenance of the status quo. Communication is critical, as it must impact both the development and the implementation of policies, research, and behavioral skills. Additionally, communication must convince stakeholders (especially those with opposing views) and consumers to consider alternative approaches: approaches that influence change. Ultimately, leaders are positioned in the system to initiate meaningful change. Institutions require leaders who resolve ambiguity and communicate effectively, with intentional consideration of their constituents' perspectives and needs.

The purpose of this article is to provide an analysis of the contingencies influencing both the speaker (leaders) and the listener (employees or constituents) in a series of verbal episodes, involving persuasion and related to systemic oppression. We discuss specific factors of behavioral systems (i.e., cultural milieu and institutional rule generation) and how they can influence and augment complex shared functions among groups—specifically, how behavior analysis can promote prosocial behavior related to cultural change. It is our hope that this conceptual work will inspire behavior scientists to advance not only the field but also social movements in the direction of equitable, prosocial change that dismantles systemic oppression. By drawing on complementary perspectives, we will contribute to the literature in three ways: (a) by expanding the reach of behavior analysis and using it to discuss systemic oppression, (b) by discussing the interaction between social issues that have been addressed separately in the literature, and (c) by discussing the pivotal role leaders play in this process through organized and values-based communication.

Why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Matter

Demographic Shift

The United States is changing, both physically and demographically. For example, the U.S. census reported that in 1940, nearly 90% of the population identified as White. However, in 2010, the population had more than doubled, and the percentage of those who identified as White fell nearly 20% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In another report, the U.S. Census Bureau projected that between 2014 and 2060, the U.S. population would increase by approximately 98 million, and with this would, again, come an increase in racial and ethnic diversity (Colby & Ortman, 2015).[1] It has been argued that the non-White population will grow to 50% by 2050 and the non-Hispanic White population will fall below 50%, leaving no clear racial or ethnic majority[2] (Cárdenas, Ajinkya, & Gibbs Léger, 2011; Colby & Ortman, 2015).

Even with an increasingly diverse workforce (Toossi, 2006), marginalized groups have not been adequately represented in positions of power (Hill, Miller, Benson, & Handley, 2016; Zarya, 2017). In 2016, less than 4% of CEO positions were held by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC; Gino, 2017), less than 5% were held by women, and less than 3% were held by women of color (Hill et al., 2016). Although recent data indicate representation has improved, with "more progress in board representation for the *Fortune* 500 between 2016 and 2018 than between 2012 and 2016" (The Alliance for Board Diversity [ABD] and Deloitte, 2018, p. 7), there is still a consistently slow rate of change, with 80.5% of board seats held by non-Hispanic White individuals (61.4% men and 19.1% women; ABD and Deloitte, 2018).

In degree-granting, postsecondary academic institutions, with the exception of White women, data are similarly grim. Among full-time faculty in fall 2017, 41% of faculty identified

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[1] These population projections rely on assumptions about how mortality birth rates, and immigration will take course over the next 30 years.

[2] In the context of race and ethnicity, the term "minority" carries patronizing hierarchical connotations. For this reason, the authors use the term, and related terms (i.e., "majority"), only when associated literature does so, and sparingly to reference changing demographics.

as men, whereas 35% identified as women; 6% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander (API) men, 5% as API women; 3% each identified as Black and Hispanic men and women, and less than 1% American Indian/Alaska Native (McFarland et al., 2019). These numbers become even more disproportionate when varied by rank. For instance, men and women who identify as Black and men who identify as Hispanic account for 2% of full-time professors, whereas women who identify as Hispanic and all who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native make up 1% or less of full-time professors (NCES, 2019).

At the federal level, although the 2018 U.S. midterm elections resulted in record-breaking strides, representation in Congress is still lacking. Despite an increase in the number of women elected to Congress, seats are still disproportionately held by men. Specifically, White (77%), straight (98.1%), Christian (81.5%), cisgender males (76.2%) over the age of 35 (97.5%; Morris, Adolphe, & Salam, 2019). Conversely, whom these individuals hire or provide training opportunities to is just as important. In a large-scale experiment focused on discrimination in hiring for top-level administration in politics, Baekgaard and George (2018) found that among Flemish politicians, discrimination was mediated by ideological beliefs. Namely, ideological predispositions influenced applicant evaluations, as well as reported inclinations to interview historically excluded and marginalized individuals. What is most disheartening about these findings is the potential silencing of these peoples' voices or, in many cases, the perpetuation of oppression. Oppression is exacerbated when an entire political group, which has the potential to affect policy change, is dominated by a homogeneous group. Although the aforementioned study is not specific to the United States, Scott, McCray, Bell, and Overton (2018) reported that only 13.7% of all top House staff positions (e.g., chiefs of staff, policy directors, and communication directors) were held by people of color. All of this considered, it is safe to conclude that diversity and inclusion efforts are essential. The lack of representation of BIPOC is present across institutional levels globally, and until the contingencies that maintain this practice shift, the overall population will not be adequately represented.

It is important to recognize that diversity in numbers alone will not suffice. Institutions must promote, create, and maintain prosocial (Atkins, Wilson, & Hayes, 2019; Houmanfar, Alavosius, Morford, Herbst, & Reimer, 2015), inclusive, and healthy work environments. Addressing representation, both passive and active, will influence whether the interests of all constituents and/or employees are considered in dialogue about policies and changes that affect those parties (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011, p. 158). Passive representation refers to the practice of employing individuals from underrepresented groups, in numbers proportionate to the population, whereas active representation ensures the voices and interests

of underrepresented groups are not overlooked. The presence of both types of representation "is positively associated with bureaucratic outcomes consistent with the interests of the members of those groups" (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011, p. 160). Therefore, the topic of representation needs to be at the forefront of workforce and labor conversations, as it is central to the conversation about the changing demographics of both the United States and the world.

Need for a Paradigm Shift

Although much of the focus on diversity in the workforce has been limited to a legal context (i.e., discrimination and harassment policies or laws), it is argued that the aforementioned

> demographic shift will hold important policy implications, particularly if current racial and ethnic disparities in education, employment, health, and other social services continue. If we do not ensure the success of the most vulnerable among us moving forward, then we will prevent the United States from fully capitalizing on the global economic advantages we can derive from our increasingly diverse population. (Cárdenas et al., 2011, p. 1)

Marginalized groups such as BIPOC experience "significant obstacles and disparities," and this will only continue (Cárdenas et al., 2011, p. 1) unless effective policies and interventions are implemented. The development and implementation of effective policies and interventions that terminate and/or ameliorate human suffering and oppression are unlikely if marginalized groups are not actively involved in their development. Moreover, policy makers and researchers invested in employing social interventions should avoid colonial or exploitative relationships with the target population (Fawcett, 1991), where colonial relationships refer to "the economic, political and cultural domination of one cultural-ethnic group by another" (Omvedt, 1973, p. 1). An understanding of how interventions may impact these communities in the near and long run is essential. Good intentions can have harmful effects, some of the most obvious examples being gentrification and homelessness. In addition, as U.S. demographics shift—leaving no clear racial or ethnic majority—so does the marketplace. It is possible that consumer choice and demand will shift, resulting in the selection of organizational practices and products that meet the needs of a diverse population. Yet this does not mean that power will be acquired by marginalized groups. The danger of unchecked capitalism always looms, as the affluent few have the resources to capitalize on cultural practices and objects. Capitalist practices, such as rebranding cultural products for a profit (appropriation) and gentrification, do not serve citizens but instead profit the wealthy. Unchecked capitalism is integrally connected to

social and economic inequality, exploitation, and marginalization (Davis, 2016), making it an issue leaders must address (Biglan, 2020).

In much of the organizational behavior management literature, one of the primary focuses of analyses and interventions is added financial value (Brethower, 2000; Gilbert, 2007; Houmanfar et al., 2015). The financial marketplace and the consumer marketplace interact in a strictly monetary fashion: The organization works to maximize financial gains, the employee works to earn a living, and the consumer tries to get more "bang for a buck." Houmanfar et al. (2015) suggested that "the main challenge of organizations in the 21st century is to interact with increasing environmental demands that are not only financial but also social in nature" (p. 18). That is, organizational leadership should consider the sociopolitical climate and the values of consumers/constituents. This demonstrates to the consumer that though financial gains are essential to the organization's survival, social values are simultaneously considered. Organizations that speak to this balance "demonstrate that social values can trump public displays of affluence" (Houmanfar et al., 2015, p. 21). Moreover, Houmanfar et al. (2015) argued that the emphasized concordance between financial and social values should exceed a present moment perspective, by considering the entire population and their needs, which is one step in the right direction.

The Role of Leadership in Influencing Social Change

The clarion call for effective leadership is no stranger to behavior analysis (Houmanfar et al., 2015; Houmanfar & Mattaini, 2016; Mattaini & Aspholm, 2016); the need for an effective technology to address societal ills has been present in the literature since the inception of the science (Skinner, 1938, 1948). More recently, Houmanfar and Mattaini (2016) emphasized the role of leadership in constructing nurturing, just, and reinforcing societies (p. 43), and as recent events show (e.g., the long list of lives taken at the hands of police brutality and the separation of families at U.S. borders), this construction at all levels is well past due. Addressing the resurgence of explicit prejudice and discrimination (Anti-Defamation League, 2020) has become both a moral and ethical obligation. In order to address these issues, leadership will need to construct and implement a new progressive movement (Mattaini & Aspholm, 2016)—a movement that goes beyond piecemeal approaches and into analyses that allow leaders to address the complex system that gives rise to oppressive cultural practices. Equally significant is the understanding of the complexity of systemic oppression and how it deeply connects to other social struggles. For instance, systemic oppression has long forced a number of social groups—specifically, those of low socioeconomic status and BIPOC—into overcrowded,

poorly maintained neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are most vulnerable to dangerous crises (e.g., oil spills and hurricanes; Tierney, 2012) and have been shown to be disproportionately exposed to air pollution (Tessum et al., 2019) and infection and disease (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, 2018).

Intersecting Social Issues

Decades of research have documented the relationship between social inequities and disaster vulnerability. In reviewing the factors that contribute to vulnerability and resilience in disasters, Tierney (2006) stressed the importance of recognizing "disaster vulnerability as a function of both physical place and social conditions" that increase the likelihood of harm and ability to cope (p. 111). For example, at the time Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana, New Orleans was physically vulnerable, given its below-sea-level elevation and proximity to the Gulf of Mexico. Additionally, prior to the hurricane, it had become a majority-Black and poor city, with few employment and educational opportunities. Therefore, "large segments of the population of New Orleans were indeed highly vulnerable, both on an everyday basis and with respect to extreme events" (Tierney, 2006, p. 112). This research lends urgency to the importance of proactive policy work, especially because disaster relief has historically been inequitably distributed and/or blocked by political interests.

Researchers have found that race, class, and gender—which intersect at various points—are correlated with lower levels of postdisaster resilience (i.e., the handling of insurance applications, the distribution of business loans, the displacement of residents, and the monitoring of relief resources; Tierney, 2012). For example, Hurricane Katrina exposed existing inequities that manifest leading up to and following disasters in the United States. The state and federal response to Hurricane Katrina demonstrated that leadership had not actively considered the needs of a marginalized and under-resourced community when preparing policies and strategies for disaster relief. Katrina was by no means an isolated occurrence. A year after the catastrophic Hurricane Harvey hit the coast of Texas, survey research suggested that those in the poorest afflicted areas were struggling to recover, and people of color reported that they were not receiving necessary aid (Hamel, Wu, Brodie, Sim, & Marks, 2018). In the same vein, following the devastation of Hurricane Maria, though governmental aid was provided to the island of Puerto Rico, it fell short of what was necessary to recover (Meléndez & Venator-Santiago, 2018). Furthermore, years later, corruption among local island governance was revealed. Funds were misallocated and mismanaged, disaster supplies were hidden, and a lack of empathy for the diverse Puerto Rican community was made evident through the release of governmental communication (Ardila Sánchez, Houmanfar, & Alavosius, 2019; Meléndez & Venator-Santiago, 2018; Romo

& Florido, 2020). The choices leadership made both at the governmental and local levels clearly demonstrated that action is too often guided by personal values and not those of the overall population.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed long-standing health disparities. Emerging data suggest that non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic and Latinx, and Native American and Alaska Native persons have higher rates of hospitalization and death due to COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020) report that non-Hispanic Native American, Alaska Native, and Black individuals are hospitalized at a rate 5 times that of non-Hispanic Whites; and Hispanic and Latinx persons are hospitalized at a rate 4 times that of non-Hispanic Whites. In addition, data suggest these groups are more susceptible to other infections and diseases (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, 2018), increasing their risk of contracting COVID-19 (CDC, 2020). Even more discouraging is the fact that these trends are not new; "history shows that severe illness and death rates tend to be higher for racial and ethnic minority groups during public health emergencies" (CDC, 2020, para. 3). Health and health care disparities are influenced by many factors (e.g., access to health care, occupational exposure, quality of care), and leadership is responsible for promoting proactive, counterhegemonic conversations that transform policy for groups exposed to additional harm.

Instrumental decision makers and policy teams hold critical functions and should be privy to the literature demonstrating the relationship between social inequities and other social issues (e.g., climate change; Islam & Winkel, 2017). At the same time, these leaders need to understand that they influence the processes that contribute to these struggles, which means they need to be active in reconstructing them. When instrumental stakeholders and administrative leaders are educated on large-scale social trends, structural forces, and group characteristics related to preparedness for, responses to, and recovery from disasters, appropriate policies and governance can be implemented. Thus, it is critical that educational institutions not only model prosocial leadership but also prepare future leaders to think critically about systemic issues. The bulk of literature on leadership focuses on common characteristics, habits, and team building, but rarely does it focus on systemic approaches to addressing critical factors at the group *and* individual levels. As highlighted by Mattaini and Aspholm (2016), "we are in the midst of a period in which global change will be required if societies and many species, perhaps even our own, are to survive," and "it is hard to imagine a time when effective leadership is more necessary or will be more challenging" (p. 109).

Leadership Repertoires

When complex and seemingly unresolvable problems (i.e., wicked problems; Levin, Cashore, Bernstein, & Auld, 2012) manifest, a ubiquitous reaction is to look for historical

examples of resilience and intervention. A remarkable amount of research centers on the identification of leadership skills that may accomplish effective social change. By studying history and a number of influential leaders such as Ida B. Wells, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, Nelson Mandela, César Chávez, Angela Davis, and Tarana Burke—to name a few—researchers have identified a plethora of characteristics common to effective leaders. Malott (2016), for instance, identified four characteristics of great leaders: commitment to principle, independence, resilience, and consistency. Similarly, Krapfl and Kruja (2015) outlined a menu of leader behaviors, briefly highlighting the importance of communication skills across three aspects: communication of a bigger picture as it relates to an assigned task, clear communication, and listening.

Outside of behavior analysis, research has focused on the leader trait paradigm (Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009). With varying models or conceptualizations, the leader trait paradigm analyzes varying personality traits that make leaders effective, giving rise to personality tests and career assessments, such as the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (Richmond, 2008). Although the idea that certain behaviors and traits make someone more effective is supported by a vast body of literature, isolating particular behaviors and traits does not acknowledge context. We argue that a holistic perspective, with an eye on the functional relations between environment and behavior across time and context (Hughes, Barnes-Holmes, & Vahey, 2012, p. 22), would offer a more comprehensive approach toward cultural change. Moreover, the role of leadership communication, as well as collective organization (Mattaini, 2013) pertaining to cultural change, is worthy of further discussion.

Prosocial leaders serve a critical function in large behavioral systems. When they understand their function and the ways their decisions impact the behavioral system, they can be more successful in constructing change. Thus, we argue that a leader's efficacy is defined in context. Knowing about overlapping issues impacting members of society, with intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993), allows leaders to take a systemic approach to interventions, coordinating prosocial action within and across organizations. Additionally, they are able to create a culture of inclusiveness through shared identity and values (Atkins et al., 2019), empowering members within the group and mobilizing efforts through collective leadership.

A recent recommendation by Mattaini and Holtschneider (2017) suggested that collective leadership is necessary to address wicked problems. An analysis of social movements reveals that social justice work is rarely dependent on a single leader; "a densely interconnected network of leadership," also called collective leadership, is critical (Mattaini, 2013, p. 121). Collective leadership may refer to social movement organizers, student organizers, academic faculty, people joining

together to form unions, policy makers, and more. As organizers who operate across various levels of an organization, these individuals have the potential to influence both the masses and those who occupy the top positions in the organizational hierarchy (i.e., centralized leadership). This is especially likely when centralized leadership fails to adequately address systemic issues. That being said, the mobilization of collective leadership does not always come from the top; it may transpire from ineffective practices and conflict within an organization (e.g., inequitable pay, unsafe conditions, and poor communication) that mobilize employees or constituents, thus giving them power. After all, effective prosocial organizations should rely "on processes of shared power in which all voices are respected in deliberations and on established procedures to make decisions after all voices have been heard and to maintain discipline around those decisions, once made" (Mattaini, 2013, p. 129).

The problem of power relations in any institution or organization (e.g., religion, education, government, or sciences) has to do with control, coercion, or dominance of individuals operating under institutional contingencies (Foucault, 1982). In these sorts of relations, the exercise of power does not necessarily imply the absence of freedom. There is always the potential for individuals within the institution to influence one another (Foucault)—that is, the ability to collectively organize (Mattaini, 2013). Thus, freedom exists, albeit at varying levels, so long as alternative choices for reinforcement—and in some cases, countercontrol—are available (Goltz, 2020). As such, when analyzing social issues such as systemic oppression, the focus should be on shifting the balance of who is holding or exercising power, through collective leadership. Until then, systemic contingencies that maintain the status quo (i.e., power held by dominant groups) will survive through cultural hegemony (Gramsci, Hoare, & Nowell-Smith, 1971).

Cultural Milieu and Systemic Change

Styles of leadership and management are believed to function as important factors in the design and implementation of effective organizational contingencies. Leadership communication networks affect the ways by which coordinated or organized practices of organizational members bring about the generation of emergent products that in turn influence the cultural milieu. For instance, leadership and management practices may promote conflict among members of an organized group through environmental ambiguity that is defined as incomplete or inaccurate information regarding work-related matters that lack a clear or accurate description of contingencies and their context (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003).

As discussed in the recent culturo-behavior scientific literature (Ardila Sánchez et al., 2019; Houmanfar, Ardila Sánchez, & J. G.,, & Alavosius, M. P., in press; Houmanfar, Rodrigues, & Ward, 2010), the cultural milieu consists of contextual factors influencing the acquisition and maintenance of the collective behaviors of individuals interacting with the associated aggregate products (i.e., what is produced by the group). The design of a product and its generation rely not only on selection by consumers but also on the cultural milieu, which consists of the prevailing beliefs and values within the culture, as well as predictions about the future. Institutions and product designers study market trends and create consumer demand. In much the same way that rules can govern behavior before that behavior comes into contact with contingencies, societal values and beliefs about the future—be it the economy, a richer middle class, the competition, advocacy organizations, or other factors—can also guide the design of organizational products or the provision of human services, which consumers may or may not select or purchase. This relationship can be circular in that consumers' interaction with products and services often alters the cultural milieu, resulting in a different set of strategies for organizational practices. For example, Facebook has revolutionized the access and sharing of information and created an online marketplace plus media platform that retailers and media networks have utilized. Though touted for its benefits of enhanced communications and information sharing, the influence on the presidential election in 2016 via its shadowed use by special interest groups and foreign forces has negatively influenced Facebook's image among some users and tarnished consumer trust. This transformational change in the cultural function of Facebook has also negatively affected users' confidence in social network platforms as venues for sharing trustworthy information.

As institutions move toward values-based practices, they hold themselves accountable for creating organizational processes that better serve the communities they are a part of. Behavioral products such as texts, television shows, music, and art establish new relations among stimuli and evoke stimulus substitution and derived relational responses. When members of society are exposed to television shows depicting the same family dynamics, the same identities for certain professions, and the same identities for deviant or socially unacceptable events, verbal functions that participate in relational responding are established (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001). Therefore, behavioral products replicated by various groups and organizations influence the cultural milieu, and the cultural milieu influences behavior at the individual level. The relation in any system of analysis is not linear—every component interrelates.

Dismantling the racist and oppressive components of the cultural milieu that in turn will influence systemic change will require critical masses. Leadership will serve as a catalyst in this process, orchestrating teams to identify points of intervention across systems (Houmanfar et al., 2010; Mattaini, 2013).

Doing so will permit the institution to move beyond piecemeal approaches and into systemic strategic interventions guided by shared community values. Even more important is the need for leadership to transcend performative allyship and create a culture of inclusive accompaniment (Farmer, 2011; Fulambarker, 2016) through values that motivate the collective group to dismantle years of oppression and racism. Moreover, the literature indicates that the level of environmental ambiguity produced by leadership communication negatively affects group cooperation and increases resistance to change (Houmanfar, Rodrigues, & Smith, 2009; Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003; Kolvitz, 1997). All of this requires careful and strategic communication, a challenge that behavior science is equipped to address. In that regard, in the remaining sections of this article, we will explore how understanding communication networks and the nature of verbal rules may contribute to understanding the issues involved in reengineering behavioral systems in the face of continued socioeconomic and cultural demands. This discussion will include an analysis of leadership and the associated roles in relation to communication networks in organizations.

Leadership Communication and Systemic Change

One important skill common to both leaders and effective social movements, within and outside institutions, is communication. The role of communication has become "a common thread in behavioral account of leadership" (Houmanfar & Rodrigues, 2012, p. 22), some placing emphasis on how institutional rule generation can achieve change, and others focusing on persuasion, which may also include rule generation from a behavior-analytic perspective. Words, carefully crafted, are one of the greatest weapons against systemic oppression and racism, as they open a window onto others' realities. Therefore, leaders are often in critical positions to not only pinpoint how interrelated systems can be addressed but also learn how verbal behavior can be used to move communities to intervene in the oppressive systemic practices that have been upheld for centuries.

Institutional Rule Generation

Though the study of rule-governed behavior is not new to behavior analysis, recent conceptual and experimental analyses have expanded its relevance to the analysis of leadership communication. Peláez and Moreno (1999) proposed that the "concept of rule-governed behavior can be useful if it accommodates the description of complex behavior that is under the control of contingencies and can be modified by antecedent verbal stimuli (i.e., rules)" (p. 21). Moreover, they suggested that the function of a rule is to influence listener behavior. How the rule is

communicated (i.e., through statement and rhetoric) to listeners influences how listeners will respond (Ghezzi, Houmanfar, & Crosswell, 2020; Johnson, Houmanfar, & Smith, 2010; Rafacz, Houmanfar, Smith, & Levin, 2019; Smith, Houmanfar, & Louis, 2011; Smith, Houmanfar, & Denny, 2012).

Expanding on the work of Peláez and Moreno (1999), and examining rules from a relational frame theory (RFT) standpoint, Houmanfar et al. (2009) drew attention to the importance of communication networks. They suggested that "leaders have to take into consideration the ever-evolving external environment and verbally evaluate the potential adaptations the organization can make to [the possible future]" and, in doing so, "account for conflict of human values" (p. 270). Related to the forgoing discussion pertaining to factors influencing oppressive and racist cultural practices, leaders must fully analyze the system they are a part of, the feedback selecting their institutional practices, and the direction toward which they would like to move in order to generate institutional verbal stimuli, such as rules (e.g., organizational policies, bylaws, and values).

According to RFT, individuals learn to respond to a stimulus based on its relation to other stimuli. The ability to relate stimuli based on nonphysical, arbitrary properties is termed arbitrarily applicable relational responding (AARR) and is central to many everyday interactions. AARR, to be referred to as relational responding for the remainder of this article, occurs in varying patterns given one's history with particular contextual cues (see Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes, & McEnteggart, 2020, and Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes, Luciano, & McEnteggart, 2017, for a full account), and it is the hyperdimensional, multi-level dynamics of this type of verbal behavior that make communication complex. Through ongoing interactions with their social communities, individuals are able to learn a multitude of relations with varying implications. Relational responding can involve simple relations between just a few events (relating at one level) or relations between entire networks of events (another level). In fact, it is what lies "at the core of metaphor, allegory, anecdote, and parable" (Hayes et al., 2001, p. 74). Further, it is through relating, under the control of arbitrary contextual cues, that functions of one event (or relational network) transform related stimuli/events (people, places, and objects). Hence, the simple action of labeling a particular social group as "different" has the potential to transform the functions of that group, the stimuli related to that group, and anyone who identifies with that group. Considering stimulus functions are influenced by sociocultural practices upheld over centuries (i.e., the cultural milieu), many groups labeled as "other" have wrongfully[3] acquired stimulus functions that evoke hateful and racist behavior (e.g., racial slurs). This defining feature of language, the transformation of

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[3] Although we recognize the importance of using technical terminology, in this case, "wrongfully" refers to the overgeneralization of certain properties based on learned stereotypes.

stimulus functions, lies at the center of racism, permitting the development of a broad and harmful repertoire.

It has been argued that because verbal stimuli (i.e., stimuli participating in relating) acquire psychological functions, some consequences do not have to be directly contacted to influence behavior (Hayes et al., 2001). When contextual control over the transformation of stimulus functions is considered, rules, "in a less technical way, . . . [ensure] contact with a domain of events" (Hayes et al., 2001, p. 108), such as verbally constructed consequences. In the RFT literature, three types of rules are defined: plies, tracks, and augmentals. All three are useful in organizational rule generation and communication on the part of leadership. We will discuss augmentals as they relate to persuasion.

Persuasion

Although the phenomenon of persuasion has not been especially common to the literature of behavior analysis, a vestige of early work can be found in social psychology and, more recently, in behavioral accounts of language (see Table 1). For instance, Aristotle's term *ethos* refers to the character of the speaker and contributes to their social influence—how credible, eloquent, and well versed the speaker is (Aristotle, ca 350 B.C.E./2004). In social psychological literature, Cialdini (1984, 2011) reinvented this concept through the principle of authority, which refers to the importance of the speaker. In behavior analysis, researchers have considered speaker variables by referring to the credibility of the speaker (Hayes et al., 2001; Houmanfar et al., 2009). These conceptualizations have permitted the study of persuasion as a repertoire, enabling the identification of persuasive tactics that may be utilized to mobilize communities.

Elaborating on social psychological definitions and influenced by the work of behavior scientists, such as Mattaini (2013), we define *persuasion* as the use of verbal stimuli (i.e., vocal, written, auditory) to influence or move a listener's behavior toward preconstructed values, either individualized or shared. An emphasis on listener values or on shared listener–speaker values is necessary, because in some cases, persuasion is used unethically. This is not to be confused with coercion, which relies on the implementation of aversive consequences and is more likely when power holders are less skilled at using their power in noncoercive, nonaversive, or nonexploitative ways[4] (Goltz, 2020, p. 140). In the present formulation, we maintain that persuasion, of any form, differs from coercion when the speaker is not in a position (of power) to influence behavior through the

implementation of aversive consequences. For example, pointing to the effects of climate change may draw attention to aversive contingencies, but the speaker may not be the one who has influence over those contingencies. Further, the listener is free to choose to engage in values-based action. In recognition of the deterministic doctrine guiding most behavior-analytic research, in this sense, freedom refers to having access to resources and alternative responses that permit the individual to genuinely choose to take action in the absence of coercion or punishment (Baum, 2017; de Fernandes & Dittrich, 2018; Goldiamond, 1965, 1975a, 1975b, 1976, 2002). Furthermore, a genuine choice is one in which "critical consequences are available for different behavioral patterns" (de Fernandes & Dittrich, 2018, p. 12). To focus on the need to address inequitable systems, we use the term *prosocial persuasion* when the speaker works to align speaker–listener values, in order to construct shared values that relate to community wellness and benefit. Achieving prosocial behavior change through prosocial persuasion requires skill and a greater understanding of the principles of persuasion.

Cialdini (1984, 2016) formulated one of the most recent and prominent accounts of persuasion. Influenced by early literature and personal experimental endeavors, Cialdini (1984) developed six principles of persuasion: authority, consistency, reciprocation, liking, social proof, and scarcity. These principles are composed of multiple strategies and are collectively called *weapons of influence* because they are carefully constructed to evoke desired behavior. Furthermore, it is argued that an individual who (a) uses these principles, (b) understands when to use them, and (c) knows with whom to use them will be most effective at crafting a persuasive statement (Cialdini, 1984). Considering the robust line of research that this work has generated, Cialdini (1984, 2011, 2016) has provided a solid framework for researching the phenomenon of persuasion. More importantly, each of his principles can be understood from a behavior-analytic lens, placing focus on skills leaders can utilize to evoke prosocial behavior. To highlight a few, let us consider two of these principles.

First, the principle of *consistency* relies on the assumption that humans desire to be as consistent with existing commitments or behavior as possible (Cialdini, 1984). Similar to Aristotle's model of logos (see Table 1; Aristotle, ca 350 B.C.E./2004), consistency has been exemplified through a tactic called the "foot-in-the-door approach," where a speaker makes a small request in preparation for a larger one. According to this principle, if the listener has already complied with a small request, they are more likely to comply with a larger request. A behavioral account could explain this principle using literature on behavioral momentum, a metaphor that refers to the establishment of compliance when high-probability requests are followed by low-probability requests (Nevin, 1996). The effectiveness of this strategy has been demonstrated across various contexts, including high-intensity situations such as hostage negotiations (Hughes, 2009).

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[4] On average, police departments require 651 hr of basic training for individuals to join the police force (Institute for Criminal Justice Training Reform, 2020). A call to action to expand the "self-improvement" category in police academies was published by Blumberg, Schlosser, Papazoglou, Creighton, and Kaye (2019), but it is likely that police officers do not get enough training to learn useful communication skills.

Table 1 Proposed behavior-analytic accounts of persuasive tactics

Aristotelian perspective (Aristotle, ca 350 B.C.E./2004)	Social psychology (Cialdini, 1984, 2011, 2016)	Behavior-analytic accounts
Logos	Consistency	Behavioral momentum
Pathos	Reciprocation	Reinforcer sampling & cooperation
Ethos	Authority	Credibility of the speaker

Second, based on the finding that "people say yes to those they owe" (Cialdini, 2016, p. 153), the reciprocity principle suggests that listeners are more likely to comply under conditions in which the speaker/requester has already provided the individual with a gift or good of some sort. To illustrate, consider the example of taking a trip to the grocery store: warehouse stores will often provide samples to their customers with the intent of persuading those customers to buy the product they are sampling. Cialdini (2016) described this effect by suggesting that individuals feel obliged to return a favor. However, a closer look at behavioral literature can provide a supplemental explanation through reinforcer sampling and motivative augmenting (Hayes et al., 2001). Ayllon and Azrin (1968) conducted several experiments that implemented a reinforcer-sampling procedure to increase the reinforcing value of activities available to patients in a treatment facility. In short, the researchers set up conditions that prompted the patients to sample activities before being presented with the opportunity to fully engage in the event. The results of the study suggested that when the reinforcer-sampling procedure was implemented, more patients selected the activities as reinforcers, and patients who had already been selecting the activities did so more often. These findings indicate that merely a brief exposure to an event or tangible item can alter its reinforcing value and the frequency of relevant behavior. Of note here is the argument that motivative augmentals operate in a similar manner, a concept we will cover in more detail in what follows. Their effect, however, is achieved through derived relations and transformed functions instead of direct sampling (Hayes et al., 2001). This concept explains how verbal stimuli may present motivating functions of various consequences, evoking target behavior. For example, statements that emphasize prosocial values, or documentaries about the trafficking of Indigenous women, may bring human suffering into psychological proximity, occasioning prosocial behavior.

In developing a persuasive message, one must consider its function and how the message aligns with the values or history of the targeted audience. Mattaini (2013) suggested that in most cases, this can be accomplished by "offering (or clarifying) incentives for changing behavior in specific ways" (p.

168). Additionally, he posited that "nearly every campaign requires action that is intended to increase motivation for the struggle among the population and within the resistance group" (e.g., Black Lives Matter; Mattaini, 2013, p. 170). Therefore, leadership should establish rules that shift motivation. One such way is through the use of motivative augmentals (motivational statements): rules that "alter the degree to which previously established consequences function as reinforcers or punishers" (Hayes et al., 2001, p. 109). Drawing upon RFT, we will discuss three ways this can be accomplished.

When a leader generates persuasive and/or motivational statements, they emphasize established or verbally constructed consequences that appeal to the listener's values and reinforcers (Hayes et al., 2001). For example, in advocacy work aimed at establishing mentorship or pipeline programs, one might consider reaching out to educational leaders with a message like the following:

> You mentioned that as a first-generation college student, you have come to value education because it continues to offer opportunities for growth. Children in our community need mentors and role models like you, who can teach them to love learning. Are you willing to give back to your community?

This message highlights a previously constructed value of education and potentially increases related behavior such as donating time, resources, or money. Another effective tactic might be to highlight incoherence (Hayes et al., 2001). Consider the title Powell (2020) used in a recent blog: "All Lives Can't Matter Until Black Lives Matter Too." In eight words, the title highlights incongruent relations and elaborates on already-established relations. Many people say they value *all lives*; however, by perpetuating systemic racism, regardless of intention, they are not demonstrating that they value *all lives*—certainly, not Black lives.[5] This form of motivative augmenting is similar to the concept of cognitive

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[5] Considering the origins of the phrase "all lives matter," we acknowledge that it is often used to dismiss the Black Lives Matter movement. The purpose of this example is not to reduce the complexity of its usage or to discuss intention but to provide an example of incoherence.

dissonance—a term used to describe the psychological discomfort one feels when cognitions or actions are incoherent (Festinger, 1957)—but places a heavier emphasis on incongruent verbal relations. Finally, the "simplest form of rhetoric involves the weakening of psychological functions maintained by verbal relations" (Hayes et al., 2001, p. 204). This has far-reaching implications, as it is built around the premise that relations are not directly eliminated; instead, one transforms the functions of the stimulus in question through the establishment of new relations. Thus, if a person learns stereotypes about a group of people, simply saying that the stereotype is incorrect may not be effective.[6] Verbal relations are altered through exposure to alternative pieces of information that are inconsistent with previously established relations and can be verified through direct and indirect experiences. This exposure may require special attention because the dimensions of rhetoric are just as pertinent as the need to carefully craft the message.

re special attention because the dimensions of rhetoric are just as pertinent as the need to carefully craft the message.

When the occasion to act and bring together a community to address important social issues arises, critical dimensions of persuasion such as the source of the message, the timing, and the medium/form are important for leadership consideration. *Source* refers to the person conducting the delivery of a given message. Though every organization has leaders, as described previously, credibility is essential. For instance, a university's president may be called a leader; however, in some cases groups of well-respected academic faculty and deans may have the greatest impact on other faculty and staff. Second, how frequently leaders allude to values, mention a particular issue in a speech, or offer opportunities for community members to engage is critical. By simply attending a church sermon or speech given by a political candidate or activist, one can bear witness to the ways in which points are repeated and emphasized for added effect. For illustrative purposes, let us briefly consider one of the most iconic addresses in history: the address Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, titled "I Have a Dream." In one small section, Dr. King repeated the statement "I have a dream" 8 times, followed by 10 repetitions of the words "let freedom ring" (The Avalon Project, n.d.). Dr. King, as one of the most influential individuals known to the civil rights movement, was able to appeal to his audience's experiences, values, and dreams in just a few minutes through the power of words. Last, the medium or form of the rhetoric should thoroughly be considered. Some advocacy leaders use audio in the form of podcasts; others use printed stories and art. One of the most

unique and interesting abilities known to human organisms is their verbal repertoire—specifically, their ability to tell stories across mediums and through art. In a TEDx (2014) talk, Dr. Tammy Brown described art as a weapon for social change (Brown, 2014). We agree with this statement and suggest that art as a verbal stimulus, whether it be through paintings, music, poetry, or narrative, has the power to occasion values-based action.

Narrative

Storytelling and narrative can be traced back, as a cultural practice, to the beginning of human social interactions. They have provided comfort in times of darkness, knowledge in times of need, and motivation in times of struggle. Narrative and persuasion have also been key skills lawyers use in the courtroom, and critical race theorists have emphasized their usefulness in building a case (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). As described in detail previously, those looking to alter verbal relations can present new information through counter-storytelling, altering already-established relations. Furthermore, storytelling can be the "cure for silencing" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 20), giving marginalized or disenfranchised groups a voice and, in some cases, empowering those who feel isolated or feelings of blame related to their situation to learn that they are not alone in their suffering. Many of the persuasive skills already discussed are fundamental to narrative; however, one form of narrative that has not been given due diligence is narrative on canvas (or any other surface). Malott (2019) provided a detailed account of the interlocking behaviors of muralists and painters that occasioned a cultural cusp, the muralist movement; however, to date, murals as stories that serve as motivating variables for prosocial action have not been discussed. In the time of social media and the ability to use technology for social change, it would behoove any leader to consider this form of narrative in their communication.

A drive down the streets of East Los Angeles provides some of the most vibrant and moving pieces of art one could encounter. With each paint stroke, a piece of Latinx history comes to life, and standing in front of one piece alone allows the viewer to derive an endless number of relations. Sometimes, the viewer derives the story the artist intended to tell; other times, they derive a new story, a story from their own perspective, motivating them to engage in prosocial behavior that contributes to the well-being and survival of their community. It can be argued that in many cases, murals, paintings, sketches, and other similar pieces of art serve as motivative augmentals, bringing viewers into psychological proximity to previously established consequences. Additionally, they provide the opportunity for individuals to psychologically reaffirm their values and, subsequently, take action. The beauty of art on canvas is that it tells stories through metaphor, realism, and symbolism. For example, an image depicting a raised

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[6] This idea also relates to the issue researchers have pointed out regarding cultural knowledge/competence training, where associating groups of individuals with certain cultural practices may perpetuate stereotypes (Esquierdo-Leal, Jacobs, & Strauss, 2020; Stone & Moskowitz, 2011).

fist has been used in activism for decades, more recently flooding social media news feeds. The raised fist has come to symbolize solidarity and support and, for many, represents BIPOC, social movements, activism pertaining to the murders of Black community members, and more. Thus, simply seeing the raised fist may evoke an entire network of events given one's history. Understanding the effects of art on canvas, paper, or any other surface will serve useful to leaders engaged in social movements and cultural change. A simple values slogan can easily be replaced with an image that has acquired perceptual functions that go above and beyond words. Moreover, careful consideration of all of the aforementioned tactics for prosocial persuasion may permit the development of educational resources that alter relations and practices that harm marginalized communities.

As we have argued throughout this article, prosocial leadership for social change requires a systemic, values-based strategy. To summarize, the critical components of this leadership approach include (a) studying the cultural milieu and increasing awareness of social issues that affect their institution; (b) understanding how social issues and social identities intersect; (c) promoting active representation through inclusive hiring and institutional decision-making practices; (d) generating institutional verbal stimuli (i.e., policies, rules, and values) that create equitable, just, and inclusive practices; (e) communicating those policies and rules through persuasion and narrative to establish shared values; (f) implementing institutional analysis teams that identify points of departure and intervention within and external to the institution (including conflicting values and training); (g) identifying structures to measure change within the organization; and (h) putting plans in place to reevaluate processes.

Conclusion

The United States, and the world for that matter, faces a plethora of issues that require social movement. To reduce the effects of climate change, address the dangers of terrorism (including White supremacy and police brutality), and reduce the perpetuation of systemic oppression through the abuse of power, the development of a prosocial approach toward leadership is necessary. This calls for leaders who are able to bring communities together in solidarity and create inclusive environments that encourage members of society to engage in values-based action that moves us, as a collective, toward shared prosocial values. As discussed, effective leadership relies on a consistent focus on the design and implementation of systemic contingencies that impact behavioral change within and outside the organization. Communication and values-oriented decision making are essential. As the forerunners of organizations, leaders must take notice of verbal networking systems that can promote behavioral change through authentic rhetoric and collective organizing. In doing so, they will be in a prime position to begin implementing the transformative change that the world needs now and well into the future.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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