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# Nathan H. Azrin (1930–2013)

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Nathan H. Azrin, our long-time friend and colleague, died on March 29, 2013, at the age of 82. He was professor emeritus at Nova Southeastern University in Florida. He was an enormous figure in both experimental and applied research, and throughout his life his work was characterized by rigor, relevance, and creativity.

Nate was born on November 26, 1930, in Boston, Massachusetts, to Harold and Esther Azrin. He graduated from Boston University in 1951 and received a doctorate in psychology from Harvard in 1956 as a student of B. F. Skinner. Before coming to Nova Southeastern he was director of the Department of Treatment Development at Anna State Hospital in Illinois and lecturer and professor at Southern Illinois University (1958–1980). As a research psychologist at Anna State, he initiated a series of basic animal laboratory studies that resulted in a monumental contribution to the analysis of the effects and side effects of punishment and other processes (e.g., extinction, satiation, differential reinforcement of other behaviors). His pioneering work provides the scientific underpinnings of what we know about punishment and helps us understand human reactions to trauma, pain, and fear as they activate anger, rage, aggression, and withdrawal.

We can barely highlight the peaks of the mountainous range of his accomplishments. A prime example of one such peak was Ayllon and Azrin's work at Anna State Hospital, where they created a system that relied heavily on all the known and empirically determined features of effective positive reinforcement. Their seven-year collaboration produced a book, *The Token Economy: A Motivational System for Therapy and Rehabilitation* (Ayllon & Azrin, 1968, Appleton Century Crofts), that revealed their creative work with psychiatric patients. Within 10 years of its publication, the token economy had been applied to diverse populations (e.g., from children to the elderly) and settings (e.g., military boot camp, college campuses, schools, prisons, business, industry, and the community at large) and with a stunning array of goals (e.g., academic skills, athletic performance, safety skills, and conservation). Another well-known application was the toilet training program for adults with mental retardation, which was redesigned for young children with clinical dysfunction. The resulting book, *Toilet Training in Less Than a Day* (with Richard Foxx, 1974, Simon & Schuster), was translated into several languages and systematically guided parents on how to make that challenge easier.

Nate was interested in alleviating suffering and making a palpable difference in people's lives. He designed training procedures for individuals with challenging behaviors such as self-injury, behavioral stereotypy, stuttering, tics, hair pulling, nail biting, Tourette's disorder, eating disorders, and depression. He developed techniques, including time out, habit reversal methods through the use of incompatible behaviors and overcorrection, and positive practice, all of which were widely used. Later he focused on more complex dysfunctional behavior patterns and designed procedures such as reciprocity counseling for marital problems, the use of "Job Clubs" to secure employment, community reinforcement to treat alco-

holism, and more recently, family behavior therapy to treat adolescent drug abuse. Nate was committed to experimental evaluation that allowed him to incorporate procedures that came from classical and operant research as well as from imitation, cognition, instruction, and experiential learning.

Highlighting some of his accomplishments does not do justice to him. To those privileged to work with him, he revealed a disarming simplicity in generating creative ideas and interventions. Witnessing his creative process was comparable to watching Picasso quickly stroking some lines, adding a few colors, and suddenly producing a face, a mood, a message, and something truly novel. Nate was an idealist. From the time he entered the field of psychology he wanted to change it so that it would be more outcome oriented. As it happened, he achieved that dream.

Nate received many professional awards (e.g., the American Psychological Association's Award for Distinguished Scientific Applications of Psychology and the American Psychological Society's James McKeen Cattell Fellow Award for scientific applications of psychology). He also served as president of two large membership organizations (e.g., Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy, 1975; Association for Behavior Analysis, 1976). By the late 1970s, he was designated as one of the most-cited psychologists ever (*American Psychologist*, 1978, Enderler et al., pp. 1064–1082). His extensive publication record included more than 200 journal articles and 20 books or book chapters for professional and lay audiences. Some of the books were co-authored with his wife (of over 60 years) and colleague psychologist Victoria Azrin Besalel.

In his later years, Nate took up dancing as a hobby that enabled him to celebrate his infectious *joie de vivre*. He and Vicky invented a new dance (the Lib-Vicky dance) that is creative, playful, and "rigorous" in that it followed 12 "psychological" principles. (A video of this dance and a video of Nate reflecting on his personal and professional life can be found online at YouTube.com, and an autobiographical video, at [www.nathanazrin.com](http://www.nathanazrin.com).)

Nate is survived by his wife Vicky, his four children Rachel, Michael, David, and Richard and their spouses and children, and his siblings Violet, Morris, Gertrude, and Dorothy. He was predeceased by his brother Jack and sister Silvia. For those of us who knew Nate, his passing is an enormous personal and collegial loss. For those who did not know him, his interventions have changed and continue to improve the world of treatment, education, and rehabilitation for so many different populations. What a privilege to have known him and to have been exposed to his mind and wit. The loss as well as his impact will be enduring.

Teodoro Ayllon  
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independent practice, Atlanta, Georgia*

Alan E. Kazdin  
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