

THE PLACE OF BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS IN THE ACADEMY

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As Lawrence Fraley notes, the place of behavior analysis in the academy has long bothered many behavior analysts. He correctly, if somewhat pejoratively, points out that we have never been comfortable in departments of psychology. This discomfort has stemmed both from our failure to thrive in such academic environments as we might wish and from our treatment by colleagues who work within different world views.

My own struggle with this issue began not in graduate school but as a faculty member. During a visit by Skinner to the University of Florida, I asked him what he thought the relationship should be between behavior analysis and psychology. His answer: "Not much." When I organized a symposium on this issue at the Association for Behavior Analysis convention in 1984, the speakers (Jack Michael, Hank Pennypacker, Charles Catania, and myself) split more or less evenly on our positions about staying in or leaving psychology and psychology departments. Since then, many behavior analysts have struggled to reconcile idealistic desires and practical realities. After much deliberation, the following analysis seems to be what it comes down to for me.

I would rather that behavior analysis had emerged within academic biology, though we would probably have faced some of the same struggles in that discipline. Although I enjoyed debating with my psychology colleagues early in my career as I developed and refined my own convictions, I long ago grew tired of the repetitive and seemingly endless misunderstandings and disagreements. Once I had figured out how to address my colleagues' ignorance about behavior analysis, at least to my own satisfaction, the conflicts were no longer instructive or even entertaining. What was left was a constant struggle for departmental happiness and security.

In a way, however, wishing for a new history is too easy. Like a discontented teenager, of course we would prefer a different family. Having not experienced the alternative of living in biology departments, it seems to have everything to offer. We would prefer to be part of the natural sciences, which share our world view (or so we imagine). We would be respected for our scientific and technological accomplishments, we assume, and be misunderstood only to the extent that we failed to make our case effectively.

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REVIEW AND COMMENT ON FRALEY

Alas, we are doomed only to understand the effects of our history, not to revise it. Most of us seem to be left with the stark choice of either struggling to remake psychology or leaving it. Convincing our departmental colleagues of the error of their ways is an appealing option. Proselytizing is satisfying work when successful, and behavior analysts have always been known for their evangelical fervor. We are less well known for our conversions, however, especially at the local level.

There are sound reasons for continuing to fight the good fight instead of escaping to greener pastures. My colleague, Peter Harzem, points out that we should not be so quick to give up the subject matter of psychology. What he means is that we should not abandon to psychology the challenge of studying those phenomena underlying its problematic language. We have as much right to those phenomena as our mentalistic peers. We might even argue that we owe it to science, not to mention our own discipline, to give real psychological phenomena the kind of attention they deserve and are likely to receive only from behavior analysts.

Of course, the most frequently noted reason for staying within academic psychology is that psychology departments control all of the institutional goodies. They have the faculty lines, the departmental budgets, the students, and the credibility required to compete with other departments. Good opportunities to start new academic departments in established fields are rare and always tied to local circumstances. The chances of being allowed to start a new department in an apparently *new* discipline, particularly in the social sciences, might be characterized as remote at most institutions of higher education.

Nevertheless, the possibility of leaving psychology's inhospitable nest to build our own academic home remains appealing. Many behavior analysts would love to be part of such a venture, in spite of its challenges. Because few will ever encounter this opportunity, there is no reason not to encourage the occasional department-building enterprise. Such efforts might be considered probe experiences, whose findings may guide the decisions of others. However, this hardly seems a viable strategy for developing behavior analysis.

Although, like Skinner's youthful boast, quoted in Fraley's article, we might like to think we can change psychology to suit our views, it has proven as challenging as it might be for the unhappy adolescent to change the personalities of his or her family members. Yet, because this task often seems Herculean, we need not admit defeat. Endless patience may be required, but we probably have the best chance of making progress by working from within. Steady progress in addressing, in our own conceptual and methodological style, the research issues we may think mistreated by psychology will be our best offense.

Meanwhile, our mantra must continue to be "The truth will out!" We cannot know how long it may take before our approach earns broader appreciation and our lives in psychology departments grow more enjoyable and secure. Those of us who have been fighting the good fight for more than 25 years can appreciate the considerable impact that behavioral philosophy and methods have had within psychology, while remaining frustrated by the distance yet to go. For the next 25 years, there seems little choice for most academic behavior analysts but to persevere

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within psychology's dysfunctional family. There is good reason to be hopeful that we will yet realize our desires for influencing the way psychology defines and approaches its subject matter.