

MARKETING BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS REQUIRES (REALLY) DIFFERENT TALK: A CRITIQUE OF KOHN (2005) AND A(NOTHER) CALL TO ARMS

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ABSTRACT: Behavior analysis has a lengthy history of misrepresentation by both academic and popular-press authors, and several suggestions have been offered regarding how best to market behavior analysis. Although behavior analysts have made some advances in such marketing, significant obstacles remain. One obstacle is Kohn's (2005) book, *Unconditional Parenting*, which argues against adopting a behavioral approach to parenting. A related obstacle is that there have not been any behavior-analytic replies to Kohn, nor have there been any objections to Kohn by non-behavioral authors. These latter points are disappointing given the nature of Kohn's inaccurate statements (e.g., that the behavioral approach entails that parental love is made contingent on appropriate child behavior). This paper provides a critique of Kohn by noting his misrepresentations of behavior analysis and discussing their potential sources. This paper also discusses the marketing of behavior analysis in the context of Kohn. Despite his attacks against behavior analysis, we describe how Kohn's general views on parenting actually could be strengthened by considering an accurate description of behavior-analytic principles and philosophy. By providing such a description, we hope to improve future characterizations of behavior analysis by non-behavioral authors. That is, in addition to discussing other marketing techniques, we emphasize the need for behavior analysts to engage the interests and passions of popular-press authors, but with considerable attention given to our language.

KEYWORDS: behaviorism, Skinner, parenting, Kohn, reinforcement

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Historically, the field of behavior analysis has been misunderstood and misrepresented, both in and outside academics (e.g., Morris, 2009; Todd & Morris, 1983, 1992). It generally is agreed that behavior analysis has an “image” problem (e.g., Reitman, 1998) and is in dire need of more effective marketing (e.g., Bailey, 1991). In this marketing context, it probably is unfortunate that Skinner rarely replied to his critics (e.g., Skinner, 1983). Other behavior analysts, however, have responded to attacks and discussed various techniques to enhance the image of our field. Some of these techniques include altering our language when we speak to laypeople and other professionals (e.g., Bailey, 1991; Friman, 2006; Geller, 2002), more effectively utilizing the resources of our professional organizations (e.g., Morris, 1985), and engaging the media much more comprehensively (e.g., Morris, 1985; Reitman, 1998). There also may be considerable value in engaging more deeply and widely in inter-disciplinary inquiry such that behavior analysis is accepted by the academic community to a greater extent. Lastly, we should remain persistent in advancing our views (e.g., Geller, 2002; Heward, 2008), particularly when addressing misrepresentations of our field (e.g., Staddon, 2004).

The efficacy of some of the aforementioned techniques can be assessed in the context of the popular-press author Alfie Kohn. Nearly two decades ago, Kohn authored the book, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes* (1993). In that book, Kohn sought to undermine the empirical and conceptual foundations of reinforcement theory and, in doing so, limit the adoption of reinforcement-based approaches to behavior change in settings as diverse as school, home, and employment. Reitman (1998) comprehensively reviewed Kohn's misunderstandings of reinforcement theory in particular and behavior analysis in general. Reitman described the motivation for his review partly in terms of the potential harm to the field of behavior analysis if Kohn's arguments were taken without criticism. For example, because Kohn's book was written for the general public, its presentation may enhance opposition to the adoption of behavior-analytic treatments in a wide audience. Reitman's argument, in part, was that the public ought to be better informed of the inaccuracies in Kohn's description of behavior analysis. Unfortunately, despite Reitman's thorough treatment, his review failed in terms of discouraging Kohn from continuing his negative portrayal of behavior analysis. Specifically, Kohn extended and refined his earlier presentation to focus solely on the harmful effects of adopting a behavioral approach to parenting in the book, *Unconditional Parenting: Moving from Rewards and Punishment to Love and Reason* (2005). As suggested by the title, “conditional parenting” is labeled as an approach based in

behavioral principles and philosophy and contrasted with an approach comprised of love and reason (i.e., “unconditional parenting”).

Nearly seven years have passed since Kohn (2005) accused behavior analysts of espousing strategies that encourage parents to teach their children that they will be loved only if they act according to the rules set forth by their parents. In these seven years, there have not been any behavior-analytic replies to Kohn, nor have there been any replies by non-behavioral psychologists that find utility in a behavior-analytic approach (e.g., behaviorally oriented clinical psychologists). These facts should disturb every behavior analyst. The absence of a reply by behavior analysts may suggest to individuals who read Kohn that his arguments are valid. The absence of a reply by non-behavioral psychologists may suggest that they view Kohn’s arguments as persuasive, and may constitute yet further evidence that our marketing is in need of considerable improvement.

To an academic audience, Fodor (2003) recently presented “behaviorism...as a parody” (Staddon, 2004, p. 118). Importantly, in his response entitled, “A call to arms,” Staddon notes:

I must confess that as I read this piece by Fodor, my first reaction was amazement that something almost self-evidently nonsensical—or at least going wildly beyond the scientific evidence—could be published at all, let alone published in a respected journal with a readership much wider than *The Behavior Analyst*. But my conclusion after reflection was much worse. If this sort of stuff can be accepted as self-evidently true, behaviorism really is in trouble. We are in trouble not because behaviorism is wrong, but because we have drawn our wagons into a circle and now speak—and shoot—mainly at one another rather than at the wide world outside. Self-criticism is great, but critical misrepresentation by nonbehaviorists requires more. It is time to take articles like Fodor’s seriously—to respond to them, rather than ignoring them in the vain hope that truth unaided will prevail. (p.118)

The present paper, motivated in part by Staddon (2004) and Bailey (1991), has two purposes. First, we review the content of Kohn (2005), highlight his misrepresentations of behavior analysis, and discuss the potential sources of these misrepresentations. Second, we discuss the marketing of behavior analysis in the context of Kohn. We illustrate how his views on parenting actually may be strengthened by considering behavior-analytic research and theory. This illustration is advanced in hopes of improving future characterizations of our field by non-behavioral authors. Specifically, we discuss the value of engaging the interests and passions of popular-press authors as a way to enhance our image.

Importantly, however, we expand on the call by Bailey, and others (e.g., Friman, 2006; Geller, 2002), for the use of a different language when presenting ourselves to these authors. Finally, we discuss the role of inter-disciplinary inquiry in the acceptance of behavior analysis.

Unconditional Parenting: A Summary

Kohn (2005) offers a brief introduction by noting the social significance of, and difficulty involved in, parenting, and by foreshadowing his primary argument about the misguided nature of a behavioral approach to parenting. He emphasizes that the behavioral approach focuses on short-term, rather than long-term, parenting goals. According to Kohn, parents following the advice of behavior analysts only would rely on techniques that induce short-term compliance (e.g., “mindless obedience”), such that children comply only to gain immediate rewards, or to avoid immediate unpleasant events (e.g., “compulsive compliance”). By learning to comply in this way, children do not learn important skills such as those related to the term, self-discipline. Following this introduction, Kohn summarizes (in Chapter 1, p. 19) the key components of unconditional and conditional parenting (see his Table 1). The purpose of the first 6 chapters of the book is to elaborate on these characterizations by describing the harmful effects of conditional parenting.

Kohn (2005) presents conditional parenting by connecting its foundations to the “...school of thought known as behaviorism, which is commonly associated with the late B. F. Skinner” (p. 13). He mistakenly notes that such an approach only focuses on behavior, as opposed to the organism as a whole (i.e., reasons, thoughts, feelings). According to Kohn, by focusing only on a child’s behavior, conditional parenting necessarily entails loving children only for “what they do” such that parental love is made contingent on appropriate behavior. For Kohn, this approach is negative in that it presumes that children will not behave appropriately unless external contingencies are enacted. Because conditional parenting involves the creation of such external contingencies, parents are controlling their children as opposed to navigating them through the course of development. Most importantly, then, conditional parenting, which Kohn mistakenly equates with the foundations of behavior analysis, entails the use of parenting techniques that compel children to believe that their parents only will love them if they act according to the rules and contingencies set forth by the parents.

Kohn (2005) then describes how operant punishment and operant reinforcement should be equated with withholding and providing love, respectively. He equates timeout from positive reinforcement with “love

withdrawal” and presents its important negative consequences on child development (e.g., poor moral development, decreased self-esteem, and increased anxiety). He describes the punishment process as ineffective at improving behavior and counterproductive in that it makes people angry and more defiant. He notes that using punishment models the use of power and force, damages the parent-child bond, distracts children from learning the lesson the parent hopes to impart, and, over time, it may lose its efficacy. In his discussion involving reinforcement, he reiterates several of his earlier claims (Kohn, 1993) including how reinforcement inhibits appropriate moral development, erodes intrinsic motivation, and transforms children into “praise junkies” who rely on others for validation.

Chapter 7 presents unconditional parenting in detail by introducing Kohn’s (2005) thirteen principles. Kohn notes that his principles are not a step-by-step “recipe” for parenting; instead, they are guidelines for becoming more aware of how these interactions might impact the child and parent-child relationship. He suggests that parents should prioritize the relationship with their child and urges them to reflect on their own motives and behaviors. He advises parents to reconsider whether they are presenting reasonable demands to their children. Most importantly, he encourages parents to consider the long-term goals for their children.

Kohn’s (2005) final chapters expand on his principles of unconditional parenting. He suggests that parents focus on three important tasks: showing unconditional love, providing children with the opportunity to make choices and be included in the decision-making process, and promoting a child’s moral development by modeling and encouraging perspective-taking. Kohn focuses on expressing unconditional love in three ways: by minimizing the number, scope, and intensity of criticisms, by eliminating threats, bribes, and behavior-specific praise, and by maximizing positive interactions with children. He concludes by noting that even though most parents have been using conditional techniques, they have not harmed their young children irreparably. Kohn encourages all readers, regardless of their current practices, to examine their own actions to discern how these practices can be improved.

Unconditional Parenting: Weaknesses

Although there are numerous specific problems with Kohn (2005), they arguably can be described in terms of two general and related weaknesses. First, Kohn argues that conditional parenting is based on, or at least closely connected to, behavioral principles and is consistent with the underlying philosophy of behavior analysis. Second, Kohn either misunderstands, or misrepresents, the

field of behavior analysis. The first weakness is problematic in terms of presenting a conceptually coherent account of his primary topic. It also is problematic if readers unfamiliar with behavior analysis believe that conditional parenting is *the* behavior-analytic approach to parenting. The second weakness is problematic in terms of its more specific and practical consequences. That is, due to his misunderstandings or misrepresentations, Kohn often presents flawed “behavioral” scenarios. In addition, there are instances in which his recommendations, said to be inconsistent with a behavioral approach, not only can be understood through a behavioral lens but can be improved by appealing to actual behavior-analytic research.

Kohn (2005) never explicitly equates conditional parenting with authoritarian parenting (e.g., Baumrind, Larzelere, & Owens, 2010); however, he often describes them as having similar features, particularly in terms of their “controlling” aspects. In the parenting literature, across several decades (but see Baumrind et al., 2010), parenting practices have been characterized such that parents could be described primarily as authoritarian, permissive, authoritative, or uninvolved (e.g., Baumrind, 1967, 1968, 1972). In general terms, authoritarian parents are highly demanding of their children, requiring great levels of obedience, but are not highly responsive and flexible; permissive parents are moderately responsive and not very demanding; authoritative parents are both highly demanding and highly responsive; and uninvolved parents are the least demanding and responsive. The authoritarian style involves the harsh, controlling techniques Kohn argues against and that are related (e.g., Baumrind et al., 2010) to several of the aforementioned negative outcomes (e.g., low self-esteem, increased anxiety and depression). Importantly, there is no reasonable argument supporting the claim that such practices are recommended by behavior analysts (e.g., Christophersen & Mortweet, 2003; Kazdin, 2008; McIntire, 1999; see O’Dell [1974] for an early review of a behavioral approach to parenting).

Kohn’s (2005) presentation of behavioral principles and philosophy does not reflect an accurate understanding of behavior analysis. He demonstrates this misunderstanding in three general ways: by repeating several of his earlier flawed arguments (i.e., Kohn, 1993) described by Reitman (1998), and others (e.g., Strain & Joseph, 2001), by presenting these flawed arguments in a more expansive way, and by introducing novel, and perhaps more egregious, commentary. It first is worth noting Kohn’s (1993) five critical misunderstandings of behavior analysis (Reitman, 1998) repeated in this more recent book. Reitman’s evidence-based claims countering these misunderstandings are not presented here for the sake of brevity. First, Kohn claims that behavior-analytic research only has occurred with animal subjects and, thus, is irrelevant to humans (see also Flora, 2004; reviewed

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by Doughty & Shields, 2009). Second, he states that behavior analysts consider children passive agents to be manipulated. Third, he asserts that behavioral methods are used in educational settings only to generate obedience (see also Miltenberger, 2007; Vargas, 2009). Fourth, Kohn states repeatedly that a behavioral approach is used to change behavior without concern for its causes or motives (see also, Carr, 1977, 1993). Fifth, he suggests that behavior analysts are unconcerned about the protection and welfare of children in that their freedom of choice is eliminated, as behavior analysts bribe and/or threaten children to ensure compliance and obedience.

Not only does Kohn (2005) repeat these mistaken claims, he also expands some of them in the context of parenting. Arguably Kohn's most critical confusion about the field of behavior analysis is his insistence that behavior analysts do not consider the reasons, motives, or causes of behavior (i.e., that behavior analysts only are interested in behavior itself). This confusion compels Kohn to claim that unconditional parenting, with its focus on the child as a whole, must be incompatible with a behavioral approach. Kohn also expands his earlier claims that behavioral techniques only are useful at promoting compliance, and that behavior analysts only view children as passive agents. His former stance compels him to remark often that the behavioral approach, then, only is helpful in engendering short-term (and sometimes mindless) obedience. In other words, his narrow view about the range of potency in behavioral techniques prevents him from observing that these techniques also can be applied to the skills he deems outside the realm of simple reinforcement principles (e.g., self-control, perspective taking). His claim that behavior analysts view children as passive agents prevents him from understanding how, from a behavioral standpoint, parents and children, together, can create and maintain contingencies that are mutually rewarding (i.e., representative of parenting practices labeled authoritative).

Kohn's (2005) misunderstandings of behavior analysis also are observed in his introduction of novel, and perhaps more egregious, commentary. It may be surprising to some behavior analysts to read that their approach teaches parents to love their children only when they act appropriately. Recall that, according to Kohn, a parent employing timeout from positive reinforcement is said to be withdrawing their love, and a parent is told only to provide affection contingent on appropriate behavior. To be as fair as possible to Kohn in regards to this issue, his words vacillate between two positions. On the one hand, they can be interpreted in such a manner (i.e., the withdrawing and giving of love) when he argues that a core assumption of the conditional approach is that parental love is a "privilege to be earned" (i.e., see his Table 1). On the other hand, Kohn also

discusses how the impact of parents' actions towards their children may be different than the parents intended. That is, a child may describe the effects of timeout from positive reinforcement in a way that indicates s/he feels s/he is not loved by the parent, even if the parent very much loves the child and only aimed to reduce some undesirable behavior. Given the emphasis in behavior analysis on the consequences of behavior, behavior analysts certainly would be alarmed if the effects of their treatments resulted in children displaying the adverse effects described by Kohn. However, two points must be remembered. First, a comprehensive behavior-analytic approach to parenting was not described by Kohn. Recommendations to parents by behavior analysts do not focus solely on obtaining short-term compliance through repeated use of timeout procedures (e.g., Christophersen & Mortweet, 2003; Kazdin, 2008; McIntire, 1999). Second, the effects of the strategies recommended to parents would be monitored such that undesirable outcomes would be known and used to alter the recommended strategies (e.g., Christophersen & Mortweet, 2003; Kazdin, 2008; McIntire, 1999).

Another weakness in Kohn (2005), that he does not offer *specific* alternatives to conditional-parenting practices, probably is related to his misunderstandings of behavior analysis. By mistakenly labeling a behavior-analytic approach to parenting as conditional, and recommending its elimination, Kohn discards techniques that not only could be useful to parents but actually could be viewed as consistent with his broad framework. His advice, given in general principles without specifics, describes well how parents should approach their overall relationship with their children (e.g., always have respect, offer choices, essentially to love their children while also helping them to develop socially important skills). However, his advice offers little to families struggling with behavior problems, nor does it explain what to do should his approach fail to encourage safe, healthy, and appropriate behaviors. In the end, while he may have the best intentions in developing his general principles, Kohn lacks specific techniques and advice to help parents learn to discipline their children effectively and lovingly. As discussed further below, Kohn could have described his general principles, illustrated how they are consistent with behavior-analytic philosophy, and ended with specific suggestions about parenting practices consistent with behavior-analytic research.

Unconditional Parenting: Strengths

Despite the aforementioned weaknesses, at least four strengths can be noted in Kohn (2005). First, Kohn discusses several factors which contribute to the development of an individual's parenting style, and he acknowledges the

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difficulty of altering this style. Second, he consistently encourages parents to consider the child's perspective. Third, he discusses the potential harmful effects of "punishment." Fourth, Kohn's unconditional-parenting principles certainly reflect the types of parent-child interactions any behavior analyst would value.

Kohn (2005) considers many factors which might lead to the development and maintenance of 'conditional-parenting' techniques. Among others, he includes having been raised by parents using such an approach as well as religious and societal beliefs concerning childrearing, justice, and control. The former factor certainly relates to behavioral research on observational learning (e.g., Chance, 2003), and the latter factor seems related to the powerful role of social and verbal contingencies in the development of complex behavior (e.g., Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001).

Kohn (2005) consistently urges parents to consider their children's perspective in the various situations in which they find themselves. Kohn states that employing this method shows respect for the child and encourages the parent to be aware of the causes or motivations of the child's behavior. Such awareness is said to increase the degree of compassion and understanding parents will have for potential undesirable behavior. This method also models perspective taking for the child, such that s/he learns to consider the needs and wants of others. Although behavior analysts would describe such interactions and processes differently, Kohn's insistence on this issue is consistent with a behavior-analytic approach in several ways. For example, by emphasizing the causes of the behavior, as opposed to focusing solely on the form of the behavior, behavior function may be learned more reliably. In addition, in the context of considering behavioral goals for their children, Kohn urges parents to "keep their ages in mind." Such suggestions are consistent with the notion that pre-requisite skills must be mastered prior to learning more advanced skills (e.g., Rosales-Ruiz & Baer, 1997). Lastly, behavior analysts discuss frequently the importance of modeling appropriate behavior, as well as the potential negative effects of children observing undesirable behavior (e.g., Chance, 2003).

The potential harmful effects of observational learning discussed both by behavior analysts (e.g., Chance, 2003) and Kohn (2005) often have been discussed in the context of operant punishment. In Kohn's discussion of punishment, there is both overlap with concerns expressed by behavior analysts (e.g., Sidman, 1989; Skinner, 1971) as well as significant points of departure. Regarding the latter, in most instances, Kohn equates punishment with harsh, forceful actions by parents towards their children (i.e., the layman's conception of punishment). However, his general approach to presenting the potential harmful effects of the repeated use of such tactics should resonate with behavior analysts.

Probably the greatest strength of Kohn (2005) is his emphasis on the overall parent-child relationship. His principles of unconditional parenting speak to a high-quality, parent-child relationship. His emphasis is on long-term goals for children, putting the role of parent first, always treating your child with respect, frequently offering choices, and making requests rather than demands. In sum, Kohn encourages parents to maintain a respectful, loving, and positive overall relationship with their children. Behavior analysts certainly would be ecstatic if more parent-child relationships could be characterized as having these qualities.

Unconditional Parenting: A Curiosity

It is curious that Kohn (e.g., 1993, 2005) consistently attacks a behavioral approach to socially significant issues (e.g., education, parenting) without acknowledging the fact that several of his broad views are consistent with the positions offered by behavior analysts, including by Skinner himself. For example, Reitman (1998) shared comments made by Skinner (1984) regarding the American education system "...that, with few changes, could have been taken directly from *Punished by Rewards*" (p. 153). Jordan (1996) offers a particularly illustrative account of Skinner's views on parenting because it describes Skinner's interactions *with his own children*. Jordan's graduate training was in a history and theory in psychology program, not in a behavior-analysis program (i.e., she can be viewed as an objective observer). In preparing her chapter, she read Skinner's relevant works and interviewed (at least) Skinner's wife and two daughters. What Jordan describes about Skinner's parenting practices might surprise Kohn but certainly would not surprise a behavior analyst. For example, in describing the Skinner family dynamic, she wrote: "they talked about problems and tried to negotiate solutions... They always explained their reasons for a decision... In the language of child experts, the Skinners were using an authoritative, rather than authoritarian, child-rearing style" (p. 204). Given published accounts of Skinner's views on parenting and related areas, does Kohn present his position as counterpoints to a behavioral worldview simply to frame his argument (i.e., using a behavioral approach as an ultimate straw-man argument), or do behavior analysts deserve some blame for Kohn's writings?

Unconditional Parenting: Source of the Problems

Some speculations are offered next to address questions about the potential sources of Kohn's (e.g., 1993, 2005) consistent framing of his views as counterpoints to a behavioral approach. Although the material is necessarily speculative, we hope it proves useful in discussing some techniques behavior

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analysts might consider adopting to promote our worldview such that it may be accepted more widely by non-behavioral authors.

It was stated above that Kohn's (2005) most critical misunderstanding of behavior analysis was his insistence that behavior analysts do not consider reasons, thoughts, or feelings. On the one hand, his claims are understandable in that they are repeated often by non-behavioral critics, even in mainstream psychology textbooks (e.g., Aronson, Wilson, & Ackert, 2002). The source of such claims may reside in our strong commentary that thoughts or feelings cannot be taken as *causes* of behavior (e.g., Skinner, 1974). From such commentary, our critics may claim that we dismiss the *reasons* for behavior altogether. On the other hand, however, any student of behavior analysis is taught repeatedly that any particular behavior only can be understood by analyzing its function (e.g., Carr, 1977, 1993; Catania, 1998; Miltenberger, 2007; Skinner, 1953). Furthermore, the role of environmental context in such understanding is emphasized repeatedly (e.g., Fantino, 2001; Rachlin, 2000). Additional material is presented below (e.g., Hayes et al., 2001) in response to claims that behavior analysts ignore thoughts and feelings.

What might be the source of Kohn's (e.g., 2005) confusion regarding the supposed behavioral characterization of children as passive agents? One potential source may be the overlap in language between behavior analysts and the general public (e.g., Hiline, 1992). For behavior analysts, the term "control" refers to orderly relations between events in the environment and the behavior of organisms. It is the bi-directional nature of these relations that is the focus of behavior-analytic investigation. On the other hand, Kohn presents the term "control" as it appears in everyday discourse (i.e., in a unidirectional manner from one person [parent] to another [child]). Consequently, he argues that behavior analysts would recommend treatments in which parents present demands to their children without taking into account the important dynamic between parents and children as well as between children and their own environment (i.e., that behavior analysts present strategies for parents to control children).

A final potential source of Kohn's (2005) misrepresentations about a behavioral approach to parenting may be the limited interaction in the parenting literature between behavior analysts and mainstream psychologists. Kohn does not cite any contemporary research or theory in behavior analysis, but he did cite the mainstream psychological literature on parenting. Perhaps if there were greater exchange between behavior analysts and mainstream psychologists (i.e., functioning as a form of acceptance of a behavioral approach to parenting), then the inaccurate and negative portrayal of a behavioral perspective would be less likely.

Unconditional Parenting: Rectifying the Problems

One technique to promote behavior analysis is to increase the number of presentations of our field to the general public (cf. Reitman, 1998). Table 1 shows the number of times Kohn (2005) has been cited in GoogleScholar, the ranking of the book on Amazon's Best Seller list, and the number of customer reviews of the book on Amazon.com (the latter two measures relate to the attraction of the book to the general public, whereas the first measure speaks to its relation to academia). Displayed for comparison are three books related to a behavioral approach to parenting (i.e., Christophersen & Mortweet, 2003; Kazdin, 2008; McIntire, 1999). Although these data should be viewed with extreme caution (i.e., they are quite limited and the books were published in different years), they are consistent with the claim that Kohn has been relatively successful at advancing his views to the general public. In fact, his book was a 2006 NAPPA Gold Award Winner (i.e., National Parenting Publications Awards). Thus, the fact that Kohn can provide such an account seems to be another failure for behavior analysts in the marketing of our views to the general public (e.g., Eisenberger & Cameron, 1996; Morris, 2009).

How should behavior analysts respond to the repeated misrepresentations of our field by professionals such as Kohn (e.g., 1993, 2005), as well as to the absence of any replies to his claims by other authors (e.g., psychologists sympathetic to behavior analysis)? In other words, how should we proceed in terms of altering our marketing strategies so as to foster an environment in which commentary like Kohn's does not occur or, engenders aversive consequences if it

Table 1. *Comparisons Among Books Taken from Amazon.com and GoogleScholar.com on 3/22/12.*

	Christophersen & Mortweet (2003)	Kazdin (2008)	McIntire (1999)	Kohn (2005)
Times cited (Google Scholar)	23	8	0	37
Amazon's Best Sellers Rank	471,991	10,814,329	3,164,735	389,846
Customer Reviews (Amazon.com)	10 (4 stars)	31 (4½ stars)	1 (4 stars)	100 (4 stars)

does occur? In addition to making certain that such commentary receives a behavioral reply (cf. Staddon, 2004), we discuss, next, two general approaches that may be valuable: altering our behavior to encourage positive portrayals of our field by popular-press authors and increasing our role in inter-disciplinary inquiry, broadly defined. These two strategies have received less discussion in the marketing of behavior analysis, but they may be necessary paths to explore in the positive promotion of behavior analysis.

It may seem surprising, given Kohn's commentary (e.g., 1993, 2005), that we emphasize collaboration with popular-press authors in the dissemination of behavior analysis. Behavior analysts could be urged to present our views to the public directly, given that when we rely on non-behavioral authors to do so, they may portray our field negatively and inaccurately. Behavioral authors should not be discouraged from attempting dissemination; however, as others have noted (e.g., Austin & Marshall, 2008), behavior analysts only rarely (e.g., Bailey & Burch, 2006; Pryor, 1999) have presented our field in a manner that is understandable to the general public. As Morris (1985) observed, graduate-training programs in behavior analysis rarely, if ever, establish skills related to engaging the public, or media. Our emphasis in reaching out to popular-press authors primarily is grounded in the fact that such authors have the training, as well as the time and resources, to communicate more successfully with the general public.

Reflecting on past successes, we need to engage the passions and interests of popular-press authors (e.g., Maurice, 1993; Sutherland, 2008). Maurice described in a personal and eloquent manner, after her daughter made dramatic gains attributable to behavior analysis, the powerful impact our field holds for individuals diagnosed with autism and related disabilities. It generally is agreed that Maurice's book influenced tremendously the acceptability of the behavior-analytic approach to autism treatment, even though its efficacy already was well established. When Sutherland applied behavioral principles to improve relationships with her husband, family, and friends, she wrote about the robustness of these principles in a manner that was simple, humorous, and interesting. In addition to her book, these aspects of her writing secured publication in places as diverse, and popular, as the New York Times and Cosmopolitan.

Whereas the point of engaging the interests of popular-press authors is uncontroversial, the next issue may generate mixed reactions among behavior analysts. In discussing the value of altering our language when communicating with the public, Bailey (1991) offered several useful comments. We argue, however, that one particular point has not received its deserved attention. Bailey

stated, “Instead of trying to sell determinism... we need to promote the view that behavioral technology gives children dignity and cultivates their freedom” (p. 447). In reviewing Bailey and Burch (2005), Austin and Marshall (1998) noted,

...our focus on current environmental contingencies as the most salient determinants of behavior fails to glorify the individual as a free and mysterious being. Instead, it identifies humans essentially as a collection of behaviors controlled by the environment... this notion has been controversial for years... so public resistance to these threats to freedom and dignity should come as no surprise. However, one might argue that the majority of the general public is not aware of the philosophic underpinnings of behavior analysis, so this cannot possibly account for all of our dissemination woes. (p. 147)

While we agree that the public generally may not be aware of our deterministic stance, the issue becomes significantly more important when considering our communications with popular-press authors. These writers would be exposed more deeply to the underpinnings of our field, including our views on determinism. It is reasonable to conclude that, in general, our deterministic stance would induce negative reactions in these writers (e.g., Chiesa, 2003; Galuska, 2003). In fact, in the context of Kohn specifically, the notion of “autonomy” may be held in the highest degree (e.g., Kohn, 1993).

The issue of how to discuss with popular-press authors our approach to concepts such as autonomy and control is thorny, to say the least (e.g., consider the negative reactions induced by Skinner [1974]). We are in general agreement with Bailey (1991) that behavior analysts need to alter our language considerably when discussing these controversial concepts. We agree with Galuska (2003) that behavior analysts should remain pragmatic in such discussions, noting the many similarities between the typical use of the term freedom and our use of it (e.g., freedom from aversive control, choosing one action at the expense of another). In addition, the research by Hanley and his colleagues discussed below (e.g., Heal & Hanley, 2007; Tiger, Hanley, & Heal, 2006), as well as by others (e.g., Catania, 1975; Neuringer, 2002; Rakos, Laurene, Skala, & Slane, 2008), can be incorporated into these discussions by highlighting the fact that behavior analysts investigate variables related to freedom. If pressed, behavior analysts must describe, in a simple and straightforward manner, the rationale for our deterministic stance; however, there seems to be a number of ways we can present this issue such that it does not prevent us from marketing the value of our science. Needless to say, this issue does not lend itself to a simple solution; however, we

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feel it is an important one for behavior analysts to discuss more extensively in terms of marketing our field.

Behavioral principles and philosophy also may be accepted more widely by popular-press authors, and the general public, if behavior analysis was viewed more favorably by other psychological scientists. When popular-press authors begin learning about a particular topic (e.g., parenting), if they consistently read about the value of our approach as described by other researchers, then our credibility should be enhanced. One means by which behavior analysis may be viewed more positively by psychological scientists is to increase our role in interdisciplinary inquiry, broadly defined. There are at least three relevant tactics: (a) present the power of behavioral principles and philosophy in a broader way (e.g., DeGrandpre, 2000), (b) highlight better our research accomplishments that bear directly on the socially significant topics of interest in other research areas (e.g., Hayes et al., 2001; Heal & Hanley, 2007; Tiger et al., 2006), and (c) directly collaborate with these other researchers (e.g., Biglan, Brennan, Foster, & Holder, 2004; Biglan & Hinds, 2009; Komro, Flay, & Biglan, 2011).

DeGrandpre (2000) argued that behavior analysts should expand the presentation of reinforcement theory to illustrate its explanatory value in the context of concepts usually considered, by non-behavior analysts, outside the realm of “simple” reinforcement principles. Such an expansion includes framing the reinforcement process as one in which reinforcement results in organisms ascribing meaning to relevant environmental features. Through such an expansion, he argues that behavior analysts can impact psychological science greatly in a quest for a central, socially significant dependent variable (i.e., meaning making). His presentation has several attractive features, two of which relate well to Kohn (2005). First, he describes how this approach incorporates both the motivational and phenomenal qualities of stimuli. The former qualities are said to guide behavior (i.e., response selection) and the latter qualities are said to promote our conscious experience related to the stimuli. Following DeGrandpre’s suggestions may allow non-behavior analysts to appreciate reinforcement beyond the so-called simple response-strengthening effects of reinforcers. For example, such an account may be attractive for critics such as Kohn in that it speaks to the types of activities deemed particularly socially significant, “phenomenologically, these qualities are experienced in terms of meaning or value and, when taken as a whole, result in the personal sense of living a purposeful or intentional existence in a meaningful world” (DeGrandpre, 2000, p. 726). A second relevant aspect of DeGrandpre is his emphasis on the role of promoting an understanding of natural reinforcement contingencies. Throughout his book, Kohn fails to acknowledge two key points: that stimuli may

function as reinforcers in the absence of an agent (i.e., a parent) *actively* manipulating contingencies and that behavior analysts would recommend the transfer of control from contrived reinforcers to natural reinforcers. Both of these issues relate to the difficulty some non-behavioral critics have in understanding the natural effects reinforcers exert on behavior (e.g., Chance, 2003; Flora, 2004).

Behavior analysts, including our professional organizations (e.g., Morris, 1985), should highlight better our research accomplishments most relevant to the values of both mainstream psychological scientists and popular-press authors. The work highlighted next was selected, in part, because of its relevance to Kohn (2005). For example, it would be challenging for Kohn to claim that behavior analysts do not concern themselves with the topic of cognition if he considered the literature on relational frame theory (e.g., Hayes et al., 2001). Not only is this work aimed at understanding language and cognition in the laboratory, but there are several applications that relate well to topics that Kohn, and others, deem socially significant, such as caring, self-efficacy, and psychological flexibility (e.g., Biglan, 2009). In the work of Hanley and his colleagues (e.g., Heal & Hanley, 2007; Tiger et al., 2006), children choose their own form of treatment in a concurrent-chains schedule. This research bears on Kohn's presentation in at least three ways. First, behavior analysts not only value the role of children making decisions about their own environments, but we investigate the variables of which such decision making is a function. Second, inherent in such investigation is the view that children are not simply passive agents but instead are active learners. Third, such research is significant given recent calls by behavior analysts to broaden our research base with typically developing children (e.g., Friman, 2010). The impetus for such calls is related to the present focus of discussing techniques to illustrate the wide reaching power of a behavior-analytic approach.

The work of Biglan and his colleagues (e.g., Biglan et al., 2004; Biglan & Hinds, 2009; Komro et al., 2011) exemplifies the synthesis of behavior-analytic research and theorizing with other psychological approaches in addressing many key issues in child and adolescent development. Their framework for creating nurturing environments (e.g., Komro et al., 2011) incorporating such a wide range of environmental factors (e.g., family, school, and social influences) and outcome variables (cognitive, social/emotional, behavioral, and health) illustrates the weaknesses in Kohn. Not only is behavior analysis not impotent in addressing socially significant environment-behavior relations, the investigation and improvement of such relations define our mission. Thus, the work by Biglan and his colleagues illustrates the type of inter-disciplinary inquiry that may help behavior analysis persist against the misrepresentations of our field by Kohn and others.

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Summary

Science is a social enterprise (e.g., Sidman, 1960). As a science related to human behavior, behavior analysis must do more than accumulate facts and theories to survive; we also must be viewed as valuable to a significant portion of society (e.g., Critchfield, 2011). As such, we must attend closely to how we are portrayed in the popular press, responding consistently to inaccurate portrayals. This latter statement is especially relevant when the inaccurate portrayals focus on socially significant topics (e.g., parenting). We are in agreement with others (e.g., Staddon, 2004) that the issue is not the efficacy of our science and technology; instead, we have a marketing problem. While we find value in many of the marketing suggestions previously offered (e.g., Bailey, 1991; Geller, 2002; Heward, 2008; Morris, 1985), the tactics of collaborating with popular-press authors more vigorously and enhancing our role in inter-disciplinary inquiry seem particularly worthwhile to pursue more deeply. Regarding the former, we argue that behavior analysts need to discuss the thorny issue of “marketing determinism” more frequently. The concept of autonomy is an important value to many in our society, such that our discussions (and possibly empirical assessments) should produce a more effective means of communicating the strengths of our field. In terms of inter-disciplinary inquiry, there are a variety of tactics that may increase the likelihood that our key concepts and principles are viewed more positively (e.g., broadening the scope of our dependent variables to include measures deemed socially significant by others; e.g., Geller, 2002). We argue that popular-press authors, such as Kohn (2005), will be much more challenged to misrepresent our field under conditions in which our impact reverberates throughout the psychological sciences (cf. DeGrandpre, 2000).

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