BOOK REVIEWS


Because I use a copy-shop anthology to teach an upper-division, behavior analytic laboratory course I was immediately interested in this text "for undergraduates and graduate students with little practical knowledge of research methods" (vii).

Chapter 1 presents valuable introductions to science, the experimental analysis of behavior, and applied behavior analysis; whereas Chapter 2 discusses research topics, the process of research design, and assessing generality. Beginning researchers are wisely encouraged to first conduct close replications of published experiments before exploring novel procedures or problematic procedures which may not "work."

Chapter 3 covers experimentation: intervention integrity, design flexibility, pilot studies, manipulating independent variables, and unanticipated findings. Additionally, the chapter addresses the process of socially validating applied outcomes.

Chapter 4 focuses on behavior definition and measurement; whereas Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 discuss within-subject and between-subjects designs, respectively. The text nicely warns readers only to use between-subject designs for good reason and even then to present data at the level of the single subject.

Chapter 7, the longest chapter, discusses graphic analysis of data. This is the most thorough and well-crafted chapter.

Chapter 8 addresses statistical inference, a topic better addressed in a separate course. There are, however, valuable lessons here which transcend statistical inference. For example, the chapter illustrates how averaging data can cover up an otherwise obvious treatment effect.

Chapter 9 discusses disseminating findings: attending conferences, making conference presentations, and preparing manuscripts for publication.

Throughout, the text presents much friendly, practical advice which is usually only learned through lore, observation, or painful exposure to scientific contingencies. The text also uses applied and basic examples, so it is appropriate for courses of either orientation.

Unfortunately, the chapters are poorly coordinated. For example, Chapter 5 presents a study (pp. 98-101) as if the study had not been introduced in Chapter 4 (pp. 67-69). Chapter 7 discusses the difficulty of inferring treatment effects when they are delayed (pp. 157-159), without referring to the vital antidote presented in Chapter 5: examining study states.

Poor editing is also evident. For example, Chapter 8 misdefines the sample variance (p. 162) by omitting the denominator. Although Chapter 9 quotes Claiborne (1986, p. 38) on the virtue of conciseness, the chapter includes "Over time, good writers learn to be critical readers of their own writing; they can judge whether their writing is clear or not and make necessary modifications" (p. 202). Would Claiborne have instead written "With practice, good writers learn to
effectively edit their work”? It is hard to know, for the corresponding citation is absent from the reference list.¹

Although the text offers plenty of excellent advice for beginning graduate students, I sometimes wondered about the text’s appropriateness for undergraduates. For example, the text occasionally uses technical terms without first defining them. This is most evident for terms referring to schedules. If the text is a primer, as stated in its preface, then it is certainly not as self-contained as are primers addressing other aspects of behavior analysis (Reynolds, 1975; Winokur, 1976).

Despite some problems, the text accompanied by Catania’s (1992) glossary would well function as a primer. Adding an anthology, of reports of basic or applied experiments, would make the text a solid foundation for a course addressing single-subject experimentation.

References


¹Some copies included an inappropriate index. According to the publisher this error has been corrected and the publisher will provide replacements for uncorrected copies.

(Marshall Lev Dermer, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)


As described on the book’s back cover, this is “a guide to a correct reading” of B. F. Skinner. It is also a guide with a perspective—Marc Richelle’s—a Belgian psychologist known for his contributions to behavior analysis and well published in the French- and English-language literatures. His perspective is at once partisan, but unique in bringing a European flavor to bear on Skinner’s work. The result: Although Richelle mentions limitations in Skinner’s American approach, his presentation is accurate and well balanced.

The book’s title notwithstanding, though, this is not a Skinner biography, although relevant material is included. It is also not a substantive primer or review of Skinner’s scientific and philosophical programs, but instead it cuts across myriad topics, organized into four sections. The first describes Skinner’s contributions to a science of behavior (“a stimulus-response model with no stimulus”) and controversies arising from them (e.g., from the Baby Box). The second relates Skinner to the European tradition (e.g., Lorenz and Piaget) and illuminates commonalities between them (e.g., “in the beginning was action”). The third describes Skinner’s approach to biology, cognition, linguistics, thinking, and creativity (e.g., “the operant as problem-solving”). The fourth takes Skinner’s work into real life, specifically, into mental health (a pragmatic approach), education (questioning the school system), science and utopia (women’s liberation), and “freedom at last” (where mentalism is a tool for control). One
theme that runs throughout all this material is Richelle's spirited defense of Skinner against all manner of misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

The reactions to this book will vary. Skinnerians will embrace it: Richelle gets Skinner right, upholds him steadfastly, and provides interesting notes and references. They might quibble, though, with whether there is any new news and about Richelle’s views on Skinner’s place in the American context. Non-Skinnerians will find the book illuminating and interesting: Richelle offers unusual breadth in his synopses of Skinner’s work, relates it to nominally anti-Skinnerian perspectives, and writes in a generally engaging and accessible manner. Anti-Skinnerians will judge the book overly partisan and not sufficiently deep in analysis or scholarship. They should give pause, though, over their misrepresentations of Skinner, as well as Richelle’s constructive comparisons-and-contrasts with their colleagues’ work.

I used this book in an advanced graduate seminar in behavior analysis, and the responses were as I have judged: The book was described as illuminating, interesting, engaging, accessible, and enlightening—but not particularly deep. A better audience might be first-year graduate students or college seniors. The book may also interest the more general reader, educated in the liberal arts and sciences. It is, indeed, a good and proper guide to the writings of B. F. Skinner.

(Edward K. Morris, University of Kansas)