ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Determining How, When, and Whether You Should Publish Outside the Box: Sober Advice for Early Career Behavior Analysts

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Abstract Publishing outside of behavior analysis is necessary for the field's impact in advancing its science or improving its treatments. As consumers of behavior analysis, we typically only see the success stories in outlets such as the *Journal for the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*, the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, and *The Behavior Analyst*. Lacking from these models is a description of the hard work and occasional missteps that accompany dissemination outside the box. In this paper, I propose that prospective disseminators need to (a) critically evaluate what they have to say, (b) carefully consider the field's interests, and (c) honestly analyze professional and personal contingencies to determine whether publishing outside the box should be a priority, depending on one's stage of professional development. I conclude with some general recommendations to early career behavior analysts aspiring to disseminate outside the field.

Keywords Dissemination · Publication · Journals · Audience control

Publishing outside the box is necessary for the widespread acceptance of our science, discipline, and field. The success stories offered by Friman (2014), Schlinger

(2014), and Vyse (2014) are impressive and serve as excellent examples of how and why behavior analysts should publish outside the box. The sober reality, however, is that doing so is difficult and attempts to do so may come at the cost of other professional responsibilities. Attempting to reproduce the foregoing successes will prove daunting. You will likely face aversive consequences if you are not sufficiently prepared to speak to novel audiences. My commentary focuses on considerations that early career behavior analysts must make when determining how and when to publish outside behavior analysis. Specifically, these considerations entail (a) determining what you have to say, (b) making sure that what you intend to say is in the best interest of the field, and (c) deciding whether the effort requirements inherent in publishing outside the box are worthwhile, given the competing professional contingencies.

What to Say

Determining what you have to say is easier said than done. We all have opinions and perspectives concerning the utility of a science of behavior. Convincing those without behavior-analytic training is going to be difficult, so your message must be fluent and articulate. First, remember that although non-behavior-analytic audiences are naïve to our science, they are not “heathens.” This is an important consideration regarding how to frame your message. The delivery of the intended message should be instructional rather than evangelical or, worse, patronizing. Second, you need to have a well-

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formulated message that has evolved from much precurrent verbal behavior. I recommend reading Skinner's article, "How to discover what you have to say—a talk to students" (1981), before deciding that you are ready to share your message with the masses. The gist of his article is that your ideas are verbal operants emitted in the presence of listeners, including yourself via editing and revision. As such, they are subject to the shaping process. This process ultimately refines your position and message and is a necessary step in speaking to novel audiences. The longer the shaping process, the more refined and articulate your messages become. Approach your editing process from the perspective of fellow behavior analysts. Then, do it again from the perspective of someone with a stake in the topic, but with no formal behavioral training. As your message becomes more refined, share your work with close colleagues willing to give honest, critical feedback. In short, rely on your verbal community—behavior-analytic colleagues and those without formal behavioral training—to shape your message.

The Field's Interests

The next consideration in determining whether to publish outside the box begins by accepting the role of an "ambassador" for behavior analysis. Propagating the field renders you a spokesperson for it. You must therefore determine whether your message is something that the field would endorse because your message may define "behavior analysis" for your listeners. An uninformed or inappropriate message could ultimately do more harm to the image of behavior analysis, as well as the listener's concern, than good. For instance, I have served as a guest reviewer for several non-behavior-analytic journals (e.g., *Clinical Psychology Review*, *Learning & Behavior*, *Psychological Bulletin*, *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*) to provide commentary on the attempts of behavior analysts to publish outside the box. In this role, I have been appalled at the grammatical mistakes and conceptual missteps in the submissions—missteps that could make our field look immature (or worse, inadequate) to novel audiences.

The best tack in determining whether your message has sufficient quality and is representative of the field's interests is to share your message with the broader behavior-analytic community for feedback and support. Again, verbal behavior must be emitted to be shaped.

Novel research can gain traction via publication in field-specific, peer-reviewed behavior-analytic journals (e.g., *The Behavior Analyst*, *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, *The Analysis of Verbal Behavior*, *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis (JABA)*, *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*) before its methodology and analyses are disseminated to novel outlets (e.g., presentations at non-behavior-analytic conferences, non-behavior-analytic journal submission, blogs). Of course, it is also wise to communicate your ideas and message to behavior-analytic peers via conference presentations before submitting to behavior-analytic journals to verify that the publication process is even a worthy endeavor. Although publishing inside the box may delay publishing outside the box, it demonstrates the field's support for your ideas and will refine your message through the peer review process.

Priorities

The final consideration in determining whether to publish outside the box is to ask yourself whether you have sufficient time and resources to do so. If you are early in your career, you have many competing responsibilities, each with high-stakes consequences. For example, if you are a student, you should be focused on earning your degree in a timely manner. As a new clinician, you must develop a sufficient caseload and attend to client needs to maintain a practice. As an early career faculty member, you must obtain tenure to retain your position. Consider the following example.

Much of my research entails translating ideas from everyday human experience into behavioral principles. One such interest is *choice overload*, that is, where too much choice may result in deleterious consequences (see Schwartz 2004), which is rooted in the social psychology literature (e.g. Iyengar & Lepper 2000; Dar-Nimrod et al. 2009). I attempted to publish some of my early translational work on this topic in social psychology outlets. One journal rejected my interpretation on the grounds that it was too controlled and lacked the complexities of the "real world." Upon making edits to address these issues, the next journal rejected the manuscript because my sample was too small ($n=66$) and my analyses in terms of delay discounting were not typical of social psychology. By the time I received two more rejections from other journals, I had spent over 12 months attempting to publish the manuscript

in social psychology outlets. The study was ultimately published in *Behavioural Processes* (see Reed et al. 2012), a multidisciplinary outlet friendly to the behavior-analytic perspective. Upon publication, I have received invitations to serve as a guest reviewer for articles on choice overload for mainstream psychology journals (e.g., *Learning & Behavior*), to comment on how choice overload can impact environmental sustainability efforts for *The Guardian*, and to speak on this topic to interdisciplinary groups (e.g., Wells Fargo Financial Literacy & Economic Education Conference). Had I simply followed my own advice to gain traction in behavior analysis before attempting to disseminate more widely, my work would have made an impact much sooner and I would not have lost so much time in the revision and resubmission process. This lost time could have been spent conducting and publishing more research. This was a hard lesson to learn, especially for someone on a university tenure track position, but it was a valuable experience in having to toe the line of preaching to the choir and publishing outside the box.

My experience is not atypical. The rejection rate across all journals published by the American Psychological Association averages 74 % (APA 2012). This rate approximates those for *JABA* (65 %; D. C. Lerman, personal communication, July 26, 2013) and other behavior-analytic journals. Assuming your work is ultimately deemed to be in the top 30 % of the submissions and is accepted, publication lags typically range from 6 months (APA 2012) to a year or more (Smith 2006).

In sum, getting your message in print will take much time and work, even if you are preaching to the choir. Publishing outside the box will likely be even more difficult, given differences in language, style, and philosophy. Before you embark on the arduous task of widespread publication, you should make an honest appraisal of your workload to determine whether such a challenge is wise at your stage of professional development.

The stories of more senior members of our field (e.g., Friman 2014; Schlinger 2014; Vyse 2014) are inspiring, and we should all strive to reproduce their success. However, these examples are the exception, rather than the rule, for early-career behavior analysts. Potential ambassadors of behavior analysis must understand the probable contingencies associated with publishing outside the box. You will likely face rejection and criticism. At times, publishing outside the box may even seem like a fool's errand, and it may be a fool's errand if your

current skillset or job responsibilities prohibit adequate preparation. Let me close with some recommendations, though.

Recommendations

Success in publishing outside the box may be achieved if sufficient steps are taken early in one's career. First, publish your work *inside* the box to demonstrate that your ideas are indeed accepted within behavior analysis. Disseminating your ideas to "outsiders" will be difficult if you do not have support from the inside. Second, learn to speak the language of your target audience. Behavioral jargon will not impress an audience that cannot understand your message (Hineline 1980; Lindsley 1991; Poling 2010). This requires reading articles in the target publication outlet to become familiar with its style and lexicon. Third, expect rejection and criticism. Behavioral perspectives will likely be at odds with long-standing philosophies and approaches for individuals trained in other disciplines. Fourth, maintain a healthy presence inside the box. Behavior analysis has much to benefit from your contributions. Contribute to it heavily, while occasionally publishing outside the box. Publishing inside the box will strengthen your message when it is ultimately time to begin publishing elsewhere. Fifth, and finally, recall Mont Wolf's (1978) message concerning social validity: "if we aspire to social importance, then we must allow our consumers to provide us feedback about how our applications relate to their values, to their reinforcers" (p. 213). The consumers of behavior analysis are everywhere. Sharing our findings and perspectives with them is the only way to obtain feedback on whether our science is relevant to science and society at large. Societal support guides consumer demand, which in turn drives insurance waivers and reimbursement for services, grant funding for research, and so on. With so much at stake, we should all seek ways to publish outside the box, while never forgetting that preaching to the choir is not only permissible, but also important in order to keep our own science alive.

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