Prominent Women in Behavior Analysis: An Introduction

Melissa R. Nosik¹ · Laura L. Grow²

Published online: 25 July 2015

© Association for Behavior Analysis International 2015

Today is an exciting time for women in behavior analysis. Over the years, multiple articles have documented increases in women's participation in behavior analysis (e.g., McSweeney and Swindell 1998; McSweeney et al. 2000; Myers 1993; Poling et al. 1983; Simon et al. 2007). Contemporary data, however, depict an even more striking degree of participation. For example, 82.2 % of Behavior Analyst Certification Board® (BACB®) certificants are female,¹ including 68.3 % of those who are certified at the doctoral level (i.e., BCBA-D™). These data represent a 148 % increase in female certificants over the last 15 years. The Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) reported that 52 % of their full members in 2014 were women (personal communication ABAI, April 7, 2015).² Female authors accounted for 55.5 % of authors who published in the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis (JABA)* in 2014. These data represent a 142 % increase since the first volume of *JABA* was published in 1968. In addition, 27.1 % of authors who published in the *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior (JEAB)* in 2014 were female. These data represent a 115 % increase since the average from 1978 to 1982. Given the representation of women in behavior analysis, a demographic population that is typically a minority in other scientific disciplines (National Science Foundation 2015), has increased substantially over a relatively short period of time (~20 years), we thought it an important time to provide accounts from the perspectives of prominent women who experienced behavior-analytic academic training and professional environments over this period of time and get advice based on what they learned.

¹Gender reporting is not a requirement; data reflect only those who reported (1.81 % of BACB certificants did not report gender).

²Gender reporting is not a requirement; data reflect only those who reported.

✉ Melissa R. Nosik
melissa@bacb.com

¹ Behavior Analyst Certification Board, 8051 Shaffer Parkway, Littleton, CO 80127, USA

² The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

The following special section includes interviews with seven prominent women in behavior analysis. A two-part process was used to determine the interviewees for the special section. First, we developed a list of women that are current or former: (a) ABAI fellows, (b) editors or associate editors of *JABA* or *JEAB*, or (c) ABAI presidents. These criteria resulted in a list of 21 women. Second, a consensus process was used to select a group of interviewees who were representative of a combination of different characteristics, including (a) academic training environments, (b) areas of expertise, and (c) work settings. The process included grouping the women that met all three criteria ($n=4$), two criteria ($n=8$), and one criterion ($n=9$) and identifying their representative characteristics. When there was overlap in a category (i.e., attended the same university training program, were at the same stage in their career, worked in similar settings), we selected the woman that had a second or third characteristic (e.g., early vs. mid-career and applied vs. basic research).

Following from this review process, we interviewed Judy Favell, Linda LeBlanc, Frances McSweeney, Anna Pétursdóttir, Carol Pilgrim, Beth Sulzer-Azaroff, and Bridget Taylor. Each interviewee was asked 15 questions organized in two general categories (training history and advice to others). Questions within the history category were selected to provide readers with information about the training environment and the variety of experiences that were a part of each woman's career (e.g., first exposure to behavior analysis, graduate training experience, what they learned in their first job interview). The category of advice to others (e.g. how to be an effective leader, provide feedback, select graduate programs, handle mistakes, and having families) was selected to provide mentorship on a variety of topics from the perspective of these women.

Collectively, the interviewees have made valuable and enduring contributions to behavior analysis in different areas of practice and research. For example, these women have (a) published 682 journal articles, book chapters, and books; (b) held a total of 74 appointments as editors or associate editors of top-tier journals in behavior analysis; and (c) have served in 39 elected leadership positions in national and international organizations. In addition, their many professional contributions have included sustained positive impacts on service delivery and public policy in behavior analysis.

Although there were a number of commonalities among some interviewee responses, three views shared by all include the importance of mentorship, of understanding behavior analysis in a historical sense, and of having foundational knowledge of basic principles of behavior. These three commonalities might seem especially useful given how they could be applied to the growing number of training programs for behavior analysts. For example, the emphasis on mentorship might suggest that not only is it important to have experience with a mentor during graduate training, but also to incorporate specific training for students into coursework on mentorship approaches. This illustrates only one of many potential implications for current practices that follow from these interviews.

The complete interviews (Favell, forthcoming; LeBlanc, forthcoming; McSweeney, forthcoming; Pétursdóttir, forthcoming; Pilgrim, forthcoming; Sulzer-Azaroff, forthcoming; Taylor, forthcoming) provide accounts of events that were part of each of these successful women's careers and might serve as a guide for other behavior analysts in their own professional development. In addition, we hope this special section might serve as a springboard for future manuscripts featuring other prominent leaders' guidance to be included in our historical record.

Author Note We are grateful to Judy Favell, Linda LeBlanc, Frances McSweeney, Anna Pétursdóttir, Carol Pilgrim, Beth Sulzer-Azaroff, and Bridget Taylor for sharing their histories and providing such thoughtful guidance in these interviews. We also thank Jim Carr for his generous guidance during this project.

The content of this article does not reflect an official position of the Behavior Analyst Certification Board.

Ethics Statement

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

References

- McSweeney, F. K., Donahoe, P., & Swindell, S. (2000). Women in applied behavior analysis. *The Behavior Analyst, 23*, 267–277.
- McSweeney, F. K., & Swindell, S. (1998). Women in the experimental analysis of behavior. *The Behavior Analyst, 21*, 193–202.
- Myers, D. L. (1993). Participation by women in behavior analysis: II. 1992. *The Behavior Analyst, 16*, 75–86.
- National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics. (2015). *Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering: 2015*. Special Report NSF 15–311. Arlington, VA. Retrieved from: <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/wmpd/>.
- Poling, A., Grossett, D., Fulton, B., Roy, S., Beechler, S., & Wittkopp, C. J. (1983). Participation by women in behavior analysis. *The Behavior Analyst, 6*, 145–152.
- Simon, J. L., Morris, E. K., & Smith, N. G. (2007). Trends in women's participation at the meetings of the Association for Behavior Analysis: 1975–2005. *The Behavior Analyst, 30*, 181–196.