

In Response

The Trend of Stimulus Control Publications

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Although the stimulus control of behavior represents a fundamental concern of behavior analysis, the extent to which such research constitutes the behavioral literature is unknown. Deitz and Malone (1985) have applauded what they consider to be a recent increase in applied stimulus control research. Conversely, Williams (1984) has lamented a supposed decrease in basic stimulus control research, stating that "few relevant articles are now published." Although these two views are not incompatible, it is surprising that stimulus control publications would be increasing exponentially in one field, while diminishing rapidly in the other. Unfortunately, neither of the aforementioned authors presented empirical data to support their claims. Because an emphasis on empirically derived data is a hallmark of behavior analysis, the purpose of the present paper is to provide such data with respect to the publication of stimulus control research in both the basic and applied areas.

All studies appearing in the *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior (JEAB)* and in the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis (JABA)* were surveyed for their relevance to stimulus control. For present purposes, all publications appearing in *JEAB* were considered basic research, while those appearing in *JABA* were considered applied research. Because these two journals are the primary publication outlets for researchers in behavior analysis, other journals were not surveyed. A combination of the cumulative and annual indexes was searched for stimulus control keywords from the

year of each journal's inception through 1985, the most recently completed volume. All pertinent references, excluding duplicates, were counted for each year. To determine the total number of studies per year, all articles excluding technical notes and articles, book reviews, and brief communications (*JABA*) were counted.

The topic areas searched in *JEAB* were discrimination, discrimination learning, inhibitory stimulus control, stimulus control, and stimulus generalization. Related topics, such as peak shift, were not separately surveyed because the articles found here also typically appeared under the more general headings above. The keywords searched in *JABA* were discrimination, discrimination training, generalization, stimulus control, and stimulus generalization.

A second, independent observer also counted stimulus control references for five randomly chosen years for each journal. Interobserver agreement was calculated by dividing the smaller percentage by the larger for each year and averaging across the five years. In both cases agreement rates were greater than 95%.

The filled circles in Figure 1 depict the percent of articles published annually in *JEAB* that are stimulus control related. From the late 1950s until 1971, the data indicate a strong upward trend in the relative percent of stimulus control publications. Following the early 1970s, however, stimulus control publications dropped off rapidly, reaching a fairly stable level (10-15%) until recently, when relative stimulus control research has risen again to above 20%. In all, the stimulus control and discrimination categories comprised the majority of the basic research articles.

No major trends in stimulus control research are evident during the first de-

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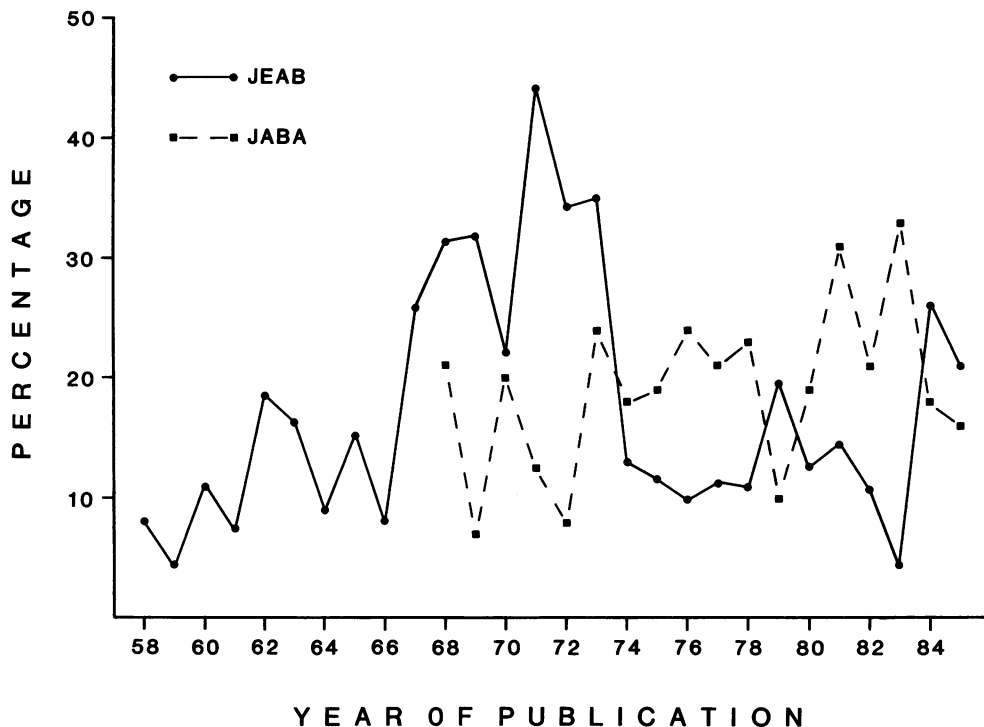


Figure 1.

cade of *JABA* research as indicated by the squares in Figure 1; these percentages vary between 8% and 25%. The early 1980s saw an increase in the percent of stimulus control research, reaching a peak of 33% in 1983, but declining subsequently. Overall, the bulk of relevant studies came from the generalization category, typically involving assessment of treatment gains to novel settings.

In summary, although stimulus control research in the experimental analysis of behavior has dropped off relative to the 1970s, it still constitutes a significant proportion of all *JEAB* studies. In applied behavior analysis, the stimulus control of behavior has been and contin-

ues to be an active field of publication; however, it is not growing exponentially (cf. Deitz & Malone, 1985), but rather remains at a stable level. Other survey methods and journals may, of course, yield different results, but the data presented here indicate that stimulus control is a vigorous research area in both the experimental and applied analyses of behavior.

REFERENCES

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