

# In Response

## Children Are Human Too

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Baron and Perone (1982) provide clarifications of some common misconceptions impeding human operant research, and Buskist, Morgan, & Barry (1983) in their response offer as compelling reasons for appreciating and implementing Baron and Perone's comments the problems of generalizing from animal data. Neither article considered the special relevance of research with children, although the focus was on human operant research. By failing to do so, some possible solutions to a number of methodological and conceptual problems were not considered.

For example, the problem of demand characteristics, discussed by Baron and Perone (1982), is greatly diminished, if not avoided entirely, when children are used as subjects. Children are not likely to bring into the research situation the kind of history that will lead them to discern the hypothesis under test and then act to support or to disconfirm it. On the contrary, given their naivety, children are far more susceptible to instructions (appropriately adjusted for their age) than adults are.

Baron and Perone (1982) also mentioned the danger of providing adult subjects with information crucial to the experiment in the course of obtaining their informed consent. In contrast, with children two types of informed consent are necessary. A formal, signed consent based on a full disclosure of the procedure is needed from the parents. But for the children themselves, only a description suitable to their capacities need be provid-

ed. Rarely, if ever, need this include crucial details. Because one cannot be sure that young children have actually grasped a description, their informed consent is actually gained by their willingness to continue in an experiment. As a result, informed consent may be obtained with a greatly diminished likelihood of contamination.

It is in regard to the problematic role of cognition and verbal mediation in the study of human behavior that research with children may have its greatest benefit. Certainly, this was the problem that seemed to most trouble Baron and Perone (1982). At early ages, children show behaviors more similar to the presumably unmediated behavior of animals (Kendler & Kendler, 1962; Lowe, Beasty, & Bentall, 1983) than to adult human behavior. Comparative study of these unmediated forms of behavior in animals and humans would serve more to integrate animal and human data in our science than to provide the kinds of animal analogues to human behaviors that Buskist et al. (1983) so rightly object to.

Ultimately, identification of the variables controlling those behaviors in adults usually attributed to cognitive mediation may arise from developmental studies with children. In developmental studies the course of change in early forms of a particular behavior can be traced as it becomes increasingly mediated by other, more recently acquired behaviors (Lowenkron, in press). If cognitive concepts are ever to be supplanted in the face of the complexity of adult human behavior, it will almost certainly include a process of acquiring alternate explanations for increasingly more complex behaviors by studying the conditions of their development (Baer, 1973). To be able to do

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so, with a methodology free of the need to generalize across species, is an approach that promises much and should not be ignored.

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