MEXICAN JOURNAL OF BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS: AND YET, IT SURVIVES…

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Abstract

In 2015 the Mexican Journal of Behavior Analysis (MJBA) celebrated 40 years as the flagship journal of behavior analysis in Mexico. Previous editors faced challenges that threatened the survival of the journal on many occasions. Additionally, behavioral research in Mexico has been relegated from leading psychological research in Mexico to a part of ancient history. New topics of research, the expansion of approaches to the study of behavior, and contact with other fields are shaping the practices of behavioral researchers and could help increasing the impact of our field on general psychology. Accepting and promoting these variations both conceptually and in terms of the topics that are studied, revolving around the principles of behavior analysis, could be important nowadays to bring back behavioral research to a dominant position in scientific psychology in Mexico.

Keywords: Mexican Journal of Behavior Analysis, behavioral research, variation, selection

Ten years ago, Héctor Martinez (Martinez, 2006) wrote a paper titled *Mexican Journal of Behavior Analysis: A Challenge for Survival*. The paper described some of

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the many and varied problems faced by editors in the 30 years of the journal's existence. The problems, unfortunately have not disappeared and the Mexican Journal of Behavior Analysis (MJBA) has faced serious problems in the last ten years. Despite these many problems, MJBA has survived and in 2015 celebrated 40 years as the flagship journal of behavior analysis and behavioral research in Mexico.

The health of MJBA is directly related to the activities of behavioral researchers in Mexico. In 1975 when MJBA was created, behaviorism and behavioral research dominated the study of psychological phenomena in Mexico. With behavior analysis as a unifying field, MBJA and the Mexican Society for Behavior Analysis (SMAC) began their history. Even though MJBA has survived for over 40 years, its impact on the practices of general psychologists in Mexico is limited. Furthermore, it has been argued that its influence in Mexico has reduced over time. The population of behavior analysts in Mexico is still important but every day we are relegated from areas in which our principles and methods could have a positive effect on society. It is not a coincidence that applied behavior analysis in Mexico, which was a solid approach in the 1970s, is seen with diminishing frequency.

That behavioral research in Mexico has been in crisis for some years is a fact that cannot be ignored. Unless we accept this fact and take action into this matter, we run the risk of extinction. Relative to the population of psychologists in Mexico, only a minority have behavioral "genes." As expected, other "species" of psychologists, are competing and limiting our access to resources in favor of their own kind. Behavioral researchers in Mexico have to adapt to new audiences and to a new environment in which we are no longer the dominant group.

On the bright side, I consider that we are already seeing new adaptations that must be encouraged. New topics of research, the expansion of approaches to the study of behavior, and contact with other fields, are shaping our practices in new and interesting ways and could help increasing our impact on general psychology. Behavioral researchers are working on diverse topics like mathematical models, economics, pharmacology, neuroscience, comparative cognition, cognitive processes, evolutionary biology, associative learning, interbehaviorism, neural networks, and artificial intelligence, to name a few. These adaptations are not mere "fashion" but the result of a real interest on the part of Mexican behavioral researchers in an integrated understanding of behavior.

Recently it has been noted that variability among practices of behavior analysts could increase the chances of survival of the field (e.g., Lattal, 2016). I completely agree. Variability in a group produces new practices that could contact new contin-

gencies. Variability among behavioral researchers is a desirable characteristic that must be encouraged if we are concerned with our survival as a group.

From the beginning, behavioral research in Mexico has been variable. Diverse approaches to the study of behavior were embraced before MJBA and SMAC were created. It was only after Bijou's visits in 1967 that the principles and methods of behavior analysis were adopted and helped bringing together the diverse approaches to the study of behavior. With such integrated set of principles, a journal and a scientific society were created (Ribes, 2015). As a side note, this history resulted in the fact that the definition of behavior analyst is probably broader in Mexico than in other countries.

Such variability should be a strength of behavioral research in Mexico. Nevertheless, the initial variation was replaced with rigidity and intolerance in deciding how we should study behavior. Therefore, we turned a strength into a weakness. Unsubstantiated critics within our group have weakened the field and threatened our survival. By fragmenting our already reduced population into sub populations, we are competing with each other for resources. Other approaches to psychology are ready to discredit our field and take away resources from behavioral researchers; trashing each other within our group only make things easier for them.

Ever since Watson's manifesto (Watson, 1913) behavioral researchers have shared the view that the study of behavior is a natural science. We also share the notion that the goal of our discipline is to predict and control behavior. Because behaviorism has gone through many substantial changes in the subsequent 103 years, these may be two of the few statements that behavioral scientists these days agree on, but they are important ones.

In addition to the focus on behavior, in MJBA the set of principles and language used as starting point are, and will continue to be, those of behavior analysis. In this sense, MJBA has to be an example of how we can have a strong group that promotes variability both conceptually and in terms of the topics that are investigated, but also promotes communication between behavioral scientists. Based on the principles of selection by consequences, behavior analysis has greatly improved our understanding of behavior and has produced a precise language for describing phenomena.

Two great textbooks that describe amazingly the principles of behavior analysis and the precise use of language in basic and applied research are those by Catania (2013) and Cooper, Heron, and Heward (2007). These books not only summarize the principles of behavior but also demonstrate how behavior analysis has pro-

gressed since Skinner's classic books *The Behavior of Organisms* and *Science and Human Behavior* (Skinner, 1938, 1953). My proposal is to embrace variability around the principles and language of behavior analysis so that readers of MJBA can fully appreciate the contribution of behavioral researchers doing innovative research and theoretical analysis.

To this end, I will add two new categories for publishing papers in MJBA: brief reports and tutorials. Brief reports have been successful in other behavioral journals and could help increase the number of papers published in MJBA. Brief reports of experiments will be considered for publication if these do not exceed 2000 words, excluding the abstract and references, and include maximum two figures, two tables or one figure and one table. Publication of brief reports will be subjected to the same double-blind review process followed with all manuscripts submitted to MJBA. It is expected, however, that the editorial process with these manuscripts will be faster than with regular manuscripts.

The idea of publishing tutorials is to help readers familiarize with new topics of research, with topics that have advanced noticeably in recent years, or with topics in different areas of research that could be relevant to behavior analysis. These tutorials are expected to be clear enough to be understood by any MJBA reader, especially by students. Occasionally we could contact researchers, in areas perhaps considered opposing to behavior analysis, but that could be receptive to suggesting problems in their field or research area to which behavior analysis may contribute. I am open to suggestions regarding these tutorials but, I must clarify that tutorials will also be subjected to the double-blind review process.

Previous editors left a solid foundation for MJBA. It now is indexed in PsycInfo, Scopus, and Redalyc. Alicia Roca, my predecessor as Editor, did an amazing job by literally rescuing MJBA from a serious crisis in 2011. Thanks to Alicia, MJBA not only survived but has markedly increased its international visibility. Several factors have been crucial for the success of MJBA under the leadership of Alicia. One was that Andy Lattal accepted to work with her as Editor for English Language Submissions. Andy has done a remarkable job editing manuscripts and reviewing everything that is published in English. Furthermore, Andy was coeditor (with Alexandra Rutherford and Dave Wacker) of two fantastic special issues that have attracted numerous readers from different countries. Second, Alicia created a thoroughly organized website that is appealing to visitors. Third, Alicia conscientiously reviewed, edited, and prepared every manuscript that was included in MJBA. Her

work can be seen in the quality of the papers published both in terms of scientific content and in form.

I will continue with the practices that have increased international visibility of MJBA in previous years. Fortunately for MJBA, Andy Lattal agreed to serve, for the third time, as Editor for English Language submissions during the next four years. I want to thank him for agreeing to continue with this arduous task.

Because of the solid foundation, some changes in organization can be accomplished. The funds necessary to produce MJBA are provided by SMAC. These funds come mainly from conference registrations and memberships. While I am against the idea of a greedy scientific society, I believe that saving economic resources is important for the survival of SMAC and MJBA. Luckily, my graduate and undergraduate students have agreed to work pro bono for MJBA. Rodrigo Benavides and Katya Quiñones will serve as executive and administrative editors, respectively, other of my students, Kenia Cruz, Patricia Olguin, and Brissa Gutiérrez, will work as Editorial Assistants. This will save money for SMAC that hopefully will be used for disseminating behavior analysis in additional ways.

The number of subscriptions to MJBA have decreased considerably over time because of online availability of scientific resources. Previous editors, made a bold move by making all contents freely available online. This strategy reduces the number of subscriptions but put MJBA in an advantageous position relative to other journals that require payment for downloading articles. I believe this is the right way to continue and I will not change it, but I will try to add an option to allow the MJBA to receive donations from authors and readers. I will work on this feature with the president of SMAC.

Shipping costs of printed issues have increasing considerably. The main problem is that printed issues are expensive and the service provided by *Correos de México* is, unfortunately, unreliable. Therefore, in order to avoid delays and losing printed issues, which have to be replaced for free, we have been using a courier service, but this service is expensive. My proposal is to ask those members of SMAC and authors of manuscripts, who still want to receive printed issues, to pay for shipping charges.

I will do my best to keep MJBA vibrant and healthy during the next four years. It is my hope that the few changes in MJBA that I described in this paper will contribute to increase not only to variation but, in so doing, also to our "fitness"; that is, the number of behavior analysts in the next generation that can also themselves

go on to train even more behavior analysts. With increased fitness and variation let's hope that we get to see behavioral researchers leading psychological research in Mexico once again.

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