

Preface

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014), approximately one in six children in the USA has a developmental disability with 1 in 68 diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. The societal costs for caring for children with autism are estimated at over \$61 billion per year in the USA (Buescher et al. 2014), suggesting a need for high-quality research on assessment and treatment procedures to address this growing public health concern. While applied behavior analysis has emerged as a clear scientifically validated approach to the assessment and treatment of behavior associated with autism spectrum disorders (e.g., Odom et al. 2010; Thompson 2014; Walsh 2011; see also <http://www.asatonline.org/treatment/recommendations>), the field of behavior analysis has seen much fracturing between the basic and applied wings of its discipline in its recent history. The divergence of behavioral science and practice has been of concern for decades (e.g., Poling et al. 1981; Reed et al. 2014). An unfortunate source of this separation may be the lack of coordinated research interests aimed at translating principles and findings from the basic operant laboratory to the front lines of service delivery (Mace and Critchfield 2010). Toward this end, we were inspired by Murray Sidman's call to educate practitioners on the basic behavior-analytic science that serves as the backbone to applied methods (2011). A noteworthy addition by Sidman is that basic researchers ought to have an understanding of how practitioners use basic science, and what aspects of practice warrant additional inquiry in the highly controlled operant laboratory. This bidirectional approach to advancing behavior analysis thereby serves as the major influencing factor for the format of this book.

The purpose of this book is to compile the most recent research on areas that practitioners tackle in their daily lives when making clinical decisions to benefit individuals with autism. Although existing research and books address this general area, our book is unique in that each topic includes two chapters, one of which summarizes basic research and the other on applied research. Presently, there is no book that synthesizes this literature into a single resource. We identified topics with direct relevance to everyday clinical decisions of practitioners and educators that have a substantial and profound impact on the learning and adjustment of children with autism. The book begins with an introductory chapter on the definition of translation, the importance of highly controlled laboratory research as well as

real-world applied research, and the value of efficacy and effectiveness studies. Remaining topics include stimulus control, transitions, choice-making, conditioned reinforcement and token economies, preference and demand characteristics of reinforcement, behavioral momentum, tolerance for delay to reinforcement, and staff preparation and performance management. We have two goals: (1) to summarize recent and relevant basic and applied research on topics that benefit practitioners and consumers and (2) to stimulate research that addresses the full range of the basic-to-applied continuum on topics of great social importance. In doing so, we hope to influence the development of competent and well-informed scientist-practitioners (both basic and applied)—a la Sidman’s vision (2011)—in the behavioral study of autism spectrum disorders.

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Autism Service Delivery

Bridging the Gap Between Science and Practice

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