

# This Week's Citation Classic<sup>®</sup>

**Wolf M M.** Social validity: the case for subjective measurement or how applied behavior analysis is finding its heart. *J. Appl. Behav. Anal.* 11:203-14, 1978.  
[Department of Human Development, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS]

An interesting issue in the field of applied behavior analysis has been the degree to which the consumers involved in behavior analytic treatment should be asked to provide feedback about the goals, treatment procedures, and effects of these programs. This article attempted to make the case that our field needs this consumer feedback. It did not make a completely convincing case. Thus, the issue became controversial, and the paper became frequently cited. [The SSCI<sup>®</sup> indicates that this paper has been cited in more than 410 publications.]

## Why Did "Social Validity" Become a Classic?

Montrose Wolf  
Department of Human Development  
and Family Life  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045\*

While there are several universities around the country with groups of applied behavior analytic researchers, the University of Kansas has had undoubtedly the largest and most influential group. Since the middle 1960s, this group has been conceptualizing, debating, and defining the field of applied behavior analysis. This stimulating ferment and the uniquely supportive academic environment provided by the University of Kansas have been very productive for us all.

This environment has produced an important body of applied behavior analytic work resulting in hundreds of papers by faculty and students across many departments, bureaus, institutes, and off-campus applied research sites. These papers have affected theory, research methodology, and treatment.

These papers also have affected practice in community-based and residential treatment for the retarded, autistic, delinquent, elderly, physically disabled and abused, as well as in special education and educational technology.

This fall we celebrated more than a quarter of a century of prolific basic and applied behavioral research at the University of Kansas by dedicating the new Dole Center for Human Development. During these last 25 years, dozens of classic behavioral research papers have been published, including some that also have been selected by *Current Contents*<sup>®</sup> (CC<sup>®</sup>) as *Citation Classics*. This is my fifth paper honored by CC as a *Citation Classic*.<sup>1-4</sup>

I think that the four other papers were frequently cited because they explored new conceptual or therapeutic areas. This paper, I believe, was frequently cited because it became controversial. In this paper I tried, and partially failed, to make the case that consumers touched by applied behavioral programs should be involved in providing feedback to behavior analysts about the goals, methods, and effects of our treatments. But, my paper was not good enough to convince all my colleagues. In fact, some of my colleagues were so unconvinced that they claimed that I grew soft in my head as well as in my measurement principles since I recommended that our measurement systems include subjective measures as well as our traditional objective measures.

Social validity remains controversial. To explore the controversy, the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* is considering devoting an issue of the journal [in 1991] to the debate about social validity.

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2. Baer D M, Wolf M M & Risley T R. Some current dimensions of applied behavior analysis. *J. Appl. Behav. Anal.* 1:91-7, 1968. (Cited 895 times.) [See also: Baer D M. Citation Classic. (Smelser N J, comp.) *Contemporary classics in the social and behavioral sciences*. Philadelphia: ISI Press, 1987. p. 108.]
3. Wolf M M, Risley T R & Mees H L. Application of operant conditioning procedures to the behavior problems of an autistic child. *Behav. Res. Ther.* 1:302-12, 1965. (Cited 335 times.) [See also: Wolf M M. Citation Classic. (Smelser N J, comp.) *Contemporary classics in the social and behavioral sciences*. Philadelphia: ISI Press, 1987. p. 263.]
4. Barrish H H, Saunders M & Wolf M M. Good behavior game: effects of individual contingencies for group consequences on disruptive behavior in a classroom. *J. Appl. Behav. Anal.* 2:119-24, 1969. (Cited 200 times.) [See also: Barrish H H. Citation Classic. (Smelser N J, comp.) *Contemporary classics in the social and behavioral sciences*. Philadelphia: ISI Press, 1987. p. 110.]

\*Received October 12, 1990