

# **Review of Research of the 1940s and 1950s**

## **From Interviews with Dr. Francis Mechner & Dr. Murray Sidman**

*Cathy Polakoff*

The author interviewed Drs. Mechner and Sidman by email in the spring of 2011 as part of a project for a History of Behavior Analysis class at the University of North Texas. The information below is derived from those interviews. PDFs of the actual interview with Dr. Mechner can be found on his personal page on this website, with links to the 1940s and 1950s sections of the 'When' page. Dr. Sidman responded to the interview questions with two previously published journal articles, which are listed on his personal page on this website, again with links to the 1940s and 1950s sections of the 'When' page. Finally, a journal article by Hefferline, and two others that he co-authored, are listed on his personal page and linked to the 1950s section of the 'When' page. It should also be noted that Dr. Mechner mentions in his interview that during the 1940s and 1950s, Behavior Analysis was referred to as "learning theory". All articles can also be found listed under the 'References' section below.

## **1940s**

### **Recollections of Important Areas of Research**

Skinner's "Pigeon Project" (1944) - B.F. Skinner trained pigeons to peck a target so as to keep a missile on target. The project was later discontinued, but led to Skinner's discovery that pigeons respond faster than rats, making them ideal for behavioral research.

Avoidance behavior and free operants

Stimulus control

Use of dolphins to find and destroy enemy submarines

Hefferline's research on control of overt behavior by private events

## **Recommended Reading**

Keller, F.S. (1941). Light aversion in the white rat. *Psychological Record*, 4, 235-250.

Winnick, W. (1949). Response vacillation in conflict situations. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*, Columbia University, New York.

## **Interviewee Recollections of Important People**

B.F. Skinner (*Mechner, Sidman*)

Charles Ferster (*Sidman*)

Fred Keller (*Mechner, Sidman*)

Joe Antonitis (*Mechner, Sidman*)

Joe Brady (*Sidman*)

Nat Schoenfeld (*Mechner, Sidman*)

Ralph Hefferline (*Sidman*)

W. Winnick (*Sidman*)

## **References**

Keller, F.S. (1941). Light aversion in the white rat. *Psychological Record*, 4, 235-250.

Skinner, B.F. (1938). *The Behavior of Organisms, an Experimental Analysis*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: B.F. Skinner Foundation.

Winnick, W. (1949). Response vacillation in conflict situations. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*, Columbia University, New York.