

**REVIEW OF *CULTURAL CONTINGENCIES: BEHAVIOR ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURAL PRACTICES*,
EDITED BY PETER LAMAL**

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In this essay, we review Peter Lamal's (1997) text, *Cultural Contingencies: Behavior Analytic Perspectives on Cultural Practices*, summarizing the chapters and appraising them against the goal of the text. We begin with some professional and disciplinary context, and then review and evaluate the chapters and the text overall. In conclusion we urge that this text, like all others, be evaluated in the context of its purposes, not independently of them.

Professional and Disciplinary Contexts

Professional Context

As a discipline, behavior analysis is today progressive in its three branches, that is, in the basic (e.g., Lattal & Perone, 1998), applied (e.g., Schroeder, 1990), and conceptual (see Leigland, 1999) analysis of behavior. It is also increasingly applicable to other professions (e.g., psychopharmacology; Higgins & Katz, 1998), inclusive of psychology's content domains (e.g., cognition, emotion, motivation; Hayes, Hayes, Sato, & Ono, 1994), effective in clinical and educational outcome (Crandall, Jacobson, & Sloane, 1997; Kazdin, 1994), and consistent with a naturalized philosophy of science (Batts & Crawford, 1991).

This progress and applicability notwithstanding, behavior analysis is not today mainstream as a cultural practice. In the United States, for instance, it is largely "ghettoized" within establishment psychology and education (see, e.g., Leahey, 1997, pp. 454-457; Watkins, 1997), and bereft of significant presence in these fields' scientific journals and organizational structures (see, e.g., Coleman & Mehlman, 1992). Within the academy, and the culture more generally, behavior

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analysis is commonly considered scientific (Mahoney, 1989; contra. Catania, 1991), superficial (Proctor & Weeks, 1990; contra. Wolf, 1991), and conceptually naïve (Garcia & Garcia y Robertson, 1985; contra. Todd & Morris, 1992).

Cultural practices. This is a worry if cultural survival is ultimately dependent on a science of behavior that can provide empirically-based strategies and tactics for resolving which cultural practices increase the probability of survival and which do not, and in which contexts (Skinner, 1948, 1953, pp. 415-449; 1974). Until a culture evolves in which a science of human behavior is one of its established practices, behavior analysis will emerge and struggle many times over; sometimes it will be useful, but sometimes a threat (e.g., Watson, 1913; Skinner, 1974; cf. Kantor, 1963, 1969).

In the face of such struggles, behavior analysts and their professional organizations have occasionally attempted to make behavior analysis a cultural practice. First, they have sought to increase their own effectiveness, thereby making their science more valuable to the culture at large. These practices include improving the teaching of behavior analysis (see Malott & Heward, 1995), developing behavior-analytic certification and credentialing programs (see Hopkins & Moore, 1993; Shook, 1993), and making behavior analysis more accessible through information technology (e.g., the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies' web site, www.behavior.org). Second, they have sought to alter practices external to their own in order to increase their inclusive fitness by, for instance, making behavior analysis more important within mainstream professional associations (e.g., Eckerman, 1998), joining in consortia to change both governmental and legislative action (e.g., Gershenson, 1994), contributing to public and social policy (e.g., Fawcett, Bernstein, Czyzewski, Greene, Hannah, Iwata, Jason, Mathews, Morris, Otis-Wilborn, Seekins, & Winett, 1988), influencing media coverage and representation (see Morris, 1985), and informing the public about its worth and applicability (see *Behavior Analysis Digest*, P.O. Box 844, Hurricane, WV 25526-2778). To the extent that these efforts are successful, then behavior analysis can compete more effectively within the behavioral and social sciences (e.g., psychology, sociology), the humanities (e.g., history, philosophy), and the professions (e.g., education, social work).

Disciplinary Context

In addition to making behavior analysis a cultural practice, behavior analysts have also undertaken interpretations and analyses of cultural practices—and changes therein—in order to assess what conceptual and practical advantages might accrue from understanding those practices and to broaden the scope of their

own practices. Although contributions of this sort were part of behavior analysis soon after its inception (e.g., Skinner, 1948, 1953, pp. 415-449), they only emerged as a disciplinary practice in the 1980s. Among these interpretations and analyses were reviews of Marvin Harris's (1977, 1979) texts on cultural anthropology (Lloyd, 1985; Vargas, 1985), conceptual syntheses of Harris's (1974, 1983) work with that in behavior analysis (e.g., Malagodi, 1986; Malott, 1988), the emergence of the concept of the "metacontingency" (Glenn, 1988), and the founding of the journal, *Behavior Analysis and Social Action* (est. 1986), now *Behavior and Social Issues* (1991-present). Then, in the early 1990s, Peter Lamal (1991) edited the first behavior-analytic text to address cultural practices per se, *Behavior Analysis of Societies and Cultural Practices*. His text offered interpretations and analyses of, for instance, politics in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and practices in higher education, clinical psychology, and corrections in the United States.

The reviews of Lamal (1991) were mixed, both inside and outside the discipline. For instance, Richard Dangel (1992), a behavior-analytic social worker (see, e.g., Dangel & Polster, 1984), praised the text for being "an excellent collection of papers that provides a wonderful framework for discussion" (p. 663), but complained that it was also "irritating and presumptuous" (p. 661). His complaint arose from the book's general lack of experimental validation: It was overly theoretical, not applicable enough in practice or promise, and did not address literatures in professions that had developed effective means for changing organizational systems (e.g., social work). Kenneth Gergen (1992), a social constructionist critic of behavior analysis (see Gergen, 1985), also praised and faulted the text. He praised it for achieving a singular conceptual advance, the metacontingency (Glenn, 1991), but faulted it for being isolated from related disciplinary advances (e.g., in organizational culture). In general, he opined that the field's "enchantment with an analytic technology seem[ed] to foster an insensitivity to other voices within both the intellectual and the organizational spheres" (p. 1187).

Dangel's (1992) and Gergen's (1992) praise was well placed, but their criticism was not entirely fair, even though we are at places in agreement with them. The criticisms were not fair, first, because Lamal (1991) had mainly meant to offer interpretations and analyses, not reviews of behavior-analytic applications. Applications are rare because experimental control is often impossible or unethical in the context of large-scale cultural systems (e.g., in Soviet politics). Second, some of the nonbehavior-analytic literatures Lamal (1991) did not address (e.g., cultural meaning systems; see Gergen, 1992) are inherently more speculative than a behavior-analytic interpretation because they are based on perspectives antithetical

to a science of behavior (e.g., metaphysical social constructionism; see Zuriff, 1998). This defense of Lamal (1991) notwithstanding, behavior analysts are not excused from offering, where they can, interpretations and analyses that lend themselves to practical action, for instance, by (a) addressing behavior-analytic interventions on a scale smaller than inclusive cultural practices (e.g., preventative medicine) and (b) reviewing nonbehavior-analytic literatures for points of convergence on methods and results (e.g., higher education), theory and metatheory (e.g., socialism).

A few years after Lamal (1991) and its reviews were published, two important texts appeared that, in part, redressed these criticisms. These were Anthony Biglan's (1995) *Changing Cultural Practices: A Contextualist Framework for Intervention Research* and Mark Mattaini and Bruce Thyer's (1996) *Finding Solutions to Social Problems: Behavioral Strategies for Change*. Biglan (1995) offered an integrated, contextualistic framework for behavior-analytic research on cultural practices; he addressed the methodological issues involved in conducting such research; he reviewed applied literatures where cultural practices have been changed (e.g., in tobacco use, childrearing, sexism); and he concluded with specific suggestions for establishing a science of cultural practice. In their text, Mattaini and Thyer (1996) brought together experts—not all of them behavior-analytic—who offered interpretations and practical strategies for solving a wide variety of seemingly intractable social problems (e.g., youth violence, racism, child maltreatment, drug abuse), with an emphasis on problems for which effective action was being (or might in the future reasonably be) taken.

All these—the profession and the discipline of behavior analysis, behavior-analytic concerns over cultural practices, the literature on these practices, Lamal's first text and its reviews, and the more recent books—are the context in which Lamal's 1997 sequel has appeared, our review of which follows.

A Review

A book should be reviewed, first, on the basis of its self-stated purposes, and only after that—if reviewers are honest—on the basis of the book they would have written instead. So, we begin with Lamal's (1997) prefatory material concerning his test, where he wrote:

The 1990s have seen renewed interest in a behavior analytic approach to societies and cultural practices This book is a contribution to the ongoing development of this area [T]he contents . . . are wholly devoted to consideration of particular cultural practices, across three countries [the United States, Canada, and Japan]. The first four chapters are concerned with cultural

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practices having to do with individual and public health. Chapters 7-9 are concerned with contingencies that affect families. Other chapters (5, 6, 10, 11, 12) address a variety of cultural practices. At first glance it may appear that the reader is presented with a potpourri, but that is not, in a fundamental sense, true. What gives these diverse chapters coherence is their shared foundation in a behavior analytic approach to the description and interpretation of cultural practices. (p. ix)

Our review is organized as Lamal suggested above.

Individual and Public Health: Prevention, Compliance, Anorexia, and Partnerships

In “Preventive Medicine and Cultural Contingencies: A Natural Experiment,” Hovell, Wahlgren, and Russos describe contingencies responsible for today’s preventative medical services or, more accurately, for the lack thereof. Over the last century, medical contingencies (e.g., in disease etiology, medical technology) have made prevention increasingly a problem in behavior: physician behavior in offering preventative services. More recently, short-term political and professional contingencies have mitigated against offering these services (e.g., the economics of managed care). Where these services are offered, they are varied, resulting in an ongoing “selectionist” experiment in nature, which authors alluded to in their title, but which is far from complete. In the end, the authors recommend that behavior analysts play a role in contributing to and evaluating this experiment, but some practical examples—or generalities—would have been welcome, which they might provide in the next chapter they write.

Another problem in the delivery of medical services that is also a problem in behavior is patient compliance (e.g., with appointments, medical regimens, behavioral programs). Greenspoon’s chapter—“Compliance, Health Service, and Behavior Analysis”—offers a fine review of the research on medical compliance (e.g., say-do-say correspondence), as well as on means for ensuring compliance (e.g., commitment responses). An important side bar is Greenspoon’s warning that if reported compliance with behavioral programs (e.g., self-control of drug use) does not correspond with actual compliance, then the failures that follow will often indict behavior analysis (e.g., “I’ve tried it, but it doesn’t work”). When these failures are problems in compliance, not in behavioral technology, then we need to develop better means for establishing say-do-say correspondence (e.g., program integrity). Because the physician’s rule-governance plays a critical role in attaining correspondence, more of the rule-governance literature might have been brought into this chapter (e.g., Hayes, 1989).

In “Activity Anorexia: The Interplay of Culture, Behavior, and Biology,” Pierce and Epling address the combination of cultural, behavioral, and biological processes that induce activity anorexia. After describing the disorder and their own animal model thereof, the authors review the evidence for the predisposing cultural processes (e.g., obese women, more than obese men, earn less than their “normal weight” co-workers) that produce a unique combination of exercise and diet that in turn engages biological process (e.g., dopaminergic) that altogether produce the disorder. Although cultural conditions are most relevant to the text under review, the authors’ incorporation of all three levels of analysis—cultural, behavioral, and biological—makes this chapter especially interesting. Multi-level analyses such as these are becoming standard requirements for reviews of the social science literature and in applications for funding. In this, Pierce and Epling’s analysis stands out because it is grounded in a science of behavior, while many others are not.

The final chapter of this section is “A Behavioral Analysis of Collaborative Partnerships for Community Health.” Here, Russos, Fawcett, Francisco, Berkley, and Lopez describe the interrelation among a university-based research group, a statewide health foundation, and local communities. More specifically, they review the means by which this partnership “aims to change the environmental context of behavior so that distal consequences [e.g., teen pregnancy, drug use, heart disease] bear on proximal environmental factors and behaviors [e.g., poor education, exercise, nutrition] leading to them” (p. 88). Among the critical features of this partnership are the use of (a) objective methods for evaluating community change over time and (b) contingencies for reinforcing that change (e.g., grant renewal). As this was one of the few chapters to describe an actual experiment, some data would have strengthened the relation among its behavior-analytic interpretations, the community applications, and the cultural change. Perhaps Lamal’s next text could emphasize experimental analyses of cultural practices.

Contingencies that Affect Families Welfare and Childrearing

In “Reworking Welfare: Untangling the Web,” Mattaini and Magnabosco describe contingencies and metacontingencies operating in welfare policy and the role of behavior analysis in improving them. As for policy, coercive contingencies do not work and societies are better to the degree that their members contribute. As for behavior analysis, it can assist in the analysis and design of welfare contingencies and of the metacontingencies that establish and maintain them. The former largely involve vocational and educational requirements; here, the authors are appropriately cynical about policies described rhetorically as “incentive” that

are actually coercive. The metacontingencies offer behavior analysis an unrecognized challenge: “achieving a coherent vision of the desired outcomes and finding ways to link these outcomes to the interlocking practices that produce them” (p. 163). In all, the authors provide a thoughtful analysis of the multiple contingencies that lead to welfare policy and that follow from it, as well as the metacontingencies controlling those contingencies.

The next chapter—Nackerud, Waller, Waller, and Thyer’s, “Behavior Analysis and Social Welfare Policy: An Example of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)” —provides a contingency analysis of welfare policy. Among the contingencies are: (a) those that control the behavior of policymakers, which range from the public (e.g., the culture’s self-actional philosophy of mind) to the personal (e.g., re-election); (b) those written into welfare policy, which often do not work as intended (e.g., work incentives); and (c) those in the lives of welfare recipients, which illustrates that their behavior is lawful and orderly when policymakers think it is not. AFDC in Georgia, for example, puts a cap on the number of children a recipient may have, removing the incentive for having more children to increase monthly allotments. But, AFDC also waives the work requirement for receipt of welfare for mothers with children under age three, which differentially reinforces a high rate of childbirth. The strength of the chapter lies in this and its many other insightful analyses of current and future welfare policy.

Biglan, Matzler, Fowler, Gunn, Taylor, Rusby, and Irvine’s chapter, “Improving Childrearing in America’s Communities,” takes a public health approach toward “increasing the prevalence of healthy children,” which implies a concomitant increase in the prevalence of healthy environments—families, schools, and peers. To increase the prevalence of healthy children, communities need clinical (e.g., parent training) and nonclinical programs (e.g., mass media campaigns against smoking); high quality preschool and day care programs, as well as curricula that teach-to-learn; and programs involving prosocial peers (e.g., at school, in supervised recreation). Behavior analysts know how to design and implement these programs, but communities still have to adopt them. This means: (a) identifying the community organizations that influence the aforementioned environments, (b) clarifying the contingencies that influence these organizations’ actions (e.g., their values), and (c) influencing their influence in these domains. This is the next challenge in applying behavior analysis to cultural practices.

Varieties of Cultural Practices

In “Behavior Analysis and Demographics: Governmental Control of Reproductive Behavior and Fertility in the Province of Quebec, Canada,” Krull and Pierce combine behavior-analytic interpretations and population statistics to enhance our understanding of cultural practices, in this case, the use of economic incentives to increase family size (e.g., tax allowances). Although the authors describe research designs and data sources in ways that allow for informed analyses of the results, this material might have been improved: (a) the validity of some statistics could have been qualified (e.g., birthrates can be estimated from formal records, but use of birth control was likely based on verbal reports), (b) other data might have ruled out alternative interpretations (e.g., data on total population, number of children per family, infant mortality), and (c) the stretch-to-fit graphs sometimes interfered with the analysis of the results. These points notwithstanding, the chapter is an excellent example of how to incorporate population statistics in a behavior-analytic interpretation.

In contrast to the foregoing analyses of specific practices, Tazaki and Baer analyze an endemic practice in “Women’s Roles in Japan’s Economic Success and the Problems that Resulted.” Although Japan may be “rich,” this has come at a price. In the authors’ analysis, the workplace causes husbands to relinquish all other responsibilities to their wives; wives are then responsible for their children’s ultimate success, tutoring them for “examination hell” and advocating for their scholastic standing; wives-to-be thus select husbands based largely on their likelihood of success as providers, and that is all; as a result, spouses often lack the skills for negotiating a marriage and find solace elsewhere. According to Tazaki and Baer, although women play a central role in these contingencies, their role will change only as the culture slowly evolves. In this, we sensed some resignation, as though the practice of changing sexually stereotyped practices could not become a practice unto its own. This may be our own myopia, but further data and analysis might have clarified the limitations and possibilities.

Although behavior analysis has mainly focused on cultural practices per se, it can also address practices-as-cultures. This is the purpose of Nevin’s chapter, “The Formation and Survival of Experimental Communities,” a quantitative analysis of an experiment in history (cf. cliometrics). His thesis: “If experimental communities are to play a significant role in the culture as alternatives to current patterns of living, it is essential that we understand the determiners of their longevity” (p. 230). His methods: He carefully selected the communities, established the independent variables (religious vs. secular), identified the dependent variables (e.g., longevity), subjected their relation to visual analysis, and drew objective and

circumspect inferences (e.g., religious communities survived longer, not due to their religiosity, but to independent factors, for instance, previously shared histories). Because more precise predictions than this were impossible, further research is necessary in order to identify still other relevant variables, which we can then put to use on “behalf of the human future” (p. 231).

In “Corporate Control of Media and Propaganda: A Behavior Analysis,” Laitinen and Rakos offer a behavioral interpretation of propaganda, drawing both on Glenn’s (1991) concept of the metacontingency and Harris’ (1964) cultural taxonomy. In particular, they describe how the deregulation of mass media ownership (e.g., print, radio, television) has led to the accumulation of multiple outlets by but a few corporations with many subsidiaries. The economic contingencies that operate on the subsidiaries lead corporations to direct their news media toward coverage that supports (or does not harm) the subsidiaries. As a result, the news media is compromised as an effective counter-controlling agency. These contingencies also lead corporations to limit the news media’s economic resources relative to their other, possibly competing subsidiaries. This, though, allows other controlling agencies to manipulate the media to their own ends, as in the Bush administration’s systematic manipulation of public opinion concerning the war with Iraq. Laitinen and Rakos’s analyses is subtle and sophisticated—and chilling.

The final chapter is by Lamal, himself: “A Behavioral Approach to the Visual Arts.” It subverts the view that there is “universally good art” and interprets the behavior of those involved in the arts. As for the former, Lamal argues that art is only “good” in cultural context. As for the latter, he describes the social and financial contingencies that establish, select, and direct the actions of artists; viewers of art; art collectors, investors, and dealers; and gallery owners. As almost an aside, Lamal observes that artists are social, not solitary; their behavior is socially contingent, rarely the product of lone genius. This is true of philosophers as well (see Collins, 1999). Although these are minority views, an edited collection of them, along with well-reasoned arguments and more data than Lamal provides, warrants development. Finally, although the visual arts may be lacking in relatively immediate social importance (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968), any adequate analysis of cultural practices must not only apply to problems of proximal importance in science and technology, but also to the distal content of conduct in the arts.

An Appraisal

Returning to Lamal's (1997) preface, we can affirm that his text met his purposes: (a) It is a contribution to the development of behavior-analytic perspectives on cultural practices; (b) its contents are devoted to particular cultural practices; and (c) its coherence is based on the chapters' foundations in behavior analysis. It is also an improvement over Lamal (1991): The chapters are better prepared, more professionally written, and more sophisticated in style. Lamal's purposes, though, underdetermine his text. Other texts could be edited that would have attained the same ends, yet range from merely satisficing to more fully satisfying. (As an aside, behavior analysts should only publish their best work in public places because their critics will otherwise take their worst work to be their best work.)

Where Lamal's text falls on the continuum from satisficing to satisfying depends on the needs of the discipline and those of its members, which are likely quite variable. For some readers, the text's contribution to the behavior analysis of cultural practices might have been broadened to include different and more diverse practices, such as those addressed by Biglan (1995) and Mattaini and Thyer (1996). Its coverage of particular practices might have distinguished those that are cultural and controlling from those that are merely common (e.g., medical noncompliance), as in Skinner's (1953) distinction between "controlling agencies" and "the behavior of people in groups"—and set the latter aside. Its coherence might have been insured though some explicit coverage of what behavior analysis entails (e.g., an introductory chapter or section; cf. Lamal, 1991), as opposed to its implicit coverage in each chapter (see also Houmanfar & Fredericks, 1999). Finally, its preparation might have aimed for more precision in style; for example, it was sometimes quite abstract in its descriptions of issues, processes, and even contingencies.

How might behavior-analytic colleagues in other professions and critics in other disciplines evaluate Lamal's newest contribution? First, although the text describes more practical applications than Lamal (1991), it is in the main highly interpretive; and, although it is also more sensitive to "other voices" (cf. social validity), it is still not very diverse. However, to the extent that its emphasis on interpretation and the lack of diversity are representative of behavior analysis in general, then the field might be criticized, but not the book. Second, the text might also be criticized for not addressing literatures in professions that had effectively changed organizational systems and for being isolated from other disciplines' advances in cultural analysis. These, though, were not Lamal's purposes, nor are they a basis for criticizing how he attained his own. However, a

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behavior-analytic text that did engage practical and conceptually consistent advances in other professions and disciplines might be more compelling (e.g., less isolated and scientific) to colleagues and critics. It might increase the scope and precision of present behavior-analytic practices (e.g., less superficial and naïve). And, it might add variability to the content, approach, and style of those practices for the selection of more effective action. This might just be the next text to write (or to edit).

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