In Response

The Alleged Vices of Popularization and the Potential Vices of Laboratory Isolation

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In his review of my book, *Self-Control: Waiting Until Tomorrow for What You Want Today* (1995), McDowell (1996) noted that this book has some characteristics that are not typical of academic books. He therefore concluded that it must be a popular book, destined primarily for a nonacademic audience. However, as McDowell also noted, the book has a number of characteristics that are not typical of popular books: “For a popular book, Logue’s writing is often too academic. For example, Parts I and II, which provide the scientific tone, are too long” (p. 132). The review had difficulty categorizing the book as either academic or popular. What I maintain here is that the difficulty is not in fitting the book into the category of academic or popular but rather is in a lack of sufficient categories.

This book was never intended to be a popular book or a monograph concerning laboratory research on self-control. Instead, this book’s purpose is to bring laboratory research on self-control, research conducted within a behavior-analytic framework, to a broader audience. The book shows a wide range of possible applications of a self-control analysis in order to stimulate ideas for further research and application.

Some of the people who understand basic research need to present that research in such a way that it can be understood and positively attended to by the wider psychology community as well as by the community outside of psychology. Otherwise there will be little hope of basic laboratory research ever affecting the behavior of anyone other than those who conducted that research. Research on self-control is one of the useful vehicles for promoting such communication, because self-control is a subject of interest to many types of psychologists as well as to nonpsychologists. The intention of the book under review was to capitalize on that wide interest in self-control so as to facilitate communication about basic behavior-analytic research.

In discussing how the book does not fit the academic category, the review states that “many of the virtues associated with a popular treatment are vices from an academic perspective” (p. 132), and that the book is characterized by at least three such vices. The first is a “relaxing of definitions and recovery of ordinary-language meanings” of self-control and impulsiveness (p. 132). One aspect of this vice is apparently the way that the book uses laboratory concepts to examine nonlaboratory phenomena. The review does not recommend applying laboratory research and concepts to nonlaboratory phenomena unless the nonlaboratory phenomena completely reflect those studied in the laboratory: “Naturally occurring situations should be selected such that all their important characteristics are also present in the laboratory

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preparation, and such that the laboratory preparation does not entail anything important that is missing from the naturally occurring situation" (p. 132). Leaving aside the issue of how one identifies and decides upon all of the important characteristics of a preparation, laboratory preparations by definition are not the same as situations that occur outside of the laboratory. Frequently, nonlaboratory situations entail a greater number of uncontrolled variables, as well as different sorts of variables, than do laboratory situations. Until our science progresses to the point that the effects of many more types of variables and of multiple uncontrolled variables are better understood, research conducted in the laboratory will have only partial relevance to understanding and controlling nonlaboratory behavior, and investigations of nonlaboratory behavior will have the potential of furthering that understanding. Further, if, due to the discrepancies between laboratory and nonlaboratory behavior, researchers confine their efforts entirely to certain types of laboratory behavior, such researchers will have very little if any impact on researchers who study other types of laboratory behavior or on those who are not researchers.

According to the review, another example of the vice of relaxing definitions is the book's referring to people, and not just people's behavior, as demonstrating self-control and impulsiveness, along with the book's consideration of personality tests and questionnaires as means of assessing self-control. Certainly in the popular press, people, and not just behaviors, are referred to as exhibiting self-control. However, it is also true that most psychologists, and even some behavior analysts, refer to people, and not just behaviors, as showing self-control. The review is thus espousing not an academic approach, but one type of approach within behavior analysis. Thus it is not surprising that the review would find the book's approach to be too discrepant from one type of behav-

ior-analytic approach. However, this does not necessarily indicate that the book is destined solely for a popular audience. The book's approach to the definitional issue is useful in communicating with a broad audience. Were the book to confine itself to terms and phrases used only by certain behavior analysts, its audience would shrink drastically. If researchers value the application of their research outside of their own laboratories, then they must present that research in ways that are likely to make it seem of value to the rest of the verbal community.

A second vice listed in McDowell's review is that the book implies that "virtually all behavior can be conceptualized as . . . impulse versus self-control" (p. 129). According to the book's definitions, in order for a behavior to be classified as self-control (or the converse, impulsiveness), an organism must be faced with a choice between two behaviors, one of which will result in a relatively less valuable outcome sooner and the other in a relatively more valuable outcome later (Logue, 1995, p. 7). Choices between behaviors resulting in two outcomes of equal delays or of equal value, and all behaviors that do not involve choice, constitute neither self-control nor impulsiveness. Even within the laboratory, experimenters program a huge variety of reinforcement schedules that cannot be classified as either self-control or impulsiveness. The book did not, of course, list the many types of behavior that cannot be classified as either self-control or impulsiveness.

It is true, however, that these definitions do permit the application of a self-control analysis to a large variety of behaviors. Some of these behaviors may not have been conceived of previously as examples of self-control or impulsiveness, even though they are squarely within the book's definitions. One of the book's examples named in the review was faculty research productivity. The book points out that the reinforcers for conducting research are often quite delayed, whereas the rein-

forcers for many other activities engaged in by faculty are not so delayed. Some of the not-so-delayed reinforcers include those obtained for teaching an effective course and for being an effective academic administrator. The availability of choices between these quite delayed and not-so-delayed reinforcers results in such problematic situations as new assistant professors who find themselves spending large amounts of time on their teaching and insufficient time on their research in order to obtain tenure, and college administrators who become too distant from research ever to return to it (see Logue, 1995, chap. 9).

It is precisely this variety of behaviors to which a self-control analysis applies that makes these definitions of self-control and impulsiveness so useful. By permitting a self-control analysis of many different (but certainly not all) types of behaviors, it is possible for laboratory researchers who study self-control using a behavior-analytic approach to communicate with researchers in other areas and with nonresearchers, and to provide new insights about certain types of behavior. For example, to the best of my knowledge, no one has previously described the difficulties that some assistant professors and college administrators have with conducting sufficient research as being related to the fact that the reinforcers associated with conducting research are more delayed than are many of the reinforcers associated with other parts of these positions. When such problems of inadequate research productivity are examined using a self-control analysis, new solutions, such as structuring the academic environment so as to provide reinforcers for research after shorter delays, become apparent. Further, with this analysis, the work of behavior analysts who study self-control in the laboratory seems of greater relevance to the academic community outside of behavior analysis, and thus is more likely to be attended to by that community.

The third vice listed is the "cursory

development of applications to human problems. . . . In the section on bulimia, for example, Logue does not discuss the anxiety-based conceptualization of this problem . . . or the fairly successful exposure-with-response-prevention treatment to which this conceptualization has given rise" (p. 132). More generally, "self-control analyses suggest treatment interventions for practically every known human problem. . . . We can read Logue's book, learn how to overcome the burdensome legacy of our evolutionary past, and then proceed to function effectively in the present environment. Good can triumph over evil, if only we work at it" (p. 129). Certainly a self-control analysis can be applied to a large range of human problems. However, there are many such problems that were not mentioned in the book, and this book was not the place to explain all of the issues concerning each problem that was mentioned. For example, there are a great many explanations of bulimia and a great many treatments for bulimia that have had at least some success (for multiple examples see Logue, 1991). The aim of the book under review was to show how a self-control perspective could be useful in understanding and modifying certain behaviors—but in addition to, not instead of, other approaches. Throughout the section on applications, repeated references are made to the complexity of and the difficulty of treating various behavior problems. Many of what the review interpreted as treatment suggestions were simply examples of behaviors that people or their therapists have engaged in to increase self-control. Finally, from the very first chapter, the book hypothesizes that impulsiveness has an evolutionary basis, and that it is therefore not useful to conceptualize it as bad (or good). This book is not a how-to book showing people how "good can triumph over evil." It is a book that tries to show how a certain type of analysis, based on laboratory research, can apply to a number of different behaviors, in an attempt to in-

crease our understanding of those behaviors and to generate ideas for further research and application.

In conclusion, this book is not a popular book that needs to have some of the science removed, nor is it an academic book that needs to restrict its discussion of applications. This book is also not compatible with the views of all behaviorists. These are the behaviorists who state that it is essential that they adhere closely to all of the tenets and practices of behaviorism when conducting or discussing research, and that they must not communicate with people outside of the behavior-analytic community except within a strict behavior-analytic perspective: "Once even a small measure of academic respectability has been lost, all is lost, and so one might as well give up" (McDowell, 1996, p. 132). However, the function of this book is compatible with the views of other behaviorists. These are the behaviorists who state that the value of behaviorism results at least in part from its effectiveness in communicating with and changing the behavior of the wider community: "If

behaviorists were more humble, their effectiveness as scientists would increase. . . . 'Humility' is used broadly to imply tentativeness of theoretical and methodological positions, willingness to consider alternative views, support for diversity, openness to criticism" (Neuringer, 1991, p. 1). This book attempts to show how different areas of research and areas of application can be integrated within a behavior-analytic framework for self-control. It attempts to facilitate communication between the behavior-analytic laboratory community and other communities. Whether or not it fulfills that intended function will have to await the test of time.

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