Book Note

There's a Better Way: A Review of Karen Pryor's *Don't Shoot the Dog*

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Many reviews in this journal reflect the fact that many behavior analysts are particularly inclined to give advice to laypeople. Some behavioral principles are simple, and hence an extensive background in the field is not necessary to get started. So we have reviewed Skinner's *Enjoy Old Age: A Program of Self-Management* (Keller, 1984) and Frederiksen's *Handbook for Organizational Behavior Management* (Brethower, 1983). Karen Pryor's *Don't Shoot the Dog* suggests the use of behavioral principles in everyday problems, and in that respect it is closer to Skinner's book than Frederiksen's.

I can verify from personal experience as an author that authors of these books often begin with a confusing set of intentions: (1) to help a layperson beset with specific problems, (2) to convince the reader of the validity of the principles by presenting scientific documentation, and/or (3) to describe the useful general principles and hope the reader will make appropriate adjustments in applying them. For the first intention, the author would need to guess specific problems facing the reader; for the second, the author would have to educate the reader in the whole scientific process; and for the third, the author would need to say how applications can be adjusted. A book accomplishing all of these intentions would probably be too large and too ponderous to tempt the moderately motivated layreader. So we write our "how to" books with some compromise.

In the case of Pryor's *Don't Shoot the*

Dog, the compromise is to focus on a presentation of principles using an exciting variety of examples drawn from all possible circumstances of human activity in an effort to capture the reader's attention. No documentation is attempted, nor is there an effort to use examples relevant to any particular reader. But Pryor successfully draws on her own extensive experience in applications to the military, businesses, zoos, and, of course, everyday life. The principles are paraded out one by one: reinforcement, shaping, stimulus control, fading, and extinction in five chapters (189 pages indexed).

The advantage of Pryor's strategy is that the book makes colorful and enjoyable reading while teaching the important behavioral principles. The disadvantages of this strategy turn out to be that the reader's problem is not likely to be specifically addressed and rules concerning step-by-step applications are often left out. But, if you need some examples to add new color to your lectures on behavior analysis, there are delightful discoveries for you here. Also, the book would be helpful to clients involved in a behavioral program and in need of an overview of principles, pointers for success, and a pep talk.

Both professional and layperson will enjoy the useful advice and memorable examples—from the avid fortyish squash player (who doesn't know one of these?) who berates himself for errors and changes by learning to reinforce more productive behaviors, to the junior executive who reinforced his boss's actions toward him by bringing papers to be signed, to Pryor's solution for her own cat that urinated on the stove (she got rid of it . . . the cat, that is).

Pryor's book was published by Simon and Schuster in 1984. Reprints of this paper are available from the author, Department of Psychology, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.

In the process of selling the important principles, Pryor sometimes states them in ways that go beyond the data and this may distract the academic professional who will often think of exceptions: "Behavior that is already occurring, no matter how sporadically, can always be intensified with positive reinforcement . . . One can make a conditioned reinforcer more powerful by pairing it with several primary reinforcers . . . The longer the variable schedule, the more powerfully it maintains the behavior." Many would agree with such generalizations, but we would be hard-pressed to document the points. Nevertheless, even without the references and literature, I found myself taking notes on many useful ideas: Jack-potting (using a large and very effective reward for unusual successes; e.g., unsaddling and freeing a horse during a session for a perfect performance), "going back to kindergarten" (reviewing from

square one with easy reinforcements when things go awry), and the eight methods of UNtraining (how to get someone to STOP doing something). Pros and cons and examples of punishment, extinction, negative reinforcement, and a change in motivation are presented as alternatives to Pryor's Method 1: Shoot the Animal ("This always works.").

If you would enjoy reading a variety of success stories, from the shaping of skating and skiing in humans to selective reinforcement of Frizbee-throwing in elephants, Pryor's *Don't Shoot the Dog* will be positively reinforcing for you.

REFERENCES

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- Keller, F. S. (1984). Enjoy old age: A program in self-management by B. F. Skinner and M. E. Vaughan. *The Behavior Analyst*, 7, 65-66.