

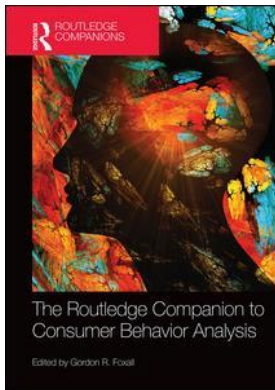
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Consumer heterophenomenology

Gordon R. Foxall

The challenge is to construct a theory of mental events, using the data that scientific method permits.

(Dennett, 1991, p. 71)

Introduction

Dennett (1991, p. 72) describes heterophenomenology as

the *neutral* path leading from objective physical science and its insistence on the third-person point of view, to a method of phenomenological description that can (in principle) do justice to the most private and ineffable subjective experiences, while never abandoning the methodological principles of science.

He argues, moreover, that we can study all there is to know about first-person consciousness at the level of third-person analysis without leaving a significant residue (Dennett, 2005, pp. 29–30). This chapter outlines the considerations of which an interpretation of consumer choice in the context of what I have called *consumer behavior analysis* (Foxall, 2002, 2010a) must be aware. The hallmark of Dennett's conception of scientific method, the use of third-person analysis which implies intersubjective agreement on terms and observations, is beyond the reach of attempts to investigate directly the conscious experience of human beings. Heterophenomenology is a methodology introduced by Dennett (1982, 1991) for obtaining such a third-person understanding of the contents of consciousness which are directly apprehended only subjectively, i.e., in the first-person terms of the individual who is conscious of them. The essential character of this experience is its *privacy*. How are we to tap into this experience, given that the individual's account (say, in verbal expression) is not necessarily accurate? Dennett (2005) further characterizes heterophenomenology as a *bridge* between the subjective experience or consciousness of the individual and the physical sciences. At one end, the bridge must be securely affixed to the objective or third-person perspective pursued by the physical sciences in its conventional spheres of operation. The causation implied or invoked is that of standard conservative physics, or we might say, the extensional mode of explanation that is central to scientific explanation (Dennett, 1969).

The bridge between science and interpretation that I would like to argue for in the context of consumer heterophenomenology has two implications. First, a purely scientific approach to the analysis of consumer behavior, one that proceeds in third-person extensional terms, despite its value in aiding understanding of numerous facets of product and brand choice, consumer maximization, and the sensitivity of consumer behavior to the contingencies of reinforcement and punishment, cannot do full justice to aspects of consumer choice such as its cross-situational continuity. For this, it is necessary to turn to interpretation and interpretation requires rules if it is not to descend into undisciplined speculation. Second, therefore, a scheme of interpretation must rely on a standard of knowledge of consumer behavior founded on a third-person analysis.

My interest in heterophenomenological interpretation arises from my research program over the last thirty years. The Consumer Behavior Analysis Research Program came into being as a result of what I perceived to be the uncritical adoption of cognitive terms to “explain” whatever aspect of consumer choice happened to have been observed. Whatever consumers did could apparently be made intelligible by recourse to the mentalistic language of positive attitudes, beliefs and intentions, even though the measures of these artefacts seldom correlated beyond the low-level characteristic of almost any two variables in social science (Meehl, 1990) and failed to address many of the persistent facts of consumer choice identified by marketing scientists such as Ehrenberg and Goodhardt (e.g., Ehrenberg, 1988; Goodhardt et al., 1984). Despite these “inconveniences” for the cognitive analysis of the day, grand theories based on the prevailing paradigm of cognitive psychology held sway over most teaching and research. While I did not doubt that cognitive theory had an important role to play in explaining consumer choice, I doubted that so liberal an approach would yield useful consumer theories. The answer I proposed was to develop a parsimonious behavioral model of consumer choice which eschewed entirely cognitive and other structuralist terms. (The derivation of the model in contradistinction to the prevailing cognitive paradigm is described in Foxall, 1990/2004, 1997a, 2005.) The methodology of *establishing the boundaries of minimalism* or alternatively *the bounds of behaviorism* which I pursued involved testing this behaviorist model to destruction to ascertain the point at which the explication of consumer behavior in purely stimulus-reinforcer terms was no longer possible and resort had to be made to cognitive variables to make sense of the observed patterns of choice. Since then, the major question motivating my research has been how, once the need for cognition has been ascertained, it can be understood and legitimately ascribed.

In retaining the extensional analysis of behavior as my starting point, I aim to demonstrate when and how more interpretive approaches to understanding behavior ought to proceed if they are to avoid the charge that they consist in the undisciplined psychologizing of observed activity. This may not be standard ethnography, but it is surely what many ethnographers, and certainly many other social scientists, have been doing for decades. My aim is not to critically evaluate heterophenomenology (see, for example, the essays in *Philosophical Topics*, 22(1–2), 1994), or even to do so in the context of consumer behavior analysis: rather it is simply to set out a possible scheme for realizing its insights in this field, to introduce a substantive field of social inquiry to a methodological perspective.

The Behavioral Perspective Model

The parsimonious behaviorist model of consumer choice that underlies this research program, the Behavioral Perspective Model (BPM) (Foxall, 1990/2004), is a means of unifying the components of consumer behavior analysis, namely behavioral psychology, behavioral economics and marketing science. Radical behaviorism, the parsimonious model of human behavior on which my research program is founded, reflects the following observations. Behavior generates

consequences, some of which are followed by an increase in the rate at which that behavior is performed; because these consequences seem to “strengthen” the behavior, they are termed *reinforcers*. Other consequences reduce the rate of responding and are known as “punishers.” (My definitions are intended to avoid the circularity of reasoning to which some early statements of behaviorism were prone.) The BPM brings these guidelines for predicting behavior in the laboratory into the arena of consumer choice in the rough-and-tumble of real-world marketplaces.

It locates consumer behavior at the intersection of a learning history (more precisely, a nexus of learning histories both general and pertaining to previous patterns of consumption and their rewarding and punishing outcomes) and the rewarding and aversive outcomes of current consumption as signaled by the stimuli that make up the consumer’s current behavior setting. The consumer behavior setting comprises two kinds of stimulus: discriminative stimuli and motivating operations. Discriminative stimuli are elements of the environment in the presence of which the consumer discriminates behaviorally, performing those acts that have previously met with rewarding outcomes and neglecting to perform those which have not. Motivating operations are also environmental stimuli that enhance the value of the reward promised by the setting variables as contingent on the performance of a particular behavior. An advertisement that asks, “Can’t you just *taste* the difference?!” is an example.

The rewards so signaled are of two types: *utilitarian reinforcement* which refers to the functional benefits of purchasing, owning and consuming a product or service, and *informational reinforcement*, which is the feedback in the form of social status, prestige and self-esteem that follows these behaviors. Any laptop provides certain basic services such as enabling wordprocessing or designing presentations; in other words, all laptops provide a common degree of functional benefits (though some are more sophisticated than others, of course). But owning and displaying a particular leading brand that is acknowledged as the market leader may also confer additional benefits: the esteem provided by colleagues’ appreciative statements or stares and the self-worth that accrues to the owner as a result of owning a superior product.

The BPM, summarized in Figure 25.1, elaborates the *three-term contingency* that is the explanatory building block of radical behaviorism:

$$S^D : R \rightarrow S^r$$

in which a discriminative stimulus, S^D , sets the occasion for reinforcement, S^r , contingent on the performance of a specific response, R (Skinner, 1953, 1974). The colon linking the S^D to the R indicates that the discriminative stimulus *increases the probability of* an appropriate response. The response, should it occur, is emitted by the organism rather than being elicited by the preceding stimulus as in classical conditioning. The \rightarrow linking the R to the S^r indicates a necessary and contingent relationship in which the response is automatically followed by a consequence that subsequently alters the rate of behavior. Theoretically, this explanatory device could be extended into an n -term contingency, but it is sufficient to go only as far as four terms, including motivating operations (MO) as a pre-behavioral influence on choice. These elements and the relationships among them are defined entirely in extensional terms, i.e., without recourse to intentional terms such as *believes*, *desires* or *intends*. (For a philosophical treatment, see Smith, 1994; for development in the context of consumer behavior analysis, see Foxall, 2004, 2010b.)

The particular combination of utilitarian and informational reinforcement that consumers obtain by purchasing and using a product is known as its *pattern of reinforcement* and each broadly defined pattern of reinforcement gives rise to a particular pattern of consumer choice (Figure 25.2). Consumer behavior settings differ in the extent to which they compel a particular course of action. A (relatively)¹ *open setting* such as a café or bar provides numerous different

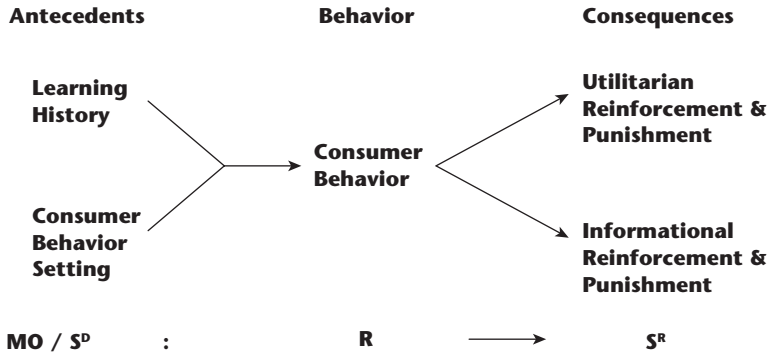


Figure 25.1 Summative Behavioral Perspective Model

Source: Foxall, G. R. (2010). *Interpreting Consumer Choice*. New York and London: Routledge. Reproduced by permission

		Informational reinforcement	
		Low	High
Utilitarian reinforcement	High	Hedonism	Accomplishment
	Low	Maintenance	Accumulation

Figure 25.2 Patterns of reinforcement and operant classes of consumer behavior

Source: Foxall, G. R. (2010). *Interpreting Consumer Choice*. New York and London: Routledge. Reproduced by permission

ways in which to behave, each reinforced uniquely by a particular pattern of reinforcement. By contrast, a (relatively) *closed setting* provides few, perhaps only one, behavior pattern or program: completing the paperwork necessary to purchase a home, for instance, or exercising at the gym, or undergoing dental treatment. This additional dimension of the *scope of the consumer behavior setting* is incorporated in Figure 25.3.

The BPM has generated a large volume of empirical research which indicates that it has the capacity to predict product and brand choice, the sensitivity of consumers' behavior to changes in price and value in relation to the pattern of reinforcement exhibited by the products they purchase, and that consumer behavior maximizes a utility function comprising a particular combination of utilitarian and informational reinforcement. In addition, the scope of the consumer behavior setting has been shown to be an important variable in actual consumer choice.

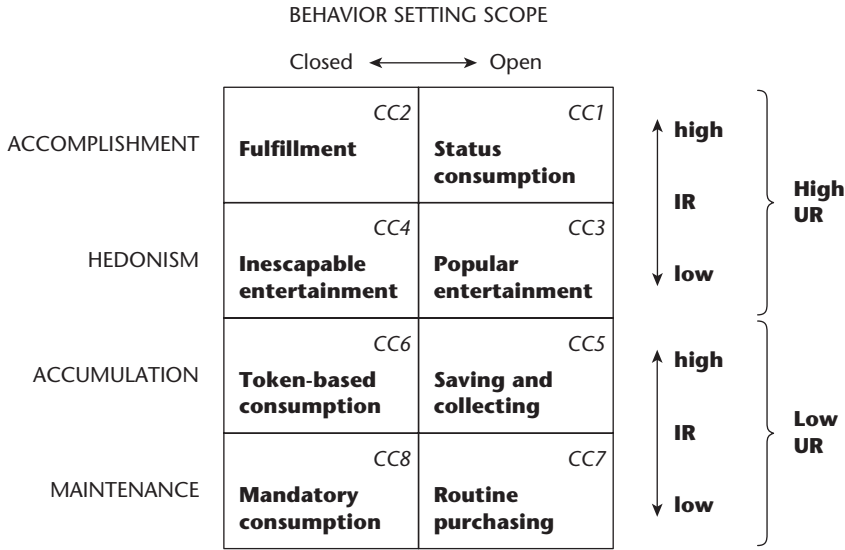


Figure 25.3 The BPM contingency matrix

Source: Foxall, G. R. (2010). *Interpreting Consumer Choice*. New York and London: Routledge. Reproduced by permission

The ascription of cognition

Despite these results, which indicate the efficacy of a purely extensional model of consumer choice, the search for the bounds of behaviorism has revealed three aspects of the explanation of human behavior for which the three-term contingency proves inadequate. In summary, these are to account for the continuity/discontinuity of particular patterns of behavior, to deal with the personal level of exposition, and to delimit the scope of behavioral interpretation (Foxall, 2004, 2007a). At these junctures, which denote the *imperatives of intentionality*, it becomes necessary to turn to intentional idioms to interpret the behavior.

The sole criterion for determining the point at which intentional interpretation becomes necessary is that the extensional language of radical behaviorism no longer suffices to explain the observed behavior. This is the case when the stimuli required are not empirically available: we cannot identify the reinforcers, for instance, that would be necessary to account for the persistence of a particular pattern of behavior. At this juncture, we have no alternative to accounting for the behavior in terms of what the subject believes or desires, perceives or feels. More difficult to arrive at are means of delimiting this intentional interpretation before it devolves into unnecessary psychologism, i.e. giving a ready-made “psychological” quasi-explanation of whatever behavior we happen to observe.

Because cognition is an unobservable, a theoretical creation aimed at making the observed more intelligible, its use owes more to *interpretation* than *explanation*. The relationship it proposes between the data language in which observation is described and the theoretical language in terms of which it is explicated is not amenable to the rigor of an experimental analysis in which behavior (the dependent variable) is a function of the environmental stimuli that precede and follow it (the independent variables). In experimental science such functional relationships can be demonstrated to hold; they can be so demonstrated to the satisfaction of an intellectual community; members of that community who wish to criticize the methodology of those who claim

to have demonstrated such functional relationships can do so on the basis of common assumptions, criteria and modes of discourse. This third-person methodology is not foolproof but it is built upon standardized perspectives that facilitate informed criticism upon which progress may be based. Establishing confidence in cognitive interpretation is not so simple. But it is possible. Moreover, while consumer behavior analysis relies in this task upon heterophenomenology, Dennett's methodology may also make use of the basic model of consumer choice that is central to consumer behavior analysis.

In this chapter, I first describe the methodology of heterophenomenology and then show how it is applicable to the analysis of consumer choice. I then seek to establish criteria for the credibility of heterophenomenological interpretations of economic behavior, drawing on the BPM of consumer choice to provide these.

Heterophenomenology

Heterophenomenology begins with "recorded raw data." This means the transcribed verbal behavior of the subject. His/her description of his/her first-person thoughts, expressed in words and then transformed into data for heterophenomenological investigation. This transcription is itself an act of interpretation since it transforms sounds into syntactical sentences. It could also be that the subject responds to the investigator's instructions by means of key-presses (perhaps on a computer keyboard): these are then transformed into speech acts. However they are obtained, these speech acts constitute a *text* for further linguistic analysis, similar in principle to the text of a novel which is subjected to literary critique.

To clarify what are the fundamental data of heterophenomenology, it is useful to note Dennett's (2005) response to Levine's (1994) argument that these data ought to consist in actual conscious experiences rather than beliefs, judgments or other intentional expressions *about* those experiences. Dennett replies by tracing the levels from "raw data" to "heterophenomenological worlds": a. conscious experiences; b. beliefs about these conscious experiences; c. verbal expressions of these beliefs; and d. utterances. Dennett asks which of these represents the "primary data." For the heterophenomenologist, he says, they are the sounds or utterances, d. But these data can be interpreted via speech acts, c., to beliefs about experiences, b. These, he maintains, are the primary *interpreted* data, the QED, "organized into heterophenomenological worlds, for a science of consciousness" (Dennett, 2005, pp. 44–5). But it is not possible to go as far as a. to locate our primary data in conscious experience itself; for, if a. > b., indicating that I have conscious experiences I am not aware I have, these experiences are inaccessible to me exactly as they are to anyone else; and if b. > a., indicating that I believe I have conscious experiences that I don't in fact have, then the beliefs are what has to be explained rather than the non-existing experiences. Therefore, b., beliefs about one's subjective conscious experience, emerges as the "maximal set of primary data."

Given that conscious experience (a.) is ruled out as a datum for scientific analysis on the grounds that it is simply not empirically available for third-person analysis, the closest a scientific investigation of consciousness can get to the raw primary data is by reconstructing what the subject believes about his/her subjective experience (b.). This believing, when it is the unreconstructed mentalizing of the individual, is also a first-person occurrence, also not publicly available. But the subject is able to give it verbal expression (c.) and, in the course of a heterophenomenological investigation, to make utterances based on it (d.) The heterophenomenologist takes d., the basic recorded data, and employs the intentional stance to interpret them as expressions of beliefs and to infer the subject's beliefs themselves from the expressions. This is the heterophenomenological methodology. The subject describes what *seems* to be going on

in his/her consciousness (on which he/she is the authority), not what is actually going on (on which he/she is not). He/she knows as no other what it is like to be him/her.

The intentional stance requires that to account for the behavior of an intentional system, the investigator ascribes to it the beliefs, desires and other intentions that enable the behavior to be predicted (Dennett, 1987). An intentional system is any entity the behavior of which is predictable by the ascriptions of such intentionality. The beliefs and desires that are ascribed for this purpose are those the system ought to have, given its history and its current circumstances: i.e., in the terms of the BPM, given its learning history and its current behavior setting. All there is to believing is to be predictable by the intentional stance. The point of the interpretive phase of the heterophenomenological enterprise is, therefore, to reconstruct the intentional structure that would be consistent with the utterances made by the subject. Dennett is careful to note that even in the process of transcribing these utterances into sentences (typified by but not limited to the work of an audio-stenographer transcribing a recorded voice) interpretation is taking place: the utterances are being organized into sentences that follow a particular syntactic logic; perhaps at some stage sentence structure is altered to make the utterances more intelligible (to whom?); perhaps the sentences themselves are later reordered to construct or preserve a narrative. But the application of the intentional stance requires another form of interpretation: the assignment of the beliefs and desires necessary to predict the behavior of the intentional system, beliefs and desires that are judged (by whom and by what criteria?) to be those the system “ought to have” (as determined by whom and on what basis?) given its history and circumstances. I propose here that the bases for the ascription of intentionality are twofold: a pattern of molar operant behavior and an underlying neurophysiological foundation. Before I say more about the rationale for this methodology, let me examine the form it would need to take.

Of course, if we were to know the precise operant learning history of a subject, together with his/her neurophysiology, we would have no difficulty in constructing an intentional framework within which to interpret his/her behavior. This is an unlikely prospect, however. Rather, we are thrown back on a general understanding of the kinds of behavior and its outcomes that the person is characterized by and its neurophysiological underpinning. In the case of the social and economic behavior of consumers, however, we have an advantage. We are aware of the general factors towards which such behavior is directed and the environmental stimuli that shape and maintain that behavior. They are the very subject of the BPM and the empirical research that it has inspired. We also have an understanding of the neurophysiological bases of these behavior patterns, the role of neuronal firing in the selection of behavior in regard to economic goals and behavioral norms. They are the subject of neuroeconomics. Knowing the potential and the limits of the methodology, we can now say more of its rationale. The point is not that we can pinpoint the exact causal texture of the consumer behavior the interpretation of which preoccupies us: rather, we can use behavioral science and neuroeconomics to delimit the scope of our intentional interpretations of behavior which otherwise might grow Topsy-like into the unfalsifiable generalizations of cognitive psychologism that brought the Consumer Behavior Analysis Research Program into being.

Consumer heterophenomenology

Dennett argues that the intentional stance is inevitable in transforming heterophenomenological data into interpretations. I would add that the content of such ascribed intentionality (in the context of consumer choice in which we are operating) is provided in the context of consumer choice by the structural variables of the BPM. Moreover, as the model proceeds from a purely extensional portrayal of consumer choice through the intentional and cognitive portrayals, it

acquires more intentionally based constructs in terms of which the heterophenomenological interpretation should proceed such as that of the *symbolic consumer situation* and *symbolic reinforcement* (Foxall, 2013). The following account does not present a comprehensive example of consumer heterophenomenology but aims to show how such a study would need to adhere to the requirements of interpretive practice on the basis of consumer behavior analysis.

I should like to illustrate the distinctive mode of heterophenomenological interpretation by reference to research which sought to test the BPM by means of investigations of the emotional reactions elicited by descriptions of consumer situations based on the structural components of the model described above. A comprehensive analysis would require four stages of research, each of which would complement the others. These kinds of analysis are:

1. *A statistical analysis of aggregated results.* This would proceed in terms of a third-person investigation of the ways in which consumer-respondents react to written scenarios of consumer situations that reflect the levels of utilitarian and informational reinforcement and the scope of the consumer behavior setting as defined by the BPM. The responses would be cast in terms of answers to psychometric measures of the emotional dimensions appropriate to testing hypotheses about the consumer situations. The results would be interpreted according to the model's expectations of consumer choice in these various situations. Results for a large sample of consumers would be aggregated and subjected to statistical analyses.

This I have done.² The responses to scenarios of consumer situations which embody sources of high vs. low utilitarian reinforcement, high vs. low informational reinforcement, and relatively open/closed consumer behavior settings in terms of the emotional reactions of consumer-respondents allow the process to be illustrated (Foxall, 1997b). The scenarios depict each of the eight contingency categories shown in Figure 25.3. The psychometric instruments employed to elicit consumers' reactions are the scales for the assessment of *pleasure*, *arousal* and *dominance* devised and tested by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). The working hypothesis of the studies we have conducted in several cultural contexts, two languages and for a wide range of consumer scenarios was that pleasure would be more strongly reported for situations embodying higher levels of utilitarian reinforcement, arousal for situations embodying higher levels of informational reinforcement and stronger dominance for more open settings. In the eight studies we have now conducted thus far, these hypotheses have been supported. Figure 25.4 shows the results.

2. *An individual-level analysis of a single respondent member of this sample.* This would still entail using the psychometric measure of emotional reactions. The verbal responses of this consumer would be interpreted according to the model from which the hypotheses in (1) were derived. Individual-level results could also be interpreted in terms of the results gained from (1).
3. *An individual-level interpretation of the verbal behavior of an individual requested to respond ad lib to each of the scenarios presented in (1) in terms of his/her first-person experience of the situations depicted.* This would enable a wider range of verbal responses to be sampled than those made available in the psychometric measures.
4. *An individual-level interpretation of the verbal behavior of an individual requested to respond ad lib in describing their subjective experience of whatever consumer situations they choose to speak about.* This is probably closest to the spirit of heterophenomenology since it imposes the fewest interviewer-defined categories on the respondent.

From the point of view of the heterophenomenological method, the verbal behavior provided by each respondent, when properly transcribed, provides a third-person account of the first-person feelings and experiences that that person felt on reviewing the stimuli presented in

BEHAVIOR SETTING SCOPE

Closed ← → Open

ACCOMPLISHMENT	CC2 PLEASURE AROUSAL dominance	CC1 PLEASURE AROUSAL DOMINANCE
HEDONISM	CC4 PLEASURE arousal dominance	CC3 PLEASURE arousal DOMINANCE
ACCUMULATION	CC6 pleasure AROUSAL dominance	CC5 pleasure AROUSAL DOMINANCE
MAINTENANCE	CC8 pleasure arousal dominance	CC7 pleasure arousal DOMINANCE

Contingencies and emotions: research hypotheses and summary of findings. Studies show that: (i) pleasure scores for contingency categories (CCs) 1, 2, 3 and 4 each exceed those of CCs 5, 6, 7 and 8; (ii) arousal scores for CCs 1, 2, 5 and 6 each exceed those of CCs 3, 4, 7 and 8; (iii) dominance scores for CCs 1, 3, 5 and 7 each exceed those for CCs 2, 4, 6 and 8. Moreover, (iv) approach–avoidance (aminusa) scores for CCs 1, 2, 3 and 4 each exceed those for CCs 5, 6, 7 and 8; and (v) approach–avoidance (aminusa) scores for CCs 1 and 3 each exceed those for CCs 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8

Figure 25.4 The BPM emotional contingency matrix

Source: Foxall, G. R. (2011). Brain, emotion and contingency in the explanation of consumer behaviour, *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 26, 47–92. Reproduced by permission

each scenario. The results summarized in Figure 25.4 are aggregated for statistical analysis and ease of presentation but the analyses to which methods (2)–(4) refer could be undertaken for each of the consumer-respondents in turn at the individual level. The pattern of responding revealed by the aggregate analysis (1) might provide a means of interpreting the verbal behavior of the individual respondent but the extent to which this is feasible or desirable is as yet an open question. Similarly, the information gained in the more interpretive analyses (2)–(4) might provide important insight into the actual experiences of consumers and allow the scope of the statistical patterns revealed by (1) to be more accurately assessed. The relationship between (1) and (2)–(4) is that of quantitative social science to qualitative.

Now the advantage of conducting this multi-stage research is that the quantitative stage (1) allows us to compare the content of the propositional attitudes employed by individual respondents in the later stages with that which a psychometric study imposes by regulating the range of responses the consumer is permitted. This is especially so with respect to the most nebulous stage (4) in which the consumer is seeking to reveal his/her beliefs, desires, emotions and perceptions in the context of any experience as a consumer he/she chooses to speak about. Are the

categories on which the psychometric measures are based those in terms of which the consumer normally thinks when formalizing his/her prior behavior? Do the settings he/she chooses to speak of resemble those scenarios selected on the basis of the BPM's contingency categories (Figure 25.3)? Do consumers naturally think in terms of utilitarian and informational reinforcement, the functional and social/symbolic benefits provided, in describing their consumption experiences? Stages (2) and (3) facilitate a closer comparison of heterophenomenologically revealed consumer experience with the results of the psychometric work since they are based on greater situational continuity of the imagined scenarios. There is no ultimate need to confine the experimental stimuli to pre-written consumption scenarios, of course; the possibility arises of obtaining scripts that serve as texts for further analysis actually in the consumption situations populated by consumers.

The literary critique that is the methodology of the analysis of plays or novels or other written works is in my view not sufficient for the heterophenomenological analysis of texts produced by stages (2)–(4). In the case of consumer behavior, we can draw upon a much broader field of knowledge as our interpretive base, a functional model of consumer choice which can be subjected to empirical test by means of the third-person methodology of science, as well as a third-person description of the first-person experience of consumers that is as close as we are likely to get to the subjective mentality of consumption.

Heterophenomenology in the context of intentional behaviorism

The situations of explanation in which the imperatives of intentionality hold – where the continuity/discontinuity of behavior cannot be related appropriately to the discriminative and reinforcing stimuli required to fulfill the requirements of the three-term contingency, where the personal level of interpretation becomes necessary, and where behavioral interpretations must be delimited – are especially relevant to these heterophenomenological considerations. The extensional model of consumer behavior depicted in Figure 25.1 is insufficient to cope with these requirements and *intentional behaviorism* has been proposed as a methodology that can take them fully into account by responsibly ascribing intentionality. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a complete account of the methodology of intentional behaviorism (see, for instance, Foxall, 2007a,b, 2008, 2009), I should like to illustrate the relevance to it of this discussion of heterophenomenology by reference to the derivation of appropriate intentional idioms.

The behavior of adults on matching tasks can be explained by the concurrent schedules of reinforcement in operation. If, in phase 1 of an experiment, pressing key A is reinforced every 10 seconds as long as at least one press has been made and pressing key B once every 20 seconds as long as at least one press has been made, then we can predict according to the matching law that the participant will allocate 66.6% of responses to key A and 33.3% to B. In addition, he/she will obtain similar proportions of reward, respectively, from each key. Similar results are obtained for human and nonhuman animals. But if, in phase 2 of the experiment, the schedules are modified so that different periods must elapse before responding receives reinforcement, nonhumans adapt quickly to the new schedule while human participants tend to retain the former response pattern. We cannot explain humans' insensitivity to the altered schedules by reference to the discriminative and reinforcing stimuli now in operation since their behavior is by definition not influenced by them. The sole explanatory factor within the scope of orthodox radical behaviorism is the private events (thoughts and feelings) that are a central, even defining, element in this philosophy of psychology. The rules that participants devise for themselves to comply with the schedules in force during phase 1 of the experiment and that are enshrined in their thoughts are held to be carried over to the new situation defined

by phase 2 and to lead the individual to continue the behavior pattern that was reinforced in phase 1 but not phase 2.

An alternative strategy of explanation might be to maintain that it is the individual's learning history that carries over from phase 1 to phase 2, that he/she is constrained by previous reinforcement patterns to repeat the behavior under the new stimulus conditions.

Neither of these explanations is acceptable within a science of behavior because each deals in unobservables that cannot enter into either an experimental or correlational analysis. Any statements about the verbal rule-formulations that entered into the decision-making of an experimental participant are mere fabrications, untestable conjectures, explanatory fictions. Similarly, any appeal to a learning history that is not empirically available is not an entity that can enter into a scientific explanation. They are speculations the purpose of which is to save the theory on which the accompanying explanation of behavior rests. These are precisely the sorts of explanatory fiction that behaviorists such as Skinner sought to eliminate from scientific inquiry. The fact that they proceed in the terminology of behavior analysis may seduce the reader into thinking that they do not "appeal to events taking place somewhere else, at some other level of observation, described in different terms, and measured, if at all, in different dimensions" (Skinner, 1953, p. 193). In fact, they contravene Skinner's strictures on every count. Resort to private verbal behavior or to an unobserved learning history is necessarily an appeal to otherwise-located events, observed by who knows whom, and discriminable only in different dimensions. It would be intellectually dishonest to provide accounts of this kind simply to prop up the radical behaviorist ideology of explanation or to appeal to some form of "action-at-a-distance" to fill in the gaps that scientific observation is unable to fill. The fact of the matter is that the behavior cannot be explained in terms of the extensional language that is the hallmark of behaviorist psychology and perhaps its very *raison d'être*.

More satisfactory is to acknowledge the explanatory gap that arises when the stimuli responsible for a behavior pattern cannot be identified using intentional language to account for the behavior. But how is such an interpretation to be constructed and justified?

The construction of an interpretation in intentional terms depends on establishing how a pattern of behavior that *is* amenable to explanation in operant terms (because the antecedent and consequent stimuli that control the behavior and their relationships to the behavior can be identified) could be understood in terms of the putative desires, beliefs, emotions and perceptions that need to be ascribed to account for its emergence and persistence. So, the behavior of an adult human participant in a matching experiment could be interpreted in terms of his desire to achieve successful outcomes, his belief that this could be achieved by pressing keys A and B in a particular sequence, his feelings of pleasure, arousal and dominance on achieving a winning outcome, and his perception of the efficacy of the keys pressed in producing rewards at a particular rate. Yes, these desires, beliefs, emotions and perceptions amount to explanatory fictions but, *faute de mieux*, we have no alternative to employing them, given the absence of any means to ascribe the behavior to observable contingencies of reinforcement. To ascribe the schedule-insensitive behavior of the matching participant to the contingencies that were obtained in phase 1 would not square with the influence of the contingencies obtaining in phase 2 to which he/she is currently subject.

This strategy takes a pattern of behavior that is as close as can be achieved to the pattern to be explained and extrapolates an intentional interpretation from the former to the latter. The behavior that is the subject of the extrapolated interpretation must be consistent with selection by consequences at the levels of (A) natural selection, and (B) operant conditioning.

(A) The first criterion seeks a rationale for the interpreted behavior in the general neurophysiology of the individual. This is not the same as saying that his/her behavior is *caused by*

neuronal activity: only that the organism would have evolved in such a way as to acquire a neuronal system that behaves consistently with the behavior pattern being interpreted. I have in mind here the formation and operation of reward prediction errors, the release of dopamine as a preparation for reinforced behaviors, the further reward of reinforced behaviors through the experience of emotion, and so on. An important demonstration in our work is therefore that the consumer behaviors we are investigating are rewarded by emotional feelings. Rolls's (1999) theory of emotion provides an underlying rationale for the necessary links between emotion and reinforcement. Rolls proposes that any reinforcing stimuli present in the extra-individual environment³ can act as an eliciting stimulus to generate corresponding emotions (Foxall, 2011).

(B) To reach this level of corroboration it is necessary to determine that the behavior in question is amenable to reinforcement; hence, the requirement that selection by consequences be demonstrated by showing that the behavior is subject to operant conditioning. Operant conditioning is determined by applying the correlational law of effect (Baum, 1973) to the molar behavior pattern observed during the period when the contingencies of reinforcement can be ascertained (phase 1 in the matching experiment). The purpose of determining this is that an intentional interpretation of behavior that is under contingency control can be logically extended to that for which contingency control is not obvious, i.e. similar behavior that is interpreted because its explanation is not possible in view of the lack of observable contingencies.

This interpretation is broadly similar to that obtained in the case of consumers' emotional reactions to various consumption environments by means of psychometric analysis. At least it is as close as we can get to understanding the behavior of consumers in extensional terms and constructing an intentional interpretation that fits the "facts" so established. However, useful as this may be when extensional analysis is no longer possible, it is corrigible through the use of heterophenomenological methods (2)–(4). The possibility of reconstructing the consumer's actual experience of decision-making by eliciting his/her desires, beliefs, emotions and perceptions by heterophenomenology adds immensely to the warrant of assertibility we can assume as interpreters of behavior.

Moreover, this example of a behavioral situation requiring interpretation that goes beyond the explanation of which the three-term contingency alone is capable illustrates the three imperatives of intentionality: the fundamental problem is one of accounting for the continuity of behavior in the absence of supporting stimuli, be they antecedent or subsequent to the behavior; this necessitates a personal-level interpretation based on intentional language; finally, the range of interpretation invoked is limited by the scrupulous use of intentional language rather than explanatory fictions in the form of invented learning histories, private verbal behavior or rule-governance. Although this example is drawn from experimental analyses of behavior, its invitation to interpret behavior intentionally is also a common feature of consumer choice; e.g., when a new brand is incorporated into the consumer's consideration set in the absence of prior experience with it (Foxall, 2007b, 2008).

Conclusions

A third-person account is at the heart of science. But the methods of empirical confirmation to which it gives rise, e.g. experimentation and psychometrics, are not always sufficient to explain aspects of behavior e.g., cross-situational continuity, the personal level of experience and how behavioral interpretation is to be delimited so it does not descend into psychologism. Heterophenomenology allows us to access first-person accounts of experience and to translate them into the third-person statements of science. But how are such third-person transcriptions to be understood? I have argued that a framework supported by a more conventionally scientific

approach to consumer choice allows the finer points of interpretation to be added to what is made available purely by heterophenomenological method in the abstract.

I must admit to being left wondering whether Dennett intends heterophenomenology to be taken up by the social and behavioral science community as a practical methodology for research or whether he is simply demonstrating that a third-person scientific account could be given of the first-person subjective experiences of human beings. (Just as I wonder whether Dawkins's 1976 introduction of *memes* into his discussion of the selfish gene was intended to be taken as a jumping-off point for a whole research program: but I digress.) Whatever, the exercise of examining the kinds of knowledge that could be gained through an examination of consumer experience from a variety of methodological standpoints is instructive. Nevertheless, as a stimulus to the systematic interpretation of consumer choice, the framework suggested in this chapter provides a means of comparing knowledge gained via a number of alternative perspectives, a means of triangulating our efforts to portray consumer behavior in its fullness. The usefulness of this multi-pronged approach will be revealed by further empirical investigation which will permit judgment of the extent to which stages (2)–(4) add to the knowledge gained by the purely quantitative analysis of stage (1), the ways in which that additional interpretation enhances and clarifies the relationships revealed by the psychometric approach, and the contribution to understanding made available by the interaction of these differing methodological avenues.

Notes

- 1 The openness and closedness of consumer behavior settings are always to be understood as relative, as are the levels of utilitarian and informational reinforcement that compose the pattern of reinforcement. It is tedious for both writer and reader to make this point repeatedly, however.
- 2 The range of scenarios investigated are itemized in Foxall (1997b) and Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano (2005). Details of the testing of the materials and establishment of intersubjective criteria can be found in Foxall (1999). Comprehensive analyses of the eight studies can be found in Foxall (2011) and Foxall et al. (2012). Further commentary and analysis is available in Foxall (2005), Yani-de-Soriano and Foxall (2006) and Yani-de-Soriano et al. (2013).
- 3 I employ the term “extra-individual environment” to make clear that the reinforcing stimuli exist out-with the organism in what we would normally call simply the environment. “Extra-individual environment” is a cumbersome locution intended to avoid confusion that could arise from Skinner's (1974) argument that a small part of the environment is enclosed within the skin. It is the “without-the-skin” environment to which I ascribe reinforcing stimuli. Within-the-skin are the emotion feelings that are the ultimate reward for behavior and that may be the final determinants of its rate of repetition.

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