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Collecting to the Core-Psychology Handbooks

Donald Polzella

University of Dayton, polzella@udayton.edu

Ann Doherty

CHOICE/ACRL, adoherty@ala-choice.com

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Collecting to the Core — Psychology Handbooks

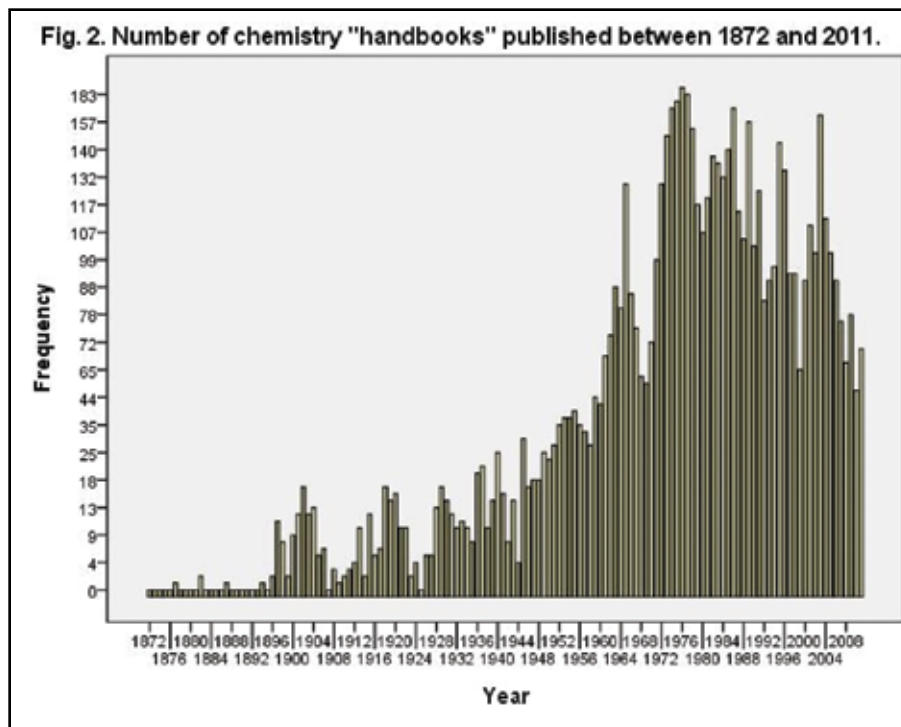
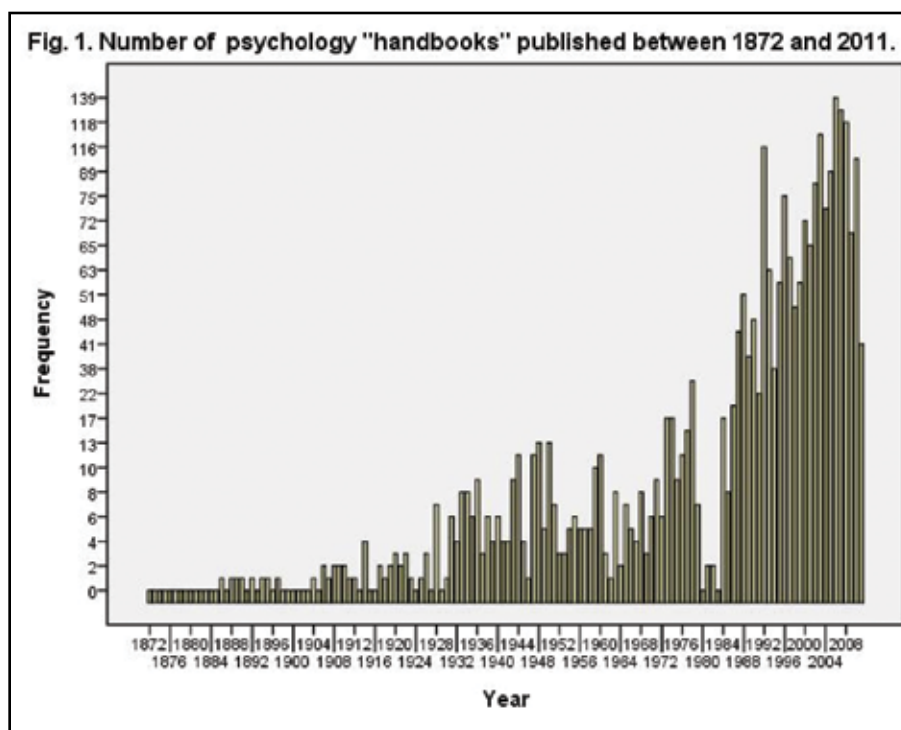
by **Dr. Donald Polzella** (Associate Dean and Professor of Psychology, University of Dayton; Psychology Editor, *Resources for College Libraries*) <polzella@udayton.edu>

Column Editor: **Anne Doherty** (*Resources for College Libraries* Project Editor, CHOICE/ACRL) <adoherty@ala-choice.org>

Column Editor's Note: The "Collecting to the Core" column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the *Resources for College Libraries* bibliography (online at <http://www.rclweb.net>). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — AD

One of my responsibilities as psychology editor for *Resources for College Libraries (RCL)* is to update the core list with any new or revised editions that may have been published over the past year. This year's revisions included the second edition of the 12-volume *Handbook of Psychology* edited by **Irving B. Weiner** and published by **John Wiley & Sons**.¹ First published in 2003, the *Handbook* is an extraordinary accomplishment and is arguably the most comprehensive reference work in psychology, past or present. Each of its volumes covers a major basic or applied subdiscipline and includes chapters written by some of the most respected scholars in the field. The first edition is still in print, although — at over \$2,500 for the hardback — its cost makes it prohibitive for most personal libraries. Even the revised edition, priced at \$1,600, constitutes a formidable investment. As a result, sources such as the *Handbook of Psychology* are found almost exclusively in university and college libraries. This and other handbooks are critical resources in the psychology curriculum, offering what the **American Psychological Association** calls "a one-stop shop for both overviews and in-depth analyses of a variety of sub-fields within psychology."² This essay explores the growth in handbook publications and discusses some of the essential psychology handbooks, many of which can be found in the core RCL collection.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* informs us, not surprisingly, that the term *handbook* originally denoted "a small book or treatise, such as may conveniently be held in the hand" [italics mine]. At some point during the 19th century, *handbook* assumed its current meaning as "a compendious book or treatise for guidance in any ... study." Certainly, **Weiner's** (2012) *Handbook* exemplifies the latter definition. Another characteristic of handbooks is that they tend to be consulted if and when a need arises. In general, upper-level undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty scholars consult handbooks for different reasons. Upper-level undergraduate and graduate students sometimes read handbook chapters for a course or seminar. (In my experience, most lower-level undergraduates find



the style and content of handbook chapters bewildering.) Undergraduate honors students and, especially, graduate students may consult handbook chapters when they begin to work on their theses or dissertations, because the

chapters provide authoritative reviews of relevant literature. Faculty members rely on handbooks to identify important references outside their areas of expertise.

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When I learned that a second edition of the *Handbook* was scheduled to be published, it reminded me of a delightful, though somewhat cynical, article I read some years ago. **Roddy Roediger**, who was then President of the **Association for Psychological Science**, wrote an editorial entitled "The Great Handbook Scam" in the association's monthly magazine.³ It seems that **Roediger** was approached by the editor of a major publishing company asking if he would edit a planned definitive *Handbook of Human Memory*. **Roediger**, a respected scholar in human learning and memory, pointed out to the editor that there was already a fine handbook published only a few years prior by another company. (That highly-regarded book, *The Oxford Handbook of Memory*, is still available.)⁴ The editor pressed on, suggesting that **Roediger** could organize his handbook in a different manner. **Roediger** declined, but he was led to wonder whether some scholarly handbooks are superfluous — that is, whether they meet an important need of researchers or are driven primarily by economic factors.

A search of the **PsycINFO** databases for books that include the word "handbook" provided the data shown in Figure 1. It is obvious that psychology handbooks have been published in increasing numbers. (Similar data obtained from the **Chemical Abstracts** database, and plotted in Figure 2, suggest that

a proliferation of handbooks is not a phenomenon unique to psychology.)

The earliest prototype of the modern psychology handbook appears to be **James Mark Baldwin's Handbook of Psychology**, published in 1889.⁵ Both a philosopher and an experimental psychologist, **Baldwin** was well-suited to writing his *Handbook*. During the last decades of the 19th century, psychology was still tied theoretically to the European philosophical traditions, while at the same time it was striving to be recognized as a rigorous empirical science. In addition to its primacy, there are three remarkable features of **Baldwin's Handbook**. First is that **Baldwin** was its sole author. This is unprecedented among contemporary handbooks. Indeed, it is rare among psychology textbooks in general. Second is its scope. Each of its chapters, either alone or in combination with others, encompasses most of today's experimental subdisciplines, e.g., sensation, perception, learning, memory, motivation, emotion, neuroscience, motor behavior. The only subdisciplines missing are those that emerged later in the 20th century, e.g., clinical, personality, social, child. And finally there is its longevity. Even after more than 120 years, 16 editions of the original *Handbook* are still available in print.

Viewing **Baldwin's** handbook as a starting point and **Weiner's** forthcoming revision of his own handbook as the point of furthest development, one can see how the psychology handbook has evolved. Subdisciplines that could

once be summarized in their own chapters and collected in one or two small volumes now require separate massive volumes containing numerous chapters, each covering a particular theoretical approach or research area. Between these two points, there emerged many handbooks that focused on particular subdisciplines. Some of the better ones have been revised regularly in order to remain current. Others have given rise to new handbooks, as specializations within the subdiscipline have emerged. Many of these, too, have been revised depending on the viability of the specialization.

The first modern psychology handbook in the area of child psychology was **Carmichael's Manual of Child Psychology**.⁶ Now in its sixth edition, it has been renamed *Handbook of Child Psychology*.⁷ Under the direction of two editors in chief, each of its four volumes (*Theoretical Models of Human Development; Cognition, Perception, and Language; Social, Emotional, and Personality Development; and Child Psychology in Practice*, respectively) has its own volume editor(s). Each volume comprises around 20 chapters written by respected scholars representing a broad sample of sub-specialties, e.g., life span theory, development of mathematical understanding, development of morality, learning disabilities. In addition, there are high-quality, stand-alone child psychology handbooks covering numerous major subdisciplines. A few representative examples include the *Handbook of Pediatric*

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*Psychology, the Handbook of the Psychology of Aging, and the Handbook of Clinical Child Psychology.*⁸⁻¹⁰

The social psychology handbook has evolved in a similar manner. First published in 1935, the *Handbook of Social Psychology* is now in its fifth edition.¹¹ Its two volumes provide comprehensive coverage of topics within the areas of social research methodology, social cognition, and individual and group behavior. High-quality interdisciplinary handbooks include the *Handbook of Research Methods in Social and Personality Psychology*, *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Psychology*, and the *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*.¹²⁻¹⁴

In addition to those works in child psychology and social psychology, high-quality stand-alone handbooks are available in most of the major psychological disciplines and subdisciplines. Representative titles include the *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change*, the *Handbook of Human Factors and Ergonomics*, *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity, Design and Analysis: A Researcher's Handbook*, and the iconic *Stevens' Handbook of Experimental Psychology*.¹⁵⁻¹⁹

To be included in the psychology section of *RCL*, a candidate handbook should meet several criteria. First, recognized subject-matter experts should have written all or most of the chapters. Second, the data or information contained in the chapters should have currency. Third, tables, figures, and a sophisticated indexing system should be included in order to facilitate the accessing of data and information. Fourth, the topics covered in the handbook should be representative and comprehensive.

One increasingly important criterion that few psychology handbooks meet is that of online accessibility. In contrast, online handbook materials are readily available in engineering (*ASM Handbooks Online*, *ASTM Standards Digital Library*), chemistry and physics (*CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*), and biology (*SpringerProtocols*). Ever more, both researchers and students prefer to access information online, and electronic access has at least two advantages. First, it renders the content portable, thereby avoiding the need to consult and transport increasingly large and cumbersome tomes. Second, handbook revisions, when necessary, can be realized quickly and with minimal effort. The paucity of online handbooks in psychology is understandable if we compare published handbooks in psychology to those in other scientific disciplines. The most striking difference is that handbooks in psychology include proportionally fewer tables, figures, and equations to present data and findings. While this is less apparent in areas such as psychophysics, sensation, or perception, where data and findings are more firmly established, handbooks or chapters that cover the “softer” areas of personality, clinical, and some of the social psychology subdisciplines, for example, contain a preponderance of text. Notwithstanding their scholarly excellence,

is it appropriate to label these latter works “handbooks”? As users increasingly turn to mobile devices and publishers make electronic versions of handbooks more affordable and easier to use, perhaps handbooks will again become resources that can be conveniently

accessed and “held in the hand.” Until then, academic libraries should ensure that the core psychology handbooks discussed here are either on the shelf in print or available online for researchers and students. 🌱

Endnotes

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Editor's note: An asterisk () denotes a title selected for *Resources for College Libraries*.

Oregon Trails — A Browser's Serendipity

Column Editor: **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (Retired,
Eugene, OR 97404) <oskibear70@gmail.com>



When I think about books, as I often do, my mind wanders to bookish memories and associations, an experience not unlike going through family photo albums and the ghosts that they invoke. One of my memory albums consists of places where I have bought books, most of which are bookstores, and as I write this, there is one bookstore, still fresh in my mind, that I want to tell you about.

It was not until the fall of 1961 when I was a freshman at **Chapel Hill** that I discovered a store that sold nothing but books — in other words, a bookstore. It was the **Intimate Bookshop** on Franklin Avenue, a glorious place to me but destined for an ignominious fate that it

did not deserve. What a revelation to an Army brat who, up until then, had bought books in the Post Exchange or the book stall outside the Frankfurt Hauptbahnhof, a place that hawked **Pan** and **Tauchnitz** editions of British and American authors.

In my defense, I had never lived in a city large enough to have a real bookstore. Back then, the 1940s and 1950s, paperbacks (and not just pulp fiction) were sold off of racks in drug stores, a form of distribution that continued well into the 1960s. The PX on the military base in Karlsruhe, Germany, where I attended my last two years of high school, had racks of paperbacks that included my favorite publisher

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