



Twenty-Five Thousand Entries in One Book!

A Review of

APA Dictionary of Psychology

by Gary R. VandenBos (Ed.)

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Reviewed by

Kurt Salzinger

After the *psychologist* administered the *MMPI*, the *CPI*, the *WAIS-III*, and the *DIS* to the *client*, she gave him a *diagnosis* of *anxiety disorder* and insisted that he was suffering from *lygophilia*. The psychologist's *supervisor* questioned the validity of the diagnosis because the client's *presenting symptoms* were *formication* (not *fornication*), possibly based on a *prick experience*, and *indirect speech acts*, which irritated both the client's wife and the *psychometrician*. The *patient* (a term that the client actually prefers when it comes to the *patient-client issue*) managed to perform a *mental rotation* on the psychologist's handwriting and accused her of *graphorrhea*. It turned out that the client had studied *psychology* as an undergraduate and suffered from a *collecting mania* restricted to rare *psychological* terms, oddly enough. He accused the psychologist of an *ontogenetic fallacy* and of *abuse*. The psychologist finally threw the client out of her office when he pointed out that the *WAIS-III* scores failed to generate a *ratio scale* and insisted that she use a *memory drum* to test his *memory*. After that *Sturm und Drang period*, he went home, returning to his dictionary to look for rare psychological terms or *neologisms*, as he preferred to call them, wondering about his *libidinal transference* to a psychologist he had only just met.

Using a method employed by public school teachers to demonstrate the learning of new words, I subjected myself to the same kind of test described above to see the kinds of words (italicized above) one can learn from reading the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*.

In the remainder of this review, I first list some words that might have been included but were not. I follow that by listing words that I believe could have been profitably omitted. Finally, I assess the quality of the definitions provided, using what the *Dictionary* calls *convenience sampling*.

I should state at the outset that I find this dictionary most impressive, not only because of its size and general inclusiveness, but also because of its accuracy and clarity. So, for those of you who are reading this review to make a decision to buy or use this dictionary, by all means go out and get this book. It will not be available as a used book because those who buy it will not want to part with it. For those who want some details about the *Dictionary*, read on.

One caution is in order. My criticisms are given in the spirit with which the dictionary was produced. Like all other dictionaries, it is a work in progress and will profit, I hope, despite the many reviews that produced it, from still further review here.

Missing Terms

The most difficult decision to make in writing a dictionary is to decide which psychologists to include. Nevertheless, I will

start my criticism with this subject. I did not find *S. S. Stevens* as a headword in the dictionary, even though his power law and its association with his name are appropriately listed. *Neal Miller* is correctly listed. However, *George A. Miller*, who has been much involved in the introduction of information theory and psycholinguistics à la *Noam Chomsky* (who is properly included), never mind his work on meaning and the introduction of cognition into psychology, is not. *Hans Eysenck* is in but *Joseph Zubin* is not, even though the latter made major contributions to quantification and experimentation in psychopathology and introduced the concept of evidence-based therapy many years before it became generally accepted.

Francis Galton as a separate item is absent, even though his “Galton bar” and “Galton's questionnaire” are described. *Daniel Kahneman*, the psychologist who studied decision making under conditions of uncertainty and won the Nobel Prize in economics in 2002, is missing, whereas *Herbert Simon*, who won the Nobel Prize in 1978, is listed. *Herman L. F. Helmholtz* appears only in relation to his chessboard, color mixer, and theory, and does not receive his own headword. *Murray Sidman* is appropriately listed in relation to the avoidance schedule he devised but has no headword, nor is his landmark work on stimulus equivalence associated with him. Other names come to mind that are conspicuous in their absence, such as *Jerome Bruner*, *H. Muensterberg*, and *Ulric Neisser*.

Aplysia appears in the dictionary, as it should, with mention of the fact that it is an organism “often used to study neurophysiology, especially the neurophysiology of learning and memory” (p. 65). Nevertheless, the book omits mention of *Eric Kandell*, the neuroscientist who received the Nobel Prize in 2000 for work in that area and on that organism.

What about the matter of missing organizations? The *Association for Behavior Analysis International* (*ABA International*) is not listed. This is despite the fact that *ABA* correctly appears in the dictionary as an abbreviation for applied behavior analysis and as an experimental design. *AABT*, the *Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy*, now called *ABCT*, the *Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapy*, is another unlisted organization—despite the fact that both incarnations of this organization have counted thousands of psychologists among their members.

What about psychological terms? Skinner's concept of “reflex reserve,” according to which responses accumulate as they are reinforced and decline as responses are emitted, is not listed in this dictionary. Although the concept was only of historical interest until Charles Catania (2005) recently produced a computer simulation of a modified form, it should have been included.

Speaking of Skinner, the dictionary correctly contains some basic terms from his *Verbal Behavior* (Skinner, 1957). Both *mand*, a verbal response specifying the reinforcer that is supposed to follow it, and *autoclitic*, which alters the effect of other verbal behavior on the listener, are correctly defined. Surprisingly, it omits the key term *tact* (a tactless omission?), also coined by Skinner for verbal behavior under the control of a stimulus, such as the verbal response “cat” in the presence of a cat.

Although *suppression* was not suppressed from this dictionary, its meaning is explained in relation to psychoanalytic therapy only. This leaves out the term's meaning in learning as a reduction of behavior resulting from a punishing stimulus.

Sample of convenience has to be found under *convenience sampling*, but it is there.

Accident and *near-death experience* are there, but *near-accident* (which appears some 40 times in PsycINFO) is not.

Observer appears in relation to *observational method* and *telepathy*, the second definition for *observer*, but not in relation to *psychophysical* experiments. It used to be the term of art in descriptions of psychophysical experiments. Observers were the subjects (or participants, if you insist) in experiments. They were also abbreviated as “O.”

Although *acceptance and commitment therapy* is here, the term's more common abbreviation, *ACT*, is not. Nor is *Steven Hayes*, who is most associated with this form of therapy, mentioned.

There is a mysterious missing item, namely *V3*, otherwise known as *Visual Area 3*. This is despite the presence of *V1*, *V2*, *V4*, and *V5*.

Finding missing terms is not easy; after all, this is a dictionary of some 25,000 terms that requires 1,024 pages and weighs 4.68 lb, according to Amazon.com. Nevertheless, other terms may be missing. Indeed, it occurred to me that the editor of the book might do well to challenge users of the dictionary to identify other omissions. The person who compiles the largest number of missing items could then be given a free dictionary.

Superfluous Terms

This heading may be too strong. Yet, in the interest of saving forests, maybe the reader could have survived the absence of some of these listed headwords.

Enema, which at first blush would seem to be superfluous, is probably included because it is followed by *enema addiction*, apparently a form of psychopathology. A search for that term in PsycINFO, however, yielded not one reference.

Several military terms report for duty (e.g., *AWOL*, *POW*, *VA*, *military service*, and *military environment*). Psychologists might well come across these terms, but aren't they considered to be part of the general vocabulary?

Skin graft precedes *Skinner* and, although well explained, does not seem at first glance a psychological term.

Test-tube baby appears on the same page with "tetra- (tetr-) *combining form* four" (italics are the dictionary's). *Delivery* appears in relation to childbirth, as does *afterbirth* and *labor*. I suppose these terms are included because complications of birth may have psychological effects. By that criterion, however, the editors ought to also include *gunshots*, *homelessness*, and *poverty*, all of which may have profound psychological effects.

Both *fossil* and *fossilization* make their mark in this dictionary, but only the latter is relevant to psychology, as it refers to second-language acquisition.

Finally, *Gödel's proof*, although clearly a significant mathematical achievement, does not seem to be a psychological term.

Quarrels and Quibbles

The third way to evaluate a dictionary is in terms of the definitions provided. Here are some entries I would have defined differently.

Prick experience seems an awkward way of referring to the sensation experienced when such stimuli as pins or needles are applied to one's skin. In the editors' defense, I must point out that the *Longman Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry* (Goldenson, 1984), on which this dictionary is based, also contains this entry.

Drosophila is described in this dictionary, but behavioral studies done with that organism by psychologists (e.g., *Jerry Hirsch*) are not mentioned. Given that Hirsch pioneered the study of geotaxis and phototaxis, his name should have been mentioned in relation to this entry. Even more important, the "behavior" of *Drosophila* should have been described to make the entry appropriate for a dictionary of psychology.

Hawthorne effect is one of those hoary terms that has been long misinterpreted. H. M. Parsons (1974) reviewed the original conditions of the experiments. He found that the workers did not increase their rate of production in a mysterious and irrational manner whenever environmental conditions varied. It was the nature of the consequences of their behavior that accounted for their increase in production.

Hermann Ebbinghaus appropriately appears in this dictionary, but is inappropriately described as "the first to apply quantitative *psychophysiological* methods to the study of higher mental processes" (p. 310, my italics). In fact, he

worked on the memory of nonsense syllables without using any psychophysiological methods at all.

GRIT, or “Graduated and Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension Reduction,” does not have *Charles E. Osgood* (1962) associated with it, although he wrote a book on the technique and was its originator.

Subject, an appropriate entry, is at first correctly described. However, the entry also states that the word *participant* is now often preferred “because the word ‘subject’ is depersonalizing and implies passivity and submissiveness on the part of the experimentee” (p. 903). What about the entry *participant*? The text does not say that there are some psychologists who prefer “subject” to “participant” because the latter term implies that these experimentees are involved in construction, design, conduct, and analysis of the experiment.

In defining *false memory syndrome*, a term that this book appropriately defines and describes, the *Dictionary* notes that some prefer the more neutral phrase “recovered memory.” That definition, however, denies the meaning of that term and cannot be substituted for it without losing the original meaning. With that reasoning, we could say that some prefer the term *pregnancy* as a more neutral term for *false pregnancy*, a neighboring entry in the dictionary.

Finally, this dictionary supplies no help to its users with pronunciation. For the majority of entries such help is unnecessary, but how about such entries as *phthinoid* and *phthisic type*? My spell-check rejects these words outright.

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The publication of a new *Dictionary of Psychology* bearing the imprimatur of the American Psychological Association is a major event in the world of publishing. Because this book is likely to become the definitive dictionary of psychology, I recruited two reviewers to write companion reviews. Dr. Korn, an Associate Editor for *PsycCRITIQUES*, identifies himself primarily as an academician, and he reviewed the dictionary from the perspective of a college professor. Dr. Salzinger identifies primarily as a scientist, and his review is written from that perspective. —DW