A Closer Look at PsycCRITIQUES®

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PsycCRITIQUES, APA's online database and weekly journal of book, film, and media reviews, grew out of reader feedback about its predecessor, Contemporary Psychology: APA Review of Books (CP), a bi-monthly paper journal that began publication in 1956. The journal was initially edited by Harvard psychologist E. G. Boring, and it grew out of a tradition of reviewing psychologically relevant books in the journal Psychological Bulletin that dates back to 1904.

Surveys of Contemporary Psychology subscribers revealed that both readers and librarians wanted more timely reviews (books were often 2 to 3 years old before a review could be published in CP) and more of them (CP only offered about 300 reviews per year, and many of these were quite short). In response, publisher Gary VandenBos conceived of APA's first online weekly journal, a journal that would release approximately 500 reviews per year into a database containing all previous Contemporary Psychology reviews. The newly named PsycCRITIQUES focused on reviewing books within their copyright year, whenever possible, bringing the idea of “contemporary” back to the fore and making the journal much more useful for librarians and others making purchasing decisions.

I was privileged to be asked to be editor for this new incarnation of Contemporary Psychology, and we decided to expand the review coverage to include popular films and other media (primarily educational videos). PsycCRITIQUES was launched in late 2004, and the full collection of CP reviews was added to the database shortly thereafter. We now publish approximately 500 book and film reviews each year. The addition of film reviews has been especially well received (and it brings back a tradition E. G. Boring had instituted in early CP releases with reviews of psychologically relevant films like the 1948 film The Snake Pit).

PsycCRITIQUES retains the breadth of coverage across all psychology specialties that CP had, and extends it with its greater volume. The content of our reviews is still based on the original guidelines E. G. Boring first articulated in 1956. We strive to have reviews that will be pertinent to
our broad international readership, which includes clinicians and all mental health professionals, academicians, librarians, interested lay readers and students. Moving the journal online and creating a searchable database that accompanies the other APA databases made PsycCritiques a 21st century resource and research tool. Reviews almost always include hyperlinks from the References section to primary source documents. Since 2004, they have also included links to biographies of the reviewers.

My six Associate Editors and I work hard to identify and recruit the world’s most prominent psychologists to review especially important books. These reviewers have included many of the most eminent figures in psychology, and we try to review any book that substantially advances the science or practice of psychology (e.g., Daniel Kahneman’s Thinking, Fast and Slow, Philip Zimbardo’s The Lucifer Effect, Martin Seligman’s Flourish). We also review popular books that psychologists and other social scientists are likely to find interesting and relevant (e.g., Freakonomics, The Secret Life of Pronouns), as well as other social science titles likely to be interesting to psychologists (e.g., Charles Murray’s Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960 – 2010 or Amy Chua’s Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother).

To broaden our outreach even more and offer an international public forum for the discussion of contemporary issues in psychology, APA launched a PsycCritiques blog site (http://psyccritiquesblog.apa.org/) in the fall of 2008. Each week I or one of my Associate Editors post a discussion topic based on a recently published review. Visitors can read the related review and comment, share, or tweet the discussion. We had over 14,600 visits to the site in 2012, and our visitors came from over 70 countries (about one-third of our visitors are from outside the United States). The blog extends both the journal’s and APA’s international presence, and we welcome comments from librarian readers. Blog topics range from very serious (“The Death Penalty: No Resolution in Sight”) to professionally relevant (“Dissociative Identity Disorder: Legitimate or Faddish Diagnosis?”) to intellectually engaging (“Are We Dumb to Worship Intelligence?”) to whimsical (“What Films Would Win If Psychologists Gave Out Academy Awards?”). Some of the most spirited exchanges on the blog were generated in response to a book arguing that there is no connection between creativity and mental illness (The Insanity Hoax: Exposing the Myth of the Mad Genius).

Four previous editors of PsycCritiques have gone on to become APA Presidents: E. G. Boring, Gardner Lindzey, Janet Taylor Spence and Bob Sternberg. These four individuals have all made important contributions as psychologists and scientists.

It’s been 60 years since Contemporary Psychology was initiated, and as the 9th editor of APA’s only review journal, I feel I’m carrying on a core mission that has not changed: PsycCritiques will continue to review films that are psychologically relevant and every important book that substantially advances the science or practice of psychology.

We’d like to know what you think of PsycINFO News. If you haven’t already taken our reader survey, please take a few minutes to fill it out now. It won’t take long! http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/1130225/PsycINFO News-Survey

New From APA: Psychotherapy App

Faculty who depend on the APA journal Psychotherapy may be interested to know about a new mobile app released earlier this year. The Psychotherapy app is a free app for iOS and Android that allows any user to search the journal’s content back to 1963. Users who are affiliated with an institution that accesses PsycARTICLES via the APA PsycNET platform can also access the full text. For more information, visit http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/pst/mobile-app.aspx
PsycCRITIQUES® Book Reviews

APA is a major publisher in the field of psychology through both our journals and books programs. But beyond our own collections, including PsycBOOKS®, the APA Books® E-Collections, and APA Handbooks in Psychology™, we are also committed to being a go-to source for published books relevant to psychology. PsycINFO provides citations, abstracts, subject indexing, and tables of contents for English-language books published worldwide. PsycCRITIQUES is our review database and designed as a tool for researchers specifically focused on the behavioral sciences, providing reviews of very current books—as well as films and software—by a highly qualified team of reviewers.

If you are a PsycCRITIQUES user, have you ever wondered how books are selected for review? Or have you come across a work, for example, by a faculty member at your institution, that you wanted to get the exposure of a PsycCRITIQUES review? Here’s how it works.

Book Selection

Meet Mike Baetzhold, Supervisor of Book Content, who will explain the process. Mike has been a part of APA since 2000, although he has spent the bulk of his career here as a technical information specialist—that is, one of the trained staff who analyze and index content for PsycINFO. He has a BA in psychology from Canisius College in Western New York. One of the committees he served on while in PsycINFO was the Books group, and last year when he was ready for a new challenge and the Books supervisor position opened up, he made the change.

A river of books flow through Mike’s office. He receives all that come into APA, those destined for both PsycINFO and PsycCRITIQUES, as well as those that do not meet our criteria. Mike estimates that he has averaged processing perhaps 40 titles a week—although the flow is definitely uneven. Some weeks he has so many he can build a fort with them, whereas other weeks they appear in just a trickle. They come to APA in a number of ways. Many publishers who specialize in behavioral science fields provide essentially all their new work to us for evaluation as a matter of course. Some authors who are aware of the value that indexing in PsycINFO or a review in PsycCRITIQUES can add ask their publishers to send us their work as it’s published. Mike also proactively searches for appropriate content, spending part of his day reviewing publisher websites and reviews for new titles.

In addition, for PsycCRITIQUES specifically, there’s a further source for content. Danny Wedding, Associate Dean for Management and International Programs, California School of Professional Psychology, Alliant University, and ebullient Editor of PsycCRITIQUES, is constantly on the lookout for titles that interest him, asking that Mike procure and send him two or three specific titles a week.

As a rule of thumb, all PsycCRITIQUES reviewed books are in PsycINFO, but not all PsycINFO books are reviewed in PsycCRITIQUES. Threshold inclusion criteria for both are stringent. Thus, last year, out of the books that arrived at APA, almost 2,000 met the inclusion criteria for PsycINFO. About half of that number then went on to the PsycCRITIQUES Editor’s office at the Editor’s request or our suggestion. The PsycCRITIQUES editorial office selects about one in four of the available books. The books chosen are sent to a reviewer, and guidelines for reviewers are also exacting.

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In Search of: Using PsycCRITIQUES® to Find Films That Teach

The relatively new field of positive psychology seeks to find and nurture genius and talent and to make normal life more fulfilling. Instructors teaching positive psychology have found it helpful to use film to demonstrate positive strengths such as wisdom and courage, mindfulness, flow, optimism, hope, happiness, well-being, attachment, love, good work, and resilience.

The PsycCRITIQUES database provides movie reviews by leading psychologists as well as book reviews. Let's do a search across platforms for movies that could be used in a positive psychology class.

To view the tutorial, please visit: http://youtu.be/SOpPjlvSTOqI

APA grants permission for librarians and educators to link these tutorials to their library web sites, Libguides, course management software, and other resources intended to assist students and researchers in their work.