

A Modern Classics Sampler

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Writing classics in psychology did not come to an abrupt end in the early 20th century. It undoubtedly continues today, although time will tell which of today's titles will emerge as tomorrow's classics. The Observer asked a handful of APS Board members which modern era textbooks had most influenced their work, and why. The envelopes, please:

Social Psychology

By Roger Brown, 1965

The book is “warm and engaging,” filled with “apt analogies out of real life,” and written in a “wonderful, pithy, engaging style that just draws the reader in,” said Roberta Klatzky of Carnegie Mellon University. “It’s got a wry sense of humor and an astute observational sense.”

She first encountered it as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, a math major “raking in top honors.” Despite her grades, she was told “women did not do well in math and I should find some other profession.” She “found” psychology and Brown’s book. “It was a very exciting exposure to scientific psychology for me,” she recalled, although “no one today would recognize this book as social psychology. It is an odd amalgam of sociology, social psychology, and cognition.”

Brown’s text influenced Henry L. Roediger, III’s career as well. “It had the same impact on many people,” said Roediger, University of Washington at St. Louis. “Most social psychologists I meet today tell me they read it and still have the book. It was idiosyncratic in that it presented Brown’s own vision of social psychology, including a lot of what would now be called cognitive psychology. But it was so beautifully written and had so many interesting topics; he could weave things into a beautiful story. It was one of the few textbooks that, when I put it down, it was almost like a novel. [I] wanted to pick it up again.”

Cognitive Psychology

By Ulric Neisser, 1967

Roediger, Klatzky, and APS Fellow and Charter Member Denise C. Park of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign recommended this modern classic. Neisser came along “just as what is now called cognitive psychology was emerging,” says Roediger, who is attempting to get the book back into print. “It really defined the field. Like Brown, Neisser’s a beautiful writer. His book was outstanding. It didn’t just concatenate study upon study, but wove the facts into a whole. It just had tremendous influence. It educated a generation of cognitive psychologists and gave the field its name. If you surveyed all the college psychology departments before 1965, I don’t think you’d find any that had a course in cognitive

psychology; by 1985, probably all major psychology departments had one.”When Klatzky entered Stanford, she says, mathematical psychology was rooted in traditional learning theory, “but the field was turning a corner and becoming cognitive psychology, much more concerned with higher-level processes, with the role of memory. All of us who were in that program became cognitive psychologists. Neisser’s book captured a change in the field at that time, so it was part and parcel of a change in what we studied and how we studied it. It’s a beautiful book. Anyone who ever read it would tell you that.”

“It was the very first book I read in graduate school,” Park said, “and it really impressed me. I already knew this was what I wanted to do, but the book was just incredibly exciting. When Neisser wrote it, it was almost forbidden to talk about what goes on inside the mind. Probably the most extreme example of that was B.F. Skinner, who talked of the mind as a black box, and that you could understand it all by inputs and outputs. Neisser said, ‘no, no, no! There’s a whole other way of talking about complex behaviors; we have to look inside the black box.’”

Learning, Memory and Conceptual Processes

By Walter Kintsch, 1970

Park describes Kintsch’s work as another book that made the transition “between older traditions in the field and new traditions. Kintsch summarized the learning and memory research done in the previous decades, with a nice respect for history.”People who did a lot of early verbal learning research reinvented themselves as cognitive psychologists,” she explains. “A lot of what we know about verbal learning is becoming lost to the profession. Newer faculty members don’t know this stuff and the people who do know it don’t teach it, because it’s not the most interesting, salient, or important research. I use Kintsch all the time, even today. When I’m writing an article I’ll often remember that someone else did some work and thought about these issues. I’ll look back and see where contemporary cognitive psychology came from. Often people think they have new ideas when in fact there is earlier good research that precedes them. Some very fine work is getting lost to our profession, and I really like this book for that reason.”

The Nature of Prejudice

By Gordon Allport, 1954

“That qualifies as a classic, without a doubt,” Fiske said. “It is heavily cited because of its wisdom and insight. The writing style is beautiful. It’s fluid, and like [William] James, it’s full of anecdotes, concrete examples that bring it to life. I still use it as a core textbook. If that’s not success, what is?” She even has a favorite phrase from the book to illustrate its incisiveness: “Nouns that cut slices.”

The Social Animal

By Elliott Aronson, 1976

A third text nominated by Fiske, *The Social Animal* prompted one anonymous Internet reviewer to gush that it “reads like a cliffhanger, like ‘tune in next week.’ Just when things seem hopeless, here comes the hero – the social psychologist – with a brand new experiment in a lab under controlled conditions.

You're left wondering for a page or two, itching to rebut a theory Aronson just posed. Turn the page and voila! Your question is answered."

Foundations of Social Psychology

By Edward Jones and Harold Gerard, 1967

Fiske said she especially remembers one of this text's insights, that "basic antinomy [exists] between openness to change and the desire to preserve a pre-existing view or conviction." The concept "turns out to come up all over social psychology," she said. "In 1999 there was a book of three dozen theories in social psychology alone that derived from that."

Principles of Learning and Memory

By Robert Crowder, 1976

"This book captured the field of learning and memory as it existed in the 1970s," Roediger said. "Not only was it used in all the courses, it made a real scholarly contribution, because the whole field learned from it. Crowder was able to take not only his own research, but also others' work, and put it in a context so people could cite him even about others' scholarship." Roediger is co-authoring an introduction for a reprinting of the book. Instead of revising the text for the new edition, he and other former students of Crowder are writing chapter postscripts to point to the more recent research.

Handbook of Experimental Psychology

Edited by S.S. Stevens, 1952>

"This book really was the bible of experimental psychology in the 1950s," Roediger said. "Everybody would have read it." Originally in one volume, it is still in print today, expanded to four volumes, including a chapter by Roediger and two co-authors.

Experimental Psychology

By R.S. Woodworth and Harold Schlossberg, 1954

"To anyone from the Brown University of my era," said APS Fellow and Charter Member Linda Bartoshuk of Yale University, "Woodworth and Schlossberg would have to go to the top of the list. After learning psychology from this text, the timing of the third edition (1971) was just right. I got to write the taste chapter (Bartoshuk's specialty)." Woodworth started writing the first edition in 1910, but it wasn't published until 1938, when he was 70. The second edition, in collaboration with Schlossberg, "managed to preserve the easy informality and clarity of the earlier work despite the increasing complexity of the material covered," according to J.W. Kling and Lorrin A. Riggs, in the 1971 edition's preface. "A good part of the success of the previous editions can be attributed to the avoidance of any preoccupation with jargon and narrowly defined experimentation."

The Chemical Senses

By R.W. Moncrief, 1967

This is another favorite of Bartoshuk's, who said she learned "a tremendous amount from [Moncrief] but, strangely enough, it's a piece of trivia that has stuck with me the most." On page 142 Moncrief wrote that ethyl alcohol is a substance with the relatively uncommon qualities of odor, taste independent of the odor, and the ability to stimulate the common chemical sense (the one that detects the irritating properties of substances in the mouth and odors in the nose), and "it affords an opportunity of comparing directly the sensibilities of the three senses." Moncrief made those comparisons and demonstrated that, in the case of ethanol, smell is 30 times more sensitive than taste and 60 times more sensitive than the common chemical sense.

Principles of Sensory Evaluation of Food

By M.A. Amerine, R.M. Pangborn and E.B. Roessler, 1965

Although the book was a collaboration, "we all knew that the source of the taste section was Rose Marie Pangborn," Bartoshuk said. "She was a role model for me. Not only was she a successful woman in a field dominated by men, but she was also one of the most ethically admirable people I ever met, in a field where commercial interests sometimes trump academic values."