

This Week's Citation Classic

Berelson B & Steiner G A. *Human behavior: an inventory of scientific findings.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964. 712 p.

This book is a comprehensive attempt to summarize those findings of the behavioral sciences for which some substantial body of scientific evidence exists, by current standards. The findings are arranged in 1-2-3-4 order, and organized by the major topics of the field. Most findings have supporting evidence and illustrations. [The *Science Citation Index*® (SCI®) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*™ (SSCI™) indicate that this book has been cited over 330 times since 1964.]

Bernard Berelson
7 Ardsley Terrace
Irvington on Hudson
New York, NY 10533

August 6, 1979

"In effect, this book was born at a lunch at the University of Chicago in Fall 1957, when Allen Wallis, then dean of the Business School, was formally introducing me to social science colleagues as a new member of the School's faculty. Someone asked what it was exactly that I was going to do in a business school — certainly not my field — and before I could reply Allen said: 'He's going to tell us what's true in the behavioral sciences.' That was such a shocker that there was no need for any further response from me, but on the way back to the office I kept thinking: Why not?"

"That was the genesis of the idea. I began experimental work on the sociological side, and with the help of James Lonie at the School, found my way to Gary Steiner, who immediately saw the challenge and joined up to cover the psychological material.

"I have always believed that such a book could be done, indeed conceived, only by people like us who were marginal to the disciplines covered. I was a trained librarian, of all things, without a single formal course in any behavioral science let alone a degree. Gary was an authentic Ph.D. in psychology but he had 'gone downtown' into a commercial career. If a proper disciplinarian worked along this line, the outcome would be the traditional text — whose subject is the discipline rather than the behavior.

"That was also reflected in the use of the book, predicted by both the publishers and ourselves. Namely, that it would have difficulty in displacing the traditional disciplinary text by some form of 'survey' course but that it would do well in the 'marginal' settings of professional schools and junior colleges, not to mention as a trade book, where the interest was less on the discipline as such than on the (more or less) verified and communicable knowledge. (I used to hear of hard-pressed university lecturers withholding the book from students but using it themselves, but much of that must have been apocryphal!)

"By now the book is long out of print, and surely out of date (though a few years ago the chairman of a major department told me that in his discipline the bibliography would change but not the findings!). In the original volume (not the summary version), there were 1,045 findings about human behavior that we thought had some decent claim to substantiation. (In early talks about the book, having already compressed a gigantic literature, I used to offer a 3-proposition grand summary: (1) some do, some don't; (2) the differences aren't very great; and (3) it's more complicated than that.) The book has been cited, I suppose, because it provides an easy way to refer to material, particularly from a neighboring field."