

péter's picks & pans



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Psychology is one of the most popular fields for undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate studies. It tells you something when, as of mid-May 2003, there were already 5,396 dissertations written in 2002 filed in the free ProQuest Digital Dissertations database. For the same period, there are only 1,595 computer science dissertations. Comparing counts over the entire database shows 225,105 for psychology versus 41,147 for computer science. Although computer science is catching up, it is clear that there are many students and faculty who need information about, and access to, scholarly sources in psychology.

For this reason, I dedicate this column to psychology-related sources. The two picks are the PsycARTICLES database as implemented by the American Psychological Association and the Journal Locator subset of PsycLINE. The pan is the Mental Health Abstracts database which has been clinically dead for 3 years and should be deep-sixed rather than sold at the absurd hourly connect rate of \$70. Considering its utterly stale and cringingly inferior content, its price is outrageous—the superb PsycINFO database costs \$30/connect hour. This is particularly peculiar since Mental Health Abstracts is now owned by the American Psychological Association.

PsycARTICLES

PSYCLine Journal
Locator

Mental Health
Abstracts



the picks

PsycARTICLES

The American Psychological Association (APA) has been doing a good job in developing its core database, PsycINFO, innovating time and again—such as with the creation and interlinking of monographic and analytical records for books, offering direct end-user service through PsycINFO Direct at the very affordable rate of \$11.95 for a day, and now with the PsycARTICLES database [www.psycinfo.com/psycarticles]. PsycARTICLES has more than 30,000 full-text documents, in HTML and/or PDF format, at the standard price of \$11.95 per document.

The database claims it has articles from 49 (or maybe it's 48) journals, most of them published by APA (including 13 titles from the Educational Publishing Foundation [EPA] imprint, three by the Canadian Psychological Association, and five English-language journals from Hogrefe & Huber, the well-known German publisher). Oddly, there are no articles from APA's own free, electronic-only journal *Prevention & Treatment*, even though it's listed as one of the included titles. There is a note at the bottom of the source list hyperlinking you to the journal's Web site. Since APA plans to discontinue the publication at the end of 2003, it may not be worth worrying about whether it is or is not in PsycARTICLES.

This may seem to be a limited journal base by the numbers alone, but it is quite a prestigious set, almost as good as Ovid's Mental Health Collection. The Journal Citations Reports (JCR) cover 37 of the journals, and 20 of them are in the top quartile of the 469 psychology and psychiatry journals by Impact Factor, as well as by the number of citations received in 2001, the latest JCR year



Is this your first visit to PsycARTICLES Direct?
[Click here](#) for coverage and pricing information.

Look for: In:

AND In:

AND In:

Search options:
 Maximum results per screen:

Browse Table of

- All Journals
- General Topics
- Basic Research
- Applied & Practic
- Health/Mental He
- Social/Personalit
- Professional Issu
- Theory, Reviews,
- PsycCHAPTERS

Search options:

- All fields
- All fields
- Author
- Title
- Source
- Subject
- Publication Year
- Abstract
- Keywords
- Key Concepts
- Language
- Population Group

PsycARTICLES has more than 30,000 full-text articles.

available as I write this. One of the journals, the *American Psychologist*, ranks #3 in OCLC WorldCat in terms of the number of OCLC member libraries which have or had a subscription to journals classified under the subject headings of psychology or psychiatry. Five additional journals of PsycARTICLES share the 9-13th rank in the above WorldCat category. There are also 85 APA handbooks with analytical records for every chapter, adding about 1,100 records

The software, PLWeb, allows you to browse journal tables of content by seven categories and offers a good search template. The software does automatic pluralization and singularization, so crime and crimes retrieve the same number of articles. Automatic stemming is not that straightforward: gambling did retrieve gamble and gamblers, but gamblers as a search term did not retrieve gambling. Boolean AND, OR, proximity, and exact phrase searching options are available, but they are not intuitive.

A term like "emotional abuse" retrieves the same number of hits as emotional abuse because the double quotation marks are ignored and the space triggers an AND operation. You should use single quotes, like 'emotional abuse' or emotional ADJ abuse. To allow another word in between, you must use emotional W/2 abuse, and if only proximity is required but not word order, then you should use emotional NEAR/2 abuse.

You can limit the search to the most important field-specific indexes from pull-down menus. If you choose Sub-

ject as the field-specific index, it will combine the title, keywords, and key concepts indexes. It would be useful to have the APA thesaurus browsable to pick up the most appropriate descriptors (keyword in PsycARTICLES parlance), which are not always obvious. So you are guessing whether the best term would be wife abuse, spouse abuse, spousal abuse, or partner abuse. It is the latter, and you'd better know that because the descriptors are not displayed in the results.

The best thing is that the abstracts are free for anyone. Sure, PubMed seemingly covers 75 percent of the journals in this database, but its coverage is often extremely selective. As an example, PubMed has three records for articles in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*; PsycARTICLES has 1,527. For the *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, the ratio is 2:173. Many online services

(EBSCO, OCLC, Ovid, for example) offer this excellent collection, but only the APA version makes available the abstracts for free, offering the pay-as-you-go option for the full document.

PSYCLINE JOURNAL LOCATOR

Many Web directories provide a link to PSYCLINE [www.psycline.org], the excellent browsable and searchable database, but most of them are quite outdated and don't provide enough information to whet the appetite of those who need information about various kinds of psychological journals on the Web. This is a labor of love for Armin Günther of the University of Augsburg, with help from many people.

The journal locator portion [www.psycline.org/journals/psycline.html] provides information about more than 2,000 English, German, French, and Spanish language psychology and social science journals—subject coverage, publisher, types of information available online (table of contents, abstracts, selective free full-text articles, the time span of availability), and links to the sites. Not every journal has all this information, but overall the entries are very informative and mostly current.

If a journal is covered by MEDLINE, there is a link that launches a search by the journal name in PubMed. It is an excellent idea, although it has been implemented only partially. For example, at least 10 APA journals that are decently covered by MEDLINE do not have such a link, nor is there a link to the free

Journal Locator provides information on more than 2,000 psychology and social sciences journals.

APA journal *Prevention & Treatment*. Then again, this is a free service by an information-savvy psychologist who obviously must have a life.

The relatively new interface and the entire design are excellent. You can search the database by keywords in the whole records, by major subcategories (like social psychology, family psychology, and gerontopsychology), information content online, and by the first letter of the alphabet. There is no direct search by publisher, but if you know a single journal of a publisher, you are in luck, because the information snippet about the publisher in each journal record is followed by a link to the publisher's Web site. Most of the links that I tested worked fine in spite of publishers' proclivities for reorganizing their Web sites, like ALA did, without forward links.

The other component of PSYCLINE, the Article Locator, was a very good service to search in the archives of publishers and MEDLINE, but by now, only the searches in PubMed and Kluwer work. Even these often yield too few results because the searches are limited to the title fields. Maybe I will develop a Psychology PolySearch engine to complement and compliment this very useful site.



the pan

MENTAL HEALTH ABSTRACTS

I hoped I would never again have to pan Mental Health Abstracts, File 86 on Dialog. It became clinically dead in June 2000, not to be updated anymore after decades of malnutrition and maltreatment. But here I am again, prodding Dialog to remove this dead body from its collection. To its credit, Dialog does not offer MHA on CD-ROM anymore, but online it still exists at an incredible \$70/connect hour and \$1.50/record displayed or printed. PsycINFO's charges are \$30/hour, and \$0.80/record. Should you have to pay a premium for the MHA records because a) most of them are in all uppercase (giving the aura of the 1960s

computer I/O technology), and b) often the descriptor spellings are a joke?

Although you can't tell from the Bluesheet, MHA was acquired by APA after it ceased adding records. The primary reason was to add "unique" records from MHA to PsycINFO. There are far fewer unique records in MHA than meet the eye. A search on psychopharmacology (a topic MHA claims it's strong in) in both databases, after duplicates are removed, still displays duplicate records. The discrepancies in spelling, punctuation, journal name abbreviations, and author initials prevent Dialog's de-duping algorithms from recognizing them as duplicates. Even the genuinely unique records are not worth the price, let alone the extra cost of cleaning up MHA to make them PsycINFO-compliant. Finding worthy, unique records that are still relevant makes digging for gold in the Gobi desert look like a walk in the park.

While I appreciate that I can use MHA to demonstrate to students how unprofessional a professional database can be, I am increasingly concerned that paying customers may burn money on MHA and cause harm—just as with consuming stale food. Even those who remember that this database has not been updated for 3 years may forget about excluding it from a PSYCH OneSearch operation, and pay an arm and a leg for stale, puny, and sloppily created information. The ultimate irony is, even in subject fields that its Bluesheet brags about, claiming MHA's superiority, you can do a far better and free search in PubMed, especially if you complement it with a free search in PsycARTICLES and Scirus—or in the archives of any major publishers which have free abstracts from its journals of psychology and psychiatry.

I would mourn briefly the chance to show students the consequences of the chronically careless treatment of this database (as they do in medical schools with cadavers of people who had been seriously ill to show the ravages of diseases and bad habits). Where else

Dialog Response		Dialog Response	
Items	Index-term	Items	Index-term
146	LA=DANISH	1	LA=ENGLILSH
877	LA=DUTCH	3	LA=ENGLIS
0	*LA=E	0	*LA=ENGLISH
2	LA=E GLISH	5	LA=ENGLISH ENGLISH
1	LA=E NGLISH	1	LA=ENGLISH 12
1	LA=EEN	8	LA=ENGLISH.
2	LA=EGLISH	2	LA=ENGLISH/JAP.
3	LA=EGNLISH	1	LA=ENGLISH,
2	LA=EIGLISH	1	LA=ENGLISH'
4	LA=EINGLISH	3	LA=ENGLISHN
1	LA=EMGLISH	1	LA=ENGLISHH
1	LA=ENBLISH	1	LA=ENGLISH
5	LA=ENG	20	LA=ENGLSIH
1	LA=ENGIISH	1	LA=ENGLISH
24	LA=ENGISH	10	LA=ENGLTSH
1	LA=ENGLAIH	4	LA=ENLISH
25	LA=ENGLAND	1	LA=ENN 1984

Mental Health Associates has been clinically dead for 3 years.

could I demonstrate that browsing the compound terms in the Basic Index (which indicate that these terms were generated from the descriptor field) guarantees that you will bump into misspelled descriptors within three clicks wherever you open up the index?

Where else could I demonstrate the emaciating effect of decimating the journal base so systematically that during the first half of the 34-year time span of MHA, there were almost 8 times as many records added to the database than in the past 17 years? For comparison, in the twice-as-large PsycINFO database, 95 percent of the records are less than 20 years old. In MHA, the records added to the database since 1984 represent merely 11 percent of the total. If you crave more than 40-year-old documents, PsycINFO wins hands down in that regard, after having added more than 300,000 records for such documents, all the while vigorously adding records about new documents. I would rather use only my screenshot collection of MHA for educational purposes, even if it is not as effective as when I demonstrate in vivo the disturbing condition of MHA vis-à-vis the exemplary condition of PsycINFO, and urge Dialog to remove the online version of MHA. [Editor's Note: Dialog reports it has no plans to remove MHA from the system.]

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Comments? E-mail letters to the editor to marydec@xmission.com.