Louttit, C. M. 1933. "The Dewey Decimal System and Psychology". *Journal of General Psychology* 9, no. 1: 234-238.

THE DEWEY DECIMAL SYSTEM AND PSYCHOLOGY

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The most widely used library classification scheme, that devised by Melvil Dewey and first published in 1876, has never adequately considered psychology. At the time of its origin psychology was classed as a minor branch of philosophy, but even on that basis a rather unexplainable division was made, viz., Mind and Body was given class number 130, followed by Philosophic systems as 140, and that in turn by 150, Psychology. With subsequent editions no substantial changes were made and as new fields of inquiry were introduced into the science they were not recognized in the classification as a part of psychology at all. The impracticability of the Dewey scheme for use in psychological collections even as early as 1894 is shown by a comment of Dr. H. C. Warren's published in the *Proceedings of the Thirty-eighth Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association* (1): "When the Psychological Index was started in 1894, I examined the Dewey System carefully with a view to adopting it. But I found their arrangement even at that time absolutely unsuited to psychology."

The attitude of the Dewey Decimal people has been that any major changes in their scheme were impossible because of the confusion that might arise in libraries and the cost of making changes. This is, perhaps, a logical and justifiable reason for no change. However, at the December, 1930, meetings of the American Psychological Association (1) the Council of Directors "reported the receipt of a request from the Dewey Decimal Classification and Relativ Index for the Appointment of a Committee to make suggestions for a revision prior to March 1." The Council requested an expression from Dr. Warren, the tenor of which is shown in one paragraph: "I doubt

whether it is worth while for the American Psychological Association to take an official action. The Dewey people would not for a moment consider any radical revision of their scheme. And it would need thorough rearrangement to fit in with modern psychology. We can't express approval; and if public libraries find the system generally useful, why should we interfere in their business?" At this meeting Dr. Madison Bentley was elected as a committee to confer with the Dewey people and if there seemed to be some hope of success he was authorized to appoint other members on the committee. That Professor Bentley did not find a very ready response is indicated by the fact that no other members of the committee were ever reported as having been appointed. Furthermore, at the 1931 meetings of the Association (2) it was voted that a communication be sent to the Dewey Decimal Classification expressing the belief that recent changes in the psychology section were of service, but again pointing out that fundamental revision was needed.

In the fall of 1932 the 13th edition of the Decimal Classification and Relativ Index appeared under the editorship of Dorkas Fellows, Dr. Melvil Dewey (3) having died in December, 1931. In this edition the classification for psychology has been much expanded, but still remains in the old divisions of 130, Mind and Body, and 150, Psychology. However, there is offered an alternative scheme for psychology tacked on to the end of 159 (which is volition in the old scheme) as 159.9. It is this alternative scheme we are to consider.

This classification is claimed to be not only for library use, but also, to quote from the title page, for "personal use in arranjing for immediate reference books, pamflets, clippings, pictures, manuscript notes and other material." With this in mind one could only expect that the system would adequately serve for a special collection of psychological literature. In previous editions the scheme has not done so; the alternative scheme of the present edition, unless it is half-hearted compromise, should certainly do so. A careful examination of the schedules raises grave doubts.

In the first place what will one do with literature in fields totally omitted. For example, the field of clinical work, psychological, psychiatric, mental hygiene, or child guidance, has an enormous literature. Neither in the complete tables nor in the relative index are these fields mentioned. Mental clinics of any sort are included only under psychoanalysis where they share a long number, 159.964207, with training classes.

Neither, in this alternative scheme, is any provision made for the psychologies of religion, education, crime, language (except in a non-subdivided heading 159.9463, vocal expression, which is to include speech, singing, whistling, etc.), esthetics, or advertising, to mention some of the important fields. Among minor topics for which one searches in vain might be mentioned the organismic school (although endocrinism as a school is given a number), handedness, eye reflexes (except pupillary), general effects of

drugs, the glandular system as a reacting mechanism, or apparatus in general. Bibliographies are given no place at all within the psychological scheme, although other collections and history may be fitted in by the use of a general table of "Form divisions."

Omissions are not the only queer things to be noticed. Physiologic psychology, 159.91, is a curious rubric. It includes the anatomy and physiology of the nervous system, but nothing about other parts of the organism. The deviser of this section surely never saw Ladd and Woodworth's *Physiological Psychology* or Troland's *Psychophysiology*. Then to complete the picture Mental Hygiene is included as the third major division! Why it should go here instead of sensation, motor phenomena, animal behavior, or any one of a dozen other headings is a mystery. In practical application this means that works on mental hygiene would be separated the whole length of the library from those most closely related, i.e., abnormal psychology, 159.97. Mental hygienists will find New Thought movements a part of their domain, but nothing said about the influence of environment at home, in school, or at work.

Mental development and capacity and comparative psychology (meaning plant and animal behavior) are combined in number 159.92. This section includes physiognomy divided into phrenology, graphology, and palmistry, each of which are so finely subdivided that their symbols have as many as eight decimal places. The section for plant and animal behavior is not subdivided but note is made that it may be divided like the general scheme. Even this device cannot accommodate such a work as H. C. Bingham's monograph, *Gorillas in a Native Habitat,* nor does it make any provision for a phylogenetic arrangement which Willoughby's (4) classification indicates is useful.

There seems to be confusion in relation to synesthesia. Colored audition goes in 159.931373, but all other types of visual synesthesia go in 159.93771, while figured or geometric audition goes in 159.937713. Also in connection with apparatus used in studying sensation there is duplication. Apparatus for each sense field has a number in 159.93824, but in the sections for each sense is a number for tests and measurements which would include apparatus.

Psychic research, 159.961, has five pages devoted to its subdivisions, or about 9 per cent of the total scheme. Illusion is put under this heading although another section under perception, 159.9373, is reserved for "normal illusions."

Section 159.97, abnormal psychology, is entirely hopeless. Apparently the official classification of mental diseases of the American Psychiatric Association remains unknown to the compiler of the alternative scheme for psychology. In the published schedules the psychopathological effects of alcohol may be found under five different numbers. Dipsomania, kleptomania, pathological lying, etc., are classed as types of moral imbecility under

mental deficiency, while modern practice considers these as types of psychoneuroses. Incidentally it is interesting to note that neurasthenia is not included as a psychoneurosis, while epilepsy is.

Practically nothing is said of feeblemindedness. The section mental deficiency includes psychopathic personality, moral imbecility, and intellectual defect. This last has only three divisions—grades, accompanying deformity, accompanying disease and injury. The word feeblemindedness is used only once and then in the English sense of moron. Upon looking for feeblemindedness in the relative index we find:

asylums for	362.3
architecture	725.53
child study	159.9227623624
education of	371.92
libraries for	027.6623
mental derangements	159.973624 (this is for morons)

Not a single mention of diagnosis, social relations, psychobiology, or the many other topics one finds in this large literature.

A third cogent criticism of the system relates to the many cumbersome class numbers. As the alternative scheme is based on 159.9 every number starts off with four digits. With expansion the class numbers get as long as fifteen digits. For example, the eye-movement theory of geometric illusions has number 159.931374150163, while von Kries's duplicity theory has class number 159.93133016472 which is only fourteen digits! Partly controlled association reaction-time is number 159.9383433532, only thirteen digits, but one wonders if there is sufficient literature to make such a symbol justified.

The decimal classification published by Willoughby (4) is an excellent example of the way modern literature might be satisfactorily classified. Checking the Dewey scheme against this much condensed outline we find the omissions earlier mentioned. As Willoughby's scheme was devised by considering actual numbers of titles to be classified it is at once evident that the Dewey omissions are serious.

The classification offered by the Dewey Decimal scheme has never been adequate for psychology. In the attempt to correct this inadequacy the 13th edition offers an alternative scheme supposedly following modern lines of thought. A careful examination of this scheme makes one wonder if it was even seen by a psychologist before being published. We can with certainty say today, as Warren could in 1894, that the system is "absolutely unsuited to psychology."

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A REPETITION OF THORNDIKE'S EXPERIMENT ON IMPROVEMENT IN THE ESTIMATION OF LENGTHS

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Thorndike (2) in 1927 reported that subjects who were informed as to their correctness in estimating lengths of lines improved, whereas subjects who were given no information, aside from the presence of a standard of known length, did not improve. On the basis of this experiment and many others, Thorndike (3) has recently reached the conclusion that "the repeated occurrence of a situation, in and of itself, does not produce adaptive learning."

Although we agree with Thorndike that improvement is not a function of repetition *per se* but a function of conditions mediated by repetition, e.g., consequences of behavior, we believe that he holds a narrow view regarding these effective consequences. For it would appear on the basis of this length-judging experiment that the development of more suitable behavior is solely dependent upon verbal acknowledgment of its correctness. We suggest, however, that the acquisition of more adequate conduct may be self-regulatory. We believe that individuals possess the ability to recognize faulty responses and to correct them on repetition of the situation. Of the elements in the situation or the reacting organism which lead to such self-regulation, we are ignorant. But the hypothesis is consonant with a substantial body of psychological data. Dodge (1), to cite but one example, has found that there is improvement in the exactness with which the eye follows a moving light despite any information from an outside source regarding the correctness of these pursuit movements.

We were prompted, therefore, to repeat Thorndike's experiment because we expected that improvement would be noted in the situation where a standard of known length alone was present.

Procedure. The procedure of our experiment was similar to that used by Thorndike. A group of never more than eight individuals sat at a distance of 6 feet from an easel on which were presented the lengths to be judged. The shelf on which the cards rested was about 3 feet from the floor or at approximately eye-level. The lengths were black strips of the same width (22 mm.) and texture. Twenty-five lengths made up the variable series,