



*Book dedications: a new measure
of scholarly indebtedness*

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*A different criterion for placing scholarly books in the firmament of
knowledge is the treatment of 'dedicatees,' delineated here
by a pioneer in this new field*

Many studies have dealt with the problem of measuring scholarly impact by counting citations in journal articles and books. Citation counts have been employed to assess the importance of authors (e.g., Endler and Edwards 1987), departments (e.g., Rushton, Littlefield, Russell, and Meltzer 1983), journals (e.g., Archibald and Finifter 1987), and even of one country's scholarly impact on another (Solso 1985).

However, counting citations as a method of assessing scholarly impact has numerous limitations (e.g., Bavelas 1978; Christensen-Szalanski and Beach 1984). Many authors have noted that the flowering of citation counts is due as much to the easy accessibility of the data (in the Social Science Citation Index and its companions) as to the inherent value of the method.

In the search for good indices of scholarly impact, other kinds of information have been overlooked. Perhaps these sources also have warts and biases, but at least they could provide another dimension on which to map scholarly indebtedness and impact.

In their lists of references, authors acknowledge academic sources of inspiration; these are the basis of citation counts. In their dedications, authors acknowledge personal and academic sources of inspiration and nurturance. Dedications are often made to family members and friends, but they are also made to teachers, colleagues, organizations, and students who helped or inspired them in important ways. Thus, dedications tend to reflect both sides of scholarly impact, that is the 'input' side, including the contributions of parents, teachers, and spouses, and the 'output' side, including gratitude to students, readers, and children.

In dedicating my own book recently, I experienced the terrors of choosing among several deserving potential individuals. (At this point I must beg the

reader to tolerate the introduction of a neologism that seems necessary in this new field of inquiry: 'dedicatees.') Even sole-authored books are made and inspired by many people and I had considerable difficulty in selecting a dedicatee.

These difficulties provoked me to study the patterns of book dedications as an alternate method of assessing scholarly impact. Who among deserving potential dedicatees are 'cited' in dedications by authors who have spent years depriving themselves of a normal life to write a book? A computer search turned up no references at all to the topic. So, on behalf of other authors who may face a difficult choice and on behalf of both dedicatees and those who believe they *should* have been dedicatees, I began to collect basic information on this important but neglected dimension of scholarly impact. The fundamental question was: Which authors dedicate which books to whom?

Because I wished to do a relatively thorough examination of at least one discipline rather than a shallow examination of many, I concentrated on my own field, psychology. I see no reason why patterns would be different in other areas of academia, but I would be more interested than surprised if future research demonstrated that dedication patterns vary by discipline.

To obtain a broad sample of psychology books, 180 books were sampled randomly from the entire BF section (Library of Congress classification for psychology) of a university library. To supplement this sample, 377 books from the shelves of twenty faculty members in my department, representing very diverse areas of psychology, were also randomly selected. Basic information from each book was collected, including publication year, edition, and type of book (text versus monograph); number, order, number of books by, and sex of, authors; whether the book had a dedication; if so, the sex, number, and relationship to the author or authors of each dedicatee.

We found that slightly more than half of the books contained a dedication. On average, dedications were made to about two dedicatees. In total, we examined 389 dedications to 824 dedicatees. Unfortunately for this nascent endeavour, 215 authors merely dedicated their books to Frank, or to Stella, making it difficult to know whether these are friends, spouses, children, or pets (we did find one book explicitly dedicated to a cat). However, 167 dedications made clear the relationship of author and dedicatee and because many dedications are made to more than one dedicatee, about 500 author-dedicatee relationships may be examined.

Who, then, receives how many dedications? Who do authors honour most as their sources of inspiration and assistance? The following tabulation (table 1) is offered. It should be noted that some dedicatee types must be single individuals (e.g., mother), but most other dedicatees may be one or more of a type (e.g., teacher, student).

TABLE 1
Author / dedicatee relationships

Relationship to author	Number of dedications
Mother	59
Father	54
Spouse	51
Son(s)	24
Daughter(s)	24
Friend(s)	20
Teacher(s)	27
Student(s)	15

Another way of examining this form of scholarly impact and indebtedness is to break down the dedications by generation (table 2). By senior generation, we mean one's parents and teachers. The peer generation consists of one's spouse and friends. The junior generation consists of one's children and students. As before, these numbers include a single count for each category, whether the author dedicates the book to one or more members of a given type of dedicatee.

Next we proceeded to examine some patterns in the dedications. For this exploratory venture, only Pearson correlations and means were used. We decided to spare the reader the numerical results, but we will send them to anyone who requests them. All results based on inferential statistics are significant at conventional levels of significance.

First we looked at dedications across time. The average book publication date was 1975; they ranged from 1909 to 1987. More recent books have more authors (cf. Over 1982) and females have been writing more books lately. More recent books contain more dedications than older books did; more dedications have been made recently to fathers and to daughters, in particular.

Collaboration appears to affect dedication practices. One hundred seventy books were written by single authors, 138 by two, and the remaining 81 by three to five authors. As the number of authors rises, so does the number of dedications made by each author. In addition (but inexplicable to me), when a book has more authors, fewer dedications are made to the authors' parents.

Textbooks and monographs have different authorship and dedication patterns. The 339 textbooks we examined tended to have more authors and these authors are more often male, compared to the 50 monographs. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, textbook dedicatees are more often female. Authors

TABLE 2
Dedications by generation

Generation relative to author	Number of dedications
Senior	88
Peer	71
Junior	49

of texts also dedicate their books more often to parents and less often to teachers than do authors of monographs. They also make more dedications in which the dedicatee's relationship to the author is discernible.

What happens in revised books? In our sample, 291 first editions were examined; 98 books were second to ninth editions. Later editions have fewer authors than first editions, which may say something about the difficulty of keeping a writing team whole and hale. In later editions, more dedications are made to spouses and females. This may be because, as the data also reveal, authors of later editions are more often male.

If this sampling of books is accurate, men write many more psychology books than women: they outnumber female authors by a six to one margin. However, the sexes differ little in most of the dedication practices we examined. One difference was that men are more likely than women to dedicate their books to members of the younger generation (e.g., children, students).

Prolific authors, as one might expect, have different dedication habits than do authors of single books. The more books an author writes, the more likely that the dedication will go to a non-person (e.g., an organization or a pet), although in general very few dedications (about 1 per cent) are made to non-persons. The prolific author more often dedicates books to females and less often to members of the senior generation (e.g., teachers and parents).

Some authors apparently try to avert interpersonal disaster by dedicating their books to many people. We found thirty cases in which the number of dedicatees could not be determined (e.g., 'to my students') and another thirty-seven cases in which the number was discernible and more than nine dedicatees were honoured). This strategy of mass dedication may dilute the appreciation felt by an individual dedicatee. Perhaps this explains why other authors select a single dedicatee on whom to lavish their appreciation (we found 119 such cases).

As the number of dedications rises, the number for which the relationship between author and dedicatee is made clear also rises. In today's world, where a dedication 'To Jane, Ellen, and Sue' may be misconstrued by some

readers, it helps to add, 'my wonderful wife and daughters.' Also, as the number of dedicatees rises, more dedications are made to students, females, and fathers. I don't know why.

The many wonderful turns of phrase that accompany dedications were not formally examined in this initial investigation, but a content analysis would show them to be, by turns, creative, sentimental, revealing, funny, hackneyed, and sincere. Of course, most dedications ring with a high seriousness that serves to underscore the importance of dedication analysis. Solemn declarations such as 'To Barbara, without whom this book could never have been written' are typical. There are quite a few dedications to dead people. But some authors venture from this pattern. One read, 'Dedicated to the brightest but lowest paid form of slave labor: the psychology graduate assistant, without whose efforts research would never get done.'

What does all this mean? At the very least, it demonstrates that dedication patterns are not random. Collaboration, publication era, writing experience, book type, and sex all influence dedication practices. One's seniors are honoured more than one's peers, who are honoured more than one's juniors. Non-academic individuals are honoured far more often than are academic individuals, but teachers and students are mentioned often. Academic dedications are more often made to several dedicatees (e.g., 'to my teachers Frank Smith and Stella Jones'); academic dedications may be more common, in total, than table 2 suggests. In sum, book dedications do reflect an author's 'citation' of both personal and professional impact and indebtedness.

Clearly, the dedication as a form of scholarly acknowledgment is distinct from the citation. As the results of this study show, a variety of interesting questions may be posed about this form of scholarly impact. Dedication analysis, if that term is acceptable, is not the same as citation analysis. It asks different questions about scholarly impact and it reaches different conclusions. But that was the original goal: to develop another dimension in the so-far-one-dimensional study of scholarly impact. So let the imbalance be redressed: we should explore and understand the debts acknowledged by authors in their dedications at least as much as we explore and understand their debts as measured by citation counts. Scholarly impact has more than one dimension!

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