



RESEARCH
ARTICLE

Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover: A Case Study and Comparative Analysis of Popular vs. Academy Psychology Books

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HIGHLIGHTS

A review of selected 'pop psychology' books shows that they do not inevitably contain misreported facts or findings from the original research studies they reference. This result suggests that negative stereotypes of such lay books should be reconsidered.

ABSTRACT

Many academic psychologists hold negative and stereotypical views about popular psychology books, even though there have been few formal investigations into these materials to understand their content, construction, purposes, or orientations, or their authors' credentials. This paper explores the origins of these views within the Sociology of Scientific knowledge literature and psychological literature. Through formal case study methodology, an extensive review and comparative analysis of books with the psychological construct of "Attention" in their title was undertaken to determine whether the current delineations between scholarly and popular materials and those who write them are as clear-cut as they seem, or if an alternative model of the relationship between academic and popular psychology literature could be offered. A bibliography of 145 books was compiled, followed by what turned out to be an arduous and at times impossible task of sorting these books into either popular or scholarly categories. This revealed flaws in the dualistic nature of this activity that is often required of university students, instructors, and scholars alike. Six popular and six scholarly books (Table 3) revealed that while some of the popular books were less rigorous in referencing and representing experimental or original findings, they offered bibliotherapeutic benefits and were cited by others within journal articles, books, and dissertations across multiple disciplines, thus suggesting that popularization is not simply a trickling down of knowledge from the scientific arenas to the public, but that science can be informed by professionals with expertise in applied areas. Meanwhile, the six books designated as scholarly only had a collective of 14 Amazon reader reviews. This project's findings have implications for educators, researchers, librarians, and journal editors who may presently disqualify useful materials without fully understanding them, and for writers seeking to improve in their research and writing skills.

KEYWORDS

Popularization of science, popular science, attention, scholarly books, pop psychology, popular psychology, bibliotherapy, self-help books



BACKGROUND

Popular psychology books comprise a billion-dollar and ever-expanding industry. However, there exists a gulf between many academics and the rest of society in relation to the materials they read and write. Many academic psychologists view “popular” books, along with those who write them, with outright disdain. Often, they are not at all familiar with the books they are disqualifying (Campbell, 2017).

Academic psychologists make generalized statements that “how to,” self-help, and self-improvement books misrepresent good science through distortion of evidence and unsubstantiated or exaggerated claims. They accuse those who write such books of duping the public for their own financial gain. Reviewers for journals may reject papers or recommend that citations referencing such sources be eliminated prior to publication, even when they are unfamiliar with the sources. Similarly, instructors may forbid students from citing books perceived to fall under these headings in class papers. One senior librarian who has worked at the University of Illinois Library of Social Sciences for close to two decades stated in an interview with the present researcher that some psychology professors discourage students from citing books at all, including those she carefully selected for them.

Morris (1977) referred to books written by nonscientist experts or experiencers as “airport” books, occasionally referencing them while minimizing their importance through the suggestion that they are like those found in airport gift shops. Rosen (1975, 1981) referred to popular psychology books as “psychobabble,” and Lilienfeld et al. (2017) calls them “psycho-mythologies,” blaming a naïve public for trusting “folk mythologies,” “intuition,” and “common sense” instead of utilizing “critical thinking” and “the scientific method.” While these authors accuse popular psychology books of exemplifying “bad science,” a review by the present researcher of some of these materials found such criticisms to be more related to a clash of philosophical frameworks that largely go unrecognized as such.

Such criticisms were found by the present author not to be based on a careful review of popular psychology materials themselves (Lack & Rousseau, 2020) but rather on skeptical and negative attitudes toward entire subdisciplines of psychology, including parapsychology (Gale & Null, 2019; Carol et al., 2018; Buyniski, 2018; Pinsker, 2015; Weiler, 2013), psychoanalysis, humanistic, transpersonal, and positive psychology (Lack & Rousseau, 2016; Justman, 2005). An extensive review of sources containing the keywords “popular” or “pop” psychology revealed that some of the most prolific opponents of popular psychology books have come from leaders of activist skeptical organizations (Lack, 2012), some who are influential within the

American Psychological Association (APA). Some are also authors of top-selling introductory textbooks (Lilienfeld et al., 2017). This means they have the potential to wield influence among their own academic peers and the 1.6 million students who enroll in introductory courses each year (Gurung et al., 2016), who may be unaware of the author’s skeptical orientation or that some of their writings are part of a larger activism campaign.

Another group of critics, such as Ganz (1993) and Justman (2005), are those with strong religious views who advocate for biblical teachings over psychotherapy. These authors are highly critical of the entire field of psychology.

Sociological Literature on Popularization of Science

A dominant theme within the *sociology of scientific knowledge* (SKS) literature is that definitions of popularization are always situated within a particular viewpoint, orientation, or philosophical framework, although they often go unacknowledged (Mannheim, 1936; Kuhn, 1962; Parsons, 1967; Merto, 1973; Latour, 1979; Gieryn, 1983, 1995; Hilgartner, 1990; Miller, 2000; Fleck et al., 2009).

Gieryn (1983) has written extensively about positivist science origins, which had as its central task “boundary work,” defined as the need to demarcate itself from all other pursuits. According to Vuolanto (2015), scientists take the position of superiority within their own discipline (intradisciplinary), between different scientific disciplines (interdisciplinary), between themselves and professionals outside the fields of science, and between themselves and the public. Mellor (2003) noted that boundary work can involve disparaging another group while also benefiting from their positive traits.

O’Connor (2009) defined the “popularization of science,” or “popularized science,” as the discussion and conversion of the work of “elite” scientists into a simpler form. “Popular science” is a broader term referring to the discussion of a topic that would fall within the subject areas of science and technology, not necessarily referencing past works.

Whitley and Shin (1985) define the “conventional view” or “simpler view” of popularization as “the transmission of scientific knowledge from scientists to the lay public for purposes of edification, legitimation, and training” (p. 3). It is seen as a “low status activity, unrelated to research work, which scientists are often unwilling to do and for which they are ill-equipped.” They write that popularization is “not viewed as part of the knowledge production and validation process but as something external to research which can be left to nonscientists, failed scientists, or ex-scientists as part of the general public relations effort of the research enterprise” (p. 3).

Hilgartner (1990) refers to this older, outdated framework as “the traditional view” or “old view” or “dominant view of popularization.” He juxtaposes this with “the new theoretical framework,” which recognizes that the sharing of knowledge is bi-directional, meaning information flows both from the experimental domains to the public and vice versa, with the general population being made up of scientists and critical thinkers from many disciplines, who through various materials and venues help inform science. He also argues that all knowledge is transformed as it moves from one source to another, and that the old model is unrealistic as there are far too many groups of “experts” and venues in which they operate to pre-determine who has the true right to share knowledge.

This viewpoint is supported by Bowler (2009), who declared,

Historians and sociologists of science now recognize that popularization is not just a top-down dissemination of knowledge from the scientific elite. This means they understand that it is necessary to adjust delivery and dissemination of information to the particular audience. (p. 3)

Historical & Feminist Perspectives on Popularization in Psychological Science

The field of Sociology, and particularly the SKS literature, addresses the topic of popularization much more extensively than does the psychological literature. Danziger (1990) points out that within the first psychological laboratory run by Wundt in 1879, initially researchers and subjects were one and the same. When this was found to be impractical, they took turns serving in these roles. It was only later that the separation of roles occurred, as psychological science attempted to emulate the medical model with a strong divide between expert and patient—this was the model of the French hypnotists, who were highly educated males studying mostly women believed to be suffering from various deficiencies.

Schmidt (2018) conducted a case study of the highly controversial publication of a female journalist’s book *Passages* (Sheehy, 1974). This best-selling book was the first to suggest that women’s psychological development might look different from that of men, particularly at the mid-life point. The author was sued by a prominent psychologist who had been interviewed for the book and claimed he therefore deserved to receive royalties from it. At the same time, he and his colleagues openly disparaged the book, using terms such as “psychobabble” and women’s “folklore,” but would go on to publish their own less successful versions later on.

Schmidt suggests the male psychologists’ derogatory attitudes toward popular psychology materials were a direct assault against female writers, tracing these to financially motivated interests, to beliefs that only male scientists can generate useful knowledge within a top-down, trickle-down model, and to biases against the feminist and “human potential movement,” which includes concepts such as “self,” “development,” and “liberation” (p. 160). She makes the case that it was the subjectification of women by established male scientists that led to continued present-day misconceptions of women writers, including those who publish popular psychology materials.

Adams (2006) has found coverage of the popularization of psychology to be minimal and lacking coherent definitions of the term “popular psychology.” He suggests that some of the difficulties with conceptualizing the popularization of psychology are reflective of the same difficulties with conceptualizing the field as a whole. Psychology is a newer field that developed from and continues to interface with other disciplines such as philosophy, physiology, and psychiatry. The field is divided into two disparate realms that are often at odds with each other: experimental/academic psychology and applied psychology, or “being a science and being a practice” (Woodward, 1982). This confusion is represented in much of the literature. Adams attempts to sort out these differences through offering a typography of popular psychologies. These include naïve/homespun/folk psychology, therapeutic “pop” psychology (self-help), and the popularization of (scientific) psychology. He notes that readers of popular psychology are constantly checking the material against their own personal experience. This means for the writing to be accepted, it cannot contradict what the reader already knows from their own experience, but it still needs to be shown with “sufficient novelty that the material presented cannot be taken for simple commonsense.”

Bibliotherapy and “Giving Psychology Away”

In his 1969 presidential address to the American Psychological Association (APA), George Miller stated there were two directions the field could take: It could develop as a professional elite, with specialized knowledge that only the experts would have access to, or that they could “give psychology away” (p. 1066). He emphasized that it should be the aim of psychologists to follow through on their social responsibility to help people learn how to help themselves. He expressed that there would not be enough psychologists to meet the psychological needs of the people, and that therefore it was up to the psychologists to establish applications and theories and carve the way for people to serve as their own psychologists.

Since then, several methodological studies have focused on the topic of bibliotherapy, which can be defined as the assigning of self-help materials by professionals to clients who may or may not be closely supervised (Dufour, 2014). Scogin et al. (1990) found that self-help programs yielded significantly better results in comparison with no treatment. Gould and Clum (1993) examined the effectiveness of 40 self-help studies that used no-treatment, waiting-list, or placebo comparisons as control groups. The effect sizes for interventions involving self-help were almost as large as those involving therapist-assisted interventions. Kurtzweil et al. (1996) analyzed 53 published studies on the clinical efficacy of selected self-help programs; the findings indicated that these programs were more effective than no-treatment controls.

Norcross et al. (2000) conducted a review of several studies on bibliotherapy, including a survey of 2500 mental health professionals, declaring that a “massive, systemic, and yet largely silent revolution is occurring in mental health today and is gathering steam for tomorrow.” He referred to this movement as “self-help efforts without professional intervention,” declaring the participation of organized psychology’s participation as “vital” (p. 370). He asserted, “Despite the professional proclivity to devalue self-help resources, their success is reasonably well established” (p. 371). Still, he noted that of the 2000 self-help books published each year, less than 95 percent of them undergo outcome evaluations, concluding “Popular science is not our enemy but rushing into print before or without supporting evidence is” (p. 375).

Williams (1995) asserted that culturally relevant bibliotherapy is needed for those who cannot afford other forms of therapeutic help. Schliebner (1992) noted many cultures shun the practice of sharing one’s problems and seeking help from outside the family system, and therefore receiving guidance in written form may be their best source of professional help.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

This project focused on three main questions: 1) How should popular psychology be understood? 2) How is popular psychology characterized by academic psychological science and to what extent do these characterizations accurately and appropriately represent popular materials? 3) How might a more fair and fruitful relationship between academic and popular psychology be conceived?

These questions were addressed by means of analyzing a set of popular psychology books through adaptation of *formal case study methodology* developed by Yin (2017).

Unlike many qualitative methods that don’t require identification or testing of hypotheses, Yin’s method calls for a more systematic approach to a case study, in which the researcher identifies their own hypotheses as well as rival ones, and then sets about testing these through a comprehensive comparative analysis. Overall, *the new view of popularization of science as defined* by Gieryn (1983, 1995), Shinn and Whitley (1985), and Hilgartner (1990) informed my own hypothesis construction, while the *dominant/old view of popularization of science* personified by myth-busters such as Lilienfeld (Ausch, 2016; Ganz, 1993; Justman, 2005; Lilienfeld et al., 2017; Rosen, 1987, 1993) formed my rival hypotheses. For brevity’s sake, all 4 hypotheses and findings will be presented in the “Results” section below.

Books on Attention

The choice was made to narrow the subject matter of these books to the psychological construct of Attention, which is a historically enduring category that has been handled in different ways over time (Hatfield, 1995; Neumann, 1971; Burnett, n.d.). It initially was addressed mostly in academic texts, but in recent years has become the central topic in a growing number of popular self-help and how-to books that seem to be enjoying increasing sales (Konnikova, 2020; Van der Stigchel, 2019), with little to explain its movement into the popular arena. Therefore, it was theorized that the way in which Attention is currently addressed in popular and in academic-oriented literature may not only help to demonstrate differences between these types of books, but might offer insights into the field of psychology’s current state and what topics and methods it considers to be more legitimate than others. This theory was informed by a social constructionist approach, as described by Danziger, who examined the history of other psychological constructs such as Memory (2008) and Intelligence (1990).

The first phase of this study involved surveying the entire collection of Attention-themed books from their inception to the present, which ranged from the year 1880 to 2020 and covered multiple subtopics and interdisciplinary fields. The books had to specifically be about the construct of Attention, rather than just have the word in their titles.

This resulted in the identification of 145 book titles, which were entered into a spreadsheet along with information about their authors and publishers. Next, a collection of library guidelines was utilized to determine whether each title was popular or academic/scholarly. From this larger set, a sampling of 12 books was selected for the purpose of performing a more careful analysis of their actual content. This sampling included the eBook versions of six scholarly and six popular books. eBooks were chosen in-

stead of print due to the ease of acquiring them and the usefulness of their notetaking features.

Criteria for selection of the 12 books included that they be published within the last 20 years (but preferably more recently), that they all be available in eBook versions, and that they serve as a representative sample of the various subfields found within the literature on Attention. Initially, the plan was to try to match the subfields between scholarly/popular categories (for example, to have an ADD/ADHD book that was scholarly and one that was popular). However, all books related to this topic seemed to fall into the popular category, while all books about cognitive science seemed to fall into the scholarly category. Therefore, efforts to match subtopics between categories were abandoned.

The covers for the 12 books are presented in Figure 1. Their full citations are included in the references section.

Per Yin's formal case study method, a thematic analysis of each of the selected books was completed first. This was followed by a comparative analysis of the books for the purpose of testing both the predetermined hypothesis and rival hypothesis for each of the 4 hypotheses.

While several characteristics of their books and authors were compared, three foci were central to this examination. These included: 1) handling of factual statements

in relation to references, 2) bibliotherapeutic value, and 3) how much potential the book had for helping its readers in the aspects for which it was intended to do so.

To support investigations into these aspects, a thematic analysis of Amazon reviews and Google Scholar citations was conducted. Other assessments included whether each book had stated its purpose clearly or seemed to achieve its purpose, whether a methodological or philosophical approach was defined, how well its table of contents indicated the topics of the chapters, how well chapter headings defined content contained therein, formality of language, number of chapters, extra sections beyond chapters, number of pages, whether the book contained a foreword (yes or no and by whom), how well an eBook's structure allowed for ease of movement between citation and references, and how many resources/referrals were provided for helping purposes.

Rating Scale. A simple 0–3-point rating scale was developed and utilized by the present author to tally scores for each measure per book, and ultimately per category, to determine whether scholarly vs. popular books had collectively received more scores. These ratings were meant to complement the qualitative findings and not to supersede them. The scale was used as a simplification device to reduce both numerical values and qualitative assessments



Figure 1. Twelve selected books for case study (those assigned as “popular” are in the top row).

down to one of three ratings for easy comparison (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Rating scale used to aid in analysis of various subheadings.

Article Review

A review of factual statements that referenced other studies or experiments or historical information was vital to this project's objectives, particularly since a core criticism of popularized materials is that they do not accurately reflect the original researcher's methods or findings. This review was accomplished by selecting and evaluating a minimum of six statements or passages for each book that made an assertion of fact or truth.

Statements were selected by flipping through a book's pages until a statement asserting a fact or finding that was supported by at least one reference was found. At least

six statements were selected from six different chapters within each book. While this procedure would not be considered randomized, the statements were chosen per pre-established criteria: The statement needed to be a truth or factual statement. It needed to contain a citation to at least one other written source that was not part of the book. Factual statements that contained multiple references were preferable and selected more often than those containing only a single reference. The cited sources could be anything from a website, blog post, book chapter, or journal article, provided these were obtainable. Although only three of the scholarly books solely focused on neuroscience or neurobiology, other books in both categories included a single chapter, section, or discussion addressing cognitive science. Therefore, at least one, if not more than one, reference from chapters with these words in their headings were selected for analysis in order to provide a more homogenous dataset.

For each factual statement selected, the goal was to continue to trace and study every source until the original was found. For example, if an author referenced an online blog post, this post would be located and examined. If the post then mentioned a published magazine article, this article would be examined. If the article then referenced a formal experimental write-up in a journal, the journal article would be examined. If any sources per statement in this chain were not found, the entire statement was eliminated from the overall analysis, and a new one was selected to take its place.

For every factual statement examined, factors such as number of supporting references, quality, type and strength of references, accuracy of statements, and quality of the discussion were assessed. A checklist of questions was utilized to determine the following: Were the citations properly, accurately, and fully referenced in terms of formatting considerations? How closely and accurately did the statements under evaluation portray the original material? Did the author exaggerate, dramatize, or overemphasize anything compared to the original, or state information in a neutral manner? Were the references provided within the passage to original experiments and research, or to other popularizations? If the references were to other popularizations, how well did these reflect original experiments or original research in terms of accuracy? How well did the authors integrate this material into their discussions or in presentation of their own arguments or of other viewpoints? The statements selected for analysis could stand independently on their own or within entire passages of connected statements. It was through assessment of connected statements within entire passages that it was possible to evaluate how the author presented their own positions and arguments in relation to alternative arguments.

RESULTS

Hypothesis #1

Researcher's Hypothesis	Rival Hypothesis	Findings
The division and differences between scholarly and popular books will be found to be less definitive than the rival hypothesis suggests.	Scholarly books are written by credentialed authors with advanced degrees. Popular books are written by those who are much less credentialed and are not scientists.	Researcher's hypothesis confirmed. Rival hypothesis was partially confirmed, partially rejected.

Some books were easier to distinguish and categorize than others. Categorizing 145 titles proved to be an arduous task. Most authors held at least Master's-level degrees. The most obvious indicator that a book belonged to the scholarly category was whether the publisher was an academic one affiliated with a university. Titles of books such as those that had terms associated with behavior, cognitive science, or neuroscience were the easiest to categorize, especially when paired with a university publisher. However, several publishers whose names did not include the title "university press" or "academic" were found to publish an array of both scholarly and popular materials, so even studying the publisher's website did not always prove useful with sorting efforts.

Harder to categorize were titles with the words "mindfulness" or "consciousness," or words pertaining to disorders such as "Attention deficient," "ADHD," "aphasia rehabilitation," "autism," and suffering from "life challenges" and "Attention challenges." These titles also frequently contained "your" and "how to." Easier to categorize as popular were titles that seemed to suggest how to solve a problem or get along better in life. There was a theme in some titles with the following words: overcome / accomplish / improve / capture / control / master / inspire / create / seize / build / teach / grab / manage / self-regulate.

Several of these also seemed to make reference to these actions within society, mentioning a place or a larger world, such as "in an organization," "in a noisy digital market," "in a busy world," "in an Attention economy," "in a world full of," "in a constantly connected workplace," "in a modern culture," "in the globe," "in everyday life," "in a land of." Many titles with these words did not seem to address constructs found within experimental psychology, but rather in other academic disciplines like business management, marketing, or finance. These titles included words such as business / economy / professionalism / productivity / employees / profitability / accountability / time management / visibility / marketing / persuasion. Many of these were written by people with PhDs or MBAs.

A sampling of titles that were difficult to categorize included: *The Art of Attention. A Poet's Eye* (Revell, 2007); *Rapt: Attention and the Interested Life* (Galagher, 2010); *Now You See It: How Technology and Brain Science Will Transform Schools and Business for the 21st Century* (Davidson, 2012); *The Attention Revolution: Unlocking the Power of the Focused Mind* (Wallace, 2006); and *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Beller, 2006). After several attempts at working these out over several weeks, all but 10 of the 145 titles were categorized.

Hypothesis #2

Researcher's Hypothesis	Rival Hypothesis	Findings
There will be varying levels of quality and consistency of popularized experimental findings when compared to the original experimental write-ups. This will be true in both categories.	Scholarly books will primarily be based on well-researched findings and report such findings in a methodological, organized, factual way, written in a formal manner with proper citations, while the popular books will be based on hearsay, superstition, wives' tales and will perpetuate falsehoods and myths rather than share factual information based on experimental findings.	Researcher's Hypothesis #2 was confirmed, with the first part of the Rival Hypothesis partially confirmed and the second part rejected.

How well-referenced were the sources presented in relation to a book's factual statements? Figure 3 displays the number of references provided for each book and the total for each category. The scholarly books, particularly those that focused on topics related to cognitive and neuroscience, were written for the express purpose of sharing findings about psychological science and contained the most references. One title, *The Neuropsychology of Attention and Orienting of Attention* (Cohen, 2013), contained more than 7900 references. The books with the next-highest numbers of references were also in the scholarly category, and were written from a philosophical perspective (*The Attention Complex* [Rogers, 2014] and *Structuring Mind* [Watzl, 2017]). Within the popular category, books covering the history of Attention within the media or with a media focus, *The Attention Merchants* (Wu, 2017) and *Indistractable* (Nir, 2019), had substantially more references than the three books that focused on ADD/ADHD. *Driven to Distraction* (Hallowell & Ratey, 1995), written by two Harvard-trained MDs, did not even contain a reference section. The authors occasionally did mention experiments or projects to support their own statements, but the author's name might be mentioned on one page, while the partial name of the study itself was mentioned on another, and then where it was conducted was presented on yet another. They more often referred to lectures they had attended than written sources, as if they were writing from memory.

How closely did the books in each category report procedures, findings, and conclusions referenced in the original sources they cited? How well were sources integrated into discussions? (See Figures 4 and 5.) Scholarly books did appear to back up statements more frequently and consistently with references to original sources, and tended to be more reflective of the language and intentionality of the original authors. They did a better job overall of integrating the findings of references into their discussions of factually based statements. Despite the complexity of the topic of the neuroscience of attention, *Orientating of Attention* (Wright & Ward, 2018), which covers the development of experimental paradigms that study covert orienting and related theoretical issues, was found to do the most artful job of integrating earlier findings into its own discussion and presentation of the topic (see Figure 5). The book contained 850 references and introduced topics and definitions, while providing multiple examples and references, sometimes within a single paragraph, that spoke to multiple perspectives and competing theories and controversies. They were comprehensive in pointing out where prior sources complemented or contradicted each other or their own research. The authors' writing style seemed to be largely devoid of emotionality, which seemed to be accomplished through keeping the use of adjectives and adverbs to a minimum.

Conversely, popular books more frequently seemed

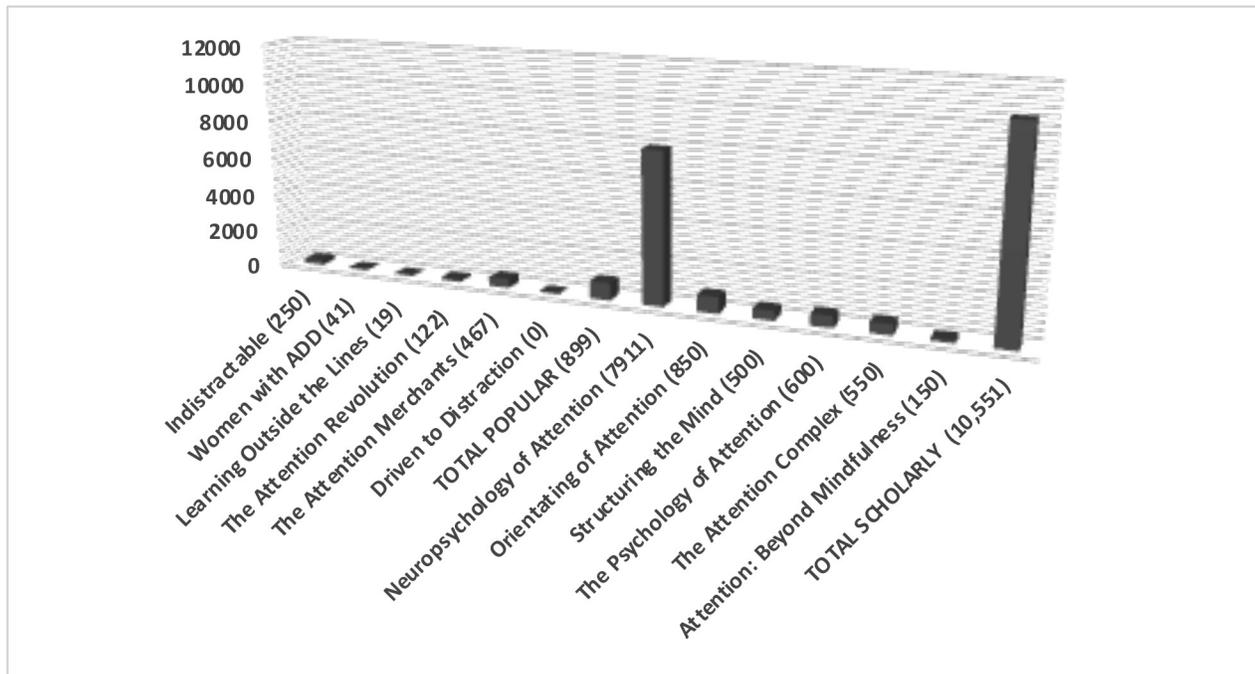


Figure 3. Number of references.

to reflect statements made by less formal, popularizing sources over the language used in the original research articles. This was particularly found to be the case in *Indistractable*, which included 250 references. The author frequently referenced both an original study and then also an online article or blog post that discussed the original research. A review of both sources found that the author had taken wording from the popularized source that was more emotional in its tone, more expressive of a strong opinion, and that used more definitive language than the original article.

It was observed that across most of the peer-reviewed journal articles examined, whether these were reporting original experiments or replications, a more conservative approach to the wording was used in discussions around

their results, regardless of how successful they appeared. This was not the case with popularizing sources referenced by the six books in the popular category, or by the book authors themselves. Instead, they tended to use more emotional language and make stronger statements of veracity or truth. Still, there was no evidence to suggest that any of the 12 book authors in either category incorrectly reported results. For both categories there was a wide range of number of sources, types of sources, and in how well they were integrated into discussions. Ratings for the individual books and comparisons between the two categories are reported in Figures 4 and 5.

Scholarly books also exhibited issues with referencing. Popular books were not the only ones that exhibited issues with referencing. *The Attention Complex* contained

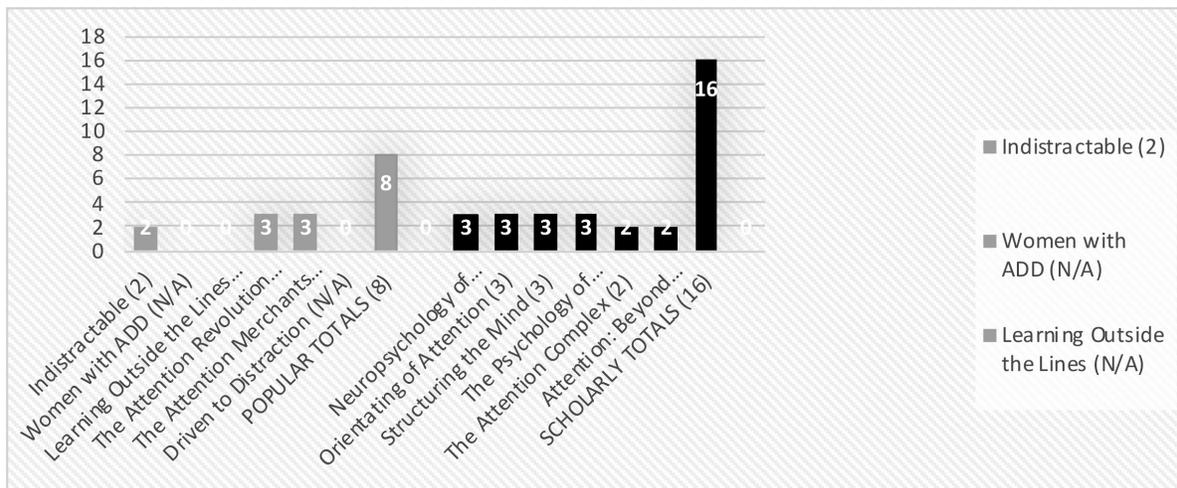


Figure 4. How accurately the book portrayed original research using a rating scale of 0–3.

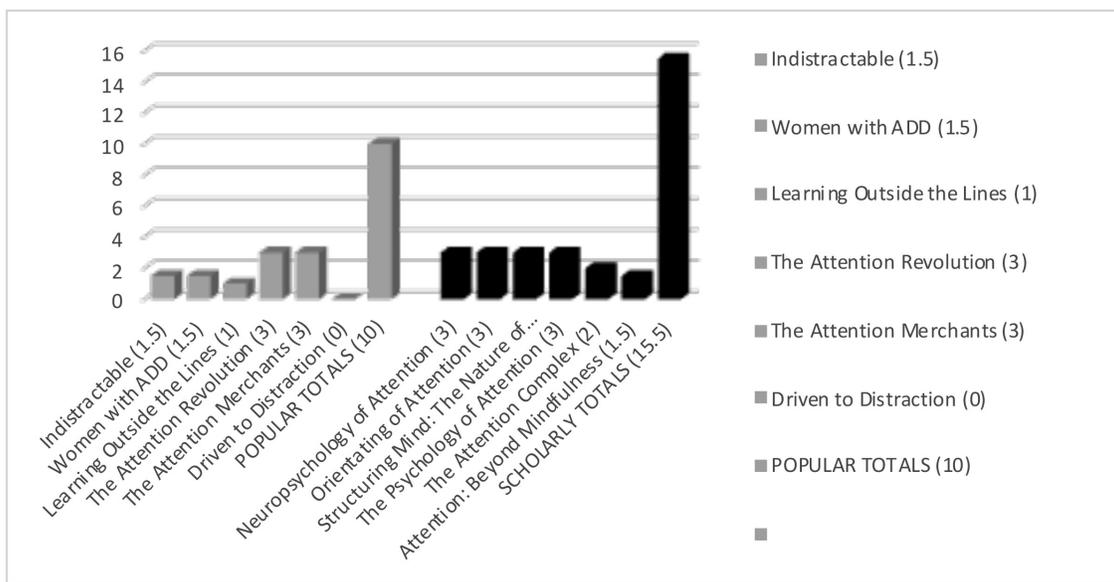


Figure 5. How well do book authors integrate references supporting factual statements into discussions?

550-plus references, but was inconsistent in its referencing. Sometimes citations were handled with finesse, in a similar manner to the authors of *Orienting to Attention*, through including multiple sources espousing different perspectives and theories within the same paragraph to support the author's own position. However, at other times Rogers stated something as factual without providing any support for it. Sometimes he included an in-text citation, but this citation was nowhere to be found within the notes or bibliography sections. There were sometimes missing page numbers. This made it difficult to examine the original sources to assess how clearly or accurately he had represented them.

Meanwhile, another book in the scholarly category, *Beyond Mindfulness* (Watson, 2017), included a section addressing neuroscience. However, rather than referencing any formal studies directly in these discussions, Watson merely interviewed a neuroscientist who seemed to give his opinion rather than referencing formal literature. She also provided several references in her bibliography that cited both popularized sources and the original source within the same entry, leading one to surmise she may have only read the popularized version without reviewing the original one, although there is no way of verifying this. An example of this is the reference: "M. Heidegger, on the way to Language (New York, 1971), p. 123, as cited in Bortoft, Appearance, p. 135." Here the full reference for Bortoft is not given, but it is mentioned in the entry above this in full form. Still, a review of her references did not reveal any discrepancies between the information she shared and the original author's statements. For this reason, I gave her a rating of 3 for how she handled her referencing of informational or factual statements.

No evidence found of popular books perpetuating "superstition," "wives' tales," "folklore," or myths. The second part of rival hypothesis 2, suggesting popular books perpetuate superstitions, wives' tales, falsehoods, or myths, was rejected. Although, as noted above, popular books did not seem to do as good a job as their scholarly counterparts in terms of handling references, most of the popular books' authors backed up many of their statements with either references to their own expertise as long-time and highly credentialed professionals in the field or to statements made by other credentialed experts and professionals. These included practitioners, researchers, authors, and instructors who shared information through formal conference talks, organizational sources like workshops, presentations, magazine and newsletter articles, blog post articles, and interviews, group interactions, or private correspondence. This was true of the three books focusing on ADD/ADHD. Little evidence was found to suggest that information being shared should be called "naïve"

or homespun, or of the folk categories. The concepts of bibliotherapy were more accurate. Resources shared within these books were reflective of professional work and long-time study of the topics by the book authors—even if this study often occurred outside of a cognitive sciences laboratory or academic setting.

Driven to Distraction, written by two MDs, contained no bibliography, and the studies cited within the text appeared to be poorly handled. While one could easily question the validity or veracity of statements made considering the lack of formal referencing, especially in their discussions around medications and physiology, their discussions were clearly intended to be supported by their reputations based on professional-level experience as medical experts, as well as the research findings of their colleagues. While some might argue that professional experience is not on par with peer-reviewed articles published in formal journals (with others suggesting just the opposite), the information shared within the evaluated passages would also not be considered mere "wives' tales" or myths.

Further, some of the books that fell within the popular category, such as *The Attention Merchants*, which contained 467 notes, citations, and references, overall handled sources in a diligent manner, earning it a top rating of 3 (see Figures 4 and 5). Since this book focused on the history of Attention in the media, it utilized the most logical sources, which were not experimental science write-ups, but rather newspaper clippings, industry magazines, biographies in book and video format, and some archival materials. Sometimes the original source was used, and sometimes the only available source seemed to be used. In one instance, however, a popularized source was used instead of the original, which would have yielded a slightly more representative picture of the past than was offered.

The Attention Revolution was another book in the Popular Books category that didn't rely on sources from psychological science, yet it contained 122 references. Since the book centered on Buddhist meditation practices, most of the sources were to original Buddhist texts or translations of these texts, and to other writers, philosophers, and practitioners of Buddhist thought, tradition, and practice. There was nothing to indicate that authors relied on old wives' tales or myths or even folk psychology, even though the subject matter addressed Attention from a practice-based perspective, which involved topics related to mindfulness, meditation, and transpersonal psychology.

Authors of books in the popular category mostly had comparable qualifications to those in the scholarly category. A review of credentials of 145 authors within the master spreadsheet of Attention books, and of the 12 authors of books chosen for closer evaluation, demonstrate that a majority of all authors had at least the equivalent of

HYPOTHESIS #3

Researcher's Hypothesis	Rival Hypothesis	Findings
The distinctions between academic qualifications of researchers will be less clear than in the rival hypothesis.	Scholarly books will be written by credentialed experts and professionals, while popular books will be written by lay people without credentials and for purposes largely motivated by financial gain.	Hypothesis #3 was confirmed, while the rival hypothesis was rejected.

a master's degree, while many held a PhD or equivalent, even within the popular category. Further, those who were not academics were often long-time professionals within their domain of expertise or held dual credentials in multiple professional or academic disciplines. Within the sampling of 12 books, there was only one book, *Learning Outside the Lines* (Mooney & Cole, 2000), whose authors held only bachelor's degrees (albeit from an Ivy League school).

In terms of the rival hypothesis' assertion that authors of popular books are only writing for their own financial gain, there was only one incidence where a popular book written by a marketing professional (*Indistractable*) did seem more self-serving than the other books in either category.

Eyal Nir is a marketing professional who first wrote *Hooked: How to Build Habit Forming Products* (2013), designed to help companies get their clients addicted to their services. He then wrote *Indistractable: How to Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life* (2019) to help the public combat such influences. Nir encouraged readers visiting his website to access additional journaling and self-discovery materials. In order to do this, it was necessary to input one's email into his contact form. The materials did arrive soon after via email, but these were heavily branded with his own

business logos, which ironically was quite distracting.

He devoted an entire page of the book to ask readers to do "a personal favor" for him and leave him an Amazon review. Readers responded, leaving 1407 reviews. While many reviewers seemed to simply recite his end-of-chapter "points to remember," numerous readers gave specific examples of ways they had changed their behaviors as a result of his book. One provided a diagram of the methods she had applied from his book, and their results over time. Personally, I found that applying his lessons and approaches enabled me to cut down on my own social media time by approximately 90 percent, something I've maintained even a year later.

These intrusive marketing approaches were not found in any other books. Some of the popular authors did not even mention their own websites in their books.

Differences between scholarly and popular books are found to be reflective of different epistemological and ontological approaches to knowledge. The largest differences in referencing were between books intended to present the experimental findings of attention studies as they relate to neuroscience and those expressly written for human-centered purposes, such as the three books focused on issues related to ADD/ADHD. All authors in

HYPOTHESIS #4

Researcher's Hypothesis	Rival Hypothesis	Findings
Categories of popular and academic books would not simply be related to differences in quality or presentation of information, but rather would be reflective of different epistemological and ontological approaches to knowledge, such as those reflected within the natural sciences vs. human sciences frameworks.	A top-down, uni-directional flow of information from experimental settings to the public in a watered-down fashion would be found within all books, since none of these were reporting original research findings for the first time. However, this would be much more prevalent in the popular book category.	Hypothesis #4 was confirmed. The rival hypothesis was not confirmed.

both categories stated their book's purpose in either the foreword, introductory chapter, or within multiple chapters (see Table 1). For popular books on ADD/ADHD, the authors' stated purposes indicated that they were writing the books to help readers determine whether or not they were lifelong sufferers of ADD/ADHD, and how to cope with their limitations while emphasizing the positive aspects. Included with human or person-centered books was *Indistractable*, which was designed to help readers overcome distractions posed by the media and advertising. *The Attention Revolution* was included as human-centered as it informed readers about how to deepen their personal meditation practices.

TABLE 1. Comparison of Categories on Various Measures Using a 0–3 Point Rating Scale

Measure	Popular	Scholarly
Did author discuss a methodological approach outlined?	2	11.5
Did author achieve a stated purpose?	18	18
Is the author an expert on the topic on which the author is writing?	15	12
Ease with eBooks' functionality going between text and references	12	3
Social impact and level of personal helpfulness	13	3
Formality of language	12	18

Four out of five of the popular books did include references to written sources, but they tended to cite professional sources that were also more human-focused, such as expert advice delivered face to face through conference presentations, organizational meetings, personal interviews, and personal correspondence. Additionally, even within the scholarly category, *Attention: Beyond Mindfulness* took a human-centered approach through conducting qualitative research that involved interviewing a range of experts on their phenomenological experiences of Attention in their professional and creative endeavors. Therefore, her references included citations of personal interviews and correspondences, as well as books such as biographies.

Meanwhile, the philosophers such as Rogers, who wrote *The Attention Complex* and applied Foucault's writings to address aspects of power and subjectivity as they relate to the history of Attention and development of At-

tention as a psychological construct, had as their focus a social sciences orientation rather than a natural sciences emphasis on experimental and laboratory science. These books did offer numerous references, but their sources were more often philosophers than experimentalists. Their tone was less formal and more emotional than the experimentalist/cognitive science writers. They also spent more time defining their approach and frameworks than any of the other types of writers.

From these three orientations—natural sciences, humanistic, and philosophical social constructionist approaches—flowed different types of content, references, discussions, terminology, and use of voice and other stylistic devices. Probably the most obvious example of this was when the authors of “outside the lines” used profanity, with the experts writing the foreword using slang words such as “yo!” While some Amazon reviewers found this to be surprising and distracting, one could not even imagine these devices being used in the books written about neuroscience.

Evidence of bidirectionality of information flow, rather than only top-down from science to the public. All titles within the popular book category were cited on Google Scholar by sources published in peer-reviewed journals. This is evidence that these books are being used to advance knowledge within scientific arenas. Per Table 2, the total number of Google citations for all popular books was 1704, while for scholarly books it was slightly higher, totaling 2054. While these numbers are already close, one should keep in mind that the popular books selected had more recent publication dates than some of the scholarly books. This means that the popular books earned more citations faster than the scholarly books, or, conversely, the scholarly books have been around longer to potentially receive more citations.

It was also clear from statements made by the authors themselves, from those who wrote the forewords to their books, and from the formal book reviewers and the numerous Amazon reviews analyzed (Table 2), that these books often were used to inform other professionals, instructors, and researchers, who utilized the information in their professional work. Sometimes these books were mentioned to professionals by their clients or students as having had a positive impact on their own behavior or on someone else close to them, and sometimes the professional recommended the book to their client and then observed a useful effect. Some of the books included in both popular and scholarly categories referred to each other's books.

For example, Drs. Holloway and Ratey, co-authors of *Driven to Distraction*, wrote the foreword for Solden's book, *Women with ADD*, asserting it had a significant impact on the field and had stimulated further research into the area

TABLE 2. Showing Number of Amazon Reviews and Google citations

Year Published, Author	Book Title	# of Amazon Reviews	# of Google Scholar Citations
2019, Nir	<i>Indistractable</i>	1407	18
2002, Solden	<i>Women with ADD</i>	406	78
2000, Mooney & Cole	<i>Learning Outside the Lines</i>	152	123
2002, Goleman & Wallace; 2006, Wallace	<i>The Attention Revolution</i>	112	459
2017, Wu	<i>The Attention Merchants</i>	263	448
1995, Hallowell & Ratey	<i>Driven to Distraction</i>	1400	578
Totals for Popular eBooks			1722
2013, Cohen	<i>Neuropsychology of Attention</i>	0	583
2018, Wright & Ward	<i>Orienting of Attention</i>	1	6
2017, Watzl	<i>Structuring Mind: The Nature of Attention</i>	1	449
2006, Styles	<i>The Psychology of Attention</i>	1	96
2014, Rogers	<i>The Attention Complex</i>	8	18
2017, Watson	<i>Attention: Beyond Mindfulness</i>	3	6
Totals for Scholarly Books			1522

of gender differences with this disorder. Further, it was clear from Solden's statements, along with the writers of *Learning Outside the Lines* and formal and informal Amazon reviewers, that Holloway and Ratey's original edition of *Driven to Distraction* had a similar impact on themselves as people, professionals, researchers, and the field overall.

DISCUSSION

A Third Category Exists—Replacing Either/Or with “And”

The act of designating whether a book is scholarly or popular was necessary so that a comparative analysis of such books could be carried out. This activity also enabled the researcher to experience firsthand what a student, educator, or editor might encounter when using library guides to aid in the categorizing of similar materials. Initially, it was assumed that through the use of such guides, this sorting would be an objective practice. However, it was clear that many designations were subjective, as they changed after repeated attempts and could only be carried out with the aid of further investigations into the book's publisher and the author's background.

While titles containing references to neuroscience, neurobiology, and cognitive science published by university presses were easy to categorize, the lines between

popular and scholarly for all other books were blurred. At times, the sorting process proved to not only be an arduous task, but an impossible one. The library guides were only partially useful. They offered inaccurate and confusing advice, particularly in stating that authors of popular works would not have advanced degrees. Further, none mentioned how to handle a situation in which an author had an advanced degree or was actively teaching in a different discipline from the one in which they were writing.

It was found that the dichotomy between scholarly and popular books could be seen as existing on a continuum, rather than falling strictly into one category or the other. In Figure 6, I've shown where the 12 books in this study seem to fall. This graphic demonstrates that two of the scholarly books teetered on the line of what might be considered more popular, with several of the popular books falling somewhere in a middle zone.

Let Primary (Original) Source Designation Be the Guide

When looking for sources and reference materials, recommendations were to let go of the dualistic consideration of scholarly or popular and replace it with one basic question: *Is this truly the most original, reliable, and correct source to back up my statement or series of statements?* In

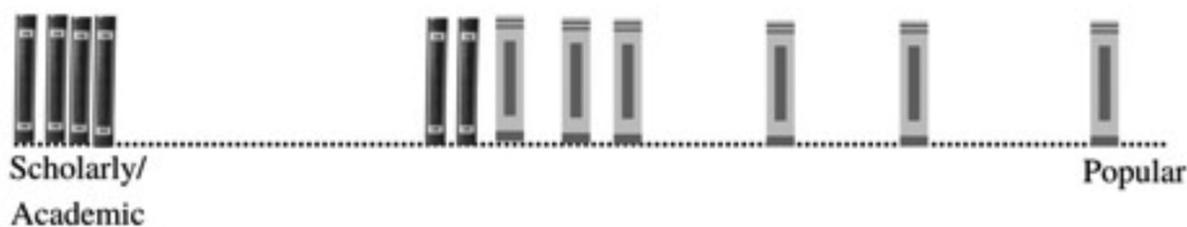


Figure 6. Distribution of 12 books on the scholarly/popular continuum.

doing this, one will sometimes find sources other than peer-reviewed journal articles, which may be frowned upon by reviewers or editors. However, as was discovered during the present study, there are a variety of situations where a writer or researcher may not be referencing an earlier study, but instead cite an original newspaper article reporting on a historical event, or credit the creator of a definition or method. One example of this came from Gay Watson's book *Attention: Beyond Mindfulness*. She shared a passage from the autobiography of Philip Glass, *Words Without Music*, where he described how he trained himself in "the habit of attention" (p. 83). This information was purely anecdotal, yet it was one of many stories that served to present a larger picture of what attention is to different people, which was part of her overall qualitative project.

Amazon reviews and Google Scholar citations suggest lack of concern for referencing. An examination of the content of book reviews from a sampling of each of the 12 books showed that reviewers often voiced appreciation for resources shared by authors, such as referrals to other practitioners or to other books, but not a single criticism related to references was found.

A tallying of Google Scholar citations revealed that lack of referencing did not stop other researchers from referencing books that were deficient in this area. As mentioned earlier, *Driven to Distraction* did not even contain a references or bibliographic section. Instead, the authors spread out mention of a single source's name, publisher, and title across multiple paragraphs, with other topics tossed in between. If this was intended as a demonstration of writers suffering from ADHD, they did an effective job, but otherwise some of their passages would likely not have been deemed acceptable within even a high school essay.

Despite this lack of referencing, according to Google Scholar, *Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder* has been referenced 904 times in books, dissertations, and journals. Further investigation into the purposes and reasons for referring to this book lies beyond the scope of this project, but it would be interesting to know whether those referencing it noticed its lack of a references list. This example may illustrate the need

for researchers to more closely examine the materials they cite, even when they are written by former faculty members of Harvard Psychiatric Hospital and Medical School.

Authors should not cover a topic unless they have the ability and intention to do so properly. In two of the ADD/ADHD books within the popular category, and even in one of the philosophically-oriented academic books, authors sometimes included chapters, sections, or discussions on neuroscience. However, rather than citing original studies or meta-studies, or even popularized written sources by neuroscientists, they elected to share verbal comments made by neuroscientists in private conversations or at meetings or conferences. This may have been appropriate if the scientists they were referencing had been sharing information not published elsewhere, but this did not seem to be the case. Rather, it seemed as if the authors failed to do their due diligence. In both Solden's (2002) and Hallowell and Ratey's (1995) books, it came across as if they were simply getting through an obligatory, uncomfortable discussion as quickly as possible.

An example of this comes from *Women with ADD*, under the heading "How Medications Work for ADHD." Solden wrote:

The above complexities of attention are commonly linked to the inefficient or inconsistent transmission of information in the brain through chemical brain messengers called neurotransmitters (NTs). You can refer back to this in the pocket guide which you read earlier. But to review, neurotransmitters send information between the millions of nerve cells in the brain.

Even though she refers the reader back to "the pocket guide," which she describes in the introduction as a "section that is useful for people who are not familiar with ADHD and can also be consulted as a handy reference throughout the book" (p. 422), this section does not actually contain a single reference.

It would have been better to not even attempt inclusion of the topic of neuroscience if it was not going to be

handled diligently, as many scientists (especially neuroscientists) reading these books would just outright dismiss a book on this basis alone, when in fact the topic was not central to the book's purpose or focus.

Despite the flaws mentioned in relation to books found in both categories of books, it should be reiterated that no evidence was found suggesting they contained major inaccuracies or outright incorrect information. They all held merit in different ways, meeting their own expressed purposes.

Additional Writing Tips

It is recommended that popular writers rethink using metaphorical, flowery, or creative wording when composing their chapter headings. It was sometimes difficult to gain an understanding of the type of content contained within the chapter for the popular books.

Writers of both types of books needed to be careful about finishing one thought before starting another. Some would make a statement, introduce another thought, and then go back to the first thought, all in the same paragraph. This was confusing to a reader.

None of the six of the scholarly eBook/Kindle versions of the books were on par with the popular books in terms of technological functionality (see Table 1). The features that made for effortless movement between in-text citations, notations, and references within the popular books were largely not available for the scholarly books. While lack of modernization of functions is likely due to the age of some of the scholarly books, some of these are in their second or third editions. Despite this lack of functionality, scholarly books had much higher pricing than their popular counterparts. *Neuropsychology of Attention* cost \$189.99 for the eBook and \$247.08 for print (see Table 3).

TABLE 3. Pricing Differences between Popular and Scholarly Books in U.S. Dollars

Book Type	Popular	Scholarly	Difference
Kindle Mean Price	12.83	63.83	51.00
Paperback Mean Price	15.00	68.00	53.00
Hardcover Mean Price	39.65	92.80	53.15

Given that scholarly books are precisely the kind where readers would need to reference the sources, more attention needs to be paid to such functionality.

Further, scholarly books were in no way immune to errors. Even with just spot checking, Rogers's 2014 book *The Attention Complex: Media, Archeology, Method* contained several citations that could not be found in the references section. It was also missing page numbers, and some fac-

tual statements were not well-supported by references in some sections, while they were in others.

Further, some of the scholarly books even on neuroscience had occasional links to website pages (such as one that was linked to a federal government website) that were no longer working. Because of the precarious nature of webpages and links, I recommend that links to websites not be included in either print or digital versions of a book.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

One of the earliest promoters of science was John Tyndall (1820–1893). Acting as superintendent at the Royal Institution in London, Tyndall was tasked with demonstrating “to lay and scientific audiences the progress of scientific knowledge” (Gieryn, 1983, p. 780). This was a daunting undertaking, given that much of Victorian English society still subscribed to the authority of the Church, believing that religion and prayer would solve their problems. Additionally, Tyndall encountered resistance from tradesmen such as mechanics, engineers, and architects, who enjoyed political power within their communities and saw themselves as having advanced their technology through hard work and life lessons. Many opposed any alignment with this new domain called “science” that sought to appropriate their achievements and assert authority or superiority over them. Likewise, as the present project suggests, many books written on Attention revealed that they, too, were written by accomplished professionals who gained knowledge through observations made while working and living within the larger laboratory called “life.”

Hilgartner (1990) defines the new view of popularization as the bi-directional transfer of information from the public to the scientific domain. Support for this view was found for this in the present study by counting the number of Google Scholar citations (even by many peer-reviewed journal articles) the books in the popular category had received.

Franczak (2016) less diplomatically defines the new view of popularization as “the process whereby the dominant administrators of scientific knowledge lose their monopoly position” (p. 19). He attributes this change to technological advances, which give those who do not have “legitimate institutional or scientific authority,” such as politicians, the media, business or religious leaders, new social movements, and the “determined amateur enthusiast” the power to voice alternative viewpoints. He asserts, “Many of these successfully defend themselves against labels of ‘counter-knowledge’ or ‘pseudoscience’ and seek supporters within channels not necessarily sanctioned by scientists” (p. 20). Meanwhile, he believes that many scientists seem not to have noticed that this change has occurred.

Having just survived two years of a worldwide attack by microscopic creatures invisible to all but the scientists who have the means to study and develop ways to combat them, we see that today's concept of Superman looks less like Christopher Reeves and more like Dr. Anthony Fauci, who has been dubbed "science's defender" (Ledford, 2020).

Despite our reliance on biologists, virologists, and immunologists to develop vaccines and medications and provide vital preventive information, topics such as these have become highly politicized (Bokemper, 2021), with politicians stepping in to offer their own medical advice that is not only untested but has sometimes directly opposed to the guidelines put out by their own scientific advisors and appointees. While strain between politicians and scientists has been observed during pandemics of the past (Cohn, 2003), we have never had so many individual media sources available to communicate a large barrage of inaccurate and unsubstantiated information, mixed in with some experimental findings and useful advice.

Clearly, most of the public is more inclined to wake up each morning and turn on a major or local news network on their television set—with some older folks perhaps still opening up a newspaper—rather than starting off the day with a cup of coffee and a library search to discover whether a new peer-reviewed study has been released. However, this is not to say many people in the public (outside academia) would not want to read such articles, but most would not have easy access to them.

While there has been a movement in recent years for organizations like the SSE to make their journals open access, many have yet to follow suit. For scientists who remain critical of popularizing efforts, rather than writing about errors in critical thinking (again) or protesting visiting lectures given by parapsychologists or psychics, it might be more productive to take up efforts such as helping to ensure easier access to original or quality experimental findings by the public. Meanwhile, encouraging and helping non-academics to get involved in formal scientific pursuits will ensure a more informed, enthusiastic, and participatory public overall. Engaging in projects related to citizen science that show direct practitioners of many modalities, or even educators, inventors, and business leaders, how to move to more formalized documentation and reporting of their work with clients and customers; opening up to more forms of research that include human science methods and qualitative research; joining forces with media outlets to create quality science-based programming; and even engaging with younger people where they spend much of their time these days—on social media outlets—are all manageable activities that scientists can do to promote critical thinking, the production of more quality research and writing, and science overall.

IN CONCLUSION

This study was one of the first of its kind to systematically review popular psychology books about Attention under the lens of dueling hypotheses. While Attention is a topic historically studied within the domain of psychology, it intersects with other fields such as marketing, business, advertising, art and aesthetics, philosophy, history, aviation, athletic performance, neuroscience, and Eastern religion and spirituality. While it is not possible to say whether this study's findings are transferable to books addressing topics outside the area of Attention, future projects might utilize the methodology described here to perform case studies on books from other scientific disciplines.

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