

Casting Nets and Testing Specimens: Two Grand Methods of Psychology

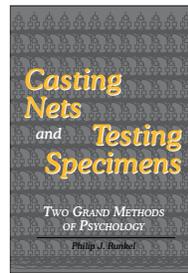
Reviews from
the web

I wanted to write to express my gratitude and enthusiasm for your book *Casting Nets and Testing Specimens*. As a social psychologist, I have kept with the method of relative frequencies (and it has been good to me), but I have had nagging doubts for years. Your monograph provides a devastating, but, at the same time, diplomatic critique of conventional methods, and provides a better alternative. I had already been on the way to idiotic approaches, but, although superficially aware of control systems theory, I had not made the leap to an individual level of analysis. Congratulations and THANK YOU for a marvelous and witty monograph.

*Jerry Suls Ph.D., Professor, Dept of Psychology,
University of Iowa
Comment on the first edition, September, 1991*

A major contribution to the study and practice of socio-psychological research. Runkel's prescriptions understood and followed would revolutionize the behavioral sciences. The specific methods used by people who call themselves behavioral and medical scientists have a basis in theories, often unexamined ones. Runkel shows what statistical studies of groups of people, which he calls the method of relative frequencies or "casting nets" can do and what it cannot do: tell anything specific about the nature of individuals. Runkel shows how the scientific study of the individual can get done, what he calls "the method of specimens." It requires a radical shift in the understanding of human behavior, including your own. He also discusses action research and the usefulness of single trials, the "method of possibilities," often dismissed as providing only anecdotal evidence, which can usefully demonstrate the possibility of accomplishing something. An epochal work.

Bruce I. Kodish



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By Philip J. Runkel

Like a detective in the heat of investigating a crime, a psychological researcher hunts feverishly among the data for principles not evident to the casual observer. Even in the excitement of the hunt, however, a cooling pause, perhaps a refreshing touch of rain, can permit a reassessment of goals and methods. Such a refreshing rain shower is *Casting Nets and Testing Specimens* by Philip J. Runkel.

In his book, Runkel reviews current psychological research methods (i.e., 'casting nets') and tells the reader in an easily understandable way what kinds of information the methods do and do not provide. Any research method is a tool appropriate in some but not all situations. The mainstream research tools of psychology are not sufficient to explain individual behavior and its causes.

Following this review, the reader is familiarized with the concept of causation and with W. T. Powers's Perceptual Control Theory, the framework necessary for a change in perspective on human behavior (i.e., 'testing specimens'). The author explains how an appropriate investigation of causation in individual human behavior should be designed and then expands the view to an interaction between individuals.

The clear didactic concept, the many instructive examples, and the entertaining writing style make the pages virtually fly by.

I recommend this book to all advanced students of psychology who already have acquired a good knowledge of statistics and research methodology. They will appreciate the critique of mainstream research paradigms in contemporary psychology and will be astonished that there is a new and fascinating way to think about human behavior.

Michael Cramer