# University of Groningen

## Towards a replicable and relevant social psychology

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# Editorial

# Towards a Replicable and Relevant Social Psychology

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In the last few months, I had many awkward conversations. When people heard that I will take on the role of Editor-in-Chief the responses varied from "Why do you do this to yourself?" to "Oh. The replication journal. You're one of THEM now?" Here are my standard answers: I like to read and discuss research. And, while *Social Psychology* became known to many non-German colleagues through the Special Issue on replications (Nosek & Lakens, 2014), it publishes a mix of original research and replications.

Those anecdotes also illustrate lingering issues in the field. There are still many uncertainties on how to deal with various factors that make social psychological research challenging. On the one hand, there are concerns about the replicability of findings in social psychology. Those attract considerable attention in traditional and social media. On the other hand, researchers in many countries are faced with a changing academic environment that asks for research that has actual societal impact. This factor is rarely debated outside of the academic environment despite its direct influence on the topics investigated. An unfortunate fact is that those two main issues ask for research strategies that are not always easy to combine.

The efforts in replicating existing findings have led to a general consensus that sample sizes need to increase, and that the documentation of the research process and the findings need to be improved. Many colleagues have outlined the path forward in excellent contributions (e.g., Fiedler, 2017). However, inherent to the field of social psychology is the problem that we examine a person's behavior in a *certain situation* or *social context* (Lewin, 1946). Though this idea is covered in every introductory psychology textbook, it has often been neglected, leading to sweeping generalizations when interpreting original findings as well as some replication attempts. In line with this classic idea, replication attempts focusing on studies with less (social) context seem to replicate better (Van Bavel, Mende-Siedlecki, Brady, & Reinero, 2016). Despite the fact that the latter argument leads to a separate debate (e.g., Inbar, 2016), it is apparent that the nature of concepts studied

in our field oftentimes (e.g., cultural stereotypes) makes a direct replication without any adjustments difficult. It is therefore tempting to reduce a research question to its most fundamental core and examine it in highly controlled conditions. However, a highly replicable finding is not necessarily an impactful finding (see also Maner, 2016). In order to be impactful, it also needs to be tested in terms of its influence on behavior outside of the lab.

In various countries, it becomes more and more important (if not mandatory) that knowledge produced in a project has demonstrable implication for the "real world." In other words, findings are expected to have an impact. This pressure is coming from funding organizations, as well as from universities aiming to establish a meaningful profile that attracts students. For example, in the Netherlands the former Marxist term "valorization" received a new meaning by becoming a criterion for the evaluation of grant proposals. Applicants have to demonstrate the relevance of their findings for society and the economy. Moreover, a stronger collaboration between the corporate sector and universities is emphasized in order to increase the societal impact of research (NWO, 2017). In Germany, the introduction of differentiated master programs, oftentimes with an applied focus, has raised concerns about the marginalization of more fundamental subdisciplines of psychology (Bermeitinger et al., 2016). Both types of pressures do point to the necessity for individual researchers to study phenomena in more applied settings, both to secure funding as well as to have a professional future in academia.

It is of course not the case that replicability is incompatible with impact. In line with Maner (2016), I would argue that they complement each other. Fundamental research is needed to establish an effect, while applied research helps to test the implications and the impact of the effect. Combining both goals oftentimes leads to research that might just not be applied or fundamental enough to be suitable for journals that are only interested in one or the other. Social Psychology is open for such an approach. Especially in a time when many societal questions also require social

psychologists to provide answers, it would be detrimental for the future of the field to be completely absorbed by a debate that only focuses on replicability while at the same time losing sight of the (societal) impact of our research. I'm completely aware of the fact that such a statement can be met with relentless cynicism. However, I also think that the standing of the field can be improved if we show that our findings do matter outside of the lab. The editorial team of Social Psychology will continue to strive for a replicable (Unkelbach, 2016) as well as impactful social psychology.

## Adjustments in the Editorial Policy

I would also like to slightly specify some aspects of our editorial policy. For several years now, Social Psychology publishes replication reports. Starting with a whole replication issue, this format has gained a lot of attention. By now, many psychological journals offer the opportunity to publish replication reports. Despite the broadened interest in replications, the standards for what is a "good" replication and which original studies should be replicated only develop slowly. This leads to some uncertainties both on the side of researchers as well on the side of editors. We aim to publish replication reports. However, Social Psychology reserves the right to decide whether a replication is suitable for the journal. This means that like regular submissions replication attempts are evaluated in terms of whether they are within the scope of the journal, and whether they are of interest to the readers.

Social Psychology strongly encourages open data and open materials to become the default for publications in the journal. In case of preregistered studies, the respective paper will receive an additional note at the end of the paper stating the details of the preregistration.

In light of the growing importance of collaborative research projects, future submissions should also include a note stating the contribution of each author.

## Comings and Goings

I would like to express my gratitude to the previous Editor-in-chief, Christian Unkelbach, and the former Editorial Assistant Juliane Burghardt. Both did a great job in the time of transition and were responsible for much of the success of the journal in recent years. I'm even more grateful, that Christian has decided to remain with the journal until this spring in the role of an Associate Editor. I would also like to thank Julia Becker, Malte Friese, and Markus Kemmelmeier for their work. They served as Associate Editors for many years and thereby helped to shape the journal's profile.

I would like to welcome Adam Fetterman (University of Texas at El Paso, USA), Ilka Gleibs (London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK), and Toon Kuppens (University of Groningen, The Netherlands) as new Associate Editors. All of them started in 2016. Later this year, Anna Baumert (Max Planck Institute for Collective Goods, Bonn, Germany) and Kim Peters (University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia) will join the editorial team as Associate Editors. Wim Meerholz (University of Groningen, The Netherlands) is the new Editorial Assistant. Together with the already experienced Associate Editors Michael Häfner, Hans IJzerman, Ulrich Kühnen, Ruth Mayo, and Michaela Wänke the new editorial team is complete. I hope that we can continue the success of Social Psychology as a journal and help to strengthen social psychology as a field.

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