

Responding to the Association for Psychological Science Strategic Plan, 2022–2027

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In 2022, the Association for Psychological Science (APS) issued a 5-year strategic plan, their first ever: *Catalyzing and Communicating Psychological Science: Building an Inclusive, Connected, and Meaningful Global Science*. Three priority areas are featured in the plan: strengthening the global psychological science community, making psychological science more meaningful in the public sphere, and using resources wisely and efficiently to advance the mission of the society. As explained in the plan itself, the third of these priority areas is “inwardly focused” (p. 8) and concerns the manner in which APS does business. The other two are “public-facing” (p. 8) and concern the audience that APS serves and aspires to serve. As one of the tools available to APS to further these agendas, it is reasonable and appropriate for *Psychological Science* to contribute to the effort. Accordingly, in this editorial, I introduce three initiatives for *Psychological Science* designed to promote the two public-facing priorities. Two initiatives are aimed at strengthening the global psychological science community by diversifying the populations represented in the research published in the journal and diversifying the scientists who author it. The third initiative is aimed at making psychological science more meaningful in the public sphere by bringing greater authenticity to the research we publish.

Expanding the Public Good of Psychological Science Through Psychological Science

Psychology often is referred to as a “hub” discipline (Cacioppo, 2007). It connects—and is connected to—many other disciplines, including education, genetics, gerontology, neurology, neuroscience, and public health, to name a few. As such, its products have value not only within the discipline but also well beyond it. We can and should celebrate this privileged position. Yet we also need to remind ourselves that “to whom much was given, of him much will be required” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Luke 12:48). In other words, our status as a hub discipline to which others look for insights on the human condition requires that we have something

valuable and meaningful to contribute. The two public-facing priority areas outlined in the APS strategic plan suggest ways to improve the status of our science in this regard. *Psychological Science* stands to contribute to both.

Strengthening the global psychological science community

There are two ways in which *Psychological Science* may contribute to APS’s priority to strengthen the global psychological science community: We can encourage efforts to diversify the populations represented in the research published in the journal, and we can encourage efforts to diversify the scientists behind the publications.

Diversifying the populations represented in published research. In 2018, Rad and colleagues quantified that as recently as the last three issues of *Psychological Science* published in 2017, the overwhelming proportion of articles reported results from studies with participants from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) populations (Henrich et al., 2010). More specifically, 15% of the world’s population accounted for more than 90% of the samples. What is more, Rad and colleagues noted that no study in their sample was based on people from the regions of the Middle East, Latin America, or Africa, the second-most populous continent on earth. Together, these regions are home to roughly 2.5 billion people (World Population Review, 2022), none of whom were sampled.

Why is exclusion of most of the world’s population problematic for psychological science? As Arnett proclaimed well over a decade ago, “research on the whole of humanity is necessary for creating a science that truly represents the whole of humanity” (2008, p. 602). There are major differences between the populations of WEIRD and non-WEIRD countries, including income, education, and health. These differences have implications for virtually all of the subject areas represented in psychological science broadly as well as the journal specifically: affective, cognitive, neural, and social functioning; development, language, and even basic perception; and heavily culturally infused domains such as

gender, sexuality, politics, and religion. It is only logical to assume that samples drawn from different populations may think, feel, and act differently. Thus, to create a generalizable science, we must include more of the worlds' population in our studies.

Diversifying the scientists behind the publications.

Most of what we might consider the canon of psychological science was established on the basis of research conducted by authors from only a subset of nations around the globe. To illustrate, in 2021, *Psychological Science* received submissions from authors based in 83 different countries. Yet submitting authors were overwhelmingly from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Together, they accounted for 79% of the submissions. The rest of the world's regions combined made up the remaining 21%. Moreover, authors from the United States comprise the majority of first authors on publications (Cheek, 2017). And that majority is itself unrepresentative, stemming from the fact that in the United States, researchers from minority groups are underrepresented in the academy and in the academic literature (Zárate et al., 2017). Thus the individuals and research teams authoring articles submitted to and published in the journal are not representative, either of the nations of the world or of the populations within nations. Clearly, if we are to build a *global* psychological science, we must allow a broader range of scholars to set the agenda for research and to disseminate their findings in our field-leading journals.

Making psychological science more meaningful in the public sphere

To be meaningful in the public sphere, psychological science must be authentic. In the paraphrased words of Merriam-Webster, authentic research is research that is worthy of acceptance or belief because it reproduces essential features of the original and is true to character rather than a false imitation. Though it may raise the ire of some readers, I contend that all too often, the basic science work we publish in *Psychological Science* lacks authenticity. Moreover, when discussing their findings, authors do not do enough to consider the limits on authenticity posed by their populations, stimuli, tasks, protocols, and so forth.

Consider that in much of the research we publish, participants are undergraduate psychology students who take part in research for course credit, crowd-sourced workers from Amazon Mechanical Turk or Prolific who are compensated with pennies for spending a few minutes engaged in surveys, and children in university-sponsored daycare and preschool programs

who participate one-on-one with a well-trained experimenter who devotes undivided attention to keeping the child on task. These populations are tested with well-controlled, often artificial stimuli that lack features of the actual real-world objects they are meant to emulate. The stimuli are used in tasks and protocols that are unlike those in which participants engage in the world outside the laboratory. Participants are often asked to imagine—rather than actually experience—what are sometimes unlikely scenarios. Conclusions about patterns of behavior are based on performance on a small number of trials or even a single trial. The most typical setting of research is a psychology laboratory that features none of the sights, sounds, smells, or distractions that are experienced in everyday life beyond the laboratory. Some studies are characterized by one or a few of these attributes; others check all or most of these boxes.

Just as we generalize across populations at our peril, so too should we feel in peril about generalizing from these study features to actual day-to-day functioning of people outside the laboratory faced with real problems and opportunities. The findings may well generalize flawlessly. Yet until we test that possibility, we do not know whether results from tightly controlled experimental paradigms bear any resemblance to the modeled behavior as it more typically unfolds. If we want to make psychological science more meaningful in the public sphere, we must strive for greater authenticity in the work we offer for the public's consumption.

Expanding the Criteria for Publication in Psychological Science

The Submission Guidelines of *Psychological Science* (APS, n.d.) state that the main criteria for publication in the journal are general theoretical and empirical significance and methodological and statistical rigor. "General" is specified because to warrant publication in the journal, a manuscript must be likely to be read and understood not only by specialists in a subdomain but also by audiences more broadly. "Theoretical and empirical significance" is specified because research published in *Psychological Science* should be strongly empirically grounded and should make a difference in the way psychologists and scholars in related disciplines think about important issues. "Methodological and statistical rigor" is specified because replicability is a foundational value of science. To succeed, submissions must be as rigorous as is practically and ethically feasible and also should be frank in addressing limits on their precision and generality (see Simons et al., 2017). This is a great set of criteria, and it has served the journal well since its debut in 1990.

The three-legged stool of major criteria for publication in *Psychological Science* is intrinsically appealing: three legs form a triangle, the most stable geometric shape. Yet hexagons—six-sided forms—show up with striking frequency in nature: They are the shape of the honeycombs of bees, scutes in the center of the shells of tortoises, ommatidia of the eyes of dragonflies, basalt columns, snowflakes, and the basic organic component of the benzene ring. Taking our cue from nature, it seems time to expand the triumvirate to embrace criteria that will encourage a psychological science that is more global and a scientific psychology that is more meaningful to the public. To move in this direction, we are adding three new review criteria: (a) whether participants are drawn from populations that are currently underrepresented in psychological science, (b) whether the author team of the submission represents the global psychological science community, and (c) whether the work contributes to a psychological science that is more meaningful in the public sphere (by being more authentic).

Expansion of the criteria is not a retreat from or demotion of the current criteria of general theoretical and empirical significance and methodological and statistical rigor. Nor does the expansion mean that in order to qualify for publication in *Psychological Science*, submissions must meet all six of the criteria. Rather, what it means is that we are expanding the ways in which submissions may meet the expectation of making impactful contributions to psychological science. We will consider it a strength when submissions are based on participant samples from populations that are currently underrepresented in psychological science. We will consider it a strength when submissions are authored by scientists or practitioners from non-WEIRD countries around the globe. And we will consider it a strength when submissions feature authentic populations; authentic stimuli, tasks, and procedures; and/or data that have been collected in authentic settings. These elements are not substitutes for general theoretical and empirical significance and methodological and statistical rigor—they are complements to them.

Responding to the Expanded Criteria

There are a number of ways to respond to the expanded criteria for publication in *Psychological Science*.

Diversify study populations

To begin to find out whether our science “represents the whole of humanity” (Arnett, 2008, p. 602), we can (a) identify questions that we think of as “answered” on the basis of majority participants from WEIRD countries

and (b) ask whether we get the same outcomes when we broaden the lens to view populations from non-WEIRD countries and/or underrepresented populations from our own WEIRD backyards. The most potentially impactful of these will be questions for which there is a conceptual or theoretical reason to expect that different life circumstances would give rise to different patterns of mentation or behavior. These tests for generalization will be most favorably received when authors spend some of their 2,000-word Introduction and Discussion sections explaining the cultural significance of the questions addressed in the research and thus why it is important to ask the specific question in the specific population. Tests for generalization beyond majority participants from WEIRD regions also can be done close to home. Every WEIRD country in the world has populations that are less Western in their orientation, less educated, less privileged by industrialization, less rich, and/or less free.

Tests for generalization of “known” findings do not exhaust the ways in which diversifying study populations stands to benefit psychological science. Different regions of the world are going to give rise to different questions, so by diversifying study populations, we also stand to diversify the domains of inquiry. In summary, the pages of *Psychological Science* should represent populations from all over the world. With the expanded criteria for publication in the journal, diversity of study populations will be one way authors can establish the potential impact of their research.

Diversify author teams

Expansion of the criteria for publication in *Psychological Science* is an open invitation to researchers around the globe to submit their work to the journal. It is like the lottery—you cannot win if you do not play. Author teams need not be comprised entirely of researchers from underrepresented global regions. They may represent collaborations among authors from non-WEIRD and WEIRD countries. Collaboration with scientists and practitioners from far-flung regions has never been easier. The past 2.5 years have taught us that many scholarly activities can be pursued largely online. A great place to start a new international collaboration is at APS’s International Convention of Psychological Science (ICPS). In 2019, the last meeting of ICPS, researchers from 69 different countries were represented. The next meeting will be in Brussels, Belgium, from March 9 to March 11, 2023.

Opportunities for establishing and furthering international collaborations are also available at APS’s annual meeting, the next of which will be held in Washington, D.C., USA, from May 25 to May 28, 2023. Given

that APS has members from more than 80 countries, it is inevitable that a diversity of regions will be represented. There also are resources to aid in structuring and furthering international research, such as the guides developed by the American Psychological Association Committee on International Relations in Psychology (2011, 2015) for the series *Going International: A Practical Guide for Psychologists*. In summary, the doors of *Psychological Science* are open for contributing authors from all over the world. With the expanded criteria for publication in the journal, diversity of authors and author teams will be one way in which authors can establish the potential impact of their research.

Increase authenticity

There are many ways to make our work more authentic and thus more meaningful and impactful. We can sample more broadly, including from populations who have more of the characteristics of those to which we want to generalize. We can replace—or complement—highly simplified or artificial stimuli with actual objects, images, sounds, and so forth, thus testing the limits of generality. We can engage participants in real-world problems and actual as opposed to imagined scenarios. We can administer multiple trials and observe how fluid and variable performance really is. And we can take our questions and our tasks outside the laboratory, meeting participants where they actually live and breathe. These steps may come at a cost—a cost to internal validity and, potentially, to the sensitivity of our tests. Yet by observing where patterns of performance on more and less constrained tasks converge and diverge, we stand to learn a great deal about the phenomena we are devoted to explaining.

In summary, the pages of *Psychological Science* should be populated not only by tightly controlled experimental paradigms administered to homogeneous samples but also by studies of performance in populations and situations that are more authentic representations of the worlds in which we live. With the expanded criteria for publication in the journal, greater authenticity in terms of study populations; stimuli, tasks, and protocols; and settings will be one way in which authors can establish the potential impact of their research.

Conclusions

The 5-year strategic plan for APS presents a great opportunity for reflection on the current practices of psychological science and what we might consider “aspirational” practices. As noted in the plan, psychological science has a great deal to offer to solve complex problems of public interest and concern, such as climate change, public and mental health, bias and injustice, and lack

of access to and use of quality information (APS Strategic Plan, p. 10). *Psychological Science* has a role to play in these efforts. We already are a go-to resource for expertise and informed perspectives. Yet we stand to be more impactful in these critical spheres and beyond by diversifying the populations from which we draw our samples, diversifying our research teams, and asking more authentic research questions using more authentic research methods. These actions stand to strengthen the likelihood of application of our research findings beyond our laboratories. They also stand to strengthen our basic theories by testing their limits and making them more comprehensive.

Achieving the potentials of strengthening basic theory and improving application require that we once again adopt a “business not as usual” approach (Eich, 2014). A fundamental principle of psychology is that people respond to incentives and rewards. Accordingly, going forward (at least for the balance of my editorial term), the journal will assign value to samples from currently underrepresented populations, to diverse author teams, and to authentic methods. These elements will not displace the criteria of general theoretical and empirical significance and methodological and statistical rigor, nor will they be required for publication in the journal. Rather, they are introduced as complements to our existing criteria, thus expanding the ways in which submissions may meet the expectation of making impactful contributions to psychological science.

—Patricia J. Bauer
Editor in Chief

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