

The Reproducibility of Economics Research: A Case Study

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Abstract

Given the importance of reproducibility for the scientific ethos, more and more journals have pushed for transparency of research through data availability policies. If the introduction and implementation of such data policies improve the availability of researchers' code and data, what is the impact on reproducibility? We describe and present the results of a large reproduction exercise in which we assess the reproducibility of research articles published in the American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, which has implemented a data availability policy since 2005. Our replication success rate is relatively moderate, with 37.78 % of replication attempts successful. 68 of 162 eligible replication attempts successfully replicated the article's analysis (41.98 %) conditional on non-confidential data. A further 69 (42.59 %) were at least partially successful. A total of 98 out of 303 (32.34 %) relied on confidential or proprietary data, and were thus not reproducible by this project. We also conduct several bibliometric analyses of reproducible vs. non-reproducible articles and show that replicable papers do not provide citation bonuses for authors.

JEL codes: B41; C80; C81; C87; C88

Keywords: Replication, reproducibility, transparency, replicability, journal policies

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1 Introduction

Replication, reproduction, and falsification of published articles is an important part of the scientific endeavor. It helps to make science “robust and reliable” (Bollen et al., 2015) and is a *sine qua non* condition for the credibility of economic research. Robust and replicable research is especially important in policy institutions such as central banks or governments since it provides input needed for its core activities and informs their decisions. Given its importance for both research and policy purpose, the reproducibility of articles has been discussed in economics for at least thirty years¹. While there are no systematic checks of replicability in most economic journals², some however have a data availability policy aiming at better transparency. In this paper, we carry out a large replication exercise of a journal which implements such data availability policy and test its efficiency.

As aforementioned, though not unheard of (Camerer et al., 2016; Chang and Li, 2015; Chang and Li, 2017; Höfler, 2017b), actual published reproductions or replications are rare (Bell and Miller, 2013; Duvendack et al., 2017). For example, Mueller-Langer et al. (2018) found that just 0.1% of the 126,505 articles published between 1974 and 2014 in the top 50 economics journals were replications. Sukhtankar (2017b) found that, of the 1,138 empirical development economics articles published between 2000 and 2015 in the “top 10”³ economics journals, just 6.2% were replicated in a published or working paper. The paucity of replications in economics is, in part, because it is often difficult to find the materials required to conduct reproducibility or replication exercises (Dewald et al., 1986; McCullough et al., 2006; McCullough and Vinod, 2003). Despite a long standing explicit recognition of the importance of replication in economics (Frisch, 1933), it has been suggested that “there is no tradition of replication in economics” (McCullough et al., 2006, p. 1093).⁴

To promote transparency, more and more journals are adopting “data and code availability” policies (the AEA announced one in 2003, the Journal of Political Economy (JPE) in 2004), though some doubt their effectiveness (Höfler, 2017a; Stodden et al., 2018). According to Duvendack et al. (2015) only 27 of the 333 economics journals listed in the Thomson Reuters *Web of Science* as of September 2013 regularly publish data and code for empirical articles, and 10 of those journals explicitly state that they publish replication studies. While that number seems low, it is higher than it was a decade earlier. More recently, the Journal of the American Statistical Association (JASA) has moved towards much more stringent replication requirements (Fuentes, 2016), and the AEA in 2017/2018 appointed as Data Editor the last author in lexicographic order of this article (Duflo and Hoynes, 2018).⁵

Making data and code available should enhance transparency hence replicability. In this paper, we set out to assess how well a particular journal’s “data availability” policy, combined with light enforcement, yields *reproducible* articles. By *reproducibility* we refer to “the ability [...] to duplicate the results of a prior study using the same materials and procedures as were used by the original investigator,” (definition

¹Anderson and Kichkha (2017), Anderson et al. (2005), Berry et al. (2017), Burman et al. (2010), Chang and Li (2017), Coffman et al. (2017), Dewald et al. (1986), Duvendack et al. (2017), Hamermesh (2017), Höfler (2017a), King (1995), Sukhtankar (2017a), and Vinod (2005)

²An exception is the American Economic Association (AEA)

³These were the traditional “top 5” and the American Economic Journal: Applied Economics (AEJ:AE), the American Economic Journal: Economic Policy (AEJ:EP), the Economic Journal (EJ), the Journal of the European Economic Association (JEEA) and the Review of Economics and Statistics (ReStat).

⁴Though Hamermesh (2007) and Hamermesh (2017) disagree.

⁵Much of the research reported in this article was started before the appointment.

articulated by Bollen et al. (2015), among others⁶, which is related to the “narrow” sense of replication of Pesaran, 2003⁷). Use of the “same procedures” may imply using the same computer code or re-implementing the statistical procedures in a different software package⁸. In simple words, the same code and data should produce similar results. Our protocol is set with a relatively high bar: can undergraduates, armed only with the information provided by authors on the journal website, successfully reproduce the tables and figures presented by the author in the article? Unlike Dewald et al. (1986) and McCullough and Vinod (2003), who requested data and programs from the original authors, we did not attempt any contact with authors to clarify issues that arose. While our replicators were instructed to do their best to fix any bugs or inconsistencies that they encountered, they were limited both by time and training.

We conducted this experiment over several summers and during the 2018 Fall semester, using the [AEJ:AE](#) as our source of articles, which we chose primarily for two reasons. First, because of the empirical nature of its articles and its policy of publishing papers “only if the data used in the analysis are clearly and precisely documented and are readily available to any researcher for purposes of replication,” we expect that nearly all articles have some empirical component. Second, while other journals may also have theoretical or more complex empirical papers, using a variety of software, we wanted articles to be reproducible by the undergraduate student armed with knowledge of Stata and Matlab only. However, nothing in the methodology used in this paper is specific to the [AEJ:AE](#), and it can be expanded to other journals. Part of the motivation is also to test the feasibility of “pre-publication verification” similar to what is done at the American Journal of Political Science ([AJPS](#)) (Christian et al., 2018; Jacoby et al., 2017) and now at the [AEA](#).

We find a moderate replication success, with a replication rate of 37.78 % overall, in spite of the data availability policy. 41.98 % of articles were successfully reproduced, conditional on available data, with an additional 42.59 % partially replicated. Compared for instance to the replication rate of 13% of Dewald et al. (1986), who conducted a large replication exercise on the Journal of Money, Credit and Banking ([JMCB](#)) which at the time had no similar policy, our results seem to suggest that journal policies that enhance transparency are helpful, yet not sufficient to reach full replicability. We further show that fully replicable papers do not benefit from a citation bonus, but authors’ reputation seem to matter the most when it comes to citations. Our novel findings on what determines citations underline that we may be in a relatively low reproducibility equilibrium because the costs of producing reproducible research (for instance in terms of time) outweigh the advantages (given it does not lead to more citations). Our contribution to the literature is thus twofold: (1) we provide an estimate of reproducibility standards of a journal that imposed, from its creation, a data availability policy; (2) we provide a rationale for authors’ lack of incentives to produce replicable research, absent journals’ verification of reproducibility.

We start by describing, in Section 2, our methods of selection, analysis, and reproduction. We present our results in Section 3 before concluding in Section 4.

⁶A variety of replication concepts are used (Bollen et al., 2015; Clemens, 2015; Hamermesh, 2017)

⁷Hamermesh (2007) calls this “pure replication”, which Christensen and Miguel (2018, p. 942) argue is the “basic standard [that] should be expected of all published economics research, and hope this expectation is universal among researchers.”

⁸In contrast, *replicability* refers to “the ability of a researcher to duplicate the results of a prior study if the same procedures are followed but new data are collected” (Pesaran, 2003, “wider” sense of replication), while *generalizability* refers to the extension of the scientific findings to other populations, contexts, and time frames, perhaps using different methods. Because there is a grey zone between these last two definitions, we will generally refer to either context as “replicability”, which Hamermesh (2017) calls “scientific replication.” In this text, we will use the terms as defined above when the distinction is material. However, we may refer to the overall concept of redoing the analysis as “replicability”.

2 Description of Reproduction Procedure

Our replication exercise was conducted over the course of four summers from 2014 to 2018 as well as the fall semester of 2018. This section describes the procedure used to conduct the replication exercise, which was split into 3 parts. First, an “assessor” evaluated the task of replication as to the availability of the required components and its difficulty, and recorded a selection of article characteristics. A “replicator” then conducted the actual replication. Often but not always, the same person would be assessor and replicator. Finally, upon completion of the replication attempt, replicators filled out a guided report with questions about the exercise, such as whether or not the main results of the article could be replicated and, if not, the main barriers impeding a successful replication. To complement the information collected during the replication exercise, we also obtained descriptive article and author information such as citations and h-indices. Each of these steps are discussed in turn in the following subsections.

2.1 Initial Assessment

We first assessed each article. An assessor filled out a questionnaire (see Appendix C), gathering descriptive information, and providing an initial assessment of the expected level of ‘replicability’ of an article. Each assessor was provided the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) of the article,⁹ and then verified the following elements:

- The presence of one or more downloadable datasets (including DOI or URL, if any), an online appendix, the programs used by the authors and documentation on how to run them (the “Readme”);¹⁰
- The clarity and completeness of the documentation and of the program metadata;
- The presence of clear references to the original data provenance and a description of how to construct the initial datasets;
- Data availability (e.g., restricted access data, private data, public use data, etc.)

Although some of the responses to the questionnaire could have been captured via web-scraping tools, it is not possible to assess the completeness of the supplemental data without inspection by the assessor. While many supplemental data packages contained some content, they often did not contain all the data or programs. Sometimes, the data provenance might be described in an online appendix, while the instructions for the programs might be enclosed in the supplemental “data” package. Thus, a “clerical” review of each article’s webpage, and some careful reading of the actual article and online appendix were the only way to collect all the information requested. We will return to the aspect of machine-readability (machine-reproducibility) in the concluding discussion.

⁹DOIs are a managed identifier space built on top of the Handle System (Sun et al., 2010), a technology for distributed, persistent, and unique naming for digital objects. Virtually all academic publishers assign DOIs at the article level in all of their publications. In addition, DOIs are increasingly used to identify data (Pollard and Wilkinson, 2010). In particular, each DOI provides a persistent identifier (International DOI Foundation (IDF), 2012) for a digital object: an article or data artifact.

¹⁰In theory, the author might have provided a DOI to a third-party data archive for some or all of the content. Ideally, each component – the article, the online appendix, the data and the programs – would have a separate DOI. In the case of the AEJ:AE, only the article itself is assigned a DOI. Supplemental data, programs, and online appendices are linked from the landing page associated with the article’s DOI.

Based on the initial objective enumeration of the characteristics of the article and on subjective evaluation by the assessor of the complexity of the task described in the “Readme” document, the assessor was asked to provide a subjective rating of the replication difficulty, from 1 (easiest) to 5 (most difficult), based on a set of heuristics (see Table ??).¹¹ Assessors also recorded the programming languages and separately the data storage formats contained within each archive. Archives can and do contain programs and data in multiple formats. While all articles had some supplementary data, not all articles were accompanied by the datasets necessary for replication. Assessors recorded whether the articles were accompanied by a dataset and, if not, the (apparent) reason why data was not provided. This included an assessment of whether the data were confidential or proprietary, for which we provided some guidance.

2.2 Reproducing the Empirical Analyses

Once the article was assessed and determined to be amenable for replication, a replicator was assigned based on characteristics of the article, and in particular the type of software required and the assessed difficulty of the replication task. Most often, the initial assessor self-assigned themselves as the replicator although some replications were conducted by the supervising team or distributed to a replicator based on their familiarity with a particular programming language. The replicator was instructed to document any changes made to the author-provided programs using a version control system (VCS).¹² The materials for each article were downloaded, and used to populate a article-specific repository. If multiple replicators worked on the same article, they would work in separate subdirectories of the same repository. In addition to recording changes in the VCS, replicators were asked to record information in two additional files. They recorded one or more Uniform Record Locators (URLs) of materials obtained in ‘*SRC.txt*’. And, in addition to any VCS commit messages, they were asked to provide a high-level summary of steps undertaken for the replication and results obtained in ‘*REPLICATION.txt*’.

Once the VCS area was populated and all data files were downloaded, each replicator was instructed to read the author-provided “Readme”, and attempt to run the programs in the author-provided archive. Replicators were told to keep modifications to the absolute minimum, starting with the adjustment of path structures to the replication system (Figure ??). Whenever a program required more extensive changes to run, the replicator would do so to the best of their ability. Replicators were free to use any computer they had access to for the replication, unless the author materials specifically mandated a particular operating system. This was quite rare, but did happen a few times. We note that the journal does not require authors to specify the required software, operating system (OS), and versions thereof, and most articles were silent on the topic. In addition to replicators’ laptops, our team had access to university-provided Windows remote desktops and a Linux cluster, and were unlikely to be constrained by computing resources. Both Windows and Linux

¹¹A score of 1 assigned to an article does not imply that its ‘replicability’ cannot be improved. For example, the programs provided by authors might lack a complete header or DOI for each database, but overall the article appears to be easily replicable.

¹²Until August 2018, the team used an restricted-access Subversion repository. Since September 2018, the team uses a restricted-access Git repository.

is also gathered at the assessment stage described in Section 2.1 to assign a subjective measure of ex-ante replication difficulty, a full understanding of an article’s documentation quality is best left to a replicator who has gone through a replication attempt. We also captured the qualitative nature of the code changes (if any).

2.4 Other data related to the articles

In addition to the data collected through the replication process, we also obtained complementary descriptive data for each article and the (academic) characteristics of the authors. We queried the Web of Science (Thomson-Reuters, 2016) database for each of up to five authors per article, and recorded their h-index (Hirsch, 2005) and the number of citations for each author by year, which is the raw data underlying the calculation of the h-index, as well as the search criteria used to find the author. In some cases, a simple search by author name does not yield a unique person (e.g., “Smith, Adam”), and sometimes, the metadata in Web of Science contained errors.¹⁵ We also obtained citation statistics for each article.

2.5 Recruitment of Replication Lab Members

Over the course of five summers, we recruited undergraduate students (typically but not always seniors) for the replication work as part of summer research, to serve as assessors and replicators. The team members needed to meet some minimal technical qualifications, such as experience working with the relevant programming language and acceptable performance in economics or technically equivalent courses (it turned out that many of our students had never taken an economics class). Team members attended a one-day training course covering the background and purpose of the replication exercise and our approach. They were also given guidance about the subjective aspects of the exercise such as difficulty rating and classifying documentation clarity, and were instructed on some technical matters such as version control with Subversion and the use of remote computing clusters using materials from a Cornell High Performance Computing course designed for social science researchers. The team members were supervised by economics Ph.D. candidates from Cornell University (Kingi, Stanchi, Herbert) and a faculty-level researcher (Vilhuber).

The information gathered by the students in the entry and exit questionnaires allow us to grasp how documented the data and code is, and how easy the replication can potentially be.

3 Are data policies enough to ensure full reproducibility?

```
##  
## > repllist4 <- readRDS(file = file.path(interwrk, "replication_list_clean.Rds"))  
##
```

¹⁵For example, we only found one article for “Lawrence E. Katz” in Web of Science as of January 2016, namely the article in [AEJ:AE](#), but did find quite a few more for “Lawrence F. Katz.” While we initially thought this to be the result of some inside joke for senior economists, even the [AEJ:AE](#) website lists the author of the article as “Lawrence F. Katz,” and we have no explanation for how this error could persist in Web of Science. Our search criteria adjusted for this error.

```
## > d <- repllist4 %>% mutate(replicated_clean = replicated1_clean)
##
## > exit <- readRDS(file = file.path(dataloc, "exitQ.Rds"))
##
## > entry <- readRDS(file = file.path(dataloc, "entryQ.Rds"))
##
## > bibinfo.df <- readRDS(file = file.path(interwrk, "crossref_info.Rds")) %>%
## +   select(DOI, year, journal)
##
## > bibinfo.df$journal <- gsub("American Economic Journal: Applied Economics",
## +   "AEJ:AE", bibinfo.df$journal)
##
## > bibinfo.df$journal <- gsub("American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics",
## +   "AEJ:Mac", bibinfo.df$journal)
##
## > bibinfo.df$journal <- gsub("American Economic Journal: Microeconomics",
## +   "AEJ:Mic", bibinfo.df$journal)
##
## > bibinfo.df$journal <- gsub("American Economic Review",
## +   "AER", bibinfo.df$journal)
##
## > d <- d %>% filter(journal == "American Economic Journal: Applied Economics")
##
## > exit <- exit %>% left_join(bibinfo.df, by = "DOI") %>%
## +   filter(journal == "AEJ:AE")
##
## > entry <- entry %>% left_join(bibinfo.df, by = "DOI") %>%
## +   filter(journal == "AEJ:AE")
```

In total, 303 [AEJ:AE](#) articles were assessed¹⁶. Table ?? presents the by-year breakdown of these articles. We first document the compliance with the data availability policy by gathering information about data availability, documentation clarity and a subjective measure of replication difficulty. We then turn to the replication results.

3.1 Descriptive statistics

```
## 'summarise()' has grouped output by 'absence'. You can override using the
## '.groups' argument.
```

¹⁶There were 342 assessments for these 303 articles. Articles could be assessed multiple times for a number of reasons, including explicit double-coding, “onboarding” of new replicators, and operator error. At this stage, we consolidated duplicates, which will be removed later in the analysis to keep the most successful outcomes when several outcomes were available for a given article.

3.1.1 Data compliance

While all articles had some supplementary materials, not all articles were accompanied by the datasets necessary for replication. Table ?? details whether the initial assessment declared an article to be eligible because the necessary data was present, based on the README and other materials provided by the authors. In general, if the data was not present, it was due to the confidentiality of the data. 80 articles stated that they used confidential or proprietary data and were therefore not considered for replication, along with the 14 articles with missing data for which no explanation was provided. We note that this is based on an ex-ante assessment, not based on an attempt to actual reproduce the analysis (see Table ?? for causes of reproduction failure due to datasets being missing).

.....

.....

Most papers had programmed codes and stored data in proprietary softwares format. The vast majority of articles used the Stata programming language for at least some portion of analysis (Table ??). This preponderance of a single language is reflective of broader usage in economics, though the particular dominance of Stata might be specific to the [AEJ:AE](#). From a reproducibility perspective, Stata has both advantages and disadvantages. While it is proprietary software, it is relatively cheap and accessible. Many packages to extend its usability are available, many of which are accessible from within the software from both peer-reviewed (Stata Journal) and crowd-sourced (RePEc/SSC) repositories. Unfortunately, in contrast to CRAN, the SSC does not currently support versioning of packages, making it sometimes difficult to find the relevant version of a package. Table ?? also indicates that economists tend to provide data in the native format of the programming language used, instead of open formats (CSV and others). Again, the Stata format has proven to be quite robust, as newly released versions of Stata maintain backward compatibility to all previous versions of the data format. Furthermore, the data format is well understood (albeit not open-source), and can be read by many open-source software packages (R, python). The Stata format allows the embedding of richer metadata, which is not feasible for CSV formats. We did not verify that metadata (variable labels, sane variable names, etc.) complied with modern data curation standards.

3.1.2 Documentation of replication packages

Overall, the documentation of data and code were considered clear enough to enable reproduction attempts. Indeed, the subjective measure of “reproducibility” (described in Table ??), presented in Table ??, shows a reasonably even distribution of articles across the rating scale.

.....

```

#####
## 'summarise()' has grouped output by 'clarity'. You can override using the
## '.groups' argument.

```

Previous authors have pointed toward the need to improve the documentation of submitted data and programs (Chang and Li, 2015; McCullough et al., 2006). Replication attempts are made significantly easier when replicators are not required to resolve ambiguity and each figure is well documented for reproduction. Table ?? presents a summary of the documentation quality of the materials provided with the articles for which a reproduction attempt is made categorized by the year in which they were published (from the post-replication questionnaire). As evaluated by the replicators, the quality of documentation seems decent, with a majority of articles being well documented. 133 articles out of 180 (73.89%) provided complete documentation, defined as a ReadMe file with step by step instructions on how to execute every provided program. However, 45 articles (25%) only provided incomplete ReadMe files that either skipped some of the important steps required to run the programs or contained some ambiguous instructions. No documentation was provided in 2 articles.

```

#####
## Repo for CRAN already set

##
## > repllist4 <- readRDS(file = file.path(interwrk, "replication_list_clean.Rds"))
##
## > d <- repllist4 %>% mutate(replicated_clean = replicated1_clean)
##
## > exit <- readRDS(file = file.path(dataloc, "exitQ.Rds"))
##
## > entry <- readRDS(file = file.path(dataloc, "entryQ.Rds"))
##
## > bibinfo.df <- readRDS(file = file.path(interwrk, "crossref_info.Rds")) %>%
## +   select(DOI, year, journal)
##
## > bibinfo.df$journal <- gsub("American Economic Journal: Applied Economics",
## +   "AEJ:AE", bibinfo.df$journal)
##
## > bibinfo.df$journal <- gsub("American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics",
## +   "AEJ:Mac", bibinfo.df$journal)
##
## > bibinfo.df$journal <- gsub("American Economic Journal: Microeconomics",

```

```
## +      "AEJ:Mic", bibinfo.df$journal)
##
## > bibinfo.df$journal <- gsub("American Economic Review",
## +      "AER", bibinfo.df$journal)
##
## > d <- d %>% filter(journal == "American Economic Journal: Applied Economics")
##
## > exit <- exit %>% left_join(bibinfo.df, by = "DOI") %>%
## +      filter(journal == "AEJ:AE")
##
## > entry <- entry %>% left_join(bibinfo.df, by = "DOI") %>%
## +      filter(journal == "AEJ:AE")
```

As can be seen in Table ??’s totals, the post-completion response questionnaire captured information about 180 of the 209 eligible articles (see the table in appendix A for a description of articles at each stage of our analysis). However, there were 228 post-completion reports filed for these articles, 36 of which were duplicated articles resulting from multiple reproduction attempts. Of these duplicated articles, 21 arrived at different conclusions about the replication success of that article. In these cases, we kept the replication attempts that resulted in the more successful outcome. Specifically, we define an article to be a successful replication if at least one replicator was able to replicate the results. Similarly, if multiple replications of an article arrived at a “partially replicated” and “not replicated” conclusion (without a successful attempt), then we say it was partially replicated. This categorization gives the best chance for replication, results that we present in the next subsection. ¹⁷

```
## ‘summarise()’ has grouped output by ‘year’. You can override using the
## ‘.groups’ argument.
## ‘summarise()’ has grouped output by ‘year’. You can override using the
## ‘.groups’ argument.
```

3.2 Replicability assessment

3.2.1 Extent and sources of non-replicability

We find a moderate replication success overall, regardless of the definition of reproducibility ratio we consider. We define the reproducibility ratio as

$$R_{t,s} = \frac{n_t}{d_s}, \quad (1)$$

¹⁷Our final sample differs from the 209 eligible articles for two reasons. First, the completion response questionnaire captured information for some articles that were not recorded in the initial assessment questionnaire. We only kept articles for which we had both entry and exit questionnaire information. This is explained by a subsample of 2013 articles that were incorrectly recorded, which explains the corresponding low 2013 number in Table ?. Second, it appears as if not all of the 209 eligible articles were attempted. However, these non-attempts were not assigned specifically so it should not affect the results.

where n_t is the number of articles that were either fully, partially or not replicated, with $t = (fail, partial, full)$. The denominator d_s stands for the number of articles, with $s = (assessed, eligible, nonconf)$. *Assessed* corresponds to the sample of articles for which we had both an entry and exit questionnaires, which means the assessor finished the replication exercise or assessment, as well as a unique record. This includes papers with missing or confidential data. *Eligible* articles are those identified as using non-confidential data in the preliminary analysis, and finally, *non-conf* is restricting the sample to papers amenable for replication, those that have the data¹⁸. During the replication exercise, results could differ in precision (small discrepancies, rounding errors) or coverage (all, some or few results being reproduced), so how do we distinguish between full and partial replication? Assessors were instructed to categorize articles as fully replicable if all numbers and figures matched up to some decimals (allowing for some minor rounding errors). Partial replication means that the replicators were able to execute the computer programs that produced the numerical values reported in the articles and that there were differences in the numerical values but they remained negligible.¹⁹ In particular, the results were qualitatively similar, or the main results had to hold but other secondary results and robustness checks could still differ. It has to be noted that the categorization remained to some extent subjective to the assessor.

Table ?? presents the main results of the reproduction exercise. 68 of 180 replication attempts successfully replicated the article’s analysis (37.78%). The success rate of replication conditional on non-confidential data was 41.98% (68 out of 162). A further 69 (42.59%) were at least partially successful. We summarize our replication success depending on how we define the replicability ration, i.e., whether we consider assessed articles, eligible or articles with non-confidential data in figure ?. Considering all assessed articles for which we had complete records (entry and exit questionnaires), we only successfully replicated 24.82% of them. Restricting to the sample of articles eligible for replication because identified as using non-confidential data we get a higher success rate of 37.78%. Conditional on non-confidential data (after removing articles identified as using confidential data during the exercise, as it was not mentioned by authors), our success rate of 41.98% is thus higher.

The main reason for unsuccessful reproductions is that the data used in the article was either confidential or proprietary, and therefore not available to replicators. Normally, this would imply that no replication attempt is undertaken. We have 18 cases where it would seem that assessors had missed the information that no data was available. The fact that these articles were not immediately recognized by the assessor is itself an argument for better metadata on journal websites. Combining with the 80 articles identified as relying on confidential data at the initial assessment stage, a total of 98 out of 303 (32.34%) relied on confidential or proprietary data, and were thus not reproducible by this project.

¹⁸recall that this sample can differ from the previous one as assessors discovered confidential data while doing the analysis, as this was

¹⁹Possible causes may lie in software version discrepancies, uninitialized random number generators, different operating systems, or even different machines. We did not identify the causes of the discrepancy.

```
## 'summarise()' has grouped output by 'year'. You can override using the
## '.groups' argument.

## Error:
## ! Assigned data 'value' must be compatible with row subscript 'i'.
## x 1 row must be assigned.
## x Assigned data has 7 rows.
## i Row updates require a list value. Do you need 'list()' or 'as.list()'?
```

Table ?? lists a further 25 articles that were not able to be reproduced for other reasons. Table ?? breaks down the reasons for these unsuccessful reproductions. articles did not provide the (non-confidential) data required to produce their results. Further investigation is needed to identify the reason for this apparent non-conformance to the [AEJ:AE](#) data availability policies, although we point out that some non-confidential data is still subject to terms of use that prevent redistribution (earlier years of IPUMS data and any version of PSID data are just two examples). Errors in the provided computer programs prevented the replication of article²⁰, while the data provided in articles was corrupted in some way so that the software available to us was not able to read the datasets. Our replicators did not have access to the software required to run article. For articles, the computer programs successfully ran, but the numerical values were inconsistent with those reported in the articles, and the replicators were unable to find a convincing reason.

```
#####

## 'summarise()' has grouped output by 'year'. You can override using the
## '.groups' argument.
## 'summarise()' has grouped output by 'year'. You can override using the
## '.groups' argument.

## Error:
## ! Assigned data 'value' must be compatible with row subscript 'i'.
## x 1 row must be assigned.
## x Assigned data has 5 rows.
## i Row updates require a list value. Do you need 'list()' or 'as.list()'?
```

```
## Error:
## ! Assigned data 'value' must be compatible with row subscript 'i'.
## x 1 row must be assigned.
## x Assigned data has 5 rows.
## i Row updates require a list value. Do you need 'list()' or 'as.list()'?
```

While most unsuccessful replications were not due to programming errors but rather inconsistent

²⁰For instance, one example of assessor's comment was "Could not replicate due to incorrect use of indicator variable function. Did not understand what the author was trying to achieve due to lack of comments in the code, and therefore could not come up with alternate way to generate the dta file."

numbers, even successful replications required complex code modifications. We tabulate in Table ?? the extent to which modifications to the provided computer programs were required to successfully reproduce the articles. The majority of successful replications required minimal work from the replicators. of the successful replications required, at most, a simple rerouting of directory references. The remaining successful articles required a deeper understanding of the software, and a more in-depth analysis of the code and/or command of the subject matter. These “Complex Changes” to the code required more than simple directory adjustments such as, for example, the debugging of classical code errors or the adjustment of outdated commands to reflect newer verions of software or operating systems. The fact that about % required complexe changed calls for at least better documenation in implementing these changes were they unavoidable, along with more robust coding practices.

3.2.2 Documentation and reproducibility

Good documentation is key to better reproducibility, as emphasized by many authors (Chang and Li, 2015; McCullough et al., 2006; Stark, 2018). In Table ?? we investigate whether better documentation is positively correlated with reproduction success. The results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between reproduction success of an article and the quality of its documentation, based on the Pearson and Kendall correlation tests.

If clear documentation allows for better replicability, we then wonder if such “easiness” of use of replicable papers’ material make these papers more widely used and cited.

3.3 Is there a citation bonus for replicable papers?

We would expect *a priori* that replicable papers provide research which can be easily built upon and that other researchers are thus more likely to use. Providing clear programs and data may increase the reputation of an author and his papers. This should lead to a higher citation count for these papers. To test for a citation bonus of papers successfully replicated, we captured bibliometric measures in 2017 for articles published through 2013, leaving a minimum of 3 years of post-publication years available to measure these metrics. We captured h-index for all authors of a paper, and computed the avarege per-paper h-index, as well as the lowest and highest when multiple authors were present. We also computed the average annual citations of the paper. Table ?? presents a summary of these measures, categorized by reproduction success. Articles have an average of 2.23 authors and were cited, on average, 4.53 times per year. Papers with more authors tend to have more documentation (table ??).

We investigate the relationship between the bibliometric measures, reproducibility measures and outcomes. We model the count of citations, conditional on h-index measures, reproduction outcome of the paper, the type of data used, and other covariates. In Table ??, we start by controlling for the h-index measures, interacted with an indicator whether the article used confidential data. Results indicate a positive but noisy citation bonus for papers with confidential data. Authors with a high h-index, an indicator of high citation count in the past, also seem to obtain more future citations, but there is no interaction with the use of confidential data.

```
## Error in if (is.na(s)) {: the condition has length > 1
```

Conditional on not using confidential data, how does the reproducibility of an article affect its future citation count? Tables ?? and ?? (in log terms) show that, controlling for h-indices, the ability to reproduce an article does not appear to play a significant role in the citation count. In columns (1) through (3), we control only for full reproduction, in columns (4) through (6), for full or partial reproduction. The only correlate with a strongly significant effect appears to be the authors' reputation as captured by h-index (column (2)). These results are worth highlighting as replicable papers should make it easier for other researchers to build on previous research, and therefore could be used (and quoted) more often.

```
## Error in if (is.na(s)) {: the condition has length > 1
```

4 Conclusion

In this paper, we carried out a large scale reproduction exercise of a journal that introduced a data availability policy. How do these results compare with and differ from similar exercises conducted by other authors? Dewald et al. (1986) found that only 7 out of 54 (12.96%) articles from the [JMCB](#) were able to be replicated. In later work using the same journal, McCullough et al. (2006) found only 14 of 186 (7.53%) articles selected from the [JMCB](#) were reproducible. Using a different economic journal, we found a higher but nonetheless moderate reproducibility rate of 37.78 % (41.98 % conditional on non-confidential data). Our main reason for failure of reproduction was the confidentiality or proprietary nature of data, but conditional on available data, the majority of failures stemmed from inconsistent numbers without convincing reasons.

Such moderate replication success is not specific to this journal. Chang and Li (2015), using slightly different methodology in selection, selected all articles from 13 well-regarded economics journals satisfying certain criteria (empirical paper using data on U.S. gross domestic product), and successfully reproduced the results of only 22 of 67 (32.84%) papers. This seems to suggest that journal policies to enhance publications are helpful, but insufficient to foster replicability.

Most importantly, we showed that replicability of papers did not provide a citation bonus. This is surprising given that researchers can build on state of the art research more easily with transparent and easily replicable research. Part of the reason could be that it is sometimes easier to rewrite codes. Our analysis highlighted that complex changes to the code were frequently required to reproduce the papers, and documentation sometimes was lacking or inadequate. This is in line with the assessment of Trisovic et al. (2021) of the current state of research code. They analyzed more than 2000 replication datasets and found that 60% of R files crashed even after some small correction such as directory changes or packages installation (58% when restricting to data from journals).

Data availability policies are thus necessary to reach transparency, but not sufficient to foster good coding practices. While our analysis sheds some light on good coding and data practices that facilitate replication, aiming at improving the way we do research, the fact that replicable papers carry no citation advantage emphasizes we will not get to this “good” equilibrium on our own. Systematic reviews of datasets in journals with strict data sharing policy can help, as studies have shown that they result in higher re-execution (Trisovic et al., 2021).

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A Appendix

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B Acronyms Used

AEA American Economic Association

AEJ:AE American Economic Journal: Applied Economics

AEJ:EP American Economic Journal: Economic Policy

AJPS American Journal of Political Science

DOI Digital Object Identifier

EJ Economic Journal

JASA Journal of the American Statistical Association

JMCB Journal of Money, Credit and Banking

JPE Journal of Political Economy

JEEA Journal of the European Economic Association

OS operating system

ReStat Review of Economics and Statistics

URL Uniform Record Locator

VCS version control system

C Assessment Questionnaire

10/8/2014

ReplicationDataQuestionnaire - Google Forms

ReplicationDataQuestionnaire

Please fill out the form to the best of your abilities.

* Required

1. Please enter your NetID

.....

2. **DOI ***

What is the DOI (not the URL!) of the article you are reviewing? (This was sent to you by email: simply copy it here)

.....

3. **TypeOfArticle ***

Does the article contain empirical work, simulations, or experimental work?
Mark only one oval.

☐

Yes

☐

No

After the last question in this section, stop filling out this form.

4. **OnlineAppendix ***

Does the article have an online Appendix?
Mark only one oval.

☐

Yes

Skip to question 5.

☐

No

Skip to question 7.

Information on online materials

5. **OnlineAppendixURL**

Enter the URL of the online Appendix

.....

6. **OnlineAppendixDOI**

Enter the DOI of the online Appendix (this is often the case if the journal provides a DOI to the article, and hosts the appendix)

.....

Online Data

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1c6wfHmXgcad5unPtVWltml_rU8piOcvNQEqgmK_lu9w/edit

1/12

In the next few sections, we consider the following types of data: (i) input data are data as collected by the authors or another agency (examples: "CPS" or "my survey data" (ii) analysis data are the post-processed and clean data underlying specific regressions. Think of the basic workflow [input data] -> [preparation programs] -> [analysis data] -> [regression programs] -> results. If available, we will request information on up to three input datasets, and one analysis dataset.

7. **OnlineData ***

Does the online appendix link to one or more downloadable dataset?

Mark *only one oval*.

☐ Yes *Skip to question 9.*

☐ No

8. **OnlineDataInside ***

Does the article itself mention where to obtain the final analysis data? (for instance, because the data are confidential or proprietary, or because there is a public-use download site for the data)

Mark *only one oval*.

☐ Yes

☐ No *Skip to question 43.*

Information on online datasets

Please describe the first INPUT dataset.

9. **DataRunClean ***

Does the article and/or its appendices allow you to identify the data needed to start from scratch? (Original input datasets)

Mark *only one oval*.

☐ Yes

☐ No *Skip to question 43.*

Input dataset 1

10. **OnlineDataDOI**

Please enter the DOI of the downloadable dataset (notation: doi://)

.....

11. **OnlineDataHandle**

Please enter the Handle of the downloadable dataset (notation: hdl://)

.....

12. OnlineDataURL

Please enter the URL of the downloadable dataset. (this may duplicate one or the other of DOI or HDL, but is a more general way to describe it. notation: http://)

.....

13. DataAvailability

Are the data available without restriction (can be downloaded or requested by anybody without restriction)? [Answer DK (Don't know) if it is not clear from the article how users can access non-downloadable data]

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

14. DataAvailabilityAccess

Do the data require users to apply for access, purchase, or otherwise sign agreements to access the data? (This should be mentioned in the Readme PDF or in the article) [Answer DK (Don't know) if it is not clear from the article how users can access non-downloadable data.]

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

15. DataAvailabilityExclusive

Are the data accessible only to the authors? [Answer yes if the authors clearly state that the data are only available to them. Answer No if there is clear evidence that others can access to the data, albeit with restrictions. Answer DK if you can't figure it out from the article.]

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

16. OtherNotes

Any notes for this dataset that was not covered by the questions above.

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17. Do you want to describe another dataset? *

Mark *only one oval*.

☐ Yes

☐ No *Skip to question 34.*

Input dataset 2

18. OnlineDataDOI2

Please enter the DOI of the downloadable dataset (notation: doi://)

.....

19. OnlineDataHandle2

Please enter the Handle of the downloadable dataset (notation: hdl://)

.....

20. OnlineDataURL2

Please enter the URL of the downloadable dataset. (this may duplicate one or the other of DOI or HDL, but is a more general way to describe it. notation: http://)

.....

21. DataAvailability2

Are the data available without restriction (can be downloaded or requested by anybody without restriction)? [Answer DK (Don't know) if it is not clear from the article how users can access non-downloadable data]

Mark *only one oval*.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ DK

22. DataAvailabilityAccess2

Do the data require users to apply for access, purchase, or otherwise sign agreements to access the data? (This should be mentioned in the Readme PDF or in the article) [Answer DK (Don't know) if it is not clear from the article how users can access non-downloadable data.]

Mark *only one oval*.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ DK

23. DataAvailabilityExclusive2

Are the data accessible only to the authors? [Answer yes if the authors clearly state that the data are only available to them. Answer No if there is clear evidence that others can access to the data, albeit with restrictions. Answer DK if you can't figure it out from the article.]

Mark *only one oval*.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ DK

24. OtherNotes2

Any notes for this dataset that was not covered by the questions above.

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25. Do you want to describe another dataset?

Mark *only one oval*.

☐ Yes

☐ No *Skip to question 34.*

Input dataset 3

26. OnlineDataDOI3

Please enter the DOI of the downloadable dataset (notation: doi://)

.....

27. OnlineDataHandle3

Please enter the Handle of the downloadable dataset (notation: hdl://)

.....

28. OnlineDataURL3

Please enter the URL of the downloadable dataset. (this may duplicate one or the other of DOI or HDL, but is a more general way to describe it. notation: http://)

.....

29. DataAvailability3

Are the data available without restriction (can be downloaded or requested by anybody without restriction)? [Answer DK (Don't know) if it is not clear from the article how users can access non-downloadable data]

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ DK

30. DataAvailabilityAccess3

Do the data require users to apply for access, purchase, or otherwise sign agreements to access the data? (This should be mentioned in the Readme PDF or in the article) [Answer DK (Don't know) if it is not clear from the article how users can access non-downloadable data.]

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ DK

31. DataAvailabilityExclusive3

Are the data accessible only to the authors? [Answer yes if the authors clearly state that the data are only available to them. Answer No if there is clear evidence that others can access to the data, albeit with restrictions. Answer DK if you can't figure it out from the article.]

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ DK

32. OtherNotes3

Any notes for this dataset that was not covered by the questions above.

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Analysis datasets

33. DataRunFinal

Does the article and/or its appendices allow you to identify the data needed to run the final models?

Mark only one oval.

☐

Yes

☐

No

Skip to question 41.

Analysis dataset**34. OnlineFinalDataDOI**

Please enter the DOI of the downloadable dataset (notation: doi://)

.....

35. OnlineFinalDataHandle

Please enter the Handle of the downloadable dataset (notation: hdl://)

.....

36. OnlineFinalDataURL

Please enter the URL of the downloadable dataset. (this may duplicate one or the other of DOI or HDL, but is a more general way to describe it. notation: http://)

.....

37. FinalDataAvailability

Are the data available without restriction (can be downloaded or requested by anybody without restriction)? [Answer DK (Don't know) if it is not clear from the article how users can access non-downloadable data]

Mark only one oval.

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

DK

38. FinalDataAvailabilityAccess

Do the data require users to apply for access, purchase, or otherwise sign agreements to access the data? (This should be mentioned in the Readme PDF or in the article) [Answer DK (Don't know) if it is not clear from the article how users can access non-downloadable data.]

Mark only one oval.

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

DK

39. FinalDataAvailabilityExclusive

Are the data accessible only to the authors? [Answer yes if the authors clearly state that the data are only available to them. Answer No if there is clear evidence that others can access to the data, albeit with restrictions. Answer DK if you can't figure it out from the article.]

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ DK

40. OtherNotesFinal

Any notes for this dataset that was not covered by the questions above.

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Data formats

Considering all of the datasets described above, please check all boxes that apply.

41. DataFormatInputs

What format are the original input datasets in?

Check all that apply.

☐ Stata

☐ CSV

☐ R

☐ Matlab

☐ SPSS

☐ SAS

☐ Other:

42. DataFormatAnalysis

What format are the final analysis datasets in?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Stata
- ☐ CSV
- ☐ R
- ☐ Matlab
- ☐ SPSS
- ☐ SAS
- ☐ Other:

Information on programs**43. OnlinePrograms**

Does the online appendix have information on the programs used to run the analysis?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes *Skip to question 45.*
- ☐ No

44. OnlineProgramsInside

Does the article itself mention where to obtain the programs needed to replicate the study (for instance, at a data or code repository)?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Information on online programs**45. OnlineProgramsDOI**

Please enter the DOI of the downloadable programs (notation: doi://

.....

46. OnlineProgramsHDL

Please enter the Handle of the downloadable programs (notation: hdl://

.....

47. OnlineProgramsURL

Please enter the URL of the downloadable programs (notation: http://

.....

Documentation

48. DocReadmePresent

Does the downloadable data/program archive include a Readme PDF or TXT file, or some other generic instruction file?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

49. DocReadmeContent

Does the Readme PDF (or generic instruction file) list all included files, document the purpose and format of each file provided, and provides instruction to a user on how replication can be conducted?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ lists all included files
- ☐ documents the purpose of each file
- ☐ documents the format of each file
- ☐ provides instructions for replication

Program details

50. ProgramFormat

What format are the programs in?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Stata
- ☐ R
- ☐ Matlab
- ☐ SPSS
- ☐ SAS
- ☐ Other:

51. ProgramSequence

Does the Readme PDF or one of the other included documents (including one of the programs) provide enough detail to run all the programs?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

52. ProgramsDocumentation

Are the programs themselves clearly documented? (There are comments throughout the program that briefly describe what is done at each step)

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

53. ProgramsHeaderAuthor

Do the programs have a header that identifies the author? (Program metadata)

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

54. ProgramsHeaderInfo

Do the programs have a header that identifies when they were created and/or modified (Program metadata)

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

55. ProgramsStructureManual

Do the instructions require the user to do manual modifications to data or programs?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

56. GeneralNotes

General notes on this article, that wasn't captured by the questions

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10/8/2014

ReplicationDataQuestionnaire - Google Forms

57. **How difficult do you think replicating the article will be? ***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
easiest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	hardest

Powered by



D Exit Questionnaire

10/8/2014

Exit_Questionnaire_Draft - Google Forms

Exit_Questionnaire_Draft

Please fill out the form to the best of your abilities.

* Required

1. Please enter your NetID

.....

2. **DOI ***

What is the DOI (not the URL!) of the article you reviewed?

.....

3. **Code_Success ***

Did you manage to eventually get all the programs to run successfully?
Mark only one oval.

☐

Yes

☐

No *Skip to question 11.*

Original Program

4. **Program_Run_Clean ***

Did the programs run "as is" without needing to make ANY changes?
Mark only one oval.

☐

Yes, no changes were necessary. *Skip to question 7.*

☐

No, I needed to make changes in the code.

Changes to Program Code

5. **Directory_Change**

Were the changes restricted to simply redirecting file/folder paths?
Mark only one oval.

☐

Yes

☐

No, the changes to the code were more involved.

6. Code_Changes

If the changes were more involved, briefly describe what changes you had to make.

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.....

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.....

Program vs Paper Discrepancies**7. Output_Accuracy**

Do the numbers produced by your program exactly match their corresponding values in the paper?

Mark only one oval.

☐

Yes

☐

No, some of the numbers are different.

8. Discrepancy_Location

If there are values that do not match, please list their location (ie. table number, column, page).

.....

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Skip to question 11.

Reason for replication failure.**9. Which of the following apply?**

Check all that apply.

☐

Missing data set

☐

Error in the program code

☐

Other:

10. Briefly describe the reason why you could not replicate.

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Software Issues

11. **Software_Extensions**

Did you have to load any software extensions? (Eg. In matlab, the optimization toolkit is required to run the fmincon command. In Stata, outreg2 needs to be installed before running the command.)

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

12. **Software_Version**

Did the authors use a different version of software (ie. Stata11 instead of Stata13)?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

13. **First_Replicator**

Are you the first replicator?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes *Skip to question 17.*
- ☐ No

Previous Replicator Questions

14. **Common_Issues**

Did you encounter the same issues as the previous replicator?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

15. Overcome_Issues

Were you able to overcome any problems faced by the previous replicator?
Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ N/A. The previous replicator had no issues.

16. Replication_Helpfulness

Describe the usefulness of the previous replicator's notes. Did you add to them?

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Original Author**17. How complete was the original author's readme/generic instruction file?**

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Complete. Provided all information required to run the programs.
- ☐ Incomplete. Was ambiguous or left out crucial steps.
- ☐ No readme file was provided.

18. What actions could the authors have made to make the replication exercise easier? (Eg. correctly point to folder names)

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Overall Rating**19. How difficult do you think the replication exercise was? ***

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
easiest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	hardest

20. If this differs from the initial assessment, why?

21. **GeneralNotes**

General notes on this article/replication, that wasn't captured by the questions

E Replication Team

The following members of the Replication Lab provided valuable assistance:

Hautahi Kingi Alice Elaine Chou, Haeyong Shin, Yaxian Xie, Nathan Allan Bach, Cindy Vincens, Yuxin Chen, Flavio Stanchi, Sarah Jane Harrison, Yiwen Jiang, Jack Wendler, Jose Fernandez, Joran Isenberg, Sarah Harrison, Koonj Vekaria, Charley Chen, Yang Guo, Yiwen (Evelyn) Jiang, Noah Kwicklis, Madeline Kwicklis, Koonj Vekaria, Robin Wang, Jack Q. Wendler, Qianyan Yao, Joao Vitor Costa, Evan Shapiro, Yudi (Grace) Wang, Christopher Chang, Chuhan Liu, Daniel Kim, Kassandra Madulka, Robert Goldberg, Xinyi Wan, Siming Zou, Yu Gao, Andrew Wink, Matthew Salazar, Naomi Li, Anderson Park, Carina Chien, Nick Swan, Vendela Norman, Hayley A. Timmons, Jack VanSlyke, Gabriel Bond, Wenxin (Andee) Cao, Mcrid Wang, John Park, Xueshi Su, Sam Mbugua, Jiazhen Tan.