

Dear Recommender,

Please find attached our Stage 1 Snapshot “Psychology: The science of behavior?” for consideration.

Psychology’s self-image is that it is the science of behavior. This definition is common to scientific associations’ definitions (APA, BPS, DGPs), dictionary definitions, and introductory textbooks (according to our review of 12 common textbooks). Provocatively, Baumeister et al. (2007) called this self-image into question by pointing out that, as a field, we measure actual behavior with increasing rarity, arguing that psychology has become “the science of self-reports and finger movements.”

Much has changed in the intervening 17 years. Baumeister et al.’s study happens to have been published within months of the release of the first iPhone. Since then, smartphones have become ubiquitous, and along with them wearable devices, smart home devices, and other digital technologies. Collectively, these have greatly expanded our potential to collect real-world behavioral data (Harari et al., 2016). This raises the question of whether this potential has been capitalized on by our field, or whether the downward trend in behavioral data collection that Baumeister and colleagues observed has continued.

Additionally, there are reasons to believe that Baumeister et al.’s methods may not provide the most robust and generalizable conclusions. Among other things, only one journal was inspected (JPSP), no clear definition of “behavioral measure” was provided, and no inter-rater reliability of the codings was estimated. Therefore, our study goes beyond Baumeister et al.’s (2007) methods in multiple ways (a) by addressing these issues; (a) by quantifying the use of other types of psychological measurement beyond behavioral measures; and (b) by also assessing whether the self-image of psychology stated in introductory textbooks is also reflected in the individual articles.

We are writing this manuscript with the readership of AMPPS in mind as our intended audience - although it is of course up to PCI to recommend a venue should it eventually be accepted. We believe the AMPPS’s readership would be interested in these questions of trends in types of psychological measurement over time, and the alignment of our field’s self-image with its actual scientific activities.

Best regards,

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