

Editorial

Increasing Scientific Quality in the Expanding Field of Personality Science

Ironically, procrastination helped me kick off this overdue editorial. As it does every year, EJP's editorial team is presenting a Wiley Award for the best publication by a student that is based on a PhD or Master/Diploma thesis—and as I am every year, I was a bit late in gathering, re-reading, and ranking all the eligible papers (no less than 15 in 2018) and asking the associate editors for their independent ranks. Finally completing all of this in a very brief amount of time was a dense and extremely difficult but also extremely gratifying task. The conceptual and methodological quality of all the papers, the straightforward implementation of transparency standards, and the rich variety of phenomena and questions they focused on simply made me happy—they showcase what we at EJP would like to publish. I would like to congratulate Elien Mabbe, who won the 2018 Wiley Award for her co-authored article titled 'The Role of Child Personality in Effects of Psychologically Controlling Parenting: An Examination at the Level of Daily Fluctuations' (Mabbe et al., 2018). Young researchers are strongly represented in our journal, and I am delighted to see the quality of their work.

Another case of procrastination—opening the emails that were popping up in my inbox while I should have been focusing on writing (this editorial)—reinforced this positive mood (and thereby helped me keep on writing). When the latest entry in our EJP blog popped up, I ended up re-reading interview after interview, many of which were with authors of papers I had just read for the Wiley Award selection. To experience how much enthusiasm and genuine intellectual curiosity our authors have when they tackle their work and to learn about the background of this work from a very personal perspective were again very gratifying and offered much insight. I want to thank Joanne Chung and Lisanne de Moor for their excellent work with the EJP blog (<https://www.ejp-blog.com/>). It is a worthwhile source of information for anyone who is interested in personal views on how personality psychologists approach their work, what aspects of their work they are most excited about, where they are heading next, and how they experience publishing in EJP and pursuing a scientific career more generally.

Both recent experiences strengthened my confidence in the potential of our field, in its ability to self-correct and improve, and in the value of expert-based feedback that focuses on increasing scientific rigour. Personality science might be ready to sustainably increase its conceptual, methodological, and reporting standards as well as its heterogeneity, breadth, and crosstalk with other fields. Scientific journals can contribute more or less to this development depending on whether and how they set the respective quality standards, evaluate and help to increase the quality of the papers

accordingly, and welcome the whole variety of relevant contributions. In this editorial, I will reflect on EJP's criteria for deriving editorial evaluations and recommendations and on the various shapes and forms of valuable contributions to EJP. I will also report on some recent developments and planned highlights.

As always, my biggest thanks go to EJP's wonderful team of associate editors: Erika Carlson, Malgorzata Fajkowska, Christian Kandler, Odilia Laceulle, Jan-Erik Lönnqvist (who joined the team in 2018), René Möttus, and Cornelia Wrzus. They all ensure that our high standards for scientific quality also apply to the editorial and review process. Our goal as editors is to help the authors realize their best possible products, and we invest a lot of time and intellectual resources in carefully digesting each paper, in pinpointing critical issues and those that can be optimized, and in providing detailed and constructive feedback. This policy is, obviously, something reviewers of our journal are well aware of. Since the beginning of my editorial term, I have not seen a single review of the 'lazy', 'meaningless', or 'unfair' types that seem to lead many of our colleagues to describe the peer-review process in general as erratic, arbitrary, or hopelessly unreliable. This is not at all what we experience at EJP. I am deeply grateful for the quality feedback our reviewers provide: They really help our authors produce better science.

Citation-wise, the numbers stayed high with a 2-year impact factor (IF) of 3.5. The 5-year IF (which one might regard as the more robust developmental indicator given the publication speed of our field) went up for the fourth time in the row and is now at 4.2 (2.9 in 2013, 3.4 in 2014, 3.6 in 2015, and 3.7 in 2016). For both IF variants, EJP secured its position as the second highest empirical journal in the social-personality field (after JPSP) and as the journal with the highest impact factor among all journals that are exclusively devoted to the science of personality. We have a stable overall rejection rate of around 85%, and roughly 55% of submitted papers are desk-rejected. Although the introduction of this editorial might indicate otherwise, we do not tend to procrastinate and are comparatively fast with an average time to first decision of 25 days.

In 2018, we continued to foster the transparency of work published in EJP, and successfully so. Ever since we introduced a new policy that was geared toward increasing Open Science practices in manuscripts submitted to and published in the journal in 2017, we have seen a steady increase in transparency. One way of quantifying this trend is to look at the number of papers with one or more open science badges that are awarded to papers that meet the standards for Open material, Open data, and/or Preregistration (see

<https://cos.io/our-services/open-science-badges/>). While only 2% of empirical papers published in 2016 had such a badge, this percentage increased to 47% in 2017 and continued to increase to 68% in 2018 (for more details, see: <https://www.ejp-blog.com/blog/2019/1/16/reflection-on-open-science-practices-in-2018>). In fact, according to the Center for Open Science's systematic overview, which is based on journal policies as they relate to the TOP Guidelines and is thought to encourage comparison and conversation, EJP has the third highest transparency score (20; along with *Collabra: Psychology*) out of all listed journals and the highest transparency score in our field (e.g. *JRP*: 19; *Psychological Science*: 17; *JPSP*: 13; *PSPB*: 7; *SPPS*: 3; *PAID*: 1; *JOPY*: 0; for details, see: <https://osf.io/7bsjw/>). All authors are advised to very carefully read our guidelines and make sure their papers are in line with EJP's transparency standards (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/10990984/homepage/forauthors.html>). Last year, we also began officially including Registered Reports (RRs) as a publication format and received our first RR submission. We consider RRs to be a very valuable option and hope to receive substantially more RR submissions in the future (see <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/10990984/homepage/registeredreportsguidelines>).

Although we are certainly happy about having increased the transparency of published work in EJP and will continue to do so, transparency is, of course, by no means the only and not the most relevant criterion when it comes to evaluating the scientific quality of personality science. We do not wish to fetishize it. We have undertaken substantial efforts to increase the transparency of the scientific work we publish simply because we think it is a necessary and feasible precondition. It summarizes minimal standards that allow us as well as our reviewers and readers to evaluate the quality of research.

Quality, then, has several facets, and EJP has a long tradition and expertise in evaluating the portfolio of quality indicators comprehensively. As I have outlined in my inaugural editorial (Back, 2017), our policy is to have a keen eye on all four relevant domains of quality indicators: transparency, statistical power, representativeness, and conceptual logic. The credibility revolution in psychology (Vazire, 2018) has led to a much needed increased focus on minimal standards of science: transparency and statistical power. An empirical contribution to our science needs to be transparent, and it needs to be based on enough data. As trivial as this might sound to a psychology undergraduate, we will still need several years and persistent reminders to have these well-known principles fully implemented into our (i.e. personality psychologists) everyday scientific work (and even more years for other disciplines).

But we also have additional challenges ahead of us, and I will very briefly hint at two that correspond to more advanced quality standards that we at EJP deem important: representativeness and conceptual sharpness. Representativeness and the respective degree of generalizability concern a most important aspect of data quality (Back, 2017; Simons, Shoda, & Lindsay, 2017): How much does the assessed data, assessment procedure, and context represent meaningful

phenomena to which one wishes to generalize results based on analyses of the data? Are our assessment tools capturing the psychological content their labels promise to assess? Are the cue and stimuli configurations we present—and that participants perceive—representative samples of the universe of environmental cue configurations that characterize the situations we aim at in our interpretation and discussion of results? Are the ways participants can and do act, feel, want, and think during our assessment procedures representative samples of the universe of behavioural, affective, motivational, and cognitive states they actually have in the real-life contexts we care about? We as personality researchers can and should do more to try to increase the representativeness of our data.

Another domain of quality indicators refers to conceptual logic. Very often we invite authors to improve on and flesh out their ideas about what a certain construct represents and about why one variable should be associated with or even lead to another. Our field is in need of a sharper and more formal representation of concepts and effects. Far too often, the delineation of hypotheses is based on ad hoc and metaphorical reasoning. Also, far too often, concepts and hypotheses are formulated in such a fuzzy verbal way that does not allow us to clearly distinguish one concept from the other and to decide when exactly one or the other hypothesis will be supported. Defining our concepts more sharply and stating our hypotheses in a more formalized way that allows them to be translated into distinct and testable statistical models will go a long way toward establishing a more mature personality science. Let us be bold: What about a representativeness/generalizability and conceptual formalization revolution next?

Minimal and advanced quality standards should not be played off against each other. At least for the 'classic' publication format that presents theoretically derived hypotheses as well as a confirmatory empirical test of these hypotheses, one is not worth much without the other. For such a confirmatory empirical contribution, transparency and power do not compensate for a lack of representativeness and weak conceptual logic. A perfectly transparent preregistered contribution based on thousands of participants can still represent meaningless data and a silly rationale. Similarly, sharp theorizing and representative data do not compensate for a lack of transparency and power. A confirmatory empirical test of a hypothesis that is elegantly delineated and based on real-life data is of little help if it is based on a tiny sample, post hoc hypothesis generation, and little information about what exactly was done and analysed and why.

At the same time and in line with the variety of papers we at EJP aim to publish (see Back, 2018), it is important to note that not every paper needs to provide all at once: the presentation of a conceptual framework, the delineation of hypotheses, and the testing of these hypotheses with representative empirical data. A division of labour might in many cases even be a better solution and might also prevent authors from engaging in questionable research practices (e.g. feeling forced to write a fitting 'theory' around an interesting pattern of exploratory findings; feeling the urge to strengthen one's novel theoretical framework by adding fitting 'empirical illustrations'). Both the interesting pattern of exploratory

findings and the novel theoretical framework have their own independent scientific value—if they are based on representative data and sharp conceptual reasoning, respectively. They can build the basis for future theory development and hypothesis testing, optimally by independent research teams. It is my hope that this need for a larger variety of complementary scientific contributions is increasingly reflected in EJP. That is, in addition to the more standard package of hypothesis generation/delineation and testing, we invite (i) papers that exclusively focus on developing sharp conceptual ideas (e.g. featuring formalized theoretical models and hypotheses) and (ii) papers that exclusively describe and explore relevant but understudied phenomena using representative data (e.g. focusing on actual behavioural data for which a basic descriptive landscape is missing). I would also like to see submissions that feature and reflect on our science as a collaborative undertaking, such as the introduction of research consortia and other big collective data collection projects, the presentation of results of replications across labs as well as of adversarial collaborations, and of brief commentaries that challenge the collective state of knowledge and practice. In sum, I would be delighted to see a further increase in the variability of paper formats that we publish.

We also continue to invite contributions regarding all different fields (e.g. personality structure, processes, expressions, development, and consequences) and aspects of personality (e.g. goals, temperament, interpersonal styles, prejudice, values, narratives, and leisure preferences). And yes, this includes intelligence and individual differences in cognitive and noncognitive abilities more generally. In addition to featuring the variety of contributions in different sub-areas of personality science, we will also continue to try to tackle both more general fundamental issues (e.g. What is a trait? When and how does personality change and for whom? Prediction and/or explanation?) and applied issues (e.g. What we can contribute to and learn from clinical psychology and medicine, organizational psychology and economics, educational psychology, sociology and political science?) that are key to our field.

The increasing breadth and current dynamic of personality science is also reflected in a larger number of diverse special issues we have planned for the future. These special issues allow us to highlight promising topics and to start and continue debates we consider to be important. This year, Cornelia Wrzus will edit a special issue ‘Does age matter for personality psychology?’ tackling the underexamined questions of when and why age does (or does not) moderate personality effects and processes affecting intrapersonal, interpersonal, or institutional outcomes. Another highlight for 2020 is already under way: a joint special issue with the *European Journal of Psychological Assessment* on ‘New approaches towards conceptualizing and assessing personality’ edited by René Möttus, David Condon, Dustin Wood, and Sacha Epskamp. The respective call for papers has led to an enormous number of more than 100 proposals. The special issue will represent this increasing interest in a fresh look at the fundamentals of our field. In doing so, it continues a debate we started with a recent target paper by Anna Baumert et al. (2017) on the integration of personality structure,

personality process, and personality development and last year’s special issue ‘From correlations to explanations’ edited by Möttus and Kandler (2018). Another 2020 highlight will be a special issue on ‘Behavioral Personality Science in the Age of Big Data’ edited by John Rauthmann. More than 10 years after Mike Furr’s (2009) target paper on ‘Personality psychology as a truly behavioural science’ and against the background of a growing behavioural assessment toolbox, we aim to take stock: How well does personality science describe and explain what people are actually doing in their personal, social, and occupational lives—and how might we do better?

Finally, I invite you to consider three open calls for paper proposals concerning future special issues. First, as we do every year, we are searching for target papers to appear in our ‘European Personality Review Special Issue’; conceptual pieces that initiate new lines of research and theory, provide a coherent framework for existing theory and lines of research, or focus on critical or controversial issues that have important consequences for personality research (see https://wol-prod-cdn.literatumonline.com/pb-assets/assets/10990984/EJP_2020_European%20Personality%20Reviews_Call_for_Papers_b.pdf). Second, and following up on recent contributions by Filip Lievens (2017) on the integration of personnel selection and personality research and by Christopher Hopwood (2018) on interpersonal dynamics in personality and personality disorders, we seek paper proposals for a special issue on ‘Personality Dynamics in Applied Research’ edited by Joanna Sosnowska, Joeri Hofmans, John Rauthmann, and Bart Wille (https://wol-prod-cdn.literatumonline.com/pb-assets/assets/10990984/CfP_EJP_Applied%20Personality%20Dynamics_updated.pdf). Third, Malgorzata Fajkowska is focusing on a classic and timely theme of personality psychology and invites you to submit proposals for a special issue on ‘Personality coherence and incoherence’ (https://wol-prod-cdn.literatumonline.com/pb-assets/assets/10990984/CfP_EJP_Personality_Coherence-1546609078560.pdf).

I am already looking forward to the many exciting issues ahead of us and invite you to be part of them.

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