

Editorial

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In all that we do in our academic and intellectual lives, there are few experiences—at least in my view—like reading a systematic, integrative, authoritative, and commanding review of the literature on a topic of interest. Such reviews inspire appreciation for good science and for the importance of psychology as a field. They often inspire motivation to pursue additional, cutting-edge investigations. Well-constructed reviews are typically marked by their ability to define core variables and constructs; to reveal conflicts and gaps in the knowledge base; to argue (narratively, quantitatively, or both) for certain kinds of associations between variables of interest or causal effects of key factors on important outcomes; to identify moderators, mediators, and potential underlying mechanisms that may explain linkages of interest; and to point the field toward promising new directions while simultaneously highlighting blind alleys and dead ends. Many such articles also provide cogent analysis of historical trends across the literature of a given subfield. Importantly, systematic reviews serve as wonderful teaching mechanisms, alerting scholars, policymakers, those with applied interests, and the general public of the potential for psychology to be of real relevance. Indeed, as described in his inaugural editorial as editor of this journal, and bespeaking the great teaching value of articles in this outlet, Robert Sternberg noted that reading an article in *Psychological Bulletin* is the “. . . best single vehicle for a continuing education in psychology” (Sternberg, 1991, p. 3).

For over a century, *Psychological Bulletin* has been the leading source of such systematic review articles for the entire discipline of psychology. Its impact is undoubted. For example, in 2007, according to the ISI Web of Knowledge’s Social Science Journal Citation Report, this journal had the highest impact factor across the 102 journals in multidisciplinary psychology, and it was the third-most-cited journal across more than 1,850 social science journals overall. Thus, a *Psychological Bulletin* article is apt to be read and cited widely, which emphasizes the sheer force of the work published in this outlet and which highlights the need for breadth, top-notch scholarship, clarity, and accessibility of prose in writing a viable manuscript for publication herein.

In this inaugural editorial I aim to discuss, in brief fashion, the nature of systematic review articles, the kinds of features that are critical in getting a manuscript to cross the high bar of acceptance in *Psychological Bulletin*, and some particular objectives and procedures to be prioritized during my editorial term.

Systematic Reviews of the Literature

In his own inaugural editorial for this journal 6 years ago, Cooper (2003) emphasized a scientific approach to integrative research reviews. He pointed out that whereas multiple treatises have been written, across the history of psychology, on conducting experiments and field research, until relatively recent times scientific interest in the compilation of evidence across multiple studies through systematic reviews has been almost an afterthought. The benefits of Cooper’s editorship to *Psychological Bulletin* and its readers have been great, given his strong interest and skill in elucidating the properties of scientific review syntheses, a major focus of his own research.

Cooper (2003) provided a taxonomy of literature reviews, marked by the core dimensions of their focus, goal, perspective, coverage, organization, and audience. Selecting among the many points made, he noted, with respect to organization, that any of several organizational schemes can apply to reviews in *Psychological Bulletin*—that is, historical, methodological, or conceptual—depending on the review’s purpose. With regard to audience, his contention was that scholars, policymakers, and the general public all read this journal, a list to which I would add students. His clear message was that authors should not only be aware of these core dimensions but also communicate a given manuscript’s “placement” along them when framing the manuscript’s arguments.

He also addressed head-on the question of whether research reviews for *Psychological Bulletin* should employ formal, quantitative meta-analyses. His answer, appropriately enough, was that it all depends. Specifically, when the purpose of a review is to summarize research findings toward the end of understanding relationships among variables of interest, meta-analysis should be the “default” option. Indeed, a clever experimental study from earlier in his career revealed that presentation of formal meta-analyses leads readers to draw more accurate conclusions about associations between variables than traditional qualitative accounts (see Cooper & Rosenthal, 1980). In other words, when randomly assigned to a quantitative versus qualitative review article on precisely the same database, readers of the former were more accurate with respect to concluding what the actual findings presented.

Still, different goals for a review (e.g., providing a conceptual or historical account), or the presence of different paradigms across a research literature (precluding amalgamation of studies), may dictate against a formal meta-analytic strategy. Many or even most *Psychological Bulletin* articles may not contain formal meta-analyses. In short, there are no absolute givens for review articles; the particular objectives and the state of the literature for a particular topic area will dictate the optimal procedures for amalgamation and synthesis of the findings.

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The current editorial team for *Psychological Bulletin* will maintain such methodological pluralism in considering the best means of communicating the state of a given psychological literature. It is incumbent upon authors to have in mind enough of an overview of their own objectives—and of the status of the scientific output in the area of interest—to make wise decisions with respect to presentation of findings, synthesis of results, and discussion of core conclusions. Having several options, and choosing wisely among them, is the best strategy.

Components and Features of a *Psychological Bulletin* Article

With all this in mind, what are the components and features that we consider in evaluating manuscripts for publication in *Psychological Bulletin*? The rejection rate for submitted manuscripts has been over 80% for some time, so the bar is indeed high. Among a host of issues and potential criteria, I emphasize the following eight points.

First, I have streamlined the journal’s previous Likert-style rating system for reviewers to incorporate a set of five items, plus an overall recommendation. Reviewers are asked to complete these in the process of providing a narrative account of their reactions to the manuscript. The rating items are presented in Figure 1.

Second, during the months that the current editorial board has been considering new manuscripts, the journal continues to receive such items as reports of empirical research (i.e., regular scientific articles) and what I would term “opinion pieces” (i.e., an author’s perspective on an important topic in the field, but lacking any systematic consideration of the literature) or “soft” literature reviews (cursory reviews of a scientific field, but without a detailed examination of core findings). Such pieces are typically rejected without outside review, after I have read them carefully. I therefore urge potential contributors to pay attention to the Instructions to Authors and to recognize that the purpose of *Psychological Bulletin*, as listed inside each copy of the journal and at its website (<http://www.apa.org/journals/bul/>), is to publish “. . . articles that evaluate and synthesize the research literature on issues in scientific psychology. The journal features comprehensive research integrations, often cross-disciplinary in nature, that increase the reader’s understanding of substantive issues in all areas of psychology.” Importantly, a research synthesis must involve a literature large enough to truly analyze and synthesize; the typical *Psychological Bulletin* article is fairly lengthy (40–60 manuscript pages, excluding tables and references) and almost inevitably contains one or more comprehensive tables, listing the findings of the primary research articles that are subject to either qualitative or quantitative analysis. Thus, it is essential for authors to examine carefully the scope of the literature under consideration: Is it sufficiently large that a viable synthesis is truly possible?

Third, related to the *focus* of the manuscript, if the topic is theory development or explicit theory comparison, *Psychological Review* is usually the “home” for such work (see <http://www.apa.org/journals/rev/>). Alternatively, if the focus is explicitly on methods (e.g., collecting, analyzing, understanding, and interpreting psychological data; research design, measurement, methodology, quantitative/qualitative analysis; assessment tools; psychometric or statistical procedures), then *Psychological Methods* is likely to be the appropriate venue—as it has been for the past 14

A. Is the topic appropriate for *Psychological Bulletin*?

1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
definitely unsuitable—too narrow or specialized or obscure	probably unsuitable	probably suitable	definitely suitable— appropriately broad and integrative

B. Is the paper intellectually stimulating?

1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
unimaginative and non-stimulating	some stimulation provided	considerably stimulating	imaginative and stimulating

C. Detail of specific works reviewed

1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
Review of specific investigations too cursory	Review of specific investigations marginally helpful	Review of specific investigations fairly helpful	Review of specific investigations “on target” (enough detail provided in text or tables)

D. Are the conclusions reasonable?

1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
conclusions not warranted based on the review	conclusions need greater qualification	conclusions reasonably supported by the review	conclusions well supported by the review

E. Is the presentation clear and readable?

1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
barely comprehensible	needs extensive re- writing	largely clear and readable	a model of clarity

RECOMMENDATION

1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
Reject, not worth revising or rewriting	Reject, but consider a revision (which would need to be considerable)	Encourage revision; good chance of success	Accept essentially “as is” or with minor revisions

Figure 1. Evaluation criteria for manuscripts submitted to *Psychological Bulletin*.

years, since it “broke off” from *Psychological Bulletin* (see <http://www.apa.org/journals/met/>). The focus of *Psychological Bulletin* is almost always on the *content* of scientific articles in a given area of psychological research, whatever the particular content area may be.

Fourth, as emphasized in guides for publishing excellent, systematic review articles (see Bem, 1995), there is no prescribed organizational scheme or fixed set of headers that one must follow in preparing a manuscript for *Psychological Bulletin*. Depending on one’s framework and objectives, headings may be historical in nature, they may be related to substantive subareas of the review, or they may be linked to methodological subdivisions of the studies reviewed. I recommend that potential authors read any recent (or even not-so-recent) issue of *Psychological Bulletin* to gain a sense of the diverse aims, organizational schemes, and presentation styles that can “work” for publications herein.

Fifth, must review articles be neutral in tone, to the point of sterility? The answer is “decidedly not.” Although impartiality in

considering which research to include (see below) and how to evaluate its merits is essential, a mere cataloguing of empirical studies, no matter how interesting or important they may be, would be a dry affair indeed. Interpretive commentary and perspective by the author are essential, and it is clearly acceptable to “take a position” on the synthesis provided in the review. At the same time, authors should make explicit when they are evaluating evidence with a valenced perspective as opposed to when they are undertaking an objective review of contents.

Sixth, considerable attention must be paid to the sources of the literature under review. Just as convenience samples of research participants are highly suspect, “convenience samples” of research articles may be biased in known and unknown ways. Authors must clearly state their means of obtaining the literature that is reviewed, with an eye toward gathering the most representative sampling of investigations possible (e.g., PsycINFO or Google Scholar lists; systematic scouring of reference lists of extant articles; means of probing unpublished works, which may be important for a more accurate appraisal of effect sizes—see Rosenthal, 1979; or combinations thereof). In some cases it may also be advisable to probe colleagues and/or relevant authors for relevant research from unpublished reports in their laboratories. Sampling is as important for literature reviews as it is for empirical investigations.

Seventh, one of the key qualitative judgments that must be made in ascertaining the suitability of a manuscript for *Psychological Bulletin* is whether the subject matter is sufficiently broad and important for a journal of this breadth and generality. Many otherwise competent reviews may of interest largely to specialists in a particular subfield; they may not pique the interest of the wide range of readers of this journal. Part of the issue here is the breadth of the investigations under consideration, as well as their ability to generate intellectual excitement; but another is the author’s skill in convincing readers that the problem under review is of real importance, with generalizable content. In short, successful manuscripts for *Psychological Bulletin* must make a good case for the significance of the topic outside narrow subspecialty lines.

Finally, and absolutely crucially, a *Psychological Bulletin* article should sparkle in terms of its writing (see Bem, 1995, for pointed and inspiring advice in this regard). Above and beyond clear sentences and paragraphs—and a compelling organizational framework—an article in this outlet should let readers across the entire discipline know why this particular topic is as important as the authors believe it to be (see the point immediately above). It should speak, when needed, to historical advances leading to the current state of the art, key conceptual issues and debates, and the potential for implications and applications beyond the theoretical controversies or methodological issues that are salient largely to the author. Indeed, writers of high-quality review articles must work toward a kind of “omniscient stance” in organizing their thinking and writing, with awareness of their goals and purposes, their coverage and organization, and the intended audience for their work, making explicit any biases they may have and any underlying assumptions that drive the review. They should also provide appropriate guidance for readers with respect to criteria for appraising the literature. Throughout, the writing must be compelling, logical, and lucid. The current editorial team will not be afraid to offer guidance and suggestions regarding how to enhance the clarity of a given submission’s messages.

Issues and Initiatives for the Current Term

Because many readers may not know of the process of selection of American Psychological Association (APA) journal editors, I provide a brief synopsis of my own experience as a nominee. In early 2007, completely unexpectedly, I was informed that I had been nominated for the editorship of *Psychological Bulletin*. After my indication of potential interest (and more out of morbid curiosity than anything else), I was asked to provide some written thoughts about the goals, objectives, and perspectives I might bring to this position. Along with the names of potential references, I submitted the requested 2,000 or so words to APA.

Not quite half a year later, per the prespecified timetable, I received a text message that I should stay tuned for further correspondence and was soon contacted by APA with an offer for the position. After several discussions and following some soul-searching on my part, I agreed. Although my opening “application essay” is not necessarily binding, I recently re-read it in preparation for this editorial. Here are some crucial points.

1. Paraphrasing a bit, I argued that it is hard to mess with as good a thing as *Psychological Bulletin*—and that it would be foolhardy to envision any radical changes. Still, I noted, the playing field is shifting in terms of review articles in psychology, as other venues for thoughtful review pieces have emerged in recent years (e.g., *Perspectives in Psychological Science*, published by the Association for Psychological Science). To keep its status as the “home” for the field’s most systematic, interesting, authoritative, and widely cited reviews, *Psychological Bulletin* must not only maintain its high editorial standards but also look toward innovation. Commentaries on selected articles of wide interest, or those with particularly provocative findings, may be invited in selected cases; as noted above, the editorial staff will work diligently with authors to shape lucid prose. In addition, I have taken seriously APA’s urging of all journal editors to consider diversity at the levels of solicitation of manuscripts, the editorial team, and the reviewers. Furthermore, given the increasing fragmentation and specialization that exists within the vast domain of psychological science, *Psychological Bulletin* will continue to be a venue that appeals to all psychologists, as well as disciplines beyond psychology, by featuring reviews that span the content domains and include interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives.

2. I contended, and continue to believe, that young psychologists, including those just beginning in their scientific efforts and even graduate students, can and should participate in writing systematic review articles. Certainly, the bulk of articles published in this outlet emanate from midcareer or senior scholars, a fact that is not surprising given that it may take substantial familiarity with wide-ranging literatures to gain the necessary perspective and understanding for writing a truly authoritative review. On the other hand, I can think of few better ways to engage in a topic of real interest, even passion, at the beginning of one’s career than embarking on a thorough synthesis of the literature on that topic. Indeed, fresh perspectives from diligent and creative young investigators are extremely welcome. As I wrote specifically in my essay,

Another perspective of mine is that, in addition to the obvious editorial role of producing a journal with top-notch work, a subsidiary objective for all editors—particularly the editor of an outlet like

Psychological Bulletin—is to promote the career development of authors, particularly students/post-docs/young scholars who are brave enough to attempt to publish their work in such a journal. Writing a positive, constructive, clearly articulated, yet critical review can be an essential piece of scholarship and teaching that may last the lifetime of an investigator/review-writer.

In fact, submitting two manuscripts to *Psychological Bulletin*—both of which became accepted articles (Hinshaw, 1987, 1992)—was among the seminal experiences of my post-doctoral and early-assistant-professor years. I was motivated to write the first by my puzzlement over contentions in developmental psychopathology (DP) that core pathologies of the externalizing spectrum—aggression/conduct problems and inattention/overactivity—were one and the same. Soon, I was reading works on factor analysis, external validation of psychiatric syndromes, wide-ranging correlates of child behavioral disturbance (including family, peer, and neuropsychological variables), and differential treatment outcome, contending that these domains were partially independent. I realized that a synthetic review might be helpful for the field while simultaneously helping me to organize my thinking on essential topics in my area of interest. Regarding the second article, I became interested in understanding the longitudinal associations between problem behavior and academic deficits, which led to consideration of a host of methodological and conceptual issues in the DP arena. Constructing this piece took me to new intellectual places regarding core DP constructs (see Cicchetti & Cohen, 2006; Hinshaw, 2008).

Each of these articles has been cited many more times than any empirical article I have ever authored or coauthored. Publishing in *Psychological Bulletin* promotes one's work and ideas in ways that most other journals simply cannot offer. Crucially, writing these articles helped me in setting my own research agenda for years to come. Overall, writing *Psychological Bulletin* reviews should not be reserved for already-established investigators. Getting excited about a topic, working to understand its historical antecedents, struggling with methodological and conceptual dilemmas, and forging a true synthesis can be a galvanizing force early in one's career. Rather than distracting from the key task for tenure of producing empirical articles, writing a synthetic review can organize and focus one's empirical work. It certainly does not hurt when promotion reviewers note that one has published in as an outlet as prestigious as *Psychological Bulletin*. Potential authors of all age cohorts should consider publishing in this journal.

3. From time to time there may be particularly controversial manuscripts that come to the attention of the editorial staff. This possibility has been a distinct reality for empirical journals in recent years, given notorious cases of falsified data in cold-fusion and stem-cell research, to name two salient examples (see Kennedy, 2006; for background on the Korean stem-cell fraud, see also <http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/2006/january25/med-kennedy-012506.html>). A key result is greater precautions and extra review procedures for such controversial, high-impact empirical pieces.

Although it is hard to imagine that outright falsification could plague a journal devoted to research syntheses, controversy can and does occur. Indeed, the publication of Rind, Tromovitch, and Bauserman (1998)—a review of the sequelae of child sexual abuse in college-student samples—placed *Psychological Bulletin* and the entire APA in a firestorm of controversy a decade ago. In the year

following its publication, talk-show hosts excoriated the conclusions, and both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives unanimously condemned the authors, given perceptions that the article was failing to consider the harmful outcomes of traumatic abuse and was attempting to normalize such practices. (For commentary on the part of the editors, see Sher & Eisenberg, 2000.) Although a thorough analysis is far beyond the scope of the present editorial, the bottom line is that particularly sensitive, politicized, or controversial topics can ignite explosive reactions and should require a sophisticated approach to contextualizing findings, even for review articles. At the same time, the integrity of the scientific process, and of peer review, needs to be upheld, even when the topic at hand deals with sensitive or politically controversial topic areas.

The goal here is decidedly *not* to suppress publication of important research or research syntheses. Rather, it is to appreciate that framing them—for example, by providing simultaneous commentaries and/or by supplying editorials that may highlight contentious points—may produce a clearer signal to multiple audiences about impact and import of such findings. Thus, in addition to thorough review, I aim to ensure that cogent perspectives are published alongside the core article for pieces that are provocative or potentially subject to misinterpretation (for a particularly thoughtful piece on handling contentious findings, see Sternberg, 2002). There is no doubt that rigorous scientific investigations and rigorous scientific reviews may challenge existing paradigms and deeply held beliefs. Needed is greater appreciation of the cumulative nature of science, respect for the peer review process, and acknowledgment of the need to approach areas of high controversy with both rigor and appropriate contextualization.

4. I feel compelled to provide a word about reviewing for *Psychological Bulletin*. With the proliferation of journals these days, along with the seemingly never-ending demands on all of our time, aided and abetted by the 24/7 culture of e-mail requests for just about everything, a request to review a manuscript for this journal may be viewed as particularly onerous, given the length and substance of the manuscripts submitted. Although any act of urging on my part may well be ignored, please remember this: Reading a submission to *Psychological Bulletin* may be a wonderful substitute for attending a seminar on the topic under consideration. With respect to submissions that my team and I have already considered, I have been amazed at the diligence, thoughtfulness, and utter thoroughness (e.g., five single-spaced pages of detailed commentary) of a number of the reviews provided. Like submitting a manuscript to *Psychological Bulletin*, providing a review for it can, in a far shorter timeframe, provide invaluable education while simultaneously serving the field. Please consider carefully our requests to review!

Conclusion

I am honored to have been selected for the editorship of this venerable journal, and I look forward to receiving systematic, integrative, compelling, and well-written manuscripts for the valuable space in *Psychological Bulletin*. The Associate Editors, Consulting Board, and I pledge to work with you to craft your manuscripts—if they near the threshold of acceptance—into the kinds of review articles that can propel the field forward across the vast terrain of psychology. It is a truism, but one worth repeating, that

a journal like *Psychological Bulletin* can only be as good as the submissions it receives. I therefore encourage psychologists and behavioral scientists of all persuasions and all age cohorts to consider investing the time, energy, and effort to sharpen their own interests and skills, and those of the field at large, by submitting high-quality, integrative, and systematic reviews to this journal and by reviewing for it when asked. The payoff will be great for all concerned.—Stephen P. Hinshaw, Editor

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