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NOT EVERYTHING CAN BE DECREED

The struggle against pathology in the form of plagiarism or data falsification is undoubtedly necessary. However, limiting such efforts to building a system of control will turn this struggle into a cops-and-robbers game played by controllers and dishonest scientists. In this kind of game, the robbers will prevail sooner or later. Institutional solutions should therefore lead to building a system enabling open access to raw data and making it possible to publish results in which no statistically significant differences were found between conditions. What is even more important is organic work in the academic community and the realization that dishonesty will hit all of us.

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The last few years have witnessed ongoing debates in world, European, and Polish psychology on what should be done to enhance the scientific standards of our discipline and, above all, to prevent serious pathologies and abuses that Jerzy Brzeziński writes about. I have no doubt that it is worth discussing new regulations – first of all, the transparency of research procedures, making raw results available, keeping full documentation of research, as well as the necessity of replicating the studies conducted. It is beyond doubt, too, that discussions alone will not do. Discussions should merely serve as an introduction to the implementation of specific solutions. Still, I am fully convinced that this is not the key issue.

The scientific community prosecuting those of its members who are guilty of crimes and offenses against Science will indeed resemble the cops-and-robbers game. The problem is that both in the game and in life the robbers are usually one step ahead of the cops. In psychology, when the “cops” detect a plagiarist and demonstrate that certain paragraphs in the original work are identical to

those in the “suspicious” one, subsequent offenders already know that, when plagiarizing, they must replace the original words in each paragraph with their synonyms, split some of the sentences into two parts, and combine other sentences into a compound-complex structure. In psychology, when the “cops” perform an analysis of standard deviations in each group and announce that they have identified an offender in this way, subsequent offenders already know that, when fabricating data, it is necessary to pay close attention to standard deviations. What is more, the cops-and-robbers game is not satisfactory for the cops-scientists, who could focus on their own theoretical and research ideas instead of pursuing offenders. After all, practicing science is not about scientists earning recognition by policing. So, what is crucial? Self-awareness! The belief of the entire community and of each researcher that dishonesty is pointless. And what makes it pointless is not even the fact that it can be exposed but, above all, the fact that success achieved dishonestly cannot give satisfaction.

Therefore, when considering formal and institutional solutions we should not focus exclusively on the procedures of detecting and prosecuting cases of academic dishonesty or negligence. What I consider extremely important is publishing papers based on research in which differences between means across experimental conditions are not found to be nonsignificant, in which correlation is close to zero, and in which beta value is close to the desirable level of significance. The researchers who obtain such results should not be discriminated against. From the perspective of pursuing the truth, such results are not any worse than those that reveal strong effects. Yet, the reality in which we find ourselves functioning is completely different. Editorial boards of journals usually disapprove of “zero findings.” Nearly 20 years ago I performed a replication of the research conducted by B. W. Johnson (1937), who asked American students for 65 consecutive days about what mood they were in compared to their typical mood. It turned out that the respondents usually declared that they felt... better than usual. In contrast, the Polish students I examined tended to say that they felt... worse than usual (Dolinski, 1996). It can therefore be said that Americans and Poles reveal a funny bias – but in opposing directions. Americans affirm reality (in this case: their own mood) while Poles invariably complain (in this case: about their own mood). So much for history (for now). A few months ago I was contacted by a researcher who had just replicated the same study in Poland again and found that students “usually felt as usual,” which means they showed no bias (either positive or negative). The editors of one of Polish journals rejected her paper on this subject on the grounds that “Dolinski found something quite different.” I did, it is true – but that should not shatter anyone’s chance to

publish research that revealed a different pattern of results. In this context, it is also worth referring to a different study, conducted a dozen years ago by Wojciszke and Baryła (2005). Admittedly, they asked their subjects about mood (“in comparison with their own typical mood”) only once, but they did that with a representative group of Poles. They found negative bias, just as I did. The number of Poles regarding their mood as “worse than usual” was higher than the number of Poles declaring their mood to be “better than usual.” What is interesting, though, is that this negative bias was not found in young people. In the young population, the groups declaring that they felt “better than usual” and those declaring that they felt “worse than usual” were approximately equal. The person I corresponded with and who found no bias examined young people (students) as well...

It is highly probable that cultural, civilizational, and political changes result in the young generation of Poles functioning in a way somewhat similar to the way their American peers function and at the same time different from the way their parents functioned two decades ago. Perhaps the next generation of 20-year-olds, examined around 2035, will display a pattern characteristic of Americans, namely positive bias.

Passing time is an important but, unfortunately, totally ignored psychological variable. It is worth investigating how certain patterns of attitudes and behaviors change over time and how their cultural unification proceeds... If, in 2035, someone shows that Polish students “usually feel better than usual” and are very similar to Americans in this respect, then in the paper reporting these findings it will be worth not only writing that 40 years before young Poles “usually felt worse than usual” but also adding that 20 years before they no longer exhibited any deviations from rationality. Well, yes: this will be worth doing, but how is a researcher to know these results if they will not have been published? One must bear in mind that the results that seem “not very interesting” today may become immensely interesting if we consider the passing time vector as well as the related civilizational and cultural changes. Looking at it more broadly: the results that seem to be of little interest may be very interesting in the context of other results.

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