

JOHN B. NEZLEK

College of William & Mary

Department of Psychology

University of Social Sciences and Humanities

Faculty in Poznań

THE IMPORTANCE OF NORMS AND VALUES:
COMMENTS ON JERZY M. BRZEZIŃSKI'S ARTICLE
ON THE STATE OF POLISH PSYCHOLOGY

I think Prof. Brzeziński has described some important issues facing Polish psychology and other disciplines. Moreover, I think that many of the issues he raises such as the rise of bibliometrics and honesty in conducting research apply to all countries and disciplines, not just Poland and psychology. In my comments I describe my broad agreement with the Professor's evaluations. The only difference between us is that I think that solutions to the problems science (and academia in general) face need to emphasize the roles of values and norms more than the Professor described. Academia is in danger of being conceptualized as just another service business, a view that I think portends very poorly for the future. Noting this, I suspect he will agree with what I suggest, and that this difference is not one of substance, just relative emphasis.

Keywords: bibliometrics, research integrity, norms for conducting research.

I thank the editors of *Annals of Psychology* for inviting me to comment on Prof. Brzeziński's well written and very interesting article. I was flattered by the invitation, and I hope that my comments match the high standards of the article they concern. I have organized my comments around the questions posed by Prof. Brzeziński, and I have taken the liberty to offer some comments that were inspired by his remarks, although they may not directly concern what he wrote.

Question 1: Specificity of Research Carried Out in Poland

I think Prof. Brzeziński outlined the major issues underlying this question. Moreover, I agree with his general conclusion that Polish psychology will be best served by placing itself within the broader context of the international scientific community. Noting this, I think that there is still some room for a “Polish psychology” that is defined in terms of topics and theoretical stances but not by methods or standards by which truth statements are evaluated. The latter clearly need to be international. Poland, like any country, culture, or society, has a unique history that informs how Poles think, feel, and behave, and it is useful to understand this uniqueness and its limitations. Regardless, researchers who claim to be studying a “Polish only phenomenon” are obliged to do more than simply assert this. Moreover, it would be beneficial to determine if something that is thought to be specific to Poland is a manifestation of something that exists in other cultures/countries, albeit in a different form.

Question 2: Publishing in Polish and Internationally

Again, I think that Prof. Brzeziński outlined the major issues underlying this question, and I agree with his general conclusion that Polish psychologists need to publish both in Polish and in English, the default language for international science. By the way, I think that English will remain the language of international science for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, psychological texts serve important purposes in addition to communicating the results of research and the presentation of theoretical positions. Teachers, students, and practitioners need to have access to native language materials to teach, learn, and practice. Such a dual responsibility places an additional burden on Polish psychologists however, and this additional burden needs to be recognized when evaluating Polish psychologists and their accomplishments.

Question 3: Evaluating Professional Achievement

This is a question that is being discussed in academic circles across the world, and the rise of bibliometrics was seen as an answer to this question – objective measures of scientific achievement and eminence could be used to provide a fair and impartial basis for judging achievement. Unfortunately, although bibliometrically based measures of accomplishment can provide valuable information, they are not a panacea. More unfortunately, they are being treated as such by many. Increasingly, raw bibliometric data are replacing judgment. One

does not need to read a scholar's articles to evaluate what he or she has done. Simply calculating the h-index suffices.

The type of detailed, individually focused bibliometrics that are now available are relatively new, and I hope that the present fascination with them diminishes as their novelty wears off. Bibliometric indices can and perhaps should be part of the evaluation of scholarship, but they need to be part of evaluations; they cannot be the evaluations themselves. In this sense, bibliometrics are similar to psychological tests. No one should be admitted or denied access to a program solely based on a test score. No one should be diagnosed with a psychological disorder based solely on the basis of responses to a survey or questionnaire. Psychological tests are intended to help people make decisions. They are not designed to be used in isolation, and bibliometric summaries of scholarship should be treated similarly.

Question 4: Scientific Pathologies

Although recent and newsworthy cases may make it appear to be, the problem of fraud in scientific research is not new. For example, many believe that Cyril Burt falsified data for some of his publications in the early-mid 20th century. Scientists are people, and there will always be some level of fraud. The important challenge is how to reduce fraud. Although I agree with much of what Prof. Brzeziński suggested about dealing with fraud, I am not certain that structural solutions will solve the problem. Yes, replication will help, but do we really want to require replication before something is published? We already have this in multi-study articles, and the publication process already takes too long. Data access, which is being widely discussed, has been required for some time, at least by APA ethical procedures. Moreover, if someone is going to fabricate data on the order that Stapel did, what would prevent such a person from fabricating a replication and making the fabricated data available? Calls to require registration of studies before they are conducted also provide a false sense of security. Who will watch the watchers? Distrust breeds dishonesty.

Like children, scientists need to be socialized properly. They need to be taught the norms of science. Scientists need to make norms clear to students. I was taught experimental methods by Jack Brehm. It was quite clear from his instruction (in and out of class) that you ran the number of subjects that you planned to run. You did not analyze the data as you went along waiting to "catch" a significant result. It was also quite clear from his instruction that you discarded subjects before you analyzed the data and that you described how

many you discarded and why in your report. These and other practices were not options, suggestions, or good ideas to consider; they were rules, etched in stone. Cheating at science is like cheating at solitaire – you are only fooling yourself. Now, if you are playing solitaire to impress someone else that is a different story; other motives are involved.

Some Additional Thoughts

To me, the great danger facing science and higher education, in Poland and out, psychology and elsewhere, is the increasing pressure to think of science and education as businesses. Knowledge is a product and students are customers. In business, “the customer is always right” – this can hardly be applied to students. In business, the bottom line (profit) is the hallmark criterion for success. Science and education have no such convenient metric (even bibliometrics). Although science and education need to be efficient, business does not have a stranglehold on efficiency. Scientists and educators can learn from business, but we do not need to emulate business practice. What works in one domain may fail miserably in another.

I think that the current fascination with bibliometrics and the types of pathologies Prof. Brzeziński discusses stem (in part) from the adoption of business models in science and education. Scholars are pressured to produce more and more under the false impression that numbers are magical indicators of quality, and careers become pursuits of numbers rather than pursuits of knowledge. This emphasis is helping transform publication from a manifestation of the pursuit of knowledge to an indicator of success. What was an end in and of itself is becoming a means to an end – success and a reputation. Moreover, as such norms and practices become more salient and commonplace, I think we attract more individuals who are more focused on success rather than knowledge, and that such people, like Stapel, are more likely to violate ethical norms because the ends (success) justify the means (lying).

I think Polish psychology is facing many of the same problems that psychological communities in other countries are facing. Of course, there are differences from place to place, but issues of evaluation and integrity and the balance between teaching and research are international. Papers such as Prof. Brzeziński’s are a way to simulate and focus discussions around core issues, discussions that are needed to solve the problems we all face. I am pleased to have been included in this conversation.