



**AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION**  
SERVICES, INC.

April 1, 2024

Re: Notice number (NOT-NS-24-052), Request for Information on Potential Solutions for Reducing Publication Bias Against Null Studies

Via email: [RigorChampions@nih.gov](mailto:RigorChampions@nih.gov)

To whom it may concern:

I am pleased to respond on behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA) to NINDS's Request for Information on reducing publication bias against null studies. The APA is the nation's largest scientific and professional nonprofit organization representing the discipline and profession of psychology. The Association represents over 157,000 members and affiliates who are clinicians, researchers, educators, consultants, and students in psychological science. APA is proud to publish 90 peer reviewed journals spanning the breadth and depth of psychology, many in partnership with APA's specialty divisions and other national and international societies.

APA Journals supports the publication of null results. See <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/resources/open-science>, in which we say that "all APA core journals encourage the submission of replication studies, regardless of their results, including null findings (i.e., where study hypotheses were not supported or failed to reach conventional levels of statistical significance, yet can still contribute to advancing the literature)."

APA has endorsed the Transparency and Openness Promotion (TOP) Guidelines<sup>1</sup>, developed in part to address some of the gaps in the literature due to the "file drawer" problem of null results languishing in metaphorical file drawers. The [article](#) introducing the TOP Guidelines cites a key *Psychological Bulletin* [article](#)<sup>2</sup> describing the issue and points to Franco, Malhotra, & Simonovits (2014) as evidence that null results are published less frequently than results found to be statistically significant.<sup>3</sup>

### **Significant barriers to addressing publication bias.**

Our journal staff have observed that authors are pressured to publish in highly cited journals whose editors are reluctant to dilute the perceived quality of their journals by publishing articles whose findings are not novel or significant. Editors may be reluctant to lower their journals' impact factors by publishing work that is likely to be cited less often.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nosek, B. A., Alter, G., Banks, G. C., Borsboom, D., Bowman, S. D., Breckler, S. J., Buck, S., Chambers, C. D., Chin, G., Christensen, G., Contestabile, M., Dafoe, A., Eich, E., Freese, J., Glennerster, R., Goroff, D., Green, D. P., Hesse, B., Humphreys, M., I. Yarkoni, T. (2016, October 5). Transparency and Openness Promotion (TOP) Guidelines. *Science*, 348(6242), 1422–1425. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aab2374>

<sup>2</sup> Rosenthal, R. (1979). The file drawer problem and tolerance for null results. *Psychological Bulletin*, 86(3), 638–641. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.86.3.638>

<sup>3</sup> Franco, A., Malhotra, N., & Simonovits. (2014, August 28). Publication bias in the social sciences: Unlocking the file drawer. *Science*, 345(6203), 1502–1505. [DOI: 10.1126/science.125548](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.125548)

<sup>4</sup> Duyx, B., Urlings, M. J. E., Swaen, G. M. H., Bouter, L. M., & Zeegers, M. P. (2017). Scientific citations favor positive results: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of clinical epidemiology*, 88, 92–101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2017.06.002>

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Researchers and faculty of color are likely disproportionately impacted given how publication metrics play into decisions of tenure and promotion. APA's recent task force report on Promotion, Tenure and Retention of Faculty of Color in Psychology (p.14) noted,

A review of trends in publishing of cross-cultural psychology and ethnic minority psychology across journals published by the APA and Association for Psychological Science (APS) found that the substantial majority of articles are published in specialty journals and journals with low impact factors (Hartmann et al., 2013). Further, little change in trends occurred between the 1990s and the 2000s. These patterns suggest that cross-cultural and ethnic minority psychology continue to be relegated to the margins of the field. The practice often translates into lower journal impact factors for that research, a metric often used to evaluate research merit (Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022). This dynamic is one way that faculty of color, who are often engaged in such scholarship, might experience devaluation of their research in the tenure and promotion process.<sup>5</sup>

### **Potential solutions to publication bias across biomedical research fields.**

Potential remedies for publication bias from a publisher perspective include mitigating tenure and promotion-related citation pressure; making it easy to register and get credit for registering protocols at every stage (tenure and promotion, funding, and publication); and better registration infrastructure for protocols.

Another suggestion is that journal editors require that authors preregister their studies (see [Laitin et al., 2021](#)); other proposals outlined here include empowering IRBs and funders to require registration of protocols and dissemination plans for all results.<sup>6</sup> Challenges that remain, though, have to do with discoverability and indexing of null results in a way that is standardized and useful to researchers.

Eighteen APA journals publish registered reports, an article type in which a protocol is peer reviewed for its study design and methodology and accepted on that basis – as long as the final manuscript adheres to the study protocol, it will be published, regardless of results. APA Journals supports preprints as a way of making articles that have not been published freely available.

Thank you for raising this important issue. APA is glad to work with you on potential solutions. Please contact me or Corbin Evans, [Cevans@apa.org](mailto:Cevans@apa.org), for more information.

Sincerely,



Mitchell Prinstein, PhD  
Chief Science Officer

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<sup>5</sup>American Psychological Association, APA Task Force on Inequities in Academic Tenure and Promotion. (2023) APA Task Force Report on Promotion, Tenure and Retention of Faculty of Color in Psychology. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/inequitiesacademic-tenure-promotion.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Laitin, D. D., Miguel, E., Alrababa'h, A., Bogdanoski, A., Grant, S., Hoeberling, K., Hyunjung Mo, C., Moore, D. A., Vazire, S., Weinstein, J., & Williamson, S. (2021). Reporting all results efficiently: A RARE proposal to open up the file drawer. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 118(52), e2106178118. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2106178118>

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