

Towards a global psychological science

Two Comments in this issue discuss how international efforts to make psychology more representative of the global population continue to privilege Western perspectives.

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Just over a decade ago, the acronym ‘WEIRD’ (Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic) entered the psychological science lexicon¹. As described in the article that coined the term, the overreliance on WEIRD samples limits the generalizability of psychology research: WEIRD participants represent only a thin slice of the human population, and are frequent outliers in their performance.

Although the term WEIRD has become ubiquitous in psychology, change in response to the criticism that there is an overreliance on WEIRD samples has been slow to materialize. For example, authors and participant samples in articles published between 2014 and 2018 in six prominent psychology journals were still predominantly from English-speaking and Western countries, which represent only 11% of the world’s population². Indeed, nearly all Reviews published in *Nature Reviews Psychology* so far call for more research with non-WEIRD samples.

Two Comments in this issue discuss ongoing efforts to make psychology research more globally representative through international collaborations. Both pieces acknowledge that the increase in such collaborations — in particular, between wealthier, well-resourced countries and lower-income countries or countries from the global South — represents progress and is well-intentioned. However, critical limitations remain.

Adeyemi Adetula and colleagues [draw attention](#) to the fact that international projects aiming to understand cultural variation in psychological processes almost universally test whether effects documented in Western countries generalize to other populations. This one-sided approach to generalizability limits psychological theories because they fail to include concepts, phenomena or processes outside Western experience. More importantly, this approach prioritizes research

topics that might be irrelevant to the local populations that are ostensibly ‘included’. Focusing on Africa, the authors note that this approach to international projects risks recreating neocolonial dynamics “in which African labour goes toward generating knowledge that is mostly relevant to rich white people.”

Leher Singh describes another facet of neocolonialism in psychology: [imbalances of power and privilege](#) in collaborations between high-income countries (HIC) and low- and/or middle-income countries (LMIC). For example, studies conducted in LMICs typically do not include any authors from the LMIC in which data were collected, which reflects normalized practices of exclusion. Furthermore, entrenched Western-centric narratives confer high credibility to HIC ‘outsiders’ and low credibility to LMIC ‘insiders.’ This imbalance compromises the integrity of the scientific narrative and limits understanding of human behaviour: even studies conducted in non-Western settings with non-Western participants are ultimately filtered through a Western perspective.

The publication of these two Comments coincides with the release of a new framework from the Nature Portfolio that aims to improve inclusion and ethics in global research³. As part of this new guidance, authors are encouraged to follow the recommendations of the [Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings](#) when developing, conducting, and communicating research. Authors are also encouraged to provide a disclosure statement of how local researchers were included, whether and when researcher roles and responsibilities were agreed upon, and the local relevance of the research.

The steps outlined in this new framework resonate with Singh’s recommendations for more equitable authorship practices and more transparent contributor statements. However, Singh stresses that “true change relies on changing research practices well before publication.” Psychology still has a long way to go before becoming truly global. We hope that drawing attention to these issues and critically reflecting on the progress made and remaining challenges will help to catalyse change.



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1. Henrich, J., Heine, S. J. & Norenzayan, A. The weirdest people in the world? *Behav. Brain Sci.* **33**, 61–83 (2010).
2. Thalmayer, A. G., Toscanelli, C. & Arnett, J. J. The neglected 95% revisited: is American psychology becoming less American? *Am. Psychol.* **76**, 116–129 (2021).
3. *Nature* addresses helicopter research and ethics dumping. *Nature* **606**, 7 (2022).