Author’s response to reviews

Title: Moral Orientations in Psychology: Contrasting Theoretical Perspectives

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Birgitta Dresp-Langley
Associate Editor
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February 03, 2019
Dear Dr. Dresp-Langley,

I was pleased to receive your letter dated 13/01/2019, which provided the opportunity to revise and resubmit my manuscript entitled “Moral Orientations in Psychology: Contrasting Theoretical Perspectives” (ID: PSYO-D-18-00185). Feedback from reviewers was exceptionally useful, and I believe the manuscript is improved in its new iteration.

The explicit details of my revisions are provided below. Page numbers are included with these details so that corresponding edits can be easily found. As instructed, such edits were made using track changes. The revised manuscript has been uploaded for your review. I have given each reviewers’ comments thorough attention, making revisions were appropriate. Additionally, I have provided detailed explanation when making no or conservative changes.

Thank you for considering the revised manuscript for publication in BioMed Central.

Sincerely,

James Wiley, BA
Alumni, Department of Psychology,
Carleton University
Please find enclosed the requested revisions to my manuscript (ID: PSYO-D-18-00185) entitled “Moral Orientations in Psychology: Contrasting Theoretical Perspectives”. Below are descriptions of how I attended to reviewers’ suggestions, which have also been indicated in text using track changes.

Response to reviewer 1 (Dr. Claus-Christian Carbon):

I would like to thank Dr. Claus-Christian Carbon for pointing out sections of the current manuscript that were unclear or overly suggestive of an unintended message. My responses to this reviewer’s comments are as follows:

Comment 1: The authors' major claim is that the relational development systems (RDS) approach represents "significant advancements for psychological research as a whole".

Response 1: This comment suggests that the main aim of the manuscript lacks clarity and several revisions have been made to improve this. Although it is understandable how this interpretation could have been made, this is not the main aim of the paper. The main aim of the paper is to criticise RDS theorists’ claim that the sciences must operate within a morally righteous framework. This is achieved by contrasting RDS thought with perspectives in medical and public health research. Below I will outline the revisions I made to address this misconception:

In the first paragraph of the current manuscript (i.e., introduction; page 4) it may not have been clear that the aim of the paper was to criticise the RDS metamodel. Some wording changes were made to address this (i.e., changed the statement “the RDS metamodel has great scientific merit” to “While many aspects of the RDS metamodel are of scientific value, some of its propositions lack pragmatism”). Additionally, the contrast being made between the RDS metamodel and life history theory was not clear in this paragraph. Some wording changes have been made to make this contrast more explicit (i.e., added “in contrast,” before discussing life history theory). Some other minor wording changes were made to this paragraph with the aim of improving the clarity of the manuscripts’ overall message.
The current manuscript describes the RDS metamodel in great detail. I believe it is crucial to adequately and accurately describe a perspective that one is critiquing to ensure it is not misrepresented. However, I also recognize that this resulted in the main point of the manuscript being lost at times. To address this, I have revised the transition between the initial description of the RDS metamodel and the point at which I begin my critique of it. When discussing RDS theorists’ outlook on positive human development, the introduction to this section (page 7) was altered to read as such:

“The above premises appear well accepted across the human sciences (Lerner, 1984, 2015; Lerner, Johnson, et al., 2015). However, the RDS metamodel also adheres to an ethical obligation to facilitate positive human development (Lerner, Johnson, et al., 2015; Lerner & Overton, 2008). This perspective bears a degree of controversy when contrasted with viewpoints in medicine and public health (Wells et al., 2017).”

Previously, no context was provided regarding why this premise of the RDS metamodel was suddenly being discussed.

Comment 2: This major aim shows two essential problems: first, the RD approach is the common approach used in most areas of psychology;

Response 2: This was a valuable comment highlighting a potential gap in my description of RDS thought. RDS theorists aim to summarize those perspectives commonly held across many psychological theories in an attempt to unify researchers’ understanding of the human experience. Thus, the RDS metamodel is representative of common approaches used in psychology (as reviewer 1 points out). I have added a paragraph explaining this on page 4 and 5, which reads as follows:
“The RDS metamodel attempts to explicitly define the paradigm through which contemporary psychological research is conducted (Lerner, Johnson, et al., 2015). Thus, it is generally representative of perspectives in psychology and bears similarities with many pertaining theories. RDS proponents seek to outline the boundaries within which contemporary psychological science typically operates (Lerner, Johnson, et al., 2015; Overton, 2015). This distinguishes the RDS metamodel from lower level models, in that it aims to make explicit the often implicit assumptions made in psychological research. By pinpointing assumptions that are commonly made across segregated psychological disciplines, RDS theorists hope to promote a more unified understanding of the field as a whole.”

Additionally, minor wording changes were made throughout the current manuscript to reflect this more detailed understanding of the RDS metamodel.

Comment 3: second, we have to ask what the delta is between the current ms and the Lerner et al. (2015) paper.

Response 3: I hope that my response to Comment 1 and pertaining revisions have clarified the difference between the Lerner et al. (2015) paper and the current manuscript. The Learner et al. (2015) paper describes and promotes the RDS metamodel, whereas the current manuscript is a criticism of the RDS metamodel. Specifically, RDS theorists claim that the sciences should operate with some kind of moral righteousness in mind. By contrasting the RDS metamodel with life history theory (Wells et al., 2017) and varying perspectives in medicine, I aim to showcase that this premise is not pragmatic.

Comment 4: Furthermore, the text does not follow a clear red line but oscillates from one argument to another.

Response 4: I hope that revisions described in Responses 1 and 2 address this issue. Adding a more explicit transition to a major turning point in the current manuscript (i.e., Response 1) should reduce the appearance of there being multiple arguments, when really there is only one. Additionally, by clarifying the relationship between RDS thought and commonly held perspectives in psychology (i.e., Response 2), I hope that it is clearer to the reader what the main argument of the paper is.
Given this comment, it may be beneficial to discuss why the RDS metamodel and life history theory are described in such detail before pinpointing their singular point of contention. RDS theorists tend to react viscerally to anything that could even be remotely interpreted as supporting genetic determinism (Lerner, 2006, 2015). As an example of this one can refer to Greenberg (2016), where he criticises contemporary biologists (e.g., Marshall, 2015; Queller, 2011) for continuing to support inclusive fitness theory (Hamilton, 1964), given some of its earlier proponents (Nowak, Tarnita, & Wilson, 2010) have called for its abandonment. Traditional operationalisations of inclusive fitness theory could be seen as having loose ties to genetic determinism (Marshall, 2015). However, if one understands the mathematics behind what Nowak et al. (2010) are proposing as a replacement, it is clear that inclusive fitness theory and its supporters strongly advocate against genetically deterministic principles (Bourke, 2011; Marshall, 2015), whereas Nowak et al. (2010) argues in favour of deterministic science (Birch & Okasha, 2015). Greenberg’s (2016) interpretation is precisely the opposite of what is actually occurring. Being familiar with the inclusive fitness debate and having observed these kinds of misinterpretations, it is best to explicitly state one’s rejection of genetic determinism when criticising the RDS perspective. There is additional danger in that the current manuscript contrasts RDS thought with an evolutionary theory (i.e., life history theory; Wells et al., 2017), and suggest the former should adopt viewpoints from the latter. In reality, life history theory adheres to all premises promoted by the RDS metamodel save one, being its adherence to facilitating positive human development. All else is regarded as coherent and valuable by life history proponents (Wells et al., 2017), including the rejection of genetic determinism. My aim is to accurately reflect all of this in the current manuscript as to avoid misconception and criticism.

Comment 5: Please check the ref.list: some sources are not in accord with APA 6th ed., e.g. Kim et al. (2016) and Azim et al. (2016)

Response 5: I have fixed those references used as examples above and reviewed the remainder of the current manuscript’s reference list. I have also reviewed those references that failed to validate through BioMed Central’s reference checker. Thank you for noticing this.
Response to reviewer 2 (Dr. Christoph von Castell):

I would like to thank Dr. Christoph von Castell for taking the time to read and understand the current manuscript. I was pleased to read that pertaining insights were considered interesting and worthy of attention. I hope that changes made to address the first reviewer’s comments will still render the overall aim the paper clear.

Comment 1: Typo in line 38 on page 13: "psychological" should read 'psychology' or 'psychological research'.

Response 1: Thank you for noticing this, I have made an appropriate revision (i.e., Now on page 14, this sentence reads “While conformity yields a variety of social benefits (Brown, 2000), related detriments are famous in experimental psychology (e.g., Milgram, 1963; Zimbardo, 1973”).

References:


