

health psychology review

Review articles in Health Psychology: More important than ever!

Research in the field of psychology is burgeoning. There are more researchers and investigators, articles published, and journals than ever before. To a large extent, electronic databases and digital holdings for journals like Web of Science and Medline have revolutionized research and the process of locating articles has never been easier or more efficient. However, the sheer size of the psychology canon has, paradoxically, created new difficulties. Distilling, synthesising, and interpreting such a large body of literature presents a real challenge for scholars, particularly those wanting to identify a pithy, succinct précis of a particular field or area. As a consequence, researchers and academics increasingly turn to narrative and empirical reviews in order to get an up-to-date compendium of the research in their topic of interest. Furthermore, recognition of the importance of an evidence-base in the development of policy and practice in the field of health and medicine has also created the need for syntheses of research evidence in key areas. Such syntheses have been used extensively to inform practice in the health arena and will continue to do so (e.g., Cochrane database of systematic reviews). Finally, the rise of methods to conduct empirical syntheses of research evidence such as meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and, more recently, the meta-synthesis of qualitative research has also assisted in producing evidence-based summaries of the state of the literature in health psychology. Coupled with more traditional integrative narrative reviews, these syntheses are increasingly 'in demand' and highly-cited in the field.

As the editor of *Health Psychology Review (HPR)*, I view the journal as an essential forum for the dissemination of high quality empirical and narrative reviews of the literature. Its reputation is increasing with huge potential for making a lasting contribution to the fields of health psychology and behavioral medicine. The journal occupies a unique niche in the field as it is the only review publication of its kind and is clearly located as an essential reference for all psychologists seeking articles that summarise the state of the literature in the discipline of psychology applied to health, broadly defined. The journal has vast potential to attract citations and serve as an essential resource for academics, students, and practitioners of health psychology. It will serve as an important source of original thought in which theories and hypotheses in health psychology can be put forward, debated, modified, and refined. This will serve as an important step prior to future empirical and formative research that will verify theoretical developments. So, *HPR* is an essential reference and keystone publication that will summarize the state of the health psychology literature, catalyse future research, and spawn new, original thinking that will move the field forward.

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The journal has three aims. First, the reviews published in *HPR* must be of high quality. To this end, the journal aims to publish only manuscripts that make a contribution to advancing knowledge, thinking, and future research. I will outline later my comments on

what makes a good review article. Second, the journal aims to encourage authors to submit new, original contributions to the journal that will be of interest to the readership and address fundamental questions and contemporary topics in health psychology and behavioural medicine alike. The journal must play an active and progressive role in moving knowledge forward. To this end, the editorial team actively encourages authors to submit contributions in new formats that complement standard full-length articles. These will include commentaries and articles on methodological and practice issues. Third, the journal is already making an impact based on reports on the quality and originality of the contributions published so far, but also in terms of important metrics such as numbers of citations of *HPR* articles, electronic articles downloaded, and visits to the journal website. There is a clear need to formally quantify this impact, and my aim is to bring about the first impact factor for *HPR* in the next year. We have already received data on citations for the journal and have computed an unofficial impact factor of 1.33 and we hope that this will be higher when the official impact factor is released in the year or so.

What makes a 'good' review article?

Looking back on the hundreds of articles I read during the course of my doctoral research and tenure as an academic, a few have left a lasting and indelible impression on me and still influence my thinking to this day. Some of these articles fall into the 'classic' experiment or study category and represent ground-breaking research that changed the way psychologists viewed and theorised on a particular behavioural phenomenon or adopted a unique methodological approach that paved the way for future research. Others were narrative or systematic reviews of a particular field or area, but were equally as influential on my, and certainly many others', thinking and were highly influential in

advancing knowledge in the area and catalysed future research. Reflecting on these highly-influential review articles led me to further ruminate on the key ingredients that make a 'good' review article; a highly pertinent question for the editor of a review journal such as *Health Psychology Review* which has ambitions to be the lead forum for reviews on health psychology and behavioural medicine! Perusing the characteristics and features of the reviews that made such an impression on me, and likely many others, I have drawn up the following shortlist of candidate features that make a 'good' review article:

- (1) Originality
- (2) Advances knowledge and original thinking
- (3) Theory-based
- (4) Evidence-based
- (5) Accurate, comprehensive and rigorous
- (6) Recommendations for future enquiry
- (7) Stimulating debate

I will elaborate upon each of these features in a future editorial of *Health Psychology Review* in the hope that this will help guide those considering authoring a review in the field and submitting to the journal.

The future

On behalf of the Associate Editors and Editorial Board of *HPR*, I encourage readers and researchers to submit their best research syntheses, in the form of systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and new ideas, in the form of narrative reviews and commentaries, to the journal. The journal will continue to grow and expand in the next few years and I predict it will

become a centrepiece in the field that will promote original scholarship, broadly summarize and synthesize the research in the field, and provide innovative new theories that will engender further empirical study. I want *HPR* to be the 'go-to' journal for scholars who seek narrative reviews, meta-analyses, and systematic reviews that inform and innovate the field. I am confident that in the next few years the journal will establish itself as the leading review publication in the field with high impact and considered the *Psychological Bulletin* of the health psychology discipline. ■

This article is an updated version of an editorial that first appeared in Health Psychology Review:

Hagger, M. S. (2010). Health Psychology Review: Advancing theory and research in health psychology and behavioural medicine. *Health Psychology Review*, 4, 1-5. doi: 10.1080/17437191003647306



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