



## Letter to Editor

© 2020 Serpa et al..

This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

## Personal Argumentation in the Scholarly Publication

**Sandro Serpa**

*Department of Sociology,  
Faculty of Social and Human Sciences,  
University of The Azores;  
Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences – CICS.UAc/CICS.NOVA.UAc;  
Interdisciplinary Centre for Childhood and Adolescence – NICA -UAc, Portugal  
Corresponding Author*

**Carlos Miguel Ferreira**

*ISCTE –University Institute of Lisbon,  
Av. das Forças Armadas, Lisbon, Portugal;  
Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences –CICS;  
Estoril Higher Institute for Tourism and Hotel Studies, Portugal*

**Ana Isabel Santos**

*Department of Education,  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
University of the Azores;  
Interdisciplinary Centre for Childhood and  
Adolescence – NICA-UAc, R. da Mãe de Deus,  
Ponta Delgada, The Azores, Portugal*

Doi: 10.36941/jesr-2020-0021

**Abstract**

*Currently, the journals in the field of social sciences seem to emphasize the preference that authors submit for evaluation and publication manuscripts in the form of research articles with empirical data, following the model of exact sciences and, preferably, with the possibility of research replication. The scholarly publication based on reasoned logical argumentation seems to be increasingly relegated to the sidelines. This letter argues that questioning preconceived ideas and contributing to thinking is critical and that its publication, after the quality and relevance of personal argumentation is assessed, should take place even without respecting the replication of the research model.*

**Keywords:** *personal argumentation; research replication; scholarly publication*

In the academic environment, there is increasing pressure to publish as a central dimension of the academic profession (Chien, 2019; Espinoza, 2019; Harremoës, 2019; Kortabarria, 2019; McCuen, 2017), in a context in which “The toxic ‘publish or perish’ environment can cause both authors and editors to err on the side of caution; writing papers likely to get published, with low liability for backlash due to ‘informed opinions’ being seen as diametrically opposed to ‘empirical rigour’ — an age-old

conflation between objectivity and subjectivity that humans struggle to get past” (Sawrikar, & McAuliffe, 2019, p. 4).

Scholarly communication is, currently, facing several challenges: in terms of the form, with the possibility of digital, Internet dissemination and open access, and in terms of content (Weilenmann, 2018). Currently, the journals in the field of social sciences seem to emphasize the preference that authors submit for evaluation and publication manuscripts in the form of research articles with empirical data, following the model of the exact sciences and, preferably, with the possibility of research replication, or, at most, a literature review of a current synthesis of information on a given topic through document collection and analysis. In a very pertinent recent illustration mentioned and felt by Sawrikar, “I called this Special Issue because three of my own personal essays [...] were rejected 18 times between them by scholarly journals. Yet, I was a 41 year old academic with nothing but academic experience — having gone straight from school, to undergrad, to postgrad, to teaching and research in higher education. [...] When we speak with our voice, we are dismissed. In this way, we are not seen to be true knowledge-bearers” (Sawrikar, & McAuliffe, 2019, p. 1).

The scholarly publication based on logical and grounded argumentation materialized in various forms, such as essay, perspective, viewpoint, communication, commentary or opinion piece, which has often been a central element for the social sciences, seems to be increasingly relegated to the sidelines as non-scientific. This is a trend to be confirmed, but which seems to us to be growing and taking root.

The essay is one of those forms of an argumentative paper (Kantesaria, & P, 2018), by counterpoint to the research article, which directly mobilizes empirical information. An essay may be “a text usually presented in the form of a nonfiction literary exercise. It is elaborated in an authorial voice that presents as authentic a subjective mode of expression, or narrated personal experience, and may range from the stylistically disordered to the very structured” (Mercadal, 2019); “You will consult and refer to a range of literature, which should be presented in a logical manner to develop and defend your argument. Indeed, presenting a structured argument, reinforced and developed through literature, is the fundamental goal of writing an essay” (West, Malcolm, Keywood, & Hill, 2019, p. 609).

Since journals (McCuen, 2017) and their editors are, currently, true gatekeepers (Primack et al, 2019) of scientific dissemination, the fact is that in the exploratory research scholars undertake, there seems to be a growing trend towards a preference for scientific research articles, in which replication is possible, aiming for the “detection of erroneous reporting of work only surface when other researchers try to duplicate the reported results and cannot get the same general result. Then the original work undergoes thorough scrutiny, at which time the reason may be determined” (McCuen, 2017, p. 3).

Notwithstanding the deep discussions around this concept of replication research (Harremoës, 2019; Anvari, & Lakens, 2018; LaPlante, 2019; Romero, 2019; França, & Monserrat, 2019; August, & Osrecki, 2019; Penders, Holbrook, & de Rijcke, 2019), we will define it as those “studies that put published empirical results to an additional empirical test” (Block, & Kuckertz, 2018, p. 355). In these studies, transparency is critical to the confidence that the scientific community, but also the whole society, may have of scientific knowledge (Romero, 2019; França, & Monserrat, 2019; Block, & Kuckertz, 2018; Bakken, 2019). On this, Romero (2019) states: “We trust scientific findings because experiments repeated under the same conditions produce the same results. Or so one would expect. However, in recent years, important published findings in the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences have failed to replicate (i.e., when independent researchers repeat the original experiment, they do not obtain the original result)” (p. 1).

But what about social sciences? This replication is much more difficult or even impossible to achieve in social sciences (Harremoës, 2019; Romero, 2019; Peels, & Bouter, 2018; Silva, 2019; Castro, 1986), due to their specificities. In an excellent analysis of replication in social sciences by Freese and Peterson (2017), the authors sustain that “First, replication contains a series of unavoidable interpretive ambiguities. Second, these ambiguities are partially rooted in a tension between the

epistemic values of similarity and difference in replication. Third, scientific communities develop rules and conventions around replication that are meant to alleviate these ambiguities but can themselves become objects of epistemic debate. Finally, because these rules and conventions develop in path-dependent response to both internal and external pressures, it is important to recognize the particular challenges that each epistemic culture faces rather than accept a universal theory of scientific replication” (pp. 148 and 149).

This letter, focusing on the relationship between the essay as an example of argumentative scholarly publication and research replication, seeks to highlight the importance of the essay for scientific progress itself, as well as its potential relevance for discussion and reflection on some social, political, scientific elements, which need to be (re)thought from a critical standpoint and, if necessary, be challenged by contributing to their trans(formation). It is concluded that this work of disorder, which the model of essay allows to carry out by questioning ideas made and contribute to thinking, is critical and, therefore, its publication, after the quality and relevance of the personal argumentative discourse is duly assessed, should take place, even without respecting research replication.

## Acknowledgement

All authors collaborated in the preparation of this manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding was provided by University of Azores, Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences – CICS.UAc/CICS.NOVA.UAc, UID/SOC/04647/2019, with the financial support of FCT/MEC through national funds and when applicable co-financed by FEDER under the PT2020 Partnership Agreement.

## References

- Anvari, F., & Lakens, D. (2018) The replicability crisis and public trust in psychological science. *Comprehensive Results in Social Psychology*, 3(3), 266-286, doi: 10.1080/23743603.2019.1684822
- August, V., & Osrecki, F. (2019). Transparency Imperatives: Results and Frontiers of Social Science Research. *Der Transparenz-Imperativ*, 1-34. doi:10.1007/978-3-658-22294-9\_1
- Bakken, S. (2019). The journey to transparency, reproducibility, and replicability. *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*, 26(3), 185-187. doi:10.1093/jamia/ocz007
- Block, J., & Kuckertz, A. (2018). Seven principles of effective replication studies: strengthening the evidence base of management research. *Management Review Quarterly*, 68(4), 355-359. doi:10.1007/s11301-018-0149-3
- Castro, A. (1986). A causalidade nas ciências sociais: uma abordagem epistemológica. 279-312. Augusto Santos Silva e José Madureira Pinto (orgs.). *Metodologia das Ciências Sociais*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento.
- Chien, S.-C. (2019). Writing for Scholarly Publication in English for Taiwanese Researchers in the Field of English Teaching. *SAGE Open*, 9(3), 215824401987018. doi:10.1177/2158244019870187
- Espinoza, D. M. (2019). Consideraciones éticas en el proceso de una publicación científica. *Revista Médica Clínica Las Condes*, 30(3), 226-230. doi:10.1016/j.rmcl.2019.04.001
- França, T. F. A., & Monserrat, J. M. (2019). Reproducibility crisis, the scientific method, and the quality of published studies: Untangling the knot. *Learned Publishing*, 32(4), 406-408. doi:10.1002/leap.1250
- Freese, J., & Peterson, D. (2017). Replication in Social Science. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43(1), 147-165. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053450
- Harremoës, P. (2019). Replication Papers. *Publications*, 7(3), 53. doi:10.3390/publications7030053
- Kantesaria, M., & P, S. (2018). Argumentative Analysis on Persuasive Essays. 2018 *International Conference on Recent Trends in Advance Computing (ICRTAC)*. doi:10.1109/icrtac.2018.8679130
- Kortabarria, L. (2019). A new model for scientific publications: the case for 100% free Open Access journals and why they can succeed. *SocArXiv*, 9 Dec. 2019. doi:10.31235/osf.io/25rwu
- LaPlante, D. A. (2019). Replication is fundamental, but is it common? A call for scientific self-reflection and contemporary research practices in gambling-related research. *International Gambling Studies*, 19(3), 362-368. doi:10.1080/14459795.2019.1672768
- McCuen, R. (2017). Advancing Scientific Knowledge: Ethical Issues in the Journal Publication Process. *Publications*, 6(1), 1. doi:10.3390/publications6010001

- Mercadal, T. (2019). Essay. Salem Press Encyclopedia. <https://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=6&sid=26a2397c-3b6e-4e79-8552-0178392a42b2%40sessionmgr103&bddata=JkFidGhUeXBIPWlwLGNvb2tpZSxzaGliLHVpZCZsYW5nPXBoLXB0JnNpdGU9ZWZRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2loZQ%63d%63d#AN=87322013&db=ers> accessed in January 20, 2019.
- Peels, R., & Bouter, L. (2018). The possibility and desirability of replication in the humanities. *Palgrave Communications*, 4(1). doi:10.1057/s41599-018-0149-x
- Penders, B., Holbrook, J. B., & de Rijcke, S. (2019). Rinse and Repeat: Understanding the Value of Replication across Different Ways of Knowing. *Publications*, 7(3), 52. doi:10.3390/publications7030052
- Primack, R. B., Regan, T. J., Devictor, V., Zipf, L., Godet, L., Loyola, R., ... Koh, L. P. (2019). Are scientific editors reliable gatekeepers of the publication process? *Biological Conservation*, 238, 108232. doi:10.1016/j.biocon.2019.108232
- Romero, F. (2019). Philosophy of science and the replicability crisis. *Philosophy Compass*, 14(11). doi:10.1111/phc3.12633
- Sawrikar, P., & McAuliffe, D. (2019). Introduction to Special Issue on Personal Essays in Social Science. *Social Sciences*, 8(12), 325. doi:10.3390/socsci8120325
- Silva, A. F. C. da. (2019). A história e as mudanças na publicação científica: resistência ou adaptação? *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos*, 26(3), 723–726. doi:10.1590/s0104-59702019000300001
- Weilenmann, A.-K. (2018). Scientific Communication—A Vision for Tomorrow. *Publications*, 6(4), 49. MDPI AG. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/publications6040049>
- West, H., Malcolm, G., Keywood, S., & Hill, J. (2019) Writing a successful essay. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 43(4), 609–617. doi: 10.1080/03098265.2019.1655720