

Editorial

## HARM – Concept and Aims of an Open Journal

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Journal of



Hostility, Anger, Repression, and Malice

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### Introduction

HARM, the *Journal of Hostility, Anger, Repression and Malice*, is an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed, open-access journal. Like most journals, it is a project driven by a certain vision and idealism. HARM aims to broaden the focus of current violence research (on overt forms of violence such as murder, torture, rape, war, genocide, etc.) by contributing to a view of violence that includes contempt, humiliation, insult, disenfranchisement, distress, deceit, disempowerment, malice, ruthlessness, and so on.

Human beings can be harmed by catastrophic events, everyday conflicts, basic living conditions; they can be harmed in social relationships, by their own shortcomings, their own and others' expectations, evaluations, and insinuations; humans can be harmed by love, jealousy, desires, frustration, and hatred; by the past, the present, and the uncertain future. These and similar experiences are familiar to every human being and every human society. Harm causes varying degrees of suffering and the experience of being harmed and suffering has undoubtedly played an important role in the emergence of religions and other spiritually oriented worldviews that offer suggestions for coping with harm or overcoming states of suffering. The observation that people are always in danger of being physically or psychologically harmed is certainly also one of the main reasons for the emergence of political theories that propose social orders and institutions designed, among other things, to protect people from harm that often comes from their fellow human beings and the social network usually called society. Human history clearly shows that the natural, cultural, and social conditions in which we live as human beings have immense potential to expose us to various forms of suffering, to threaten us, to frighten us, and to hurt us, that is, to harm us.

We created the acronym HARM to draw attention to exemplary phenomena and areas of research from which harm can emanate or with which harm is most closely associated: *Hostility, Aggression, Repression, and Malice*. The acronym could also refer to other phenomena and concepts, such as *Hatred, Anxiety, Resentment, and Malevolence; Hurt, Animosity, Rancour, and Menace; Hideousness, Atrocity, Ruthlessness, and Meanness*; etc. Thus, HARM will not focus on the allegedly 'central' aspects of *violence*, as is common in sociology, or on supposedly 'fundamental' aspects of *aggression*, as is common in social psychology. Rather, HARM aims to expand the space of inquiry and discussion about perspectives and semantics in such a way that previously marginalized aspects of our conflict-laden lives become more visible, understandable, and analysable in terms of their importance to the larger whole of human existence.

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To this end, HARM is intended to provide an experimental field for diverse contributions, such as psychological, psychoanalytical, sociological, historiographical, anthropological, ethnographical, cross-cultural, artistic, philosophical, and both theoretical and empirical assessments. Since we are serious about keeping the experimental space offered by HARM as open as possible, our purpose in providing the following list is not to suggest boundaries, but rather to point out potential research topics while highlighting some of our own epistemic interests. In this sense, HARM sees itself not only as an open access, but primarily as an *open* journal.

### **The Purpose and Scope of HARM**

1. HARM is a research field that deals with phenomena such as those mentioned above. Of course, the overview given here is exemplary and by no means exhaustive. It is one of the main concerns of HARM to gradually fill the research field with examples, findings, insights, and stimulating ideas.

2. Humans and other living beings can be HARMED directly, i.e., physically and psychologically, on the one hand, and indirectly, through the manipulation of their natural and social environment, on the other. The latter can be, for example, the destruction of bonds, homes, sacred places, or food sources. HARM is interested in investigations at both levels, as well as in the connections between the respective areas.

3. People can be HARMED by other people, other living beings, and economic and environmental conditions, which are mostly, but not exclusively, man-made. People can also intentionally harm themselves.

4. HARM can be inflicted and experienced by various forms of man-made violence, but also by physical or mental illness, or loss. It can be caused by, or result from, anything that causes individuals to be hurt, to be less successful, to feel more worthless, or to lose things that are of value to them. These consequences are usually intentional, but they can also have complex and obscure origins.

5. HARM is done, suffered, observed, represented, documented, defended, and analysed. Thus, there are many perspectives on HARM. These are not to be equated with *ex post facto* created typifications of actors such as victim, perpetrator, or bystander. Rather, they are dimensions of experience.

6. Since HARM opens a wide field of research, it cannot be compartmentalised along disciplinary lines. On the contrary, the diverse experiential dimensions of HARM explicitly open the field for interdisciplinary approaches in the broadest sense, including contributions from the arts, which will help to achieve the desired broadening of perspectives and stimulate discussions of thematically relevant issues more effectively.

HARM addresses topics that are the subject of diverse research on violence. Concepts such as violence and aggression or complex events such as wars, genocides, abuse, and exploitation belong to HARM's field of interest. However, the goal of HARM as a journal, idea, and field of experimentation is explicitly to break away from these fields or the concepts already established and crystallised within them. This means, above all, to leave behind the respective orthodoxies and canons and to open the space for interpretations and approaches that have received little or no attention so far.

### **Aims**

Here, we, the authors of this editorial and the founding editors of HARM, outline only a small portion of what the subject matter of HARM is intended to be. Therefore, HARM is a journey into the unknown, often a search for answers to questions that have not yet been asked — in other words, we hope to learn from others and trust that they expect the same.

We, too, have been thinking about what HARM should be concerned with in the next few years, within the framework of the literature we are familiar with. As cultural and social psychologists trained in social theory with an interest in social science methodology and methods, in the following, we will highlight three of our own main interests in relation to HARM.

#### De-canonisation

When authors, studies, concepts, approaches, typologies, and also data (e.g., numbers of victims or financial loss amounts) are mentioned particularly frequently and regularly in the literature, we understand them to be *canonised*.

To put it pointedly and provocatively, canonisation represents the opposite of what should characterise science, especially the social sciences, which deal with extremely complex, dynamic, and historically changing phenomena. Undoubtedly, there are outstanding empirical and theoretical studies that have been central to the development of a discipline or field of research and can still be considered significant today. However, the constant repetition and transmission of the same findings — often over decades, sometimes over centuries — in teaching, in textbooks, and, unfortunately, also in many other prominent publications can lead to a problematic one-sidedness of scientific discourses. In addition, studies that reach ambivalent and potentially challenging conclusions are often uncritically truncated and thus simply misrepresented in the canonisation process. This is true of several classic and influential experimental papers that are still used today, for example, as evidence for so-called situationism, but also for competing theories that emphasise personality traits as the main motivating factors for malicious or violent actions.

However, criticism, a characteristic basis of serious science, is only one element of de-canonisation. Another is the turning to explanatory models that have received little attention so far. For example, for psychology, this means examining which approaches that see themselves as psychological have the potential to contribute to a better understanding of HARM. We, ourselves, see such an approach in the so-called continental European tradition of cultural psychology that is probably best described as culture-sensitive or culture-informed psychology. However, even beyond the so-called Western discourses, there are a multitude of concepts that have general cultural and specific scientific significance and are concerned with human action, thought, feeling, and behaviour. These include, for example, so-called religious texts, many of which explicitly address issues relevant to HARM. The habit, firmly entrenched in Western scientific thinking since the European Enlightenment and secularisation, of not accepting that there can be scientifically relevant ideas and approaches in traditional ways of thinking, labelled religious, can prevent us from overlooking valuable suggestions and insights that guide the beliefs and actions of billions of non-Western people.

It is certainly no easy task to document, interpret, and critically examine the potential that relevant intellectual narratives, academic or otherwise, might have for a better understanding of HARM. It is not our intention to condemn so-called Western psychology, often falsely described as a homogeneous complex, and instead to idealise anything considered non-Western. On the contrary, we want to encourage people to overcome these labels and instead, engage critically and constructively with styles of thinking and reasoning, in which, to ignore would mean nothing other than ignoring the role of culture in human existence and in coping with HARM. The focus must always be on the interest in documenting and understanding the experiential dimensions of HARM across time and space as adequately as possible.

#### Methodologies & Methods

Using language as an example; after Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Arabic — which were once scientifically influential languages in earlier times and different regions — English is now the dominant lingua franca of science. Of course, it is beneficial to have an international language of science in which many of us can exchange ideas. At the same time, however, this circumstance brings with it a number of difficulties that, although discussed from time to time, are far from being adequately addressed in research and theory development. The problem is already evident in the

context of empirical research in non-English-speaking countries. Researchers often do not have sufficient language skills and therefore have to rely on the skills of translators.

Scientific texts (questionnaires, transcripts, records, protocols, field notes, publications, etc.) may contain idioms, colloquialisms, and terminology that can make accurate translation difficult. As we know from ethnolinguistic research, a particular difficulty is that some terms do not translate adequately into English or another language, so researchers often fall back on vocabulary that is more familiar to them. However, this can be scientifically questionable and misleading.

Unfortunately, many studies lack methodological reflection, especially about the corresponding consequences for the collection and analysis of data. As far as we know, there is no relevant work that explicitly addresses this issue and would have had significant consequences for the field of research discussed here. Basically, there are numerous psychological, but also sociological research projects and approaches that lack sensitivity for linguistic and other cultural peculiarities. Looking at violence research, for example, in domestic violence, torture, genocide, and trauma, which often draw on such work, it is sufficient to see that many publications use the same questions and subsequent explanatory concepts for different cases without taking into account their significant differences, which are often rooted in cross-cultural differences or in class- and milieu-specific differences within the same society.

Accordingly, another task of HARM is to create a space for the discussion of this issue, but also of concrete examples, and thus to find culturally sensitive methods of data collection and analysis or to apply modified existing methods.

#### Documentation

Scientific journals are media that prepare information of all kinds, structure it, present it for discussion, and preserve it for further use. As a rule, scientific documents claim non-fictionality, which they substantiate with the help of reliable sources and testimonies as well as adherence to standards of scientific ethics. Against the background of the objectives outlined above, HARM also sees the documentation of different topics, perspectives, research approaches, and research problems as one of its main tasks. However, the documentation is not to be understood as an end in itself, but rather, we wish that through the collection and documentation of relevant contributions, a kaleidoscope of those facets of our research field will emerge over time, serving to increase complexity rather than reducing it as is usually the goal. We do not see this as a problem, but rather as an opportunity to thereby gain a more complex and appropriate overview of which aspects and factors would need to be considered to adequately navigate the research field of HARM and thus gradually gain a better understanding of previously hidden processes, effects, and interactions.

In addition to these three highlighted concerns, our desire is, of course, to attract as many colleagues as possible to HARM — from a wide variety of fields in which we are all seeking knowledge, by different means, but with the same level of curiosity.

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#### **About the Author(s)**

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**Christian Gudehus, PD Dr. (Ruhr-Universität Bochum)** is a social scientist with an inclination towards social and cultural psychology. His research focus is on collective violence. Be it violent professions, violent practices, psychologies of violence or the combination of social theoretical concepts with empirical approaches. In addition, there is a keen interest in methodological questions.