

It's Motivation's Time: An Invitation to Partner With Us!

We write to apprise you of exciting new developments in the science of motivation and to invite you to partner with us on initiatives meant to reinstate motivation as a focal topic in psychology. It is time for motivational research to resurface after decades of neglect and to re-claim its centrality to the management of human affairs. Stimulating work in this domain is being done as we speak; fundamental advances are poised to happen. If understanding the dynamics of human action is your passion—your place is with us. It is a *rendezvous* with history, please do not miss it!

The Resurgence of Motivation Research

The topic of motivation has traditionally been one of the mainstays of the science of psychology. It has played a major role in early dynamic models of the mind (including psychoanalytic theory), and it was fundamental to behaviorist theories of learning and action. The advent of the cognitive revolution in the 1960 and 70s eclipsed the emphasis on motivation to a large extent, but in the past two decades motivation has made a forceful comeback. Today, motivational analyses of affect, cognition, and behavior are ubiquitous across psychological literatures and disciplines; motivation is not just a “hot topic” on the contemporary scene, but is firmly entrenched as a foundational issue in scientific psychology.

A survey of articles published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (JPSP)* in 1990-1991 and 2010-2011 reveals the percentage of articles published containing at least one of nineteen motivation-related keywords in their titles and/or abstracts increased from 32.7% during 1990-1991, to 42.9% during 2010-2011. Important motivational work is being conducted in essentially every area of psychology, including personality and social psychology, consumer and marketing psychology, industrial/organizational psychology, developmental psychology, clinical psychology, educational psychology, health psychology, sports and exercise psychology, and neuroscience (including biological psychology and psychophysiology). Motivational research not only has conceptual implications for understanding mind and behavior, but also has direct and pragmatic implications for daily self-regulation, addiction, substance abuse, mental health, life at home and the workplace, and consumer behavior, as well as other areas of application.

Society for the Study of Motivation (SSM)

Recognizing the importance of motivation as a psychological topic, the Society for the Study of Motivation was established in order to provide an integrative focus to motivationally relevant research, and to encourage information transfer and cross-fertilization across the many disciplines and psychological domains in which cutting edge motivational work is being carried out; in short, to set the conditions for building a coherent science of motivation for the 21st century. Essential for this enterprise is to progress from establishing motivationally relevant effects or motivational phenomena to identifying the principles underlying the phenomena. Phenomena are local and specific. They often address different life settings with their own special practical problems to be solved in domains such as business, education, sports, law, medicine, and so on. Principles, on the other hand, pertain to general laws that cut across localized contexts. They aim to expose the deep structure of motivational effects beyond the diversity of surface manifestations in specific fields of inquiry.

Four central areas of phenomena can be identified where general motivational principles apply— preference and choice, well-being, achievement, and social influence. The area of preference and choice includes research on attitudes, decision making, resource allocation, and strategic planning. The area of well-being includes research on emotional, behavioral and physical problems, self-esteem, and quality of life. The area of achievement includes research on learning, performance, and activity engagement. The area of social influence includes socialization, communication and persuasion, and cooperation and conflict.

Research in these areas appears in journals across many disciplines, including psychology, economics, sociology, political science, management, marketing, education, medicine, and law. However, rarely do researchers in one discipline know about the motivation research conducted in other disciplines, even when the research concerns very similar phenomena. Interdisciplinary conferences on motivation science rarely occur. By emphasizing phenomena associated with particular settings, such as the classroom, the workplace, home, or a courtroom, the common principles underlying the phenomena have often been overlooked. This has hampered advancement in motivation science because there has been little attempt to integrate the research findings across areas and identify general underlying mechanisms that manifest themselves across different settings and are interconnected at deeper levels of analysis.

A similar lack of integration has occurred among motivationally relevant areas within a single discipline. Within psychology, for example, there have been unrecognized motivational principles underlying phenomena in social psychology, developmental psychology, personality psychology, organizational psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and clinical psychology. Each subdiscipline has its own societies, its own

journals, and its own conferences that emphasize their own “special” effects, without recognition that common principles can underlie these phenomena. A similar condition was present in the mid-50’s among those researching brain phenomena. When scientists with common interest in these phenomena began to get together and work together, neuroscience was born. This has not yet happened among those interested in what people want and how they get what they want—motivation science. The potential for this science is at least as great because the number of disciplines and schools potentially involved in motivation science is even greater.

Ways and Means

To promote the quest for the common core of motivational phenomena, the SSM will set up inter-disciplinary publication outlets, organize meetings and workshops on methods and substantive issues pertaining to motivation, facilitate the establishment of institutes and centers devoted to motivationally relevant research, and promote their networking and inter-communication via various electronic and print media. To that end, we will utilize existing resources and activities such as the *Center for Motivation Science at Columbia University*, *Center for Affective Science in Geneva*, *The Munich Symposium on Motivation*, and the *Motivation and Emotion Journal*, serving as the Society’s official Journal. We are also in the process of launching an annual *Advances in Motivation Science* series with Andrew Elliot as the founding editor. The SSM will also set up a public outreach initiative to communicate in various ways motivational principles and findings of real world relevance and applied value to interested lay publics.

If motivational principles, phenomena and cutting edge motivational research are of interest to you, we urge you to join us here at the SSM, check out our website, and take part in what shapes up to be an exciting scientific movement that ushers a new era and a fresh, dynamic, emphasis on behavioral research.

Cordially,

Arie Kruglanski, Tory Higgins, Richard Sorrentino, Rex Wright, Roy Baumeister and Andrew Elliot