

## *Preface to the special issue*

This issue of *Review of Psychology* illustrates the wide range of current interests in social psychology. These range from everlasting topic of relations between minority and majority groups, over the role of ethnic identity in everyday social functioning, factors affecting interpersonal relations, to the lasting quest for improved measuring of different aspects of attitudes, and relating socio-psychological concepts to health and child care. These articles exemplify the vigor of social psychological research and its relevance for our understanding of complex human behaviors. They also offer a small peek into both worlds that are inherent to research in social psychology: the study of fundamental relations among individuals and groups, and the applied dimension of such studies in the people's lives.

The article by Prišlin and colleagues is a fine example of a careful experimental study of relations between a social majority and a minority, which is the fact of life that we all encounter every day in different settings and life situations. Moreover, this study sheds new light on the consequences brought about by the change of the relative position of the minority and majority and related social power structure. The fact that neither majority nor minority see themselves as belonging to a single group when the social power is a consequence of the group size, but view themselves rather as two distinctive groups, has profound implications on the understanding of why such situations contribute to the fragmentations of communities. In fact, if power is associated with the group size, social change moves the two groups further away from the common identity. However, when the power is derived from other sources than from the group size, the prevailing group seems to promote a common identity that also encompasses the minority. Also, the former minority that became a new majority tends to gradually become inclusive through increased perceptions that they interact with other as separate individuals. Analogies of such experimental studies with communities divided along ethnic, racial or religious divides are palpable, as illustrated from field research in such communities.

The two articles looking at the ethnic identity illustrate how this concept is both relevant at the level of inter-group relations (Kosic and Caudek) and for personality attributes (Brouillard and Hartland). In the first case the high and low ethnic identification was shown to have differential influences: in the majority group, it led to negative responses to a minority, while in the ethnic minority it was associated with more positive attitudes towards the outgroups. In the latter article, more salient ethnic identity was associated with higher self-esteem among the minority group. But, it also showed that the role of ethnic identification in people's lives should not be overestimated. More down-to-earth issues were important for the academic achievement, such as how much time students can devote to school work, rather

than their ethnic identification. For the international readers it will be interesting to note the differences in the meaning of the concept of "ethnic" as it is used in Europe and in the US, where it very much overlaps with the concept of "racial" identification.

The other articles merit to be highlighted for bringing a variety of perspectives into the focus of research. Kamenov and Jelić have studied consistency of attachment across different types of close relationships, demonstrating that the assumptions about universal and life-long effects of early attachment experiences with the principal care-provider do not seem to hold. Hip-Fabek examined self-handicapping as one of the self-presentation strategies people use to protect own positive self-image. Effective strategy for positive self-presentation was found to be self-reported external self-handicapping (such as claiming task difficulty as a reason for failure), and if the failure could be attributed to features that are external, uncontrollable and unstable in time. Franc and Brkljačić worked on developing a measure of attitude functions that can be used with a range of non-specific attitude objects, unlike previous attempts to assess different functions of attitudes. Though the outcome was not conclusive with regard to the validity of the new instrument, at least two out of five attitude functions seem to be assessed well (instrumental and value-expressive). This is a nice example of evolving and promising research approach to the issues that have been looked at a number of times before.

In their study Hudek-Knežević and colleagues brought together personality traits, stress and coping and looked at their mediating and moderating effects on the health outcomes in children. The finding of differential effects of problem-oriented coping with stress among individuals high or low on neuroticism, on physical symptoms, is well worth further study as it reiterates that there is no generally good or poor coping style for all the people at all the times. Pečnik and Brunnberg attempted to decompose a very complex decision-making processes about child protection in which social workers are involved. They highlighted the overwhelming role of the perception of risk for a child, definition of a problem and judgments about appropriate interventions in the social workers' decisions, and much lesser contribution of their personal childhood experiences, available resources or cultural norms.

In sum, this journal issue brought together different research questions, various methodological perspectives and levels of analysis, but all the articles address socially relevant topics in the broader realm of social psychology. I am sure that my colleague and friend, Alija Kulenović, would have been happy to see them published here.

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