

An APS Research Hotline

July 27, 2005

As evaluators of research, psychologists are really good fault-finders. Our critical skills are nonpareil.

It has been my experience that the range of things that can be wrong with a research study is rather small. In fact, we tend to look for the same faults in every research study we evaluate. If we identify none, we conclude the study must be pretty darn good, because we couldn't find anything wrong with it. I say if we are so good at spotting fatal flaws in our colleagues' research, we should become skilled in helping them to survive these near death experiences. That's right; I'm saying APS should enter the research recovery, repair, and restoration business. Here is my idea.

First, we gather a dozen of the most esteemed and talented researchers in APS — a panel of subject matter experts second to none. (How we pick the 12 people out of the pool of 2,000 who think they should be chosen is not my problem.) Their task is to collectively provide workable solutions to the common problems they are so adroit in identifying in the research of others.

Now comes the slick part: A “research hotline” — how about (555) APS—HELP ? — complete with a menu of messages to assist those of us in need.

While this is just a first draft of my idea, here is how I see it working:

Thank you for calling the Research Hotline. Please listen carefully, as our menu has changed.

If you are having trouble with your Introduction section, please press 1. [You press 1.]

If your research idea has been criticized because it lacks a theoretical base, and you want a theory, any theory, to append your data to, please press 1.

If your research idea has been criticized because it has already been examined in previous studies, and you want some help in re-positioning your study as a ‘constructive replication,’ please press 2.

If your research idea has been criticized because it seeks to integrate two conflicting explanations (as environment vs. heredity), and there is no way you can keep everyone happy no matter what you say, please press 3.

If you would like to conduct a meta-analysis of something, but haven't the foggiest idea of what hasn't already been meta-analyzed, please press 4.

If you would like to impress a particular person by making gratuitous references to his or her unpublished tech reports, but do not know where this obscure stuff might be buried, please enter the first five letters of the person's last name, followed by the pound sign.

If you can't think of any compelling reason to conduct your research, and would like a pseudo-intellectual justification for doing so, please press 5.

If you are having trouble with your Method section, please press 2. [You press 2.]

If your research has been criticized because of an insufficient sample size, and it is on a topic like the personality profile of US Presidents who resigned from office, please press 1.

If your research participants have been criticized because of sample bias, and you would like some help explaining that your biased sample was drawn from a biased population, please press 2.

If your research design has been criticized for a lack of power, and you would like some psychometric muscle-enhancing steroids, please press 3.

If your criterion measure has been criticized because it suffers from contamination, and you want to send it to detox, please press 4.

If your predictor measure has been criticized because it lacks reliability, yet it possesses other virtues as honesty, dignity, and integrity, virtues that your critics don't possess, please press 5.

If you are having trouble with your Results section, please press 3. [You press 3.]

If your corrected validity coefficients exceed 1.00, and you want help in explaining how predictive accuracy can exceed perfection, please press 1.

If you want some help in coming up with a way to depict boring data with a sexy diagram or figure, please press 2.

If you tested 100 hypotheses at the 5 percent level of significance and six of them turned out statistically significant, and you want some help in convincing people your findings meaningfully exceeded a chance outcome, please press 3.

If you want some help in convincing people that your statement of identifying 'interesting trends in the data' is more than a lame cover-up for non-significant results, please press 4.

If you would like some help in presenting never-before-seen Greek letters to signify your command of what must be really vast knowledge of statistics, please press 5.

If you are having trouble with your Discussion section, please press 4. [You press four.]

If you would like some help in discussing a sow's ear as if it were a silk purse, please press 1.

If you would like some help in explaining why the set of negative results you got should not be regarded as a Platinum Member of the 'most likely to add to the file drawer effect' club, please press 2.

If your research has been criticized as lacking any shred of practical significance, and you want to

defend your findings on the grounds there is little chance they thankfully never will be perverted for evil purposes, please press 3.

If your findings have been criticized because they are not likely to generalize, and you would like some help in artfully explaining you do not care if your findings do not generalize, please press 4.

If you feel your research has sucked the last ounce of life out of a topic and there really are no implications for future research, yet you feel it would be imprudent to actually say this, please press 5.

If you are experiencing other reactions to your research, typically of an existential nature, not pertaining to the Introduction, Method, Results or Discussion sections, please press 5. [You press 5.]

If your writing style has been criticized as being long-winded, verbose, wordy, tedious, and rambling, please press 1-7-5-8-6-9-2-8.

If your research has achieved a level of acclaim that leads you to believe you are the Golden Child or the second coming of Wilhelm Wundt, please press the star key.

If your research study has soured you on the prospect of devoting the rest of your working life to this type of activity, and you want some information on a new career, please press 4-1-1.

If in the conduct of your research study you were forced to submit yourself to the whims of a pompous, self-important, legend in his or her own mind, and you seek relief from the pent-up rage within you, please press the pound sign as often as it takes to make you feel better.

If you feel distraught and a sense of despair that your research is not likely to alter the course of humanity, please press 0, or stay on the line.