

August 15th 2022

Dear Dr. McNutt,

We write to kindly ask you to consider a change in NAS's policy regarding group authorship, which was brought to our attention when we submitted a manuscript titled "[A Global Experiment on Motivating Social Distancing during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)" to *PNAS*. In this letter, we explain how the current group-authorship policy adversely affects researchers and research worldwide, in particular those who are in early career stages, are from a minoritized group, and are located in lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs; [Morton et al. \(2022\)](#)). We hope that our letter will pave a way for fruitful discussion and help mitigate some lesser known consequences and long-lasting effects of publishing policies. In doing so, we believe *PNAS* would lead by example while simultaneously furthering its aim to improve how science is disseminated.

The project that led to our publication was run by the Psychological Science Accelerator (PSA)—a standing collaborative network of 1,328 researchers from 84 countries. As a group of international researchers, we pooled resources to investigate psychological factors that may help organizations around the globe manage the COVID-19 crisis. After resubmitting the revised manuscript to the *PNAS* Editorial Office and receiving conditional acceptance pending minor edits, we were informed that we could not list all the authors on the byline because it would cause the manuscript to exceed *PNAS*' page limit. Thus, we were required to choose one of three options. One option was to combine the author names into a consortium group name. An alternative option was to cut the manuscript's length in half to accommodate the author names, affiliations, and locations, which would not only affect the reporting of the study, but we also learned would jeopardize its conditionally accepted status. Another option was to withdraw the paper and submit it elsewhere, which would be counterproductive to the objective of helping manage the COVID-19 crisis.

When faced with these options, we asked all authors about their preference. Of the 252 who responded, 48% indicated that they were opposed to consortium authorship in principle, representing substantial opposition to this authorship arrangement. Many brought up important consequences of choosing consortium authorship. On a systematic level, in a recent example which we have brought up to *PNAS*, we have received direct communication from SCOPUS to one of the co-authors stating that SCOPUS does not allow individual authors to claim papers where only group authorship name is visible and authors' names are listed in Supplementary Information document. On an individual level, many researchers who are ECRs or reside in LMICs, voiced their concerns that they might not receive due recognition of authorship or proportional contribution when listed as group members, despite the fact that they are properly denoted as authors in the article meta-data. This is due to the fact that policies in many LMICs do not allow for group-based authorship (meaning that people will not be recognized as authors despite their efforts), as well as the fact that group-based authorship flattens the recognition that people get (meaning that very active group members are treated the same as less active members). Furthermore, such contributions could not be counted towards career advancement, positive evaluations, research funding or increases in salaries. On a global level, these constraints place an additional barrier to big-team science, research replicability, and research with a diverse community. We believe that more and more empirical work conducted by big teams will follow and our collaboration is not a unique instance. Although there are many previous papers with consortium authorship, many of the authors in the consortium are from high income countries, later in their careers or not a minoritized group, and thus are not affected by the problems mentioned above. Therefore, the

policy change regarding the authorship credentials is critical for supporting international big team science that is inclusive, representative and diverse. To quote the National Academy's [Statement on Diversity and Inclusion](#) "Convening a diverse community to exchange ideas and perspectives enhances the quality of our work and increases our relevance as advisers to the nation about the most complex issues facing the nation and the world".

We hope that members of NAS will carefully examine the drawbacks of its current group authorship policy and consider policy reform. Many changes could be made to increase representation in publishing and this science as a whole. For instance, as a starting point, it would be greatly beneficial to include all authors. This could be accomplished by not including names as part of the word count. We also hold that reform is needed within both publishing teams as well as academic institutions and its funders. Many of us have raised these issues within our countries and institutions. We believe that a change in policy will help enhance the quality of psychological research worldwide in a more fair and just way.

We appreciate your time and we hope we can discuss this further.

Sincerely,

SIGNATORIES

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