Capturing the Conversation of Trust Research

The *Journal of Trust Research* launched in 2011 as the go-to source for "critical insights into the unique features and roles of trust within and across disciplines" (Li, 2011, p. 1). Since then, *JTR* has published over 150 articles across 13 volumes and 26 issues which include four special issues exploring multilevel trust (Fulmer & Dirks, 2018), negotiations and repeated bargaining (Kong et al., 2017), international relations (Haukkala et al., 2015), and calculativeness (Möllering, 2014). The journal's most read [hyperlink to https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showMostReadArticles?journalCode=rjtr20] and most cited [hyperlink to https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showMostCitedArticles?journalCode=rjtr20] work demonstrates a clear commitment to advancing a nuanced understanding of the nature and dynamics of trust. *JTR* has, therefore, been successful in collecting the empirical and conceptual fruits of scholarship exploring trust in a wide variety of contexts and from an even wider variety of substantive and methodological perspectives. Our impact is then demonstrated, in part, through our first impact factor, released last year (2022 IF = 1.4; see Möllering & Hamm, 2023)

Capturing the breadth and depth of a construct like trust can only be achieved with the help of a deeply engaged community like the one that *JTR* enjoys. Closely associated with the First International Network of Trust [hyperlink to https://fintweb.org/], our journal brings together a passionate community of editors, reviewers, authors, and readers, all working to foster a cross-boundary science of trust. Particular mention, however, must be made of our outgoing Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Guido Möllering. Guido took the helm in 2017 and—in addition to a 2014 special issue on calculativeness (Möllering, 2014)—he led issues 7(2) through 12(2). During his tenure, Guido made good on his commitment to "cultivating the field of trust research" (Möllering, 2017, p. 107). In his first editorial, he analogized the work of the journal to "watering seeds and deepening roots" (p. 107) by creating space for research exploring foundational issues like conceptualization and measurement, and "weeding, trimming, and fertilizing" (p. 111) through an inclusive but rigorous peer-review process designed to ensure a strong yield. Personally, and in collaboration with his editorial team, Guido has done much to "nurture [the field's] growth" (p. 107). Guido's infectious curiosity and impressive capacity for weaving disparate research into an integrative and engaging story has helped to elucidate the contours of our field and firmly positioned his editorials among our most read articles. The field of trust research is, in no small part, what it is today because of his effort, and we are forever grateful for the work he did to elevate our collective impact.

Looking Forward

This transition in leadership provided an ideal opportunity to reiterate our commitment to positioning *JTR* as a "high-impact source journal" of trust research (Li, 2011, p. 1). To this end, our incoming Editorial Team took the opportunity to frame trust research as an ongoing conversation happening in more-or-less connected pockets throughout the broader scholarly literature. We argue that there is utility in working across the incidental boundaries that inevitably segment any sufficiently large group of people to ensure that work done in one area can foster thought in another. Taking up our Founding Editor, Dr. Peter Ping Li's charge to position *JTR* as *the* place for the state of the science on trust (Li, 2011), we have centered our efforts on two initiatives that take important steps toward our goal of *capturing the conversation of trust research*.

In the first, we restructured our Associate Editors into a smaller group of Area Editors focused on five of the most central pockets of trust research: organizations, government, society, law, and practice. Drs. Kirsimarja Blomqvist (LUT University School of Business and Management), Nicole Gillespie (University of Queensland School of Business), Ben Seyd (University of Kent School of Politics and International Relations), Ed Tomlinson (West Virginia University John Chambers College of Business & Economics), and our inaugural Area Editorial Fellow, Kwan-Lamar Blount-Hill (Arizona State University School of Criminology and Criminal Justice), graciously agreed to devote their energy, not only to managing submissions within their areas of expertise, but to enhancing the journal's visibility through their personal and professional networks. Coupled with our EIC (Dr. Joe Hamm; Michigan State

University School of Criminal Justice, Environmental Science and Policy Program, and Department of Political Science), Deputy EIC (Dr. Lisa van der Werff; Dublin City University Business School), and Managing Editor's appointments (Dr. Amanda Isabel Osuna; University of Tampa Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice), our journal is well-positioned to achieve its goal of integrating thought across disciplinary lines. Our Area Editorial Fellowship further builds on this commitment through yet another opportunity for integrating fresh perspectives into our Editorial Team, while simultaneously supporting early career researchers in gaining the skills and experience needed to lead the next generation of constructive and engaged editors.

In a second initiative, we revised our article types and submission requirements to explicitly invite a wider variety of manuscripts. Empirical Articles are those that use systematic and replicable methods of analysis that are generally accepted within their scientific communities. Conceptual Articles create opportunities for non-systematic efforts like directed reviews, specific critiques, and model or hypothesis development. Target Articles are submissions identified by the authors or our Editorial Team as having strong potential for direct engagement and for which our Editorial Team invites commentaries that are published alongside. Finally, to ensure the greatest degree of flexibility in submission, we revised our word limits to allow submissions between 2,000 and 10,000 words, thereby creating new space for shorter, particularly thought-provoking contributions.

Capturing a Conversation

Weaving "critical insights into the unique features and roles of trust within and across disciplines" (Li, 2011, p. 1) into a coherent conversation is an important but challenging task. Trust is a subject of inquiry in virtually every scientific discipline, each of which brings its own constellation of normative values, analytic epistemologies, and focal relationships (Isaeva, et al., 2015). As a fundamental human experience that transcends the distinctions disciplines impose on themselves, the scholarly understanding of trust has the most to gain when we draw our boundaries inclusively. There remain a number of important differences of thought on foundational questions like whether trust is better conceptualized as an attitude or behavior, whether it resides within an individual or is necessarily a characteristic of a relationship, and even the specific conditions under which it is relevant. Nonetheless, capturing a coherent conversation requires some level of recognition of how each individual contribution engages with the larger literature. Importantly, integrating these inquiries does not require agreement across perspectives: In fact, we would argue that, often, more is gained through well-argued disagreement. It is, however, critical that authors be aware of and speak to the positioning of their work.

Foundational Perspectives. To assist authors, we offer the following as examples of what we consider to be foundational perspectives within trust research. These are not intended to be prescriptive: *JTR* continues to welcome work that leverages any of a variety of competing perspectives. Instead, we offer the following as central touchpoints and invite authors to engage with them as they are useful, even if only as a point of departure.

Regarding the overarching nature and process of trust, Dietz (2011) elucidates what he calls a "universal dynamic" of trust in all relationships. He argues that inputs feed into a process of trustworthiness assessment that fosters a willingness toward the relationship which, in turn, facilitates trusting behaviors that feed back into the initial inputs. Although a number of competing accounts have been explored (see e.g., Bachmann, 2011), Dietz captures what many accept as a default understanding of trust across contexts. Similarly, Six and Latusek (2023) offer a potentially default account of distrust. Their work starts from Dietz' argument and elucidates a process by which negative inputs foster distrust and, ultimately, protective behaviors.

Trust research also engages with a number of specific elements, many of which also have default perspectives captured within *JTR*. For example, rather than focusing on a relationship between a specifically identified trustor and trustee, some work conceptualizes trust as a personality trait. On this point, Patent and Searle (2019) offer a review of a variety of conceptualizations, and especially measures, of a trustor's dispositional propensity to trust others. Another branch of trust research considers the multi-level nature of trust and trusting relationships. Fulmer and Dirks' (2018) introduction to a special issue on the topic offers a potentially default perspective on the dynamics and critical questions in this area of research.

A third important consideration for trust research explores the implications of a variety of methodological decisions. Measurement is one particularly important issue as the implications of trust research are particularly sensitive to how researchers conceptualize and operationalize the construct. McEvily and Tortoriello (2011) provide a comprehensive review of measures of trust and explore their implications (see also PytlikZillig et al., 2016). Similarly, Schilke and colleagues (2023) explore the use of experimental manipulations in quantitative trust research, especially to evaluate the causal influence of trustworthiness. Although both of these reviews are limited to the organizational context, their insights are widely applicable. On the qualitative side, most trust research leverages the relatively greater flexibility of the method to shed light on its dynamic nature. Karhapää and Savolainen (2018) offer a noteworthy example of a qualitative exploration of a trust process at a university through their analysis of the speeches of and interviews with its rector.

Key Questions. Positioning scholarship to clearly contribute to a conversation of trust research is also facilitated by attending to the elements of a trusting relationship that are most clearly addressed by the work. In elucidating these contributions, we encourage authors to consider the "who", "for what", "why", and "so what" of trust.

The "who" of trust highlights the need to clearly identify the subject(s) and object(s) of trust by asking "Who (or what) is trusting and who (or what) is being trusted?" Without undermining the importance of dyadic (Lu et al., 2017) and network perspectives (Mathews, 2017) that often explicitly argue that each actor plays both roles, this distinction motivates consideration of, for example, whether the actors are specific individuals (Frederiksen, 2014), generalized others (Weinschenk & Dawes, 2019), or institutions (Høyer & Mønness, 2015; Bachmann, 2011), and at what level trust is operating (see Fulmer & Dirks, 2018).

The "for what" of trust elevates a discussion of the nature of the relationship between the trustor and trustee by asking "For what is the trustor trusting?" Trust is necessarily context-specific such that trustors often have a more or less explicit potential for injury (or domain of injuries) in mind, and differences among these are likely to have important implications for the nature of that trust: The trust we place in an employer we expect to recognize and reward our effort is often importantly different from the trust that we might feel in someone asked to provide childcare. The specific concerns that are most central to a given trustor are often less than explicit in trust research, but most scholars proceed from the assumption that trust matters most in the face of the most salient risks (Elhardt, 2015; Li, 2012). Indeed, a growing conversation within the literature positions the trustor's vulnerability as a critical but often-overlooked element of understanding a trust relationship (Schafheitle et al., 2023).

The "why" of trust concerns the conditions under which trust and distrust emerge and evolve over time, and motivates questions like "Why would the trustor (dis)trust?" "Why is (or isn't) the trustor (dis)trusting?" and "Why would the trustor (dis)continue their (dis)trust?" Importantly, these questions are among the best-studied elements of trust research and—beyond the universal sequences offered by Dietz (2011) and Six and Latusek (2023)—articles in *JTR* have explored the role of reciprocity (Mathews, 2017), calculation (Möllering, 2014), control (Vallentin & Thygesen, 2017), affect (Chen, Saparito, & Belkin, 2011), and the institutional environment (Bachmann, 2011).

The "so what" of trust turns to outcomes and impacts, asking "What changes about the relationship when the trustor (dis)trusts?" In general, this discussion tends to center on issues of cooperation (Young &

McGrath, 2020; van Dijk, Makagonova, Kwaadsteniet, & Schutter, 2017) and especially on the risky empowerment of the trustee (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2016).

Journal Priorities. Finally, authors are encouraged to attend to the following key opportunities to empirically and conceptually expand the existing literature.

One important opportunity lies in the development of new insights as contextualized within a specific relationship or relationship type. The modern world is rife with pressing questions of trust as it exists within relationships that run from the interpersonal to the relationships between various publics and their governments, their religious leaders, and even their technologies. Explorations of the nature and dynamics of trust as embedded within a given organizational, political, or social context constitute the critical raw material to be integrated in broader discussions of its purpose, nature, and consequences. Novel and rigorous submissions exploring these questions are, therefore, strongly encouraged.

A slightly more abstract opportunity lies in conceptual and theoretical integration. Although some of these efforts explicitly seek to transcend a specific context (and thus are more relevant to the next point), there are important contributions to be made within contexts as scholars integrate individual inquiries to explain, for example, the development and implications of trust in artificial intelligence (AI) or the nature of and relationship between trust and control in business organizations. Submissions are therefore encouraged, not only as Conceptual Articles, but also in empirical work that contributes to explaining the dynamics of trust within contexts (e.g., meta-analyses).

Most important, however, is the development of explicitly integrative perspectives that leave behind the particulars of context to build a parsimonious and generalizable, cross-boundary science of trust. Although this work may (and often will) lean on contextualized inquiries as their foundational evidence, elevating work to this level typically requires specific attention to more than one context, either in the foundational work that is to be integrated or in the relationships to which the implications are applied. As a result, submissions in this area should present their key implications generally but, at the same time, they should not neglect the inevitable influence of context. As a result, the strongest submissions in this area will be those who offer clear propositions regarding the nature and dynamics of trust, while explicitly speaking to their mechanisms, modifiers, and boundary conditions.

The Current Issue

The current issue opens with *JTR*'s first Target Article (Mangold, 2023). In it, the author challenges the dominant domains conceptualization of trust relevant constructs (e.g., PytlikZillig et al., 2016). Their piece—contextualized within the relationship between the media and the public—leverages Item Response Theory to suggest that measures of the public's perception of the currency and believability of mainstream media are better conceptualized as measuring different levels of trust than as measures of distinct concepts. In their commentary, Lalot and Greifenender (2024) elucidate theoretical and practical implications for this work and, in particular, explore its potential for rethinking classic accounts of the relationships among ability, benevolence, and integrity, and between trust and distrust.

Yogev (2024) explores a very different situation in an article contextualized within the relationship between the police and the Haredi community in Israel. Although a historically challenging relationship, the article compellingly argues that trust has increased over time. Through the use of the dialogical account of legitimacy as a lens for analyzing interview data with trustors and trustees, the author identifies a number of developments that appear to have been critical in reversing an ostensibly distrusting relationship. In particular, they elevate the role played by the development, identification, and prioritization of shared values and perspectives.

Shepisi and colleagues (2024), center their inquiry on behavioral manifestations of trust, and test whether different trusting behaviors have different relations with conspiracy mentality in the interpersonal context. More specifically, they explore whether individually reported levels of a belief that others are working to cause harm differently relate to a willingness to entrust money or a password. In so doing, their work adds to the "for what" of trust and contributes to a growing conversation about the implications of different vulnerabilities.

Finally, Hughes (2024) explores the nature of trust in international relations through an analysis of the Confidence- (and Security-) Building Measures regime. Although these uncertainty-reducing measures were designed to allow actors access to information relevant to their level of trust, the regime is argued to have failed, in part, because of the nature of trust in this context. More specifically, the authors position the centrality of a notion that security arises from the trustor's ability to control the trustee's behavior by projecting a threat of force as a key inhibitor of a state of genuine trust.

Thus, these articles challenge a dominant perspective on conceptualization, explore the rebuilding of trust in fraught relationships, demonstrate the specificity of the impact of an antecedent of trusting behavior, and speak to the potential that efforts to control actually inhibit the development of trust. We gratefully acknowledge the authors, reviewers, publisher, and our entire journal community for all of their efforts and look forward to continuing to work together to capture the conversation of trust research.

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