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Exploratory vs. confirmatory research: A false dichotomy?

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(Hannover)

The replication crisis in psychology has given rise to intense soul searching with respect to questionable research practices, such as p-hacking and HARKing. One response to these problems is to call for researchers to preregister their statistical hypotheses so as to make sure that the results they report as confirmed by their data are in fact the ones they set out to test. There is an argument in the literature that retrospective theorizing or data analysis is only legitimate if it is explicitly labeled as “exploratory.” In my talk, I will argue that the underlying understanding of *exploratory research* is counterintuitive and philosophically problematic. Turning to the philosophy of science literature about exploratory experimentation and exploratory modeling, I will propose an account of exploratory research that is better able to capture the dynamics of research and that allows for a more precise understanding of why the exploratory/confirmatory distinction is problematic on both descriptive and normative grounds.
(The talk is based on research that was conducted jointly with Berna Devezer)

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