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On: 06 October 2012, At: 03:32

Publisher: Routledge

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Journal of Sports Sciences

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjsp20>

Psychology and the Journal of Sports Sciences: Getting published

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Version of record first published: 31 May 2012.

To cite this article: Andrew M. Lane (2012): Psychology and the Journal of Sports Sciences: Getting published, Journal of Sports Sciences, 30:13, 1325-1327

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2012.694210>

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EDITORIAL

Psychology and the Journal of Sports Sciences: Getting published

Introduction

I recently took over the editor's position for Sport and Exercise Psychology for the Journal of Sports Sciences. In this editorial, I will outline how I plan to operate as editor. I raise three areas; review criteria, ethics, and review processes.

Review criteria: Impact, originality, and quality of data and methods

I am looking for high-quality papers that will have an impact, that are original, and based on a rigorous methodology. This ambition to receive high-quality papers is a standard request. It is the criteria reviewers are asked to use when considering a paper (see Table I). I wish to encourage prospective authors to consider how their article might score against the publication criteria identified in Table I. In terms of impact, I encourage authors to ask themselves the question, "Will other authors use the findings of this paper in their work?" An impactful article should inspire debate among fellow academics or usage among practitioners. Impact infers the article will be read, re-read, and the reader will act upon the information read in some way. The article starts something that others later develop or criticise. It is important to emphasise that an article could also have applied impact. As part of the professionalism of sport and exercise sciences, practitioners in sport, exercise and health-related fields read academic articles as a source of continuing professional development. I see it as the author's responsibility to explain why their work should be impactful. The intellectual capability to produce an article worthy of publication in the Journal of Sports Sciences (JSS) should also include the ability to present a cogent argument as to why the work could have an impact.

When presenting an argument for the relative impact of a paper, I urge caution against the use of the following two arguments. The first is the claim that "no previous research has examined 'X', and therefore, future research is needed." This

argument sounds reasonable at first glance. However, originality on its own is not persuasive without an argument to justify why the research is needed. Work might be original, but the reason that there has not been any research in a specific area might be because the question is meaningless or at best lacking value. The authors should make a case for the potential impact of the paper, and then explain the relative originality of the research. If the research is needed, and it has not been done before, then authors have presented a persuasive argument.

A second argument authors use to propose the value of their paper is that it follows a line of investigation that is popular. I can understand why authors indicate this point. It says to the reader that other authors are interested in this topic. Consequently, the content of the work has the potential to make an impact. However, authors should be cognisant that popular research does not necessarily mean that further research is needed. A related point is the use of the phrase "recent research" to help build a case for undertaking a study and then providing a supporting reference. I would caution authors from using such phrases as they date quickly. If authors insist on making such a claim, then I request that the authors use a reference that is less than three years old. I have seen cases where authors put a reference that is over 10 years old. So what counts as recent? I would say less than three years old.

Ethical issues

A second issue that I am keen to emphasise is ethics. The position is that it is the author's responsibility to demonstrate that their work is ethical. The Journal of Sports Sciences has guidelines that say that all papers require ethical clearance, albeit with the caveat term "normally" being included for special cases. I wish to take this opportunity to emphasise that the norm will be to have sought institutional ethical support. Before submitting, the researchers should consider ethical issues for participants, the institution to which they are affiliated, and the readers or users of the

Table I. Example of a review for the Journal of Sports Sciences.

Article Assessment	Top	Top	Top	Bottom	Bottom	Bottom
	5%	30%	50%	50%	30%	5%
reqImpact of article				✓		
reqOriginality of article				✓		
reqQuality of data and methods				✓		

science. An ethics board can fulfil all these roles. One caveat for arguing that ethical clearance is not needed is that data are in the public domain. However, even if data are in the public domain, issues such as the nature of the subject matter and the interpretation of findings carry ethical implications. Furthermore, the issue of what constitutes the public domain is becoming a grey area particularly with the advent of social networking. For example, research on discussion forums on eating disorders would involve using data in the public domain. There are pro-anorexia chat rooms that can be accessed easily via the search engine, Google, using the terms “anorexia chat rooms”. The reader can observe the content of these chat rooms without having to log in. As such, the data being used is in the public domain and the potential researcher is only reading from a computer screen. The content of such chat rooms represents rich data, and examining discussions of anorexics could help understand the issue and help treatment. Further, exercise is commonly used as a strategy for weight management. Hence the topic has relevance to the JSS. However, I suspect most researchers would say that a research design that involves examination of the content of an internet forum has ethical implications and would need ethical approval. I suspect the institutions of the researchers planning the study would be interested particularly if it could be construed that the research is seen as endorsing the behaviour of contentious groups.

I do not intend to provide a list of areas that require ethical approval and a list of areas that do not. I place this responsibility with the authors in the initial instance. The authors should consider the ethical issues in the research project before data are collected even if this will mean using data in the public domain. Once authors decide that the benefits of doing the research outweigh the risks involved, then they should seek institutional ethical approval. An institutional ethics

review board should act as the first line of peer review. Without institutional ethical support, the editorial team do not know if the institution has approved the method used and the subsequent publication of results. Further, a paper submitted without a statement that it has ethical approval is in effect asking the editorial process to act as an ethics committee. Therefore, I am insisting that authors address the issue of ethics. If the paper does not have ethical approval, the paper will be returned to the author with a request to provide it or explain why ethical approval was not sought. I think this is not an unreasonable request and one that is in line with UK Research Council procedures.

Review

The system of peer review is used to gain an impression of the value of a paper. If the journal published this work, would other authors read and use it in their work? If the answer to this question is affirmative, then the peer review process should help the authors refine their work. Reviewers are the authors’ peers; a review offers an insight into how the work will be interpreted. The job of peer review is to increase the likelihood of identifying articles that will be influential. The editor’s job is to oversee the process and decide whether to pursue publication.

I am keen to develop the review process. It can be quite hard to find reviewers. Authors suggest reviewers and this is a good start. When selecting potential reviewers, please could authors suggest reviewers from outside their own research group and colleagues who work closely with their research group. In addition, please try to suggest reviewers from outside of your current country of residence. If I see reviewers who have published with the submitting author, I am not likely to select them. I have been using database search engines such as “Sports Discus” and “Psych info” to locate potential reviewers. I select authors of recent papers in the area of the authors, add them to the Journal of Sports Sciences database and submit a review request. I am looking for insightful and critical reviewers.

If you are an experienced researcher, I suspect you are inundated with review requests. I encourage such reviewers to consider suggesting one of their PhD students to support their reviews rather than turning it down. Reviewing is a very good method of developing the critical thinking skills of PhD students. PhD students tend to be close to recent literature and provide very detailed reviews. Reviewers can e-mail me and let know that the review is being done collectively, and I would add the PhD student to the JSS database.

The take home message from this brief editorial is that;

- a. The Journal of Sports Sciences would like to publish high-quality papers that will make an impact. In order to make an impact it's likely that the paper will be original with quality data and rigorous methods.
- b. Authors need to explain ethical issues in their paper. I prefer all papers to come to the JSS

having received institutional ethical approval. Authors should prompt their institutions to develop ethics procedures that allow examination of all research.

Please send your high quality work to the Journal of Sports Sciences.

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